Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Dialogues on African Witchcraft (1970-2015)

This file is an exchange of letters, e-mails, and documents between Norman Miller and Duncan MacDonald, MD, including a four-volume collection of MacDonald's writings, over a 30-year period, all on witchcraft, some 600 pages extracted from the original 1100. As such, the following material is unfinished, presenting sketches of ideas, concepts, and arguments.

Duncan MacDonald served as a physician in Zambia and Kenya, including a period as a "Flying Doctor". He later served as a provincial psychiatrist in Cornwall, UK. His parallel interests in economic development and international witchcraft issues led to long-term research on these issues, the witchcraft concerns in conjunction with Norman Miller.

Suggested search terms for the document that lead to a substantial amount of material:

Bantu	Behavior
Christianity	Definition (of witchcraft)
Economics	Evil
Fear system	History
Moral panic	Politics
Prehistory	Psychology
Religion	Traditional medicine
Violence	Education

In an initial pass at parsing the document, characters have been inserted by sections of particular interest:

Key: * = Area of interest, ** = Important Idea, *** = Key Concept/Definition, ? = Unclear Idea

Compiled by Marcus Helble and Andrew Beaubien

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1. Regarding our debate on the validity of witchcraft,

* + If the validity of witchcraft depended on really turning a man into a crocodile or similar wonders, it could never have become established. So since all evidence is against the reality of shapeshifting etc and yet witchcraft is a well-established and widespread phenomenon it must be causally effective in some other ways. And by exclusion these cannot be directly in the physical world - although they may have secondary effects there. The only plausible mechanisms are the manipulation of minds - of beliefs and expectations. Witchcraft is a means of manipulating and controlling minds and only secondarily, via human action, the physical world. Witches exist only in the minds of their accusers, but their bodies are broken and burned.
+ The stability of the physical world is explained in terms of physical laws that are, by definition, context dependent and unaffected by our thoughts or feelings or whims.
+ By contrast the stability of the world of interacting minds depends on contracts and conventions and hence is significantly affected by human thought, feeling, and action
? + The dichotomy between science and magic is an aspect of our western worldview. It is not necessarily indigenous or intrinsic to other cultures.
+ The world of witchcraft is one in which everything is alive and interacts not according to physical law but will and desire and beliefs. It is a living psychologically structured world.
+ The world of witchcraft is wider than that of science in that it includes causally effective entities for which science has found neither need nor convincing evidence.
? + It may be misleading to think of the parts of the world of witchcraft rejected by science as occupying a separate and exclusive territory like the christian heaven or hell. Better perhaps to consider it as interwoven with the ordinary and spirits and the dead ancestors wandering through our world unseen. According to the Koran or a Hadith, Allah is closer to you than your jugular vein. And recent theories in physics suggest the possibility that other universes may be separated from our own by an infinitesimally thin membrane.
? + Terms to avoid Art, Ceremony, ..,
? + Categorization: Classical vs Family Resemblance / Aristotle vs Wittgenstein
+ Do not base classification on internal features. Look also at differences between witchcraft and other phenomena. What do wc artifacts have in common and how do these differ from those associated with other activities?
+ Witchcraft and epidemiology -depression DSM and other bestiaries.

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+ Definitions of wc are misleading because most are based on the science vs magic dichotomy that I have already suggested is extrinsic and an imposition. For example, most definitions are variations on 'harm done to someone by magical means'. The problem is the sense of magic. A better would be 'harm done to others by extra-ordinary means.' In each the force of magjc or extra-ordinary means reduces to: that they are difficult to detect or identify, that they are beyond the capacity and control of the ordinary people, and perhaps that they often seem to be relatively unaffected by common constraints of distance or time?
+ When the focus on magic is removed new questions are revealed. For example, many published reports on wc related incidents are probably unrepresentative and refer to only the most dramatic and noteworthy cases. Less interesting cases probably go undocumented. But even if only the most serious cases, in the sense of either the significance of the alleged harm done or the punishment exacted on the assumed perpetrator, are reported it is reasonable to ask why the response to allegations of wc often seems out of proportion to the actual harm that triggered the allegations? For the media are interested in reporting mostly the most extreme cases in the sense of response or retribution. For example death as punishment for lesser or greater harm. What is less likely to be reported are responses to relatively trivial harm that do not result in death or severe injury but yet may be disproporionate in social and non physical effects on the indlviduals involved.

Definitions

Witchcraft

+ What does it mean = definition
+ Why anyone would believe in it?
+ Does 'witch' always mean the same?
+ What is relation to christianity?
+ What is relation to shamanism?
+ Why do the effects vary?
+ What makes wc malignant?
+ What causes epidemics? Metastases?

Witch
First rank = central or core
+ a living individual
+ with extraordinary powers to harm
+ powers are inherited
+ powers may be unconscious
+ always malevolent

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Second rank = peripheral or local
+ powers derived from spirits
+ often associated with animistic worldview
+ often associated with occult
+ confusion with sorcery and shamans etc
+ usually but not exclusively female
+ may use substances?

Relation of witchcraft to magic and the significance of the notion of the supernatural

*Witchcraft is the manifestations or consequences of belief in witches and the fear of them.

? Causes = disproportion between reality and reaction?

The mysteries of witchcraft

The first mystery is definition - what the words witch and witchcraft mean. This is of critical importance for it is clear that although witches have been reported to occur in almost every part of the world, it is not at all clear how the usage differs with time and place, nor to what degree it is a term used by and meaningful to local informants, or an interpretation by outsiders with a European background. And it is also not clear how the term witch relates to others whose reference seems at the very least to overlap.

Yet the question of definition is fundamental to any attempt to determine the epidemiology of witch related phenomena - what is the prevalence and incidence, and how do these vary with time and place. At present it is not known if the phenomena are universal or local.

Note: in the following section I will for convenience use witchcraft to refer to all witch related phenomena. In other words not only what witches do but the whole complex of reactions to the belief in the reality and existence of witches. Later I will make the distinction between witches and witchcraft clearer.
The first question that must be answered by any study of witch related phenomena is that of definition. What does the word witch mean, to what does it refer, and how has its meaning varied over time and place? This is surprisingly difficult as not only have some places and periods been studied far more intensively and comprehensively than others but from the outset one finds oneself in a Catch 22 situation: without an adequate

definition one cannot quantify the distribution of the phenomena, yet at the same time how can one formulate a definition without some idea of how the phenomena are distributed? Too rigid a definition will make it difficult to find the wood, too loose will render the leaves invisible. Although in principle it would be possible to set up an international study of related phenomena in different countries, along the lines of the famous WHO study of schizophrenia, this would still presume some idea of the subject and it would only be applicable to existing communities. The only alternative is therefore to start with existing definitions, what other writers have thought it to be, and from them derive a core set of features or lowest common denominators for the notion. And to this can be added additional peripheral features that are contingent or context dependent and do not occur in every case. When this is done we will find that many features that have been thought characteristic of witches and witchcraft are in fact peripheral or secondary and that the core points to a phenomenon that has far wider implications and relevance.

05 January 2002 13:28

Witchfinders (inquisitors, executioners, confessions, auto da fe etc) are made from molecules, but witches are made from signs

2.
Origin of Witchcraft

The problem and origin of witchcraft is this:

Our ability to create virtual realities, conceptual spaces, possible worlds, or what philosophers refer to as counterfactuals, is the basis of our lives because they allow us to anticipate, predict, explore, and investigate the world. And make models of it that help us to understand how it works. This allows us in the words of Karl Popper, `to let our ideas die in our stead' (instead of walking into danger we can plan and anticipate and devise alternative actions).

The downside, dark side, other side of the coin, and the price we pay for the lunch is the possibility of confusing things that exist only in our counterfactual realities with those that exist in objective reality. And this is made more likely when the simple fact of that confusion, the belief that a counterfactual thing has a real existence, can have such an immense effect and change objective reality. The belief in witches in itself can become the justification and motivation for the elaboration of a

baroque structure or system of institutions and secondary beliefs; witchfinders, inquisitions, seminars, papers, wiccan shops and periodicals, holidays, books etc. All of which is made easier if it can be grown piggyback on top of a powerful well established and sympathetic institution such as the Christian Church, State Department, FBI, DEA, etc.

A secondary source of power is that because there is no reality in witches as commonly described physical entities but the possibility of witches is accessible and present in all normal minds it becomes easy to link these to guilt feelings and the possibility that one might unwittingly be one of them. For a possibility to be a source of anxiety and guilt on a scale sufficient to make it an instrument for controlling behaviour it has to be readily conceivable by a majority of the population. Most people do not feel anxious or guilty about necrophilia because very few have felt the urge to fuck a corpse, but many might wonder about whether sometime their behaviour might have been considered sexually and politically correct.

The possibility of witches seeps through the boundaries that normally keep the objective and virtual realities separate and distinct.

05/01/2002

3.
Conceptual Maps
I will try and make some of the ideas I wrote about last night clearer.

***The notion of conceptual maps (of the possible contents of a conceptual space) is motivated by the fact that we make our way through life and the world in which we live by navigating not things but aspects of things that are not immediately experienced by our senses. That we are able to do this is because we can create conceptual maps in which the things which we cannot `see' with our primary senses have some kind of existence, and that we can link these conceptual spaces with that of the `objective' space which we call the world. Our ability to use external artifacts called signs (indexes, icons, symbols) enables us to do this.

Imagine an intelligence officer looking at an aerial photograph of a country. It is full of so many details that it is confusing. One way of interpreting it would be to overlay it with transparencies that outlined significant systems of features: major roads, or railways, or airports, or power

stations, etc. And one could also overlay a map of details from an earlier time so that any changes since then would be highlighted. On a computer one could simply remove everything that had not changed thereby leaving only those features that had. Likewise in atlases of the interior of the human body one can sometimes make sense of the confusion by overlaying the outlines of individual systems in different colours.

?There is a glass of wine in front of me, a red liquid in a glass with a certain smell and taste. In my mind I relate this to my conceptual map of wine which is scarcely more sophisticated than: red/white, sweet/dry, nice/nasty. In contrast a wine expert would have a much more detailed map that could be focussed in from country to region to subregion to district to vineyard to terroir. Another of all possible grape varieties and their characteristics. Another of weather cross referenced to a time map (calendar) and the different wine growing regions. Another of growers and negociants. Another of prices. And so on and on. The point of this is that what I perceive as a simple glass of red wine can be mapped into spaces which are in effect databases of words and numbers which I will not find in the glass no matter how hard or how long I look. They exist not in the outside world but the virtual worlds of possibilities which I refer to as conceptual maps. And they emerge when the objective world is overlaid by the conceptual.

?Not only do conceptual spaces contain information that is not immediately accesible to our senses, but they can contain an infinity of possibilities, including things that do not, never have, never will, and could not exist. In one of my conceptual worlds there is a Mr Thurber and his wife and a unicorn. Now if I paged back in time I might find a snapshot of an objective world in which Mr Thurber lived, I might even be able to find his wife, though she might have only a virtual existence, but I do not believe that I would be able to find a unicorn in any objective world to which I had access. A unicorn is as Mr Thurber says a `mythical beast'. But if I believe in unicorns I might be prepared, like searchers for The Loch Ness Monster, to spend large sums of money and time in trying to find an example. And in that sense unicorns have a certain reality; they can change the way that people behave and move things in the objective reality. Unicorn hunters would have a real existence, even if unicorns themselves do not.

*In the real world there are healers who can change the world in real ways, but there are no witches. Witches live in conceptual or virtual reality from which they have an influence like gravity on the real world although none of the beliefs about

their supernatural abilities are true there. But witches that exist only in virtual reality can conjure up witchfinders that are real job descriptions in the real world.

Your friend is therefore wrong, or naive, in trying to reduce witches to healers. They are not the same. They are beings from different worlds and influence our objective reality only when a conceptual space is brought into alignment with it.

*The invention of a Model T Ford can change the surface of the world, scarring it with roads and service stations, and motels and drive-ins, in addition to wearing away its soil and polluting the atmosphere. Some of these effects are physical, others conceptual.

?The difference between physical and conceptual interactions is that whereas the physical movement of the car according to physical laws changes the physical world directly, the conceptual world can only change the physical indirectly by interacting with and changing minds. Just as my choice of the direction in which I drive will determine where the damage I do is done.

4.

05/01/2002

Dear Norman,

Whether or not witches and witchcraft exists depends on how you define them.

If, as many popular accounts seem to do, one considers witches to be people who can do strange and wonderful things, such as turning themselves or others into animals, then from the scientific point of view they do not exist, as nobody on earth could do these things and so the set labelled witches would be empty. But, if on the other hand, one defines them as people who others believe are capable of doing these things then they do exist because some, probably many, believe that such people exist. And if you define witches in terms of a person's ability to have relations with spirits or supernatural beings then again their existence depends on what you and your readers believe rather than whether spirits and devils exist in the same way as trees, and giraffes, and clouds.

I do not believe in supernatural powers and so I do not believe in people being able to turn anybody into a crocodile. But I

believe in witches in the sense that I know that others do believe in the existence of such powers and that they can be controlled by some people and that that belief affects how they behave. For example, if you believe that the old lady next door, who is so frail that you could knock her off her feet with a sneeze, has supernatural powers or is in partnership with the powerful spirits, then you will probably try and avoid sneezing near her. And if she makes it clear that she knows what you are thinking and indicates that she would disapprove of you voting for Nelson Mandela, then you will at the very least think more than once about doing so. Thus is one of the basic foundations of democracy made nought.

From this point of view although it is an interesting question what kinds of people are identified as witches, and it seems probable that someone like a native healer would be a strong candidate, I do not believe that any correlation would allow one to discard the notion of witchcraft by making it an ignorant synonym for healing, or any other exceptional (but not supernatural) ability. Such reductionism seems guaranteed to obscure more than it illuminates, or throw the baby out with the bathwater.

?These ruminations suggest that although people can have the label witch added to them there is no intrinsic objective diagnostic sign by which they can be identified, in the sense that men are distinguishable from women, cats from dogs, or some ethnic groups by the colour of their skin. Pace the efforts of the writers of Malleus Malificarum no statistical analysis would establish reliable physical or anatomical criteria for identifying witches.

?This point is made by Hernando in his lectures (rather than book) when he walks on stage carrying an apple which he places ostentatiously on the rostrum before starting to speak. he uses this to illustrate that there is nothing about an apple, or a piece of land, to say who owns it or if it is his or stolen from somebody else; a stolen apple is indistinguishable from any other. And to identify an apple as belonging to one person rather than another therefore depends on how it is described or represented and in the case of the apple (possession being nine tenths of the law) Hernando's `title' is accepted by his audience and would probably be guaranteed by their consensus. In the case of real estate, title to property is not about the physical land or anything on it, but a representation of the consensus (recorded in the land registry) about its ownership. Which is a meta or higher order representation: a representation of the consensus representation of (about) the property.

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*The point I am trying to make is that most of the entities and events that are important to us do not exist in physically distinguishable forms, but in a relationship between the physical and one or several conceptual worlds. One of these is a world of property relationships, another mathematical properties, another beliefs and desires, another witches and devils, and so on ... These conceptual worlds are what I referred to as maps because the things and events in the physical world can be mapped on to them and thereby an apple that is indistinguishable from any other can become identified as belonging to Hernando. But whereas we tend to think of maps as recording what is known even those may contain blank spaces, that in the old days might have been labelled `obscured by cloud', and these would indicate places that merited exploration. Or perhaps a better metaphor would be with the periodic table which allowed chemists not only to predict the existence of new elements that were at the time unknown, but also to say what properties they would have. The periodic table like a map revealed relationships that were not apparent to the physical eye, or hand, or foot.

**Witches and witchcraft, like property relations, exist not in the physical world but in a conceptual world or space in which they have a place as a possibility. And that space which might well have no more objective reality than Tolkein's Middle Earth in The Lord of the Rings, or Harry Potter's Hogwarts School. Every scientific theory that goes deeper than the simplest description relates its findings to such a world and as most theories are eventually found to be wanting and discarded the conceptual spaces they suggest are discarded and replaced by others.

If you think about how you interact with the physical things in the world and the extent to which that depends on interpreting events or providing a context, which is what a conceptual map is, you will at once realise the extent to which our lives are made possible by conceptual mapping.

The creation of conceptual maps and spaces depends on the signs and symbols from which they are built up. And once created they provide the context or background from which information emerges. In Information Theory (which is strictly about the transmission of information) information content is defined as a function (in terms) of the probability of an event, which is in a sense a ratio between foreground and background. An event which is very unexpected (the creak from a stair in a movie) can

convey a great deal of information, whilst background noise such as a fan conveys very little.

In almost every case we view the world through one of a selection of maps which act like filters and these determine the things that we select out as important (just as photographs at different frequencies can be used to detect features that are not apparent to the naked eye) and allow us to interpret events. The same words in different contexts can mean very different things. "The goulash is very salty today" could be a criticism or a code depending on a context that might only be apparent to two people.

Therefore to try and understand the phenomenon of witchcraft, which is real even if there is no magic and all witches were also healers or killers, one has first to map out the features of the conceptual spaces that give it meaning.

I would suggest that these would include:

*The existence of good and evil and their corollary personal responsibility or culpability

An interpretation of events in terms of belief and desire

The lack of a concept for random events or chance

The possibility and almost certainly the conviction that everything that happens does so because of the will of some agent (either human or supernatural) working either alone or in collusion with more powerful agents (gods, devils, spirits etc). I have already made clear that I believe the basic (default until at most a few hundred years ago in the scientific world and still for most other parts) explanation for events is animistic or in terms of spirits and agents. In the past folk physics was folk psychology.

*Such maps are motivated by the need to reduce the anxiety that the existence of unexpected, chance or random events would cause.

The attraction of claiming or believing in supernatural powers is lots of secondary gains eg treated with more `respect'.

?The experience of guilt and the possibility that one might unwittingly have done bad things.

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*As you seem to be worrying about where to locate the centre of gravity of your work, I thought it might be helpful to try and set out in list form what I believe to be the fundamental premises or features of the phenomenon of witchcraft that any subsequent or higher level analysis will have to take into account.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF WITCHCRAFT

1. It is essential to distinguish between things and reports or descriptions of things. It is a defining characteristic of homo sapiens that our behaviour is determined not only by the features of things, but how they are described. And many things that determine our behaviour exist only at the level of description. For example the following table lists things that exist as things and contrasts them with things that (almost certainly) exist only as descriptions.

THINGS	DESCRIPTIONS
Horses	Unicorns
Otters	Loch Ness Monster
Sparrows	Simurg (Attar, The Conference of the Birds)
Healers	Witches
People	Spirits
Visible agents	Invisible agents
Madonna	Jesus

However, even things that exist only as a description (or presentation rather than representation) can be the basis for enterprises, cults, and institutions. Most religions are probably based more on descriptions than things and the Loch Ness Monster can generate exhibitions, books, expeditions and travel. Descriptions can change the world more easily than things.

?Agents are entities that are self-powered, internally motivated, and whose behaviour is determined not only by physical law (as when they fall to earth from a great height or are blown about by a hurricane) but by internal representations (the outcome of playing chicken on a blacktop will depend on predicting the behaviour and representations of your opponent).

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*The agents accepted by biology are visible and physical like people and bears. But the agents accepted at other times and places include a much wider range and include invisibles like ancestors, gods, demons, and spirits of various kinds.

?It is important to remember that witchcraft beliefs have their origins in a time when many of the creatures we know today had yet to be discovered and their properties were unknown or speculation. Today we live in a conceptual world that has very little space for many more large animals.

2. Although there may be well established subjective phenomena such as hallucinations, other perceptual abnormalities, delusions of reference and passivity, etc that might suggest a supernatural explanation and exist as a seed from which beliefs might develop, or grow like Topsy, the phenomenon of witchcraft does not presuppose the real existence of supernatural phenomena (whatever they may be) as a mechanism. A belief in the possibility of the supernatural, ie a description, is all that is required.

*3. For the purposes of this study witchcraft exists only at the level of beliefs and descriptions.

4. All scientific laws worthy of the name and the forces that they conjure up to explain the behaviour of things and how the world works are essentially context independent and observer (agent or participant) neutral. In other words nobody has a special relationship, or can expect favours, or preferential treatment, from gravity, electricity, magnetism, etc.

*5. This would also be expected as an essential feature of any additional forces (at present unknown and hence supernatural circa 2002) that may be found necessary to explain the phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, or psychokinesis that are being studied in parapsychology departments, like that at the University of Edinburgh.

*6. In contrast, witchcraft descriptions suggest the working, not of impersonal scientific laws or forces, but relationships between agents (as defined above). Witchcraft is based on explanations in terms of `interpersonal' (interagent) relationships, albeit with a larger range of entities (ancestors, spirits, demons etc) than current biology allows or recognises. Its explanatory mechanisms and motivations are therefore essentially (folk) psychological rather than physical.

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7. The moral and motivational system which witchcraft presupposes is therefore the more or less familiar one of notions like illegitimate alliances, treachery, treason, and conspiracy. And thus raise questions like who benefits and who is harmed by witchcraft acts and allegations.

*8. The major effect of the belief in witchcraft is a reinterpretation of perceived danger or threat and the experience of fear that is their marker. Fear and anxiety are an everyday experience that is a response either to internal (eg unconscious drives or conditioned responses) or external events; especially those that are unusual, unexpected, or difficult to account for by our `philosophy' (in Hamlet's usage), or model of how the world works. An important question is what kinds of fear inducing experiences are associated with witchcraft accusations AND which are NOT.

*8a. In a world where knowledge of physical law and especially probability and chance (which is probably the most critical) is limited, explanations in terms of psychological processes and alliances with powerful external (alien to the group) agents would seem bound to increase anxiety and induce fear in the face of any aberration.

9. In considering the working of witchcraft as a social phenomenon it is important to distinguish between calculated, conscious, intended effects and those that are incidental as it is the latter that may be more important in sustaining and ensuring the survival of the phenomena. For example, witchcleansing may ostensibly be designed to eliminate or neutralise witches, but may in addition, unwittingly or coincidentally, reduce group anxiety, increase group cohesion and solidarity and reinforce common values and standards. And by constraining deviance it will have a normative and equilibrating function.

10. In a world or system in which the group takes precedence over the individual prosperity is likely to be seen as a zero-sum game so that the success of any one person can only be at the expense of others. Hence individual success or good fortune is likely to be experienced by others as dangerous and deviant and associated with feelings of loss and abuse; or anger rather than envy (one does not feel envy for the good fortune of the thief who steals from you, but anger and a desire for retribution). Such a world is closed to the notion of surplus value and sustained transformation and development (where could it come from other than the greater community that includes ones ancestors?). Hence the benefits of a market economy and the

magic of capital are beyond comprehension and likely to be experienced as malevolent and dangerous and call forth witchcraft explanations and accusations rather than books on how to get rich quickly. This seems to be what has been described recently in Sub-Saharan Africa and accounts for a number of killings of individuals by members of their traditional community who cannot understand or account for differences in individual prosperity except in terms of witchcraft.

*11. The single most important marker of our modern `scientific' civilisation which distinguishes it from all others is the notion and experience of probablility, chance and randomness.

*12. Science is not a set of fixed beliefs but methods of assessing, or testing, the liklihood of propositions (statements that can be true or false).

13. Given belief in the reality and potency of witchcraft it becomes available for exploitation for otherwise unrelated purposes such as politics. And as yet another mechanism that can be used to coerce and change minds it can secondarily change the physical world (by making individuals or groups move matter with whatever means are at their disposal).

14. Among fundamental psychological processes that may contribute to witchcraft beliefs are:

The contrast between the early symbiotic relationship between infant and mother (carer) and its emergence into an individual with clearcut ego (self) boundaries.

The projection of anxiety provoking dispositions onto others. First the individual projects onto a suitable or safer other (scapegoat) such as an outsider or marginal. Second, the group consensus projects (in a way that witchcraft allows) the scapegoat into the wider virtual world of supernatural agents. Witchcraft could therefore be thought of as a metaphenomenon.

15. Because I believe that human beings are disposed (programmed) towards individuality (psychodiversity) there is likely to be a continuous and implicit tension between the dispositions of the individual and the mores of the group, especially in societies where the group is given precedence over the individual and the culture is closed to innovation.

16. There is a question vaguely forming in my mind that the anthropological preoccupation with witchcraft in exotic places is a mechanism whereby our recent `scientific' society has tried

to project beliefs that it finds uncongenial and embarrassing onto alien others that it despises. Like adolescents noisily rejecting the attitudes of their parents and betters. It is an exercise in intellectual cleansing. And it might even be argued that the only motivation for activities as seemingly pointless as anthropology was as a finesse to justify such racist attitudes. Or better that anthropology is a means of distancing ourselves from those beliefs and attitudes that we are embarrassed and ashamed to own.

I may add to this later

20/01/2002

Law

Singer, Rena. "New South African Law Targets Old Fears of Occult." *The Christian Science Monitor*, 6 Dec. 2000, www.csmonitor.com/2000/1206/p7s2.html.

"New South African law targets old fears of occult
The government has all but stopped mob killings of accused witches. But local occult beliefs persist."
"For generations, the rainy season in this desolate land of towering cactuses and waist-high anthills signaled the time for plowing and sowing the fields, school vacation, and deadly witch hunts."

Folk Religion

Burnett, David G, et al. "Spiritual Conflict and Folk Religion." *Lausanne Movement*, 22 Sept. 2014, www.lausanne.org/content/folk-religion.

"Suffering, misfortune and evil are part of human life".

Healing

HEALTH, DISEASE and WHOLENESS

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The emphasis upon healing in the Independent churches has proved a challenge to the mission churches, which have largely rejected healing practices. African Christian theologians have responded to this challenge by speaking positively of healing practices in traditional Africa and the AICs, with a view towards incorporating these practices into the mainline churches.

That Africans at the grassroots level gravitate towards a Christ as deliverer from all oppressive forces is evident in the AICs.

O. Imasogie goes so far as to say that the mainstream churches are superficial largely because they fail to consider seriously these realities in the lives of everyday Africans. The concern of the people over health is evidenced in a 1980 survey which indicated that 75% of the population stated that health is their greatest concern, even above family (48%) and job security (33%).(1) Given the high level of importance which traditional Africa gives to the family this is all the more surprising and significant.

?We shall address the theological response more fully in a later section. To understand more fully the context in which the African scholars write, it is helpful for us first to devote the following section to one aspect of the social construction of disease and health in Africa. This section deals with African conceptions of mental health and with the ethnocentrism of western reactions to it.

(1) Medical education both in Africa and the west should take the disjuncture of worldviews seriously and direct itself towards the elimination of ethnocentric and paternalistic attitudes. More stress could be laid on appropriation of proven therapeutic techniques of African traditional healers. (2) Health care funds should be shifted from the acquisition of high technology equipment for large urban hospitals to primary care in rural areas, upgrading the training, employing the services of, and making referrals to African traditional healers. Some African countries have already embarked upon such programmes. (3) Scientific education should make note of the inadequacy of the modern western scientistic paradigm, of which our survey gives additional evidence.

24/03/2002

Witchcraft/Animism

Phenomenal Level (from point of view of ethologist from Mars)

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1) Group: Larger than family smaller than tribe ie probably clan
2) Accusation from many to one or a few
3) Is there a specific accuser or finder?
4) Is accuser always a victim? Or someone in authority?
5) Response to unusual events
6) Events that are inexplicable within group beliefs as to how the world works

NB) Robin Dunbar in `Gossip Grooming and the Evolution of Language' estimates optimal group size and asserts that in all human societies and at all times there has been a spontaneous natural unit of around 150. This has various functions in different contexts but the size is always consistent. This is the size of a clan. In some areas such as Kalahari this subdivides into groups of 40 or so each associated with a water hole or other scarce resource. I think that they are not very active in witchcraft and this might mean that witchcraft is most common in environments where the optimal group size for survival is around 150 and anything less would be unsustainable. Hence the importance of reducing the risk that internal tensions lead to large scale fragmentation and ipso facto the usefulness of levelling accusations against individuals as a means of projecting badness outside the group.

Framed by a metaphysical world view including the following tacit beliefs:

NB) Occult beliefs do not differentiate witch susceptible societies usually the accusers share beliefs of the same form although different in detail.

1) Animism and agency
2) All events are mind dependent. There are no mind independent events.
3) Events are determined by the intervention and action of agents no physics no chance
4) Individuals can form alliances with (evil) forces to accomplish things they cannot do alone
5) These forces do not act or intrude uninvited
6) Therefore the ethical or moral context is that of treachery and treason

NB) See also comments of Benjamin Lee Whorf on metaphysics implicit in languages eg comparing English with Hopi

Motivation

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

1) Personal gain either preference or revenge
2) The society is zero-sum any individual gain is at the expense of the community
3) Therefore accusers feel wronged and are entitled to retaliate
4) Anthropologists flying in with Amex insured with tenure and health insurance usually underestimate the difficulties of survival and the degree to which it depends on group cohesion and psychology (see the psychology of survival). Hence undervalue the importance of maintaining group cohesion and identity.

Effects and Functions:

1) Constrains and discourages individuality
2) Asserts values of group over the individual
3) Reduces tension and stress by projecting negative feelings outside core group
4) In a way that reduces probability of major schism by scapegoating one or a few only
5) Reasserts traditional authority and values of role defined status
6) Increases internal cohesion by cleansing community of deviant or ambiguous members

Auxiliary and associated methods (on their own none are sufficient)

1) Any specialist knowledge
2) Healing
3) Poisons
4) Herbs
5) Shamanism

Features that make individuals vulnerable to witch accusations

1) Anything that is unique and differentiates them from group mores
2) Age
3) Absence of power or support eg spouse, children, etc
4) Incomer to clan
5) Unusual success or immunity to endemic misfortune

Secondary effects:

1) Manipulation of beliefs and anxieties about witches by politicians for party or personal gain
2) Economic advantage

3) Effect of epidemic of accusations like financial `bubbles'
4) Role of witchfinders like economic gurus
5) Analogues of witchcraft epidemics common in our society but unrecognised because not usually associated with exotic supernatural beliefs; these are usually replaced by bad science exploited for professional gain (invention of job descriptions and academic departments)

25/12/2001

WITCHCRAFT WITHOUT WITCHES/WITCHCRAFT AND POLITICS

That would be my title for there is less to the matter than meets the eye.

You were too hasty in dismissing my suggestion that witchcraft may have been a precursor of politics; it was only half in jest. You are exonerated (and your penis has not withered to nothing) only because I am fairly certain that neither you nor Hernando have realised the thrust of what we have been talking about. Which is my justification for trying to write a book. If friends do not understand me, I have failed and there is more work to be done. Or, I am talking nonsense. At the very least I must try harder. But, not now.

Politics has two components. First, the manipulation of others to reconcile conflicting agendas, or factions, towards a common end. Second, the creation of a legislative framework that will make this easier to achieve consistently and predictably.

The manipulation referred to is that of minds by means of representations and both the possibility and motivation of the second is the fact that the logic of representations, intensional logic, is different from ordinary, extensional, logic. The difference is that extensional logic, the logic of the hardest and most successful sciences, is truth functional and context independent, whilst that of intensional logic is not. This is because the representations referred to introduce an extra joint, or articulation, into the link between thought and world; imagine the difference between parking a car and an articulated tractor and trailer. If this were not so, and there were only the `laws', or better regularities, of physics, there would be no need for the invention of the institution of Law;

any more than courts would be required to ensure that gravity worked as it does, or to set the value of physical constants, or to make sure that people behaved (moved through space) in accordance with Newton's laws of motion, or Einstein's Relativity Theories.

The history of our civilisation has been marked and punctuated by the discovery or development of a series of critically important artifacts and algorithms each of which has been the key that opened the door onto a huge domain of activities to whose existence we had previously been blind. They are analogous to fundamental discoveries like the laser, or the transistor, or the microprocessor, or the wheel, or moveable type, each of which lies at the root of new technologies. They each enabled ways of living by reorganising components that had existed before them.

Among the most important are drawing (on the walls of caves, or sand), written language (more than 100,000 years after spoken language), Zero and the Indo-Arabic number system, the organisation of time that is the basis of clocks and calendars, the organisation of space into longitude and latitude that is the basis of navigation, double-entry book-keeping, transferrable property and land registers, computation, paper money, capital, etc.

What sets each of these apart is that they defined a space of possibilities to which they also provided the primary key; within these spaces all other discoveries and structures are secondary.

To shift to technology: the wheel defined a space of possible means of transportation. Within that space the motor-vehicle created a subspace. The car in itself is incomplete, as to be useful it requires roads and fuel stations and garages and motels. But, given these it works and it and the infrastructure it conjures into being becomes with it a self-sustaining loop. Cars beget infrastructure which begets more cars. In general the most economically productive technologies are incomplete, or as in the case of the PC imperfect. They imply and motivate a larger system to complete them or make good their deficiencies. Perfection like beauty is eternal and unchanging. Only imperfection motivates economies.

And each is anchored with roots into an external reality; they map the representation onto the reality that makes it accountable. Hours and days and years to the recurring cycles of the earth, moon and sun; capital to property (real estate),

words to things (including other words). Each of these fundamental discoveries brings a physical and a virtual space into alignment and makes it possible to map one to another. In a sense they function like a Rosetta stone that links different languages and allows translation from one to another.

Those I have listed are only some of the more successful, in that they have survived in a Darwinian sense and stood the test of the marketplace; they still have a use. Many others died in infancy, others survived for a time but have become anachronisms. In most cases that is because the link between the representations in which they are expressed and physical reality has been broken or attenuated. The space that they motivated is no longer bound to what is now considered reality. Nonetheless it still exists, but floating free as a structure of representations; signifiers without signification; like elves or orcs or unicorns or witches. For witches are like that. They exist, but only as possibilities in the minds of those who believe in them, or at the level of representations only.

*Witchcraft is a self-sustaining system, like the car with its infrastructure, but presupposes a space or structure about which there is no longer a consensus. The car would work in a space in which wheels worked. That space would have to be realised in materials that could be shaped into a stable and relatively flat surface; ie suitable for making roads or railway tracks. But it would not work as intended in quicksand, or water, or a gas field. In a world containing only these it would remain a possibility, somewhat like a unicorn.

*Witchcraft presupposes a world or context in which events are determined by personal motives, or agency. Things do not happen simply because of the impersonal working out of physical law, but by the will of men or other agents. And motives presuppose minds and minds psychology. It makes sense in a world of minds and motives where things happen by will. And everything happens or is influenced by will, as was the case until only a few hundred years ago in the West and still is in other places today.

*Human society is such a world and social contracts and their derivatives, the Rule of Law, attempt to regulate it. Treachery and treason are familiar and always present dangers, whenever individual ambition allies itself with greater or external force to pursue its ends. The notion of Witchcraft extends this to unconscious motivation and alliances with forces and agencies that are not physical in the sense that we know. But in a world in which everything is motivated by minds it makes sense.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Conversely in a world ruled by physical law it is redundent; it has lost its roots in reality.

*After it exists like a wraith, or hair growing on the head of a corpse, or a heart beating after the brain is dead. And witches continue to exist only because they are motivated by the free-running loop that links witches and the witchfinding industry that has grown up around them. Witchcraft without witches but retaining some of its power.

Institutions like witchcraft are like mathematical theories that seemed to offer an explanation about how the world works for a time but have been found wanting and replaced by better. The pre-Newtonian epicycles for explaining the motion of the heavens worked for a time and within what are now recognised as limits, just as Newtonian physics still works well enough to bounce spacecraft off Jupiter or a bomb a target. But each has its limits.

Witchcraft has its roots in a time when the world was motivated by minds rather than energy and worked through folk psychology rather than physics. And the problems it tried to address and the questions it tried to answer have more in common with politics than physics. Hence I think one could make a case, depending on more information about the history of witchcraft and the relation of what we call politics to hunting, gathering, pastoral, and farming, that witchcraft in a very real sense might have been close to the foundations of any social contract that worked beyond the boundaries of a family group.

And also, because there is nothing physical by which witches can be identified with any confidence, they can only be recognised within a virtual space of possibilities which presupposes a system of signs from which such a space can be constructed. I would surmise that that space required more than spoken words, but more permanent forms of representational artifacts. And that these in turn took on the power of that which they had originally been invented to represent. Images and other artifacts have a life of their own, at least for a time, like the canals of Mars.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

02/01/03
DEFINITIONS/SEMIOTICS

Norman,

Further to talking with you yesterday.

In thinking about wc and most things it is important to distinguish three levels or domains of explanation:

1. The level of physical things and primary qualities (like radiation of a particular frequency as opposed to light of a specific colour). At this level we are talking about things interacting according to physical law, eg energy and matter, manifest in chains of cause and effect. And not necessarily noticed by anyone.

2. The level of things as objects of thought; objects in a world of other experienced objects. This is also the level of secondary qualities (colours rather than radiation of different frequencies). This can include things that don't or cannot exist.

3. The level of things as signs that point to other things. This is the level of interpretation and semiotics and is what most of our lives are about; most of our behaviour is determined not by brute forces facilitating or opposing our actions, but by the interpretations of signs; traffic signals make us stop and start, walk or not walk; weather forecasts, ie numbers, determine whether we go out, the route we take, and the clothes we wear etc etc. In Bruner's terms we go `beyond the information given'.

Semioticians distinguish three types of sign:

Icons are based on similarity (the men and women on restroom doors, and most traffic signs eg deer running, rocks falling down slope)

Indexes are based on cause and effect, eg smoke indicates fire.

Symbols are based on convention eg the word `cat' and a furry feline mammal.

Relating this to a possible witch. Some people have extra breasts or nipples.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

At the level of physical things these are related to differences in development and genetic inheritance and they exist as a part of a causal chain that goes back before birth and will end at death or continue throught future generations.

At the level of objects of thought and experience they exist alongside other experienced objects that may or may not be recognised for what they are. They may not be recognized as nipples, but considered moles or other skin tumours, attractive or unattractive, but always part of the contents of the mind experiencing them.

At the level of signs they can be identified by a particular person in a particular way; eg a witchfinder would consider them as sufficient for a diagnosis, an interpretation, that the person with the extra nipples is a witch and should therefore be burned.

Another example (knowing how much you appreciate them) might be a blade of grass bent by a passing animal. The bending is simply the result of physical laws and can be explained by them. It is noticed by a weekend walker and experienced as an object of thought; the grass is noted as bent. But, to a skilled tracker, it is a sign of the recent passage of an animal of a particular kind, age and size.

At the level of physical things there are always links of cause and effect; there cannot ordinarily be smoke without some kind of fire. And this is also the case at the level of objects of thought (experience) where there is a causal chain connecting patterns of brain activity to the object experienced (smoke, bent grass, nipple like protruberence), which can also include things like unicorns or witches that have no physical existence; there is the conscious experience and the underlying brain activity that causes it in some way not fully understood, but unlike the experience of smoke there need be no fire; there is nothing beyond the experience and the brain activity.

But, at the level of the sign there is not necessarily any physical or causal connection between the sign and the thing it represents; a road sign may indicate a bridge that no longer exists; an astronomer's sketch may indicate canals on Mars; and a sequence of spoken sounds or marks on paper may indicate some event that never took place, it is a fiction only; etc.

The power of conventional signs or symbols is that they enable the imagination, we can create alternative realities and, in the words of Karl Popper we can let our ideas die in our place. What

he means is that we can in our imagination run and test out plans and practice activities that might be dangerous in real life. Another is that it makes narrative and visual art possible.

The obverse is that it makes us capable of misinterpretations, lies and deceiving. This is why I consider lying to be a fundamental characteristic of being human. And why a provisional title for my book is `Changing Minds and Telling Lies'.

Witchcraft exists at the level of conventional signs and symbols and as an object of thought, but like unicorns it has no physical existence. But, until a few hundred years ago unicorns were thought to exist and in theory might be possible. They have been dismissed because scientific investigations have found no evidence of them now or at any other time and there are very few places left where they could still be hidden. In the case of the alleged phenomena of witchcraft there is also no evidence for it as a physical reality and we have simpler explanations for any events for which witchcraft is offered as an explanation. And the mechanisms claimed for witchcraft would be incompatible with these explanations (laws, models) that can account for a vast body of demonstrable phenomena that could not be accounted for by witchcraft.

This knowledge was only acquired slowly and arduously over the last three hundred years and it is significant that in the developed world, it has been associated with the decline in the belief in witches (not to be confused with Wiccans). The basis of this knowledge is the development of ways of testing hypotheses and standards of proof or validity.

The first step is the identification of a phenomenon for which we seek an explanation, we imagine a model of mechanism that would account for it, but there might be several alternatives, so what we have to do is deduce the consequences of each and from these work out tests that will distinguish between them. In the case of swords, you have observed that steel tempered in water is softer than steel tempered by plunging the red-hot blade into a captured warrior. Your first approximation is that the courage of the unfortunate warrior has been transferred to the steel. If that is so then one might predict that steel produced from a brave prisoner should be harder than that from a coward and you might set your psychologists to create scales that would quantify courage. This would show that courage had nothing to do with it. Another approach would be to try adding things to the water being used when you might find that tempering steel in water in which asses skins had been soaked,

or a good meat stock, worked as well and saved many prisoners for ransom (which pleased the beancounters at HQ no end).

The result has been an increasing ability to distinguish things that exist only at the level of objects of thought from those that also have physical existence, and it is the latter with which science has been most interested and successful.

It should also be born in mind that much of the success of science depends on quantification and the ability to measure accurately. I suspect that in African communities the number systems are not robust or complex enough to allow measurement.

In a sense witchcraft is fabricated from symbols (conventional signs) that are confused with, or not distinguished from, indexical signs.

Now what is significant about witchcraft is that within the communities where the belief is endemic (including Europe up to the C17) the conventional wisdom and ways of thinking about the world and how it works (as opposed in Africa to foreign ideas) probably offers no better explanation. And that may be sufficient to account for its survival. I am talking here about the view from within the communities not from the outside or future.

In confusing symbols with indexes an important factor may be the development of means of forming images. How do you think about or imagine something bad? The first object of thought (when I refer to an object you should always add `of thought' to locate its existence at the correct level) is likely to be fairly innocuous as in general even Hitler, Stalin, or any of their peers would pass unnoticed in a crowded street. But, when you have the ability to create artifacts or body decorations you can start to elaborate and develop the notion of evil into something much more dramatic. And as you do that you transform your inner world and at the same time give the whole notion a reality that it previously lacked. Evil evolves with your make-up or communal doodles. And with that development so does your spoken language become more complex to accomodate it and you probably elaborate narratives and myths about your creations. So it seems easy to imagine how what might start out as a few minor differences could be evolved into much more polar oppositions and contrasts. The world of demons and devils comes into being on the walls of your cave or whatever. This is an example of the significance of what Dennett and Haugeland referred to as external prostheses for minds. Artifacts are for thinking.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

This is important

In considering and trying to evaluate evidence of cultural practices from a few scattered archaeological sites there is a great danger that you will underestimate the difficulty of interpreting what artifacts and events meant to people at a different time. It is, as Vico suggested, difficult to understand the minds of civilisations, like the Greeks and Romans, for which we have relatively abundent written records, and whose languages are the basis of our own. So it is much more difficult to make judgements about more distant times for which there are no written texts of any kind.

Personally I do not see the utility of trying to locate witchcraft in much earlier communities and all that need be pointed out is that the environment was consistent with it as it seems to have been almost everywhere. To go much further would be pure speculation and serve little purpose.

Having said that if you must try and draw out links then you should concentrate on features that are closely linked to what is likely to be the most fundamental characteristics of human beings; ie those features that are likely to be biologically based, have a developmental history, and are unlikely to have changed much in at least 100,000 years.

* The problem with this is that in my view many of the experts in the archaeological and anthropological evidence show very little sign of having considered what is really fundamental about homo sapiens ie what distinguished him from every other species including his near relatives and accounts for his enormous and unparalleled success in evolutionary terms.

From my own conclusions the following would seem relatively safe features to assume:

* 1. The existence of spoken language is so closely linked to what distinguishes homo sapiens (although I do not think it the most fundamental) that it has probably been a feature for most of human history.

* 2. Theory of Mind (or other minds). This I think may well predate language, at least as a means of communication as opposed to a tool for thought (inner language).

* 3. The tendency to ask questions about events and seek explanations for them.

* 4. The ability to tell stories; and that is likely to be the preferred form of explanation.

5. A bias towards explaining phenomena (physical, animal, and human behaviour) in terms of agents. Whereas we tend to explain physical phenomena in terms of inanimate and impersonal forces and entities such as atoms, gravity, and energy of various kinds, most if not all peoples now and in the past tend to think in terms of spirits, souls, ghosts, ancestors, demons, devils, gods, etc.. What these agents all have in common is that they bring about changes by thinking feeling and willing (cognition, emotion, and conation). What is often referred to as `Folk Psychology' and used as a term of abuse by narrow minded and shallow neuroscientists explains human behaviour in terms of beliefs desires and will. If I believe there is gold at the end of the rainbow or Fort Knox and I desire gold enough I will try and get it by going there, always assuming that my desire and will is strong enough to overcome whatever obstacles are in my way. This kind of explanation is the one used by most of us in trying to understand each other and is overall pretty successful which is why it is so common. Agents generalise this perception and are the basis of animism.

I believe that for most people most of the time, until the C17, this was the best and safest (in terms of survival value) explanation for significant events in the physical world.

6. Related to TOM is probably a built in ability to detect cheats (see the work of Tooby and Cosmides).

7. A tendency to binary thinking ie to evaluate events in terms of polar oppositions (good/bad, hard/soft, light/dark, etc).

But, although I think that binary or bipolar thinking is likely to be a fairly fundamental aspect of human abilities and as such to have been present for most of human history, I suspect that it has evolved and become more pronounced with the ability to consistently manipulate external artifacts such as images. This not only provides illustrations of inside/outside, boundaries etc, but also provides a means of accentuating evil in particular (as described above).

8. A tendency to think of the individual as part of a greater whole? It is not generally understood (for the reason that we tend to see the past through modern spectacles) that from Greece and Roman civilisations until the late Middle Ages the individual tended to be considered as fitting into an alloted place in a greater whole, a great order or chain of beings.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Since the C17 the notion of the self has developed through a process of disengagement from the external world and being relocated largely in the mind; what Weber called the `disenchanting of the world'.

Relating this to Witchcraft:

I think that the notions of umwelt and lebenswelt are helpful. The umwelt that is compatible with and to be necessary though NOT sufficient for the development of witchcraft beliefs and practices and institutions, will have the following features:

1. A belief in agency or animism. That the behaviour of everything including what we think of as the physical world can be accounted for in terms of the action of agents who unlike atoms are moved by passions, beliefs, desires and will. A corollary is that they form relationships with each other and with humans. They can be described in narratives or stories rather than formulas. And perhaps unlike (traditional, or pre Quantum, views of) atoms their behaviour is interlinked and the boundaries between them permeable.

2. A highly developed sense of good and evil to the extent that the world is thought of as being the location of a battle between rival powers one good the other evil with whom humans can form alliances.

My reason for stressing the degree of the dichotomy is that I doubt if witchcraft could depend on ordinary or less extreme forms of dichotomy. Good and bad experiences and behaviour are common what is required for witchcraft is the development of a whole complex storyline and demonology that pushes the dichotomy into fairly extreme and dramatic form.

I think this would have followed the development of imagery and matured over a long time. What one sees in Zoroastrian myths and institutions is the end stage and thus must go back much further than 4000BP.

Once you have given evil and good physical form in decoration, costume, and other artifacts it becomes a readily accessible object for thought and the basis for secondary institutions such as religions and witchfinding movements along with their associated job descriptions.

In pre C17 Europe there was a well developed notion of the world as a battleground between the forces of God and the Devil and this was manifest in the extreme form of witchfinding

institutions and practices. Some of the residues of these attitudes carried by missionaries probably accentuated somewhat similar beliefs in Africa and each can probably be traced back to residues of Zoroastrian beliefs formed in the Middle East and distributed from there via trade routes. But these would have had a much longer history and their roots in characteristic features of homo sapiens that are also related to the content of symptoms of guilt seen by psychiatrists in depression and OCD.

The very act of trying to define what is good conjures into existence what is bad; one to one as the polar opposite of each specified good. Hence inside every good man lurks the implicit existenced of evil and that is more pronounced the better the person fashions themselves to become. Good and evil are conjoined twins.

I think that these two features alone are sufficient to lay the foundations for witchcraft, but they do not guarantee that it will develop; because that and the form it takes will depend on associated factors and secondary gains which shape it into patterns of perception, belief, and practice that may have long term benefits as well as costs. It is probably significant here that the C16/C17 epidemics of witchfinding and those now found in Africa seem to be related to situations where a traditional system of belief and practice that sees the individual only in terms of a place in a whole is under threat, or changing to one in which the individual has greater autonomy and is able to enjoy disproportionate good or bad fortune in comparison with the community as a whole. In this context what is good fortune for an individual (gained by distance from a tradition) may appear as bad fortune for the rest of the community who are relatively less prosporous. It is relative and the differentials that count. For most of human history, or at least that part that depended on communal activities, individuality (or what we would describe as such) even if poorly articulated has probably been considered one of the greatest threats to survival.

Grave goods and ornaments

Ornamentation almost certainly predated imagery (drawing etc) and can serve two functions which probably always coexist.

Difference/differentiation: It can distinguish a person as being different from others, in rank, status, etc

Similarity/assimilation: It can reveal one's identity or allegiance as member of a particular community (in opposition to others).

These are always linked because I would doubt if anyone considers themselves, or could succeed in becoming, completely unique, what they mean by individuality is of a type to which they belong. On the other side of the coin of an individual identity is membership of a minority.

Hence ornaments presuppose the ability to classify, categorize and higher levels of representations (types rather than simply tokens). And these mental manipulations are probably also required for belief in agents and afterlife.

Grave goods at the same time affirm a belief and reinforce (and even shape) a hope. They imply a sophisticated and well developed world of objects (of thought as opposed to physical things).

Witchcraft becomes articulated when a belief in animism or agency becomes sufficiently complex, as a result of the elaboration of stories and images shaped by an ever increasing polarity between good and evil; considered as real forces of varying degrees of organization. This results in a world of objects of thought of considerable sophistication, but at the expense of confusion between reality in thought and physical existence. And it is likely to continue until more effective forms of explanation take its place. Disenchanting.

duncan

23/06/2001

Psychiatry, or the diagnosis of mental disorder, depends entirely on communication and that is predominantly what people say to each other. I cannot think of any artifacts that would be indicative of mental illness. It is therefore unlikely that one will ever be able to say anything specific about mental states before writing had developed to a point where a reasonable sample was preserved and had also become used to record behaviour, thoughts, and feelings.

Even then I would treat the opinions of psychiatrists with reserve as they tend to offer their backsides to every passing bandwagon. And perhaps because of that they have a sorry record of talking nonsense about any cause of concern, from jazz to

drugs and the behaviour of presidents. Psychiatry, like sex, should be practiced between consenting adults in private and not flaunted to titillate the prejudices of a lascivious public.

So anything that can be said about mental illness (assuming for the moment that the concept is meaningful) is likely to be so general as to be of limited usefulness in trying to understand something like witchcraft, where the interesting problem is not what it has in common with everything else, but why it is more common in some places and periods than others.

The fact that schizophrenia has almost certainly occurred in 1% of the population from the emergence of homo sapiens to the present day, and that animism was for all but the last few hundred years the most useful explanation as to how the world works may be more sympathetic to a belief in witchcraft, but does not say anything very useful about it.

What seems to be unique about schizophrenia is that (begging several questions), unlike almost every other illness, its prevalence is about 1% in every part of the world (wherever it has been studied). And as it is associated with reduced fertility one would have expected it to have died out long ago, unless it offers some compensating advantages; like sickle cell trait which reduces sensitivity to the effects of malaria.

The significance of this uniform prevalence is that it cannot be associated with environmental or cultural factors and therefore seems likely to be closely linked to those features of human beings that distinguished them from every other species. By contrast, the prevalence of other diseases from heart disease to MS show marked and characteristic geographical variations. The implication is that if the prevalence of schizophrenia is geographically uniform today it has been so throughout history.

Tim Crow, one of the experts I respect, has a complex argument that suggests that the disposition to schizophrenia is closely linked to the biological substrate of language.

But if one accepts that in diagnosing mental illness doctors tend to take what patients claim to experience at face value, it seems likely that in other times and places that was also the case.

One could also predict that depression of some kind, although less uniform, has been common throughout history and may well have been associated with delusions of guilt. However, these are likely to express and accentuate beliefs that are common in a

particular culture and so explain fluctuations in prevalence rather than origins. Guilt may amplify pre-existing beliefs.

Similarly, obsessional anxieties often tend to focus on fears of having thoughts and behaving in ways that the local society finds abhorrent. Again, this could kindle prevailing fears.

Moreover, false confessions are very common. The other night the policeman in charge of the investigation of the murder of Timothy Bulger (the two year old murdered by two boys aged eleven and ten) told of how the father of a boy who had absolutely nothing to do with the crime had confessed that his son had been responsible and how that had led a local lynch mob threatening the life of the unfortunate boy and the family having to move from the area.

What is more interesting is that there is evidence that the geographical and historical distribution of witchhunts in Europe and Salem may be correlated with ergot poisoning from rye contaminated with the fungus. That is associated with hallucinations and vivid dreams. There is a lady expert on this subject (Prof Mary Kilbourne Matossian, University of Maryland, and earlier Linnda R. Caporael?); see earlier correspondence.

* But this points not only towards a precipitating trigger, but more significantly a climate of beliefs that made people susceptible and inclined to a witchcraft explanation. That is why I believe that the most important questions about the phenomenon have nothing to do with its supernatural ornaments. It is the facilitating environment of belief that makes witchcraft relevant to cultures that no longer have a strong belief in the supernatural; which of course excludes the USA.

I think we need to look at the relation of witchcraft phenomenon to different religions and the way that different religions react to it.

09/02/2001

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

GLOBALIZATION OF WITCHCRAFT
16/10/2007 14:56:15

One of several possible ways of approaching the issues of globalization is in terms of morality - of facts and oughts, or mechanisms and obligations.

In general it seems that discussions in favor of globalization tend to be grounded in descriptions, facts, and what is considered to be the case, whereas those opposing globalization are more likely to be grounded and expressed in terms of oughts or obligations. Proglobalization has its center of gravity in mechanisms whilst counter-globalization has its center of gravity in morality.

Hume, famously, observed that ought cannot be derived from is. And though it is clear that the two are not exclusive or independent, but interact and influence each other, their proportions vary. Capitalism and market economics tend to argue their case in terms of an opportunistic reflection on what they consider is - impersonal and mechanistic forces approximating to natural laws. Whilst their opponents are much more likely to give precedence to what ought to be the case and the obligations that this entails. If Hume is even partly right then constructive debate is likely to be difficult and much more likely that the two sides will talk past each other and remain uninfluenced by each others arguments.

This is a general problem. In Norman's work on witchcraft it is clear that most of the prevailing confusion is largely grounded in that between mechanism and morality or obligation. Those who live in a world of witches live in a world ruled and motivated by obligations in which ought takes precedence over what is in any mechanistic sense. In contrast the anthropologists and historians with a scientific world view who study witchcraft tend to interpret what they experience in terms of rule based mechanisms approximating to natural laws. In general obligations are context dependent whereas mechanisms worthy of the name are ideally context independent.

One of the possibilities for reconciliation or at least rapprochement is that most morality is motivated by a reaction

to bad things happening to a personal experience of good and bad, nice and nasty, things that one would like versus those that one would prefer to avoid (i.e. kakia). Hence if one can create a mechanism that will shift the balance from nasty to nice or in general from poverty/kakia to prosperity then the overlap between mechanism and morality is likely to increase- though perhaps never to the extent of being coextensive.

In the past I have suggested that ideas of morality and particularly justice and injustice are based on two mechanisms or biological or neural modules that have probably evolved more or less independently in that they can be observed to some extent differentially in different species. These are:

`Economic' or Rule following behaviors based on or interpretable in terms of reciprocal interactions - tit for tat, eye for eye - expressed as `do unto others what they do to you'. This is the basis of the notion of retributive justice and explicit in most legal codes from Hammurabi onwards.

Empathetic behavior probably based on the function of mirror neurons and expressed in many cultures as the golden rule - `do unto others what you would have them do to you'. This is the basis of restorative justice.

To these I now think it is necessary to add a third component that elaborates on the empathetic and motivates the economic - a framework of obligations or oughts that amounts to a moral landscape that shapes dispositions to behave in particular ways. Or like the distortions of space time that are interpreted as the force of gravity. This is likely to be the basis of the rule of law which transforms what seems right to individuals into a system with which at least a majority is prepared to accept and act.

Balanced rediprocity
Empathetic understanding and affordances
Landscape of obligations

20/01/2002

As you seem to be worrying about where to locate the centre of gravity of your work, I thought it might be helpful to try and set out in list form what I believe to be the fundamental

premises or features of the phenomenon of witchcraft that any subsequent or higher level analysis will have to take into account.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF WITCHCRAFT

1. It is essential to distinguish between things and reports or descriptions of things. It is a defining characteristic of homo sapiens that our behaviour is determined not only by the features of things, but how they are described. And many things that determine our behaviour exist only at the level of description. For example the following table lists things that exist as things and contrasts them with things that (almost certainly) exist only as descriptions.

THINGS	DESCRIPTIONS
Horses	Unicorns
Otters	Loch Ness Monster
Sparrows	Simurg (Attar, The Conference of the Birds)
Healers	Witches
People	Spirits
Visible agents	Invisible agents
Madonna	Jesus

However, even things that exist only as a description (or presentation rather than representation) can be the basis for enterprises, cults, and institutions. Most religions are probably based more on descriptions than things and the Loch Ness Monster can generate exhibitions, books, expeditions and travel. Descriptions can change the world more easily than things.

Agents are entities that are self-powered, internally motivated, and whose behaviour is determined not only by physical law (as when they fall to earth from a great height or blown about by a hurricane) but by internal representations (the outcome of playing chicken on a blacktop will depend on predicting the behaviour and representations of your opponent).

The agents accepted by biology are visible and physical like people and bears. But the agents accepted at other times and places include a much wider range and include invisibles like ancestors, gods, demons, and spirits of various kinds.

It is important to remember that witchcraft beliefs have their origins in a time when many of the creatures we know today had yet to be discovered and their properties were unknown or

speculation. Today we live in a conceptual world that has very little space for more large animals.

2. Although there may be well established subjective phenomena such as hallucinations, other perceptual abnormalities, delusions of reference and passivity, etc that might suggest a supernatural explanation and exist as a seed from which beliefs might develop, or grow like Topsy, the phenomenon of witchcraft does not presuppose the real existence of supernatural phenomena (whatever they may be) as a mechanism. A belief in the possibility of the supernatural, ie a description, is all that is required.

3. For the purposes of this study witchcraft exists only at the level of beliefs and descriptions.

4. All scientific laws worthy of the name and the forces that they conjure up to explain the behaviour of things and how the world works are essentially context independent and observer (agent or participant) neutral. In other words nobody has a special relationship, or can expect favours, or preferential treatment, from gravity, electricity, magnetism, etc.

5. This would also be expected as an essential feature of any additional forces (at present unknown and hence supernatural circa 2002) that may be found necessary to explain the phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, or psychokinesis that are being studied in parapsychology departments, like that at the University of Edinburgh.

6. In contrast, witchcraft descriptions suggest the working, not of impersonal scientific laws or forces, but relationships between agents (as defined above). Witchcraft is based on explanations in terms of `interpersonal' (interagent) relationships, albeit with a larger range of entities (ancestors, spirits, demons etc) than current biology allows or recognises. Its explanatory mechanisms and motivations are therefore essentially (folk) psychological rather than physical.

7. The moral and motivational system which witchcraft presupposes is therefore the more or less familiar one of notions like illegitimate alliances, treachery, treason, and conspiracy. And thus raise questions like who benefits and who is harmed by witchcraft acts and allegations.

8. The major effect of the belief in witchcraft is a reinterpretation of perceived danger or threat and the experience of fear that is their marker. Fear and anxiety are an

everyday experience that is a response either to internal (eg unconscious drives or conditioned responses) or external events; especially those that are unusual, unexpected, or difficult to account for by our `philosophy' (in Hamlet's usage), or model of how the world works. An important question is what kinds of fear inducing experiences are associated with witchcraft accusations AND which are NOT.

8a. In a world where knowledge of physical law and especially probability and chance (which is probably the most critical) is limited, explanations in terms of psychological processes and alliances with powerful external (alien to the group) agents would seem bound to increase anxiety and induce fear in the face of any aberration.

9. In considering the working of witchcraft as a social phenomenon it is important to distinguish between calculated, conscious, intended effects and those that are incidental as it is the latter that may be more important in sustaining and ensuring the survival of the phenomena. For example, witchcleansing may ostensibly be designed to eliminate or neutralise witches, but may in addition, unwittingly or coincidentally, reduce group anxiety, increase group cohesion and solidarity and reinforce common values and standards. And by constraining deviance it will have a normative and equilibrating function.

10. In a world or system in which the group takes precedence over the individual prosperity is likely to be seen as a zero-sum game so that the success of any one person can only be at the expense of others. Hence individual success or good fortune is likely to be experienced by others as dangerous and deviant and associated with feelings of loss and abuse; or anger rather than envy (one does not feel envy for the good fortune of the thief who steals from you, but anger and a desire for retribution). Such a world is closed to the notion of surplus value and sustained transformation and development (where could it come from other than the greater community that includes ones ancestors?). Hence the benefits of a market economy and the magic of capital are beyond comprehension and likely to be experienced as malevolent and dangerous and call forth witchcraft explanations and accusations rather than books on how to get rich quickly. This seems to be what has been described recently in Sub-Saharan Africa and accounts for a number of killings of individuals by members of their traditional community who cannot understand or account for differences in individual prosperity except in terms of witchcraft.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

11. The single most important marker of our modern `scientific' civilisation which distinguishes it from all others is the notion and experience of probablility, chance and randomness.

12. Science is not a set of fixed beliefs but methods of assessing, or testing, the liklihood of propositions (statements that can be true or false).

13. Given belief in the reality and potency of witchcraft it becomes available for exploitation for otherwise unrelated purposes such as politics. And as yet another mechanism that can be used to coerce and change minds it can secondarily change the physical world (by making individuals or groups move matter with whatever means are at their disposal).

14. Among fundamental psychological processes that may contribute to witchcraft beliefs are:

The contrast between the early symbiotic relationship between infant and mother (carer) and its emergence into an individual with clearcut ego (self) boundaries.

The projection of anxiety provoking dispositions onto others. First the individual projects onto a suitable or safer other (scapegoat) such as an outsider or marginal. Second, the group consensus projects (in a way that witchcraft allows) the scapegoat into the wider virtual world of supernatural agents. Witchcraft could therefore be thought of as a metaphenomenon.

15. Because I believe that human beings are disposed (programmed) towards individuality (psychodiversity) there is likely to be a continuous and implicit tension between the dispositions of the individual and the mores of the group, especially in societies where the group is given precedence over the individual and the culture is closed to innovation.

16. There is a question vaguely forming in my mind that the anthropological preoccupation with witchcraft in exotic places is a mechanism whereby our recent `scientific' society has tried to project beliefs that it finds uncongenial and embarrassing onto alien others that it despises. Like adolescents noisily rejecting the attitudes of their parents and betters. It is an exercise in intellectual cleansing. And it might even be argued that the only motivation for activities as seemingly pointless as anthropology was as a finesse to justify such racist attitudes. Or better that anthropology is a means of distancing ourselves from those beliefs and attitudes that we are embarrassed and ashamed to own.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

I may add to this later

.....

WITCHCRAFT AND POISON

Date: 29 December 2002

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Sun Aug 18, 2002 12:29:52 Europe/London
To: Norman Miller <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject:

I have felt a little uneasy about your use of the term poison in relation to WC. I may be misunderstanding your intention, but at times it seems as if you are clutching at the notion as a way of domesticating a troubling concept that is difficult to assimilate into our conventional notions about how the world works. And that you are trying to reduce WC, by an act of translation or re-description, to being little more than a naive or primitive way of dealing with the use of what might popularly and informally be described as poisons.

First, I would recommend that you read the beginning of Isaiah Berlin's essay, `The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will', in his collection `The Crooked Timber of Humanity: the revolt against the myth of and ideal world' which is in print and easily available. In it he points out how recent many of our attitudes and fundamental beliefs that we now tend to take for granted really are. How the assumption that Truth is one and error multiple and hence that one is good and many bad was historically dominant until only a couple of hundred years ago. And that variety is preferable to uniformity, tolerance to intolerance, warm hearted idealism to cold realism, and that integrity and sincerity are valuable independent of the truth ot validity of the beliefs or principle involved, are very new ideas, some might say conceits, that would seem very strange and threatening to most of our ancestors

No Catholic of the 16th century (or Calvinist) could say `I abhor the heresies of the reformers but am deeply moved by the sincerity and integrity with which they hold practice and sacrifice themselves for their abominable beliefs'. On the contrary the deeper the sincerity of the beliefs of Muslims, Jews, atheists, or witches the more dangerous they were bound to be considered; the more likely they were to lead souls to perdition because heresy is `surely a poison more dangerous to the health of society than even hypocrisy or dissimulation,

which at least do not openly attack the true doctrine. Only Truth matters, to die in a false cause is wicked or pitiable'.

Notions of heresy and WC overlap in the mission statement of the various inquisitions. What they have in common may be that some express beliefs that are considered wrong and dangerous to the good of society. These are punished but there is the assumption, indeed the certainty, that there are others as yet undetected. The fear that this generates finds a focus in the behaviour or existence of individuals or groups that in some way stand out from the norm for that community and do not `fit'. These are then cleansed.

Witch cleansing is a means of dealing with troubling beliefs and intentions - not substances.

The problem is that the notion of poison has become a metaphor for ideas that we fear and its current use is often more figurative than scientific.

I remember in my childhood that medicines and substance that were potentially harmful were referred to as poisons and that classification marked by their containers; heavily built and embossed bottles in dark and dangerous colors; the shape designed to be easily distinguished from those containing benign substances in an age when the only light at night was from the moon or candles. In this sense a poison was any substance that might cause harm if used inappropriately; eg killing rats was good but killing people bad, and arsenic might treat syphilis but could also kill if used carelessly.

As it is now used poison is not really and certainly far more than a biological term, and the sense in which I first learned of it would probably now be better referred to simply as a toxic substance.

But, as it is now used, poison is to a toxic substance as murder is to death.

I would suggest that poison has the following defining characteristics:

1. A substance usually chemical or biological that can cause disease or death.
2. That is difficult to detect without special knowledge and resources.
3. That can be used by `experts' (those who have access to knowledge and resources) to harm others, usually specific

individuals but sometimes groups, in ways that are difficult to detect and therefore to defend against; ie without warning and therefore contravene tacitly accepted codes of conduct or `chivalry' - it is wrong to shoot someone in the back.
4. That it can be used with malice aforethought.
5. That it is used with malice.

The main reason for my doubts about the importance of poisons, at least in any scientific sense, is simply that knowledge of the properties and virtues of different plants and substances is widespread and ubiquitous. To claim for it a causal role in explaining outbursts of witch related behaviors would seem to require an explanation as to why such knowledge would wax and wane over relatively short periods. And I doubt if there is any evidence that that is the case.

And if most peoples have a working knowledge or awareness of potentially dangerous substances why bring the more exotic aspects of witchcraft into any explanation? Why not simply say that the incidents that are causing concern are the result of `poisons' and the role of the finder is that of the detective who will find the perpetrator? No. The real poisons are in the mind and any physical poisons are metaphors for psychological contagion and intent.

There are, however, other aspects of potentially toxic substances that may be relevant. The use of hallucinogens is widespread by shamans as a means of altering consciousness and giving access (the doors of perception) to the world of spirits. And it has been suggested that in Europe the location of the great witch outbreaks was that where rye was a staple food and the chronology might be correlated with weather conditions that would favor the growth of the fungus ergot that is well-known to produce hallucinations of a type that might be interpreted as the kind of events that witches were believed to participate in. But again although there is some evidence in support and the notion cannot be dismissed at present I think it probably runs into the same kinds of reservations that I have already expressed, and even if hallucinations were necessary to kindle a conflagration that was already primed they would not be sufficient to account for it all.

Witchcraft is primarily a psychological or social psychological phenomenon and poisons play only a minor explanatory role if any.

Maybe one can relate this to other phenomena of more recent concern, like substance abuse and particularly the way that

perceptions, preferences and habits change. You are probably aware that opium and cocaine were not only legal but widely available in this country until The Defense of the Realm Act 1916 and the Dangerous Drugs Act of 1920 which were the first legislative measures to establish the control of narcotics as social policy. Until then it had been more or less an integral part of the life of ordinary people - added to beer in the fen lands and children would be sent to the corner shop for supplies. It was used by Prime Ministers and one who fretted about his consumption was told by his physician `better a touch of laudanum than grumbling guts in The House'. Around 1850 the average consumption is thought to have been about 3-4lbs/1000 population and at that time deaths attributed to opium were around 5 per million. Compare these levels of consumption and mortality with current tobacco and alcohol.

Very roughly in EU in 2000 average consumption is about 9 litres of pure alcohol per annum (14.2 in Eire). USA around 2.2-2.5 gallons (?8.3 Litres). USA deaths from Cirrhosis alone 30/million; ie does not take accidents RTA etc into account.

The changes that have taken place since then have very little to do with medical evidence of harm and drug related policies are incoherent and illogical. As during Prohibition the vast majority of the harm correlated with drugs is the result of legislation which is almost completely ineffective. If that were not the case then, in what is perhaps the purest market economy, successful control would be marked by an increase in price. This is not the case. In the UK `ecstasy' is available to infants in school for around ¬£1 per tablet or about the same price as a large bar of chocolate or a fizzy drink. Which would you prefer? And I was often told by patients that they could have any drug delivered to their door in Falmouth within 5 minutes of a phone call - far quicker than a pizza.

I have no time to go into the history of opium in UK but see `Opium for the People' by Virginia Berridge (Free Association Books ISBN 1-85343-414-0) or the earlier edition written with Griffiths-Edwards. Also Marek Kohn, Narcomania. If you are interested I can give you a more up to date bibliography.

My point here is simply that in substance abuse you have active pharmacological substances but on their own these are not sufficient to account for the actual social phenomena observed; these are psychologically determined. Even to the extent that there is good evidence that a large part of the supposed effects of the different substances is more closely correlated with expectations than differences in pharmacology. And that the

placebo effect is related to changes in the brain similar to those also caused by the substance that the patient thinks they are taking.

You will not understand the phenomena of substance abuse if you confine your focus to pharmacology, and you will not understand witchcraft if you blinder down onto poisons or even hallucinogens.

** Nor, will you understand witchcraft if you try and break the phenomenon onto the Procrustean bed of those concepts with which we feel at ease today. I think rather that we have to try and consider them as a system; a gestalt anchored in specific times and places. Witches are atomic constituents of specific world-views. In a sense they are virtual and in other world-views they take different forms or are hung like clothes on different things such as communists or alleged ritual or satanic abusers of children. The regalia of the witch is the wardrobe with which we clothe our deepest fears. And as with all fears of that type they are projections and their origin is within us rather than outside. They are manifestations of our unconscious which is also our unknown and undescribable.

Though the basic rules of pharmacology may not vary with time and place their social and psychological context, interpretation, and effects certainly do and it these that we must address.

PRECONDITIONS OF WITCHCRAFT/PSYCHOLOGY

12/08/2000

Dear Norman,

Patience.

I share with my not so illustrious namesake King Duncan a potentially disastrous distaste for detail. Once upon a time he decided to settle a longstanding dispute with the Norsemen by suggesting a set battle on the watermeadows at Perth (now the county cricket pitch). Unfortunately his lack of attention to the details of the rules of engagement led to his defeat. He had confused horses with horsemen and Norsemen with gentlemen, so that he had assumed that a battle between 50 horse on each side would also be between 50 horsemen. He had failed to take into account that his opponents were foreign and therefore cads and they managed to get two horsemen on each horse thus giving themselves an advantage that even chivalry could not overcome.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

For present purposes a page is as long as I say it is no more and no less.

To understand the phenomena of witchcraft one has to consider it from three different aspects:

- The preconditions for witchcraft explanations
- The psychological processes involved
- The structure of the events which constitute the phenomenon

Preconditions:

1. A belief in causal explanation (cause and effect). By analogy with the Big Bang I think that causal explanations are of two kinds which could be called HOT and COLD. In this context COLD is orderly and HOT relatively chaotic.

COLD cause and effect are explanations that have become familiar, are largely taken for granted and are sufficient to account for all ordinary events. They are originally animistic but benign, lawlike, and later as a confusion of good and bad spirits collapses onto a polarity between a single good God and a single bad Devil the space left behind becomes colonised by scientific laws which are from the spiritual point of view the mechanisms by which God and the Devil exercise their powers. Monotheism is probably a prerequisite for science.

COLD explanations are associated with structures and patterns. They are extenSional.

HOT explanations are the default that have for ordinary day to day events been superceded by COLD. However, they retain their power and come into play, often explosively, when COLD explanations cannot account for extraordinary events. They are animistic and anarchic or lawless. The spirit forces that erupt into the world are largely autonomous but can be influenced for good or evil by human agency. They are essentially intenSional.

HOT explanations are associated with epidemics of witchcraft fears and accusations.

2. The existence of a social contract. This is based on the recognition of the potentially destructive powers of instincts and the need of communal mechanisms of control to contain them. This is associated with a polarity or tension between the desires and needs of individuals and groups.

3. A belief in the importance and power of human agency and a tacit understanding of the possibility of unconscious and unintended harm. This leads to a blurring of the boundaries between intention and action and in legal terms to a devaluation of the importance of intent in determining culpability. This is a defining characteristic of witchcraft events and more important than their occult ornamentation which is really incidental.

A secondary effect of this is to increase the relative importance of accessories to crime vis a vis the actual perpetrators. In this context accessories elicit supernatural or conspiratorial networked powers that are for the most part beyond the range of human justice or retribution (they are like tides or physical law). A corollary is that such forces can for the most part only do harm via the help and encouragement of human agents. Therefore retribution and control measures are directed at the latter.

The nature of the crime is therefore conspiracy or treason.

4. The possibility of suprahuman powers: these are often and especially in the past occult, but could be natural powers to which only a minority have access (?drugs, Jews, capitalists), or more commonly now putative conspiratorial networks (paedophiles, Freemasons, Communists, cartels).

Psychological Processes

1. Anxiety and terror of the unknown and the possibility of loss of control implied by the failure of ordinary explanations.

2. The possibility of unconscious culpability and agency. This means that in theory anyone might be a perpetrator.

3. Relatively easy identification with the motives of the perpetrators: eg. sex, aggression, greed, and selfishness (individuality), which to some degree all have experienced. With (2) this amounts to a powerful source of anxiety and terror which can only be relieved by:

4. A massive projection of threatening guilt onto a scapegoat or crudely categorised group. It is a characteristic that the definition of the scapegoated group ignores all internal variations. This relieves the communal anxiety by transferring responsibility for misfortune onto a less valued minority or individual and reasserts the values of the community and the social contract; it cleanses.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

The Structure of Witchcraft events:

1. Thomas Kuhn distinguished science as advancing through cycles of two phases: Revolutionary science during which old paradigms of explanation were replaced by new; and ordinary science when the implications of a particular paradigm were quietly explored until its limits had been reached and the need for a new paradigm could no longer be resisted. I want to suggest an analogous process in witchcraft events:

- Epidemics of witchcraft accusations that convulse a whole community
- Sporadic, local, small scale, institutionalised witchcraft activity that maintain and refine the defining characteristics of witchcraft that emerge during epidemics. These may focus on incidental details; as if because a red car crashes the colour is considered a significant cause of the crash, or the colour of a mugger's skin. In a sense it is a racism in action.

Epidemic Wichcraft is characterised by:

1. A Trigger: An extraordinary event or pattern that defies explanation by COLD causality and thus raises a question.

2. A System of Explanation that can suggest an answer (The prerequisites above).

3. A Social Response that can provide a solution (or resolution) (The Psychological processes outlined above)

Sporadic or endemic witchcraft activity is the result assimilating the conclusions of the epidemic phases into the worldview of the community and working through their implications.

In the context of our recent discussion of ergotism and witchcraft, the contamination of a staple food (Rye) with ergot resulted in an epidemic of mental and physical disturbance in the community that could not be explained by their COLD systems of explanation, but did fit their fallback HOT explanations in terms of witches and the Devil.

Ergot was therefore a possible trigger for witchcraft epidemics and the distribution and seasonal variations in witchcraft epidemics in Europe supports this. It is however only one of a number of possible triggers not all of which act pharmacologically.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

The importance of this is that I think there has been a tendency to confuse the three components of witchcraft: Triggers, Explanations, and Responses.

- The importance of specific triggers such as ergot may have been overlooked or at least undervalued.

- The explanatory systems have attracted the most popular attention, but that interest has given excessive importance to occult explanations which are historically important but not essential to the phenomenon; indeed they have served to hide its more common and contemporary manifestations.

- The reaction or response to witchcraft events is what interests the human sciences and is as much a defining characteristic of witchcraft as any other. Appreciating this is important in understanding contemporary social phenomena and should throw a spotlight on a very present danger that is beginning to demand a remedy:

That the usage of the term justice has been allowed to drift so far in the direction of retribution and revenge that it has become a major source of injustice and an obstacle the rule of law. I believe it may be past saving and that the notion of justice should be redefined and renamed. The injustice of justice.

duncan

WITCHCRAFT DEFINITION

I am concerned that the view of witchcraft on which your book is based is the result of an invalid logical argument.

The starting point is a failure to appreciate that what you take to be the only correct 'scientific' interpretation of the world, naive realism, is in reality quite grossly ethnocentric. It has only been believed by a significant and authoritative minority in Europe and some of its former colonies for less than 200 years and even now when its successes might seem incontrovertible, I doubt if it is fully accepted by more than 10% of the adult population. For the remainder some kind of belief in spirits is the rule.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Yet in our discussions I have had the impression that you are assuming the validity of the following 'arguments':
The scientific view of the world rejects the reality of spirits.
Therefore belief in spirits is a delusion.
The only motivation I can think of for this chain of thought, for it cannot be justified and is not an argument, is that it makes witchcraft seem pathological and comfortingly exotic.
Belief in spirits is delusional
All witches believe in spirits or the occult
Therefore all witches are delusional
Therefore any evidence of a delusional belief in spirits is also evidence for belief in witchcraft or -
Anyone who is deluded believes in witchcraft

The first part of the second sequence of propositions is valid but false, the extension is both invalid and false.

The source of the mistake seems to be a failure to distinguish figure from ground or more accurately a tendency to reference the figure to an inappropriate ground. Specifically to define the beliefs of supposed witches not in relation to those of their contemporaries, but your own; and then to use that comparison as a basis for value laden judgements.

* I cannot overemphasize the importance of understanding that belief in spirits was until recently the only and since then has been the majority view of how the world works. In spite of the technological achievements it has enabled it is still the exception rather than the rule. Witches and witchfinders shared identical views about the world and what it contains. In the same way until very recently, well after the Enlightenment, atheists were people who believed in a different kind of god, for at that time the notion of there being no god would have been simply incomprehensible.

* Therefore, in all the times and places where witchcraft has been reported and dignified with a name it cannot be defined in terms of beliefs in the occult simply because that does not discriminate it from any other contemporary beliefs or phenomena. To try and do so is about as sensible as trying to base it on witches having a head and approximately four limbs a mouth and an arse.

* If we are going to further our understanding of witchcraft we must start by accepting that belief in the occult cannot be a sufficient condition and I believe is not even necessary. One could probably go further and suggest that witchcraft does not

and cannot occur between people with very different views about how the world works; it is an extended family affair and originates from within a shared system of beliefs. It is not the beliefs of witches and witchfinders that are contrasting but those between them and those of the anthropologists from another conventional wisdom or historians from a different time.

So, when you dissect away the baroque and occult ornamentations that have encrusted the phenomena what is left? What is witchcraft without magic?

All that is left is a structure of beliefs and practices that are probably manifestations of a set of power relations. The common feature is anxiety or fear of an enemy within who has the ability and motivation to use powers that are not considered exceptional in principle, although they may not be widely available in practice, against the commons or prevailing authority.

What these powers are will vary from one time and place to another and as there has been a tendency to distinguish and define the phenomenon in terms of them, rather than the common structure of which they are simply symptoms or local manifestations, the underlying pattern has been obscured and its importance underappreciated.

A universal distinguishing feature is the belief that the feared enemy must be difficult to detect and distinguish from anyone else. And a corollary is that in order to account for the fact that only a minority in any community will have the competence to access and use the feared technologies (whether poisons or spells or spirits or demons or explosives or biological agents or weapons of mass destruction), it must be allowed that individuals who do not (have such power) can ally themselves with and elicit the help of those who do (have such power). And hence a common thread among all forms of witchcraft is the notion of treason.

Witchcraft requires and presupposes the existence of an other exceptional power. This may be spiritual or temporal but in each case it is believed and feared to be able to infiltrate and hide inside one's own cummunity and threaten it from within. But it can only do this with the collusion and active support of members of the community.

As this pattern is so common it is reasonable to assume that it has evolutionary roots and associations. But there seem to be two possible associations linked to what makes homo sapiens

unique. First, the possibility of conscious deception; not just the programmed deception of a benign insect or plant mimicking a toxic one, or a bird acting injured to draw a predator away from its nest, but a calculated deception that implies an ability to read and manipulate other minds. This is required to explain why objective similarity or identity may yet be aclompanied by marked differences of behaviour. Appearances cannot always be trusted. Second, and not unrelated, anxiety about the consistency of classification and the integrity of boundaries and their implications. Perhaps the basis of identification and trust in communities that have outgrown the limits of blood relations.

Hence witchcraft will be more likely in larger communities distinguishable from other discrete ones and maybe threatened by them. In communities with few gods and structured religious systems that are maybe tending towards monotheism - which is always an unstable and unsustainable organization, that is always in danger of breaking down into duality, unless as with Islam it projects evil into the external world of the infidel and Jihad.

And less likely in distributed fragmented low hierarchy structures like HGs. Perhaps the key here may be the distinction between societies such as USA in which, at least superficially, the structure is made up of individuals related as one to many, and two different forms of society in which individuals are considered parts of a greater whole. I speculate that in the case of HGs the whole to which they are related is Nature in the sense of Gaia. But, there ls another type of part whole relation where the whole is not the Whole Earth but specific parts of it: these might be religious (Islamic Umma, or Christendom) or political (USSR, Republicans or Democrats) or clans, or tribes, or multinationals. My hypothesis is that witchcraft is a phenomenon of this middle level of organization, of relations and interactions between subwholes and specifically when one subwhole feels threatened by another. And if that is the case it suggests that the ideal of individuality and Self that after the Classical Greeks was largely lost until it was fashioned again by the Renaissance (or was the Renaissance) is an unstable attractor in constant danger of decaying back from one/many to part/subwhole. And further, that the mechanism responsible for that decay is witchcraft in the sense that I have been attempting to describe.

The key here is to distinguish three forms of social organization based on the different conceptions of individuality

and the ways in which people are related to each other. The individual is related either-
As one to a single whole that includes animals plants and Gaia.
As one to any one of many competing subwholes that can be defined as physical, conceptual, spiritual, or virtual (these are examples and not meant to be exclusive).
As one self to many others. Like radioactive isotopes this system tends to decay at varying rates to 2 as a result of witchcraft mechanisms (as defined above).

So one might summarize the basis of witchcraft as a heightened sensitivity to Danger due to Deviation. And if that is the negative it suggests that the positive ideal that is being protected is security through sharing, or confidence through conformity. And the motivation and effect of witch finding and cleansing is a reassertion of the reality and benefits of conforming to community values.

There are other secondary aspects of all witchcraft epidemics that can serve as a diagnostic marker and early warning. Of these the most important is symptomatic of the exaggerated fear that is provoked. It is growing pressure that because of the danger well established judicial procedures, that acknowledge the possibility of miscarriages of justice and are designed to reduce them, be set aside in order to make conviction, presumed to be equivalent to detection, easier and therefore more probable. This is characteristic of all witch hunts and is almost always an indication that the assumed danger has been exaggerated and should be re-examined. The problem and solution is almost always psychological rather than judicial.

Witchcraft is the manifestations of a belief in the existence of witches
Witches are kinds of human beings postulated in order to explain why bad things happen. In this sense they are like a number of things that science has postulated in the past. These include the luminiferous aether that before Special Relativity Theory was considered necessary to explain the behavior of light; phlogiston to explain fire; and a number of sub-atomic particles that have been predicted by mathematical theories, but so far are undetected.

Witches and entities, like spirits, are essentially hypothetical, or postulated, entities that are thought to explain why and how the world works or behaves in ways that people would prefer to avoid. They differ from postulated scientific entities only in that like religions, or

psychoanalytic concepts, they are not defined in a form that allows definitive disproof, and survive as conventional wisdom in local areas because of social or group pressures. The characteristics of a non-scientific hypothesis, like the existence of god, is that believers can always formulate an explanation, from within their hypothesis, for whatever happens in an experiment. For example: if a researcher predicts that if x happens then god does not exist, the believer will point out that god could have willed x to happen in order to confuse the experimenter and maintain the precedence of faith. Likewise in psychoanalysis it is probably impossible to refute a proposed explanation for behavior, or to find any behavior that could not be explained by psychoanalysis.

Luminiferous Aether

In the late 19th century the luminiferous aether ("light-bearing aether"), or ether, was a substance postulated to be the medium for the propagation of light. Later theories including special relativity suggested that an aether did not have to exist, and today the concept is considered an obsolete scientific theory. (The word "aether" stems via Latin from the Greek Œ±Œ*π*Œ∏Œ∑œÅ, from a root meaning "to kindle/burn/shine", which signified the substance thought in ancient times to fill the upper regions of space, beyond the clouds.)

Ether, or luminiferous Ether, was the hypothetical substance through which electromagnetic waves travel. It was proposed by the greek philosopher Aristotle and used by several optical theories as a way to allow propagation of light, which was believed to be impossible in "empty" space.

It was supposed that the ether filled the whole universe and was a stationary frame of reference, which was rigid to electromagnetic waves but completely permeable to matter. Hooke endorsed the idea of the existence of the ether in his work Micrographia (1665), and other several philosophers of the 17th century, including Huygens, did the same. At the time of Maxwell's mathematical studies of electromagnetism, ether was still assumed to be the propagation medium and was imbued with physics properties such as permeability and permittivity.

In 1887, a crucial experiment was performed by Michelson and Edward Morley in an attempt to detect the existence of the ether. The experiment, named the Michelson-Morley experiment in honor of its authors, shocked the scientific community by yielding results which implied the non-existence of ether. This result was later on used by Einstein to refute the existence of the ether and allowed him to develop special relativity without this artificial (and non-existent) constraint.

phlogiston theory , hypothesis regarding combustion. The theory, advanced by J. J. Becher late in the 17th cent. and extended and popularized by G. E. Stahl, postulates that in all flammable materials there is present phlogiston, a substance without color, odor, taste, or weight that is given off in burning. ,ÄúPhlogisticated,Äù substances are those that contain phlogiston and, on being burned, are ,Äúdephlogisticated.,Äù The ash of the burned material is held to be the true material. The theory received strong and wide support throughout a large part of the 18th cent. until it was refuted by the work of A. L. Lavoisier, who revealed the true nature of combustion. Joseph Priestley, however, defended the theory throughout his lifetime. Henry Cavendish remained doubtful, but most other chemists of the period, including C. L. Berthollet, rejected it.
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Although this discussion of cosmopolitanism is probably too soft focus and rose tinted, I think it is pitching towards the same issues we have been discussing.

Theory of Mind
Theory of mind, if it is to mean anything, seems to me to presuppose that other minds are different and takes joy in diversity. Fundamentalism or universalism on the contrary aims to remove differences, so that in looking into the mind of another you are looking at yourself. And, if there is any sense of having an inner life, it would be effectively stripped naked by fundamentalists. That was also the aim of the church and conventional wisdom before the renaissance and reformation. One should make one's inner life congruent with the words of the sacred texts. The ideal according to the `Rule of Saint Benedict' was `that our mind be in agreement with our voice'. This was described by the notion of `concordia' or `consonantia' that was the ideal as to how to structure life and language in accordance with beliefs and convictions (John Martin). It is found in Dante, Thomas a Kempis, and Marsilio Ficino, who wrote `no harmony gives greater delight than that of heart and tongue'.

The background of concordia was that all men were made in the image of God and were therefore alike, even if their identity were clouded by sin, and so the aim of words and outward rituals was to restore harmony between inside and outside (the sacred texts) and between men, and with the world - the mind was a microcosm of the macrocosm that was God. This also seems to me to be the basis of fundamentalist utopian dreams with or without

a god. The emphasis is on similarity and conformity, no matter how high the ideal.

The anthropology on which concordia was based began to be undermined by William of Ockham and other nominalist theologians and came to expression in Martin Luther who could not accept that man was essentially similar to God and hence his view of man was of a sinner marked by dissimilarity, diversity, and depravity. What united men was the fact that they were sinful and different.¬†

Until the Renaissance the idea of prudence was ethical and focused on doing things for the right reasons - by choice and love of good rather than as a slave to passion. It was concerned with self control and emotional continence. But with the Renaissance and the emergence of a new kind of individuality came a new reflective consciousness of the possibilities of lying and deceit, that is the other side of the coin of the ability to read minds that Theory of Mind makes possible. This was expressed explicitly among others by Machiavelli's `Prince' and Castiglione's `Book of the Courtier'. And the ideal of prudence as one of the cardinal virtues evolved from the ethical, control of passions, to the pragmatic and the need to think before one spoke and only reveal what was appropriate , or prudent, in the circumstances and in accordance with one's individual agenda.¬† Which led to the emergence of an awareness of sincerity as a ideal and making ones voice a true reflection of ones inner thoughts, or transparency.

And so the direction of fit between mind and voice was reversed - from making ones mind congruent with the words spoken and read to¬† making ones voice congruent with one's mind.

The distinction between universalism and cosmopolitanism seems to reflect these contrasts. Universalism aims for a utopia in which minds are made congruent with authority, usually what is written, and the ideal is uniformity of thought and action, which is only possible by external rules - which are sufficient because ideally the only need for mind reading is to discover deviations from the true way. In contrast, cosmopolitanism is premised by and glories in diversity and functions by mind reading (Theory of Mind and empathy) and unconditional regard for the other.

The economics of universalism,¬† and fundamentalism of all kinds, is the planned economy and centralized control, whilst the economics of cosmopolitanism is the market.

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One of the problems is that from the point of view of the fundamentalist diversity is selfishness and therefore sin and leads to a sense of exclusion from which universalism is an escape.

¬†

MILLER SUMMARY

If you base your understanding of witchcraft only on what can be “seen” or known in an empirical, concrete way, then what do you get?

1. Witchcraft ideas are similar across cultures.
2. Witchcraft crimes are similar.
3. Witchcraft laws are similar.

WITCHCRAFT PROBLEMS

What's wrong with witchcraft?

Most popular definitions of witchcraft take the form of variants on `harm caused to people or their possessions by magical (or supernatural) means'. This has resulted in so much confusion that any study that relies on it should be treated as defective at root.

The confusion arises from the implied validity and relevance, in this context, of a distinction between natural and supernatural in which the natural is equated with `scientific' and considered superior intellectually, and even morally, to the `magical' or supernatural. In some cases the natural or `scientific' world view is also described as `causal', the implication being that the supernatural or `magical' is in some way acausal. This is presumably based on the belief that the `scientific' is causally effective, whereas the `magical' is not; but that begs the question of how effectiveness is to be measured. For, although if the aim is to bring about changes in the physical world directly `scientific' methods will certainly be superior, if the aim is psychological (with indirect effects on the physical as a result of human action) the `magical' might well be more effective - remember the power of the placebo effect.

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The emphasis and reliance on a scientific vs. magical dichotomy is blindered and evidence of an ethnocentric, specifically eurocentric, and elitist bias, as it ignores, or is ignorant of, the fact that what is regarded as the scientific world-view is little more than 200 years old, predominantly localized to the North Atlantic rim, and although it has shaped the education systems and institutions of former colonies in other parts of the world, it is still the belief of only a minority of the population even in the most scientifically and technologically advanced countries. For example, in the USA more than 80% of the population claim religious beliefs that include spirits, devils, and angels that could not be considered `scientific' in the sense implicit in most definitions of witchcraft. And, if one considers the whole history of homo sapiens then the scientific world view cannot have been held by more than a tiny fraction of one percent of the total population. To dismiss the beliefs of the vast remainder seems at best perverse. For, at the very least, although their beliefs, and the behaviours based on them, may not be as causally and predictably effective in interacting with modern technologies they may well have other significant and beneficial effects that account for their persistence.

It is my contention that the distinction between the scientific and magical is not helpful in understanding the phenomena of witchcraft, because it is a view from outside, from a presumed privileged position, and amounts to a negative value judgement against the societies being studied. It also neglects the fact that for witchcraft to be a significant phenomenon requires that the belief in witchcraft is common to at least a greater majority of the population. It is not enough that a minority regard themselves as witches and having extraordinary powers, if the rest regard them as eccentric, or unscientific. This is why the scientific vs. magical dichotomy is meaningless - it does not discriminate between witches and any others in the population. It is not that one part of society believes in magic and the other does not - within, everyone believes in magic in the sense of the definition. In all epidemics of witch accusations the belief in witchcraft is shared by witches, witchfinders, the informal institutions that regulate belief and behaviour, and the alleged victims. Witchcraft is not an alien intrusion into the body of the society, like a virus or bacterial infection, but more like autoimmunity, or cancer, when the cells of the body turn against it or themselves.

In the context of understanding witchcraft the dichotomy between science and magic is simply irrelevant - though not impotent of causing harm by the confusion it has engendered.

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This raises the question of why the significance of the scientific / magical distinction has lingered for so long. I believe that the reason is that it is due to a misunderstanding about the limits of the scientific world view and the nature of that which it has, at least in part, superceded. And that the proponents of the distinction have a glimmer of an idea about the real distinction but have missed the point and chosen inappropriate terms. They have drawn the boundary in the wrong place.

Weber described the modern scientific view of the world as `disenchanted', by which he meant mechanical in contrast to spiritual or organic. Now it is characteristic of what is regarded as the most successful modern sciences, such as physics and chemistry, and the technologies based on them, that they imply a model of the world that is by definition rule-following and predictable, and that they have selected for study those parts of the world that are consistent with that model and in terms of it as predictable as mechanisms like clockwork. And according to this view the world is made up from components like atoms and forces like gravity whose behaviour is consistent, predictable, and will remain so for ever irrespective of our whims or attitudes. To a very considerable degree this `scientific' world is context independent.

But, contrary to a frequent misunderstanding that amounts to a prejudice, this model of science is not universally applicable (the scientific method may be universally applicable but the models that it has helped select for one field may not be applicable to another), and its success depends on limiting what is appropriate for study and application to those issues for which it has been proven to be effective and neglecting or dismissing the rest. And these happen to include the greater majority of human behaviours and the interpersonal interactions on which social life depends. For, in contrast to the world of physics and engineering the behaviour of that concerned with psychological and social interaction is exquisitely context dependent and such predictability as can be discovered depends not on transcendent and universal physical laws, but more locally negotiated contracts and conventions. In contrast to physical reality, social reality is to a considerable extent constructed and an attainment.

So, whilst the `scientific' world view is mechanical and built up from neutral and impersonal atomic components and forces, that of the `pre-scientific' (including 80% of Americans) is organic and includes the living, the dead, and the never having been alive, and its behaviour accounted for, not in terms of

neutral energy or forces, but interpersonal relations, personal will, emotions, and psychological drives. And in contrast to the `scientific' world whose horizons are set by the range of the senses and bracketed by life and death, those of the `prescientific' are far wider and more porous. In this world entities other than the living can also mix and mingle, and birth and death are not clear limits, but more like the boundary between the field of a spotlight and the surrounding dark. Within this world if compartments exist their walls are thinner and easier to cross.

This is the world in which almost all human beings have lived and found familiar. And we would too, for although not one in which advanced technologies were so likely to develop it has proved compatible with their use, and it had its own technology that was in many aspects not very different from our own. Even in the most `scientific' cultures most people know how to use technologies rather than understanding them. They accept the word of authorities usually without question. When they feel sick they visit doctors and accept medicine without much explanation or evidence of its likely effectiveness. And everyone knows people who prefer less orthodox or `alternative' therapies for which there is no clear evidence base, nor any explanation compatible with the scientific principles that have been so successful in the physical sciences; and perhaps ironically many find computers indispensible to research such treatments. In what ways would the `prescientific' world be different?

Apart from differences in the available technologies, perhaps the most important would be that more phenomena would be less easily predicted or explained and so the world might seem rather more precarious and threatening. And yet it is not difficult to find debates about the dangers of the present age and nostalgia for supposedly preferable pasts. We would still seek the help and advice of authorities, and they would offer many of the same forms of solutions. Medicines would still be taken by mouth or rubbed on the body. The contents might be different and there might be more ritual involved in their use, but that would scarcely be noted. There might also be more rituals and ceremonies, although to an anthropologist from Mars these might be difficult to distinguish from our aerobics, yoga, gyms, etc.

What would be different would be a greater awareness of context and the importance of relationships, including especially those with different kinds of spirits and ancestors. And to maintain relationships there would perhaps be a greater sensitivity to the uniqueness of individuals and psychological mechanisms. The

essential differences in how one interacts with machines and people would be clearer.

INTERNATIONAL WITCHCRAFT DATA

I have done new searches for words included in the title only (not keywords that might refer to content not mentioned in title) using both Amazon UK and also USA. I have also calculated the ratio between titles available in UK and USA by dividing by the numbers for USA by UK. However the latter does not take matters very far - there are about twice as many hits in Amazon USA as in the UK; there may be a difference in conventions in that either US prefers plurals or the UK singular terms; or that UK distinguishes singular and plural whilst US does not; and possibly US prefers to focus on agents rather than processes, functions, activities, or other abstractions. But these are no more than hints.

The first column is the original figures which were based non keywords found in Amazon UK.

Numbers of results produced by searches on Amazon for:

Term	Original	UK	USA	USA/UK
Magic	33300	12704	22704	1.8
Occult	22400	766	1905	2.5
Supernatural	3200	860	1886	2.2
Evil	4000	2835	6096	2.2
Devil	5100	3708	7683	2.1
Witchcraft	3200	956	1714	1.8
Witches		1075	5653	5.3
Witch	3800	3137	5653	1.8
Wicca	2100	238	267	1.1

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Wizard	2200	1732	3296	1.9	
Terrorism	7200	1910	5617	2.9	
Terrorists		144	2031	14.1	
Terrorist	1200	393	2031	5.2	
Terror	3500	2660	5868	2.2	
Vampire	2200	1951	2984	1.5	
Vampires	1400	344	2984	8.7	
Monsters	4200	1907	6318	3.3	
Monster	3700	2849	6318	2.2	
Assassination	1500	350	1442	4.1	
Assassins		227	1118	4.9	
Assassin		400	1118	2.8	
Killers	1000	598	4437	7.4	
Killer		1951	4437	2.3	
Killing		1567	2708	1.7	
Mafia	1000	435	1146	2.6	
Murderers	1200	125	765	6.1	
Murderer		202	765	3.8	
Murder	14500	8202	16812	2.0	
Treason	617	364	1065	2.9	
Traitors		119	786	6.6	
Traitor		307	786	2.6	

All other related terms like sorcerer, werewolf, shaman, etc, are in the mid to low hundreds.

If the numbers of titles listed on Amazon containing specific terms are an indication of interest and demand then that for witches and witchcraft is comparable to that for evil, the devil, monsters, and the supernatural and greater than that for terrorist, vampire, assassination, mafia, or murderers. And though there are about twice as many titles about terrorism, perhaps not surprising in the context of the `war on terror', witch is three times as common as terrorist and three or four times more common than killers, murderers, or mafia. Also interesting is that, whilst magic and the occult are about ten times more common than witchcraft, that is also the case with supernatural which is roughly as common as witchcraft and witch and evil. I do not wish to make too much of this but simply use it as an indication that making allowances for current affairs and dangers witchcraft seems to be of comparable interest to terrorism and other forms of `evil' and to be of greater interest than specific forms of supernatural or supernormal activities.

This seems to me surprising as for most people witchcraft little more than a part of popular culture, of folk stories and horror

movies, and with the same degree of reality as vampires, were-wolfs, Jedi knights, Star Trek, hobbits, or Harry Potter.

The characteristics of witchcraft are:
1. A forensic interpretation of harm anb bad events.
2. A belief in the existence of extraordinary powers.
3. Social amplification of fear to terror with the generation of moral panic.
4. The animistic doctrine is not essential but gives the phenomenon its traditional appearance and makes it stand out from less extreme manifestations of the same process. The effects of animism are to greatly extend the realm of the forensic, make the dichotomy between the natural and forensic not exclusive, and encourage the belief in the existence of extraordinary powers that can be controlled by exceptional individuals. The result is a far less predictable world in which events are not determined by blind physical law but the whims of mindful agents only some of which have ever been embodied and enfleshed. The uncertainty that this creates make the world very scary.¬∏¬∏¬∏January 21, 2005¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùNature of Witchcraft¬∏What is usually referred to as witchcraft is really nothing more than the most extreme and exotic manifestation of the ubiquitous process that has resulted in our notions of justice and law and the institutions that have developed from them. What makes it appear qualitatively different, and hence obscured its origin, is simply a matter of differences in motivation and context.

Our notion of justice and hence law is based on a fundamental classification of harmful events, according to whether or not someone can be held accountable for them. Those that are considered accidents of nature and for which nobody could reasonably be considered responsible I will refer to as natural - as in death by natural causes. Whilst those for which somebody can be held to account I will refer to as forensic - as in death by homicide or manslaughter. And it is worth noting that the notion of the self has to a large extent been shaped by forensic considerations. The result is a dichotomy between natural and forensic that lies at the root of all our moral judgements.

The most important consequences of the distinction between natural and forensic events is to identify a large number of harmful events deemed to be the result of human action and to

create institutions, such as the legal systems, designed to minimize them.

The number of forensic events and the intensity of the response to them will be a function of two factors: the perceived risk of harm, based on liklihood and scale, and whether the dominant framework for interpreting how the world works is atomic (scientific) or animistic.

In the context of the atomic, the natural and forensic will tend to be treated as mutually exclusive categories (related by exclusive or - XOR = x or y but not both x and y) whilst in the animistic context the natural and forensic can readily coexist (related by inclusive or - OR = x or y or y and y). This has the effect of increasing the relative numbers of forensic events and reducing those considered exclusively natural. And the size of the forensic category is further increased by allowing a far greater range of causal influences.

Within the category of forensic events a further sub-classification develops from a universal phenomenon referred to as the social amplification of risk, and its subjective complement, or obverse, the experience of danger. This refers to the observation that the subjective experience of danger and estimates of risk are often distorted and far greater or less than the calculated probabilities of the unwanted outcome. And social amplification can facilitate the escalation of ordinary anxiety into terror or dread and hence kindle moral panic.

The processes of social amplification and the generation of moral panics are fundamental to witchcraft transforming the ordinary forensic interpretation of events into something qualitatively different. In the forensic context - amplification can affect natural events - this usually occurs when the alleged perpetrators are considered to possess or have access to extraordinary powers. These can be innate - as the powers attributed to witches - or acquired - either by training or by gaining control of external weapons.

WITCHCRAFT DEFINITION

The first question that must be answered by any study of witch related phenomena is that of definition. What does the word witch mean, to what does it refer, and how has its meaning varied over time and place? This is surprisingly difficult as not only have some places and periods been studied far more intensively and comprehensively than others but from the outset one finds oneself in a Catch 22 situation: without an adequate

definition one cannot quantify the distribution of the phenomena, yet at the same time how can one formulate a definition without some idea of how the phenomena are distributed? Too rigid a definition will make it difficult to find the wood, too loose will render the leaves invisible. Although in principle it would be possible to set up an international study of related phenomena in different countries, along the lines of the famous WHO study of schizophrenia, this would still presume some idea of the subject and it would only be applicable to existing communities. The only alternative is therefore to start with existing definitions, what other writers have thought it to be, and from them derive a core set of features or lowest common denominators for the notion. And to this can be added additional peripheral features that are contingent or context dependent and do not occur in every case. When this is done we will find that many features that have been thought characteristic of witches and witchcraft are in fact peripheral or secondary and that the core points to a phenomenon that has far wider implications and relevance.

The core definition of a witch is an individual living person who is believed to have extraordinary power to harm. The peripheral or second rank characteristics which are not present in every case are that the witches are usually, but not exclusively, female, that they may be unaware of their powers which are usually inherited and part of their nature, rather than learned, and hence are difficult to change. This makes the possibility of rehabilitation uncertain.
In the majority of cases reported the extraordinary powers.are derived from unembodied spirits and interpreted in terms of an animistic paradigm in which the world of the senses is only a small part of a greater whole that includes not only the living but the dead spirits and gods. The behavior of this world is understood not by the interaction of inert atoms according to the laws of physics, but by the psychology of living agents whether bodied or disembodied. And this feature of the more ostentatious forms of witch behavior has led to most definition linking the source of the witches powers to the occult, paranormal or supernatural. As in 'a person who causes harm by magical means'. There is however a problem with linking witch activity to the occult for such a belief does not distinguish witches from anybody else in a community that understands the working of the world in terms of a wider world of spirits. What it does is highlight that the designation occult or supernatural is not a description but a judgement made from a position outside in space time or paradigm. And historically that has usuallyamounted to racism and colonialism. During the European witch crazes between 1450 and 1750 what distinguished witches

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from their accusers was not a distinction between normal and paranormal beliefs but between good and evil action or intent and evidence of breaching moral commandments. The ascription supernatural is always made from the self satisfied security of an enlightened world view and is usually a marker of contempt.¬∏¬∏¬∏January 7, 2006¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitch and magic¬∏Attitudes to witchcraft, like religion, lie on a continuum from
Disbelief = Atheism
Interest = Agnosticism
Belief = Acceptance
Those at the disbelief end if they are interested at all will be concerned with witchcraft as a social phenomenon. Those at the other will be primarily interested in the witch and what it is believed to be able to do - the powers that it uses.¬∏¬∏¬∏January 7, 2006¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitchcraft as an example of disproportionate ¬∏reactlon - going beyond the evidence - and the consequences of belief. The facts are superfluous.¬∏¬∏¬∏January 7, 2006¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitch definitions #02¬∏ From my scientific interpretation of the world I do not think of physics when I switch a light or start the engine of my car I just do it taking the science and technology for granted. Likewise for those who interpret the world in terms not of physics but psychology. For them the wonders of magic and the occult are simply the technologies of a world with spirits. And they are taken for granted as air or a fish does the water in which it swims. In order to understand witches one must demote the connection to the occult, hence it is not part of the core definition.

Witches vs Witchcraft¬∏¬∏¬∏January 7, 2006¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitch contexts #01¬∏In order to understand the definition of a term it is essential to know not only what it is but what it is not; to know how it is related to and differs from other similar notions. In the case of 'witch' the literature refers to at least three terms with which it might and has been confused :
witch
sorcerer
shaman or diviner
healer

The relations between them can be understood with the help of a simple two dimensional matrix showing the relation between two congtructs - in Kelly's sense of a bipolar concept. One dimension is for the construct good - evil. The other for nature - nurture or inherited - learned which overlaps almost completely with unconscious - conscious.

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This matrix results in 4 cells. These should not be thought of as exclusive, but as centers of gravity with fuzzy boundaries between them. In this scheme:
inherited - evil = witch
inherited - good = shaman
learned - evil = sorcerer
learned - good = healer

Those who have read EP will remember that among the Azande sorcerers are the users of evil magic, which is the use of substances and rituals - techniques that would seem to require considerable conscious training rather than, or in addition to, natural ability. And this is an appropriate point to discuss the notion of substances and how they are related to ritual.

In a modern scientific model of how the world works, based on the notion of inert atoms, abstractions like energy, and physical laws that are unresponsive to human whim - they can be worked with but not changed - the behavior of substances whether chemicals or poisons is, within known limits, independent of context. But that is not always the case in a world where the psychology of embodied and disembodied agents takes precedence over physical law. For although it is possible to conceive a world in which the behavior of such agents is more orderly, so far the folk psychology on which the dynamics of animistic societies are based is far less predictable than folk physics and chemistry. And even in our world folk psychology is still a better guide to the behavior of people in ordinary situations than most behavioristic models. To overcome this difficulty we have developed institutions such as laws and rules to regulate human behavior and make it more predictable. And in animistic societies ritual has a similar function, though it is a wider one as it has to regulate not only what we would accept as minds but also substances or things whose behavior we predict with our models of physics and chemistry.

In an animistic world substances as we understand them do not exist, because hardly anything is context independent. Instead the behavior of everything is exquisitely dependent on its context, which includes, not only its immediate setting, but the mental, spiritual, and ritual state of everyone involved, whether user, recipient, or observers. In this world a substance without a ritual is incomplete and likely to be unpredictable or useless.

Much of the confusion surrounding the use of these terms is due to the fact that though distinguishing between them may be

possible and seem meaningful to observers with a scientific agenda that may not be the case for their informants. For long before notions become encoded explicitly in context independent words they will have been emerging or burrowing slowly into consciousness, via tacit, non verbal, and distributed representations; manifested in rituals, dances, and visual artifacts that are experienced as having power that cannot be described in other ways. In that context prematurely explicit distinctions may well be destructive in the same way that higher criticism can be inimical to religious experience. What is meaningful to colonialists may be meaningless to the colonized. And we should remember that anthropology like amateur dramatics is usually more enjoyable and meaningful for the actors than their audience.

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WITCHCRAFT TERRORISM

¬∏¬∏¬∏January 7, 2006¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitch contexts #02¬∏ I suspect that for most people living in a world with witches the distinctions between witches and sorcerers is as academic as whether the gun with which you are shot is licenced or unlicensed.

Thu 1 May 2003

2:10 - Hds

John Gray and al - Qaeda

Gray suggests that aQ is not a medieval but a Hyper- Modern movement in the sense of believing in the core values of The Enlightenment? The belief in the possibility of universality and progress. Think about it.
Maybe the common thread is extensionality.

What Gray points out is that the founders of Modernity and Positivism, Comte and St Simon, had founded a rationalist cult or religion in which Reason replaced God in a quite literal sense. It had a Pope in Paris, an equivalent of crossing oneself by touching the phrenological bumps on ones head thought to be associated with desired rational faculties, and a new type of clothing with buttons on the back so that one needed help to dress thus encouraging a sense of community.

The implication is that at the core of the Enlightenment the notion of Reason was not always as rational as we think of it as being. And therefore that the defining features of The Enlightenment should be slimmed to exclude reason in our sense. That would leave universality, a rejection of the prevailing

wisdom, and the belief in the possibility of progress and the importance of achieving it.

What distinguishes aQ and fundamentalism from this point of view is the specific form of their chosen or preferred core religion and the limits on what are considered justified means of achieving their conception of ultimately inevitable universal progress. It is the degree of terrorism destruction and death available to aQ and considered legitimate as means that is hypermodern. The implication being that hypermodernism transcends postmodernism. Because if Modernism aspired to universal truths and principles, and postmodernism rejected these for relativism, hypermodern seeks universal progress without the trappings of rationality that Modernism claimed. Putting in their place another set of 'non-rational' absolutes.

But what is another and perhaps more fundamental foundation is the extensional stance and its logic. And I think Gray may miss this because he has not available or developed the terminology that we have.

There are also resonances here with witchcraft because one can detect in Homeland Security the form of a traditional classic witch hunt and witchfinding. All one has to do is factor out the more exotic forms of beliefs in spirits which were never unique to witchcraft but the conventional wisdom of the time and context in which it occurred. The fear of witchcraft is the fear of terrorists in our midst. They have exactly the same form, the same effects, and the same dangers for the commons and fundamental rights.

More important than aQ is our reaction to it and to understand that one should study witchcraft. The scale of 9/11, and with hindsight what made it a work of genius, made it too easy to forget the most fundamental rule about terrorism that its greatest danger is not the death and destruction it causes directly but the far more widespread and insidious damage it causes indirectly by the response it provokes in us.

Terrorism is a long game and when it succeeds it does so at several removes. The destruction caused by tanks and smart bombs is by intention local, acts of terrorism use acts of focussed destruction here and now to kindle longer term changes. To succeed they need to understand the system, and view the world as a network for which their own structure might be a distributed representation.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

What is intriguing is the hint that the planners of successful terrorism may
need the kind of mental models that are central to intensionality yet as fundamentalists function in a fairly rigid extensional mode? The resolution of this apparent anomaly, if such it be, may be that what they lack is a notion of individuality, of a self as an object with internal structure and representations. The result is that they conceive of individuals as nodes in a network and their ambition is to move the network towards an ideal configuration.

If that is the case their vision of mankind will have close similarities to that of East Asia (China, Korea, Japan) but the crucial difference may be that in these countries there has evolved an overarching old and well developed tradition of obligations and responsibilities that motivate and encourage stability and weaken the liklihood of extremism: the Middle Way. In contrast terrorist movements seem to originate in contexts where such stabilizing traditions have been fractured, usually by external forces.

In a sense the origins of the terrorist may lie in the tension within its founders and leaders between a fragile sense of self and individuality and a conscious conception of individuals as nodes in a network; ie without individuality and hence disposable and interchangeable.

Ironically this state of relation is reached not via a tradition of network awareness as in Confucian China but by going through and beyond an emphasis on the self and individuality that found expression with the Renaissance and Reformation. This process may be observed in fundamentalism in USA today as it metastazises upwards through the conservatives in office and into international relations.

WITCHCRAFT DEFINITION/CLARIFICATION

As you may have guessed I have become increasingly dissatisfied with the traditional approach to witchcraft and feel that something new (at least to me) is needed.

I have come to the view that witchcraft is nothing more than an archaic, older, and earlier, version of criminal law. As found in Africa it appears extreme and exotic, simply because it developed during the period between the emergence of modern

humans 150,000 years ago and the Enlightenment 200 years when the dominant framework for understanding the world (the prevailing doctrine or paradigm) was animistic, and all the paraphernalia of that heritage persist, as in a stagnant pool, cut off from the ever faster flowing river of scientific explanation. And only its exotic ornamentation and colouring, which dazzle and blinder, have obscured its essential nature and kinship with more mundane institutions like criminal law.

Bad things, those that one would prefer to avoid, have always happened to good people and from the formation of the earliest groups and social contracts societies would have had to distinguish between those that were to be expected and clearly acts of nature, for which nobody could be held responsible, and the others for which an individual or group could be held accountable. I will refer to those events that can be considered acts of nature as `natural' or `accidental' and those that are the result of human agency `forensic'. This fundamental dichotomy will be found in all societies throughout history and is the foundation of criminal law.

However, the partitioning of events between natural and forensic will vary from one culture to another and over time. In the early stages of human history, long before the development of the notion of physical or scientific laws, almost every event would have had to be interpreted as the result of some animistic agency. But, even then it seems likely that a significant proportion would be considered `natural' because they were predictable. For example, the death of old people or animals would be more natural than that of the younger and fitter. And even if the sun were thought to be moved by the breath of spirits, or demons, its rising and setting would in practice attract less comment than an eclipse, or a supernova. What required most urgent explanation was the unexpected, and what was considered natural could not be events that were explicable in terms of physical law, for none existed at that time, but those that could be modelled, by generalizing from instances in which a causal chain could be observed linking a perpetator to harm done.

For example, if I were to see a neighbour spear my goat, or my son, I would probably not consider it necessary to invoke some hidden disembodied agents, or ancestors, in order to explain the death. Likewise, if I saw him administer a substance that I knew to be poisonous, perhaps because it was used to poison arrows for hunting. In these, exceptional, cases the causal chain is obvious and the addition of extra animistic agents redundent. But, in a world made up from entities with minds, rather than

inert atoms, and in which the majority of adverse events have no physical explanation it will seem very plausible, and only natural, to fill in the unknown causal links with the actions of disembodied agents and to link their activity to the malevolence of a living person, who is able to elicit their help. In an animistic society the realm of forensic explanation is therefore likely to be far greater than in a modern scientific one. And so where we would seek a physical or biological explanation they would look for what is essentially a (folk) psychological one that would link the alleged perpetrator with the harm in ways that we would consider to be impossible.

One of the consequences of the development of the scientific doctrine has been that the realm of natural events has increased at the expense of the forensic, because with increased knowledge more and more links between physical causes and bad events have been found, and as a result the realm of animistic explanations has shrunk considerably. In the case of personal interpretations it has been largely confined to the field of religion, and in the case of the law it has been abandoned as an acceptable explanation for events. And as the scientific explanation of events becomes more and more sophisticated the boundary between natural and forensic explanation becomes increasingly clear and the two sides of the dichotomy mutually exclusive.

Whereas, under the scientific doctrine an event can be considered either natural or forensic but not both (i.e. exclusive `or' - logical XOR), under the animistic it can be both natural and forensic (i.e. inclusive `or' - logical OR). XOR reduces the number of cases in each category, whilst OR can increase them - in this case the forensic.

The first and primary question to which the institutions of criminal law, including witchcraft, is the answer is: Who is responsible for this event? And the second is: What is to be done about it? Everything else about witchcraft is ornamentation and contingent on the local context and history.

NB There is a general issue here. When faced with an unexplained social phenomenon it is usually worth asking: What is the question to which this is the answer?

So, as a first approximation, witchcraft is simply the most extreme and exotic form of criminal law, as found in the context of societies in which the overwhelmingly dominant doctrine or paradigm (the framework for interpreting how the world works) is thoroughly animistic. And that form persists and is further accentuated by processes of exclusion, as a result of which the

general population feel excluded from effective law - because their concerns and anxieties are neither acknowledged nor addressed. When this occurs vigilantism is inevitable, and in this case takes on the exotic form and masks of witchcraft as the archaic law on which it is modelled.

Only one additional component is required to complete the picture; and this too is found in all societies and in association with all variations of criminal law. The mechanism that has been referred to as the social amplification of risk also applies to the experience of danger: risk is related to danger as objective to subjective and as the sides of a coin. This does not apply to all risks or dangers, but is selective, as is the effect - which can be positive in some cases and negative in others. For example the risk and danger of nuclear power stations is usually amplified, whilst that of smoking is diminished - at least by smokers. It seems therefore that some risks that vary with culture and with time are liable to amplification and that this can lead to the kindling of what has been described as moral panics, where anxiety flares into a conflagration of terror and is experienced as threatening the whole population. As a result the scale and extension of risk and danger is distorted with serious consequences for the optimal allocation of scarce resources - and in the worst cases the Rule of Law.

The factors that focus amplification onto specific issues and that kindle, enhance, sustain, and constrain moral panic therefore need to be studied. I believe that these are likely to depend on subdoctrines or attitudes that unite people of like minds into loosely defined groups and control the flow of information within and between them. If this is the case then one of the implications is that in order to control amplification and panic intervention may have to be directed not at evidence (better facts or information) but less directly at the underlying attitudes and communication networks. Here `Small World Theory' may be of crucial importance.

The exotic masks of witchcraft have blinded us to the underlying processes that are not unique to animism but are also detectable in societies under the scientific doctrine. These can be thought of as functioning like image intensifiers that reveal links and relationships that are hidden to the naked eye. The problem is that the mechanism can generate false positives and suggest the existence of things and relations that are at best exaggerrated and at worst simply do not exist. There is a computer model of a process called synaptic pruning that some experts think may account for some of the symptoms of schizophrenia. Using this

one finds that as the synaptic connections are reduced by pruning the system is able to make increasingly accurate guesses as to what it is `seeing' when exposed to less and less information. The equivalent of an expert ornithologist being able to identify a bird from a fleeting glimpse of only part, or an intelligence officer identifying weapons of mass destruction in Iraq from reconnaissance photographs. However, there comes a point where the ability to identify patterns from minimal information passes over into the invention of patterns that do not exist - a possible model of hallucinations and delusions.

One of the factors that focus social amplification and may generate false positives and moral panic, is the belief in the existence of some individuals deemed responsible for forensic events as having extraordinary powers that are either innate (witches and those with dangerous personality disorders), or acquired - either in the sense of learned techniques (such as paedophiles control of their victims), or alliances with external forces including foreign powers (communists and other traitors), spirits and demons (witches), or from specialist dealers (terrorists). Once profiled and stereotyped these are then the subject of demands for changes in due process and statutes in order to ensure convictions on minimal evidence.

I think I now understand the confusion about witches and sorcerers.

I would like to introduce a notion of that might be referred to as either, metaphysical colonialism, or conceptual colonialism. By metaphysics I mean the normally unstated assumptions that underpin a world-view or interpretation of how the world works.

In the case of the modern or scientific world view, that is taken for granted in the countries of the North Atlantic rim, there is an assumption that the world is made up of inert atoms that obey physical law and whose behavior is independent of context and especially the wishes of human beings. A chemical reaction such as an explosion will obey the laws of physics and be uninfluenced by the wishes or prayers of humans. In other words a corollary of the atomic view of the world is that there are substances - like chemicals - whose behavior is context independent.

In the case of a traditional animistic world view this is not the case. Instead of inert atoms one has living agents whose

behavior is based on folk psychology rather than physics and is therefore to a far greater degree context dependent. And not simply physical context, but psychological and hence religious context dependent. Hence in this world there is no such thing as a substance in the modern chemical sense. In this world what chemical and biological substances do is not simply dependent on their physics, but on the rituals and incantations and the state of purity of the users - whether perpetrators or victims.

What I refer to as metaphysical colonialism is when anthropologists, such as Evans Pritchard, interpret the behavior of traditional societies through the distorting lenses of the modern metaphysical world view. This is what I found myself doing in trying to make a neat four way classification of witchcraft related phenomena into witches, sorcerers, shamans, and diviners. This is possible, but it is almost certainly misleading because it assumes that, either a clear distinction has been degraded over time into confusion, or that what was always poorly articulated is being artificially cleaned up to conform to modern expectations and tastes. My view now is that the different categories were probably never clearly distinguished in practice. One reason being that the modern categorization systems preferred by most sciences are all based on Aristotelian definitions with clear inclusion and exclusion criteria and the law of the excluded middle. In contrast nature prefers what Wittgenstein called family resemblances in which the boundaries are blurred and fuzzy. This may have been the error of structuralism - it presumed the universality of classical Aristotelian classifications.

The implications of this are that if one has an animistic view of how the world works, in which inert atoms are replaced by living agents, that include not only those currently embodied and enfleshed but in addition those that are no longer embodied and those that have never been embodied, the a corollary is that there are no substances in the chemical sense, and if Evans Pritchard's definition of sorcery or magic has any merit, the substances to which he refers are far closer to the context and ritual dependent kinds described above than anything that modern science could accept. And, if the evolution or development trajectory is from animism towards science it follows that it is very unlikely that in the past the distinctions that we might draw between different kinds of witch, healer, or whatever, were considered interesting or important. Hence I doubt if such distinctions are worth making, at least so far as they imply `natural', or permanent, kinds of things, rather than fluctuating dynamic and opportunistic entities.

This does not mean that there are no distinctions, as these that we find interesting almost certainly evolved slowly over thousands of years and first appeared as unconscious distributed representations that were manifest in communal behaviors rather than explicit concepts or rules. Think of the behavior of football players during a game. Although they would now be able to describe their behavior in terms of rules that have been institutionalized in rule books and even theories, for most informal players the rules are very poorly articulated, but they are manifest principally in the way they behave and interact with each other on the field. In a similar way the behavior of wolves or lions hunting is not articulated in rules, but deadly behaviors.

So, although as with the flocking of birds, it may be possible for us to make the rules explicit in recipes or equations, it is probably misleading to assume that these are essential or even very meaningful. Children may have great fun playing football in ways that do not conform to the rule books of any football association. And in the case of witchcraft even if we think our categorization meaningful it may not be the way the natural evolutionary process eventually follows. Instead of soccer you might end up with rugby, or, god forbid, the USA abuse that goes by the name.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Briefly.

Like most of social psychology there is less to this than meets the eye.

The problem with Attribution Theory in relation to wc is that it seems to be primarily concerned with why people do what they do. In other words it starts with a subject. Yet in most cases of witchcraft the subject is not immediately obvious but only selected at the end of an earlier process. My feeling is that this makes AT less than sufficient to explain wc.

Projection would make much more sense, but only to the extent that you accept a more psychoanalytic model of behavior, which most nowadays would have reservations about. Projection in this strong sense is considered a fundamental defense mechanism whereby one reduces anxiety by projecting onto another person those feelings and dispositions that one disowns in oneself. It is considered to be the basis of pananoia - I hate (him) becomes he (hates) me. Or, in an explanation of the link between paranoia and homosexuality - A feels attracted to B (same sex)

but cannot admit to this because of its homosexual implications, so A transforms `I am attracted' to `I hate' and then projects the hatred onto B so that `I am attracted to B' becomes `B hates me'. In the case of wc, let us assume that the old person accused of being a witch, would, under traditional obligations, be due respect and support, even if they are unable to reciprocate and are in fact a burden. If the accusers feel some kind of guilt or self hatred at failing to meet traditional obligations they can reduce it by projecting their hatred of themselves onto the accused so that they perceive the accused as threatening them.

Perhaps a better example is the kind of paranoid jealousy that is sometimes associated with homicide, typically a husband killing his wife. In many cases the following mechanism is active. Husband has homosexual urges towards men, he is unable to accept these and disowns them by projecting them onto his wife - hence `I love men' becomes `I do not love men, but she does'.

My feeling about AT in relation to wc is that I cannot see that it adds anything to the description of a witch. It is simply re-description masquerading as explanation. You are `attributing' to the accused the dispositions and intentions that the conventional wisdom considers typical of witches. And these are not those that one would like to accept as being part of oneself.

WITCHCRAFT DEFINITION

Most dictionary definitions of witchcraft are variants of - `Harm done to others by magical or supernatural means'. And though not made explicit it is implied that the origin of the harm is a person acting with malice and possibly, though not necessarily, with forethought (witchcraft is sometimes contrasted with sorcery on the basis that it is largely involuntary and hence presumable unconscious, whilst sorcery is willed and conscious; but I feel that the distinction between witchcraft and sorcery is not very productive and largely a beam in the anthropologist's eye). Sometimes too the focus of harm is extended to include the victims possessions, but that simply raises additional questions about the nature of ownership. So perhaps for present purposes a provisional working definition that captures the sense of the most common might be:

Harm done to an individual or group by another, either directly or indirectly, using magical means.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

But I will try to show why I consider this definition to be misleading.

The problem is with the notion of magic (used here as a portmanteau term). In our modern scientific culture there is a conceptual space for the notion of magic and its several synonyms as a possible explanation or mechanism for events that cannot be accounted for by current scientific theories or models. In addition, instead of using it as an explanation of last resort some believe it to be more significant, a fact of how the world works, and privilege it over others, while not necessarily rejecting all of science.

This duality is buttressed by that between science and the powerful religious beliefs in which a majority of the population still have faith. And so in countries that have the most advanced science and technologies, scientific and religious belief and explanations cohabit somewhat warily across a fuzzy border. But, even before the emergence of science in the C17 there was an earlier duality not only between religion and magic but, within religious attitudes, a distinction between magic used for good and evil purposes. But this does not seem to have been considered a particular problem to the Church until in the late C14 magic came to be associated with the practitioner having entered into a pact with the devil and receiving their powers from her. This led to the setting up of the Holy Inquisition and over the next 200 years a large number, perhaps 200,000 people, were killed as witches. The belief in a pact with the devil is also what distinguishes European from African witchcraft.

Now, contary to a common belief, the development of science was not antithetical to religion and most of the key players such as Newton and Galileo and Copernicus were committed and practising christians. In other words they believed in a form of magic and a world in which science could only account for some phenomena. And with these beliefs there also came a belief in the reality of the devil and heaven and hell and black and white magic and witches.

These faults and dualities still run deep in our consciousness and lexicon and so when Europeans made contact with African cultures it was inevitable that they superimposed on them a template that included a distinction between science and magic. But it is not at all clear that such a distinction was intrinsic to all the cultures they came across, or if there was something like it, whether and to what extent it had the same sense as was assumed. See Roget T. Ames and David Hall, `Thinking from the

Han√ï and `Anticipating China√ï on how Western theological and philosophical views have distorted understanding of Confucius and Daoism.

But, if in line with what I have discussed above, you remove the duality of `science√ï (used for our ordinary view of reality) and magic and recognize that for many cultures hylozoism, animism, and magic are how the world is believed to work, a number of important questions emerge that had previously been obscured and unmotivated.

For this purpose I would suggest the following revised definition of witchcraft:

`Harm done to an individual or group by another, either directly or indirectly, using extra-ordinary means.'

These are considered to involve causal mechanisms beyond the control and abilities of ordinary people, to be difficult or impossible to discover, and often appear indifferent to distance or other ordinary obstacles or limits. But, it is important to recognize that within the society they are not considered as being inconsistent with the conventional wisdom about how the world works. In other words the dichotomy of science vs magic is imposed of the witchcraft believing culture from our own worldview.

From this point of view `witches' and `sorcerors' should be considered as analogous to people in our culture with exeptional or unusual abilities or knowledge whether innate or acquired. Examples might be idiot savants, prodigies, and 'geniuses' in particular fields, such as art, maths, music, etc. These are not considered to be alien or inexplicable within our `scientific' world view even though they may be able to do things beyond the capacity of ordinary people and intelligence. To put it crudely witches are to native peoples what (malign) prodigies are to us.

EVIL

Fri 21 Nov 2003 18:50

Things to consider:

Illnesses like cancer that are viewed as being almost mystically different from others.

Why is witchcraft considered so evil when the actual harm is often not out of the ordinary? This seems likely to be related

to the inconsistencies in sentencing and attitudes to offences when greater actual harm often attracts lesser punishments. The harm seems to be largely symbolic? Also the use of such extraordinary means as witchcraft is considered to be seems to threaten the equilibrium or safety of the whole community. It is as if a system of conventions and agreements on which the balance of forces between the living and the dead or spirit realm had been dut in question? For if you believe in other worlds or obscured parts of this one and that boundaries are porous then the behaviour of the other side must be taken into account.

I do not feel that energy needs to be expended by me to keep the sun in the sky. Nor that anyones active intervention maintains it. But for a born again christian her tenure in heaven or hell depends on the active intervention of God in sacrificing his son. The world of animism is a world of agreements of active relationships of persuasion of active intervenzion? Of extended social contracts that include ancestors and spirits. In other words a very different world from one ruled by physical law.

Fri 21 Nov 2003 20:38

WITCHCRAFT REASONING

+ I am a victim
+ This could not have happened by ordinary means. Therefore extra-ordinary must be involved.
+ Extraordinary means require extraordinary powers and those require the help of ancestors or spirits
+ These do not act without invitation, therefore someone is responsible for my misfortunes.
+ This threatens others in the community therefore the perpetrator must be found.

Sat 22 Nov 2003 2:45

The overemphasis on magic in the definition of witchcraft has masked an important question:
Why is witchcraft considered so evil when many of its alleged (primary) harms are relatively minor?
That others are major?
Secondary Muti killings?
Symbolic injuries?

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Cultural offences?

THEORY OF MIND

+ There is no such a thing as an `innocent eye' or a `naive observation'. This has been expressed nicely by Nelson Goodman in `Ways of Worldmaking', where he paraphrases Kant as follows: "Although conception without perception is merely empty, perception without conception is blind (totally inoperative)". All perception, or observation, presupposes a theory, or pattern of expectations. What we are aware of is information and that is roughly quantified (Shannon and Weaver - Information Theory) as a function of the reciprocal of the probability of an event, in other words it is a relationship between what we experience and what we expect.
+ The world of witchcraft is the world of descriptions and minds.

+ If the validity of wc depended on really turning a man into a crocodile or similar wonders, it could never have become established. So since all evidence is against the reality of shapeshifting etc and yet wc is a weil established and widespread phenomenon it must be causally effective in some other ways. And by exclusion these cannot be directly in the physical world - although they may have secondary effects there. The only plausible mechanisms are the manipulation of minds - of beliefs and expectations. Witchcraft is a means of manipulating and controlling minds and only secondarily, via human action, the physical world. Witches exist only in the minds of their accusers, but their bodies are broken and burned.
+ The stability of the physical world is explained in terms of physical laws that are, by definition, context dependent and unaffected by our thoughts or feelings or whims. By contrast the stability of the world of interacting minds depends on contracts and conventions and hence is significantly affected by human thought, feeling, and action
+ The dichotomy between science and magic is an aspect of our western world view. It is not necessarily indiginous or intrinsic to other cultures.
+ The world of witchcraft is one in which everything is alive and interacts not according to physical law but will and desire and beliefs. It is a living psychologically structured world.
+ The world of witchcraft is wider than that of science in that it includes causally effective entities for which science has found neither need nor convincing evidence.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

+ It may be misleading to think of the parts of the world of witchcraft rejected by science as occupying a separate and exclusive territory like the christian heaven or hell. Better perhaps to consider it as interwoven with the ordinary and spirits and the dead ancestors wandering through our world unseen. According to the Koran (Surah 50 Al Qaf, verse 16) Allah is closer to you than your jugular vein. And recent theories in physics suggest the possibility that other universes may be separated from our own by an infinitesimally thin membrane.

+ Terms to avoid or use circumspectly Art, Ceremony, poisons and medicines..,
+ Categorization: Classical vs Family Resemblance / Aristotle vs Wittgenstein
+ Do not base classification on internal features. Look also at differences between witchcraft and other phenomena. What do wc artifacts have in common and how do these differ from those associated with other activities?
+ Witchcraft and epidemiology -depression DSM and other bestiaries.
+ Definitions of wc are misleading because most are based on the science vs magic dichotomy that I have already suggested is extrinsic and an imposition. For example, most definitions are variations on 'harm done to someone by magical means'. The problem is the sense of magic. A better would be 'harm done to others by extra-ordinary means.' In each the force of magjc or extra-ordinary means reduces to: that they are difficult to detect or identify, that they are beyond the capacity and control of the ordinary people, and perhaps that they often seem to be relatively unaffected by common constraints of distance or time?
+ When the focus on magic is removed new questions are revealed. For example, many published reports on wc related incidents are probably unrepresentative and refer to only the most dramatic and noteworthy cases. Less interesting cases probably go undocumented. But even if only the most serious cases, in the sense of either the significance of the alleged harm done or the punishment exacted on the assumed perpetrator, are reported it is reasonable to ask why the response to allegations of wc often seems out of proportion to the actual harm that triggered the allegations? For the media are interested in reporting mostly the most extreme cases in the sense of response or retribution. For example death as punishment for lesser or greater harm. What is less likely to be reported are responses to relatively trivial harm that do not result in death or severe injury but yet may be disproporionate in social and non physical effects on the indlviduals involved.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

+ The basis of alleged facts. There is no such thing as an `innocent eye√ï or a `naive observation√ï. All observations presuppose a background and theory. This has been expressed nicely by Nelson Goodman in `Ways of Worldmaking√ï (in print but text is available on the internet at a Russian site) and discussed further in `Starmaking√ï. He paraphrases Kant - "Although conception without perception is merely empty, perception without conception is blind (totally inoperative)". This is because what we are aware of is information and that can be quantified after Shannon and Weaver (Information Theory perhaps more accurately communication theory as it is really about the transmission of information) as very roughly a function of the reciprocal of the probability of an event. In other words a relationship between what we expect and what we experince.

+ The basis of classications. Much confusion is caused by failing to take into account that there are two types of categorization. This is explained by George Lakoff in `Women Fire and Dangerous Things√ï. Classical categories are derived from Aristotle and divide the contents of the world up into groups that have rigid, clearcut, boundaries defined by inclusion and exclusion criteria. It is the usually unstated basis of diagnostic systems like DSM4 and other bestiaries. However, this is incongruous with most natural systems - nature has not read Aristotle or DSM4. More common are categories based on `family resemblances√ï as first described by Wittgenstein. Instead of the contents being described in terms of rigid boundaries and inclusion and exclusion criteria there is a central, prototypical, case to which all other instances are related as with family resemblances and these fade out to fuzzy boundaries. An example of the confusion that failing to recognize family resemblance categories can cause is the frequent misunderstanding between lawyers and doctors about the possibilities of medical evidence. The law is based on and tends to assume classical categories and hence a definite yes or no answer to many questions. It is in the nature of much of medicine and especially psychiatry that the subject matter is best described in terms of family resemblances and definite answers may be impossible or at best misleading.

+ The importance of metaphor. The background of expectation from which information emerges is structured by metaphors (see Lakoff and Johnson `Metaphors We Live By√ï) and these can be detected, though they are usually taken for granted, in our language. It is important to appreciate that although some important metaphors are almost universal the significance of others varies

from one community to another and that can be a source of misunderstanding and confusion. Moreover, when considering a preliterate society as many witchcraft believing ones are, some of the metaphors are likely to be visual and non-verbal and these are particularly likely to be overlooked, misinterpreted, or misunderstood. In such cases it is extremely difficult to overcome a tendency to impose the literate metaphorical structure of our own culture on another. See Roger T. Ames and David Hall `Anticipating China√ï and `Thinking from the Han√ï for a discussion of how the Confucian and Daoist world view has been distorted by the philosophical and theological prejudices of western commentators.

+ That witchcraft is common in many communities and seems to have been able to survive for centuries suggests that it has some utility. For if it depended on the reality of someone being able to turn another into a crocodile and other wonders it and witches would have died out long ago, or only be able to survive for relatively short periods within a particular locality. So, if we discount the reality of shapeshifting and other paranormal phenomena what we are left with is an effect on mental and social life. The realm of witchcraft is the world of minds and any tools or artifacts must work on the folk psychology of beliefs, desires and expectations. And the `tools√ï of witchcraft are designed not to change the physical world but other minds - to manipulate minds that may be of the dead or entities that have never been embodied. Any physical effects are secondary and mediated through beliefs and desires. Hence although there is no such thing as a witch, if the definition depends on the reality of magic, many thousands were nonetheless burned and hanged for meeting the classical categories of the Malleus Malificarum.

+ Witchcraft is the sum of the artifacts associated with it. Surviving and ruined religious temples and centres in all parts of the world are for atheists at least a manifestation of mankind√ïs ability to believe in things that do not exist. They are the clothes of nothing - empty shells. Yet their existence in itself and the ontological taxonomies that they imply are often sufficient to justify and ensure the survival of belief they `give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name√ï. And often that is all that is required to create and sustain a cult.

+ Whilst the system of artifacts, including actions, rituals, songs, and stories, is the phenomenon, the context they create enables artifacts to function as tools for thinking about the world. See Daniel Dennett eg `Kinds of Minds√ï and others, Richard Gregory (several works) , and Donald A. Norman `Tools that make us Smart√ï. The most important tools are tools for

thought or as Dennett and Haugeland suggested `prosthetic extensions of mind√ï. And Ernst Cassirer referred to culture as `the mind√ïs place in nature√ï. The artifacts that Norman has collected or can point out are at the same time images and tools for thinking about the phenomenon.

+ The dichotomy between science (used here for our ordinary view of how the world works) and magic is an aspect of our view of the world and is not necessarily intrinsic to other cultures. Our `scientific√ï conventional wisdom of a world ruled by impersonal, context independent, physical laws has only been held by much less than one percent of the people who have ever lived. It has developed in the countries of the North Atlantic rim only in the last three or four hundred years (from around 1600) and the notion of atheism in the sense of believing in no god at all is much less, probably no more than 150 years. And even in USA, arguably the most scientifically sophisticated country, today, at least 80% of the population, including practicing scientists and technologists, believe in God, the Devil, heaven, hell, angels and demons. So, magic and science can live side by side, as they did for Newton and Galileo and Copernicus, and there is a conceptual space reserved for miracles and magic.

It is that dichotomy that distinguishes western views and that has almost certainly been superimposed as a conceptual template on other cultures, including those in which witchcraft is common. In other words the dichotomy between science and magic is not between our culture and that of others, but internal to our own and it is the dichotomy that is exported.

In contrast to our own dualistic viewpoint, that of many cultures is much more coherent. For everything in the world is alive, hylozoim, and the familiar visible world is only part of a larger space that includes spirits and the dead. These may not occupy separate and circumscribed territory such as the christian heaven and hell, but interpenetrate and pass through our own; out of sight, over the horizon, beyond the corner of the eye. Closer to you than your jugular vein as the Koran says of Allah (Surah 50 Al Qaf verse 16).

This has important implications. For whereas a world ruled by context independent physical law is by nature, and definition, unresponsive to our whims, or wishes, or desires, one of living agents might well be. Beause, while in our view the physical world is ruled by Law, one constituted of living agents could only be ruled by contracts and conventions. The significance of this is that whereas the equilibrium or stability of the

physical world is not threatened if I flout or play fast and loose with physical law, if I flout gravity I will get hurt, the stability of a world that is a function of contracts and conventions might be. And if I fail to comply with the conventions that govern relations between the living and the ancestors the harm done might affect everyone. This may be one important reason why `witchcraft√ï is treated so seriously and why punishments may seem disproportionate to the liklihood or reality of alleged harm.

+ One of the effects of viewing witchcraft through a dichotomy in one√ïs own eye is that the presumption of magic as defined in relation to science is assumed to justify anomalies of sentencing and response. Witches are treated harshly because magic is wicked and bad (the result of a pact with the devil in European witchcraft). But if the dichotomy is removed and what we consider as magic seen instead as the folk physics of that community, anomalies and incoherent responses are left relatively unexplained.

I have already suggested one possible explanation, viz the possible effects of any breach of contract or convention, and there are others, but what I want to consider here is not specific beliefs but patterns of response to witchcraft compared to other offences. These reveal significant anomalies, incoherence and inconsistencies, in the application of (mostly informal) law and that may be further obscured because of biases in the cases that are reported - as these will naturally concentrate on the more dramatic.

I want to suggest that anomalies and inconsistencies in sentencing and application of law (and especially any clamour for rules of evidence and due process to be changed in order to facilitate convictions), reveal hot spots or stresslines in any society and are a focus for ad hoc political interference - `hard cases make bad law√ï. In our culture if treason, terrorism, or sex is added to the description of a crime it guarantees that sentences will be more severe than for equivalent objective or actual harm. For example it is not impossible that a contentious sexual offence or specific political association might attract a more severe sentence than filigreeing ones political opponents knees with a power drill (with hope of reclassification as a political prisoner and amnesty in any future peace accords). In the past `witchcraft√ï had a similar implication and may still in the informal laws of many parts of Africa.

I mention this because these stresslines may indicate the boundaries between`tectonic√ï conceptual structures shifting or in collision.

+ The meaning of poisons. To us medicines and poisons are relatively simple substances whose actions can be explained in terms of biochemistry and physiology. No magic is required to understand them. But in a hylozoistic world of the living, dead and never alive, ruled by negotiation rather than physical law, biochemistry can never be a sufficient explanation and WHAT WE describe as `magic√ï has to be taken into account. The technology of using poison will be well understood, but the explanation of their effects, as of all effects, will include `magic√ï. So it is almost certainly misguided to suggest that in every culture the fact that some harm might be attributed to poison while others are attributed to ritual and spells means that within that culture there is a significant difference in the mechanisms of harm. We may know that poisons have biochemical effects, but within many cultures their action is just as magical as any ritual or rite.

+ It is not sufficient or useful to simply juggle a collection of alleged witchcraft artifacts into different patterns, one must compare them with others. In other words external comparisons rather than external. It might be helpful to consider classification in relation to the epidemiological investigation of psychiatric illnesses such as depression, or the more contentious such as `Gulf War Syndrome√ï or ME. Read Elaine Showalter√ïs `Hystories√ï. Psychiatric disorders are relevant because several like witchcraft exist largely in the words and claims of patients - in the sense that doctors have as yet no diagnostic test that can prove categorically whether a patient is depressed or simply claiming to be so.

+ Compare witch with ordinary tools. This may highlight the often exquisite fitness for use of the latter compared with the former and illustrate that the action of witchcraft implements is not in the physical world, but the world of minds and/or the extended world of ancestors and tradition.

+ Compare witch artifacts from different communities to see if there are any distinguishing characteristics.

INTERNATIONAL WITCHCRAFT
Monday, 2 March 2009 13:51:27

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Hope you are enjoying your exile.

So far in your absence I have collected almost 300 reports of witchcraft in countries other than USA. There are usually about two or three a day. And although there is considerable overlap I think they are all significant because of the insight they give into how wc is being experienced perceived and reported. To be blunt if you want your book to have any relevance you will have to take this material into account - not least because it provides contemporary illustrative material.

My impression is that in Africa and PNG the phenomenon is increasing both in numbers and significance and revealing a variety of attitudes and policies on the part of governments, agencies, religions, and media.

Everything I have found has fitted and supports the model and definition I have suggested and provides illustrations of its implications. The frequencies of reports from different parts of the world also supports that suggested by my trawl through the anthropological database of academic reports. The vast majority are in sub Saharan Africa with PNG having an equivalent frequency of cases but for a smaller population, a few in parts of India, and relatively few cases in Islamic countries (and of a different kind).

Hotspots at present are the continuing killings of albinos in Tz, an emerging epidemic of accusations against children in West and central Africa and child sacrifice in Uganda, the killing of elders in the coastal province in Kenya and other parts of the country. Something odd going on in Gambia with government and army support concerning organized and enforced witch identifying and cleansing. And a great deal of opportunistic secondary economic entrepreneurial activity.

To put it bluntly I am horrified and despair of Africa.

What is also relevant and needs your attention is that Google has now accumulated a searchable database of news articles going back to the 19th century and containing about 55,000 items concerning witchcraft. These can also be analyzed in decades and shows a timeline that seems to support increases in cases being reported (probably reflecting the expansion and access to media). For example 2000 reports for 70-79 but 10, 000 for 90-99. However, since 2000 there have been over 9000 every year!

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

I think you need to change the plan for your book to take account of the contemporary and historical news material. Quite frankly I am not sure who would be particularly interested in an anthropologist's introduction to Africa and witchcraft without being able to fit it into a wider context of relevance. The experience of a single individual is too limited and too difficult to assess in terms of how representative they might be. And this is also a problem with most of the academic material which by its nature tends to be focused on local and deep rather than aiming for a truly general theory that can really account for the phenomenon and relate it to the rest of human activity and experience.

What is needed is to use the news stories catalogued by Google and any other relevant resources to present an overview that can engage and orient potential readers to the reality and range of the problem and all its horrific manifestations. What it is really like to live in a world with witches. What the media can provide is a series of vivid snapshots of how witchcraft is experienced and used in contemporary cultures. It does so through a lens whose imperfections are difficult to assess insofar as their relation to the scale of the phenomena because what is not known is the criteria for selection and how the cases reported compare to those that were not. In other words the `selection in' or inclusion criteria are uncertain. However it seems certain that even if the cases reported are exhaustive they represent a significant issue for human rights and present a bleak picture of the cultures involved.

The material that I am collecting for you can do this in a way that allows you to move on to a survey of the academic accounts and criticisms of them and then to the construction of an explanatory model that grounds the phenomena in universal social patterns and shifts the attention of the prurient and those seeking signs and wonders away from a futile preoccupation with the supernatural. Witchcraft has less to do with magic than the human frailties that have led to the credit crisis and meltdown of the financial system.

What is striking in my reading of the material is that the details of the `magical' aspects of the events are more or less taken for granted and accepted without comment. The details of the kinds of differences that you list are less important ¬†than the crimes that they are considered to justify. The details of the `magic' are no more relevant to the interpretations than whether a robber made his getaway by car or bicycle or used a gun or a knife. For most purposes murder is defined in terms of motives rather than means and though there may be a case

sometimes for classifying according to weapon used for far more it simply misses the point. Witchcraft begins with the identification of a perpetrator which is the result of interpreting all events in terms of agency and intent. The baroque explanations in terms of what we colonialists consider `magic' are simply excuses that are believed to justify the treatment of alleged perpetrators. In different degrees the same kind of explanations justify the behavior of christians and muslims and scientists. In every case there is a need for some way of interpreting how the world works and what follows depends on the details of the belief preferred rather than rituals and artifacts that have flowed from it. Rituals and artifacts are always local and accidental (in the sense of being contingent on local history as different).

What is involved here is the collision of several of the universal narratives or plots that humans have found helpful in explaining experience and to which they are now in thrall. The most universal is that which dominates the media - and why I rarely buy or pay much attention to newspapers - is that which sees events in terms of perpetrators and victims - this is related to and results in interpreting the world in terms of agents rather than atoms and to a fear of the bad intentions of others. The second is that of the world as having fluid and porous boundaries: that things can change and flow into each other, that no category is fixed, and that the boundaries of life are permeable so that the living and the dead are not exclusive and neither are the boundaries between what might be considered natural kinds eg humans and goats (see recent Ghana case of police arresting goat as a car thief).

WITCHCRAFT DEFINITIONS
Tuesday, 25 November 2008 20:57:49

I am sorry for becoming ragged on the phone but I have to be blunt.

The problem is that I am becoming increasingly exasperated with your work. It seems to me that it lacks bottom and if it were a rider would be unstable in the saddle and in constant danger of tumbling arse over tip. The narrative of your peregrinations in Africa and encounter with witchcraft phenomena is fine and worth doing, but the rest seems like a toy train wreck. I feel there is a danger that you are sacrificing the possibility of creating something of significance and interest for something that cannot have any.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

I think the issue is simple, you do not yet have a clear view about the nature of witchcraft. You do not have a theory or model of the process that can unify and explain the different aspects - and from which the different manifestations can be derived. Instead you are rather like a scrap dealer who has collected a vast rag bag assortment of parts - wheels, engines, wings, propellors, seats, windscreens, doors, flaps, rudders, instruments, lights, horses, reins, saddles, stirrups, spurs, tools, gas pumps, tills, anchors, windlasses, ropes, etc. But, you are still uncertain how these parts fit together into larger wholes, because you have not yet discovered the unifying concept of transport. As a result you thresh around seeking some center of gravity. At one time you foreground and privilege wings, another rudders, another horses - or senecide, witch violence, vigilantes, economics, etc. But the structure is unstable because the conceptual whole is rickety, fragmented, and lacks a secure foundation. Each of the notions you are attracted to is relevant, but only when seen as an aspect of a greater whole. They are parts and none in isolation is either necessary or sufficient, nor can stand on its own without falling and looking silly. It is the make up rather than the face, appearance rather than reality, or accident rather than substance. That is why I keep thinking that you want to give up and become a curator - because the notion of an exhibition, or display, or museum might provide an external scaffolding that masked the gap where a theory should have been. The problem is that it cannot and what you are in danger of ending up with is a kind of fairground show of wonders and oddities. Which would be a tragedy because you are capable of so much more. Pure curators are not scientists because what they are interested in is heaps, or lists, rather than theories.

I blame their education. It is grounded in a primitive belief that theories follow facts - that one can collect facts and somehow as if by magic a theory will appear, or fall out of them. The problem with this view is that there is not and never has been an innocent eye, naive observer, or a way of seeing that did not presuppose and depend on a concept (and even if there are some hard wired into our brains by natural selection they have been selected for utility or survival rather than literal truth - they are unlikely to mean what they seem). And the issue is not how to collect facts without a theory but how to test the theories that are presupposed by the facts that you think you are observing with an innocent eye - to work back from the supposed facts to the theories that they imply and test them rather than the facts. The issue is not how you see, but how you test whether what you think you have seen makes sense and is

congruent with what has already been tested and not yet invalidated. We can never see without prejudice, but we always have the option of testing what we think we have seen. What are usually considered as facts are more like colors that as such do not exist in nature, but only in the eye of the beholder.

In your case the issue is even more serious because for scientific purposes the facts that you have collected are not only contaminated and distorted by unacknowledged and unexamined assumptions, but of little relevance because they have not been collected in a sufficiently systematic and explicit way that would allow inferences to be drawn from them that might be valid for the population and phenomenon that you are studying. The only way that they are potentially useful is that some might be vivid illustrations of what one might derive from a coherent theory - what one might work out from such a theory. In the same way that from Newton's Laws of Motion one can predict the movement and position of the planets into the distant future or how to make a space craft rendevous with a distant asteroid at a precise time years hence.

If you are not interested in this approach to theory then the only honorable option is to give up and concentrate on your personal narrative.

I suspect that when you were a wee laddie in school your science teacher would have made you play with magnets and iron filings. You would have been told to place a sheet of paper over a bar magnet and then scatter iron filings on the paper. If you then shook the paper the iron filings, as if by magic, would cluster into a pattern of lines that your teacher might have explained were revealing the lines of force around the magnet - the invisible magnetic field around the bar. But the iron filings are incidental and their only significance is that they reveal the magnetic forces that are normally invisible. In the same way the permanent clouds that hang around the summits of some mountains reveal patterns of temperature and pressure - moist air forced up the mountain slope is cooled and condenses into a cloud whose shape is determined by the pattern of temperature around the summit. The drops of moisture are in constant flux and as they are swept over the peak and down the other side they are warmed, evaporate, and hence disappear - the pattern of cloud being constantly replenished by new moisture.

Now if the temperature of the planet were to increase sufficiently that around the peak might become too high for moisture to condense and so the cloud would disappear, but the pattern of relative temperatures would persist in the same form

as had at lower temperatures been revealed by a cloud. The point is that the cloud is incidental, or as Aristotle would have described it accidental. The real phenomenon is not the cloud but the pattern of temperatures, not the iron filings but the magnetic fields that they can, in the right context, reveal.

Almost all writing on witchcraft confuses the iron filings and permanent clouds for the phenomenon - they miss the point and only lead to confusion. And as a result are mostly worthless - they have no relevance in the real world, but only in the tenured debating spaces of academia. Or, socially structured games, like sports and ballroom dancing competitions. What is described as witchcraft is simply a special case of a more general phenomenon, one that is at least ubiquitous if not universal, and represents simply one of its several possible manifestations. What one has to do is to identify the core or kernal of the phenomenon and then explain how it is manifest in different forms in different contexts so that what has heretofore been called witchcraft makes sense. And why it is so easy for iron filings to be confused with magnetism and clouds with temperature patterns. The key is that the manifestations are a function of, or dependent on, the context, whereas the underlying and core phenomenon is singificantly context independent.

In the case of witchcraft this means that the core phenomenon is universal and hence ancient (if a disease is evenly distributed around the world it is likely to be grounded in fundamental human biology, whereas if it is local it is likely to be a function of the environment), but the particular manifestations that most would consider definitive of the phenomenon are in fact local to contexts of belief that are characteristic of specific times and places. This implies that though the manifestations are local and context dependent if the relevant contexts persist over long periods so will the manifestations - it is simply that persistance over time alone does not make them either universal or permanent.

The mistake is to assume that the pattern of iron filings or the droplets of moisture are the phenomena

Tuesday, 25 November 2008 22:25:17

You have a tendency to try and subdivide too much. You need to be ruled by Ockham's Razor. Do not multiply entities unnecessarily.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Your desire to elevate witchcraft related violence to some kind of special status seems too much like hoping that violence done to people run over by a Toyota is different from that done by a Ford or a Chrysler.

What you might be able to support is that witchcraft related violence is a special case of the more general category of belief related violence.

Violence is a product of human action and will and hence human drives which are based on emotions - especially fear and feelings of frustration. And emotions are the energy for beliefs.

The notion of witchcraft is saturated with the notion of evil and bad things happening that in an ideal world should not. The best term for this - though not one that is likely to be of much use to you - is the Greek `kakia'. This is usually translated in the New Testament as evil but I have seen it used more generally for `things that one would prefer to avoid'. Human beings are evil - nature is not, and the notion of witchcraft is based on the belief that anything bad that happens, all kakia, can be blamed on a perpetrator, who is either acting alone or with the help of other beings embodied or not.

What distinguishes belief based violence including witchcraft is that it normally demands that the violence be approved, validated, or authenticated by an authoritative consensus - chief or witch finding professional or `doctor'. If this were not the case then one accusation would lead to another and the whole disintegrate into chaos. Though, once the notion of witchcraft is established and accepted sporadic violence against individuals without benefit of an explicit consensus may be allowed - because the possibility of witchcraft is accepted there is an implicit consensus. This would be analagous to the acceptance in certain jurisdictions that self-defense, crimes of passion or honor, or hot pursuit, are accepted as lawful without benefit of formalities like courts and judges.

My version, which may not answer the same questions, would be something like:

1. Fear inducing event

2. Diagnosis or interpretation in terms of witch activity
3. Prescription and treatment
4. Resolution of fear

If resolution is successful there would be no cycle. In order for cyclical activity to be maintained you will need a good supply of recurring fear inducing events of a kind that can be given a witch interpretation. And this will be greatly facilitated by secondary processes inspired by witch fears that result in institutions and professional roles concerning the identification and eradication of witches.

On a relatively trivial scale a good model of the process may be provided by the recent fad for detox protocols and products. Originally detox was applied to a process of withdrawing substance-abusers from their preferred substance, e.g. alcohol, and was motivated by a desire to reduce¬¨,Ä†withdrawal effects. But it was then taken over and abused as an explanation and treatment for the vague ills and anxieties that most people feel from time to time, especially when feeling guilty about some kind of over-indulgence, or lapses in the ritual purity expected of those who take responsibility for themselves and pursue optimal `health'. The present situation seems to be:

1. Anxiety about breach of health taboos or exposure to pollution
2. Diagnosis and interpretation in terms of toxins (always better to find an external cause rather than weak self control)
3. Prescription is a detox regime and specialist products
4. Resolution in feeling of regaining ritual purity - until next time

Secondary effects are the detox industry worth billions of $ annually, huge media interest, and anxiety about toxins that verges on moral panic. However, the condition that is the justification for all this expense does not exist and none of the products sold at such high cost do more that air and water and sleep. See BBC news item below.

One of the important questions worth exploring is what conditions, and what it is about them, attracts a witch related diagnosis or interpretation. This is what I was trying to get at the other evening.

In a multicultural city like London, if one were to ask samples of different ethnic groups to select and rank the five symptoms that would lead them to seek an urgent appointment with their doctor, I am sure that the resulting lists would vary

considerably, and what were considered important by many would not necessarily be so to health care professionals. Similarly in witch believing regions what was considered sinister in traditional villages would be very different from the opinions of politicians, scientists, and jurists.

Although, potentially any adverse event could be attributed to witches, I suspect in practice only a relatively small sub-set does so regularly. Hence, a study of those events which regularly do, and especially those that do not, result in witch accusation will say something significant about the structure of relations within the community and the kind of model that is the conventional wisdom about how the world works.

But, in order for a fear cycle to be sustainable I feel confident that the events provoking witch related fear will have the following features:

1. They will be relatively common and recur frequently
2. The link between the alleged cause and the outcome of the event will be relatively obscure, e.g it will not usually be as transparent as a spear thrust, and probably in our terms would be dependent on psychology rather than physics.
3. Because of the obscurity of the presumed cause - effect link between accused and event, there is a perceived need for specialists to confirm the diagnosis and attribute responsibility.
4. Once an institution of specialists has been created then the process becomes in a sense self-perpetuating, as specialists validate the existence and malevolence of witches.

This meta-cycle then becomes the norm:
1. Event
2. Referral to specialists (whose survival and prosperity is tied to the existence of witches)
3. Affirmation of witch activity
4. Treatment
5. Lowered threshold for diagnosis and shaping of perceived events in terms of witch activity

All of these processes and anxieties are the result of a general modern attraction to what William Barrett used to call `the illusion of technique'.

WITCHCRAFT AND RACISM
Date: 14 December 2006
Topic: Reply to NM

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

this helps, thanks.Give me your thoughts on why witchcraft as a term is racists. Are some of our other no nos also racists. Magic, supernatural, mystical, occult...I want to slay those words.

I don,Äôt think I have said that the notion of witchcraft is racist, at most I have suggested that, if it is defined in terms of magic (which I will use here for the notions of supernatural and its synonyms), then it can easily approximate to being racist and lend itself to racist use - as if it were a spacecraft being captured by the gravitational field of a sun, or a black hole. The idea of racism has this characteristic, that like a black hole it can capture things that get too close. In contrast, if you define witchcraft without reference to magic, as I have been at pains to do, it is not racist and is much less likely to become so abused.

You can, however, present an argument that the notion of witchcraft in Africa (the sense in which you are using it) is potentially racist. I will put this in a traditional logical form (Barbara).

Assumptions/Context:
We are referring to witchcraft in Africa
Witchcraft in Africa is a bad thing and does much harm.
What is referred to as magic is considered to be irrational and/or a delusion

Argument:
The majority of Africans believe in witchcraft
Belief in witchcraft is wrong/irrational/delusional
Therefore the majority of Africans are in error/irrational/deluded

As it stands this argument is probably valid from a logical point of view, and whether it is true (for a valid argument can be false depending on its premises), or racist, depends on the truth of whether belief in witchcraft is indeed irrational or delusional - I remember on at least one occasion you have referred to the beliefs associated with witchcraft as delusions, and explaining that technically (psychiatrically) the notion of a delusion is context dependent in that if everyone in a community believes in magic it cannot be delusional, though it may be wrong from a `scientific,Äô point of view. In contrast in a community where the great majority believes in communism, the beliefs of the minority who disagree could be considered delusional - and the USSR acted on that assumption by incarcerating dissidents in mental hospitals and treating them

as psychotic. Hence, in a real sense, in traditional African communities those members who do not believe in witchcraft could be considered deluded.

The proximity to and attraction towards racism is also increased by the dilution of the notion in recent years. The boundaries of racism have not only expanded but become increasingly fuzzy and porous. The sentimental core of racism now blurs into and motivates attitudes to gender, nationality, and even beliefs like religions or cultures. In this country it is now a criminal offense to make disparaging comments about the beliefs of any religion (at least if they would offend the believers).

But perhaps the most important consideration is the shifting usage of magic et al. At the time of the European witch crazes everyone, for practical purposes, believed in magic in the sense (or more accurately reference or extension) that we would now understand the term (in terms of its alleged manifestations). The beliefs of authorities and alleged witches were essentially the same, and could not be distinguished in terms of what was considered possible. If witches were able to change the shapes and nature of things then so were the priests who were empowered to supervise and control the shifting of the shape of wine and cookies into the blood and body of Christ several times a day. Newton spent most of his life on `supernatural,Äô studies which he considered far more important than his physics. And if there were any atheists in our sense they were a tiny minority.

At the time of the European witches the difference between what witches were believed to be able to do and what the authorities considered possible and reasonable or rational was virtually non-existent - they were understandable in the same terms. It was like the difference between killing someone with thallium or cyanide or with polonium 210. The latter may be less ordinary but they are all understandable within the conventional wisdom of the day - in this case chemistry and physics. Hence Newton,Äôs and Leibnitz,Äôs usage of `occult,Äô was simply something hidden or not obvious to the ordinary senses.

What has happened in the intervening 400 years is that the usage of magic has changed from being part of the everyday world that conventional wisdom allowed to something outside it. Today, when, at least officially, the scientific interpretation of how the world works is in the ascendent and considered rational and correct, anything that is considered or classified as other and outside must be by implication irrational. This is what has happened to magic. Any confusion arises because there are still people who accept the possibility of `miracles,Äô, of things

happening that science does not allow. From their point of view the scientific interpretation of the world is incomplete and so they are sympathetic to claims for unusual and extraordinary powers. However, I think it is clear that from the point of view of the authorities, and as expressed in law, the scientific view is dominant in our culture. And the vast majority of academics would oppose making magic a department in a university and would consider magic to be irrational and without foundation. And if that is the case to label something as magic is to say more than that it is simply different in the sense that explaining depression in terms of psychoanalysis, or behavioral psychology, or biochemistry are different. To say that something is magical or supernatural is to say a lot more, it is to say that what is so labeled is on the other side of a boundary that defines what is rational and reasonable and established as possible. It is not that depression is a chemical or a psychological disorder, or that a machine works by clockwork or electricity, it is rather more to draw a distinction between what is possible and what is impossible, real or imaginary. And between those who believe in possible as opposed to impossible things.

To call something magical is no longer a description but a value judgement and the implied distinction is essentially moral. During the European witch craze the difference between priests and witches was not in what they were believed to do, in other words a description of what was thought to happen, but in values and morals and motives - the priest was good the witch was evil. When we say that the beliefs of an individual or group are magical we are not simply describing them but passing at least a weak value judgement on them. And although anthropologists may consider that they can quarantine their judgments and deal only in descriptions I think that that is very difficult to achieve.

The only solution that I can think of is to outlaw terms such as magic et al from any definition of witchcraft because I do not see how using them helps in understanding the subject and the inevitable consequence is to push the whole subject closer to the black hole of racism.

And as I think I tried to explain in an earlier email the function of words like magic or occult etc is to shift the context from one interpretation of the world to another. In this case from the scientific and atomic to the non-scientific and agent based. It is for this reason that I consider metaphysics to be a useful notion. What we are talking about is not what happens in the world but how it is interpreted - the frameworks of interpretation that we use. In the last hundred years metaphysics has acquired a bad name as being concerned with

inaccessible and transcendental things such as are considered by religion. From the point of view of logical positivism, itself now largely rejected, metaphysics was meaningless. But originally it was used simply as a label or title for the works of Aristotle that came after his `Physics,Äô. And I think that it can be used in a quite acceptable sense to refer not to the ultimately transcendent foundation of the world but simply the frameworks of interpretation that we use to understand it. In this sense my distinction between atom and agent based interpretations of how the world works are metaphysical and I think that such a term is needed and essential to make our ideas clear. At the very least it helps to keep separate descriptions and judgments, what happens from how it is interpreted.

In thinking about the usages of natural and supernatural it may be worth considering that whereas what witches are alleged to be able to do is usually classified as supernatural, or magical, or occult etc, the alleged existence of UFOs and the possibility of alien visitors is not. This is because, not only do most scientists consider the possibility of life elsewhere in the universe to be certain, but the existence of sentient beings from other systems does not necessarily contradict any fundamental scientific principles. The fact that a UFO landed on the lawn of the White House and a spaceman abducted or goosed Bush, might be extraordinary, even remarkable, and the technology required might be beyond our imagining, but it could still be `natural,Äô in the context of science. In addition the assumption that the alien was from a remote and totally different civilization expands the space of possibilities and suggests our relative ignorance. In contrast most of the things that witches are alleged to be able to do either contradict fundamental physical law or contradict and are contrary to all validated observations about how the world works. We may know nothing about life in distant galaxies but we would be foolish to discount what we know about our own back yard. To accept UFOs and aliens is compatible with science, to accept witches as usually imagined (or any kind of magic in the modern sense) is not.

At the time of the European witch crazes everything was natural and magical - and what separated witches from ordinary folk was not what they did or how, but their values and morals. And at that time, insofar as what magicians were alleged to do was special and exceeded the capacities of the rest, what they did was literally super-natural, in the same sense that the ability to remember the contents of a whole book after flipping through the pages, or jumping huge heights, or running faster and further, is super-natural - in other words super was

quantitative rather than qualitative, a matter of degree rather than kind. Now we draw a distinction between natural and supernatural by which the world of scientific conventional wisdom is natural and non-magical, whilst that of the supernatural is magical but not natural. The difference between natural and supernatural is now qualitative and a difference in kind. The idea of the supernatural has changed and is no longer literally true - what is described as super is not simply more of the same but something totally different and can only make sense in a different kind of world, which is to say a different interpretation of the world and how it works. I don,ÄôÄôt know the best prefix for this but it would be something like alter-natural, or extra-natural - though I prefer extraordinary, as `natural,ÄôÄô seems more judgmental and normative than `ordinary,ÄôÄô.

And there is a further implication that is not always stated. It is that what is natural is possible and rational, whilst in contrast what is supernatural, or occult, or magical, or whatever, is neither - but rather impossible, imaginary, and does not exist. Hence those who believe in it are at best mistaken, almost certainly irrational, and at worst deluded. And when you put this in the context that as far as African witchcraft is concerned almost all believers are dark skinned and culturally and religiously distinguishable, to define witchcraft in terms of magic seems terribly vulnerable to suspicion of racism. After all what marks racism is a desire to separate and exclude and alienate the other from oneself and one,ÄôÄôs own kind.

The solution is simple. Outlaw the terms magic, occult, supernatural, mystical, or any near synonyms from definitions of witchcraft and replace them simply with extra-ordinary. The advantages of extraordinary or praeternatural are twofold. First, they narrow the gap between us and them and hence the possibility of racism. Second, they allow some flexibility in what is now or may later be considered `natural,ÄôÄô; which avoids futile and sterile arguments as to whether there are really paranormal abilities like precognition or psychokinesis, etc. In addition they allow the focus to be shifted to the real issues of concern and the real mechanisms that when understood may allow some kind of effective intervention. In this context I believe that the only useful interpretation is in terms of moral panic.

Terms such as occult and supernatural function as context shifters and are thus completely different from ordinary

descriptions and in my sense are benignly and usefully metaphysical.

Finally I seem to remember that some time ago I tried to construct a diagram showing the relations between atom and agent based interpretations, but not being visual it was probably difficult to understand.

MAGIC

Date: 15 November 2006
Topic: magic by any other name

Earlier I sent you a copy of something I wrote several months ago which included a discussion of several possible terms for `supernatural,ÄÔ. I did not really like any of them and believe that when academics use them in relation to witchcraft they are at best unhelpful, in that they do not tell us anything useful about the matter, and more often are evidence of lazy and muddled thinking of a degree sufficient to deny or remove tenure. Never trust the judgment of anyone who makes magic and its near synonyms central to the discussion of witchcraft.

The problem is that all of these terms have accumulated extraneous baggage, like one of those improbably overloaded buses in India or Africa, that makes them unwieldy, unstable, and difficult to control. They also succeed in shifting the center of gravity of the subject and in doing so diverting attention onto irrelevant, peripheral, and accidental details. This makes it impossible to get a clear view of the matter and as always when confusion is created value judgments are too easily mistaken for descriptions of how the world actually is.

Terms such as magic are today (for their meanings have changed over the years) always defined with reference and in contrast to science and, more specifically, what scientific orthodoxy does not allow. Insofar as the scientific interpretation of how the world works is taken as true it is therefore almost inevitable that what is described as magical, supernatural, occult, or perhaps best praeternatural, is by implication not only not scientific but also irrational. In other words the allegedly magical phenomena are seen an unwarranted and irrational intrusions or additions to the rational scientific picture of the world. And when such beliefs are characteristic of ethnic groups that are disempowered, marginalized, and excluded, racist stereotyping is facilitated and well nigh inevitable. But that this is so simply reflects the fact that today power lies with

the scientific view and the claims of the alternatives are discounted. In the past this was reversed and those who would later be described as scientists (a term that was only introduced in the C19) were persecuted and judged as heretics or worse. My father, who was deeply religious in an American evangelical way, considered Darwin to be one of the most evil men who ever lived, because he led sinners astray by undermining the truth of the Bible account of creation and thereby condemned many to an eternity of torment in hell. I doubt if such attitudes have changed greatly among the more fervent believers today. J K Rowling illustrates this relativism nicely in the Harry Potter books with her invention of the disparaging term `muggles,ÄÔ for ordinary (scientific) folk who are ignorant, or do not believe in the reality, of witchcraft and wizardry. The terms magic et al have thus become little more than reflections of the relative power of different groups and cultures. Which is why the beliefs of Christianity, Islam, or any of the major religions are somehow considered less `magical,ÄÔ than those about witchcraft. And how helpful would it be if an anthropologist, trying to understand how creation beliefs influenced cultures and behavior, were to classify creation `myths,ÄÔ, including the `Big Bang,ÄÔ, according to how mythical or magical she considered them to be?

I do not believe that one can really understand witchcraft if one starts by alienating it by the use of judgmental terms like magic or supernatural; for from within any culture anything that is allowed by its interpretation of how the world works is `natural,ÄÔ. Hence from within the scientific world view germs as a cause of illness are natural, and from within a world view that allows witchcraft the things that witches do is not supernatural but natural. What terms like supernatural point to is not really specific kinds of events but judgments about a completely different interpretation of how the world works. And for practical purposes there are only two, which I have described as being based on either atoms or agents.

The atom based, or scientific, interpretation of the world considers it to be made up of tiny, inert, inanimate, building blocks that interact and behave in accordance with physical or natural laws that are inviolable, unchangeable, and eternal. And, as a consequence of these features are completely uninfluenced by and independent of human will and desire. This is an inhuman materialistic and law based world that has only been empowered and privileged recently and locally, and within which the supernatural has no place that is not pathological.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Essentially it only came into existence around 1600 in Western Europe and spread mostly around the North Atlantic rim. But though it has grown steadily in influence, even today it is probably a minority belief (more than 80% of Americans claim that their life is influenced by `supernatural,Äô entities and what is essentially magic - in the disparaging sense) and even where it is strong and influential it cohabits rather uneasily with the other older world view. And more recently there are even signs that in the USA relatively at least its political power and influence may be waning.

In contrast an agent based interpretation of the world considers it to be made up of living entities, or agents, whose interactions and behavior is accounted for by what are essentially psychological processes, based on beliefs and desires. Instead of eternal and inhuman physical laws the rules that account for the apparent regularities and consistencies that make the world intelligible and life possible are considered more as conventions, customs, or habits devised and enacted by disembodied entities such as gods, spirits and ancestors. And in contrast to the strict rule of Physical or Natural Laws those of an agent based world are negotiable and can in principle be changed if one knows how to ask the appropriate entities. Essentially this is a world based on rules and laws that are in form like those created by men and enshrined in statutes. It is a world based ultimately on politics and politicians.

This view of the world has overall, in most places and at most times until recently, been the dominant one on which all cultures have been based. And though from the point of view of an atom based, or scientific, culture it could be described as `supernatural,Äô if such terms have any meaning within an agent based interpretation their sense or connotation is very different and would approximate closely to what we regard as natural. In such a world entities like witches are allowed and can be influenced at least in principle by what are in effect technologies of an agent based world.

Technologies are simply the application of our understanding of how the world works in order to change it in a way we want and to attain predetermined goals. An atom based culture does this by working out the implications of physical or natural laws and then applying them to achieve its purposes - as when we use Newton,Äôs laws of motion to fire artillery shells onto a target, or arrange for spacecraft to rendezvous with a comet many years and millions of miles away. And an agent based culture does this, using what are essentially psychological and

political means, by negotiating with entities that have sufficient power and influence to change the world in the desired way. But, though these may seem very different processes they are each no more than technologies appropriate to their respective world views.

What distinguishes witchcraft phenomena from scientific is not what witches are alleged to be able to do but the different interpretations of how the world works that are used by each; what is understood to be possible is what the dominant world view allows. Referring to one or other of these interpretations, or world views, as supernatural is as helpful as referring to baseball as supernatural or praeter-football because it is played according to different rules, and vice versa. (as referring to cricket as supernatural because it is played according to different rules than football; according to rules that are not accepted by or make no sense in football).

If instead, the reference, or extension, of supernatural is limited to the scientific world view it is either trivial, empty, or a value judgment and a synonym for the irrational or beliefs for which there is no evidence. Or, in terms of Popper,Äôs view of science, simply unscientific because it cannot be expressed in terms that can be clearly falsified and hence tested. The status of `supernatural,Äô phenomena are essentially like the Flying Spaghetti Monster (FSM) worshipped by the Pastafarians, or the existence of Russell,Äôs Teapot, too small and delicate to be detected by our instruments, but believed to orbit the Sun far beyond Jupiter. In practice, terms like supernatural mean no more nor less than unusual, unorthodox, extra-ordinary, or praeternatural. To paraphrase Wittgenstein,Äôs question: `what is changed by adding the predicate `supernatural,Äô to an event, or belief, or phenomena?,Äô.

That terms like `supernatural,Äô are little more than thinly disguised value judgments is demonstrated by the observation that when they are applied to beliefs professed by a subset of the population within an overwhelmingly scientific culture, one in which an atomistic interpretation of the world has become the conventional wisdom, dominant authoritative consensus, or orthodoxy, and as such has power and privileges, then it has predominantly negative connotations. Yet when the conventional wisdom is religious or agent based, virtually the same terms, supernatural, magic, occult, etc, are also applied negatively to those who disagree or profess unorthodox beliefs. Hence, even though major religions imply an agent based view of the world they too abhor and even tend to punish severely witches,

infidels, and heretics. What supernatural et al refer to is not facts about nature but about beliefs about nature, or to use different terms they are ways of describing doctrines, or features of reports rather than the the things reported (to borrow from Searle). These value judgments completely overwhelm whatever residues of description remain in the terms and make them at best useless for your purpose, and at worst dangerous. And, more specifically the definitions of witchcraft that take the general form of `harm done by magical means,Äô make little sense, because magical et al are not terms that can be applied to means, but only to beliefs about means, and in any case the combination amounts to no more than `harm done by extraordinary (or unorthodox, unusual, praeternatural) means,Äô. In which case why not simply say that?

SENICIDE

Date: 18 December 2006
Topic: Senicide

Norman,

I think you are in danger of making too much of the notion of senicide. At most it is a kind of unlawful killing, but the problem is that killing may be a part of witch related phenomena but it is neither necessary or sufficient. The vast majority of killing has nothing to do with witchcraft and only a minority of witch related phenomena include killing - even if when it occurs it makes a major contribution to its malignancy. At most I would tend to see killing as a storm petrel, a marker or warning of a wider phenomenon that might otherwise be overlooked. You can see this with terrorism. Only a relatively small number of deaths have been caused directly by terrorist activity, whilst in contrast one could argue that the vast majority of deaths in Iraq are an indirect consequence of, or a reaction to terrorism, yet even that is only a tiny part of the harm that the action against terrorism has engendered. Even in societies where senicide might have been accepted it had nothing to do with witchcraft and in societies where witchcraft leads to the death of some elderly persons I would be very surprised if any of the community involved would explain the deaths in terms of economic expediency - so why impose your interpretation on them?

Senicide is worth no more than a questioning footnote or mention - moral panic is quite enough. The phenomena of witchcraft is much more than killing.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

There is a useful notion in psychoanalysis that symptoms are usually over-determined, in other words they are the result of the intersection of several causes. From this point of view senicide might be one, though for reasons that follow it cannot be either the only or very powerful. If it plays any part I think it can only be secondary and a derivative that hitches a ride once witchcraft has already become established.

The reason why I doubt that senicide can be a significant cause of witchcraft is that there are simply far too many instances where it cannot be relevant. How, for example, can it account for the estimated 18,000 children living rough in Kinshasa alone because their families have thrown them out because they believe them to be witches? How does it explain the SA cases of economically productive people who return to their villages only to be accused? How does it explain accusations against the young? How does it explain Salem? And so on.

If the notion has any merit it is not in relation to senicide but in a far more general form.

I would suggest a more general hypothesis that might be easily tested:

Witchcraft is one of perhaps several means by which traditional responsibilities for less-productive members of a community can be reduced, contained, or terminated without prejudicing communal values.

This would include kinds of exclusion and extrusion that do not involve killing and seems to me to be a plausible aspect or component of witch related phenomena.

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Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

I would suggest a more general hypothesis that might be easily tested:

Witchcraft is one of perhaps several means by which traditional responsibilities for less-productive members of a community can be reduced, contained, or terminated without prejudicing communal values.

This would include various kinds of exclusion and extrusion that do not involve killing and seems to me to be a plausible and probably aspect or component of witch related phenomena. But I do not believe that it is sufficient to explain the whole. It would be at most, to use another psychoanalytic term, be only a secondary gain.

From this perspective what is normally referred to as witchcraft is simply the most dramatic and exotic of several possible manifestations of that phenomenon and its main importance is that as such it can help to reveal the sinews of the subject by locating it beyond the boundaries of the familiar within which things are too often taken for granted.

In approaching the subject of witchcraft it is important to distinguish between those features that are accidental and a function of the local culture and conventional wisdom about how the world works, and the features of the more general phenomenon that are universal and largely independent of context.

In epidemiology, when the incidence of a disease varies considerably with time and place, as is the case with heart disease and multiple sclerosis, the probability of a local environmental cause would be considered high. In contrast, when the incidence shows little variation the cause is more likely to be closely linked to some fundamental aspect of human development. Perhaps some characteristic that offers benefits that far outweigh the cost of any `side effects,Äô, as some researchers have suggested schizophrenia may be linked to the development of language. Similarly when social phenomena and group behavior are ubiquitous and have a long history, in other

words when they transcend cultural differences, they are likely to be linked to basic and ultimately biological characteristics of human beings, whilst those that are local and recent are more likely to be culturally determined.

Date: 21 November 2006
Topic: Different Books

MILLER WITCHCRAFT BOOK DRAFT

I am really the last person to ask for an opinion about whether or not your book will achieve a reasonable number of readers as my interest in witchcraft is personal and largely based on the fact that you are writing about it and I would like to understand it better. Hence I do not hope and have not found a single work that gives me even a few of the answers. And that this does not trouble me is simply because I much prefer to try and work out what is going on for myself and from first or universal principles. I do not trust academics in general and on witchcraft in particular. Blinkered and befuddled would not be a bad description and most would not recognize a witch if she came up behind them and kissed their arse, or offered them her immortal soul and intercourse for a curse.

What has been clear for some time is that when we talk about witchcraft much of the misunderstanding and repetition is because we are really talking about two completely different books; although what I refer to for convenience as mine should be in scare quotes because it is vaporware and will never be written.

Briefly, your approach seems to be based on accentuating the differences between witchcraft and what might be described as ordinary life, between the beliefs and practices of Africans and the good folk in Kansas, or Inverness. In contrast mine is focused on similarities and minimizes differences, which are acknowledged only tactically as a means of revealing, or drawing out, universal processes to which most folk round the North Atlantic rim are effectively blind, because they operate beneath their radar. And a corollary of this difference in approach, is that you are writing for a reader who is interested in learning about what is remote, alien, and other, whilst I am concerned only in those who are interested in learning more about themselves and their neighbors.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Your approach is grounded in the anthropology of very foreign parts and glories in the cultural bio-diversity, culture as phenotypical rather than genotypical diversity, or the kaleidoscopic variations in leaves and flowers, rather than the common aspects of the anatomy and physiology of root and trunk. In contrast mine is based on the anthropology and social psychology of the familiar, the homeland, and is rooted in processes that are common to all people and distinguish homo sapiens from other species. From my point of view, the differences, what are usually taken to be the unique and exotic features of witchcraft, are simply the `colors,Äô that it takes on, chameleon like, from its environment or context - and especially the local world-view or interpretation of how the world works. These are related to the universal process, of which witchcraft is simply a particular manifestation, as seasonal Paris fashions are to a doctor,Äôs scrubs, or a soldier,Äôs flak jacket.

Given that you are not writing a detailed anthropological monograph based on original, peer reviewed, research, and that you are not really writing a serious review of the primary literature, there is a danger that your work will fall awkwardly into a no-mans land, somewhere between the readers of specialist anthropological journals and those of the National Geographic, Time, or other `coffee table,Äô publications. That is not necessarily a bad thing, but I simply wonder how populous this area might be? And when a reader has finished your book what do you hope that he will have learned from it, and in what way will he have been changed and benefited?

Like you I am not doing original research, or writing a systematic review of the literature, and I am quite unqualified to dabble in these matters. If anything my work, such as it is, is a rather febrile polemic against what I believe to be a danger about which few seem to be aware or even care. I am concerned that the universal process, of which I believe witchcraft to be simply one of the more extreme manifestations, distorts the popular understanding of events and for that reason has the potential to do great harm. And because it is always easier to see a beam in a foreigners eye than a mote in one,Äôs own, or in that of those near and dear and close and personal, I want to try and use witchcraft as a mirror in which my fantasy readers might glimpse themselves, if only dimly and darkly.

In keeping with this approach the description of what I have referred to as the universal process will also serve as a general definition of witchcraft. But first it is important to

be aware of two different usages of the term, between which failure to make a distinction has often led to confusion. On the one hand, witchcraft has been used to refer to what witches are alleged or believed to do, whilst on the other it has also been used to refer to what is, or should be, done about them. The former has tended to be used by those interested in the paranormal and the possibility that witches are a distinct and natural kind of entity rather than a social construction; whilst the latter tends to be used by anthropologists and historians who approach the subject from a sociological, or social psychological, point of view. And yet, even in academic literature, there has been significant equivocation between the two as evidenced by the fact that the prototypical definitions of witchcraft tend to take the form, most tersely exemplified as: `Harm caused by magical means,Äô, where `magical,Äô could be replaced, according to taste, by any of several near synonyms.

With these distinctions in mind I believe that witchcraft is best defined in something like the following way:

Witchcraft is a socially constructed reaction to the fear arising from (or provoked by) the belief that certain individuals, alone or severally, have the ability to cause great harm by extraordinary means (or have extraordinary powers to harm).

This definition has several advantages. First, it avoids reference to magic et al with which the notion has too often been confused and encumbered, and which, for reasons that I have explained elsewhere, is both confused and confusing and should be avoided. Second, it focuses on the essentials, that the phenomena is a social reaction to a fear about the behavior of living agents (whether embodied or not). And third, it leaves open the matter of whether the fear is justified, to the extent that the harm anticipated is possible or actual, real or imaginary. The overall effect is that it can easily be either narrowed towards a more traditional view of witchcraft, or, simply by removing the first two words, widened into a general definition of a phenomenon that has more general relevance and includes reactions to real dangers such as the power of terrorists to harm.

The essence of this approach is to draw out and highlight that the essential kernel of witchcraft and related phenomena is a pathological (exaggerated or over) reaction to fear, and that this has malignant consequences in that it makes it almost impossible to achieve an undistorted view of the cause - because in practice the distinction between perception and reality has

been lost, obscured, discounted, or simply overwhelmed by populist emotion and prejudices.

The motivation for this approach is the belief that, although ubiquitous and socially corrosive, the range and significance of this process is not widely recognized and for practical purposes has been rendered almost invisible. And yet only by raising awareness of the existence and scope of the phenomena, above the threshold of the collective unconscious (or indifference), will it be possible to identify it,Äôs manifestations and gain some control over them - and their grim consequences.

An illustration of the benefits of this approach is that normally witchcraft and terrorism would be considered completely different phenomena, to the extent that it might be considered at best misguided, or perverse, and at worst subversive to suggest a significant link between them. Yet, when considered from the perspective of my definition, they overlap and this is supported by the degree to which not only are the attitudes of people who live in a world with witches similar to those living in a world with terrorists, but that if `magical means,Äô (or its synonyms) in the case of witchcraft and WMD in the case of terrorism are simply replaced by `extraordinary means,Äô the terms could be used almost interchangeably. This does not discount the real differences between them, that the power of the terrorist is actual whilst that of the witch is not, but simply suggests that from the point of view of the perceptions of the people who consider themselves to be potential victims the reality of the danger is exactly the same. And the importance of being aware of the overlap between these concepts is that if it is ignored the reaction to terrorism will be maladaptive, disproportionate, poorly focused, and unnecessarily expensive in terms of both money and basic human rights.

This discussion suggests that the apparent lack of awareness of the phenomenon may be due to the possibility that what is a coherent whole has become fragmented between specialists and given different names. There is an old Sufi story of pilgrims speaking different languages squabbling over what to buy with their few remaining coins, each wants something with a different name, and they cannot agree until eventually another traveller, who speaks all their languages, takes their money and buys a bunch of grapes which is what each had wanted all along. What seems to have happened is that because anthropologists and sociologists and historians have been over-impressed by the superficial differences they have neglected the similarities between phenomena. This seems to be an endemic disorder among

social scientists who far too easily allow themselves to become enchanted by cultural differences.

I would like to suggest that the topic of study that most closely approximates that of my definition is what has come to be referred to as moral panic. This not only offers a number of illuminating examples of the range of the phenomenon and its relations to others, but also suggests a defect in my general definition. The emphasis on morals is significant because it highlights and foregrounds an aspect that was not previously made explicit. Yet when one re-examines the matter it is clear, not only that the phenomena studied under moral panic have a moral dimension, but that this is also the case with witchcraft and terrorism. For the fact that when the alleged power to harm is described as being extra-ordinary, or any of its several near synonyms, that this is not used as purely descriptive, or as a matter of degree or quantification, but that it is primarily a moral judgement. And it is really the moral dimension, with its deep-rooted associations with ideas of corruption, contagion, ritual impurity and danger, that is the source of the extremities of fear that are so easily kindled. It is the addition of the moral dimension that distorts the perception of danger and the relation between perception and reality. For one of the features of the experience of morality is that it is often and perhaps always non-linear and difficult to quantify. Perhaps if it were otherwise there would be little need for faith? This explains a conundrum: Why an alleged witch believed to have made livestock sick or a man impotent, and a suicide bomber who kills several people, or a penis penetrating a reluctant vagina or anus, are considered in some sense more damaging, evil, or morally culpable and reprehensible, than a bomber pilot or general who kills thousands, or a power-drill penetrating a reluctant knee-cap.

And it may also explain another neglected aspect - the creation of victims.

Today the notion and usage of the term `victim,Äô has been debased, from the original `living being sacrificed in a religious rite,Äô, through one who experiences oppression, loss, or suffering (by implication at the hands of another), to almost any kind of misfortune. Instead of simply getting cancer one is now a victim of cancer, instead of being injured one is the victim of an accident, instead of being unfortunate one is a victim of misfortune, and so on. The result has been a huge expansion in the number of people who experience themselves as victims; a process that the religious and secular authorities have done little or nothing to discourage. But although the term

is now applied willy nilly to accidents, illnesses, and deaths, including those resulting from natural causes for whom no one could reasonably be held accountable, the association with human, or other, agency is still an integral part of the notion. Being a victim implies the existence of a perpetrator, and that in turn adds a moral context for the event. The attraction of this expansion is probably that being able to associate, no matter how tenuously, misfortune with a perpetrator allows one to attribute blame to others, and ipso facto to absolve oneself of some responsibility, even if this inevitably implies a degree of passivity and loss of potency. But there may be a further advantage, I suspect that an anthropologist from Mars might notice a peculiar link between the present obsession with celebrity and the evolving status of becoming a victim. It almost seems as if being a victim is becoming a negative form of celebrity, that in a less than facetious sense victims are being transformed into the Paris Hiltons of misfortune. And the new victimarchies have become ersatz aristocracies.

There is a further association that enhances the status of the victim, the use of martial metaphors. I suspect that if one were asked to write the biography of a modern celebrity one would feel disappointed and at something of a disadvantage if one could not find evidence of a struggle, if the status of celebrity was simply a gift from heaven - `I was born beautiful. I still am. The end.,Äô - makes for only a short book. Which is a pretty important consideration if one is being paid by the word. In the event this is unlikely, for if nature has not been kind enough to provide the excuse for a struggle one or more can easily be manufactured. In this sense victims are usually more fortunate as some capital always comes with the role. Hence victims suffer heroically and succumb only after a long struggle and celebrities triumph only after overcoming many demons. Which gives me pause and sleepless nights. I hate the idea of dying heroically, or even struggling. I do not say that I want to die whimpering and reluctantly and without dignity but I am eager to give up without a fight. I would far prefer to accept that I am beat and say to Death, `OK you win, its a fair cop, lets get on with it,Äô. And if, after all that, I find my last days are described in martial or heroic terms I will be extremely cross.

I do not intend by these ruminations to discount or diminish the suffering of many people. What I am discussing is not the reality or quality of their experience, but merely the curious status that it has quite recently acquired. What seems to have happened is that one of the seven or so archetypal plots that are said to be the basis of all stories, the one that Christopher Booker refers to as `Overcoming the Monster,Äô, has

become elevated to the preferred narrative for our time, the one in terms of which many modern people experience and understand their lives and in terms of which the media chooses to describe their lives and passing. I do not think that this is completely new and it is likely that it has always been one of the most powerful motifs and shaped both experiences and institutions, especially those associated with moral panic, witchcraft, and terrorism. The witch and the terrorist are our Grendels, and what we are witnessing is simply the working out of the implications of a religious view that values the weak above the strong and powerful, transforms Beowolf into a victim, and considers heroes to be politically incorrectable.

Victims are the fuel of witchcraft and terrorism.

WITCHCRAFT CLASSIFICATIONS

Duncan, this is very helpful and very good thinking on your part. I want to restudy it for more gems but the question still remains, how can I (we) make this book interesting to the generala reader....not to fall between the stools as you so darkley warn....are there ways? Hooks? incentives to read on? A more integrated story line that goes from point A to B. Not chapeters about the political, economic social uses. I fear I cant write a mystery, Sherlock, but there may be a better way to hook the audience into the material. The four "solutions" or codes...seen as underlying "myths" that that explain to the African how witchcraft works...to the Africans!!!!! There are in my language transformation, inversion-pollution, transgression, empowerment.f we do not reveal these save by little clues to the end, then in Chapter 11, we have a section called "Closing the case files"...then we reveal the codes...is this a structure that might hook em?

The popular interet lies in mysteries of witchcraft, cases, photos, art objects. The task you see: finding the witchcraft "in for theyou" dear reader. This isgood, but a hard task. Hold up a mirror. George Peter Murdock, studied 189 samplecultures in the world----AROUND THE QUESTION WHAT IS THE CAUSATION OF ILLNESS. He divides the 12 answers into natural and supernatural lanswers; the last three answers are : spirit agression, sorcery, witchcraft. Combining all three he gets these theories of illness' causes to be in 186/189; with Soecery and Witchcraft only it is in 178, with witchcraft only it is

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

101. These are cultures around the world, including scots, japs, etc. Like you he finds the origins to be in the Circum-Mediteraineam (sp) zone and found in ancient Babalyon, in the tablets, etc. and he thinks brought to the outlying areas, save for north Asia, but the Spainards, out of the Med-based ideas (Duncans idea)

Can you get a 1980 book by George Peter Murdock on Theories of Illness, U of Pittsburgh Press? It may be on line as its very thin, i.e. 76 pages> He has three brief chap[ters we should talk over...he is the famous ethnographer...counter of cultural traits, author of Peoiples and Cultures of Africa, map of 900 ethnic groups from Africa, big project at Yale. Check Human relations area files, on line.

Best, Norman

Classifications:

As far as I can find the Murdock book is not available on the internet although it is from second hand bookstores. However, as far as I understand from your summary his conclusions are probably consistent with my own. His classification into witches, sorcerers and aggressive spirits is simply the three possibilities of an agent based view of how the world works:

1. Witches = innate and embodied
2. Sorcerers = acquired or learned and embodied
3. Aggressive spirits = innate and disembodied

The fact that these severally or together seem to be so common is also unremarkable if you believe, as I do and have stressed so many times, that the agent based interpretation of how the world works is the oldest and even today by far the most common even within the gated enclaves of the scientific world. If, in the USA today over 80% of the population, most of whom are entirely dependent on science and technology for a living and quality of life and many of whom profess and use scientific concepts hourly, believe in spirits (God, Devil, angels, souls, etc) then it would not be surprising if more than 99% of the world believes in them too. What is clear is that the scientific atom based and the spiritual agent based world views are not mutually exclusive but can cohabit and even breed in much the same way as in marriages between ethnic groups. There is really nothing very surprising here.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Turning to your four way classification. My problem with many of your classifications is that I do not understand on what they are based. Are they intended, as I believe classifications should, to partition the space of possibilities so that as far as possible no gaps are left - or more important allow us to detect gaps? Or are they simply keywords that others have used as headings in their books, or as approximate translations of what they think their informants are talking about, often without taking sufficient account of the fact that the informants may be using words within a totally different understanding of how the world may work? I would like to suggest that if you do not have a framework that makes sense of classification it can only lead to confusion, both about what should be included and how one category is related to another. Of course this comes back to the old question of the status of universals - are universals more than words? Is there such a thing as `horsiness,Äô that all horses share?

Taking your four concepts or dimensions as given, this is how I would approach them.

1. Transformation
2. Inversion~Pollution
3. Transgression
4. Empowerment

My first impression would be that there are not four but three, because I suspect that Inversion~Pollution and Transgression could be combined as instances, or manifestations, of a moral or ethical dimension. If that is the case then one has a tidier three-fold classification that could be considered as three dimensions along which examples or cases could be quantified. And these three would be:

1. Physical (changes in the physical world - folk physics)
2. Mental or psychological (changes in the minds of others i.e. at least one sense of empowerment)
3. Moral or ethical or normative (Inversion~Pollution and Transgression)

Now, if you approach the matter in this way what you are doing is mapping witch related phenomena, and how they differ from those with which we are familiar, onto what is a fairly standard `scientific,Äô classification of how the world is to be understood. That view is of course essentially Cartesian and dates only from around 1600 (Descartes `Discourse on Method,Äô was published around 1640), and although dualism is generally disapproved of by scientists and modern philosophers it is in

spite of that almost the folk philosophy or metaphysics of the modern world. And it is at least sufficiently close to the conventional wisdom to make a reasonable basis for a rough classification of the ways in which witches (as they are popularly believed to be) differ from and change the familiar everyday world.

If I wanted to distinguish witches from ordinary folk I would soon come to the conclusion that any observable differences in their anatomy and physiology were subtle and difficult to detect and so if I would have to focus on what they are alleged to do and be capable of doing and that means what they are able to change and in what ways. I would suggest at least as a first draft that the only ways in which witches could change the world would be the following:

1. Physical: Alter the laws of physics: by changing the nature and behavior of physical things - `move mountains,Äô, change shape, change natural kinds (men into animals), act at a distance without clear physical causal linkages.
2. Mental: Alter the minds of others: by changing how they think and feel and behave
3. Moral: Break moral conventions and laws: by behaving in ways and doing things that moral laws and normative conventions forbid.

Now, in our world view these three dimensions are more or less, though not completely independent. By definition minds on their own cannot change the laws of physics and moral conventions do not take precedence over physical law, nor do they have any power to change how people think or feel or wish as opposed to how they actually behave or what they do. They are not completely independent because anyone who had the power to change the laws of physics would, almost certainly, not only have the power to change minds, but would also acquire psychological and social power because of the reverence in which they were held by their less accomplished neighbors. However, conceptually the three dimensions: physical, mental, and moral make some sense and provide a framework for thinking about the subject.

You will of course have spotted a potential flaw - that the classification is based on and presupposes an atomistic interpretation of the world. It is a `western,Äô or scientific classification and is not strictly or transparently applicable to an agent based world such as the one in which witchcraft occurs and requires. However, the fact that in an agent based world the categories of physical, mental, and moral, are not

mutually exclusive, have very fuzzy boundaries, or even do not exist in any useful sense, can be an advantage, because it allows one to explain to your readers how living in the world of physics differs from living in a world with witches. And without that incongruity, without having a clear classification with which to contrast the one applicable to a world with witches it is difficult to imagine how one would enable your readers to understand the difference.

One way of considering the nature of an agent based world is that in contrast to the atomic, what from that point of view is considered physical or mental does not exist as distinct dimensions, but they are assimilated into and subordinate to the moral, ethical, or normative dimension. In that kind of world there are no rules of nature but only rules of behavior based on normative conventions established by tradition and the wishes of the greater living community of disembodied agents (spirits and ancestors). It might be described as one in which, unlike our concept of physical law, laws and rules are negotiable and subject to the democracy of the dead (a title for a book Ames and Hall borrowed from G K Chesterton).

There is one additional category that might be worth including, I am at present uncertain about its value. It is that of entities that are socially constructed.

Socially constructed entities, such as writing (and perhaps spoken languages as opposed to Language which is probably given), number systems, accounting, law, property, capital, money, restaurants, banks, governments, states, etc, function as the gears that connect the engine of the mental to the wheels of the physical and are responsible for most of the activity in the world. They are what Dennett and Haugeland referred to as prosthetic extensions for minds, what others have referred to as mind tools, and probably occupy the domain that Popper referred to as World 3. They are a discrete category in that they are not given but constructed and function to extend the range and power of our minds to bring about changes in the world and structure the ways in which we relate to each other.

To an extent they include, but on the other hand may even be included by, morals which are certainly one of the most important kinds. From the point of view of your approach to witchcraft, socially constructed entities include most of the artifacts that you are interested in using as illustrations. The masks and `guns,Äô are not entities that have any intrinsic power to change the world, as gunpowder, or avalanches, or fires, or tsunamis, or meteors, do, nor do they connect the

physical body to the rest of the physical world directly as a knife or hoe does, but instead can only function indirectly by changing the minds of others. And that is what socially constructed institutions and entities do. However, as in the earlier case that is looking at the classification from the scientific atomic point of view and what according to that interpretation is a distinct domain and kind of action (indirect rather than direct) will from the point of view of an agent based interpretation be meaningless or indistinguishable from the moral order of the world and how it works.

SCIENCE AND ANIMISM

Date: 26 December 2006
Topic: Rodney Stark

As I have explained elsewhere I believe that an agent based interpretation of how the world works - animistic, polytheistic, etc - is still and has historically been far more common than the modern atomistic interpretation that is the basis of scientific world view.

In an atomistic world change and the regularities of nature are explained by inviolable laws, but in an agent based world these are replaced by rules based on promises, commitments, intentions, or contracts, none of which are enforceable and only in part negotiable. In an atomistic world knowledge is based on reason and data from our senses, but in one that is based on agents it will ultimately be dependent on revelation and the authority of those deemed qualified to interpret it. And if the gods no longer walk among us, as in Eden, that will inevitably lead to the establishment of religions as great organizations, hierarchical, bureaucratic, and worst of all autopoeitic.

The issue is how does an agent based interpretation of the world change into one that is atomic? I am increasingly sympathetic to the view of Rodney Stark that monotheism is likely to have been an important intermediate stage in the development of the modern scientific world view. This does not imply that monotheism is correct in any absolute sense, only that it facilitates the development of the atomic. After that has been established the earlier monotheistic scaffolding can probably be discarded without significant loss.

What seems to have been important is the relation of monotheism to reason, and in the case of Christianity and science the belief that God created humans as rational and the world as

accessible to reason and rational argument - which implies that the products of reason can reveal what is hidden to the ordinary senses, and is in many ways an additional sense.

Monotheistic fundamental entities like the One of the Neo-Platonists, the Prime Mover of Aristotle, or the Brahman of the Hindus, who are remote and relatively indifferent to human supplication, would in practice be little different from Nature or Physical Law and there is probably no reason why all of our current science and technology could not have developed as subsumed by them. What has historically been antithetical to science has not been ultimate causes but religious bureaucracy; the curse of religion has been the churches and clerics rather than the beliefs they claim to defend.

Problems mainly arise with more personal gods who respond to human pleading and intervene with miracles when improbably good things happen, or with retribution for bad behavior. If, however, the God is good in the sense that his word can be trusted, and underpins the regularities of nature making them as secure as Physical Law, then nature is predicable and science possible in principle if vulnerable in practice when law is not blind.

But, in a polytheistic or animistic world in which there is a market for gods, their only possible USP is either to offer different contracts or laws, or to show willingness to intervene and tinker with those that already exist - which amounts to the same thing, uncertainty and chaos quite antithetical to science. The only solution is a series of mergers and acquisitions resulting in the establishment of a monotheistic monopoly - perhaps the only example for which something good can be said. A monotheistic monopoly allows God the freedom to set rules and without clamorous competition stick to them - at least most of the time, for without order anything might happen and miracles would be unrecognizable.

The key is reason. When Mohammed established Islam it enjoyed very rapid geographical and intellectual expansion until its bureaucrats made their interpretation of revelation orthodox and gave it precedence over reason. Essentially the possibility of a distinction between sentence meaning and speaker meaning was diminished or rejected and outlawed, and the doors of ijtihad were closed. Fundamentalism is mostly a function of the literal interpretation of sentences. In contrast, perhaps because it was based on a relatively large number of often incongruent sources, many of which were suppressed or rejected, Christianity succeeded to a far greater and increasing degree in preserving

rational debate and critical interpretation of textual sources. And that acceptance of reason at the root became the culture medium from which science grew.

Against Witchcraft

I am afraid that the whole topic of witchcraft makes me feel dispirited and has begun to fill me with despair. Almost everything written about it seems nonsense because it is built on insecure conceptual foundations riven with ambiguities and unresolved confusion. The problem is that almost all writers, no matter how ostentatiously eminent, seem to base their work on a definition of witchcraft in terms of notions like magic or the supernatural whose meaningfulness, validity, and transparency is simply taken for granted. Yet the reality is that these terms, which are used as if they were descriptive and based on empirical observations, are deeply contentious and little more than value judgments with roots in ancient historical debates, first within religions as to what was orthodox or heresy, and more recently between religion and science. And their use without detailed qualification can only be a sign of sloppy thinking of a degree that brings the value of any conclusions into question. Indeed I would go as far as to suggest that a proper understanding of witch related phenomena will never be attainable until all references to the supernatural are dissected out of the subject and burned like bindweed, or cancerous growths, along with the reputations of the foolish and befuddled academics who nurtured, used, and abused them.

The problem is that almost all definitions of witchcraft seem to take the general form of something like:

Harm done by magical / supernatural means

Now, for reasons I will explain, of these alternatives `supernatural,Äô is the more troublesome and there is a sense in which, with suitable qualification, `magic,Äô might be rehabilitated and given a specific use. More of this later.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

The problem with `supernatural,Äô and its near synonyms is that it is a composite of two different threads that persist in a state of uneasy tension and potential confusion.

First, in its modern usage it seems to have taken on the sense of a bipolar construct (after Kelly a construct is a concept with two poles) that divides the world into two kinds of thing, those that science accepts as real and those that it rejects. In this sense science and the supernatural are defined as complementary (defined in terms of each other, like good / evil, hard / soft, light / dark), exclusive, and mutually dependent in that each is simply the negation of the other. In other words what is scientific is not supernatural and what is not scientific is supernatural. In this case `scientific,Äô is used tacitly as a synonym for `natural,Äô in the sense of what is real, objective, and at least relatively independent of context - and especially that of human thoughts and preferences.

[A note of what is meant by real and context independence.

Modern science presumes the existence of a single external world and its aim is to discover statements about that world that are true at all times and places and irrespective of human preferences, feelings, wishes, or will. And they also remain true even if the terms used are replaced by others that have the same reference - which is not the case with beliefs or desires. In this sense such statements are context independent. This does not mean that the truth of certain statements cannot be dependent on specified contexts. For example the temperature at which water boils varies with altitude or atmospheric pressure, so the common belief that water boils at 100C degrees is only true at sea level. And, as there is no single pressure independent temperature at which water boils, any scientific statement about the boiling point of water would have to take account of the relation of temperature and pressure.]

Now such bipolar constructs behave differently from ordinary descriptive terms in which the negation of one does not indicate any single other. If I contrast Norman with what is not Norman, the negation includes everything else in the world, or in the dictionary, whilst to indicate you in terms of a negation and without tightly constraining the context, I could only do by saying something like `NOT everything else in the world other than Norman,Äô, which would be clumsy and beg the question. On the other hand if I restricted the context to you and Judy, what is not you would be Judy and what is not Judy would be you. In such cases the contents of the world are mapped onto a simple conceptual model made of only two parts, or possibilities, in

much the same way that in more complex cases we map the days of the week onto a calendar or the hours of the day onto a clock. The problem with such dichotomies is that though, as in the case of light / dark and hard / soft, they can have some descriptive uses, that is only the case if they are thought of as like the ends of a ruler whose utility depends on all the gradations in between and whose ends are, like a geometrical point, empty of content. Instead, it is far too easy for the space in between to collapse, leaving only the ends (like the smile on the Cheshire Cat) as a basis for crude value judgments that inevitably settle into prejudices.

Whenever bipolar constructs are used and dichotomous thinking encouraged, or indulged, there is an almost irresistible tendency for facts to become confused with values and for moral prejudices to begin masquerading as descriptions. And it is for this reason that I consider such dichotomies to be metaphysical, in that they rely on constructions of concepts that exist in and are only meaningful for minds. Outside of minds dichotomies don,Äôt really exist in nature.

In contrast, when I describe the natural world of pussies and doggies and duckies and bunnies and beavers and snakes, the model, or taxonomy, onto which each is mapped is much more complex and facilitates fine-grained descriptions and analyses without the taint of moral chauvinism.

The bottom line is that if `supernatural,Äô is used as one pole of a (bipolar) construct with science as the other it will always, in practice, degenerate into an implicit value judgment. And in the case of modern African or Third World witchcraft this means that it will be experienced as a criticism of an entire culture made by former colonial powers.

Second, the term supernatural has a provenance, or root, that goes back far beyond the development of modern science to ancient debates within religions about the basis of orthodoxy and what distinguishes the faithful from heretics. In this context, as in most everyday life, the distinction between natural and unnatural, or normal and abnormal, is normative and referenced to beliefs about what ought to be rather than what is - most often to divine intention, or what god created man and nature to be and do. Any deviation from the divine plan is by definition not natural and (at least in the Christian religion) only normal in a statistical sense as a result of the fall into original sin. Hence even today it is not at all uncommon for people to speak of incest or gay sex as `not natural,Äô and hence `not normal,Äô. And the issue here is that until a

relatively short time ago the `supernatural,Äô if it had any useful meaning could not have been considered as in opposition to science as the arbiter of what is normal, for science had yet to be invented, but primarily in moral terms of good and bad behavior. Until the development of modern science terms like `supernatural,Äô and its synonyms could only have been defined in terms of deviance.

And the possibility of a new usage came relatively late, for although modern science is usually considered to date from around 1600 it can only be considered the dominant and most successful interpretation of how the world works for scarcely more than 150 years. For it is too often forgotten that it was only between 1854 and 1856, only 85 years before my birth, that the universities of Oxford and Cambridge relaxed their rules and allowed dissenters, those who refused to subscribe to the `39 Articles of (the Christian) Religion,Äô, to graduate and be awarded degrees (the University of London was set up to provide for the needs of such dissenters). And it may not be entirely coincidental that Darwin, who had subscribed to them, only published his `Origin of Species,Äô in 1859 after a long gestation.

Subscribing to `The 39 Articles,Äô attested that those who did so accepted the tenets of the Christian religion including its definition of God and the creation, and would then have been interpreted as including the belief that the world had been created by God on the nightfall preceding Sunday October 23rd 4004 BCE. I append, for your instruction, a copy of the 39 Articles to which I assume you have never had to subscribe.

http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty-Nine_Articles

Hence from its religious origins the cluster of notions that included the supernatural were essentially based on ethical and metaphysical judgments, rather than empirical observations, and were part of an ongoing discourse on moral values that took place within religion itself and not between religion and any other upstart ideology. And although with the growing salience of science these terms have taken on a more neutral and superficially descriptive sense, the dichotomy between the scientific and the supernatural is still essentially about values and always gravitates towards them. As a result any definition of the form `harm done by supernatural means,Äô amounts to little more than an assertion that `bad things are done by bad people,Äô. Which adds little to the sum of human knowledge and is scarcely worth remarking.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Also, as it is currently used, `supernatural,Äô seems to imply some distinct and coexisting domain of special knowledge whose relation to the `scientific,Äô, or `natural,Äô, is akin to that between the different specialties in medicine, or departments in a university, or the division of labor in businesses, that are considered plausible derivatives from an objective partitioning of phenomena and events in the real world - a partitioning that follows the natural boundaries and fault-lines of the world and its contents as easily as an expert butcher dissecting a carcass (the Chinese say that a proper butcher never needs to sharpen his knives because they only follow the natural boundaries of the tissues and sinews). If that were so one could speak of harm caused by `magical,Äô means as one type among several on the same level as that caused by things like radiation, or chemicals, or electricity, or magnetism, or explosives, or whatever. Each discipline offering explanations in terms of context specific models and chains of cause and effect. For example, botanists study plants and zoologists animals; psychiatrists may explain the behavior of people in terms of biochemical compounds or psychotherapeutic notions like ego and id; computer scientists may specialize in hardware or software; and so on.

But the `supernatural,Äô is not like these. In the objective world there are no distinguishable `supernatural,Äô events, fields, or evidence of unique chains of cause and effect operating anywhere other than within and between minds and in ways that are familiar to everybody. The events that the notion of the `supernatural,Äô is used to explain are ultimately exactly the same as those addressed by science. And what the terms `supernatural,Äô and `scientific,Äô refer to is neither complementary types of phenomena, nor complementary kinds of explanation. On the contrary, they are not complementary but alternative, and mutually exclusive, systems of explanation that have evolved, or been developed, to make the behavior of the only world we know more predictable, and hence controllable. They are completely different frameworks for interpreting how the world works. They are not explanations for events, but frameworks for forming explanations of events.

To define and discuss witchcraft as something that can cause harm, in the sense of the kinds of events that people would prefer to avoid and for which science attempts to provide explanations, is simply to make a category mistake. What is described as witchcraft is not the kind of thing that can cause that kind of harm, because it does not exist at the same level as the content of science - the level of chemistry and physics

and biology. Witchcraft is not a body of knowledge about how the world works, but a framework for interpreting how the world works. It is related to the mechanisms of the physical world as the calendar is to the passage of days and seasons, or the system of degrees of temperature is to the level of the mercury in a thermometer and whether your bath will chill or scald you, or the system of longitude and latitude is to where you are, have been, and would like to be.

The `scientific,Äô and the `supernatural,Äô are not collections of `facts,Äô, but paradigms, or doctrines from which specific explanations or models can be derived (the scholastics distinguished between scientia and doctrina according to whether their validity could be based on empirical observation). And their `truth,Äô is ultimately metaphysical, depending not on direct empirical testing but the utility and fecundity of the theories and explanations that flow from them. The thought is not new. In the words of Jesus (Matthew 7:16)`Ye shall know them by their fruits,Äô - which also seems close to the pragmatism of James and Peirce.

The great harm that is associated with what is referred to as witchcraft does not arise because any of the prescriptions it offers are causally effective, but because they are not. It arises in the following ways:

It makes claims for efficacy that are unsubstantiated and that cannot be substantiated.

It suggests explanations and actions that are at best irrelevant and at worst dangerous

It displaces and crowds out more effective procedures and explanations

It inhibits the development of better ways of understanding about how the world works

It implies social constructions (beliefs, rituals, institutions) that when realized can harm others

All of these flow, not from harm actually done by `magical,Äô means, but from harm done under the influence of beliefs in supernatural explanations of events and how the world works. Which might be paraphrased as `harm done by cultural means,Äô.

`Witchcraft,Äô is, however, only one of several possible manifestations of the metaphysical complement to the

`scientific,Äô, for the sense and reference of `supernatural,Äô extends far beyond that of the most grandiose and over-inclusive definitions of `witchcraft,Äô. If that were not so then witchcraft would be universal, whereas all the evidence is that it is not. What is universal and often confuses careless students of witchcraft is the `supernatural,Äô paradigm. Not only is the scientific paradigm little more than 150 years old, but its center of gravity is also extremely local being largely confined to the North Atlantic rim and varying minorities in other countries that have adopted scientific technologies. The reality, however, is that the `supernatural,Äô framework for interpretation has been the conventional wisdom for all but a tiny minority, probably well under 1%, of those who have ever lived on this earth.

Now one of the surprising things about the literature on witchcraft is the relative lack and superficial quality of any discussion about the meaning of terms like `supernatural,Äô or `magic,Äô or `occult,Äô. In this regard Rodney Stark is an exception and if unsuccessful the defects of his definitions are potentially fruitful in that they suggest what has gone wrong. He defines the term supernatural as referring to `forces or entities (conscious or not) that are beyond or outside nature and that can suspend alter or ignore physical forces,Äô. This definition is good, in that it focuses on forces and entities, but falters insofar as it seems to imply either, contrasting and parallel domains containing different forces or entities, or two distinct kinds of forces and entities within the same domain. The problem with this approach is that if the `supernatural,Äô forces and entities that are beyond nature can always trump those (physical forces) that are within it, then what purpose or role do the latter play in the great scheme of things? In what way would such a world be different if there were only `supernatural,Äô entities and forces? And if the answer is that physical forces are ultimately impotent and add nothing useful then why bother with them? It would surely be more elegant without them? Give Ockham,Äôs Razor the respect it has earned.

As I have tried to suggest scientific and supernatural explanations are mutually exclusive. Not complementary but alternative explanations and the difference between them is really very simple. The fundamental problem of all systems of explanation is how to account for change and whilst the supernatural interpretation of the world is based on agents, or living entities, the scientific explanation is based on atoms, or non-living entities. And the essential difference between agents and atoms, is that agents have (free) will whilst atoms have none. Or, agents have internal motivations (both goals and

the powers to move towards them), whilst (conceptual as opposed to old school science) atoms have neither intrinsic potency or internal structure and are moved only passively by external forces that follow strict rules (the strict rule of physical law). Agents have (free) will and relate according to how they represent the world, atoms have no (free) will and relate according to rigid external rules that they must obey.

A corollary of this is that effective intervention in a world based on agents must depend on psychological and political techniques, at the level of representations, such as supplication and negotiation, whereas in a world of atoms what is important is understanding and working with the laws of nature which are incorruptible and blind to human feelings and needs. So far there seems to be no doubt that the scientific interpretation of the world has proved far more effective than the supernatural. This is perhaps unsurprising as it is difficult to imagine how one could make clear predictions about the physical world if its building blocks or the forces that moved them had free will. If that were the case doing physics would be like trying to herd cats.

Now, whilst science does not completely preclude something akin to free will, if that exists it is at the level of higher order constructions that are sufficiently complex to support `emergent,Äô properties and are ultimately constrained by the strict rule of the physical laws that defines the behavior of atoms - which at least suggests the possibility of prediction. In contrast, in the realm of supernatural explanations free will goes all the way down and trumps the action of the kind of physical forces that science has found so useful. As a result all regularities are provisional and qualified. In the end Stark,Äôs problem is trying to marry concepts from two radically different domains and jurisdictions, or even completely different species. On the one hand physical forces, entities, and rules that are only meaningful within the context of the scientific paradigm, on the other, agents that as fundamental building blocks are presumed to have properties that can only exist within the `supernatural,Äô paradigm and are quite incongruent with the `scientific,Äô. Or, to put it another way the scientific paradigm presupposes and is made from atoms and impersonal forces, whereas the supernatural presupposes and is made up of agents and is motivated by will. And though the scientific paradigm can encompass and allows the existence of agents they are always derivative and secondary to the action of impersonal entities and forces. In contrast in the supernatural paradigm agents are primary movers of the world. These

alternatives are ultimately incompatible and no viable issue could result from their union.

Traditionally, the notion of the supernatural, or that which has come to be referred to as supernatural, has been about morals and deviance. This is one of the reasons why I am uneasy at placing too much weight on linguistic assertions that the root of the term witch can be traced back thousands of years. I do not doubt that words like that existed and were used but I am not at all certain as to their meaning at that time - and if they were dichotomous what the terminii actually referred to, or the sense in which they were used. And as achieving a consensus about the best definition of witchcraft has proved so contentious, what hope is there of really knowing its significance in the distant past? The meaning of occult has changed from being simply things hidden or obscure to supernatural in less than 300 years, and evil from being merely uppity (a universal characteristic of women) to the most extreme forms of badness - long before the invention of feminism. And that in Islam the notion of a witch seems to have been largely concerned with love magic and other deviant practices forbidden by the Koran? And any European definition of a witch between the 14th and 18th centuries would include alliances and intercourse with the devil or Satan, whose characteristics, according to Kelly, postdated the scriptures and were a theological construction that became even further embellished by the witch-hunters. In which case how did it come about that an English word for a European fantasy figure came to be applied to a character in completely different narratives belonging to completely different cultures most of which were oral or pre-literate? I strongly suspect that what these terms referred to was closer to simple immoral or deviant behaviors and any associations with agent based technologies were simply references to the prevailing conventional wisdom about the working of the world. It seems to me quite probable that the most important similarity linking what has been described as witches or witchcraft in different languages and cultures is the root `witch,Äô, and that the differences are far more significant.

Earlier I suggested that the notion of magic might be rehabilitated. Stark defines magic as `all efforts to manipulate or compel supernatural forces without reference to a God or gods or to matters of ultimate meaning,Äô. Now, every paradigm worthy of the name will motivate the development, not only of explanatory models or theories about how the world works, but also of the practical interventions or technologies that are suggested by them. And each paradigm will be associated

with its own unique theories and technologies. These are familiar in the scientific paradigm as the distinction between pure and applied sciences, between the theoreticians like scientists and mathematicians and the technologists like doctors and engineers and architects. In the case of the supernatural paradigm a similar distinction, or division of labor, can be found although that between theory and practice is more variable because here knowledge is based more on tradition and revelation than empirical investigation - hence it is likely to be most evident in older traditions with a well developed canon of authoritative texts. Whereas scientists study the world their counterparts under the supernatural paradigm study canonical texts about the world. These supernatural theoreticians would include theologians and jurists, the technologists shamans, priests, and healers, of all kinds.

Approached from this point of view, magic can be defined as the use of the technologies of the supernatural paradigm for deviant ends - where, in practice, deviant will mostly be synonymous with selfish. And the scientific paradigmatic equivalent of magic would be the use of scientific technologies for deviant or selfish ends and include arms dealers, poisoners, some doctors, terrorists, fraud and confidence tricksters, corrupt politicians, etc etc.

The problems with the use of supernatural and its synonyms can be neutralized if witchcraft is defined not in terms of technologies, but beliefs in technologies, and not simply beliefs, as that would create confusion with the agent based paradigm which is universal, but (some of) the consequences or reaction to beliefs. And when one has done this one has located the phenomenon of witchcraft at a higher level than the technologies that are usually considered to be its defining features. At a level from which it can be seen as simply a manifestation of a more general process that takes on the coloring of dominant paradigms of the cultures in which it is most conspicuous and appears in its most dramatic and exotic forms. In other cultures like our own where the scientific paradigm is dominant it is more easily overlooked or classified in different ways and under different signs. Here the best, but perhaps provisional, description for the most general and almost culture and paradigm neutral process is that of `moral panic,Äô.

Hence witchcraft can be best defined as a special, paradigm dependent, manifestation of moral panic, which itself can also be re-described as group paranoia.

Definition:

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Witchcraft is a particular and exotic manifestation of a universal process that occurs as a reaction to the fear, engendered by the belief that certain individuals, acting either severally or in concert, have an unusual ability and disposition to cause harm by extra-ordinary means.

When such a view of the origin of harm is held by individuals and is not shared by their community it is usually considered paranoia and delusional, but when it is a communal consensus it becomes conventional wisdom and the basis of all moral panics, including witchcraft.

WITCHCRAFT DEFINITIONS
December 6, 2004¬∏¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùDefinitions of Witchcraft¬∏ These include redundent alternative formulations.

The structure of behaviors, roles, and institutions or social organization that develop as a reaction, or in response, to the fear of harm done by individuals with special, unusual, or extraordinary powers. These powers may be inherited or acquired and deployed with or without conscious intent or malice. Inherited powers are more likely to be unconscious and those acquired to be conscious. The latter are also likely to include the possibility of good as in use of medicine as well as harm as in the use of poisons, whereas the powers of the witch, pace wiccans, is always malign. And the powers of the witch that are not associated with use of active biochemical substances, whose potency is in any case considered within the culture to be spiritual (harm done by what we know to be poison is not causally distinguished from that done by spirits), are believed to derive from non human agents such as dead ancestors, spirits, demons or gods.

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First, it locates the centre of gravity of witchcraft in the community's response to fear. As most of the power attributed to witches is imaginary the witch is like a unicorn and witch finders the hunters of mythical beasts. But that does not prevent the formation of unicorn hunting clubs, or ghost busters, or grand organizations like the RC church, or unicorn hunters or Popes.

Second, it avoids the dubious and usually racist distinction between science and magic, or natural and supernatural. These categories always presuppose a bias against the integrity or intellectual sophistication of the culture in question. They are terms of implied contempt made by members of a culture or subculture that considers itself superior, against an alien or other. They are irredeemable and must be avoided.

Third, it allows the structures of witchcraft to occur in cultures that are predominantly materialistic in the sense of modern scientific explanations. Terrorists or pedophiles may not have access to the help of angry ghosts or demons but they are usually attributed to have unusual or extraordinary powers of corruption or mass destruction. This does not weaken the association with a spiritual or agent based interpretation of the world. A world without physical law in which predictability is more akin to trusting another person than Newton's laws of motion is a far scarier and confusing one to live in than ours in which so much is predictable and accountable. Predictability and fear are negatively correlated and the greater the fear the more likely will one find the structures of witchcraft. Witchcraft thrives on uncertainty and the lack of well validated laws.

That being said it seems certain that most cultures and religions have developed mechanisms that prevent endemic, local, interpersonal witch based explanations kindling into destructive epedemic conflagrations. They almost certainly contain immunizing prophylactic memes.¬∏¬∏

December 7, 2004¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùDefinitions of Witchcraft¬∏
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FEAR SYSTEM
December 7, 2004¬[]Witch¬[]¬[]Not Private

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

ÀùFear and Frontal Lobes # 02¬∏Another reason why the biology of fear seems less than ideal is that it seems to be at the wrong 'level' or 'grain' for the task in hand.

There is a better approach that comes closer to the ideal that you seek, but unfortunately, while providing a much more interesting interpretation it shares most of the dangers and disadvantages as far as 'political correctness' is concerned. So what follows is for information rather than use.

If, instead of fear one focusses on the higher order mechanisms that control fear (higher both conceptually and developmentally) I believe that you will gain a much better understanding of the relevant phenomena.

All animals, but humans in particular, must reconcile two potentially conflicting types of response that might be described as reflexive or reflective. These are the ends of a continuum and choosing between them involves a trade-off between speed of response and flexibility or ability to adapt to varying circumstances. The choice is between fast, 'hardwired', and relatively inflexible responses - like the reflex withdrawel of a hand from heat - and slow 'thoughtful' and flexible responses. On the one hand rape on the other a marriage contract. In many situations speed is more important for survival than subtlety, and this is still the case for all other species most of the time, but for humans living in a culture that they have created and able to adapt to a far greater range of environments, thought and reflection are increasingly important and worth the cost of being slower and taking longer.

The part of the brain that allows mature humans to override their genetically programmed reflexes and overlearned habits of reacting to events is the frontal lobes. These are very complex but to oversimplify, lesions often result in impaired ability to control reflexes, drives, impulses, habits and overlearned responses, and in planning or considering alternatives. Often the defects are subtle and the patient may appear more or less normal. They may perform well on standard IQ tests (one of the reasons lobotomies were thouqht to be 'safe' and acceptable) and memory and much reasoning may seem relatively intact, but closer observation may show defective ability to plan or organize, and most important an increase in disinhibited and socially inappropriate behaviour. In the case of a surgeon the first sign of a brain tumour was when he dropped a scalpel and bent down to pick it up and then carried on with the operation. In the case of a politician, scratching his balls on a political platform,

in that of a vicar masturbating on a hospital trolly while asking the nurse if she would like a fuck.

In the case of fear and other emotions impaired FL function might be associated with a disinhibited or less controlled response to fear inducing events. Though there may be a trade-off between analysis or perception of danger if that requires reflection or thought. But, one of the signs of FL damage is the reappearance of the primitive refleoes found in babies that are normally suppressed in adults. And reactions will tend to be amplified.

Now what is interesting about the FLs and may make them relevant is that they are not only the last part of the brain to have evolved, but they are also the last to mature - not till late teens in males a few years earlier in females. In this context the charming 'innocence' of small children is largely a function of their being less inhibited because their FLs are immature. And this also helps to explain the tiresomely bad behaviour of adolescent males that is so aggravated by alcohol. Naturally disinhibited, because of immature FLs, their precarious impulse control is further impaired by alcohol - including self control of the amount consumed. Also people who used to be referred to as sociopaths were probably in many cases those whose frontal lobes were relatively immature, either absolutely or simply delayed. ,Ä¶.

WITCHCRAFT AND TERRORISM

December 7, 2004¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not Private

ÀùLetter to Norman re Risk #2¬∏

In order to show how the amplification of risk can illuminate wc it is best to begin with one of the related phenomena. For our purposes the problem with wc is that it has such a long history that its roots probably precede literacy, so that they can only be implied from general principles. And even in areas such as Africa where it is still endemic all that we can observe is an elderly tree in an ecosystem it has itself shaped - the conditions that allowed it to germinate and the sapling it once was are gone forever.,

Fortunately, terrorism shares sufficient similarities with witchcraft for them to be considered tokens of the same type and being younger and less monolithic its development is easier to study.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

The most important difference is that whereas in the case of wc the focus of concern is part of a long tradition of conventional wisdom whose validlty has long been taken for granted, in that of terrorism it has to be consciously and ostentatiously created. What they have in common is that the events that define them have certain characteristics (insert list from Slovic and ?Douglas = surprise, shock and awe, dread, uncontrollable - external locus of control - unpredictable, malevolent, source enemy within, alien, ?guilt identification: -> paranoia or sense of being a victim, helplessness and loss of control) that are almost guaranteed to amplify the perception of risk and increase the gap between perceived and actual danger. It is probably clearer to put the resulting sequence of events as a list.

The Ontogenesis of Terrorism and related phenomena:
1. A minority with a grievance against a majority ostentatiously commit an outrage that produces shock and awe in the larger community.
2. The nature of the outrage increases the sense of danger in the general population out of proportion to what would be appropriate to the actual risk.
3. This leads to a clamour for a response that will reduce the danger and the volume is proportional to the perceived rather than the actual risks.
4. This creates a threat to the credibility and existence of the prevailing authorities who are in danger of being perceived as ineffectual or impotent if they do not react to the dangers as perceived by their subjects. They are forced to act in ways that may, from a wider perspective, seem precipitant and inappropriate if not actually counterproductive.
5. Fortunately for the authorities they have little to lose; at least in the short term. They can use the momentum of concern to win support for measures that, while ostensibly addressing the concerns of their subjects, increases their own power and control over them - resulting in a rolling back of established rights and safeguards and eroding privacy and autonomy.
6. These changes will rapidly become institutionalised with the creation of new organizations and roles that soon become their own justification, vested interests, and attest to the reality and significance of the phenomena, to which they are a reaction rather than a viable solution.

Witchcraft, at the level of the local community in Africa and in Europe in C17, differs from this pattern only in the first item in that the event that causes concern and triggers a response will, in most cases, be natural rather than the result of a malevolent act and the causal link to a perpetrator - the witch

- is justified and validated by a traditional world view within which it is believed possible. And that world view receives extra circularsupport from the very existence of the institutions and roles that flowed from it.

In the case of terrorism and some sexual crimes, the causal link between perpetrator and crime is either advertised, or relatively easily established, but in the case of wc the perceived causal link is spurious and exists only in the imagination. It is based, not on evidence, but tradition and ideology. And a characteristic of such phenomena is that the existence of the artifacts and institutions that have developed around a set of beliefs are experienced as evidence for the beliefs.

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ÀùLetter to Norman re Risk #3¬∏Hence the existence of temples and churches attests to the existence of gods. And in the case of wc the artifacts, institutions, rituals, and roles that have developed around it is for many evidence for the reality of witches as causal agents.

That people can be so wrong about the reality of risk and so resistant to changing their perception of it is another example of how their behaviour is much more sensitive to tradition and cultural consensus than evidence, reason, or education. To paraphrase Kant: consensus without evidence is no more than fantasy, but evidence without consensus is simply impotent.

In its origjns, in a world full of spirits, wc was almost certainly local, up close, and personal. It sought to explain events that provoked dread and a sense of being vulnerable and a victim in terms of malevolent agents with extraordinary powers. But, once the model had been accepted it became part of the consensus as to how the world worked and available to explain an ever expanding range of happenings that one would prefer to avoid. And soon it would have crossed a threshold to become the explanation of default for anything remotely out of the ordinary.

Thereafter standards of proof would be relaxed and strong evidence no longer required. And, in the case of terrorism, if Osama did not kill my puppy he might stili be the prime suspect for any unexpected disaster for which no immediateiy obvious cause could be found.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Witchcraft is a crime with neither victims nor perpetrators yet it is responsible for immense harm that arises from the reaction that it provokes. Collateral damage or blue on blue?

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ÀùRevised definition of witchcraft:¬∏

Harm done to an individual or group by another, either directly or indirectly, using extra-ordinary means.

These are considered to involve mechanisms beyond the control and abilities of ordinary people, to be difficult or impossible to discover, and to be indifferent to distance or other ordinary obstacles or limits. But, it is important to recognize that they are not considered as being inconsistent with the conventional wisdom about how the world works.

They should be considered analogous to people with exeptional or unusual abilities or knowledge whether innate or acquired. Examples might be idiot savants, prodigies, and 'geniuses' in particular fields.¬∏¬∏¬∏

November 23, 2003¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not Private

ÀùThings to consider:¬∏

Illnesses like cancer that are viewed as being almost mystically different from others.

Why is witchcraft considered so evil when the actual harm is often not out of the ordinary? This seems likely to be related to the inconsistencies in sentencing and attitudes to offences when greater actual harm often attracts lesser punishments. The harm seems to be largely symbolic? Also the use of such extraordinary means as witchcraft is considered to be seems to threaten the equilibrium or safety of the whole community. It is as if a system of conventions and agreements on which the balance of forces between the living and the dead or spirit realm had been put in question? For if you believe in other worlds or obscured parts of this one and that boundaries are porous then the behaviour of the other side must be taken into account.

I do not feel that energy needs to be expended by me to keep the sun in the sky. Nor that anyones active intervention maintains it. But for a born again christian her tenure in heaven or hell

depends on the active intervention of God in sacrificing his son. The world of animism is a world of agreements of active relationships of persuasion of active intervention? Of extended social contracts that include ancestors and spirits. In other words a very different world from one ruled by physical law.

DEFINITIONS OF WITCHCRAFT
December 7, 2004¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

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These include redundent alternative formulations.

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Witchcraft Layers:¬∏
Level 0 (Ground Zero) = Events. The alleged harmful events, eg misfortunes. death, disease, crop failure etc. This is the level of things and facts.

Level 1 = Interpretation or ontology ie the model used to interpret the events at Level 0. This is the level of descriptions and attitudes of or about things and facts (although a fact is a description it can be treated as a thing at a higher or meta level. For example, the cat sat on the mat, is a proposition about a cat in a particular context, but 'the cat sat on the mat' is in a metalanguage a sentence taken as a single whole without consideration of its meaning.).
There are two kinds of model.

The first or scientific is made up from inanimate atoms that form larger assemblies according to physical laws and constraints such as the principle of the conservation of energy. These constraints make changes in the system predictable and accountable and hence makes it possible to formulate hypotheses that are falsifiable and testable.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

The second, or religious, is made up of living minds, only some of which are embodied, that behave according to whim and will under the influence of beliefs and desires. Instead of behavior being determined by the unfolding of the implications of unviolable physical laws it is dependent on attitudes, interpersonal relations, alliances, and the outcome of negotiations. Folk psychology rather than physical law. As a result it is much less predictable and intrinsically difficult to falsify - in Popper's sense it is not scientific. It is a question of different kinds of trust. On the one hand trust in the proven accuracy of Newton's laws of motion', on the other trust in the behavior of others people. And because propositions about outcomes in such a world are difficult to formulate in such a way that allows testing as to whether they are true or false (if outcome A then model X cannot be valid - if I find one black swan then the proposition that all swans are white is false) it is impossible to rule out alternatives. What is difficult to falsify is very difficult to dismiss or change. This explains why beliefs like religions and witchcraft are so persistent and difficult to replace.

Important:
Whereas the product of the scientific atomic interpretation is propositions, facts, and theories, that of religious spririt and mindful interpretation is the creation of perpetrators and victims. The creation of a victimarchy is a precondition for witchcraft conflagrations.

Level 2 = Logics. This is the first meta level at which the logics implicit in different models become active.

On logics:
There is no evidence to expect that the hardwired genetically determined logic circuits of the brain differ between ethnic groups. But logic is not monolithic. Like geometry there are many varieties and they are a matter of choice, or at least context.. They are like tools optimized for different tasks.

In Euclidean geometry it is a postulate that parallel lines never meet, but in non-Euclidean geometries such as that of Riemann they do and this was used by Einstein in Relativity theory. Similarly instead of one Logic there are many. That appropriate to an scientific atomic world is extensional logic whilst that appropriate to a mind based world is intensional (note with an s not a t). Intensional statements are not truth functional and their truth does not depend on that of their internal component parts but is criticaliy dependent on the

context in which they occur. Hence it is difficult to devise universally valid laws.

Level 4 = myth and narrative
Operating on the the interpretative models the relevant logic controls the inferences that can be drawn from them and the narratives, myths, and artifacts that they allow.

Level 5 = secondary social structures and institutions
Shaped by narratives, that are to minds what molecules are to atoms, secondary structures form and constitute the overall phenomenon of witchcraft. These include witchfinders and cleansers and a variety of cults that act as the footsoldiers and executives.

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Witchcraft and Prisoners Dilemma¬∏Could one explain the persistence of wc in terms of assymetric harm operating as tit for tat?¬∏¬∏¬∏

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WC Classification¬∏
Witchcraft Phenomena
- Witch Characteristics
  - Awareness
    - Conscious
    - Unconscious
  - Source of Power
    - Inherited
    - Acquired
- Accused
  - Single or Multiple
  - Demographic
    - Sex
    - Age
    - Origins
      - Incomer
      - Local
      - Local returning
    - Relation to accuser
      - Blood
      - Affine
    - Economic
      - Rich
      - Poor
      - Dependent

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- Accuser
  - Individual
    - Sex
    - Age
    - Economic
    - Status
  - Group
    - Community
    - Subgroup
    - Church
- Specialist
  - Insider
  - Outsider
- Nature of Alleged Harm
  - Persons
  - Animals
  - Crops
- Methods alleged
  - Spirit helpers
  - Familiars
  - Poison
- Methods of investigation
  - Divining
  - Rituals
  - Torture
- Outcome
  - Death
  - Punishment
  - Exile
- Extent
  - Interpersonal
  - Community
  - Epidemic
- Secondary Phenomena
  - Institutions and roles
    - Specialists
      - Witch Finders
      - Witch Cleansers
    - Officers = Political
      - Infantry
    - Secret Societies
    - Cults?
    - Sects?
- Who Gains?

VIEWS OF WITCHCRAFT

27/10/99

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Dear Norman,

In trying to remember where I had got to in witchcraft I think that the ideas I have been considering in connection with Hernando's book may be relevant. The following is a sketch and skips over the detailed evidence and arguments.

My earlier view on witchcraft was that it was a more or less universal phenomenon whose characteristics could be discerned in the habits of modern societies and indeed it was that which made it more than a historical or anthropological curiosity. It tended to be associated with times of upheaval and transition when old traditions were being replaced by new, and to be focussed on those who were unusual in some way, incomers, old, isolated, mad, befuddled, or more recently in South Africa (which seems to provide a rich source of material) nouveau riche. And its function seemed to be to reduce communal anxieties and restore some kind of equilibrium.

My more recent interests have been centred on what is unique and distinguishes human beings from every other species taking into account the apparently long lag, perhaps 95-98% (5000 compared to 100-200,000 years) of human history, that separates the development of spoken and written language and the seemingly exponential growth in knowledge and technologies which followed its introduction only about 5000 years ago. That history seems to be punctuated by the introduction, or development, of a few key notions and technologies each of which served as a door, or perhaps better a ramp, giving access to and opening up new realms of possibilities.

I believe that the most important characteristic of human beings is their ability to transform things into signs, not simply in the sense that an animal may mark the boundary of its territory, or make different sounds for different purposes. As although these can be considered representations of something, humans go much further and can find use for representations of representations as representations. These meta or higher order representations can be nested almost indefinitely, even beyond the limits of working memory, because they enable the mind to escape the confines of the skull and colonise the external world, creating there what Haugeland and Dennett referred to as external prostheses of mind. These greatly extend and amplify human abilities, forming at least the foundations, if not the actual structure, of the cultures that Cassirer described as `the mind's place in nature'. A place within which other minds find expression and from which they can be accessed. I believe

that metarepresentations are the key that switches on both mindreading and culture; which are related to each other as inside to outside, or the sides of a single coin.

Metarepresentations, which seem to be a function of the frontal lobes, are also the basis of foresight, planning and imagination, enabling the creation of counterfactual, or virtual, realities, within which we can try out alternative futures and, in Karl Popper's apt phrase, `let our ideas die in our stead'. And although these abilities must also make it easier to develop and improve tools and technologies, until recently that has been relatively slow and, as I suggested in my last note, I am inclined to Nicholas Humphrey's view that the evolutionary advantage of having big brains and being so clever is not the making of better tools, but a better understanding of intentionality (the intentional stance), other minds, and the social structures and technologies that these enabled. Improvements in cooperation and the technologies of social contracts and organisation were probably much more important than the technologies of wood and stone. And things were more important as signs than as tools, or as tools for changing minds rather than other physical things.

If this is nearly so, then the long history of mankind is more the history of the development of tools for thought, of signs, symbols, contracts and cultures, more than knives and axes. And the most important artifacts were those which extended them, by making it easier to influence the minds of others. Among these might be the discovery of new pigments and ways of using them and places, like deep caves, where the results could be preserved from erosion by weather, light, and time.

In this context and as an aside, Humphrey's has suggested only recently that the dynamic verisimilitude of cave paintings reflects, like that of the painting of autistic idiots savant, a relative lack of symbolic development; they seem accurate or `real' because they are not filtered or distorted through higher level conceptual thought and expectation. I am uncertain whether this is so; as most modern infants start drawing in a much more stylized way, and metarepresentational abilities are all but universal and programmed to be switched on around the age of four. I also do not believe that these have only evolved within the last 30-50,000 years. However, it is possible that we underestimate the extent to which the infants first attempts at drawing are influenced by the traditions of their mostly visual environment; which must be very different from that of the cave painters. This should be testable by comparing early drawing

styles across cultures that differ in visual tradition and density.

Complex social structures can develop with only simple tools, but not without complex systems of signs.

The point of this is that the phenomenon of witchcraft has to a large degree been projected outside of modern society and discounted as a rather quaint and exotic aberration; a manifestation of the potential irrationality of human beings that sits uneasily with the enlightenment that we like to claim as our own. But what we have sent into exile are no more than the baroque encrustations and the underlying forms and forces have stayed behind and continue to thrive, only without names, mostly un-noticed, and largely undocumented.

This has come about because in our arrogance we have tried to interpret and analyse witchcraft almost exclusively through the filters of our quite recent understanding of physical law. That understanding, extensional science, has become the basis of the technologies that have shaped our culture. But although it is overall the most effective system of knowledge to date it is much more successful in addressing some questions than others.

In particular it has only recently begun to take account of the problems of dealing with systems, like computers and people, whose behaviour cannot be explained entirely in terms of physical processes (mass, energy, etc), but is also a function of information (signs, symbols, and representations). And it is only in this world of information that the phenomenon of witchcraft can be properly understood. For, whatever its critics and practitioners might assume the artifacts and procedures have not evolved to act directly on the physical world but only indirectly, if at all, via the intermediary of other minds. And the physical artifacts of witchcraft are tools for manipulating thoughts and influencing the thoughts and representations of others. Witchcraft works in a symbolic rather than a physical universe; it is a technology of symbols rather than things.

Our modern technologies, and the interpretation of the world in terms of physical law on which they are based, are a relatively recent development, built up gradually, `on the shoulders of giants', from a mass of interdependent facts and theories. But for most of human history explanation in terms of agency, human or other, was probably the best available for prediction and planning; and in many areas has not been bettered. We may understand the nature of volcanoes and earthquakes, but we are in no way better able to control them and only slightly better

at anticipating their behaviour. This might have grown up in a world in which the ability to change physical processes was limited and far less than that of changing other minds. Moreover, what could be achieved by an individual was far less than that of a group, and the benefits of communal action must, in the earlier days, have been greater and more immediate than those following from slight advances in toolmaking. So the weight of natural selection must have favoured psychology and sociology rather than engineering. The most potent physical artifacts were probably in the earliest times mostly symbolic and that may only have become obscured within the last few thousand years.

For all but a small minority and for them only part of the time our understanding of how the world works is a function of statements about it and this is equally true for extensional sciences such as physics or chemistry and their related technologies and the intensional concerned with information and representations and folk psychology of belief and desire. But statements about extensional, physical law have a different logic from those of the intensional of belief and desire. For in the extensional approach statements act as descriptions or names for external events; they are first order or primary representations pointing directly to something outside themselves. By contrast statements used in the intensional approach refer not to things but to statements about things; I do not believe a thing but a statement about a thing. The importance of this is that in the extensional case the truth value of a statement is determined by the way the world is and is not affected by changing any part of it for another with the same denotation. Tully and Cicero are one and the same so extensional statements that are true for Tully will also be true for Cicero. But in the intensional approach statements are about other statements and usually express attitudes about them. Such higher order statements are not truth functional, for even if, for example Tully and Cicero are identical, my belief that Cicero was an orator does not imply that I must also believe that Tully was too; for I may not know of their identity. Again, whilst the truth of the statement that the cat is sitting on the mat can be confirmed by looking, the truth of the statement that I believe that to be so cannot.

This is a problem as although extensional statements carry with them a relatively straightforward means of testing their validity, how this should be done for intensional statements is much less clear. I suspect that many of the characteristics of institutions and social systems have evolved to address this issue. And if I am right that intensionality was the dominant

approach to explaining how the world worked for most of human history the oldest institutions and customs were likely to have been shaped by it.

Systems of explanation are systems of expectations and as such succeed only when surprise is reduced to a minimum. Most people tend to aspire towards unitarian explanations, hence religious and scientific explanations sit uneasily together each threatened and threatening the other. In such a system any failure of prediction is seen as threatening for it may imply that cherished assumptions have to be abandoned or modified. Whilst if the system relies on agency for explanations any unwelcome occurence will be experienced as malevolent and dangerous.

In an system based on physical law the dynamics are controlled by the impersonal distribution of energy, but in an agency based system by patterns of obligations and responsibilities that are in an uneasy equilibrium with beliefs and desires. Things unexpected may indicate a failure of the system or simply be construed as a manifestation of malevolence. The arteries of such a system conduits for responsibility and blame.

Attributing blame is always reassuring because it implies that the system as a whole is OK and any failure an individual aberration. Witchcraft accusations may thus have a tranquilising effect on a community under stress.

The recent rail disaster at Paddington is thought to have occurred because the driver of one of the trains ran through a red light. Normally this would have resulted in most of the blame being attributed to him. But in this case he was dead and even attracted some sympathy. The result was that instead the search for cause was focussed on the inadequacies of the system, its contribution to the liklihood of accidents, and how it could be made safer. On the whole, although blame was not entirely forgotten, the emphasis shifted to fixing the problem.

The modern equivalents include blame seeking litigation and some attitudes to abuse.

What is lost if the default explanation is agency or animism rather than physical law.

07/11/99

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Dear Norman,

I plan to use you to help my thoughts on witchcraft and related matters by sending you the notes that I write in the same way as in the past I have done with Hernando. As there is nobody in Cornwall with whom I can discuss my preoccupations I have to talk to myself. And as that always seems to others a sign of madness, in writing I find it useful to have a particular victim in mind, whilst actually sending a text encourages me to finish it. However, often the ideas will peter out or like capitalism get bogged down in their own contradictions. So apologies in advance.

As I can't remember exactly where we ever got to in trying to understand the phenomenon of witchcraft. I am going to start from scratch. I think that some of the notions that I have been considering with Hernando might be useful and am thinking of including a discussion of witchcraft in my `book'.

First, my interest is not in phenomena which are located in exotic times or places, but those that are causally significant here and now. In the case of witchcraft it is not associations with magic or the occult but as a process that can be detected in any society, because it is a function of very fundamental human behaviours. Let me try and explain.

Witches were not burned because they believed things that were different from those of the witchfinders, but because they were assumed to share the same view about how the world worked. The occult, or rather beliefs about it, being common to both sides cancels out and what is left are only desires and allegiances. Witches were burned for spiritual treason. Yet it is an almost prurient interest in magical ornamentations that has fascinated most people and distorted perception of witchcraft; perhaps allowing it to act as a defense by providing a machanism by which embarrassing or disturbing aspects of ourselves can be projected outside our chosen group. Someone has said that we torture ourselves with guilt not because of what we have done but because of the standards that we set ourselves. Hence the notion of a modern witch hunt, but that is usually applied only to extreme and unusual cases and draws attention away from more mundane manifestations.

It is these that interest me; the possibility that the real kernal of witchcraft, its motive force, is still vital and shapes important aspects of our social behaviour; perhaps aspects that are so familiar as to be taken for granted and scarcely disturb the surface of consciousness.

This is what would make the study worthwhile. For if we are prone to dispositions which distort our perception and response to reality, that nudge us towards irrational behaviour, we should be told in the hope that we might be able to make allowances. And even if for individuals that hope is forlorn then it should still be possible for our institutions to acknowledge that and be adjusted so as to make allowances for the frailty of individuals. Unfortunately this seems to be happening less and less.

But even if the kernal of witchcraft has nothing to do with the occult these gaudy clothes have stood out and drawn attention to more subtle patterns that might otherwise have been overlooked. The cost, however, has been high; misunderstanding, misclassification and the confusion of the appearance with reality.

So my thesis is that stripped of its magical associations the processes which form the kernal of the phenomenon can be identified here and now in the everyday life of every society. And that they are important because they distort perception and judgement. These effects are subtle and profound because they draw their energy from dispositions common to all human beings and the defining characteristics that distinguish them from every other species. And it is in the nature of such features that they be taken for granted; familiarity breeds contempt, or perhaps more accurately diminishes conscious awareness.

To understand witchcraft one must understand how people normally try to explain and predict events, or how the world works; what could be referred to as `Folk Science'.

The adjective `folk' has come to be used often disparagingly for the inbuilt, or default, explanations that human beings use to predict and find their way in the world. It is probably been most used in explaining behaviour, where folk psychology has become shorthand for a system of explanation in terms of beliefs and desires. I think it was Aristotle who first articulated this by suggesting that if he knew what someone believed and what they desired he would be able to predict how they would behave, or what they would do. This approach has been dismissed by eliminative materialists and behaviourists as naive and misleading with predictions that a true psychology would replace the language of belief and desire with one of brain states and neurochemistry. But how and to what extent this would be any more than an improvement in ideological rectitude seems uncertain. And to date I suspect that folk psychology provides a

more effective approach than any other and the proposed alternatives are what is referred to in computing as vapourware.

More recently folk physics has become a focus of study. The principle is the same, the default explanatory system for the behaviour of inanimate objects. But I suspect (I have not researched this yet) that there is a subtle difference. To appreciate this one has to understand that in the design of any kind of brain, whether electronic or biological, there is a trade off between fast but inflexible processes, such as reflexes, which are mostly unconscious, and slow but flexible processes which are in our case usually conscious, as in planning. An analogy might be the system made up of a modern jet fighter and its pilot. Unlike a Piper or Cessna a modern jet fighter is designed for maxiumum manoevreability at the expense of stability which is clawed back by fast computers which can react faster than any pilot. Without these computers the fighter would be unflyable. In this system the pilots role is more that of a strategist planning ahead and selecting priorities and targets.

From this viewpoint folk psychology is towards the slow flexible end of the continuum, whilst folk physics is perhaps more concerned with fast automatic and relatively inflexible modules such as are used to calculate the trajectory of a moving object. If I am right folk physics is more concered with hardwired unconscious processes, whilst folk psychology is with `software' processes which are more likely to be conscious. But even at this end of the spectrum there is still a trade off between speed and flexibility. in the case of engineering, when planning a space mission the simpler Newtonian Physics is usually sufficient and the greater accuracy and complexities of Relativity Theory are usually unnecessary.

From the point of view of Natural Selection mechanisms need only to be good enough to maximize the survival of a species as a whole; they need to be good enough rather than absolutely the best. And in the case of Folk Psychology or Folk Science the benefits of rapid assessment of common situations will almost certainly outweigh those of a more powerful system that could account for every variant, if the cost of this was longer processing time for all. This principle is used in the design of RISC microprocessors which are optimised for the fast execution of common processes at the expense of a slower performance on the less common. This is in contrast to the CISC processors where even uncommon tasks are given a dedicated hardwired solution.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

The question is therefore; what is the optimum explanatory model for conscious planning as opposed to simply anticipating the trajectories of moving objects? I believe that there are at least two good reasons for this to be closer to Folk Psychology than physics.

First, the relative success of human beings has almost certainly been the result of an ability to understand other minds; that rather than tool design is why we have big brains. Everyday communication depends on this, as what we actually say, literal or `sentence meaning', is usually insufficient to convey to another what we really mean, or what is referred to as `speaker meaning'. That gap between sentence and speaker meaning is the territory of culture, consensus, figurative language, word games, and literary art. To communicate we have to control how we are being understood and make appropriate adjustments in real time. This requires a balance between speed and accuracy for which folk psychology seems well suited. It does not matter if it occasionally gets it wrong it is the average, the long run, that matters.

Second, nature is parsimonious and tends to make do and mend rather than create anew. So, speculating, if it is useful to have a conscious understanding of the physical world is an extra module needed? Or to put it another way; what kind of explanatory system do hunter gatherers, chronologically the dominant mode of life for human beings, need in order to make their way safely and effectively in what we would describe as the physical world? I would suggest that in practical terms a system in terms of folk psychology would be superior to one based on folk physics. By this I mean that to consider natural objects as being agents; as being not just alive but motivated by beliefs and desires, would be safer than to consider them as inanimate. As agents you are more likely to treat them with respect, to be wary of them and attend to them, than if you think of them as inanimate and lumpen or inert. And in terms of predicting behaviour, at this level of `sophistication' there is unlikely to be a significant cost.

The bottom line is that animism, panpsychism, or folk psychology is the default explanatory system, or folk science. And my reason for taking such a ponderous route to a not very original conclusion is not so much to kit it out in some new clothes, or relations, but to try and make clear that it is not simply a naive and childish mistake, the result of making the wrong choice from among several alternatives, but a disposition shaped and programmed by natural selection for its survival value. And as such a fundamental aspect of our natures which we can make

allowances for, quarantine, but probably never eradicate. It is also the conceptual compost from which witchcraft has grown.

Several times in earlier paragraphs I have been tempted to use the word inanimate, but refrained from doing so, because I felt I would have had to qualify it as something like `inanimate from our present perspective'. The problem is that I think we have forgotten much to easily that it is only in the last few hundred years that the notion of inanimate has acquired its current connotation. Before, for all the tens of thousands of years since homo sapiens emerged from Africa there was no such thing as inanimate; and even if denotations overlapped the connotations did not.

Forgetting this has a number of consequences. First, it makes animism foreign and our attitudes towards it that of a colonialist, looking in from the outside and thanking God that we were born British. And for that reason we tend to see it as a property of others and thus underestimate its force in our own lives. Colonialism is always based on and justified by differences rather than similarities. This in turn, leads us to overvalue what are often incidental details such as the association between witchcraft and the occult and undervalue or overlook common patterns. The disposition towards animistic explanations is fundamental and active in every human being.

What I am labouring is the suggestion that animism is a part of our biological inheritance, an evolutionary construction, whereas the notion of inanimate nature is a social construction which we have to work to maintain.

But although socially constructed inanimism has been by far the most successful explanatory model that the world has known and the basis of all the technologies that have, for good and ill, transformed and continue to transform our environment and the manner of our lives. These transformations have been achieved by adopting, adapting Dennets famous suggestion of the intentional stance, an extensional stance. By this I mean that successful science has adopted an explanatory approach from which agents, entities motivated by beliefs and desires, have been rigorously excluded; their role replaced by that of physical laws. But at any given state of knowledge explanations can fail and to fill the gap left by will something new is needed. This is provided by the notion of probability and a recognition of the reality of chance events; of events being determined by a random confluence of other contributory events. From the extensional stance chance fulfils the function of agency in the intentional. It is also the notion that even the most sophisticated human beings find

difficult to use consistently; and it is this that witchcraft should remind us of.

In general, explanatory systems are only dusted down for use when things go wrong; if there were no illnesses it is questionable if we would bother with understanding physiology just as most of us are happy to accept that the sun always rises without asking too many questions. Explanation clamour towards centre stage only when we are surprised by the unexpected; when our predictions have let us down. So witchcraft accusations are more likely to be made during periods of change, turmoil, or what we would consider natural disasters.

Failures of expectation are always important as they either indicate something genuinely new which may require a response, or that our explanatory system is inadequate and may need modification. But, given the complexity of the world and what seems to be a very limited knowldge about how it works, how are we to avoid being overwhelmed by failure and condemned to the anxieties of constant uncertainty? And this especially if we consider, from our extensional stance the limitations of our colonial cousins.

The reality is different and much more secure. First, even given a sound scientific education and access to all the information about the world that our technological culture has amassed, very few of us have sufficient knowledge to account for even simple events and without that knowledge there are no real expectations to be confounded. The falling of a leaf, or the dying of a butterfly, are lost in the background and demand no explanation. Explanatory systems generate new prediction and failures but are for the most part able account for them in their own terms. What is remarked on is highly selective.

In addition there are two strategies which reduce the liklihood of anxiety inducing surprises. First, by learning more about how the world works we are less likely to be surprised by it. That the sun rose today is unremarkable, but an eclipse would be. That swallows migrate and return with different seasons is predictable etc. This recognition of pattern can be atheoretical, but very effective at containing surprise and concern. And if such lore can only be accumulated across many generations and be beyond the wit of everyone, wise men and institutions can open out the view.

Second, culture and customs can insulate individuals from nature, and nature can be domesticated within at least limited boundaries. Variations in behaviour can be discouraged and

interaction with nature regulated in various ways. Life can be limited to a subset of its possibilities.

The overall result is that only scientists and they only when at work concern themselves with detailed failures. Everyone else at other times let these pass by unremarked and save their anxieties for those larger surprises that affect or can impress the whole community. It is then that explanations find a more general function of providing reassurance and restoring equilibrium and wellbeing.

In our inanimist society the explanations will tend to be in terms of mechanism and chance; a Feynman will demonstrate the inadequacy of the O ring with a glass of iced water and the destruction of the shuttle will no longer be a mystery.

In an animist system explanation will be in terms of agency, in terms of will and responsibility, and will function as a whole to apportion blame and retribution. Fear is contained and controlled by identifying someone as responsible and this is usually helped by a process which splits the seemingly homogeneous community into two; an in group and an outer onto which responsibility can be projected leaving the inner group reborn, innocent, and pure. On a small scale this can often be observed in medical, legal, and business partnerships, or even marriages.

But this is not confined to animists for it can be observed in the clamour for `justice', a common euphemism for revenge, that too often discolours the face of ostensibly inanimist systems. For how else can one account for demands for draconian punishments when behaviour is explained in terms of a conjunction of chances which would logically make the culprits themselves victims of nature.

The answer is that the extensional stance which has been so successful in relation to physical science has its limitations when it comes to the psychological sciences (I have a better terminology for this, but I would have to give you too much background explanation than I have time for now). And if animism or mind has been ordered out of the front gate it has had to be smuggled back through the tradesmens entrance, albeit in disguise. Because to date nothing better has been found to take its place. So, rather to our embarrassment, animism remains in our garden though tucked away in a corner and largely unacknowledged; like an extra wife in the marital bed, a can of pesticide in an organic garden's potting shed, or a steak in a vegetarian's larder.

This manifests itself in mildest and benign form, in the concern for fixing blame that often follows inanimist explanations. At its more malignant when the desire to punish overwhelms explanation, and its most sinister when perceptions and classifications (intuitions and concepts in Kantian terms) are distorted to justify unusual and mostly irrational retribution.

In what follows operational criteria means the observable features that allow an observer to identify and classify behaviours or events. For example a general may order his troops to take an enemy town. As this order is passed down from HQ it will be translated into more and more specific instructions and actions, until a journalist or the enemy can easily recognise the intention. Or the old definition of a coup as taking control of the head of state, parliament, communications and ports, including airports. At the time of the Falklands War I remember on my way from London to Cornwall passing columns of armour on their way to the docks. But at that stage that they were on their way to retake the islands was not certain. Closer to Port Stanley their purpose would be clear. In psychiatry operational definitions of psychopathy (in the sense of poor impulse control, or ability to sacrifice immediate for longer term reward) might include frequent changes of job, relationships and address, plus the liklihood of a pattern of frequent mostly silly offences. Operational criteria canbe unpacked from the general, or theoretical.

So, in the case of malignant animism, which I will use as term for modern manifestations of witchcraft, what are the operational criteria? I would suggest the following very provisional list.

1. Behaviours that are socially constructed and whose boundaries are fuzzy and liable to change.

It is concerned with behaviours that are socially constructed and that many people may feel slightly uncertain about in the sense that though the central issues may be quite unambiguous and clear to all the boundaries may be fuzzy and difficult to define. In addition being socially constructed they tend to shift over time so that what might have been considered acceptable in the past is no longer so. This is fertile ground for the development of guilt.

2. Behaviours that are understandable and in marginal cases relatively common.

A corollary is that it tends not to be too concerned with behaviours that are uncommon and relatively absolutely defined such as (I hope) necrophilia. Most people do not feel threatened by this because they cannot imagine being consumed by lust for it and have never come close to it. Whereas evolving sexual mores and possibly new offences, such as `date rape', sexual harrassment, etc must leave many pondering some of their adolescent behaviours.

3. Increased emphasis on intentions as opposed to actions.

It tends to blur the distinctions between disposition, thought, or intent, and actions. In this country there is a serious proposal that certain people with `personality disorders' who are thought to be potentially dangerous should, even although they have committed no offence, be imprisoned indefinitely for the safety of the public.

4. Erosion of legal safeguards.

In a similar way it argues that the significance of the offence is so great that the ordinary safeguards that have evolved to reduce the liklihood of wrongful conviction must be set aside; arguing essentially that false negatives (guilty proven innocent) must be avoided at all costs, even at the expense of an increase in false positives (innocents proven guilty). The principle of innocent until proven guilty also tends to be inverted.

5. Distortion of evidence to justify response.

The essential feature here is that standards of evidence are eroded and assertion, innuendo, and rumour rush in to take their place. This transforms rational argument into a trial of wills; personalities taking the place of reasons.

6. The invention of new offences, qualitative categories and classifications. And the conversion of quantitative into qualitative distinctions.

7. Anomalies and inconsistent sanctions and sentencing.

In a coherent system of sanctions sentencing would reflect the severity of offences according to some objective measure of harm and intention. Although this does present difficulties in practice malignant animist offences are treated as qualitatively more severe and sentencing is incommensurate and incoherent. How should the sentencing of someone who smashes someones kneejoints

with a baseball bat and maims them for life relate to that of rape, or abuse of drugs?

Summary:

Human beings live within the boundaries of a socially constructed world. These boundaries have evolved to regulate common dispositions which could threaten social cohesion and hence survival: they have not evolved to regulate uncommon behaviours although these may be drawn in and used to strengthen the system.

The dynamics of the system draws its energy from communal guilt on a mass scale. The behaviours targetted for sanctions, and in terms of which the nature of humanity is defined, have to be of a kind that individuals can understand and relate to, not simply as intellectual constructs but as dispositions or temptations. This does not mean that they must have crossed the boundaries but they must have approached and know them. The system would not work if the boundaries were far beyond the imagination of all but a small minority.

To be more specific most adolescents in the past flirted with socialism and sometimes communism. Most have probably been guilty of sexual harrassment, many of some kind of sexual assault, or even come close to at least date rape. Most parents have snapshots of children that in another time or context might be considered potentially pornographic. By all accounts only a minority, not including your president, have never dabbled with illicit drugs. And in communities where belief witchcraft is endemic many must have daydream of deploying the improbable powers attributed to witches. I have a young patient who following her favorite TV program about a teenage witch longs to have the power to turn her mother into a cockroach and stamp on her.

This may explain the associations between animist systems and the magical associations of witchcraft. These may be based on the fear of transformation through succumbing to desire (temptation), and thereby of crossing the socially constructed boundary that defines humanity. It is the fear of the alien other within us; what Jung referred to as our Shadow.

My contention is that animism and folk psychology provide us with the essential ability to read each others minds and thus communicate and construct the social contracts on which our civilisation depends. But the cost is a disposition towards a

responsibility, guilt and blame distributing system that can become malignant. In that form it has been historically manifested by witchcraft phenomena, but stripped of occult embellishment it lingers on within our inanimist system, nourished from the same source, as a disposition towards a blame and revenge fixing system which tends often to get in the way of fixing problems. The essential processes that form the core of witchcraft take on the colours of the time and place in which they occur and occult or magic shading is only one of these and though perhaps the most dramatic is the exception rather than the rule.

Postscript:

The list of operational criteria needs refinement. What I have been looking for is a set of markers that might be identified across time and societies. But this raises a number of questions. When an offence has just been invented laws can reflect this and changes and distortions more easily identified. But this may be less clear in countries where witchcraft has been endemic for a long time. There one might have to look at the ways in which different types of law relate to each other; for example the relations of customs, tribal laws, informal, common and formal or statute law. And, as in the witchhunts in Europe how the earlier accomodation with witchcraft, which was dealt with through well established procedures, gave way to the inquisition and how the effects and cooperation of the people varied from place to place and over time. Then as now the phenomena seems to be identified not just by changes in law but by the ways in which authorities responded to public anxiety and pressures as well as their own. For example often localised popular anxiety and outrage induces anxiety in authorities who set in motion changes to protect their power and status which become self-kindling.

Also in Uk cocaine and opiates were widely available and used by all strata of society until WW1 when they were restricted as an aid to the war effort. `Better a touch of laudanum than grumbling guts' was the advice to a PM by his doctor when asked if he should reduce his usage before speaking to the House. See `Opiates and the People' by Griffiths Edwards.

There may be a meta pattern here. relatively insecure authority becoming excessively sensitive to public anxiety reacting by making changes which set in motion a kind of chain reaction. In Africa national historically colonial statute law unsympathetic to witchcraft acts as a fire break to contain hysterical reactions, but may be permissive of local outbreaks. Etc

Here the phenomenon has much to teach about the relation of popular pressures and legal system and the power of authorities, and modern analogues the media mechanisms that create and disseminate information.

There is another thread which would take too long to unravel here. It is about the implications of a default animistic explanation of the world that extends agency and the control of behaviour via representations from humans to everything. If, as I believe, the primary function of law is to deal with the peculiar logic of higher order representations, will, belief and desire (intensional logic eg intensional statements are not truth functional) then law comes under pressure if it has to accomodate the behaviour of everything. Traitors today may conspire with other people but not the physical world. Even if how I have (confusedly) expressed this is the extreme case the extension of agency (shifting boundary between conscious and inanimate) would create problems for law.

GALLUP POLL
WASHINGTON, D.C.--A new Gallup report shows Americans say they are just asreligioustoday as they were in 1947, despite widespreadbeliefsociety has become more secular in recent decades.

¬†

Based on several surveys conducted in recent months, 96percentof Americans today say they believe inGod, 71percentprofessbeliefin an afterlife, 90percentsay they pray, and 41percentsay they attendreligiousservices frequently ("almost every week" or "at least once a week").

¬†

In a landmark 1947 Gallup survey, 95percentsaid they believed inGod, 73percentprofessedbeliefin an afterlife, 90percentsaid they prayed and 41percentsaid they attendedreligiousservices frequently.

¬†

"A comparison of thereligiousclimate today with that of 50 years ago ... does not support the contention of social observers who maintain that America is far less attached to religion than a

half- century ago," says the report in the April edition of Gallup's "Emerging Trends" newsletter.

¬†

Rather, the report continues, the new findings "support the contention that the last 50 years have been the most ‚Äòchurched' half-century in U.S. history."

¬†

However, the report also notes that while Americans may profess broadbeliefinreligiousideas, their faith appears to lack depth.

¬†

In an interview May 14, George Gallup Jr., executive director of the Princeton Religion Research Center, which publishes "Emerging Trends," said his organization's past surveys have identified three "gaps" that point to a lack ofreligiousdepth.

¬†

Americans, he said, do not generally live up to the ethical standards of their faith ("the ethics gap"), nor are they generally aware of their faith's basic teachings ("the knowledge gap").¬†The third gap, said Gallup, is "between believers and belonging," which contrasts the number of Americans who profess abeliefinGodwith the number who frequently attendreligiousservices.

¬†

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MORAL PANIC

Garrett, Julia M. “Early Modern Terrorists and the Dynamics of Moral Panic.” 15 Oct. 2004

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

“A modern witch-hunt does not represent a simple law-and-order problem: potential treachery and subversion are the issues.”

Larner, Christina. *Withcraft and Relgion: the Politics of Popular Belief*. Oxford Basil Blackwell , 1984.

.....The first decade of the twenty-first century is providing a sobering drama about the power and intractability of moral panic and the challenges of nurturing a culture of dissent during such a period. The passing of the controversial U.S.A. Patriot Act in October 2001, Congressional approval of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the federally sanctioned stigmatization of Arab and Muslim American men through programs such as the National Security Entry Exit Registration System (NSEERS)2,Äì,Äìall of these provide an urgent occasion to reexamine the culture and psychology of moral panic, particularly because of the national scale of policies enacted after September 11, 2001. Although early modern England did not deploy the specific rhetoric of national security or terrorism, the dynamics of the contemporary ,Äúwar on terrorism,Äù and those of England,Äôs battle against the scourge of witchcraft exhibit enough similarities to invite critical comparison. Put in the broadest terms, both historical periods demonstrate how the energy and sanctimony of moral panic can be recruited for justifying policies of repression against marginalized or powerless classes, especially those branded as deviant. Moreover, the stark language of a struggle between ,Äúgood and evil,Äù is no less vital for state authorities today than it was during the reigns of Elizabeth and James.3 And during both eras, one of the defining features of that ,Äúevil,Äù entity is its supposedly malevolent antagonism towards Christianity and its values. In any political environment defined by such unyielding binary terms, dissent is invariably demonized. Previously we may have wondered,Äì,ÄìI certainly have,Äì,Äìwhy the discourse of dissent or skepticism was so anemic during the era of England,Äôs witch trials; only one writer, Reginald Scot, succeeded in publishing an openly skeptical attack on English judicial practices regarding witchcraft. Years from now, will scholars of American history find it equally puzzling that so few nationally elected legislators were willing publicly to register their dissent about the anti-terrorist policies of the Bush Administration?4 Whatever that historical verdict may prove to be, the psychology of being the citizen of a persecutory state has become more immediate in the wake of September 11.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

.....The issue of dissent during a period of moral panic is particularly challenging to study in relation to England,Äôs witch trials because of the paucity of directly relevant primary materials; the Epilogue will return us briefly to that specific historiographic issue. For the purposes of a more general comparison of moral panics in early modern and contemporary cultures, a sociological framework will be most illuminating. Kenneth Thompson,Äôs 1998 study of moral panic, which focuses on late-twentieth-century British culture and media, provides the following broad definition:

The first [central point about moral panics] is that they take the form of campaigns (crusades), which are sustained over a period, however short or long. Second, they appeal to people who are alarmed by an apparent fragmentation or breakdown of the social order, which leaves them at risk in some way. Third, that moral guidelines are unclear. Fourth, that politicians and some parts of the media are eager to lead the campaign to have action taken that they claim would suppress the threat. Finally, [. . .] the moral campaign leaves the real causes of social breakdown unaddressed.5

To this general definition we should add Stanley Cohen,Äôs analysis of the ‚Äúprocess of sensitization,Äù that develops around a putatively threatening social group, since the concept applies to the scapegoats of both historical periods. Sociologists Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda provide the following summary of Cohen,Äôs theory:

(Remaining text dropped)

ANIMISM

Home
Norm,

The point you make is valid. There are senses in which the animistic can be considered a subparadigm of an OO paradigm, but I am not sure they are very helpful, and tend to lead to a confused tangle of related but different ideas. I was mixing together two different interests - the extensional vs intensional approaches to explaining the world that I believe is particularly useful in understanding mind, and the atomic vs animistic frameworks for explanation, that is essential to understand the phenomenon of witchcraft, especially in Africa. These are related but not identical.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

All models are motivated, and by their nature incomplete. Indeed that is what makes them useful - a map is more useful than a clone of the places one wants to visit, if only because one can put it in one's pocket. The distinction between things whose behaviour can be adequately explained in terms of physical law and those for whom internal representations have to be taken into account is framed in such a way that it should be acceptable to materialists, such as the majority of scientists would claim to be. From the materialist view the world is made of matter, as opposed to spirit, and all I am suggesting is that particles of matter whose behaviour is accounted for in terms of physical law can form higher order entities that respond not only to their external environment, but `internal' representations of it, including themselves. And that in order to explain the resulting behaviour the language of physical law is at worst indadequate and at best extremely cumbersone and inefficient.

From this point of view, atoms (ultimate entities) beget containers and objects (in the sense I use) and these beget not only living things including humans, but also computers and some other artifacts. In this world there are no such things as spiritual beings or entities and so their status is that of imaginary things like unicorns. These can only exist in representations, and as representations, or signs, presuppose objects, the world of spirits can be considered a subset of the world of objects.

Now, from an historical, or ontogenetic, point of view the notion of atoms or objects or spiritual beings is the result of reason rather than ordinary perceptions. People see and interact with tangible things like stones and trees and other animals, not with molecules, or atoms, or spirits. They arrive at notions of ultimate entities only as a result of trying for a long time to explain how the world works and what makes it move. And only entities that can form representations can imagine frameworks for interpretation and adopt the higher order or meta-cognitive stance that is required to think about them. And the relations between the resulting structures are as much constructed as discovered. Among these are:

1. That the world is made up exclusively of material entities.
2. That the world is made up exclusively of `spiritual' entities and `matter' is secondary. Perhaps, something like Leibniz's monads - though I have never fully understood that idea.
3. That both material and spiritual entities co-exist and are relatively independent. This seems to be the extreme case that opponents of Cartesian dualism try so hard to discredit.

4. That the notions of `matter' and `spirit' are aspects of a single whole and related as the sides of a coin. For example, as substance and form. This is compatible with a modern interpretation that equates form with information. There are physicists who believe that the world we live in may be a virtual reality (like a computer simulation) and that matter is secondary to information - as J. A. Wheeler put it pithily `its from bits'. From this point of view information could be thought of as what was left after maximum compression - when all redundency had been removed. Which makes substances the redundent information that `fleshes out' the idea. The `algorithmic information theory' of Kolmogorov and Gregory Chaitin is useful here (see Google) - imagine the difference in the cost of trying to send an expansion of pi over a telephone line as opposed to the formula by which the receiver could calculate it for herself? One can look on the trajectory of technology as being one in which substance is replaced by information - the material content of a modern car is considerably reduced while its information content has vastly increased.

If, spiritual entities are considered part of reality, and not simply representations, then the question arises whether they are composite. Are they like physical things and made up of some kind of atoms? Or, are they unitary, some kind of amorphous field, without distinguishable parts? I think the question here is whether any useful notion of spirit could be without the ability to form and act in terms of something like representations? Personally I think not - for without that ability what one is describing would seem more or less indistinguishable from ordinary materialist atoms. However, if they do use representations - which might be the conceptual link between matter and mind - then that would seem to imply some kind of complex `internal' structure and hence the possiblity that they could be considered from a meta point of view to be a subset of objects.

It is also important to remember that our culture is probably unique in that we are able to consider the atomic and animistic paradigms as alternatives. This implies a meta or higher-order stance, and raises the question of how many lead uncomfortable lives - atomists during working week and animists at weekends and holidays? But, for most animists there has been no alternative - the world is made up of spiritual beings and no other notion makes sense of it. This is where many approaches to African wichcraft are confused and even racist. They tend to view the phenomena from the outside, as aliens, and judge it in terms of their science. Yet, from the point of view of most

ordinary Africans witchcraft explanations are as natural, and the inferences drawn from them as logical, as ours in terms of modern science.

These are working notes exploring a possible link between the economic multiplier and the mechanism of social amplification and panic. I'm not sure you will understand it but it seems to have interesting implications. Specifically the conjecture that the maximum value of the multiplier or amplifier is set by the degrees of separation within the community. And this in turn could explain why witchcraft may be less common in small groups, e.g. hunter gatherers and small families. In these cases the relatively independent bands of foragers are so small (20 - 30?) that the multiplier effect is tiny or non existent. But, in the case of families WITHIN a larger community, although the multiplier within the family is virtually nonexistent the boundaries between the family and the larger community are porous and so the multiplier is in effect that of the whole community. Hence tensions and rivalries within families get processed by the whole community - they are exported out of the family and then reimported after processing and amplification.

Amplifier or Multiplier

Is there a link between social amplification of perceived danger and panic and the concept of the economic multiplier?

Economics

Multiplier = 1/(1 - MPC)
MPC = mean propensity to consume = Income - (saving + imports)

In case of rumour or transmission of panic there may be little equivalent of saving or imports. Perhaps scepticism or disbelief?
I warn you of danger - you tell more than one other and so on. If transmission is relatively loss free then effects as a multiplier will be potentially very large. However, small world / degrees of separation probably set a limit?

So a hypothesis = maximum value of panic multiplier equals degrees of separation?

Conjecture:

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1. Intensity of panic as a result of any fear inducing event is a function of the size of the population involved. The greater the number - perhaps relative rather than absolute - the greater the panic.

2. Intensity will be reduced by transmission losses and limited social contacts ie size and connectedness.

3. There is a multiplier effect that is a function of the average number of others to whom an individual communicates a fear inducing interpretation of events AND on which a ceiling is set by small world effects and degrees of separation for the community. This is set by the number of times the message has to be transmitted before everyone knows about it.

In a community of like-minded individuals what panics one is likely to panic all and so transmission losses are likely to be low and rumours spread fast. There are likely to be low degrees of separation, but the limit on the multiplier effect is reduced by fast recycling with scope for considerable elaboration. The witch script contains almost infinite possibilities for variations.

This may explain the relative lack of wc in small groups. Small groups would have a very small multiplier and less scope for elaborating new interpretations? Rumors are always more powerful when they are considered to come from outside one's immediate circle.

* When there are witch accusation within a small group such as a family these are probably secondary and arise when tensions within the family get exported and fed through and processed by the wider community and are then reassimilated into the family

+ What does it mean = definition
+ Why anyone would believe in it?
+ Does 'witch' always mean the same?
+ What is relation to christianity?
+ What is relation to shamanism?
+ Why do the effects vary?
+ What makes wc malignant?
+ What causes epidemics? Metastases?

Witch
First rank = central or core
+ a living individual
+ with extraordinary powers to harm
+ powers are inherited

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+ powers may be unconscious
+ always malevolent
Second rank = peripheral or local
+ powers derived from spirits
+ often associated with animistic worldview
+ often associated with occult
+ confusion with sorcery and shamans etc
+ usually but not exclusively female
+ may use substances?

Relation of witchcraft to magic and the significance of the notion of the supernatural

Witchcraft is the manifestations or consequences of belief in witches and the fear of them.

Causes = disproportion between reality and reaction?

DEFINITIONS AND PHILOSOPHY

The mysteries of witchcraft

The first mystery is definition - what the words witch and witchcraft mean. This is of critical importance for it is clear that although witches have been reported to occur in almost every part of the world, it is not at all clear how the usage differs with time and place, nor to what degree it is a term used by and meaningful to local informants, or an interpretation by outsiders with a European background. And it is also not clear how the term witch relates to others whose reference seems at the very least to overlap.

Yet the question of definition is fundamental to any attempt to determine the epidemiology of witch related phenomena - what is the prevalence and incidence, and how do these vary with time and place. At present it is not known if the phenomena are universal or local.

Note: in the following section I will for convenience use witchcraft to refer to all witch related phenomena. In other words not only what witches do but the whole complex of reactions to the belief in the reality and existence of witches. Later I will make the distinction between witches and witchcraft clearer.
The first question that must be answered by any study of witch related phenomena is that of definition. What does the word witch mean, to what does it refer, and how has its meaning varied over time and place? This is surprisingly difficult as

not only have some places and periods been studied far more intensively and comprehensively than others but from the outset one finds oneself in a Catch 22 situation: without an adequate definition one cannot quantify the distribution of the phenomena, yet at the same time how can one formulate a definition without some idea of how the phenomena are distributed? Too rigid a definition will make it difficult to find the wood, too loose will render the leaves invisible. Although in principle it would be possible to set up an international study of related phenomena in different countries, along the lines of the famous WHO study of schizophrenia, this would still presume some idea of the subject and it would only be applicable to existing communities. The only alternative is therefore to start with existing definitions, what other writers have thought it to be, and from them derive a core set of features or lowest common denominators for the notion. And to this can be added additional peripheral features that are contingent or context dependent and do not occur in every case. When this is done we will find that many features that have been thought characteristic of witches and witchcraft are in fact peripheral or secondary and that the core points to a phenomenon that has far wider implications and relevance.

Witchcraft Oracles and Magic among the Azande is a masterpiece and beautifully written. If you do not have it try and get a copy of the 1976 abridged version which has a useful introduction by Eva Gillies.

For EP witchcraft is an emanation from a witch who is characterized by an anatomical difference the witch organ (probably gall bladder) detectable at autopsy and transmitted by unilinear descent. It can also be detected by oracles of which the poison oracle is the most reliable during life. Anyone could be a witch and every death and adverse event or happening is the result of witchcraft. Although the Azande do not have a theory of natural causes or are interested in developing one - they think more in actions than concepts - they recognize that physical events cause death, it is simply that what we would regard as sufficient causes are not enough. What we would consider an adequate cause or explanation of death would be considered in our terms necessary but not sufficient. In their terms the necessary `natural' cause is only the first spear, for the outcome such as death to be completed a second spear is required and that is what witchcraft provides. One of the confusion regarding witchcraft is that we tend to think of natural and forensic causes as mutually exclusive but the witchcraft believing cultures do not, for them there is always a natural and a witchcraft explanation.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

My interpretation:

Witchcraft seems to operate in the social and moral rather than physical realm and serves as a means of inhibiting rampant individuality. On the one hand the alleged action of the witch is that of an individual acting independently against another and by extension the community. The response on the other hand, although it will involve action by the victim or their kinsmen is very much a communal one. Before any action oracles are consulted and their answers checked with a higher oracle such as that of the prince. And any action is cleared with higher authority so it is approved by the community. The effect must be to stifle or subdue any tendency towards individual autonomy and to affirm communal values. There is also an implicit opposition between social and legal constraints in that efforts are made to avoid the higher and more `expensive' legal implications by ensuring that social actions and reactions are in accord with community and custom.

What I have discovered so far about african societies is that they interpret the individual as an organic part of a greater whole - like a body, in which the arm or head is identifiable but not viable apart from the whole.

I also wonder if witchcraft societies have a very clear notion of causality. In buddhism the self is considered a constructed illusion and instead of a long term entity that changes over time there is a notion of a succession of entities that are more or less independent. This view was also to a considerable extent held by David Hume. Causality presupposes atoms or individuals of some kind that can act on one another. If the notion of the individual is weak the notion of causality will also be vague - compare one billiard ball striking another with changes in feelings. If the notion of causality is weak or vague then so will the notion of natural events in the way that we think of them.

For example EP was unable to find definite evidence for a belief in the effects of poisons in the way that we understand them. The Azande's highest oracle is the poison oracle in which a substance - mostly strychnine - is given to chickens as questions are asked. If the chicken dies it affirms that the name asked about is a witch - or whatever is being asked about. It would be interesting to explore the way in which they have developed a logic for asking the right questions and how complex it is? I suspect that the binary nature of the system would lead to the development of a basic system of propositional logic. It

is also important to realize that the oracle protocol is essentially the same as controlled trials of new medicines, lie detectors, and many other procedures that are used by science. All are asking questions of an oracle of some kind, and as with the Azande some are more reliable than others.

Now he did find minority cases where the chicken that had died after being given the oracle poison was eaten. In these cases the innards would be removed and efforts made to remove traces of the poison. But what he was unable to establish was whether this indicated a more chemical notion of poison or simply the fear that if ingested the oracle poison would continue to work and answer again the question that had been put to the chicken. His impression was that the poison was only considered to be dangerous because of the ritual that surrounded its use. In other words the poison on its own was insufficient to produce the effects that we would attribute to the poison alone.

The contrast that he makes with witchcraft is not sorcery but magic. Sorcery is simply bad magic - magic used for illicit purposes - ie not approved by authority or a manifestation of individuality or selfishness which is another way of describing the same thing.

Magic is bringing about changes by the use of medicine which, like poisons, are substances that acquire their potency by the rituals, including spells, surrounding their preparation and use. It is therefore much more of a technology than witchcraft. Witchcraft is a product of nature (the witch organ) and malice - although that may be unconscious. Magic is much more like pharmacology albeit with ritual as an essential component. Witchcraft regulates social interactions and determines the balance between individual and community, magic is either a benevolent technology - like our medicines - or in its bad form as sorcery it is a criminal activity like poisoning or causing actual harm or death. I think it is also used as vengeance against a witch by the kin of their supposed victims. So if A is believed on the basis of oracles to have been killed by a witch B, then the kin of A may seek compensation or attack B with magic. In such cases social mechanisms have evolved to prevent the development of an infinite cascade of revenge killings. This probably depends on the aristocratic hierarchy of authority. If an individual has been identified as a witch responsible for the death of another the kin of the victim are allowed to engineer the death of the witch, but as a permitted revenge that death cannot become a reason for any further retaliation.

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Another distinction is with Diviners who are described in a way that suggests they are essentially shamans. This would explain why shamans as such are not usually taken into account or confused and mixed up with witches. Shamanism is probably the oldest form of relating to a wider world that includes spirits and ancestors - an animisitic world.

Evidence for witchcraft as a form of social regulation.
- anyone can be a witch
- witch powers are local and strongest in the core community = a victim can hide in the forest from witches who cannot find them by witchcraft
- regulated by authority
- although hereditary with unilineal descent the theoretical implication that all of the lineage are witches is not made the basis for action- also even if one is of a lineage or has the witch organ it can be cool and inactive. The emphasis is on the present synchronic relationships.
- distinction of witch activity from magic

It is important to remember that the Azande had a class based society with a king and aristocrats who were distinct from commoners and an associated hierarchy of authority. This had been traditionally based on the control of oracles as the basis of a justice system. That control was overturned by colonial legal systems. But the ideas persisted and formed a `shadow' legal system - in UK the second party at present the conservatives is the opposition but its ministers are described as the `shadow chancellor' shadow home secretary etc.

My hunch is that the present state of witchcraft is a corruption or distortion of what had been in the past a more benign mechanism for the social control of individuality that might threaten the community values and hence survival. The distortions and corruption have come about first because at the time of the first interactions between Europeans and Africans and especially the first missionaries (Portugese?) about C15 Europe was in the grip of the vicious witch crazes (1450 -1750) that led to the deaths of more than 60,000 alleged witches (75% women). Witchcraft was a very hot topic and must have dominated and distorted the perceptions of the explorers. I cannot see how these could not have interpreted the strange rituals and customs they found without applying witchcraft based ideas. And in this case the European witch was in league with Satan so there was an instant polarity between good and evil. I think these ideas were partially assimilated by and changed the local views of what were now described as witches. The second wave of distortion was a consequence of colonial laws which excluded the reality of

witches and left the local people feeling vulnerable and without help from authority. The result was the development of a shadow, underground, informal, extralegal justice system. And with it a judiciary that took the form of secret societies and cults - some of which took advantage and usurped their original functions for personal gain.

A consequence of the confusion and the fact that most studies have been made by members of alien races is that the distinctions between witchcraft, shamanism, and magic have become muddied. I think conceptually they need to be reinstated and in particular the overt use of poison substances classed under magic (sorcery or bad magic).

Norman,

Two thoughts.

First, I think the pivotal change is not simply HG to farming but what follows somewhat later when surplus production leads to the development of markets and trade and hence towards cities and more complex political organization. In fact the key may be trade and the notion of alienable property that it implies. And trade also leads to the mixing and interacting of different peoples and communities with all the potential stresses that that entails.

There may be a tendency in thinking of witchcraft, that I am aware of myself, to consider a community in isolation as if it were under a bell jar and had little contact with others. Yet there is probably a case to be made that witchcraft is not indiginous to a single community but only occurs when that community is impacted on by others or interacts with them as in trade relations, or even tangentially by being near trade routes. In other words it occurs in a world that has begun to trade and interact - even if the community concerned is on the margins. A stagnant pool or backwater rather than a running river.

Second. What is the difference between evil and ordinary bad or wicked behavior? There is a tacit difference that justifies the word, and I think it is that evil is considered somewhat alien. It is badness that one denies or finds difficult to accept in oneself and so projects onto an alien or other, usually an outgroup or individual who is considered in some way different.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

So from this perspective one has a cluster of ideas and phrases of which the following are, in no particular order, only a sample:

the incarnation of evil
the personification of evil
the projection of evil
the externalization of evil

I think the problem with all of these is that it is not evil that is projected but more ordinary badness that people find difficult to accept in themselves or their true kin, and that they transform into evil. In other words evil is not the beginning but the product or end. The following may therefore be preferable:

the discovery of evil
the generation of evil
the manufacture of evil (too mechanical)
the creation of evil
the invention of evil
the emergence of evil
the incarnation of evil (incarnation could be in each group)

or:

the projection/externalization of the alien/other
the invention of the alien
the denial of the alien/other

or:

the kernel of ism (racism)
the seeds of ism

Extracts from past writing to you or norman

Here I want to introduce a distinction that will help explain the source of the difficulty in changing minds and will be important later.

The scholastics drew a distinction between two different kinds of questions that they referred to as scientia and doctrina. Scientia referred to questions that could be answered with empirical evidence, whilst doctrina were questions that could not. Scientia were based on data or facts, whereas doctrina were

related to frameworks for interpretation and explanation. In modern terms doctrina questions would be similar to Kuhn's paradigms, and unlike ordinary theories or hypotheses are not themselves easily refuted. Instead, their validity rests on their performance, on the fecundity of the questions that they suggest as well as help to answer, and it is rare for, one or a few, `facts' to be sufficient to lead to their being abandoned. Usually they are replaced only after a protracted period of increasing difficulty in accounting for new data in their terms.

....

Doctrine rather than Science

This book is not about hypotheses that might be subject to refutation but about what scholastic philosophers referred to as doctrina the framework of assumptions and models on which the formulation and testing of hyptheses depends. And unlike a scientific theory a doctrine is tested not by deducing its implications and using these as the basis of a test but rather their utility in generating testable hypotheses and easing the understanding of old. A framework in this sense is never true or false but more or less useful its concern being not with the world directly but the methods we use to learn how it works.

....

Because the following interpretation of witchcraft is based on a number of distinctions that may be unfamiliar, I will list them up front as a reference.

1. The importance of distinguishing paradigms, or frameworks for interpretation, from the beliefs and mechanisms that they allow.

The scholastics made an important distinction between doctrina and scientia. Originally, scientia referred to all of human knowledge, whilst doctrina referred to the subset of questions that could not, in principle, be answered by empirical testing or experiment. An example might be the existence of gods or spirits. Gradually the scope of scientia became more focussed and it came to refer to those questions that, in contrast to doctrina, could be answered by experiment. This distinction is somewhat similar to that between the premises or postulates on which mathematical and logical systems are based, and which are accepted as givens that are true without proof, and the theorems and conclusions that they allow.

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But, what is often overlooked is that every culture must have a view as to how the world works and these too are based on very general frameworks for interpretation. These frameworks determine what is conceivable and acceptable and hence the specific beliefs and theories that are, and can be, held. Choosing between alternative beliefs is a matter for empirical testing, aided by procedures such as the scientific method that have been developed for that purpose. However, determining which framework for interpretation is most useful is much more difficult, as each is consistent with many conflicting beliefs. In practice, the choice is generally unconscious and based on `faith', or emerges slowly with an accumulation of evidence that one framework is more fruitful, in the sense that it generates more useful beliefs and theories, than another. This is the process that Thomas Kuhn referred to as a `paradigm shift'.

There are, however, two factors that have rendered our overarching doctrines, or frameworks for interpretation, virtually invisible. First, they are so pervasive that they are like water to fish or air to humans - usually only noticed in their absence. Second, there has, in practice, been only one dominant framework for interpretation. And though recently a rival has emerged that has shown itself to have vastly greater utility it has only replaced the former among a significant minority mostly living around the North Atlantic rim in only the last hundred years.

The traditional and still dominant framework explains the behavior of the world in terms of the folk psychology, beliefs, desires, and will, of spiritual agents that are believed to be causally effective in the physical world, either by acting directly on matter, or indirectly by changing human minds. In contrast, the modern scientific framework explains behavior in terms of inanimate atoms acted upon by external forces according to the rule of physical law.

Now, though the spiritual doctrine is more sympathetic to the notion of witchcraft and gives it characteristic form and color, this is largely in contrast to the scientific doctrine that considers such beliefs to be without foundation. The result is a tendency to view witchcraft as exotic and alien to our own culture in any form except as a relatively eccentric `life-style choice'.

2. The distinction between, and universal coexistence of, formal, or legal, and informal, or extra-legal, legal systems and Law.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Beyond a certain low threshold of complexity, every culture develops a system of laws that regulate behavior within it. In the early stages these are based on informal social contracts and consensus, but when, later, these are institutionalized in statutes and courts and rituals and roles, the informal, now extra-legal, systems do not disappear, but coexist to a degree that varies with scale, and circumstances. At the smaller scale these persist, relatively benignly, as the ways in which interpersonal behavior is regulated within families and small communities. For example, how parents punish children. But, on a larger scale, they can also re-emerge when the formal, legal, legal system fails and there is a breakdown in the Rule of Law, or when the legal legal system fails to address the experienced concerns and needs of the community. When that happens the result is vigilanteism and the development of extra-legal legal systems complete with quasi legal institutions that are isomorphic with the formal.

It is my contention that witchcraft is first and foremost an example of an extra-legal legal system motivated by dissatisfaction at what the legal legal system recognizes and allows.

3. The distinction between a core, or kernel, and a context.

This distinction is about definition, between a core concept, that is usually simple, general, and of universal application, and specific contexts that flesh out the core and give it characteristic forms and colors, which are specific to the context. It is not uncommon for the local, context dependent, characteristics to be confused with those of the core. That is why witchcraft has so often been defined in terms of spirits or magic which are contingent and not essential features.

4. The distinction between proximal, or primary, and distal, or secondary and higher order, effects or consequences.

Motor vehicles were invented to provide a means of transporting goods and passengers from one place to another. But, in order to do this efficiently they required the development of roads and gas stations and repair shops and motels. Then they led to accidents and facilitated the expansion of medical and legal services. Further downstream they provoked the emergence of various pressure groups for and against the consequences, each allied with political agendas. And in the end they changed the shape of the countryside and towns and maybe in the long term will contribute to their extinction. A parasite that kills its host. So it goes. And similar processes are easily discernible

in relation to medicines and any technology complex enough to have unintended consequences.

As in the case of equivocation between core and context many studies of witchcraft confuse and fail to distinguish between proximal and distal effects. In practice, most of the features considered to be attributes of witchcraft are not primary but secondary or higher order (downstream) effects.

5. The distinction between processes that can only develop in larger groups, but once discovered feed back to change and become an integral part of the functioning of smaller groups.

In this country in the past, and to this day in many others, a husband could not be accused of raping his wife, and much internal family violence was effectively ring fenced from the criminal law. What would, between strangers, have been regarded as assault, or grievous bodily harm, was traditionally often discounted as `merely' a domestic dispute. But, increasingly, crimes that were initially defined in a wider context are being considered applicable within families and this must have an effect on how at least some families function. A variant is where the punishment for certain crimes differs depending on the relation of victim to perpetrator. For example, so called crimes of passion, or the killing of an errant wife or daughter would be treated more leniently than the murder of a stranger. Again punishments considered appropriate in the wider context are being applied to smaller.

The relevance of this to witchcraft is that it is possible that the apparent increase in accusations within families, such as the identification and extrusion of children as witches, and the violence that it provokes, might be a result of a process that began within families and was then amplified by projection onto a wider stage; for example via moral panics. Or, the result of the importation and use of explanatory concepts that were formerly more commonly applied to relative strangers. The attribution of witchcraft not to individuals but other `tribes'.

We will see later that many of the processes associated with witchcraft are critically sensitive to naming and the way in which they are described. For example, many moral panics follow the coining of a catchy new name for what is often an ancient phenomenon; there was street crime long before mugging, stalking is not a new phenomenon, and children were neglected long before `home alone children' were publicized by the media.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

DEFINITIONS, FREQUENCIES OF WITCHCRAFT
Friday, 5 September 2008 10:50:13

One aspect of witchcraft that I think you must address is the mechanism by which dissent is discouraged or penalized. This is probably characteristic of at least the most malevolent forms of moral panic - or it may be an independent variable - people who doubt the prevailing explanations and the reality and importance of the communal preoccupation are afraid to speak out because dissent is taken to be indicative of sympathy with whatever is feared and even membership of the feared outgroup.

Friday, 9 November 2007 19:13:40

Trying to reconstruct some thoughts on witchcraft that I constructed while talking to Norman. They were triggered by something I had read around the significance of religious beliefs. The core was that witchcraft seems to be correlated with a relatively diffuse authority. Rodney Stark suggests that in Europe witch hunts were most vicious where the power of church and state were weak ie towards the margins. And in Africa indiginous religions tend to be diffuse and decentralized - animism rather than monotheism - though the secondary imporation of Christianity at first not far from the time of the witch hunts in Europe and the institutional and idelogical structures of demonology etc has had powerful effects. Where religion is strong and structured then discontent and an explanation for bad things gets projected onto the devil or bad god. But where there is no such deities the power is diffused and distributed and scapegoats sought?

I think this was related to discussion of the rehabilitation of the notion of group selection as opposed to individual selection.

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Fri Apr 23, 2004 12:58:50 Europe/London
To: Miller Norman <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject: more figures

My overwhelming impression is that witchcraft-like beliefs are probably endemic but have reached an accommodation or equilibrium with the rest of the culture and so are unremarkable except in countries dominated by or overtly influenced by

northern european christianity and a legal system that had demonized and criminalized them and which was then exported to the colonies.

The figures added are from searches on witchcraft and countries using Abe Books database. The UK, France, Germany, and America are far and away the most represented - I suspect language may play a part here as Abe may not have a representative list of foreign language titles that would be too specialized for UK/USA general readers - but what is odd is how few there are for specific African countries or peoples other than the Azande. What seems to be happening is that most books are general accounts at continental or regional level, or are very specific to tribes and peoples and too specialized to result in a book. I think small academic monographs are unlikely to find their way into this database. It may also be that the work of academics is much more local in focus and leaves large areas unexplored. It is often the case that what in science looks like a even swathe of information - like the milky way turns out to be like individual stars with huge areas of darkness between them.

There is also nothing from holland belgium or the low countries which may match the relative lack of material from Indonesia and the Dutch East Indies.

Greece seems unusual - especially as it is Eastern Orthodox as is Russia which has 0.

wc + africa = 96000/98 (12/87) (7163)
wc + europe = 144000/766 (45/217) (8971)
wc + india = 118000/32 (1/22)(6838)
wc + china = 110000/6 (0/0) (6621)
wc + indonesia = 24000/2 (0/0) (1726)
wc + malaysia = 12000/3 (0/0) (1272)
wc + asia = 58300/19 (1/38) (5836)
wc + micronesia = 2650/0 (0/0) (284)
wc + japan = 132000/0 (0/0) (4899)
wc + islam = 47200/0 (0/0) (3253)
wc + muslim = 25700/0 (0/0) (3485)

Abe titles
england 558
scotland 46
wales 7
ireland 15
france 40
germany 11 (germany was until the 19th century a mosaic of more than a hundred tiny princedoms)

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

italy 1
spain 1
portugal 0
greece 17
iceland 0
america 67
mexico 0
peru 0
brazil 0
kenya 1
kikuyu 0
tanzania 1
azande 42
pakistan 0
yuglslavia 0
croatia 0
serbia 0
russia 0

FREQUENCIES OF WITCHCRAFT
From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Fri Apr 23, 2004 10:36:22 Europe/London
To: Miller Norman <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject: prevalence of wc in different regions

In an attempt to find out how common witchcraft phenomena might be in other parts of the world I have been doing some rather crude research using Google and the Amazon (UK and USA) and Abe books databases. Whereas Amazon searches on books in print Abe Books includes second hand and hence out of print titles. There is also a difference between the search tools for Amazon UK and USA. In UK one can search on titles that include several different terms. In the USA because many books have their contents indexed one can search on books whose contents contain the several terms used - hence the results of Amazon USA are more like those of Google.

This would be easier as a spreadsheet but here is the explanation.

1. To the left of the = are the two keywords used for searching (witchcraft + africa etc).
2. To the right of the = is first the results of a Google search for sites that contain both the keywords. As you will know from using Google this is always an inflated figure that includes

lots of irrelevant results. So I next searched Google for pages that included the keywords in the title and as you will see this dramatically reduced the numbers of hits. The Google results are given as Sites containing the keywords / keywords in title only.
3. The figures in the first set of brackets are for the results of search for keywords in the title of books listed by Amazon UK which are in print or recently so / And those listed by Abe Books that include books that are out of print but available second hand.
4. The second brackets contain the numbers of books listed by Amazon USA that contain the keywords in their text. Hence these are closer in kind to those of a simple Google search.

key1 + key2 = Google text/title, (in book title Amazon UK inprint/ Abe all), (Amazon USA in contents)

wc + europe = 144000/766 (45/217) (8971)
wc + africa = 96000/98 (12/87) (7163)
wc + india = 118000/32 (1/22)(6838)
wc + asia = 58300/19 (1/38) (5836)

wc + china = 110000/6 (0/0) (6621)
wc + indonesia = 24000/2 (0/0) (1726)
wc + malaysia = 12000/3 (0/0) (1272)
wc + micronesia = 2650/0 (0/0) (284)
wc + japan = 132000/0 (0/0) (4899)
wc + islam = 47200/0 (0/0) (3253)
wc + muslim = 25700/0 (0/0) (3485)

Of these figures the ones I consider most informative and meaningful are the Google title (after the forward slash) and those for Amazon UK and Abe - books with the keywords in the title.

They suggest strongly that the only areas that have considered witchcraft significant enough to merit a book or titled paper are Europe, Africa, India and/or Asia (I suspect that you would find that most of the results for Asia referred to India). The large numbers of Google hits almost certainly consist of weak links based on a context of a general interest in the occult and mysticism.

Given the size and importance of China and its long history of study by sinologists it seems remarkable that there do not appear to be any books published on witchcraft there.

They also suggests that there is probably a link between witchcraft and christianity as the African and Indian continents

were colonies of European Christian countries. I have not been able to find a significant link to the Dutch East Indies but there may well have been a different relation there between the Europeans and local population? Is there any evidence for differences in prevalence within Africa between areas colonized by different European countries?

The figures for Europe and Africa are certainly underestimates as they would be vastly increased by considering witchcraft in relation to individual countries, peoples, areas - these would be more likely to appear in the titles of academic papers than more general regions like Africa e.g. Azande.

It would be worth finding a good researcher who could access more detailed databases and produce more reliable results.

Finally these are not for publication as they are only an informal preliminary attempt to validate the view that witchcraft is largely a European and African phenomenon. They are a pointer to a more meaningful study.

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Sat Apr 24, 2004 05:47:04 Europe/London
To: Miller Norman <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject: revised figures

Region	Witch	Shaman	Population M		w/m		s/m
Europe	158	49	730		0.22		0.07
A&P	59	10	30		1.97		0.33
Asia	105	319	2400	0.04		0.13	
America	58	260	835		0.07		0.31
Africa	215	30	800		0.27		0.04
India?	105		1000	0.11			
Melanesia?	55		6.5		8.46		
correlation	-0.41				0.56		

Remember these figures are for publications about witchcraft or shamanism in these areas not actual incidents - they are an indicator of relative interest more than of possible prevalence

The figure for witches in Asia is probably almost entirely due to South Asia and mostly India

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

The figure for A&P is due to an unusually high number for witchcraft in Melanesia for which it is an underestimate as the population base used is for the whole of Oceania (30M). Referenced to that of Melanesia (6.5M) it is 8.46. Small area very popular with anthropologists??

It seems to me that the evidence suggests that witchcraft as a phenomenon studied by anthropologists is most common in Europe (past) Africa and to a lesser extent India and South Asia. Melanesia is exceptional.

But the following questions remain. What is the relation of Witchcraft to Shamanism and how much do they overlap? And is the exceptionally high interest in witchcraft in Melanesia a function of the number of investigators/studies or does it suggest that other areas might have the same levels but been relatively neglected by academics?

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Fri Apr 23, 2004 22:25:27 Europe/London
To: Miller Norman <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject: spreadsheet

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Fri Apr 23, 2004 18:13:17 Europe/London
To: Miller Norman <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject: shaman

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Fri Apr 23, 2004 17:29:12 Europe/London
To: Miller Norman <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject: from anthropological index online 1957 - 2003

Anthropological Index Online
witchcraft or witches or witch
1957 - 2003

The regional classification is rather uncertain and inconsistent as the numbers don't add up

Africa 176
N africa 4

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E africa 26
W africa 71
Central africa 14
Southern africa 53

Europe 82 (most of phenomena are historical)
UK 25
W europe 13
E europe 14
W Mediterranean 16
Mid and near east 4

Asia 27
S asia 24 (includes india)
SE asia 11 (probably duplicates south)
Central asia Far East 3 (includes china)

Melanesia 29
Australasia Pacific 0
australia 4
micronesia 0
NZ polynesia 2

Americas 1 (62)
N america 32
S america 19
Central america 11

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Sat Apr 24, 2004 05:47:04 Europe/London
To: Miller Norman <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
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THEORY OF MIND
From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Sun Jan 05, 2003 03:15:09 Europe/London
To: Norman Miller <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject:

Norman,

Below is an attempt to set out the principal components of witchcraft phenomena. It is a bit terse as it was done on my Palm PDA which does not encourage too much elaboration.

The idea of evil is based in all major religions on the separation of what at one time was and should still be one (eg Satan as the fallen angel once beloved of God) and this is also realized in its tendency to manifestation in projection, externalization, polarization, and personification. It also explains its relationship to individuality and its amplification

or augmentation at times when there is an emergence of the individual from the group. This occurred at the Renaissance and currently in Southern Africa. The individual can emerge either because of forces that encourage individuality, or the weakening of group forces; though because individuality and community are tightly bound as sides of a coin (inversely proportional) the precedence of one over the other is relative and so a single mechanism can account for the ascendency of either.

In the Zohar (written ?1295) the root of evil is in God and emerges when Din, stern judgment (the left hand of God), is separated or out of harmony with Hesed, Mercy (the right hand of God).

Do not get too entangled with my ideas about the importance of negation. The terminology is complex and I have not yet found the best form of expression. Moreover, there is no other source that I have been able to find, so you would be relying on my judgment alone. I am still working on the idea. All that you can say with confidence is that in defining good or evil we automatically define its polar opposite (they are the two sides of one coin; evil is what is not good and good what is not evil) and so good implies evil and vice versa. I believe that this accounts for much of the content of the anxieties and guilt feelings experienced by people with severe obsessional and depressive illnesses; and possibly some of the effects (on content of thoughts) of hallucinogenic and mind-altering substances. The more detail with which you specify what is good the clearer the form you give to evil.

Worth remembering that according to Zelecki the content of Near Death Experiences recorded in the Middle Ages was much more dark, diabolic, and frightening than the optimistic experiences reported nowadays. This suggests that such experiences are congruent with the beliefs and perceptual vocabulary of the subject and their time.

Remember too what the French historian Febvre (quoted by Trevor Roper) said; that the mind of one age is not necessarily subject to the same rules as the mind of another. (in my usage mind is constructed from signs rather than molecules although it uses and in a limited sense depends on the latter in the same way as a TV program uses and depends on the electrons of a TV tube)

I think that all the important features of witchcraft can be derived from three basic components; the implications of:

Theory of Mind

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Evil as separation (and separating)
The creation of a victimarchy (based on sensitivity to injustice and the detection of cheating)

Each of these is almost certainly biologically (rather than culturally) based and hence dates from the emergence of homo sapiens and applies to all peoples. Everything else is an unpacking of the implications in different contexts.

What I refer to as Classical witchcraft are the historical European and African descriptions. Contemporary are the Holocaust, McCarthyism, and later manifestations such as Satanic Abuse. I am pleased that by my formulation all that one has to do to derive the latter from the former is to limit agency to human minds. This has the effect of stripping away all the shape-shifting, magic, and other occult phenomena and what you are left with is a structure that is significant and more common than you may have imagined. There is also a relative tendency to locate the power focus of the feared subversive within rather than outside the community, but this is not absolute as in the case of McCarthyism the focus was in Russia.

I believe that the real significance of witchcraft, for anyone other than a historian, is the revelation and identification of a small set of powerful biologically based tendencies that are constantly in danger of undermining efforts towards realizing a more enlightened notion of justice. Note, incidentally, that by my definition the Holocaust was a manifestation of a Contemporary witch-hunt. `Terrorism' seems well on the way to becoming another. And the USA is probably close from the point of view of Al-Quaeda (the only question is of scale, the extent to which there is an internal arm to the threatening group - ?CIA and its agents and allies - and the degree to which AQ considers itself as representative of a community of victims - which it seems to do).

And I also believe that one of the best early warnings of the emergence of new forms of witch-hunt is pressure to change well established principles and processes of law designed to safeguard the innocent from wrongful conviction. This is always justified because a particular type of crime is causing great public concern (making people feel victims or as-one with victims) and there is a belief (often erroneous) that the existing legal processes are allowing perpetrators to escape justice (vengeance). In most cases the real reason is that there is insufficient evidence to ensure a safe conviction.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

One of the effects of this process is the shifting of the center of gravity of attitudes towards crime from understanding, which focuses on the individual and causes, to diagnosis (labeling or classification for disposal) which focuses on descriptions in terms of types and standards. One of the results is a loss of sensitivity for the differences between the individuals convicted of similar crimes, with less scope for flexibility in sentencing. And a consequence is an increasing number of prisoners, with pressure on the prison service and knock on effects on many other crimes; while in spite of harsher sentencing there is an apparent continuing increase in the number of offenders (identified and suspected).

It would be my hope that by making the underlying witchcraft mechanisms more apparent by stripping them of their occult encrustations, then better safeguards of human rights (pace Bentham's stilts) can be put in place. It may be because these processes have not been specifically identified that the approach to the construction of some human rights legislation has been less clearly focused than it might have been; or even that important `democratic' threats to rights have been neglected.

Preconditions for witchcraft

A. Theory of Mind (biological) disposing to
- Agency or animism leading to:
- A mindful world

B. Evil as separation (individual from community) given form; or realized in human and other forms (eg spirits and devils)
- Polarization of evil as opposite of good (helped by language's tendency to bipolar classifications)
- Projection of evil onto individual as a type: a member of a subversive group with external allegiance
- Personification of evil. First, at level of an individual. Second, at level of a group of which the individual is alleged to be a member. That can be either an external power (Communism or Satan), or internal (terrorists, satanic abusers, paedophiles)
- Elaboration and redescription of evil (imagery, ornamentation, words)

C. Sensitivity to injustice or cheating (biological, see Tooby and Cosmides) leading to

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

- The creation of victims
- Polarization of victims and perpetrators
- Formation of a victimarchy
- Fomalization of Vengeance

What do Classical and Contemporary forms have in common?

Projection and externalization of evil
Focus on individual as type and member of threatening outgroup or ingroup
Threat from opposing underground conspiratorial groups; individual seen as `tip of iceberg'
Amplification or augmentation of menace by association of individual with a feared group
Victimization
Vengeance
In spite of increasing retribution perceived threat and numbers of perpetrators multiply

What distinguishes Classical from Contemporary witch-hunts? In Contemporary (Western):

Agency restricted to human minds and therefore no shape shifting an other exotica
Relative focus on internal rather than external - ingroup rather than outgroup (but McCarthy focussed on outgroup)

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Fri Jan 03, 2003 05:11:13 Europe/London
To: Norman Miller <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject:

I do not say that 99.99% of humans have believed in w/c, but in some kind of agency or animism. That is a general understanding about how the world works; replaced in the European/American world by a belief in inanimate atoms, forces, etc. By contrast, a key component of w/c is at least a tacit acceptance of a major polarity between good and evil, not just good and bad. Good and bad are lukewarm, ubiquitous, and not interesting; the belief in personified extremes of evil is less common and more very interesting (can't be used to discriminate one phenomena from another). My hunch is that it developed after images and before writing and has common ancestors with Zoroastrianism which seems to have given it explicit expression (in words and institutions)

and passed it on to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and by trade links to African communities. The best current estimates of Zoroaster's founding the religion are between 600BCE and 1800BCE probably closer to the latter. Zoroastrians place their origins much earlier maybe 5000BCE but non-Z scholars don't agree.

Worth looking at the history of Satan Shayten and Hell.

The definition of a delusion has two parts: a belief that is regarded as false in the context or by the community. In other words the judgment is relative to the time and place in which the person holding the belief is living. For Christians to believe that they are eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ at Communion may seem crazy to many but is not a delusion because it is a standard belief, indeed a membership requirement, for the community that the Christian has chosen to be a member of. To claim that 99.9999999...% of the human race have been deluded because their preferred model of how the world works is different from yours, or does not accept Relativity Theory or Quantum Mechanics, seems a trifle chauvinistic if not pan-racist.

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Fri Jan 03, 2003 05:23:30 Europe/London
To: Norman Miller <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject:

I would suggest that vengeance presupposes and is secondary to the perception of oneself as a victim. Victim seems to me to be more fundamental. And because it is an experience and not a reaction to experience it suggests the more interesting question of what transforms the experience of a person suffering misfortune into a victim? This seems to me not only fundamental but for that reason much older. The current usage where one can be a victim of anything from the holocaust to a common illness or accident seems to me to be misguided and dangerous, because it encourages a search for a perpetrator where in our scientific understanding none may exist. This of course suggests what is behind the whole notion. Vengeance is not against an impersonal force like gravity (as one falls over a cliff) but a person or the kind of agency I have been thumping the tub for. Again as with kicking the cat, doorstep, mower or car, when they do wrong the idea of vengeance seems to me to imply and support my conjecture that animism or agency is the default explanation as to how the world works. And although in our cool modern public

persona we prefer scientific explanations, in the heat of passion we are all animists.

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Fri Jan 03, 2003 08:53:34 Europe/London
To: Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU (Norman N. Miller)
Subject: Re: Re:

On Friday, January 3, 2003, at 03:45 , Norman N. Miller wrote:

what think of the roots of w/c idea in the draft par about the two key beliefs.

When youtalk about default explanatiions...what exactly do you mean....a kind of "what it comes down to"concerpt.

N

In computing you can often open a file in any of many different applications. But for each type of file a user-selectable application can be set so that if a file of that type is clicked on it will open in that application (you would not want a spreadsheet to try and open in a wordprocessor on every occasion). This saves a lot of confusion and having to choose every time. The preferred application is referred to as the default.

* In the case of animism what I mean is that it is the preferred explanation for how things work WITHIN that community; and in the case of animism has been the default for most communities at all times and places until a few hundred years ago in Europe and its former colonies. It is therefore the preferred or default for homo sapiens. And this is because it was so from the earliest time in history.

* If you find some phenomena distributed world wide it is highly probable that it is very old and originates close to the emergence of homo sapiens.

DELUSIONAL THINKING

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Date: Fri Jan 03, 2003 09:26:37 Europe/London
To: Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU (Norman N. Miller)
Subject: Re: Re:

? Your conclusions are shallow unless you distinguish between the beliefs of individuals and communities. If an individual shares the majority beliefs of the community or species she is a member of she is not deluded. You might be able to argue that one should have a term of that kind for the beliefs of a COMMUNITY taken as a whole. But if so then individuals within the community would not be deluded. I suspect this is Funk and Wagnels' confusion.

The problem is that delusion, because of its predominantly mental health associations (eg diagnostic of psychoses), is a highly pejorative and value-laden term and judgment and you seem keen to apply it to almost 100% of those who have been unfortunate enough not to have been born into a euro-colonial cultural lineage.

* I do not think that value laden terms are appropriate here. They add nothing to a more neutral one even if it is likely to be less succinct. But that is the way with all value and -ist words (and swear and bad words generally) they short-circuit accuracy and reason for dramatic effect; their purpose is propoganda rather than dispassionate science (and in my view this also applies within psychiatry now).

You gain nothing by referring to other peoples beliefs as delusional rather than `now known to be mistaken', but you stand to lose much more by the implication that the vast majority of the `deluded' have been `coloured' or educated in non-eurocentric schools.

I may be able to distinguish your euro-centric bias from chauvinism and racism but many of your critics will not.

And the theories as described by both Newton and Darwin are provisional and will be modified (Newton is now a special case of Relativity, though it remains useful for most circumstances and Darwin has many interpreters) or even replaced by better.

Scientific method cannot and does not ever `prove' that a theory is correct in any ultimate sense, but that it has not yet been `disproved' (Karl Popper). Because all swans that you have ever observed are white does not rule out the existence of black ones. That is one of the problems of induction.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

? Think of Schrodinger's Cat. This animal is in a closed box with a flask of cyanide. A random process (eg the decay of a radio-active isotope) determines if the cyanide will be released and the cat killed, or not in which case the cat will live. The thought experiment is the question of whether the cat is alive or dead when the box is opened. Now according to Quantum Theory (the best established and tested scientific theory of all time that has so far been proven to huge degrees of accuracy - far greater than Newton or Darwin) UNTIL the box is open the cat is neither alive nor dead but in a superposition of these two states and that only collapses onto death or life when the observer opens the box and puts the matter to the test. If you think you understand it you can be sure you do not, nor do any Quantum Physicists who use the theory every day to design the technology on which our culture now depends.

On Friday, January 3, 2003, at 03:40 , Norman N. Miller wrote:

Delusion is exactly the case, if you accept Newton and science. What evidence of spirits, or agency can you present. Humankind until 1600....They have been deluded by their parents and teachers:

Funk and Wagnels definition:

".....state of being deluded. A false belief, especially when persistent, of what has no existence in fact...or no logical foundation...the act of deception...an error conveyed and believed."

Seems right on as a Darwinian judgement. Fact is spirits, ghosts etc do not exist according to Newton etc,

Perhaps you are putting to much of a mental health spin on this word. I do not understand your chauvinistic or pan-racists thoughts.

N.

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Mon Jan 06, 2003 01:46:36 Europe/London
To: Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU (Norman N. Miller)
Subject: Re: Re:

Doesn't seem to be available.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

I am going to suggest a hypothesis that should be testable. That WC in Africa is a residue, breakdown product, or distant echo of a monotheistic or dualistic (eg Zoroastrian) past maybe around 100BCE. This need not have been in Africa but was carried with peoples as they or their ideas dispersed there.

***** My reason is that I am more convinced that for prototypical or Classical forms of WC one needs a more developed sense of the opposition and reality of evil than seems likely to have been present in societies with animistic or pantheistic beliefs. The degree required may be that of `dark' forces that are sufficiently structured and coherent to be able to form alliances with.

? By my reading the pantheistic societies were by their nature more eclectic and accommodating as there was always room to fit in another god or two, they tended to absorb rather than destroy and as gods tended to have a limited jurisdiction it was prudent to worship the local ones when away from home. In this kind of system good and evil might exist but it would not attach or clump into polarized blocks of power. For that you really need a much simpler system perhaps no more than one good and one bad. Somewhat like economic systems where monopolies are less likely when there is lots of diversity.

The monotheistic religions seem to have become monotheistic fairly late and in the Old Testament there is clear evidence of polytheism in the earlier parts. And in the early times the gap between men and gods was quite small. The gods walked, talked and communed with men any of whom could experience such epiphanies. Only later did God become distant and unapproachable. This permeability between men, gods, ancestors etc also blurs the boundaries between life and death and would seem to me to allow differences in temperament (angry and peaceful gods) but not encourage a clear division of the world into good and evil. And if a bad man formed an alliance with a less good god or spirit or ancestor there were plenty other countervailing forces. Also at this time there was the notion of the archetype (which Jung took over and adapted for his own needs) in which the constituents of the world were an echo or perhaps distant copy of the divine. Again this accentuated links between worlds.

There are suggestions that African have some conception of monotheism at least in the past though the evidence seems unclear and what I have seen described would be consistent with a sense of the numinous or mana which is common to all peoples

and may have a biological explanation. What is not clear from the fragments I have seen is if there is evidence in the past for an articulated belief in a single all powerful god as opposed to a force or presence. The significance of this is that if you collapse all your gods into one then you immediately create the problem of the origin and management of evil. But from the distances and timing I would have thought it likely that the monotheistic developments in the Middle East around the Axial Age would have dispersed and have some influence.

One of the questions would be how present Africans see good and evil. Witches, like their 16th century isomorphs in Europe certainly seem to be considered more than usually wicked and dangerous and to maybe belong almost to a different species or lineage. If so are there also witch ancestors who are evil as opposed to those of ordinary people? Or does the witch simply take advantage of temporary or contingent bad relations between some otherwise ordinary living and dead?

? If there are echoes of a dualistic monotheistic conception of evil in the African beliefs then these would seem likely to resonate into clearer consciousness when confronted by the much more articulated notions of God and Satan coming from Muslim traders (unlike the Christian Satan the Muslim Shaytan is redeemable so the polarity is less and the greatest sin for a Muslim is Shirk or idolatory) and especially Christian missionaries. The result being two branches from an original source being reunited and fertilizing each other into new forms.

Another aspect is that if Africans were seen by the Christians as somewhat less than human or at least less advanced and so legitimate targets for exploitation and slavery and their social structures decimated by the slave trade etc then there was probably little opportunity for development and stagnation or even an accentuation of the old ways more likely. This may be seen in the SA townships where confronted by a formal Western economy to which they have until recently had only limited access there seems to be a tendency for old beliefs and customs and rituals and wc to become stronger - at least for a while.

On another matter there is a very pleasing isomorphism between the contents of many myths and some aspects of modern physics.

In most cultures the dragon seems to be a symbol of the danger of return to chaos to the undifferentiated, and formless. This is very reminiscent of the concept of entropy and the second law of thermodynamics.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

In contrast, the gods of fertility, creation, and inspiration are in their function the negative of entropy, ie information. Information and entropy are two sides of a coin, increase information and you reduce entropy; increase entropy and you reduce information. The equations that describe them are basically the same.

On Sunday, January 5, 2003, at 06:29 , Norman N. Miller wrote:

Thanks for your emails...Im working on them.

N.

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Fri Feb 13, 2004 02:58:47 Europe/London
To: Miller Norman <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject: further thoughts

Norman,

? To clarify what I think the relation between what I call the foundation or basal belief system and witchcraft to be, think of the relation of a mental illness to normal psychology and the content of mind.

Take the case of a psychotic illness, paranoia, or major depression. These are generally considered to be episodic and distinguishable from ordinary healthy mental processes. However, the form or `clothes' that they present with will reflect the culture and beliefs of the time in which they occur. Hence paranoid beliefs often incorporate and are built upon the science and technology of the time - being bugged by radio and having miniature radio transmitters inserted in brains or teeth are unlikely to have occurred to paranoid sufferers of earlier centuries. Depressive delusions also reflect contemporary attitudes and anxieties - it used to be very common but is now rare for patients to present convinced that they had committed an unforgivable sin and were doomed to eternal damnation. In the past guilt was common now I suspect it has been superseded by shame (shame is in the eyes of the community, whereas with guilt you are condemned by yourself and in your own eyes). A psychoanalyst from whom I learned a great deal, suggested that the reason that modern people were less likely to feel guilt was that few were morally mature enough to experience such an emotion. And in the case of Near Death Experiences, whereas

today the predominantly American accounts are overwhelmingly positive - peace, joy, beauty, loved ones - according to an interesting historical account by Zelecki, that for some reason although published by Oxford UP is not at all well known , the experiences of earlier periods and the Middle Ages were very much more dark and demonic.

* Hence I think of witchcraft as being like episodes of social illness that develop on the foundation of what is a normal, traditional, or pre-scientific belief system - but is distinguishable from it. This includes beliefs and explanations that we, with the wisdom and arrogance of our recent scientific successes, are tempted to dismiss as unscientific or magical, But it has to be remembered that these have been and still are overwhelmingly the most common explanations that have helped humans to come to terms with their environment. And they may still be more effective in dealing with psychological matters than modern scientific psychology or sociology that is relatively not nearly as effective as physics and biology.

So, if I am right, then in your first chapter what you should think of doing is presenting the reader with an account of the differences and similarities in the world views of traditional and scientific belief systems - from the position that each is an attempt to understand and predict and control events. The scientific being disenchanted and mechanical, the traditional enchanted and organic (saturated with life and minds).

I could make a list of what I consider the key features and how they are related.

d

I have neither the time nor the mood for much writing. I am also somewhat concerned that I may be trying to shift the center of gravity of your project too far towards my own interest in notions of the self or individuality and how these have developed throughout human history. Also a linked interest in the notion of property in the context of my work with Hernando.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

* From my point of view I believe that notions of witchcraft are closely associated with the side effects of the economic changes that followed the development of agriculture and the shift from hunting and gathering, and to a lesser extent herding, to settled farming. These effects were particularly changes in the linked notions of property and the individual - alienable property presupposes the existence of owners and these have increasingly been individuals. Also, any individual self or alienable property presupposes language as it can only exist as a description. And witchcraft too presupposes the existence of language and could not exist without it.

** It is also important in thinking of witchcraft to remember that it is not a thing or a substance but a process that exists as a dynamic tension between different components and to discriminate between the background conditions that it requires, the fundamental processes that motivate it and set it in motion, and the later elaborations that account for its more bizarre and baroque ornamentations. By this I mean that, if I am right in considering that witches are created out of the confrontation of an authority and a perceived threat to its existence, this will be clearest only in the earlier stages of its development and triggers a process that rapidly leads to elaboration and increasing complexity that takes on a momentum and life of its own. Among the more unfortunate effects of this has been a tendency to focus on the witch as primary rather than the process out of which the notion emerges as a secondary phenomenon.

There are three main approaches to witchcraft that appeal to differing temperaments and failure to distinguish between them can lead to confusion and confounded expectations. These are:

1. Witchcraft as practice. This tends towards a religion like Wicca and has the psychological benefits of religious practice - an explanation for troubling events and rituals to reduce anxiety .

2. The mechanisms used by witches. This appeals to those who seek wonders and are dissatisfied by what they perceive to be the reductionism of modern science. They tend to focus on the content of beliefs and any alleged phenomena that scientific orthodoxy excludes or is unable to accept.

*3. The functions of witchcraft within society. This approach is that of most anthropologists and social scientists. It is less concerned with the ontological status of phenomena and focuses

not on the content but the consequences of beliefs and practices and the role that they play in the functioning of the society.

It is probable that 1 and 2 which are not exclusive account for most of the interest in witchcraft and the majority of books written about it.

The following model of the origin and development of the idea of witchcraft can best be understood in terms of a timeline of human development divided into three principle stages the middle being further subdivided into two or three substages. The timeline starts with the nature of hunting gathering societies and ends with that of modern science - especially the nations of the North Atlantic rim and those whose worldview has been influenced by them. These extremes bookend a transitional phase divided into two or three stages, and it is during these that the phenomenon of witchcraft emerges and becomes elaborated.

The best way to illustrate the relations between the different stages would be by a table comparing and contrasting the differences in terms of a number of headings. The following are suggestions:

?
Size =
Cosmology =
Ontology =
Mechanisms = How the world works
The nature of the individual =
Property =
Social Structure =
Leadership =
Justice =

I think that the approach I outlined to you earlier today has the greatest potential so far. It addresses a number of issues and is both comprehensive and coherent. Remember that there are very few original ideas and what we are concerned with is how best to repackage and re-present the old. In this case we are shifting the primary focus from witches to witchcraft and from individual to the community.

The following notes define the context and the processes that I think are involved.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Witches are not primary but secondary - they are not causes but effects of witchcraft.

Many, if not most, accounts of witchcraft take the existence of witches as the primary focus and are then forced into treating the surrounding phenomena of witchfinding and `legal' processes as a reaction and secondary. In other words there would be no witchfinding without witches. This is reinforced by defining witchcraft as causing harm by magical means. The contradictions that are implicit in the notion of magic and the occult encourage the view that witches exist and are the primary focus. They also attract, like blowflies to carrion, those who are titillated by the idea of the occult and hope that the mechanisms that witches alleged activities imply may force a rethinking of what they perceive as the rigid and reductive boundaries of conventional sciences.

* Witchcraft and witches coevolve and together make up a spontaneously emergent structure of beliefs and institutions.

What is necessary to account for the origin of a phenomenon may not be necessary to explain its survival. Once conjured into consciousness it may find new functions that are sufficient to maintain and sustain it.

One of the problems with the usual formulation of witchcraft is that by focusing on beljef it encourages preoccupation with the empirical status of the content of the belief - its truth, falsity, or scientific plausibility.

* It mav be more productive to think of witchcraft as an established phenomena not in terms of belief, or an attitude to a propositional content that can be true or false, but rather simply as a topic of shared interest that brings people to communicate with each other and increases the overall flow of information in the community.

* There are many examples of this kind of process in modern western culture. To find them one has only to make lists of the range of magazines offered by newsagents, the special interest clubs and societies, or the newsgroups (usenet) available on the internet. And though some of these may be based on beliefs that

may or may not be scientifically plausible or testable that does not appear to be a major requirement nor is their success dependent on it. What sustains them is simply that the topic that describes them is of interest to a large number of people.

Better therefore to consider witchcraft as a group phenomena made up of fans, or followers, or supporters rather than believers. And this suggests the question - not 'how can any sensible person believe such tosh?', but 'why would any educated person follow Arsenal?' or be fans of Madonna?'. The key question is not about hard science but allegiance and membership.

Vansina's approach to witchcraft seems entirely compatible with mine and might be broken down into the following parts - that are not intended to be exclusive:

Worldview - `everything is full of spirits'.

* A prevailing worldview that explains how the world works in terms of living agents - ancestors, spirits, demons, gods etc. This implies also that the world of witchcraft is a wider world than that of modern science. In Classical Chinese `The World' as shijie is expressed literally as `the boundaries between one's generation and the tradition'. But the world of witchcraft, or the world of explanations about how it works includes the wider tradition.

Community vs. Individuality (from fields to particles)

A tension between an older sense of community and sharing and a probably more recent new emerging notion of individuality accompanied by its implications about property and economic inequality and prosperity that favours only a minority. This probably coincides with the development of surplus farming and markets and perhaps a change in the primary use of language. It is also manifest in a variety of ways and structures including not only economic inequality but hierarchical power relations.

It represents a shift from a view of the self as one with the field of forces that is the community to the self as a lonely particle - atoms that have to be bound into molecules by external social contracts and rules.

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Evil is harm done by one person against others. It is always embodied. It must be distinguished from bad things like

accidents or disasters - though this may be more significant for us. In contrast bad things or kakia (that which one would prefer to avoid) is disembodied - like floods and famines and earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Though it is arguable that the distinction is weaker in most societies where what we would consider the random effects of physical processes are explained by living agency (even if some of the agents are dead).

Witches may not act alone, may not be self-sufficient?

Although some witches may be considered powerful enough to cause harm by themselves, I suspect that most are considered to require the assistance of more powerful spirit helpers e.g. the European witches got their power from the devil whose agents they were.

The development of a victimarchy (a sense of being vulnerable and becoming a victim)

- Self-fashioning is always though not exclusively in language (witchcraft would not exist without language)

- If both the alien and authority are located outside the self, they are at the same time experienced as inward necessities, so that both submission and destruction are always already internalized.

- ... the alien is always constructed as a distorted image of the authority.

- The power generated to attack the alien in the name of the authority is produced in excess and threatens the authority it sets out to defend. Hence self-fashioning always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, some loss of self.

... any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss.

* The template of treachery and treason

* When the field of community has been replaced by the particles of individuality then the possibility of treason against the newly constructed society becomes more threatening.

And perhaps for linguists -

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

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But - and it is a BIG BUT

* A question that neither I, you, or what I have seen of Vansina's work, seems to answer is whether witchcraft is a universal phenomenon or local to specific times and places? And if it is universal why has it attracted so much more attention in some places and historical times than others? Principally C15- C16 Europe and Africa to the present day?

The problem is that the characteristics that I have listed above are almost certainly universal and common to all cultures. The only one that might account for local effects would be the tension associated with the emergence of the notion of the individual and the decline in a sense of community. That might account for witchcraft phenomena being a frontal system like electric storms that are associated with transitions rather than equiibria. However, I am not sure that that is sufficient.

* What seems to me to be essential if you are to pretend to explain and interpret witchcraft is to try and settle the question of whether witchcraft occurs in all societies at least occasionally. And the corollary of why it is reported and considered more important at some times and in some places than others.

I do not think that you have any choice but to do some comparative research looking for manifestations of witchcraft in India, China (East Asia Confucian including Vietnam, Korea, Japan etc), Native America, etc. And to establish similarities and differences.

? One way of looking at the problem might be to compare it to different societies relation to substances of abuse. Alcohol and drugs can cause harm but attempts to regulate their use and prohibit them are always unsuccessful and on the whole do far more harm than good. In attempting to reduce one kind of harm one (to individuals) causes others (to the fabric of society - organized crime, terrorism etc). As you found with prohibition and we have all found with opiates. See Berridge and Edwards `Opium and the People' Yale UP and Berridge alone for the 2nd edition. This is a fascinating account of the history of opiate use in UK where it was legally available and widely used until about 1914.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

* The point I am making is that witchcraft-like social mechanisms may be endemic in all societies and only becomes epidemic when attempts are made to control them through the invention of formal legal mechanisms. Left as informal they may do much less harm?

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Sat Apr 24, 2004 05:47:04 Europe/London
To: Miller Norman <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject: revised figures

Region	Witch	Shaman	Population M	w/m	s/m
Europe	158	49	730	0.22	0.07
A&P	59	10	30	1.97	0.33
Asia	105	319	2400	0.04	0.13
America	58	260	835	0.07	0.31
Africa	215	30	800	0.27	0.04
India?	105		1000	0.11	
Melanesia?	55		6.5	8.46	
correlation	-0.41			0.56	

Remember these figures are for publications about witchcraft or shamanism in these areas not actual incidents - they are an indicator of relative interest more than of possible prevalence

The figure for witches in Asia is probably almost entirely due to South Asia and mostly India

* The figure for A&P is due to an unusually high number for witchcraft in Melanesia for which it is an underestimate as the population base used is for the whole of Oceania (30M). Referenced to that of Melanesia (6.5M) it is 8.46. Small area very popular with anthropologists??

It seems to me that the evidence suggests that witchcraft as a phenomenon studied by anthropologists is most common in Europe (past) Africa and to a lesser extent India and South Asia. Melanesia is exceptional.

But the following questions remain. What is the relation of Witchcraft to Shamanism and how much do they overlap? And is the exceptionally high interest in witchcraft in Melanesia a

function of the number of investigators/studies or does it suggest that other areas might have the same levels but been relatively neglected by academics?

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Fri Apr 23, 2004 17:29:12 Europe/London
To: Miller Norman <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject: from anthropological index online 1957 - 2003

Anthropological Index Online
witchcraft or witches or witch
1957 - 2003

The regional classification is rather uncertain and inconsistent as the numbers don't add up

Africa 176
N africa 4
E africa 26
W africa 71
Central africa 14
Southern africa 53

Europe 82 (most of phenomena are historical)
UK 25
W europe 13
E europe 14
W Mediterranean 16
Mid and near east 4

Asia 27
S asia 24 (includes india)
SE asia 11 (probably duplicates south)
Central asia Far East 3 (includes china)

Melanesia 29
Australasia Pacific 0
australia 4
micronesia 0
NZ polynesia 2

Americas 1 (62)

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

N america 32
S america 19
Central america 11

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Fri Apr 23, 2004 12:58:50 Europe/London
To: Miller Norman <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject: more figures

My overwhelming impression is that witchcraft-like beliefs are probably endemic but have reached an accommodation or equilibrium with the rest of the culture and so are unremarkable except in countries dominated by or overtly influenced by northern european christianity and a legal system that had demonized and criminalized them and which was then exported to the colonies.

The figures added are from searches on witchcraft and countries using Abe Books database. The UK, France, Germany, and America are far and away the most represented - I suspect language may play a part here as Abe may not have a representative list of foreign language titles that would be too specialized for UK/USA general readers - but what is odd is how few there are for specific African countries or peoples other than the Azande. What seems to be happening is that most books are general accounts at continental or regional level, or are very specific to tribes and peoples and too specialized to result in a book. I think small academic monographs are unlikely to find their way into this database. It may also be that the work of academics is much more local in focus and leaves large areas unexplored. It is often the case that what in science looks like a even swathe of information - like the milky way turns out to be like individual stars with huge areas of darkness between them.

There is also nothing from holland belgium or the low countries which may match the relative lack of material from Indonesia and the Dutch East Indies.

Greece seems unusual - especially as it is Eastern Orthodox as is Russia which has 0.

wc + africa = 96000/98 (12/87) (7163)
wc + europe = 144000/766 (45/217) (8971)

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

wc + india = 118000/32 (1/22)(6838)
wc + china = 110000/6 (0/0) (6621)
wc + indonesia = 24000/2 (0/0) (1726)
wc + malaysia = 12000/3 (0/0) (1272)
wc + asia = 58300/19 (1/38) (5836)
wc + micronesia = 2650/0 (0/0) (284)
wc + japan = 132000/0 (0/0) (4899)
wc + islam = 47200/0 (0/0) (3253)
wc + muslim = 25700/0 (0/0) (3485)

Abe titles
england 558
scotland 46
wales 7
ireland 15
france 40
germany 11 (germany was until the 19th century a mosaic of more than a hundred tiny princedoms)
italy 1
spain 1
portugal 0
greece 17
iceland 0
america 67
mexico 0
peru 0
brazil 0
kenya 1
kikuyu 0
tanzania 1
azande 42
pakistan 0
yuglslavia 0
croatia 0
serbia 0
russia 0

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Fri Apr 23, 2004 10:36:22 Europe/London
To: Miller Norman <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject: prevalence of wc in different regions

In an attempt to find out how common witchcraft phenomena might be in other parts of the world I have been doing some rather

crude research using Google and the Amazon (UK and USA) and Abe books databases. Whereas Amazon searches on books in print Abe Books includes second hand and hence out of print titles. There is also a difference between the search tools for Amazon UK and USA. In UK one can search on titles that include several different terms. In the USA because many books have their contents indexed one can search on books whose contents contain the several terms used - hence the results of Amazon USA are more like those of Google.

This would be easier as a spreadsheet but here is the explanation.

1. To the left of the = are the two keywords used for searching (witchcraft + africa etc).
2. To the right of the = is first the results of a Google search for sites that contain both the keywords. As you will know from using Google this is always an inflated figure that includes lots of irrelevant results. So I next searched Google for pages that included the keywords in the title and as you will see this dramatically reduced the numbers of hits. The Google results are given as Sites containing the keywords / keywords in title only.
3. The figures in the first set of brackets are for the results of search for keywords in the title of books listed by Amazon UK which are in print or recently so / And those listed by Abe Books that include books that are out of print but available second hand.
4. The second brackets contain the numbers of books listed by Amazon USA that contain the keywords in their text. Hence these are closer in kind to those of a simple Google search.

key1 + key2 = Google text/title, (in book title Amazon UK inprint/ Abe all), (Amazon USA in contents)

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Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Of these figures the ones I consider most informative and meaningful are the Google title (after the forward slash) and those for Amazon UK and Abe - books with the keywords in the title.

They suggest strongly that the only areas that have considered witchcraft significant enough to merit a book or titled paper are Europe, Africa, India and/or Asia (I suspect that you would find that most of the results for Asia referred to India). The large numbers of Google hits almost certainly consist of weak links based on a context of a general interest in the occult and mysticism.

Given the size and importance of China and its long history of study by sinologists it seems remarkable that there do not appear to be any books published on witchcraft there.

They also suggests that there is probably a link between witchcraft and christianity as the African and Indian continents were colonies of European Christian countries. I have not been able to find a significant link to the Dutch East Indies but there may well have been a different relation there between the Europeans and local population? Is there any evidence for differences in prevalence within Africa between areas colonized by different European countries?

The figures for Europe and Africa are certainly underestimates as they would be vastly increased by considering witchcraft in relation to individual countries, peoples, areas - these would be more likely to appear in the titles of academic papers than more general regions like Africa e.g. Azande.

It would be worth finding a good researcher who could access more detailed databases and produce more reliable results.

Finally these are not for publication as they are only an informal preliminary attempt to validate the view that witchcraft is largely a European and African phenomenon. They are a pointer to a more meaningful study.

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Thu Apr 22, 2004 14:51:16 Europe/London
To: Miller Norman <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject: vansina fax

Vansina's approach to witchcraft seems entirely compatible with mine and might be broken down into the following parts - that are not intended to be exclusive:

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Worldview - `everything is full of spirits'.

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Community vs. Individuality (from fields to particles)

A tension between an older sense of community and sharing and a probably more recent new emerging notion of individuality accompanied by its implications about property and economic inequality and prosperity that favours only a minority. This probably coincides with the development of surplus farming and markets and perhaps a change in the primary use of language. It is also manifest in a variety of ways and structures including not only economic inequality but hierarchical power relations.

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Evil as embodied.

Evil is harm done by one person against others. It is always embodied. It must be distinguished from bad things like accidents or disasters - though this may be more significant for us. In contrast bad things or kakia (that which one would prefer to avoid) is disembodied - like floods and famines and earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Though it is arguable that the distinction is weaker in most societies where what we would consider the random effects of physical processes are explained by living agency (even if some of the agents are dead).

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Although some witches may be considered powerful enough to cause harm by themselves, I suspect that most are considered to require the assistance of more powerful spirit helpers e.g. the

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

European witches got their power from the devil whose agents they were.

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This is probably a function of two related factors.

First a developing sense of justice in which a primitive internal sense of empathy, which helps bind small family groups into larger bands, is being transformed into a more rigid and explicit external rule based system. I am inclined to think that this is what makes communities dominant over individuals. The problem being that it may not scale easily to larger groups and so empathy has to give way to rules which do. This is associated with individuals considered morally responsible and culpable.

Second, a primitive sense of paranoia. This too seems associated with a sense of individuality. In his book on `Renaissance Self-fashioning', Greenblatt, suggests that the sense of the self (or individual) as something that can be fashioned rather than given and taken for granted arises out of the confrontation of an authority and an alien. He lists a number of characteristics of the process that include:

- Self-fahioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien strange or hostile. This threatening Other - heretic, savage, witch, adultress, traitor, Antichrist - must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed.

- One man's authority is another's alien

- Self-fashioning is always though not exclusively in language (witchcraft would not exist without language)

- If both the alien and authority are located outside the self, they are at the same time experienced as inward necessities, so that both submission and destruction are always already internalized.

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First a developing sense of justice in which a primitive internal sense of empathy, which helps bind small family groups into larger bands, is being transformed into a more rigid and explicit external rule based system. I am inclined to think that this is what makes communities dominant over individuals. The problem being that it may not scale easily to larger groups and so empathy has to give way to rules which do. This is associated with individuals considered morally responsible and culpable.

Second, a primitive sense of paranoia. This too seems associated with a sense of individuality. In his book on `Renaissance Self-fashioning', Greenblatt, suggests that the sense of the self (or individual) as something that can be fashioned rather than given and taken for granted arises out of the confrontation of an authority and an alien. He lists a number of characteristics of the process that include:

- Self-fahioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien strange or hostile. This threatening Other - heretic, savage, witch, adultress, traitor, Antichrist - must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed.

- One man's authority is another's alien

- Self-fashioning is always though not exclusively in language (witchcraft would not exist without language)

- If both the alien and authority are located outside the self, they are at the same time experienced as inward necessities, so that both submission and destruction are always already internalized.

- ... the alien is always constructed as a distorted image of the authority.

- The power generated to attack the alien in the name of the authority is produced in excess and threatens the authority it sets out to defend. Hence self-fashioning always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, some loss of self.

... any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss.

The template of treachery and treason

When the field of community has been replaced by the particles of individuality then the possibility of treason against the newly constructed society becomes more threatening.

And perhaps for linguists -

Tradduttore traditore = `translators are traitors'

But - and it is a BIG BUT

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

A question that neither I, you, or what I have seen of Vansina's work, seems to answer is whether witchcraft is a universal phenomenon or local to specific times and places? And if it is universal why has it attracted so much more attention in some places and historical times than others? Principally C15- C16 Europe and Africa to the present day?

The problem is that the characteristics that I have listed above are almost certainly universal and common to all cultures. The only one that might account for local effects would be the tension associated with the emergence of the notion of the individual and the decline in a sense of community. That might account for witchcraft phenomena being a frontal system like electric storms that are associated with transitions rather than equiibria. However, I am not sure that that is sufficient.

What seems to me to be essential if you are to pretend to explain and interpret witchcraft is to try and settle the question of whether witchcraft occurs in all societies at least occasionally. And the corollary of why it is reported and considered more important at some times and in some places than others.

I do not think that you have any choice but to do some comparative research looking for manifestations of witchcraft in India, China (East Asia Confucian including Vietnam, Korea, Japan etc), Native America, etc. And to establish similarities and differences.

One way of looking at the problem might be to compare it to different societies relation to substances of abuse. Alcohol and drugs can cause harm but attempts to regulate their use and prohibit them are always unsuccessful and on the whole do far more harm than good. In attempting to reduce one kind of harm one (to individuals) causes others (to the fabric of society - organized crime, terrorism etc). As you found with prohibition and we have all found with opiates. See Berridge and Edwards `Opium and the People' Yale UP and Berridge alone for the 2nd edition. This is a fascinating account of the history of opiate use in UK where it was legally available and widely used until about 1914.

The point I am making is that witchcraft-like social mechanisms may be endemic in all societies and only becomes epidemic when attempts are made to control them through the invention of formal legal mechanisms. Left as informal they may do much less harm?

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Fundamentalism Witchcraft Heresy and Treason

Hypothesis: There is a continuum from treason through heresy and witchcraft to fundamentalism. These have a common basis; the differences being accounted for by the situations in which they occur. We are most concerned with witchcraft and fundamentalism.

Fundamental Features
Reaction to change
Disenchantment (with new)
Fear (of annihilation)
Projection of threat
Nostalgia for old ways
Adapt old to new

Present as table?

The major differences between witchcraft and fundamentalism are related to the situations in which they arise.

Witchcraft has its epicentre in smaller local communities, although later it may become institutionalised and generalised to regional or even national scales by being taken up and exapted by central authorities. An example might be the relation of witchcraft and heresy in 16th 17th century Europe.

It occurs or emerges from a background of supporting and facilitating beliefs in reaction to significant social change. In Europe these changes were internal; mostly conceptual and ideological. In Africa the trigger was probably external; the impact of contact with alien peoples and cultures and political systems.

Changes of the types involved are unlikely to benefit the majority of people at the beginning, no matter what the long term advantages may be. For example, in Europe the epidemics of witchcraft accusations were related to the Reformation, The Renaissance, and the beginning of modern science. These would have been experienced by most ordinary people as threatening. In relation to religion there was confusion, fear, and a loss of certainty; the danger of eternal damnation increased, while defences and protection decreased. Instead of the security of the mediation of a priesthood believers found themselves naked

before a stern vengeful God. The practical benefits of science were still some way off and their interest as concepts not accessible to the general population. Whilst the individuality that was manifest by the Renaissace was not significant for all or everywhere.

For most people the past must have seemed more attractive.

And all the time people had to respond and cope with all the usual traumas and threats 'that flesh is heir to'. Illness accident epidemics natural disasters deprivations etc, that in the past would have been fitted into and explained by more familiar traditions. These would have been experienced most acutely in local communities. How could they respond?

The most likely would be to attribute blame to someone the question is who? Where an external enemy was already identifiable they might be a target. But for most communities they would be quite distant or remote and might not be seen as an obvious perpetrator of the kind of natural dangers that were most problematic; especially as it would be fairly clear that they too suffered in similar ways and were not immune. However, what they and the crime of Treason could provide is a template or prototype to which other more exotic characteristics could be added and elaborated.

Nor, in a hierarchical top down society could blame be safely attrituted to authorities. So the most likely victims or targets would most likely be the weak, odd, and marginalised. These might be considered causes of misfortune in ways that were consistent with and reaffirmed older traditions that as a result of being used in this way would themselves be changed and adapted to modern concerns. And this approach would offer elites and authorities ways of reaffirming their roles and status within their communities.

This interpretation would also seem to be consistent with the phenomenon in Africa.

And the model can also fit fundamentalism simply by shifting the epicentre of concern from smaller local communities in hierarchical political structures to larger modern centralised but shallower and democratic or quasi-democratic societies. Whereas in the smaller communities splitting into factions or groups would be destructive and not sustainable. In larger, the more likely outcome would be the formation of contrasting groups.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

This seems to be consistent with the evidence. Fundamentalism arises in situations of changes which do not improve the wellbeing of ordinary people and may be associated with a deterioration in their quality of life. They experience their identity as being further threatened by others who have perhaps benefited more from the changes and this at first internal projection of threat onto another part of the community is only later associated with external institutions or forces. This may be a way in which the potential for schism and civil war may be contained.

From this perspective fundamentalism can be seen as related to witchcraft, the major differences being in scale and degree of local variation in form. I suspect that the form of witchcraft or what became so-called began as much more varied and local and was shaped into its later pattern by the Inquisition and central authorities creating a legal, standardized, or orthodox narrative into which later cases were fitted.

The common pattern is
change
disenchantment
fear
projection within community
extrusion - external projection of threat
reaffirmation of tradition and adaptation or reinterpretation to accommodate changing times

NB this does not address otuer important aspects of fundamentalism most noteably devaluation of theory of mind and distrust of figurativs language and especially irony.

Norman,

This is an update of my fundamentals for witchcraft.

One of the changes is a reformulation of the importance of a Theory of Mind. In my original suggestions ToM is the basis for interpreting events that we would consider under physical laws in terms of animism or agency. That the world is made up from and works by psychological (wills and wishes and minds and desires and intentions) processes rather than physical (atoms and energy). I still believe that to be the case but in its modern non-occult form, in which Osama is treated like a witch, animism and ToM is no longer required. Indeed on the contrary such an isomorphism and the externalization of evil is only possible if there is an impaired understanding of ToM. A

tendency to explain differences in terms of universal categories or species rather than individual variations.

This raises the possibility that one way of considering witchcraft might be as the speciation of evil.

Fundamentals of Witchcraft:

1. A theory of mind that allows the interpretation of the world in terms of psychology rather than physics. Agents and will rather than atoms and energy. This is the basis of the pre-scientific view of how the world works. In the modern `scientific' view of the world it loses this function and if well developed would prevent the development of the whole witchcraft process. That this process is still so prevalent in the USA is an indication that somehow the inhabitants of that sad country have lost much of their humanity and are regressing into a more primitive stage of development.

2. A sense of fairness or injustice. A sense of balanced relationships and tit for tat and the detection of cheating. A corollary of this is an implicit sense of individuality that is a precondition for a sense of being a victim. This implies an ethical view that bad things should not happen to good people and good things to bad (this is Ehret's definition of evil - I consider it probably necessary but not sufficient)

3. A developed sense of evil: considered as the eternalization or speciation of evil. The projection of evil onto another considered as one of a different species. This is the sense implicit in the notion of treason as opposed to simple disloyalty.

With the projection of evil onto others one loses the interpretation of behavior in terms of individual psychology. This is what is happening in the USA today. Legislation designed to reduce politically incorrect ~isms has the side effect of shifting the projection from external characteristics (sex, `race', etc) of individuals to more nebulous categories that are only names rather than realities - in a sense it is anti-nominalistic.

There are two ways of interpreting events. First, the modern minority preference in terms of physical law. Second, the majority and older preference in terms of psychological agencies. But these agents are first understood as external entities that are causally effective. This makes it relatively

easy to migrate to a `scientific' interpretation in which animate agents are replaced by inanimate entities like atoms.

Hernando,

** Further to our conversation the following notes may explain the possibility that witchcraft may be an indication of an informal or extra-legal system of criminal law. The context is my interfering in Norman's attempt to write about African witchcraft. Norman has some reports from an African academic that indicate a gross mismatch between the number of serious crimes associated with belief in witchcraft and the number of prosecutions and convictions - in one region 3000 deaths and only 7 prosecutions or convictions. Although witchcraft is dismissed as `cultural', `primitive', `criminal', a problem of enforcement, etc. it is endemic in Africa and PNG and has a malign effect on the possibility of democracy, politics, and every aspect of life - including sport. It is also associated with a significant number of deaths, in addition to exile, torture and assaults. It is a delicate subject and needs to be approached as though walking on egg shells - but I wonder if it might be relevant to the problem of facilitating the rule of law.

My interest apart from that of hindering my friends work, is in the form of witchcraft behaviour which I believe to be discernible in modern societies where belief in witchcraft is uncommon and no longer part of the conventional wisdom. But also as side issue to my interest in conceptions of the self and individuality - one cannot have the idea of alienable property without the linked notion of an individual or legal person as owner - and related modes of thinking. Specifically the differences between China and East Asia and the West. I believe that there is a tension between two modes of thinking that can be referred to as analogical vs causal or logical. And that only the latter is associated with and helps to develop ideas of evidence and proof. But this is too complicated to discuss here.

The following are notes and the characteristics of hunter gatherers and the conditions for the emergence of withcraft are preliminary and would already be expressed differently. But they are not central to the main issue.

The documented cases of witchcraft may be no more than the tip of an iceberg that amounts to an extensive system of extra-legal or informal criminal law built around the notion of the witch as

a prototypical criminal. This is the result of an incongruity between the concerns that are the motivation for formal law and those of the majority of the population on which that law has been imported and imposed. This raises the question of whether the limited overlap between the formal and informal systems has been restricted and reduced by the general lack of formal property that might have been expected to provide a scaffolding of shared interest between the concerns of the majority and that of the formal law. And whether increasing access to formal property might function as a seed crystal from which a more general acceptance of the benefits of formal law could grow. This might be expected because the documentation and accountability associated with formal property systems are an illustration and example of the application of procedures for determining evidence and establishing proof and thus serve as models or prostheses for a kind of thinking that is not generally applied in the context of witchcraft related explanations, and on whose absence the persistence of belief in witchcraft depends.

Implications of the existence of endemic witchcraft beliefs are profound:

They make democracy extremely difficult and maybe impossible. This is because if there is widespread belief in the existence and power of witches then there can be no such thing as a secret ballot or any possibility that electors can make decisions independently and without fear of coercion.

Because of their nature the alleged phenomena attributed to witchcraft cannot be proved in the way that alleged crimes that are defined by a causal chain linking perpetrators and victims. Where such proofs are attested they are based on evidence of belief and consensus and hence social constructions rather than truly causal. They amount to politics without the checks hoped for in modern democracy.

A consequence of this is that the emphasis of extra-legal or informal criminal law is on the alleged harm and the victim rather than a proven crime. It is possible that recent trends in sentencing and approaches to criminal behaviour that give more emphasis to the needs of victims and tend to reduce the burden of proof required for `hot' crimes that attract public reactions have similarities to witchcraft mechanisms.

By this I mean to consider that a major distinguishing factor between formal and informal criminal law may be a standards of proof and causal chains linking alleged perpetrators and the

harm they are alleged to have caused. With an increased emphasis on reducing the victims suffering rather than establishing proof of cause.

.....

I am copying this to Hernando for information and in case it resonates with his experiences in the extra legal sectors - though the most relevant cases would be in Africa and hence prospective.

* All the evidence that I have found suggests that witchcraft is not a global but a local phenomenon unequally distributed in place and time. On the basis of the titles and keywords of published papers (in online database of The Anthropology Library at the British Museum - incorporating the former Royal Anthropological Institute library) it is in the present time most common in Africa and PNG and to a far lesser extent in South Asia (probably referring to India). It appears to be virtually absent in China, East and Central Asia, and the main Islamic countries. It also seems to be relatively unknown in the surviving hunting and gathering peoples. Whilst the extensive literature on Europe is historical and referenced to the period of the great witch hunts around the Renaissance and Reformation. Although it is possible that this distribution tells us more about the holiday preferences of anthropologists it would require too great a degree of cynicism to believe that would be sufficient to account for it.

My first hunch was that this distribution was a result of colonization by christian countries and the missionary activity that accompanied it and which in Africa had begun at a time when concern about witchcraft in christendom was far more intense than now. But that would not account for the lack of evidence in China where there had been quite extensive missionary activity. A more plausible explanation is that witchcraft seems to be reported most often from cultures that did not have writing and an established literature on philosophy and religion. As a result local practices and beliefs would be more susceptible to being perceived, interpreted, and redescribed in terms of a complex of witchcraft related concepts with which the colonizers were familiar. This did not create witchcraft but probably helped to shape it and the terms in which it was described and this in turn was passed into the system of formal laws that were imported and imposed from outside the community. And under the skirts of these laws was smuggled in an alien conception of what it is to be human and notions of truth, falsity, responsibility, and motive. It is not clear to what extent these were congruent

or compatible with the local or if any consideration was given to making them so. But, if there were noble intentions they failed and the result is exclusion and the existence of a massive extralegal system of informal criminal law that is only partially obscured by being described in terms of practical difficulties in enforcement rather than exclusion and coexistence or rivalry. What one is faced with is not the failure of a single coherent system of law, but the uneasy coexistence of parallel systems based on radically different beliefs about motivation and mechanism that can be traced back to differing conceptions of truth and individuality. And the question is if and how these can be reconciled. It would certainly seem to be substantially more difficult than reconciling informal and formal legal interpretations of real estate of the kind that Hernando has studied.

In what follows I am outlining some of the key ideas for Hernando's benefit but may not be giving sufficient detail to make them completely clear.

Witchcraft is a social construction and could not exist without spoken language. Although it is most commonly defined in variations of `harm done by magical means' that is misleading because in this context the notion of magic is not a description, but a value judgement that tends to distort perceptions in the same way that considering the extralegal sectors of the economy as `black markets' and problems of enforcement rather than exclusion. For the modern or `scientific' world view in which we, a minority both geographically and historically, take such pride is a very recent phenomenon largely of the North Atlantic rim and dating from the Enlightenment, and the modern sense of atheism is even younger dating from the mid C19. For the rest of time and for most people today `magic' is believed to be causally effective and how most of the world works. That is so for both witches and witchfinders and does not distinguish between them. And in the USA today more than 80% of the population claim to believe in a supernatural `God' and the `shape-shifting' of bread and wine into the body and blood of his son. Hence in order to understand the phenomenon of witchcraft one has to factor out the notion of magic - which is like water for fish. When that is done one is left with a structure of beliefs and practices that is to a large extent independent of specific mechanisms and whose form can be distinguished in cultures that do not accept magic as a legitimate part of the official consensus on which law is based. As an example consider the rhetoric about the `war against terrorism'. If you change all references to terrorism and terrorist to witchcraft and witch, and magic to WMD, you will

find something very close to official attitudes to witchcraft in C17 Europe - including the arguments for changes to the law and the waiving of due process.

This, pace you Norman, is what I believe the importance of witchcraft to be - not something alien and relevant only to other times and places and peoples, or the dustier corners of tenured academia, but here now and always with us - up close and personal. And why I believe that it is essential to identify its marks so as to recognize and avoid a structure of attitudes that like a strange attractor distorts perceptions and encourages exclusion.

What I am suggesting is an approach to witchcraft without magic and with the emphasis not on mechanisms or wonders, but on motives and morality, and a definition closer to that used by Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar in `Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa', `a manifestation of evil believed to come from a human source'. And further, the usefulness of exploring the possibility that witchcraft in Africa amounts to a system of informal criminal law that coexists uneasily and overshadows the formal one that originated in the colonial period and was shaped by alien philosophies and attitudes. Witchcraft persists in Africa because the informal and formal systems of criminal law are incongruous and out of alignment.

Bearing in mind the importance of distinguishing the origins from the later elaborations of the phenomenon, the approach I will take involves a shift from witches as the primary focus to being a secondary and contingent product of an authority that creates them. Witches are constructed out of the confrontation of an authority and events that threaten to expose it as impotent. To explain this one must consider the ontogenesis or developmental history of human societies. For certain implications of the notion of the witch suggest that it can only exist after human society has reached a particular stage of development and in quite specific situations. And that stage of development required for its origin is almost certainly greater than that needed for its subsequent spread and persistence. For once the notion has been delineated and elaborated it can be applied widely and find roots in much simpler societies. If those conspiracy theorists are right in believing that HIV originated in a laboratory it has spread very happily and killed millions without further technological assistance. And even if that is not so, others less paranoid have legitimate concerns that a new virus might be created in a laboratory and spread

throughout the world to threaten the very existence of human life.

The developmental context required for the origins of witchcraft includes, interlinked and in no particular order: a state of economic development that allows groups sufficiently large to require a dedicated ruler or ruling hierarchy with a `job description' that includes some responsibility for the well-being of the community; the notion of alienable property; the notion of individuality, or a self as in some sense more than being a unique part of a greater whole and with some emerging sense of an `inner' life that can be hidden from others; the existence of other communities in potential or actual competition for scarce resources; the notion of treason and a henotheistic awareness of spiritual powers associated with rival communities. The conditions required to create something are often different and more demanding than those for its survival and dissemination.

.....

The transition from foraging, or hunting and gathering, to settled farming had far reaching implications and effects. From an economic point of view it allowed the production of surpluses that made possible larger communities, encouraged the development of markets, and hence towns and cities with division of labour and new technologies. But in addition it led to changes in the way in which individuals and communities thought of themselves and interacted with each other, and it accelerated the realization of abilities that distinguished humans from every other species.

Now dependent on investing in the produce of a specific piece of land and in potential competition with others for scarce resources there was a choice between conflict or cooperation with an increased number of strangers - including neighbours, potential usurpers, and traders. Conflict would always be expensive diverting energy from farming and so the balance of advantage would be for cooperation and that would be facilitated by the ability to represent the thoughts and intentions of others - in other words a `theory of other minds'. That would provide a relatively secure basis for mutual trust and enable such fundamental institutions as centralized markets - without it might be imprudent for a land user to leave his plot unattended and require more time for its defense. An effective theory of other minds is the foundation of all social contracts.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

The existence of long distance trade in small transportable items, such as flints, sting-ray barbs, and shells, would already have suggested the notion of alienable property and that would be further facilitated by the production of surpluses, specialization, and the development of markets that could realize the benefits of what we know as Ricardo's law of comparative advantage. And the development of the notion of alienable property is inevitably accompanied, as the other side of a coin, by new ways of thinking about the individual - for property is meaningless without an owner, either an individual or legal person.

* In a hunting and gathering community the individual is conceived as a unique node in a network that constitutes the whole world, or gaia. With the move to farming that network world is demoted to one among many of similar kind. And with farming and the creation of alienable property the node tends towards becoming a container capable of owning property and with a boundary that can potentially hide the contents from others in the network. A new conception of the individual person or self is born apart from the network. Identity as a unique part of a whole, an ordered set of external relations, is traded for the free-floating individuality of a container with internal structure and relations, defined by its contents, and in competition with others as one among many. This is a slow process as the history of the self in the West demonstrates, nor is it inevitable as that of China suggests, but even if incomplete it creates tensions between the expectations associated with tradition and the implications of the new.

A scientific theory should be as simple as possible, but no simpler .-- AlbertEinstein

The problem with all forms of political incorrectness including racism is that it amounts to a judgement masquerading as a description.

Witchcraft Explanations
COMMON DEFINITIONS

I don't think I am really helping Norman with his book on witchcraft and if I were ever mentioned it would be along the lines of `... without whose help this book would have been

finished many years ago'. But I am certainly getting more out of it than he as it has helped me to focus on issues that have more general relevance.

What interests me is that if you strip away the occult associations with which the subject of witchcraft has become encrusted, you find a much leaner and more interesting phenomenon that could help us to understand many others- from all manifestations of moral panic, through `witch hunts' (the only phenomenon that justifies the notion), to terrorism, ethnic cleansing, and genocide.

Essentially the notion of the witch is used as an explanation for bad things happening, for all kinds of misfortune including accidents, illness and death. And it has acquired an occult aura simply because it was formulated in what I call an animistic culture where the world works and is moved by the whim of willful spirits rather than inert atoms that follow the strict rule of physical laws. The definition I use is simply that a witch is someone who is believed to have the ability and disposition to cause extraordinary harm. And the phenomenon of witchcraft is the whole structure of behaviors and institutions that develop in response to the fear induced by believing in witches as an explanation for bad things happening (kakia, or things that one would prefer to avoid). The focus is therefore on beliefs, or ways of representing and describing the subject, and hence is entirely in the eye of the beholder. Witches do not exist as a natural kind of being, but witch-believers, and witch-finders, and witch-hunters both exist and do real harm. Witches are social constructions.

This has resulted in a confusion between two usages of the term witchcraft: on the one hand witchcraft is used to refer to what witches (are believed to) do, on the other to what is done to or about (those who are perceived as being) witches. Most popular interest in witches is about what they do, whilst most academic studies are about what is done to them. And in cultures that believe in witches the common people feel threatened by them and are desperate for help from the law, whilst the formal authorities and legal system do not acknowledge the existence of witches and are concerned instead with the activities of witch-hunters.

The ordinary people experience their misfortunes as a mark and result of living in a world with witches who make them feel victims. From their point of view witches are criminals who should be punished and yet the formal, legal, law not only denies the existence of witches but prosecutes and punishes any

who seek redress. This incongruity is experienced as exclusion and can only undermine the rule of law and encourage the development of extra legal legal systems that seek to provide the protection and `justice' that the legal law denies.

But, what interests me particularly is that witches are an example of how behaviors and institutions and even great organizations can come into existence as a response to a misunderstanding, misperception, misinterpretation, or simply something that does not exist.

The distinction between a thing and what is done about it, has more general relevance although probably uncertain significance. It is the distinction between the characteristics of a motor vehicle and the reaction to its existence - the transport infrastructure that grows around it. It is the distinction between the poor and what is done about them. And although one would like to think that the stimulus and response, or object and reaction, were both causally and logically and proportionately related, the relationship is often complex and confused. The problem is that what we are dealing with are not naturally given kinds of thing, like planets or dinosaurs, but at least in part social constructs, whose nature is in large measure a matter of beliefs, desires, and interpretations - in other words of descriptions. This means that there is always the possibility of confusion and hence the link between object and reaction can be corrupted by either misinterpretation, or failures of reason, or both. At one extreme one can have, at least in principle, a relatively logical and coherent transport system based on motor vehicles, at the other complex structures of behaviors and tangible institutions based on belief in entities that may not even exist, or have been misinterpreted - such as witches, or the founders of the great religions.

The common theme is that there is often a mismatch of proportion, or scale, between an adverse phenomenon and the structures that develop as a response to it, whether as therapy or prophylaxis. In most cases the consequences are trivial or short lived, but in a few cases they become malignant and metastasize far and wide to threaten the whole body. The key to the process is that the malignant response is shaped by the way in which the provoking stimulus is described, rather than whatever reality it may have - which may, as in the case of witches, be none. In general, all institutions are based on descriptions which, if inappropriate, can obscure the reality of what they are all too easily presumed to describe. The existence of religion as great, tangible, organizations may suggest the existence of gods, but by the variety and vagaries of

description renders their reality opaque and distorted. And the institutions of aid and poverty too often distort and obscure the nature of the poverty. There is a confusion and often incongruity between the reality of the poor and the reality of the institutions that have developed to do something about them.

It might be argued that in writing EOS, by a process of re-description, you changed the relationship between the poor and what should be done about them. Before they were considered a problem, or burden, afterwards an opportunity. Before, the markets were on the defensive in gated communities for protection against being over-run by the hordes of passively dependent, or actively criminal, disadvantaged. Inside entrepreneurs were noble adventurers, outside scavengers, or criminal black-marketeers. After, the gates defended, not markets, but privileges and the disadvantaged became more like hunters and gatherers surviving as best they could in a hostile area of exclusion. In one sense nothing changed overnight, the gates still divided an inside from an outside and the poor were as poor as ever and still excluded. But the implications and the solutions had changed completely, what had been a problem of exclusion and law enforcement, became one of opening, or embracing, and empowering. What had changed was perception and interpretation, in other words descriptions. That is the basis of the distinction between what witches do (or are) and what is done about them. What they are, or are believed to be, how they are perceived, will determine what is done about them, and generally the link will appear proportionate, logical, and rational - so long as the description is accepted. The old lady accused of being a witch has none of the powers attributed to her but so long as she is believed to have them her life is chaff and a motivation and justification for the rationally structured institutions associated with doing things about witches. And maybe Jesus was just a regular guy whose existence had a butterfly effect that resulted in Chartres and the the Inquisition and the Requerimiento. Mistakes can have real and vast consequences. The foundations on which institutions are built are shared beliefs, not `realities' in any more substantial sense. There is usually a mismatch of scale between cause and consequence.

The great organizations that are ostensibly designed to do something about the poor, do not necessarily tell us anything useful about what the poor are really like. Most interpret and construct what they appear to treat. They are like distorting mirrors. And so it is in other fields, responses to terrorism, to certain crimes, to communism (in the past), and to rival ethnic groups. Witches are useful because they are an extreme

from of the phenomenon of complex responses to stimuli that have no independent existence.

Now I appreciate that much of this is commonplace and not at all novel, and yet I still think it is important because in so many cases the failure to establish a proper and proportional link between stimulus and response is simply excused. Programs to aid the poor fail to deliver, projects that are estimated to cost 1 million end up costing 20, the war on drugs fails to prevent the price dropping, the war on terror increases discontent and alienation, and there are always excuses based on technical issues, when the common fault is a misinterpretation of evidence and a dissonance between the reality and the perception of what is needed.

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Bruno Latour and ANT

I think that Bruno Latour may have something useful to say to us, though this is clearer in the books that came after `Pandora's Hope'. In particular, `We Have Never Been Modern' may be about the kind of issues that interest me in the `failure' of the Enlightenment, and `The Reassembly of the Social' may have something to say about the notion of culture (though not mentioned specifically).

In recent years he has been associated with the development of Actor Network Theory, or ANT for short. This is fairly typical Continental obscurity, but there seems to be a core of utility. I have not yet got to grips with it (I only got it yesterday), but he seems to be suggesting that the social sciences have tended to treat the notion of the social as if it were a tangible thing, like wood or metal, that could be used to explain phenomena that other sciences could not - hence social (or socio-) this that or the other. Which seems to me rather like the way that the notion of culture is used by some of your critics, both as a phenomenon and an explanation for other phenomena like poverty or prosperity. Instead he suggests that the social sciences should go back to an earlier view (he mentions a French jurist and thinker called Gabriel Tarde) that did not start from the presumed pre-existence of social groups, but instead studied the multitude of ways in which actors (which can be non-human - he coins the term actant) form flexible and changing associations. My suggestion would be that from the point of view of the `culturist', culture was rigid and monolithic and sacred, whilst from an ANT perspective it was more like an emergent and variable phenomenon based on the

associations that our tools for thought, the prosthetic extensions of our mind, allow. In other words the social, or culture, are cannot be used as explanations but are themselves what requires explanation.

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What interests me about witchcraft is that it is an example of how structures and institutions without obvious end can develop from nothing outside the imagination or fantasies in the minds of men. In so many cases they grow out of what is in effect an emptiness - an empty set. Like one of these mints with a hole in the centre - the POLO principle. And the question that bothers me is whether

Aside: There is a fundamental notion in biology on which the whole of life depends, the semi-permeable membrane. This is a membrane, separating the inside of a cell from the outside, that allows substances like chemicals to pass more easily in one direction than another, and some to pass more easily than others, if at all. They are analogous to customs barriers and gates.

Closed and Open systems
Economies of obligations

When progress is blocked by mechanisms of exclusion then there is regression towards universalism - the search for the mirror of yourself and if it is not found then the perception of an alien

Cosmopolitism and ToM vs Universalism and bipolar reasoning?

The problems that have led to so many words being written about witchcraft without coming to a conclusion is due to the following confusions.

First, the almost universal tendency to focus on the material body of the witch as a natural kind of thing distinguishable in some way from other bodies. Even works that claim a functional and social approach seem to think that witches exist in some physical sense.

The most that can be said of the witch is that it is a name for a space on a map or a node in a network diagram. In other words it is socially constructed role that is waiting for a player.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Second, failure to distinguish clearly between three overlapping and related notions: the witch, the sorcerer, the shaman. These terms are not ideal because they have acquired much irrelevant baggage and have not been properly defined.

Witches are abnormal people who are believed to have inherited a special ability, more a disposition, to control and use unusual means of doing harm. Their abilities are constitutional rather than acquired although they may be able to choose whether or not to use them. Traditionally their powers are internal but their function does not require this and they can be external. In Europe the external power came from the devil. In modern forms from access to WMD.

Sorcerers are technicians whose expertise is in the use of medicines. In this sense they are somewhat like modern doctors or healers. They use substances which may in themselves be effective in causing good or harm. However, their framework for understanding the efficacy of the substances they use includes rituals of various kinds, including spells, that are considered necessary to activate the medicine. They might be thought of as somewhat akin to alchemists and like them might evolve into more modern science.

Shamans or diviners are the oldest profession. Like witches their abilities are to an extent inherited. But what they inherit is a potential that can only be realized by experiences like illness and training. Whereas the sorcerer uses external substances to change outcomes the shaman uses themselves to travel in the wider worlds and seek help. Whereas witches are generally considered irredeemably evil, in the same sense as is implied by capital punishment western legal systems and other forms of retributive justice, shamans are predominantly good and helpful - even if scary.

Confusion between these roles and abilities has been further confounded by another almost universal distortion that arises from a tendency for anthropologists and related professions to present what are actually value judgments as descriptions. Essentially they assume that their own metaphysical assumptions are transcendentally true and contrast them with those of their informants who they perceive as either immature or deluded. This is understandable because they are attempting to model themselves on the hardest sciences like physics or chemistry where relativism is unacceptable. However, in dealing with socially constructed systems and epistemic universes relativity is what the subject is about. It is therefore necessary to bracket or factor out differences in belief and recognize

different interpretations about how the world works as alternative technologies. As Einstein reminded us "What does a fish know about the water in which he swims all his life?" (Einstein)

I think that one of our problems is that we have quite different views about the nature of the world and how it works. This results in misunderstandings and a tendency to talk at cross purposes. In an attempt to overcome this I will try and explain how I understand the world. But first I will try and describe how I think you do - if I am wrong then you must correct me.

I speculate that you believe in the existence of an external world, of which our brains and bodies are a part, and that our senses give us a pretty accurate impression of what the world is like: the relationship between the world and our mental representation of it being akin to that between a scene and a photograph of it. And in the same way memory is usually thought of as being like a photo or moving film of past events and in all ordinary circumstaces provides a reasonably accurate account of them.

Consistent with this view is that the meaning of any sentence is and should be the sum of its parts no more and no less, and for all serlous communication sentence-meaning and speaker-meaning should be identical. For that reason figurative language such as metaphor is suspect and may have no place in science: its only legitimate use being for fun and in the arts or entertainment.

A corollary is that as the world exists independently of any of our beliefs about it we can make theory-free or theory- neutral observations and draw logical inferences using either deduction, to draw out implications, or induction, to develop or discover, trends, generalizations, or laws, from collections of individual observations. And that deduction and induction are the only procedures required to build a scientific understanding of the world.

When Islamist leaders describe Bush and the USA as the `Great Satan' it is important to be aware of differences between the most popular view of Satan in the West and that in Islam.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

The notion of Satan or the Devil prevalent in the West and especially among fundamentalist christian sects in USA and UK is rather different from that in the Bible and has been distorted by late medieval ideas and elaborations that emerged during the great witchcraft epidemics of the 16th and 17th centuries. Many of the features of this more gothic devil are probably derived from the confessions of alleged witches made under severe torture. What they claimed and described were then incorported into the minds of the wichfinders and inquisitors and fed into the minds of the next generation of their victims.

WITCHCRAFT DEFINITION AND EXPLANATION

The aim of this exercise is to provide a coherent account of the witchcraft phenomenon. The approach taken is to consider witchcraft to have three components:
1. Bad events that induce feelings of anxiety and concern, usually amounting to fear, shock, and awe.
2. A doctrine, in the original sense of an explanatory or interpretive framework, that is believed to account for the phenomena.
3. Behaviors, roles, social structures and institutlons that are implied by and flow from the doctrine and evolve as a means of damage limitation, prophylaxis, and retribution for alleged harm. These secondary phenomena, and the events to which they are a reaction, are the only tangible manifestations of witchcraft and being context dependent and conventional are variable in form. From the point of view of ther overall concept these variations are trivial but unfortunately have been and still are the cause of much wasted time and thought. Like the notions of energy, gravity, capital, and property (and perhaps consciousness) witchcraft itself is invisible and intangible and known only through its manifestations and effects. It has a hollow centre and a nose of wax.

The True Nature of Witchcraft

Witchcraft is simply the most extreme and exotic manifestation of the common process that is the basis and motivation of systems of law. This identity and its real nature has been obscured by its form being shaped by three factors.
First, the social amplification of the perception of risk and the experience of danger.
Second, the belief in the existence of extraordinary powers - either innate or external and acquired.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Third, the context of a prevailing and dominant framework for interpreting how the world work that is intensely animistic. This, especially, gives witchcraft its more exotic features. However, these are superficial - like the pink of the flamingo or the decorations of a bower bird's nest - contingent.and a product of environment.

The characteristics of witchcraft are:
1. A forensic interpretation of harm and bad events.
2. A belief in the existence of extraordinary powers.
3. Social amplification of fear to terror with the generation of moral panic.
4. The animistic doctrine is not essential but gives the phenomenon its traditional appearance and makes it stand out from less extreme manifestations of the same process. The effects of animism are to greatly extend the realm of the forensic, make the dichotomy between the natural and forensic not exclusive, and encourage the belief in the existence of extraordinary powers that can be controlled by exceptional individuals. The result is a far less predictable world in which events are not determined by blind physical law but the whims of mindful agents only some of which have ever been embodied and enfleshed. The uncertainty that this creates make the world very scary.¬∏¬∏¬∏

January 21, 2005¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

Nature of Witchcraft¬∏

What is usually referred to as witchcraft is really nothing more than the most extreme and exotic manifestation of the ubiquitous process that has resulted in our notions of justice and law and the institutions that have developed from them. What makes it appear qualitatively different, and hence obscured its origin, is simply a matter of differences in motivation and context.

Our notion of justice and hence law is based on a fundamental classification of harmful events, according to whether or not someone can be held accountable for them. Those that are considered accidents of nature and for which nobody could reasonably be considered responsible I will refer to as natural - as in death by natural causes. Whilst those for which somebody can be held to account I will refer to as forensic - as in death by homicide or manslaughter. And it is worth noting that the notion of the self has to a large extent been shaped by forensic considerations. The result is a dichotomy between natural and forensic that lies at the root of all our moral judgements.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

The most important consequences of the distinction between natural and forensic events is to identify a large number of harmful events deemed to be the result of human action and to create institutions, such as the legal systems, designed to minimize them.

The number of forensic events and the intensity of the response to them will be a function of two factors: the perceived risk of harm, based on liklihood and scale, and whether the dominant framework for interpreting how the world works is atomic (scientific) or animistic.

In the context of the atomic, the natural and forensic will tend to be treated as mutually exclusive categories (related by exclusive or - XOR = x or y but not both x and y) whilst in the animistic context the natural and forensic can readily coexist (related by inclusive or - OR = x or y or y and y). This has the effect of increasing the relative numbers of forensic events and reducing those considered exclusively natural. And the size of the forensic category is further increased by allowing a far greater range of causal influences.

Within the category of forensic events a further sub-classification develops from a universal phenomenon referred to as the social amplification of risk, and its subjective complement, or obverse, the experience of danger. This refers to the observation that the subjective experience of danger and estimates of risk are often distorted and far greater or less than the calculated probabilities of the unwanted outcome. And social amplification can facilitate the escalation of ordinary anxiety into terror or dread and hence kindle moral panic.

The processes of social amplification and the generation of moral panics are fundamental to witchcraft transforming the ordinary forensic interpretation of events into something qualitatively different. In the forensic context - amplification can affect natural events - this usually occurs when the alleged perpetrators are considered to possess or have access to extraordinary powers. These can be innate - as the powers attributed to witches - or acquired - either by training or by gaining control of external weapons.

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January 21, 2005¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

Witch and magic¬∏

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Attitudes to witchcraft, like religion, lie on a continuum from
Disbelief = Atheism
Interest = Agnosticism
Belief = Acceptance
Those at the disbelief end if they are interested at all will be concerned with witchcraft as a social phenomenon. Those at the other will be primarily interested in the witch and what it is believed to be able to do - the powers that it uses.¬∏¬∏¬∏

January 7, 2006¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

Witchcraft as an example of disproportionate ¬∏reactlon - going beyond the evidence - and the consequences of belief. The facts are superfluous.¬∏¬∏¬∏

January 7, 2006¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

Witch definitions #02¬∏

From my scientific interpretation of the world I do not think of physics when I switch a light or start the engine of my car I just do it taking the science and technology for granted. Likewise for those who interpret the world in terms not of physics but psychology. For them the wonders of magic and the occult are simply the technologies of a world with spirits. And they are taken for granted as air or a fish does the water in which it swims. In order to understand witches one must demote the connection to the occult, hence it is not part of the core definition.

Witches vs Witchcraft¬∏¬∏¬∏

January 7, 2006¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

Witch contexts #01¬∏

In order to understand the definition of a term it is essential to know not only what it is but what it is not; to know how it is related to and differs from other similar notions. In the case of 'witch' the literature refers to at least three terms with which it might and has been confused :
witch
sorcerer
shaman or diviner
healer

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

The relations between them can be understood with the help of a simple two dimensional matrix showing the relation between two constructs - in Kelly's sense of a bipolar concept. One dimension is for the construct good - evil. The other for nature - nurture or inherited - learned which overlaps almost completely with unconscious - conscious.

This matrix results in 4 cells. These should not be thought of as exclusive, but as centers of gravity with fuzzy boundaries between them. In this scheme:
inherited - evil = witch
inherited - good = shaman
learned - evil = sorcerer
learned - good = healer

Those who have read EP will remember that among the Azande sorcerers are the users of evil magic, which is the use of substances and rituals - techniques that would seem to require considerable conscious training rather than, or in addition to, natural ability. And this is an appropriate point to discuss the notion of substances and how they are related to ritual.

In a modern scientific model of how the world works, based on the notion of inert atoms, abstractions like energy, and physical laws that are unresponsive to human whim - they can be worked with but not changed - the behavior of substances whether chemicals or poisons is, within known limits, independent of context. But that is not always the case in a world where the psychology of embodied and disembodied agents takes precedence over physical law. For although it is possible to conceive a world in which the behavior of such agents is more orderly, so far the folk psychology on which the dynamics of animistic societies are based is far less predictable than folk physics and chemistry. And even in our world folk psychology is still a better guide to the behavior of people in ordinary situations than most behavioristic models. To overcome this difficulty we have developed institutions such as laws and rules to regulate human behavior and make it more predictable. And in animistic societies ritual has a similar function, though it is a wider one as it has to regulate not only what we would accept as minds but also substances or things whose behavior we predict with our models of physics and chemistry.

In an animistic world substances as we understand them do not exist, because hardly anything is context independent. Instead the behavior of everything is exquisitely dependent on its context, which includes, not only its immediate setting, but the mental, spiritual, and ritual state of everyone involved,

whether user, recipient, or observers. In this world a substance without a ritual is incomplete and likely to be unpredictable or useless.

Much of the confusion surrounding the use of these terms is due to the fact that though distinguishing between them may be possible and seem meaningful to observers with a scientific agenda that may not be the case for their informants. For long before notions become encoded explicitly in context independent words they will have been emerging or burrowing slowly into consciousness, via tacit, non verbal, and distributed representations; manifested in rituals, dances, and visual artifacts that are experienced as having power that cannot be described in other ways. In that context prematurely explicit distinctions may well be destructive in the same way that higher criticism can be inimical to religious experience. What is meaningful to colonialists may be meaningless to the colonized. And we should remember that anthropology like amateur dramatics is usually more enjoyable and meaningful for the actors than their audience.

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January 7, 2006¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

DEFINITION

January 2, 2006¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

Summary¬∏

Having thought around this for some time I have come to the conclusion that the four fold distinction between witches sorcerers shamans and healers is best explained by two distinctions. First between inherited vs acquired or genetic vs learned - this also overlaps with unconscious vs conscious. Second between good and evil.

The precipitation of the four roles is a late and probably yet incomplete manifestation as it requires the distinctions to have emerged into consciousness and to be clearly articulated. I suspect that in the case of good and evil this requires a religious context that is monotheistic or approximates to duality and that in the case of Africa this was influenced and hastened by contact with European missionaries at a time that witch hunts were endemic in Europe. In contrast I think that an animistic polytheistic or henotheistic context would be incompatible with a markedly polarized and dichotomous

conception of good and evil. And the latter is greatly enhanced by the belief in evil being genetic or a function of nature rather than nurture. Our own legal system still equivocates between criminals being a natural kind and hence irredeemable and or a product of environment and learning and hence capable of rehabilitation.

Until these distinctions have become conscious the roles that they imply will remain tacit or implicit and the boundaries between them fuzzy and incomplete - for example one or other role, such as the witch, may be more salient than another. And they are also likely to be more apparent to outside observers like anthropologists than their informants within traditional societies whose behavior may imply distinctions of which they are no more conscious than a fish of the water in which it lives.

Another significant variable in clarifying notions of good and evil is probably the tranformation of a means of life from hunting and gathering to farming with all that flows from a much more settled way of life and dependence on specific scarce resources. This creates more complex social relations and dependencies that provide fecund metaphors that offer a basis for the projection of emotions onto others who are hence more likely to be pereived as alien and a threat. A breach of etiquette or taboo within ones own extended kin may be dangerous and upset the balance of nature but an external threat may threaten the livlihood and survival of a whole community. Rivallry between groups locked in a struggle for scarce resources creates the conditions for the emergence of disloyalty treachery and treason which share some features with witchcraft. Each being associated with changes in the conception of the self and individuality.

The notion of the witch is difficult to address because it is not in practice always clearly or consciously articulated from related notions that are part of the same conceptual matrix.

So, the twin dichotomies of good - evil, inherite - acquired form the basis of a four cell matrix that articulates the four possible roles of which the witch is only one. For these roles to become conscious and explicit implies a background evolution of new notions of self and individuality with accompanying changes in how interventions are focused on either external substances, in an animisitic (ritual magic) rather than atomic sense, or techniques for transforming the self, in other words internal state.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

What is important about witchcraft as an extra-legal system of criminal law is that it is in some, but not all, ways incongruent with legal law. And what is remarkable and hence noticed about witchcraft is a product of these incongruities or incompatibilities. If these did not exist witchcraft would not be an issue and hence would be invisible. The ordinary scientific view of the world is like the solar system, what witchcraft or the belief in witches does is throw in an extra planet that if it existed would change the orbits of every other. Witchcraft is delineated by the differences between the world of science and that with witches.

Important observation:
In one of Rodney Stark's books he suggests that in Europe the most intense witch hunts and most vicious punishments occurred in places where centralized authority was weakest. In other words the main source of energy driving witch hunts was local and peripheral.

Date: 15 November 2006
Topic: magic by any other name

Earlier I sent you a copy of something I wrote several months ago which included a discussion of several possible terms for `supernatural,Äô. I did not really like any of them and believe that when academics use them in relation to witchcraft they are at best unhelpful, in that they do not tell us anything useful about the matter, and more often are evidence of lazy and muddled thinking of a degree sufficient to deny or remove tenure. Never trust the judgment of anyone who makes magic and its near synonyms central to the discussion of witchcraft.

The problem is that all of these terms have accumulated extraneous baggage, like one of those improbably overloaded buses in India or Africa, that makes them unwieldy, unstable, and difficult to control. They also succeed in shifting the center of gravity of the subject and in doing so diverting attention onto irrelevant, peripheral, and accidental details. This makes it impossible to get a clear view of the matter and as always when confusion is created value judgments are too easily mistaken for descriptions of how the world actually is.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Terms such as magic are today (for their meanings have changed over the years) always defined with reference and in contrast to science and, more specifically, what scientific orthodoxy does not allow. Insofar as the scientific interpretation of how the world works is taken as true it is therefore almost inevitable that what is described as magical, supernatural, occult, or perhaps best praeternatural, is by implication not only not scientific but also irrational. In other words the allegedly magical phenomena are seen an unwarranted and irrational intrusions or additions to the rational scientific picture of the world. And when such beliefs are characteristic of ethnic groups that are disempowered, marginalized, and excluded, racist stereotyping is facilitated and well nigh inevitable. But that this is so simply reflects the fact that today power lies with the scientific view and the claims of the alternatives are discounted. In the past this was reversed and those who would later be described as scientists (a term that was only introduced in the C19) were persecuted and judged as heretics or worse. My father, who was deeply religious in an American evangelical way, considered Darwin to be one of the most evil men who ever lived, because he led sinners astray by undermining the truth of the Bible account of creation and thereby condemned many to an eternity of torment in hell. I doubt if such attitudes have changed greatly among the more fervent believers today. J K Rowling illustrates this relativism nicely in the Harry Potter books with her invention of the disparaging term `muggles,Äô for ordinary (scientific) folk who are ignorant, or do not believe in the reality, of witchcraft and wizardry. The terms magic et al have thus become little more than reflections of the relative power of different groups and cultures. Which is why the beliefs of Christianity, Islam, or any of the major religions are somehow considered less `magical,Äô than those about witchcraft. And how helpful would it be if an anthropologist, trying to understand how creation beliefs influenced cultures and behavior, were to classify creation `myths,Äô, including the `Big Bang,Äô, according to how mythical or magical she considered them to be?

I do not believe that one can really understand witchcraft if one starts by alienating it by the use of judgmental terms like magic or supernatural; for from within any culture anything that is allowed by its interpretation of how the world works is `natural,Äô. Hence from within the scientific world view germs as a cause of illness are natural, and from within a world view that allows witchcraft the things that witches do is not supernatural but natural. What terms like supernatural point to is not really specific kinds of events but judgments about a

completely different interpretation of how the world works. And for practical purposes there are only two, which I have described as being based on either atoms or agents.

The atom based, or scientific, interpretation of the world considers it to be made up of tiny, inert, inanimate, building blocks that interact and behave in accordance with physical or natural laws that are inviolable, unchangeable, and eternal. And, as a consequence of these features are completely uninfluenced by and independent of human will and desire. This is an inhuman materialistic and law based world that has only been empowered and privileged recently and locally, and within which the supernatural has no place that is not pathological.

Essentially it only came into existence around 1600 in Western Europe and spread mostly around the North Atlantic rim. But though it has grown steadily in influence, even today it is probably a minority belief (more than 80% of Americans claim that their life is influenced by `supernatural,Äô entities and what is essentially magic - in the disparaging sense) and even where it is strong and influential it cohabits rather uneasily with the other older world view. And more recently there are even signs that in the USA relatively at least its political power and influence may be waning.

In contrast an agent based interpretation of the world considers it to be made up of living entities, or agents, whose interactions and behavior is accounted for by what are essentially psychological processes, based on beliefs and desires. Instead of eternal and inhuman physical laws the rules that account for the apparent regularities and consistencies that make the world intelligible and life possible are considered more as conventions, customs, or habits devised and enacted by disembodied entities such as gods, spirits and ancestors. And in contrast to the strict rule of Physical or Natural Laws those of an agent based world are negotiable and can in principle be changed if one knows how to ask the appropriate entities. Essentially this is a world based on rules and laws that are in form like those created by men and enshrined in statutes. It is a world based ultimately on politics and politicians.

This view of the world has overall, in most places and at most times until recently, been the dominant one on which all cultures have been based. And though from the point of view of an atom based, or scientific, culture it could be described as `supernatural,Äô if such terms have any meaning within an agent based interpretation their sense or connotation is very

different and would approximate closely to what we regard as natural. In such a world entities like witches are allowed and can be influenced at least in principle by what are in effect technologies of an agent based world.

Technologies are simply the application of our understanding of how the world works in order to change it in a way we want and to attain predetermined goals. An atom based culture does this by working out the implications of physical or natural laws and then applying them to achieve its purposes - as when we use Newton,Äôs laws of motion to fire artillery shells onto a target, or arrange for spacecraft to rendezvous with a comet many years and millions of miles away. And an agent based culture does this, using what are essentially psychological and political means, by negotiating with entities that have sufficient power and influence to change the world in the desired way. But, though these may seem very different processes they are each no more than technologies appropriate to their respective world views.

What distinguishes witchcraft phenomena from scientific is not what witches are alleged to be able to do but the different interpretations of how the world works that are used by each; what is understood to be possible is what the dominant world view allows. Referring to one or other of these interpretations, or world views, as supernatural is as helpful as referring to baseball as supernatural or praeter-football because it is played according to different rules, and vice versa.

If instead, the reference, or extension, of supernatural is limited to the scientific world view it is either trivial, empty, or a value judgment and a synonym for the irrational or beliefs for which there is no evidence. Or, in terms of Popper,Äôs view of science, simply unscientific because it cannot be expressed in terms that can be clearly falsified and hence tested. The status of `supernatural,Äô phenomena are essentially like the Flying Spaghetti Monster (FSM) worshipped by the Pastafarians, or the existence of Russell,Äôs Teapot, too small and delicate to be detected by our instruments, but believed to orbit the Sun far beyond Jupiter. In practice, terms like supernatural mean no more nor less than unusual, unorthodox, extra-ordinary, or praeternatural. To paraphrase Wittgenstein,Äôs question: `what is changed by adding the predicate `supernatural,Äô to an event, or belief, or phenomena?,Äô.

That terms like `supernatural,Äô are little more than thinly disguised value judgments is demonstrated by the observation

that when they are applied to beliefs professed by a subset of the population within an overwhelmingly scientific culture, one in which an atomistic interpretation of the world has become the conventional wisdom, dominant authoritative consensus, or orthodoxy, and as such has power and privileges, then it has predominantly negative connotations. Yet when the conventional wisdom is religious or agent based, virtually the same terms, supernatural, magic, occult, etc, are also applied negatively to those who disagree or profess unorthodox beliefs. Hence, even though major religions imply an agent based view of the world they too abhor and even tend to punish severely witches, infidels, and heretics. What supernatural et al refer to is not facts about nature but about beliefs about nature, or to use different terms they are ways of describing doctrines, or features of reports rather than the the things reported (to borrow from Searle). These value judgments completely overwhelm whatever residues of description remain in the terms and make them at best useless for your purpose, and at worst dangerous. And, more specifically the definitions of witchcraft that take the general form of `harm done by magical means,Äô make little sense because magical et al are not terms that can be applied to means, but only to beliefs about means, and in any case the combination amounts to no more than `harm done by extraordinary (or unorthodox, unusual, praeternatural) means,Äô. In which case why not simply say that?

DEFINITION

March 1, 2005¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

Norman's Problem¬∏

He is desperately trying to treat his data as being good enough to construct a theory by induction - from 'facts' lying ready to hand. But all he has are informal anecdotes of dubious and uncertain provenance. These are fine as illustrations and aids to explication but only when related to a theory. And the theory must come first.

The core of science is not data collection or the construction of theories by induction. It is the invention of theories and

the testing of these against data that they reveal and that to a considerable degree is a function of them.¬∏¬∏¬∏

March 1, 2005¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù
Prescriptive vs Descriptive Law¬∏

Physical laws are descriptive and preceded by Prescriptive of which those extra legal like witchcraft are an example¬∏¬∏

March 17, 2005¬∏HdS¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

The witchcraft process¬∏

+ Something bad happens - something that causes concern and FUD
+ There is a need to find why
+ This amounts to the basic forensic questions - Has a crime been committed? If so who is responsible? What should be done about it? These are the questions to which wc is the answer. This is the kernel from which wc grows and everything else is a function of context or secondary effects.

+ The context defines:
= the alternatives considered possible and suggests mechanisms - the technologies that might be involved.
= it also determines the liklihood that a crime has been committed. In our culture whether a crime has been committed will be based on a consideration of two alternatives that are mutually exclusive the event was due to the action of either nature or human behaviour. But in a culture based on a spirit doctrine the natural causes - if they exist - will be much smaller and not mutually exclusive natural and criminal causes will overlap to a far greater degree. Hence innocence will be more difficult to establish and proof will be based on consensus and authority
The conditions that allow wc are not magic but a failure to maintain a clear distinction between natural and criminal behaviom and causation. This is why the core process can occur in any society

Factors that inhibit or constrain wc

March 17, 2005¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

Notes for Norman #1¬∏

Doctrines or Paradigms

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

To appreciate why I have introduced the notion of doctrines as frameworks for interpretation and consider them the key to understanding the nature of witchcraft you need to think of them not as passive frames - as for pictures or photos - but active processors of information. They take as input an unexpected event, that causes concern or alarm, and processes it (ie transforms it) into an interpretation in terms that the community will find acceptable and conforms to their expectations - that are of course also shaped by the same dominant doctrine.

Imagine demonstrating one of those Sony robotic toy dogs ?Aibo to people from different historical periods. In the middle ages it might be thought to be moved by demons, in the C18 by clockwork, in the mid C20 by valves and servos, and in the last few decades by microprocessors controlled by computer software. The point I am trying to make is that the 'scientific' explanations would not be available or meaningful to someone in the middle ages and the 'demonic' interpretation would not even be considered by most people in UK/USA today. And, to control the beast, in the middle ages one would seek the help of a priest or even a 'white witch', but today a software or hardware engineer. The demonic, like the witch, is a subset or subdoctrine of the animistic while the mechanical or computer is a subset of the atomic or scientific doctrine. In each case the overall, dominating, doctrine and its subdoctrines process the information and interpret it. Conceptual and social structures are really computing systems that process information and select those interpretations and explanations that are meaningful to the community. They determine what can be said and done in much the same way that syntax determines the permissible patterns of words, or the rules the permissible moves in a game like chess or Go.

To the extent that people in societies with animistic and atomic doctrines interact with the same things, which in practice means parts of nature (because in the atomic most interactions are now with man made artifacts) they are likely to make similar observations and learn HOW to do similar things, such as hunt, cook, grow, kill, etc and some will become expert in more specialised fields like toxicoloqy, but this will be knowledge by experience (or acquaintance) and HOW to do things. In contrast, these societies will differ much more dramatically in their preferred explanations of WHY things happen - in knowledge by description. In the case of the scientific it will be in terms of amoral physical laws often expressed in math equations. In the case of the animistic it will be in terms of the intent, will, and desires of various kinds of living and mindful agents

only some of whom are embodied and enfleshed. Another way of putting this is that the scientific doctrine is amoral and descriptive whilst the animistic is saturated with moral judgements, FORENSIC (identifies a culprit or someone who can be held responsible), and prescriptive. It answer the question WHY with a WHO (dunnit).

The behavior of, or changes in, the scientific world is the result of the MINDLESS interaction of atoms in accordance with physical law - and points to MECHANISM. That of the animistic is the result of the MINDFUL interaction of living entities in accordance with the vagaries of folk psychology (explains behavior in terms of the notions of belief, desire, and will) and points to and implies forensic RESPONSIBILITY.

And because the animistic and witch worlds are essentially based on forensic processes they are much more often and severely scary than the scientific. Physical law is much more consistent and predictable than folk psychology.

And the problem with changing witch related behavior is not like teaching someone better moves in chess, but changing the game being played to another such as Go.

¬∏¬∏¬∏

January 1, 2005¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

Notes for Norman #2¬∏

A good, or promising, way to think about doctrines is that they are less like hardware and more like software scripts. This can be in two senses. First, like the outline of a play that leaves lots of room for improvisation. Second in the sense of computer programs. Nowadays most of these are built by connecting standard (prewritten - off the shelf) modules (often called objects - as in object oriented programming systems or OOPS) together with scripts which are usually written in a higher level and more natural like language (Python, Ruby, PERL, etc., are much easier to read and understand than C or FORTRAN). These scripts are, however, just programs that transform inputs, such as fear inducing events, into outputs, such as explanations and prescriptions for action. And, as in that for a play, scripts contain roles that in the case of the witchcraft subdoctrine, or script, includes that of the witch as perhaps the principal producer of (motive force producing) bad things happening.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Within a world dominated by the animistic doctrine and its witchcraft subdoctrine the witch is considered to be as real and causally effective a force as gravity is in that dominated by the scientific doctrine and its physics subdoctrine.

The problem with most interpretations of witchcraft is that they are based on assumptions that are like a freshwater fish's understanding of the nature of water - fine so long as it stays in the fresh, but potentially lethal if it makes assumptions about the nature of the sea.¬∏¬∏¬∏

January 1, 2005¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

Doctrine or Discourse?¬∏

There is an overlap between my use of doctrine and some social science uses of discourse.
Doctrine = Metadiscourse?¬∏¬∏¬∏January 2, 2005¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùAmplifier or Multiplier? ¬∏Is there a link?
Multiplier = 1/(1 - MPC)
MPC = mean propensity to consume = Income - (saving + imports)

In case of rumour or transmission of panic there may be little equivalent of saving or imports. Perhaps scepticism or disbelief?
I warn you of danger - you tell more than one other and so on. If transmission is relatively loss free then effects as a multiplier will be potentiaily very large. However, small world / degrees of separation probably set a limit? So hypothesis = maximum panic multiplier equals degrees of separation?

Conjecture:
1. Intensity of panic as a result of any fear inducing event is a function of the size of the population involved. The greater the number - perhaps relative rather than absolute - the greater the panic.
2. Intensity will be reduced by transmission losses and limited social contacts ie size and connectedness.
3. There is a multiplier effect that is a function of the average number of others to whom an individual communicates a fear inducing interpretation of events AND on which a ceiling is set by small world effects and degrees of separation for the community. This is set by the number of times the message has to be transmitted before everyone knows about it.

In a community of like-minded individuals what panics one is likely to panic all and so transmission losses are likely to be

low and rumours spread fast. There are likely to be low degrees of separation but the limit on the multiplier effect is reduced by fast recycling with scope for considerable elaboration. The witch script contains almost infinite possibilities for variations.

This may explain the relative lack of wc in small groups. Small groups would have a very small multiplier and less scope for elaborating new interpretations?¬∏¬∏¬∏

January 2, 2005¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

Do African cultures understand signs?¬∏

May 2, 2005¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

Witchcraft and Depression #1¬∏

This is about one possible factor that may be important in accounting for the distribution and resiliance of witchcraft. Why, given its malignant effects on individuals and communities, is it so common and so difficult to change? What possible benefits does it provide that offset its negative effects?

So far, we have tended to consider those who believe themselves to be victims of witchcraft assaults to be unfortunate victims of circumstances - of blind chance and natural processes. This is undoubtedly the case when the bad things - kakia - being experienced are of a kind that affects communities, such as natural disasters and epidemics, and these are the kind of events that may lead to the larger scale of witchcraft phenomena. But what is associated with and leads to the small scale family focused manifestations - endemic rather than epidemic - that were probably the origin of the phenomenon, the seed from which it developed, and now account for its sustenance between epidemics? To try and gain a better understanding we must focus on the characteristics of the victim.

I would like to suggest that the prototypical victim is not randomly selected by fate but is depressed, or suffering from depression. And that, as in the case of depression in the West, the description has diffused beyond the boundaries of its original sense (more accurately reference or extension) and come to be applied more widely and indiscriminately.

In the USA today approximately 10% of the population take antidepressants and it is estimated that about 5% suffer from

what might be called major depression. Note that like antibiotic prescribing there are more people being treated than is justified by their diagnosis. Being labelled depressed, or taking antidepressants, is popular with many patients.

Now it is a commonplace among doctors in Africa that Africans tend not to complain of mood disorders. Instead of being 'depressed' they will complain of weakness, impotence, or other physical symptoms. And generally these are of a kind that they and native healers would consider typical effects of witchcraft. Although it is to be expected that major or endogenous depression - thought to be associated with major neurotransmitter abnormalities in the brain rather than a simpler reaction to adverse circumstances - is no less common in SSA than USA, the model for depression that would seem most appropriate is that of Seligman's Learned Helplessness.

My impression is that another characteristic of depressed Africans is that in addition to complaining of physical rather than emotional or mood symptoms they are, perhaps ipso facto, relatively less likely to admit to feelings of guilt - in other words they are less likely to attribute their perceived misfortunes and dysphoria to their own history and behaviors. Instead they tend to a more paranoid interpretation attributing bad things happening to the malicious behavior of others - such as witches. This may contribute both to witchcraft and the endemic abuse of human rights from violent crime all the way to genocide.

This is not unique to Africa. In my professional life I have noticed that fewer and fewer severely depressed patients complain of strong feelings of guilt. I believe that this is a sign of declining moral standards and that today few Brits and Americans have the moral maturity to experience guilt. Paranoia cannot be far behind and the love of litigation only the first rumblings of the approaching front. Without more Prozac, perhaps even compulsory, genocide may return to haunt us.

May 2, 2005¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

Witchcraft and Depression #2¬∏

Helplessness is the core of depression. In the case of major or endogenous depression it is probably a consequence of neurotransmitter imbalance and brain dysfunction, but it can also occur as a result of any circumstances that overwhelm the

coping capacities of the sufferer. Bereavement, losses of every kind, and any insurmountable difficulties. In addition I would speculate that the constraints of tradition and the relative reduction in individuality and autonomy that it implies must dispose towards helplessness. The question is therefore: What can be done to reduce feelings of helplessness and 'treat' what our healers would probably label depression?

If helplessness and depression are linked as I have suggested, and in the absence of Big Pharma, Prozac, and formal therapies or 'counsellinq' the best and indeed only option is to reformulate the problem in such a way as to reduce the feeling of helplessness and futility, or 'impotence', by suggesting an interpretation of events that points to things that can be done and people to be held accountable.

From this point of view witchcraft is probably adaptive and overall beneficial for the community. The cost is injustice and destruction of the human rights of a minority that is disposable.

The benefits are that it reduces the sense of helplessness and hence the liklihood of depression that might be an understandable effect of the insecurity of life in SSA. In doing so, by transferring the focus of accountability onto one or more others, it projects dysphoric feelings of self-doubt and responsibility onto them - depression is reduced at the expense of paranoia.

The costs include an underdeveloped sense of (moral) responsibility for ones own actions, a greater vulnerability to conform to group pressure, and a tendency to blame others for anything that one would prefer to avoid. The fact that it can also be used, unconsciously at least, to get rid of social obligations and marginals who are an embarrassment and perhaps a drain on resources, is a bonus.

However, this solution has limits, because as the definition of 'depression' becomes more diffuse and more and more perpetrators have to be found and punished the security that paranoia provided is weakened and the increasing likelihood that one will oneself be accused leads to increasing insecurity, helplessness, and 'depression'. The 'treatment' has become a cause of the 'disease' it was intended to cure. Paranoia may be a partial defence against depression, but it is never a satisfactory solution. And there are strong indications that it has become a major impediment to economic development and hence creates and maintains a secondary positive feedback loop - or vicious circle

- poverty to helplessness to paranoia to witchcraft to retarded development to poverty. So it goes.

By providing a mechanism whereby endemic experiences of helplessness can be transformed into pseudo-effective procedures and activity the tradition of witchcraft reduces and contains the possibility of 'depression' albeity at the expense of justice and individual human rights. From the point of view of the community this is acceptable because it assumes and reinforces a view of the individual as a minor part of a whole that should always be given precedence. In the words of John Mbiti, 'I am, (but only) because we are'. My brackets.

These speculations are potentially testable in a number of ways. These are only two.

Study relation between prevalence of witchcraft activity and markers for depression.

Take two comparable communities in which witchcraft is endemic. Treat one with Prozac and the other with placebo. Observe markers for wc and depression. (this would of course be unethical)

May 25, 2005¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

The DNA or semen scope #1 ¬∏

Imagine that it were possible to build a satellite with a sensor that could detect traces of DNA or semen on a person from orbit. And that the intensity of the data received diminished with time, as the pheromone traces used by ants and termites does, so that it provided a snapshot of contacts in say only the last month.

If this were applied to Tanzania or Vermont I would expect that it would show lots of couples with traces of shared DNA not found anywhere else. But there would also be a much smaller number of multi-person clusters, which might be compact as around a campus, or widely distributed as along a major road, or even more widely along air links, etc. These would represent and map the activity of promiscuous men who have multiple partners. And a complementary pattern would map the activity of promiscuous females. These are the hubs or nodes that form a network of communication or transmission along which infection whether organisms or beliefs and 'memes' travel. These networks maintain epidemics like HIV that require close contact

contagion. Break them up and all but the most infectious will die out.

It is possible to think of wc in this way. One would find lots of little dots that represented family and neighbourhood suspicion and accusations. These are relatively discrete and contained, flaring up and dying down without spreading to the wider community. But sometimes these will come in contact with a hub probably a healer or other authority or expert whose traces will be
found linking many others and when this happens traces of wc grow and link increasing numbers into a characteristic pattern - probably more like that around a prostitute or brothel than a trucker or former US President.

These hubs are the amplifiers. They are the major problem. Accusations are no more significant than the expression of a wish or even threat to kill or injure someone who has annoyed or wronged you. They represent conventional or cultural wisdom about what is possible. And they only kindle into something wider and more dangerous when they are endorsed and shaped by an authority. Every country has jokes against some of their kind: in England about the Irish, in SA Boers or Africans, in Nigeria the Ibo, and in many countries Jews. But it is only rarely that these amount to more than offence. But if, as in Germany, a familiar stereotype marking of one from another is endorsed by a powerful authority a holocaust can ensue.

However, if in the case of wc healers are major hubs, it is probably not possible and would be difficult to elicit their help in eliminating wc accusations and counter wc activity. This is for the simple reason that without belief in wc their relative impotence to heal would be exposed and they would lose status and power. For what they mostly heal is the fear of witches. It is possible that among their activities is the use of herbs etc that may have some therapeutic effects and some may be more knowledgeable than others, but I am certain that most get their reputation by providing explanations based on wc beliefs.

So policy suggestions:

1. Do not put your faith in asking traditional healers to deny what is probably the foundation of their influence. That would be like asking a doctor to heal without laboratory tests or drugs. Or asking a creationist to believe in evolution.
¬∏¬∏¬∏May 25, 2005¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

The DNA or semen scope #2

May 25, 2005¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

The DNA or semen scope #1 ¬∏

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May 25, 2005¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀù

The DNA or semen scope #2¬∏

2. Map (without a satellite) the structure of authority and confirmation that amplifies wc accusations into actions and epidemics. Focus on the hubs and ignore accusations, as you will have no greater likelihood of stopping them in the short term than sexist and racist jokes, or expletive / phatic expressions of homicidal longings.

3. Start pilot schemes with the aim of identifying the kinds of misfortune that are most likely to trigger wc interpretations that lead to harm (most do not). Then if possible develop intensive and effective programs to ameliorate them. For example, infant health services. Another might be re-presenting those most likely to be accused of wc as assets eg by paying old people an allowance and/or better give something to the community for every vulnerable person unmolested. This might be similar to attempts to persuade villagers to conserve rather than kill elephant or tiger.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

4. I now have serious reservations about the utility of working through traditional healers. It would probably be better to train new in Western medicine targeting their activities to problems on which they could have maximal effectiveness in the hope that this would highlight and expose the impotence of the tradition. Though this would not address many issues for which wc would remain the favoured explanation, over time the reputation and authority of the new healer should increase relative to the traditional.

5. The problem with encouraging innovations such as shaving is that it can only endorse the interpretations and authority of the traditional healers that are the hubs that amplify folklore and gossip into behaviours that threaten rights. Instead the aim should be to identify, marginalize and neutralize the amplifiers and hubs.

Monday, 31 March 2008 12:32:34

Authority - why it is critical for witchcraft conflagrations

Because witches are not things that exist in the real world of nature but are constructions of opinions, statements, and beliefs, their status or validity is entirely dependent on the opinions that, within a given culture, are considered authoritative. And within any society there will be an implicit and usually explicit hierarchy of those who are considered to be competent to make authoritative statements.

In a modern culture, that is one based on the conventional wisdom of philosophy and science of the last few hundred years, the salient authority is the scientific community and their opinions are affirmed and supported by the legal system. This community does not believe in the existence of witches and therefore if asked for an opinion will respond in ways that dampen rather than kindle interpretations of events in terms of witches.

In contrast, in a traditional culture such as you have studied in Africa the local authorites will in general share the beliefs of ordinary people and therefore if asked will respond in ways that kindle rather than dampen conflagrations.

Again in the most monotheistic religion, Islam, which has a well established structure and the written canonical texts of Koran and Hadith, the potential power of individuals to oppose the will of Allah is limited and hence the activities of witches are

largely restricted to nuisance effects rather than ones that would threaten the whole community.

In the case of Christianity which is tainted with dualism it is no coincidence that the great witchcraft conflagrations developed late and after the authority and power of the dominant Catholic church had been weakened around the Reformation which removed, or significantly weakened, the defenses against Satan that had been provided by the priesthood. In earlier times witches were regarded as a nuisance and their alleged behaviors easily contained. When the Reformation reduced the potency of confession and absolution and exposed humans naked before the judgement and wrath of a jealous God the fear of the devil and any association with him primed the fear of witches regarded as spiritual traitors who threatened the salvation of the larger community. Eventually the Christian witch hunts diminished in frequency and intensity in the coming of the Enlightenment and the modern scientific world view.

In other parts of the world where there was a well developed written canon of religious belief, ritual, and observance, as in Hinduism and Buddhism, in addition to a formal hierarchy of religious authority and job descriptions witches were almost certainly limited to small scale local panics. In the wider community their effects were limited by the existence of a structure of beliefs that could account, discount, and contain them.

In other areas such as Daoist and East Asia there were well developed, complex and sophisticated cultures, based on written authority, which tends to limit the possible range of interpretations, buttressed by a hierarchy of officials and a conception of society as an extended structured network of relations. Within such a society individuals were conceived less as containers, with an inner life that could be a culture medium for treachery, as nodes in a larger network whose behavior was more transparent. Again this kind of structure almost certainly severely constrains the opportunities for kindling and conflagration.

It is also not coincidental that in the case of current and secular moral panics the danger is focused on individuals or groups whose malevolence and power to do harm is often ambiguous and not supported by strong evidence. This situation tends to be reinforced by a populist opinion that discourages dissent - for example, as was probably the case with witches during the great European witch hunts, accusations of pedophile or terrorist proclivities tend not to lead to many who may have legitimate

doubts finding it prudent to express them. The result is the creation of a permissive attitude that reinforces and amplifies populist distortions and allows them to develop relatively unopposed. This also is likely to be the case in charismatic and fundamentalist sects that are almost certainly vulnerable to moral panics.

For example when the definition of pedophilia is extended to include a range from taking pictures of children to killing them, and that of terrorism from 9/11 to looking at written materials that might be useful to terrorists, the resulting ambiguities are wide open to the genesis of moral panics.

Witchcraft is more likely to develop where and when:

The opinion of approved authorities is congruent with that of the population and reinforces and amplifies populist beliefs.

There is an absence of independent canonical writing that could set down and limit the range of possible interpretations concerning the bad things that can beset any individual or community.

There is an absence of an extensive priesthood or bureaucracy, backed by canonical texts, that has the power to contain populist anxieties and a vested interest in doing so - a corollary is that witchcraft will be more common where central authority is weak or ailing and when the dominant authority is oral and local.

Witchcraft is less likely to be found where:

Central authority is strong, formally structured, clearly articulated, and based on a written canon of authoritative opionion whether religious or legal.

It is in the interests of maintaining and supporting authority, and hence the priesthood or bureaucracy, to limit populist interpretation and prevent it from kindling. And the structures that have developed make that possible.

Monday, 7 April 2008 21:12:15

Witches and honor.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

In the article about tribalism in the Middle East the role of honor is discussed.

In my discussion with hernando about capital I prefer a definition with which he either does not agree or politely ignores. It shifts the focus of capital from its form to its function which I believe to be accumulated influence.

From my perspective capital, to paraphrase the old Amex ads, says more about you than cash or anything else ever can. It increases your status, quantifies it, and by so doing gives its owner a voice, he is taken seriously, and given an entry stake in the greater game.

From this point of view capital is not money or goods which are only some of the more common forms that it can take, or manifestations. Other forms of capital are human based on abilities, merit, and established utility. Even celebrity has an increasing capital aspect. And another, especially in a traditional tribal culture is honor - because it is a function of and basis for influence.

Now, I wonder what in the case of subcultures where witchcraft is endemic fills the function of capital?

My first guess is that it may be something like being a good member of the community, or simply supporting the consensus of the conventional wisdom in the response to perceived dangers. In other words your social capital in the culture depends not on what you believe but what you are perceived as doing in support of populist concerns. Hence, irrespective of a veneer of education and modern beliefs about how the world works one could be disposed towards solidarity with the community and consensus in whose eyes one is measured by ones actions.

What is the relation of witchcraft to inter tribal or community strife and violence? I have seen films in which members of one tribe or community speak of witchcraft being rife in another nearby but that did not seem to imply that they would do anything about it. It did not seem to justify or entail a local war on terror. And if this is so, or not an exception, is witchcraft predominantly internal? A response to fear of an enemy or danger within? Perhaps in a society with a zero sum view of economics and a somewhat attenuated perception or notion of individuality human and social capital is focused on consensus and `selfishness' or an overemphasis on self and individuality leads to any disposition or action tht accentuates them becoming projected externally from what we would tend to

think of as the theatre of the inner life and representations onto scapegoats in the community. And, if the community was small the cheapest and most affordable scapegoat from the point of view of common good would be the difficult, unproductive and marginalized. Projecting ones fears and anger onto them would have the least adverse effect on the welfare of the larger population.

More generally personal human capital is ultimately a function of how you are perceived by others, considered individually or collectively, and whether that is realized in terms of honor in battle and support of ones kin, or by sharing and supporting their fears and how to deal with them is largely incidental.

The economics of witchcraft are not about capital as H and economists know it but about reputation and status of which honor in various forms is a kind.

? trust ?solidarity

Effects of moral panics

Currently the number of murders in the US is between 16000 and 20000 pa and in the UK 850 (in 2003) of which 200 are in London (stable for many years). The US executes around 70 convicted murderers a year (it is estimated that around 11% of murder convictions are miscarriages of justice), or about 0.4% of murderers, and UK and most other countries none. If the UK used the death penalty in the same proportion of cases three people would be executed (3.4) pa.

In response to `Operation Ore' based on a list of about 7000 suspected `paedophiles' (who had subscribed via credit card for access to child porn sites) passed by the FBI to UK police 1500 have been arrested and of these 32 have committed suicide (2%). The suicide rate in UK is about 0.02% (18.1 / 100,000 population, but 20 / 100,000 for men). Based on the estimated rate of murder followed by suicide (8%) one would expect the annual numbers of suicide following murder in the UK to be around 68 - or if the 1500 `Ore' cases who have been charged (not necessarily convicted) were murders around 120. But none of these cases has committed murder - what they have been charged with is viewing child porn. Yet the actual death rate associated with the judicial process is the times higher than that expected from judicial execution if the death penalty was used for murder.

In this context the annual number of murders of children by pedophiles in the UK is about 6. And it would probably be more reasonable to compare the rate of murder followed by suicide with the estimated 300 of the 1500 charged who have actually abused children (which could refer to a spectrum from inappropriate touching to penetrative sex) as opposed to viewing illegal photos. I am not aware of any statistics for suicide following crimes other than murder - e.g. following actual abuse of a child that has not come to the attention of the authorities. In the case of suicide following murder there are usually two or more bodies to mark the occasion.

The point I am making is that whatever one thinks of child abuse and the fact that viewing porn is not a victimless crime, the attitude towards the offense is such that a very high percentage of those charged commit suicide and the numbers that die are as a percentage vastly greater than those executed for murder in the USA. This is characteristic of moral panics - there is a distortion or anomalies of differential attitudes, sentencing, and outcomes in relation to crimes of different kinds. And one has to consider not only the actual sentences but the whole complex of responses such as suicides.

It is also, as I have pointed out several times before, one of the characteristics of the witchcraft pattern, amounting to a early warning and marker for it, that there is a clamor for due process and sentencing to be changed in order to address the perceived severity of the threat to the community.

Notes:

"A further 14% of murderers (in Australia) either commit suicide immediately or attempt to commit suicide." (Note this includes attempted suicide - figures for murder suicide in USA are probably around 8%)

TERRORISM
The book by Lutz is a textbook and I have not been able to find a detailed review on the internet.

However, in relating terrorism to witchcraft one should adopt the same approach and point out that terrorism like witchcraft is used in two different senses that are quite different but usually confused:

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

1. What witches do == What terrorists do
2. What others do about witches == What others do about terrorists

Much if not most writing on witchcraft (at least of the more popular kind) is about what witches do and that is also the case with terrorism. But, what is more interesting from my point of view is the reaction to witches and terrorists - what people do or feel needs to be done about them.

Much of the disagreement about terrorism is rooted in doubts about the relation of perceived and experienced risk to real or objective risk. And what identifies moral panic is a marked and easily manipulated incongruity between the perceived and actual risk. In all kinds of moral panic the perceived risk is always disproportionately greater than the actual.

And, in this context what distinguishes a scientific or `atomic' interpretation of how the world works from one based on the notion of `agents' is that the former has cleared and revealed a space in which bad things can be accounted for by natural causes that are independent of human desire, will, or intent. And this can also be described as a space within which chance and random events, those that are determinate but incalculable and beyond human intervention because too many variables are involved, have a place. The effect of this is that in a scientific world many more causes are natural and not criminal or forensic, whilst in a pre-scientific or animist world almost all events can involve agents and human intent. Or, to put it concisely:

In a scientific world physics is assumed to have precedence over psychology, but in an animistic world psychology is assumed to have precedence over physics.

In an animistic and witch prone culture there is little if any space for chance and accidents.

The following is the start of something I am writing it will go on to develop my interpretation of witchcraft:

One of the differences between us that leads to confusion is that your main interest is in writing a book, whereas mine is simply to understand the nature of the phenomenon of witchcraft, and I am now satisfied that I have done so. However, the problem is that for me understanding implies stripping away most of the accidental and context dependent colour and detail with which witchcraft has been encrusted, and with which most students have become enchanted, in order to get down to the underlying

structure model or skeleton. Only by doing this can one see what witchcraft is really about, how it is manifested in different contexts and what it's essential features really are. When this has been achieved one discovers that what is usually considered witchcraft is no more than a special case of a more general phenomena, or process, that can be observed in almost any time and place, including our own. And that the interesting question is not the content of beliefs about witches, but how these work themselves out and shape and distort behavior in different contexts. Why, specifically, although the potential for witch fear and witch hunting is ubiquitous it varies so greatly with time and place, even within cultures with very similar belieifs and histories. I believe that my model of witch related phenomena can do this and also enable us to see the sticky fingerprints of the basic structure of¬† beliefs and attitudes within our own culture. From this perspective we are better able to see what previously we had overlooked and identify dangers that we would be prudent to avoid. In short I believe that my interpretation of¬† witchcraft helps towards a clearer vision and better understanding of the modern world.

First a note on Behringer.

I have not found anything in his book that is incompatible with my interpretation. As you know my view of witchcraft is grounded, not on field or case studies, but very basic and general principles about human behavior and it implies that the potential for witch beliefs should be very general and present at most times and places - especially since the beginning of the neolithic period and settled agriculture. The real problem is not the existence of witch related beliefs, for I consider these natural and inevitable, but why these are associated with problems and maladaptive disturbances in some places and periods, but not others.

Behringer implies that belief in witches is universal and can be detected in all times and places. I have no problem with this, but I am wary of his conclusions and sources because he glosses over the huge differences in the number of reports from different places and periods, makes no attempt to relate these to population, and does not take account of relevant cultural differences, such as whether a society is oral or literate and the degree to which it has institutionalized record keeping. Instead he buttresses his argument with the assumption that existing reports represent only the tip of an iceberg and that huge numbers of relevant cases are unreported. That may well be the case, but not necessarily, and what is not reported is by definition not available for examination. It is not

inconceivable that what is assumed unreported might melt under closer scrutiny as many alleged cases of muti murders are said to, or might be found to be better interpreted in other ways.¬†

The bottom line is that the number of reports from Africa today and Early Modern Europe are many orders of magnitude greater than those from much larger populations in other parts of the world, some of which have a much older culture with a sophisticated literature and history of record keeping. That witchcraft can be found there I do not doubt, but what I do is the extent of it and the degree of concern and harm with which it is associated. To go beyond the evidence, simply on the basis of the iceberg analogy, is at best weak and at worst extremely dangerous, as it is the usual justification for every kind of conspiracy theory and moral panic. It is not refutable and therefore not scientific and it should be considered as no more than one possibility among others.

In short Behringer suggests that witchcraft (in both senses - what witches do and what is done about them) is universal and ubiquitous. This is probably true. But, in addition, he goes beyond the evidence and implies, probably deliberately, that its incidence and prevalence is fairly evenly distributed across cultures. This is at best arguable but almost certainly not the case. And that casts a little doubt on his judgment and general conclusions. What seems clear is that evidence from other parts of the world are rather patchy and difficult to quantify.

My view is that though the potential for witch based beliefs and explanations is universal and endemic their manifestation and negative consequences are not, but instead vary widely and rarely achieve epidemic proportions.. Consequently the important question, and the only one worth asking, is not why people explain the working of the world in terms of witches, the answer to which is trivial, but why this only creates problems in a few places. In other words what are the local conditions or variables that cause a well nigh universal disposition to kindle into a dangerous epidemic? Or, to put it another way, what are the local conditions that contain witchcraft and limit the harm that it can do? I think that my interpretation of witchcraft can point to useful answers.

The real nature of witchcraft.

The motivation for witchcraft, why it developed and the question to which it is an answer, is to explain why bad things happen, especially to seemingly good people.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

It is arguable that if bad things did not happen, if Eve had not given in to temptation and we lived in a Garden of Eden without knowledge of good and evil, science and most intellectual activity would never have been invented - with woman came unanswerable questions. But, with the Fall bad things started to happen and with them the question why began to seem important. Why sickness, pain, hunger, death, storms, crop failures, and all kinds of misfortune - some absolute, many relative, but all clamouring for explanation. And this amounts to a search for an explanation as to how the world works or what accounts for changes.

Norman is confusing statements about things with statements about reports and beliefs.

Science aims to create an extensional context within which the propositions that describe its findings will be true.

Science creates an extensional context; but that is an achievement not a given (discovery).

Reports of witchcraft phenomena are reports not of facts but of beliefs, and beliefs are always bound to the context of the believer. They are not necessarily transferable without prejudicing their truth functions.

The Enlightenment moves everything into a common extensional context; all men are equal; all cultures are ultimately the same in the sense that they are waystations on a progress towards an ideal civilisation; there is a single ideal endstate towards which everything is moving; everything can be analysed into component atomic parts; the whole is the sum of the part no more and no less; etc.

It probably did not intend to undervalue the intensional, more likely the success of physics and cosmology, the dazzle of the developments that the extensional sciences made possible, simply blinded it to the importance of intensional contexts, which are always local and specific rather than universal. And because most are referenced to the contents of individual minds and internal representational structures they presuppose; an internal world that The Enlightenment philosophes had difficulty in defining and valuing.

Norman's new Researcher

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

I am not sure what you hope to establish beyond what can be suggested from general principles and established psychiatric knowledge.

There is likely to be some association of witchcraft and `schizophrenia' whose status as a single entity is not nearly as clear as my colleagues might claim. But that does not require much research. Something like the following is about as much as you can expect:

Human beings experience a variety of unusual mental states including dreams, delusions, hallucinations, misinterpretations and confusion.

These are associated with sleep, illness such as infections, sensory deprivation, disturbances in fluids, electrolytes, hormones, oxygen and carbon monoxide levels, toxicity from inside or outside the body (drugs etc), and psychiatric `illnesses' like schizophrenia where people will talk of abnormal experiences and beliefs.

Many of these are such as visual hallucinations and confusion are more common in old age when many old people may also be isolated and marginalized.

Schizophrenia leads to isolation and loss of social status as sufferers are unable to integrate and participate fully in social life. In our society they may become poor because they are unble to earn a living, or pay their psychiatrists bills. They do not understand other people and are difficult for other people to relate to. In most societies they will tend to migrate to the margins. Hence schizophrenia appears to be more common in places like the Tundra (fewer people to get on with), in neglected inner cities (cheap accomodation for homeless few questions asked etc) and among migrant populations (probably some with schizophrenia are in a sense extruded or not encouraged to stay. There is also a tendency for immigrants like West Indians in Uk to be labelled schizophrenic because of unusual beliefs, and styles of communication but that is probably an arifact rather than representing a genuine ethnic difference in susceptibility.

Hence interpreting apparent differences in incidence and prevalence is very difficult and requires very detailed and extensive and expensive research.

There is probably a link between schizophrenia and language and the most impressive expert is Tim Crow, some of whose papers I

have sent to you before. He is also a believer in the evidence that Schizophrenia occurs with a prevalence of aroung 1% in all populations and hence at all times.

So, `witches' are likely to be associated with sensory disturbances for the following reasons:

They are often old and hence more susceptible to confusion.

They are marginalized both socially and centrifugally/geographically(?) and in some but not all cases this may be due to `schizophrenic drift' ie they suffer from schizophrenia (if Crow is right you would expect a few in any community) and this leads to them becoming marginalized and misunderstood (rather than moving and then becoming schizophrenic; they move first).

Their reports of abnormal experiences (auditory and visual hallucinations, delusional beliefs etc) are likely to be taken at face value and integrated into the communities interpretation of the world.

Do African societies have a category of psychological experience equivalent to delusions and hallucinations? To paraphrase Foucault: what was madness before the age of reason and the irrational were defined?

The bottom line is that illness that is associated with abnormal experiences is likely to have contributed to the content of beliefs in witches and the people labelled witches. But that is certainly not sufficient to account for beliefs about witches, nor is it necessary: if it was then the pattern of witch beliefs would be more homogeneous than it is. Other factors are more important.

Chapter 1
History, Epidemiology, Context
To give reader an idea of the how the idea of witchcraft has existed and varied in different times and places

Chapter 2
Living in a world with witches
Local, personal, family small scale vignettes
To give the reader a feeling for what it must be like to live in a world in which witches exist and affect every aspect of life

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Chapter 3
Widening the focus - politics in a world with witches
To show how witchcraft is not just local and personal but affects communities and nations. The numbers affected and harmed.
Kinds of harm - social, legal, rule of law, ideas of justice, criminal, political, health, religious etc

Chapter 4
Surviving in a world with witches - unsettled times are boom-times. Fear as opportunity. Witchcraft and greed.
Structural and economic effects - distinction between primary and secondary. How the belief in witches induces the development of institutions and roles and opportunities for entrepreneurs.

Chapter 5
Moving towards definition
To show how the phenomena described can be brought together into a single explanatory model
Definitions and links to model of moral panics rather than magic. Links of moral panic to notions of good evil and depravity etc Mechanisms of exclusion and projection

Chapter 6
To show how witchcraft is an important example of a mechanism that has much wider significance. And how it can, by virtue of its alien features help us to draw out sinister aspects of present social and political behavior
With focus on model of witchcraft as moral panic demonstrate overlap with other examples moving towards using the notion of terrorism or the war on terrorism as the most important.

Chapter 7
Drawing everything together with suggestions and warnings.
Danger signs of witchcraft like developments etc

I believe that its Classical form as manifest in C16/17 Europe and Africa to the present is the tip of an iceberg and the most conspicuous manifestation of an underlying process that shapes many social and political events. The difference is that, in comparison to the Classical, Contemporary witchcraft does not rely on animistic interpretations of how the physical world works; it does not rely on or report magic or occult phenomena.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

In formulating my view I have concentrated on processes that are very old and fundamental to humanity. It is, however, important to bear in mind that what may be secondary in terms of origins or ontogenesis may become primary in later established or institutional manifestations.

If I am right about the antiquity of the presuppositions then the possibility of witchcraft is universal and the question becomes what causes its manifestation at particular places and times? I believe that to be the result of its secondary benefits for authorities or those in power.

PRECONDITIONS:

A sense of injustice (mechanism for detection of cheating; of imbalance between tit and tat)

This is very old, has an anatomical brain basis, and from my own model of emotion would justify being considered a primary emotion like fear, anger, lust, disgust etc. Its basis goes back before culture, before language and before homo sapiens, maybe even before the primates. But it is, of course, only articulated and becomes accessible to thought with language; by which it is shaped thereafter. Its significance may have been overlooked because it was considered culturally determined and because most conceptions of the nature of emotion are grossly superficial and inadequate.

It forms the kernel for the polarization of good and evil that is dependent on language and in its most extreme form probably monotheism.

A Theory of Mind

This is a distinguishing characteristic of homo sapiens, has a brain basis, and precedes language and culture. It predisposes to an interpretation of how the world works in terms of agency (animism, minds, and intentions, resulting in what I have called a mindful world). In Classical forms of witchcraft this provides the basis for occult ornamentations and reports of physical manifestations, such as shape-shifting. In Contemporary witchcraft its scope is limited to other minds.

A Sense of being a Victim and justification of Vengeance

This is deep rooted and based on the sense for, or experience of, injustice and a Theory of Mind. One of the functions of witchcraft is to convert the sense of being a victim into a

disposition to and motivation for vengeance. Or from passion (in its original sense of passivity as also found in `patient') to action.

The Incarnation of Evil

This transcends notions of good and bad and, based on psychological defenses such as projection, externalizes and personalizes evil into other people (and spirits) or groups. This is a late development dependent not only on language but a religion that is approaching monotheism. It can probably be traced to the precursors of Zoroastrianism before 2000BCE. My own view is that you will not get clear manifestations of `classical witchcraft' before that time.

TRIGGERS:

A Threatened Authority

Once the more fundamental factors in the genesis of witchcraft interpretations are in place they provide a mechanism that is well suited to being used for control by authority. And although in terms of the origins of witchcraft this is a secondary manifestation, once recognized and established, it becomes a primary motivation and trigger for witchcraft epidemics. It is necessary though not sufficient for most manifestations of witchcraft. It does not create witchcraft mechanisms, but it uses them and sustains them by the invention of institutions that give them objective existence. In a similar way Christianity is sustained by its rituals, institutions and architecture.

Although my earlier emphasis on witchcraft as an evolved mechanism for stabilizing and ensuring social equilibrium may be correct in the earliest stages, in historical times it is of most value to the authorities, the powerful, and minority elites.

This is the case because it is rooted in such ancient and fundamental human characteristics that are present in everybody, everywhere, throughout history. In the same way today the tabloid press sell newspapers and TV shows by tapping into the same universal human dispositions and emotions.

Nowadays `Witchcraft Lite' stripped of its gaudy occult ornaments is a preferred, though desperate and destructive, mechanism of control by the powerful. It externalizes evil and amplifies it by mechanisms of the sense (emotion) of injustice

and theory of mind to create anxieties for which it offers solutions in exchange for its retention of authority.

In C16/17 Europe the traditional authority was under threat from the Reformation, Renaissance individuality (self-fashioning), and the development of Science. In Africa today the traditional world views are being threatened by capitalism and the derivatives of globalization. In earlier times they were threatened by the explorers, merchants and anthropologists that confronted them with alternative ways of interpretion and behaviour.

I think this is what Greenblatt had in mind when he said that self-fashioning, or the emergence of individuality (from being defined as simply a part of a greater whole), occurs when an alien confronts an authority. In the case of witchcraft the alien is the possibility and immanence of changes that are incompatible with the conventional wisdom or tradition.

To understand instances of witchcraft you need only ask one question: Who feels under threat here? And the place to look is not the weak and vulnerable who are disposable, but the powerful, for only they have sufficient to lose. This is the beauty of the mechanism; for the weak and vulnerable who experience themselves and others as victims and perpetrators of injustice and clamour for vengeance divert attention from those who have most to lose from the changes going on around them and can use that concern to their advantage. Turn over any witchcraft stone and underneath you will find not demons but our old friends the mercantilists (people who use wealth and power to divert and subvert the Law to their advantage and against that of the commons; even though in the short term they may seem to be giving them what they want).

The Dangers of Witchcraft and Witchcraft Lite

Because the mechanism is grounded in such fundamental human dispositions it is difficult to control. It is like starting a fire to put out another. It can sometimes work in the short term but there are costs and often it can be like pouring on fuel to put out a fire. A long time ago I had a patient who went into a local pub and set fire to himself. It is reported that the other customers did what they could to put him out by throwing their drinks over him, including spirits.

This may be happening today with regard to the `war' against terrorism which seems in danger of becoming a crusade against Islam. What is not sufficiently appreciated in the West is that

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Islam is essentially not an intolerant but an egalitarian religion with an acute sense of injustice that is, as is often the case, most acutely felt by the young. The whole rhetoric of `War' seems to divert attention away from the real injustices that are experienced not only by the poor and disadvantaged in Muslim countries on account of their situation there, but also by injustices suffered by Muslims (the Umma) anywhere. Islam is much more a supranational `state' than Christendom. Our governments' approach seems guaranteed to increase the sense of injustice and seems built on the externalization of evil, the creation of both witches and witch states will do little to address the underlying causes.

This section needs more development than I can attempt at this time; it is included only to point to future threads.

duncan

Norman,

In contrast to agency, animism, and religion, one might describe the current scientific world view as atheistic. And in the past I have the impression that you have made much of the contrast between it, and its transparent superiority, with what had gone before.

But, what is not often appreciated is how recent the atheistic view actually is and what a tiny portion of the human race has lived in a time and place when that view was current.

I would recommend the French historian Lucien Febvre's book `The Problem of Unbelief in the 16th Century'.

What we would consider atheism, the belief that God does not exist, is probably a product of the Enlightenment of the late C18 and early C19; in other words no more than 200 years ago.

Until that time the religious world view was so pervasive and so saturated every aspect of life that the available vocabulary did not provide the conceptual tools needed to express the notion of atheism in the modern sense. At that time, according to Karen

Armstrong, words like `absolute', `relative', `causality', `concept', `intuition', were simply not yet in use.

You may come across C16 RC scientists like Marin Mersenne claiming that there were 50,000 atheists in France, but he was writing from the point of view of a believer and it is clear that what he meant by atheist was not someone who did not believe in the existence of God, but had views about God that disagreed with his own, or acted sinfully as if God did not matter.

For modern atheism you probably need a monotheistic religion that has chosen to regard its God as an albeit superior being but nonetheless a thing in a world of things. This view which came along with the literal interpretation of the Bible after the reformations (Protestant and Catholic) opened the possibility of the `proofs' of God's existence becoming vulnerable to scientific refutation. This would not have been the case, or to a much lesser degree, in a more pantheistic or animistic system, or in ones that were like the Greek Orthodox, Muslim Sufi, or Hindu and Buddhist, more mystically oriented and found their God, or equivalent, within and in symbolic rather than literal interpretations of scripture and experiences.

The implications for the world of African societies and witchcraft beliefs are that in order to move most easily on to a more modern atheistic point of view you may need a monotheistic religion and a vocabulary (both words and concepts) that will allow the testing of the hypothesis of the existence of the God. And the vocabulary and the monotheism probably need to be indiginous rather than recently imported; as by missionaries whose interpretation of scripture may be literal, but who by and large do not attempt to prove the existence of a God who they consider must be accepted by `faith'. With a pantheistic or animistic system this is much less likely to happen; because they are less likely to express or conceptualise their beliefs in ways that are so easily threatened or contradicted, and also because their system is probably inherently less consistent and more tolerant of ambiguities. Instead a more likely outcome would be the uneasy coexistence of parallel languages and views with the older exercising a constant `gravitational' pull or precedence on the new. I think this is probably consistent with the evidence from Africa.

duncan

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Norman,

In the C16/17 the witch was contrasted with the goodness of God and witchcraft rituals were conceived as the negative of the Church's; Black Masses, Witches Sabbats etc. But, unless focussed on specific times and places, in which case it is simply a new usage, I don't think the idea of contrasting godcraft and witchcraft will take us much further as what it gains in scope it loses in detail. It seems to assume too simple a view of God or gods. I don't think there is likely to be such a simple relationship between witchcraft and religion; all peoples have a religion (even science and atheism are) but not all have witchcraft; at least in the sense we are considering.

If you draw a line there is a tendency to value one side over another and when you draw a circle of a container inside and outside are defined in contrast. But what is contrasted will depend where and how you draw the line. So if there are many conceptions of gods there will be lots of conceptions of their opposites. And there is the additional factor that a particular god may not be considered all good or bad but like a person to have good and less good aspects or characteristics. The problems we are considering arise most acutely when men try to conceive of a God that is perfect in every way and find that they have nowhere to put everything that is less good.

Even in what is regarded as monotheism there are many different conceptions of God and not all of these would imply a contrast with witchcraft. For example: many monotheists do not think of their God in concrete terms as just an-other, albeit bigger and better, thing among all other things, but as something (if that is not a contradiction in terms) so totally other, so removed from everything in the world, that one can only think of it as `Nothing'. Even to try and conceive this as perhaps an entity in another universe would be in error and simply shift the problem up a floor. This is the God of the mystics, and Neoplatonists. Again some conceptions of God allow creation ex nihilo whilst others do not, but instead think of the universe as a constant continuous emanation from a God who takes little or no active part in the affairs of the world. The more common institutional Christian idea is of a God within the universe, a greater thing among others, or an actual incarnation that is active in and may order everything that happens. And there is the doctrine of the Trinity that was only cobbled together several hundred years after Christ did not say that he was the son of God.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

It is the latter personal conception of a single god that would most lend itself to the contrast you suggest; because if you have only one God and you define him in terms of the positive (good) ends or poles of any and every contrast then you have a problem in where to put the negative poles. But even so, in the beginning most of the conceptions of Satan, or the Devil as he became later, were of a hinderer something that obstructed man's search for the Good. And in Islam Shaytan will eventually be redeemed.

If, instead you have a polytheistic system then the problem of accounting for bad things is much easier. If Pompeii is engulfed by lava or pyroclastic flows then only the god of the mountain is angry and need be held responsible. If you have lots of gods or ancestors then no one of them needs to be all evil any more than bad people in this life need be considered to have absolutely no redeeming features. Ancestors and gods, like people, can be a mixture and the gods can instantiate specific traits like anger, or gentleness etc.

Perhaps only some Christian conceptions of a personal God who is active and accountable for everything are associated with the extreme polarisation of good and evil that would fit your terms. And that polarity almost certainly traces back to Zoroastrianism and earlier and might have drifted down from the Middle East into Africa where it permeated the local religions. Much later the Christian missionaries brought their conception of Good/Evil with them and that resonated with and kindled the subconscious residues of earlier notions dormant in Africa.

Questions arising from this conception are:

How close are African conceptions of WC to those of C16/17 Europe?

How do Africans think about good and evil?

To what degree might their conceptions be distortions resulting from contamination by contact with Christian missionaries and/or reflect earlier less articulate attitudes?

How does this differ from related beliefs in other parts of the world? Does the same phenomena exist elsewhere?

If it does, then why are the vast majority of reports reaching the Western press almost exclusively African?

Characteristics (primary, provisional and incomplete):

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- Good and Evil are conceived as absolutes
- Evil can be incarnated in a person
- Such a person may be evil from birth (without necessarily knowing it) and hence different from others, or acquire their evil later; hence it can be a kind of infection or contamination
- The evil person is irredeemable
- The evil person is so dangerous that their death is justified
- The danger is conceived as being akin to treason or maybe incest with agents from another world (of spirits or the dead); the boundaries that structure the social world are breached in some way; illicit alliances are formed and barriers breached, things are in the wrong place

It could be that what one is seeing in Africa is the very early stages of a move away from benign paganism or polytheism, where good and evil are distributed among the agencies associated with things in the world, towards a more centralised notion; this might account for the hesitant and poorly formulated suggestions that Africans have some notion of a single god. If so then the problem of suffering or evil would be beginning to move to centre stage. Whereas before if a tree fell on a man the spirit of the tree, or place, might have been angry, later the place and maybe the whole of nature is conceived as basically benign (if not actually benevolent) and any misfortune associated with it then requires another explanation.

This may point to another benefit of interpreting the world in terms of agents or spirits; their distributed personalities can account for suffering or `evil' in the world. But move to a monotheistic view, and I would suggest that the scientific world view is essentially monotheistic (a single explanatory model that removes spirits from things and places), and the problem of accounting for suffering or what is less than good becomes more difficult and disturbing. In Europe in C16/17 you had a rather crude monotheistic religion that could not provide a completley satisfying explanation for evil (but better than nothing) being threatened and in part replaced by a monotheistic scientific view that made no attempt to account for suffering. This must have left most ordinary people feeling incredibly vulnerable; especially as the Reformation had removed the intermediary of priesthood and left man naked in front of a vengeful and angry God.

Norman,

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Two thoughts.

First, I think the pivotal change is not simply HG to farming but what follows somewhat later when surplus production leads to the development of markets and trade and hence towards cities and more complex political organization. In fact the key may be trade and the notion of alienable property that it implies. And trade also leads to the mixing and interacting of different peoples and communities with all the potential stresses that that entails.

I am interested in the way that the discovery of alienable property influences the idea of the individual and the projection of personal characteristics like wickedness or evil. The notion of alienable property whether implicit as in the development of markets or explicit in social and formal contracts, is critical to development. A metaphoric extension may be that parts of the self also become alienable. And that as a result people are increasingly considered as being composites made up of alienable parts that may lead a life of their own and follow different masters.

There may be a tendency in thinking of witchcraft, that I am aware of myself, to consider a community in isolation as if it were under a bell jar and had little contact with others. Yet there is probably a case to be made that witchcraft is not indiginous to a single community but only occurs when that community is impacted on by others or interacts with them as in trade relations, or even tangentially by being near trade routes. In other words it occurs in a world that has begun to trade and interact - even if the community concerned is on the margins. A stagnant pool or backwater rather than a running river.

Second. What is the difference between evil and ordinary bad or wicked behavior? There is a tacit difference that justifies a separate word, and I think it is that evil is considered somewhat alien. It is badness that one denies or finds difficult to accept in oneself and so projects onto an alien or other, usually an outgroup or individual who is considered in some way different.

So from this perspective one has a cluster of ideas and phrases of which the following are, in no particular order, only a sample:

the incarnation of evil
the personification of evil

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the projection of evil
the externalization of evil

I think the problem with all of these is that it is not evil that is projected but more ordinary badness that people find difficult to accept in themselves or their true kin, and that they transform into evil. In other words evil is not the beginning but the product or end. The following may therefore be preferable:

the discovery of evil
the generation of evil
the manufacture of evil (too mechanical)
the creation of evil
the invention of evil
the emergence of evil
the incarnation of evil (incarnation could be in each group)

or:

the projection/externalization of the alien/other
the invention of the alien
the denial of the alien/other
the alienation of the bad

or:

the kernel of ism (racism)
the seeds of ism

As you must know by now I don't do paragraphs - this is the best I can manage:

There are two major problems to understanding witchcraft.

The first is the implied distinction between natural and supernatural, (or scientific and magical) which is irrelevant and confusing because it diverts attention from motives to mechanisms. It is a distinction made from the outside and does not discriminate between witches and anyone else. Epidemics of witchcraft accusations occur in communities in which authorities, victims and the alleged perpetrators all believe in witchcraft. Science and magic have nothing to do with it.

The second is a failure to distinguish between on the one hand a foundation world view and associated technologies that have been evolving slowly for many thousands of years, and have only been

superceded in states bordering the North Atlantic rim in the last 200 or so, and on the other, an episodic and more superficial reaction to social stresses associated with an enhanced sensitivity to evil and becoming a victim of malevolent intent, that is manifested in terms consistent with the traditional world view. The important point is that these episodes, although shaped by the foundations from which they develop are not dependent on their specific features and so can occur and take on the colouration of other more scientific views. Hence there are modern forms of witchcraft that have little or nothing to do with traditional or magical mechanisms.

The implication is that the foundation layer, or system of belief, includes most muti, homjom, juju, medicines, artifacts, and `benign rituals and magics' - in other words the technologies of the traditional world view. Witchcraft, like a wart or a scar, develops on these, but is not a necessary consequence of them. It depends instead on a conjunction of circumstances that include - provoking tensions within the community, the development of a new notion of the self or individual as a container with an `inner' life that can be hidden from the community in contrast to that of being a node in a social network, that has been the rule from hunter gatherers downwards. And, with this new conception of the individual a new sensitivity to evil associated with the willfulness or motives (conscious or unconscious) of individuals.

Linked to this is the disproportionate legal response to witchcraft and the more sever penalties associated with it. Here too it is necessary to distinguish between two levels of offence. On the one hand the amount and nature of the harm done, on the other the methods used. In the case of alleged witchcraft these are considered illicit and aggravating so that more severe penalties may be considered appropriate. In this context witchcraft methods are similar to the use of hand guns in the UK where they are forbidden.

This suggests a new variant on definitions of witchcraft - `causing harm to people or their property by illicit or proscribed means'.

Norman,

This is an update of my fundamentals for witchcraft.

One of the changes is a reformulation of the importance of a Theory of Mind. In my original suggestions ToM is the basis for

interpreting events that we would consider under physical laws in terms of animism or agency. That the world is made up from and works by psychological (wills and wishes and minds and desires and intentions) processes rather than physical (atoms and energy). I still believe that to be the case but in its modern non-occult form, in which Osama is treated like a witch, animism and ToM is no longer required. Indeed on the contrary such an isomorphism and the externalization of evil is only possible if there is an impaired understanding of ToM. A tendency to explain differences in terms of universal categories or species rather than individual variations.

This raises the possibility that one way of considering witchcraft might be as the speciation of evil.

Fundamentals of Witchcraft:

1. A theory of mind that allows the interpretation of the world in terms of psychology rather than physics. Agents and will rather than atoms and energy. This is the basis of the pre-scientific view of how the world works. In the modern `scientific' view of the world it loses this function and if well developed would prevent the development of the whole witchcraft process. That this process is still so prevalent in the USA is an indication that somehow the inhabitants of that sad country have lost much of their humanity and are regressing into a more primitive stage of development.

2. A sense of fairness or injustice. A sense of balanced relationships and tit for tat and the detection of cheating. A corollary of this is an implicit sense of individuality that is a precondition for a sense of being a victim. This implies an ethical view that bad things should not happen to good people and good things to bad (this is Ehret's definition of evil - I consider it probably necessary but not sufficient)

3. A developed sense of evil: considered as the eternalization or speciation of evil. The projection of evil onto another considered as one of a different species. This is the sense implicit in the notion of treason as opposed to simple disloyalty.

With the projection of evil onto others one loses the interpretation of behavior in terms of individual psychology. This is what is happening in the USA today. Legislation designed to reduce politically incorrect ~isms has the side effect of shifting the projection from external characteristics (sex, `race', etc) of individuals to more nebulous categories that are

only names rather than realities - in a sense it is anti-nominalistic.

There are two ways of interpreting events. First, the modern minority preference in terms of physical law. Second, the majority and older preference in terms of psychological agencies. But these agents are first understood as external entities that are causally effective. This makes it relatively easy to migrate to a `scientific' interpretation in which animate agents are replaced by inanimate entities like atoms.

But ToM enables another approach in which the behavior of people can be considered in terms of internal processes. In effect the external `agents' are internalized as components of mind - what psychoanalysts refer to as object relations (an object is an internalized other). And variations in the composition of mind accounts for the differences between individuals. This approach focusses on individuals and considers categories, types, species, or kinds as names of convenience without physical reality. What we are seeing now is a undertow back from individuation to speciation.

First, I think that you have a tendency to confuse the conditions that may be NECESSARY for witchcraft with those that are in themselves SUFFICIENT, so that if the conditions exist then witchcraft will also. Hence, once farming or monotheism has developed witchcraft will automatically appear. But if that was the case then witchcraft and farming and monotheism would all and always coexist - which we know is not necessarily the case.

Farming may prepare the soil in which eventually modern rice or corn can thrive, but in the beginning and for many thousands of years what grew was the weedy ancestors of rice and corn, which were much less nourishing grasses. And it is not inconceivable that these would not have been modified into the more efficient modern forms. The conditions that are necessary for witchcraft do not guarantee that it will ever develop or take the form in which it is now described by anthropologists. And if it does it may take many thousands of years.

Now we have been talking of how the preconditions from which witchcraft might develop seem to be closely linked to the developing of farming or settled agriculture and these include changes in thought and concepts. Among these are ideas of ownership, property and especially individuality and the modern concept of the autonomous individual or self as distinguished from an earlier one associated with hunting and gathering in

which the individual was conceived as a part of a greater community or whole apart from which an individual was difficult to imagine.

The reason that the notion of individuality is so important is that in our view only individuals can be held morally responsible for their actions and that makes possible the notion of a witch as someone who does harm with malice for which they can be considered culpable.

In their philosophical translation of the Analects of Confucius, Ames and Rosemont, suggest that one of the problems in trying to understand the world view of many thousands of years ago is that we are brought up in a culture that provides us with the tools that allow us to perceive and make our way in the world. This worldview or culture is like Plato's sun that illumines our world. But when we try to look fromi it as through a window onto the world of a distant time and place we tend to see only our reflections in the glass. Imagine the half transparent mirrors used by psychologists and police in interniew rooms. If the light in the latter is brighter than on the other side all those in the room see is a mirror, but if it is less they can see the observers next door. This is the problems with missionaries and anthropologist who try to understand witrchcraft - the glare of their faith or preconceptions blind them to all but their own culture.

One of the most important distorting factors may be our language as we tend to assume that the features of our Indo-European languages are more natural and universal than they really are. Instead they may be simply one of a number of different possible kinds of Lego kits from which we can assemble representations of the world. But that in itself is misleading because it assumes that the function of language is descriptive and that there is something called truth that is measured in terms of correspondence to a single objective standard or reality. None of these may be the case and even if they are they may not be so for the earliest languages. These are likely to have evolved from songs and poems and to have had the function not of description but prescription - to help people to get along with each other and make their way through the world and their lives in as great harmony as possible. Language is not a model of the world but a guide along the way.

A hint of this may be gained from Classical Chinese. This is a written rather than a spoken language that was used for all the Chinese classical texts and has remained relatively unchanged for more than 3000 years. It suggests a different way of

interpreting the world. It has no definite article, no genders, and is concerned more with events and changes and time than with substances that persist over time and are related externally. In some ways the view of the world it suggests is closer to Whorf's description of that of the Hopi. And different from our languages emphasis on carving the world accoriding to nouns and verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

What I am speculating is that the world view of Classical Chinese may be closer to that of the earliest languages and give a climpse of them. And that the emergence of notions of individuality of ownership and property may have been associated with if not followed from a fundemental change in language marked by a change of focus from change and time and events to substances and objects and nouns and external relations. The earlier languages prescribed something like a dance or complex pattern of correlated behaviours. Within such a world there might have been something that was a precursor of witching but unlikely to be witchcraft as an entity or substance. It was only when substances and objects began to crystalize out of the dance that notions like witchcraft might have become conceivable. And only later that the idea of a witch, morally responsible and potentially culpable would have made sense.

Now China is predominantly an agricultural society and has been so for thousands of years, yet it may be that the notions of agriculture and the larger communities and nations that that makes possible would have facilitated a change in languge towards nouns and substances. What you may be seeing in China is that the spoken languages change in ways that brings them closer to the Indo-European, but the tradition preserves the classical written form for a subset of particularly authoritative texts and this gives us a lens through which we can glimpse the older form.

ORIGINS OF WITCHCRAFT
Norman,

The point about the Le Carre was his stressing the dangers of considering good and evil as absolutes; which is more or less one of my preconditions for witchcraft.

I note the scare quotes around "injustice gene" with relief. I suspect my interpretation of Tooby and Cosmides goes further than they would. The notion of injustice is complex and difficult to define cleanly, hence I doubt if there has been much work done on determining how it is distributed in the

population. To be useful we need it to be pretty much universal, and in general anything that occurs in almost everybody is more likely to be the result of the interaction of many genes rather than a few. If it depended on one then a single mutation might knock it out and one might expect to be able to detect specific phenotypes. Again it is probable that any genetic underpinning was originally for something different and the complex behaviour we are talking about is an exaptation. Feathers may originally have evolved for insulation rather than flight. And what we think of as justice might be based on balancing weights, counting, etc...

In general be careful not to fall into the pit so attractive to lazy journalists of linking highly complex behavoiurs to a simple gene.

Regarding threat. What I am talking about is not some conscious cynical manipulation of the community by those in power. That may come later at a higher level as when a national politician may find it useful to exploit local anxieties, beliefs or prejudices. Not all mercantilists are conscious of what they do - although I would not give Bill Gates the benefit of the doubt.

What I have in mind is this. The conditions I have suggested are the basis for witchcraft interpretations of disturbing phenomena, but they are not sufficient. At most they would dispose to consideration of a wider range of influences and motivations than we would consider plausible, and might lead to some local measures to control them. This is probably the `evil eye' type of interpretations that seem to be pretty much universal. But that is NOT witchcraft.

This (the precursors) is taking place within a community with a traditional power and status structure, but within which the powerful also share the anxieties and concerns and interpretations of the majority. What those in power can do, however, is by acknowledging and coordinating the response to at least the most dramatic concerns (famines, epidemics, crop failures, etc) they establish practices and institutions that affirm and reinforce beliefs and acquire a life and momentum of their own. These institutions would in the West be associated with buildings and budgets, but in smaller communities with roles (job descriptions) and perhaps rituals, artifacts, and various paraphernalia. In facilitating these developments the powerful at the same time maintain and reinforce their power and the hierarchy of which they are a part (it is important to distinguish the holders of power within an institution from the institution itself; politicians from parliament). There is

nothing mysterious or wicked about this as in general any response that weakened the established hierarchy would not survive and lead to chaos. The whole working of such communities has evolved for stability and longevity. And even when change is thrust upon them by external events; invasion, colonisation, or the impact of a different economic system these are unlikely to completely replace or eradicate the older traditions. At worst there will be a slow bleeding away of new generations, but before that takes place you are likely to see flurries of the reassertion of traditional values, eg witchcraft accusations, in response to the external threat of change.

To recap; this is the result of a process of evolution. The origins do not amount to witchcraft which comes into being with the creation of institutions that sustain and maintain the traditional structures and the power of the individuals that fill the job descriptions associated with them. Later others may take more conscious and cynical advantage of a system of beliefs and responses that has already evolved and thus available to them.

It is important to think in terms of an evolving time frame (diachronic) rather than a static snapshot (synchronic). In the case of Contemporary witchcraft such as the response to 9/11 at first the power structures will be obscured by the `illusions of technique' the technical justifications and rationalisations for the measures deemed necessary. Only later may the mercantilist motivations (?the presidency and its backers ?arms industry ?oil, ?IT) become more apparent. And later these may also be obscured because the earlier legislative changes have created institutions with their own momentum. To discover and understant the source of these one may have to examine the trail of incoherent and incongruous laws that do not fit into a rational scheme (eg sentencing). These can survive for decades and even hundreds of years even long after they have ceased to be used (eg Witchcraft Acts in UK).

In this regard if there is a natural sense of justice then a legal system within which there is no justice (inconsistent and incoherent) in that penalties seem arbitrary and dependent more on lobbying than reason will simply in the longer term undermine the public confidence in the legal system and bring it into disrepute. That is why politicians should resist public pressure to introduce legislative changes in response to an outrage. That is why; `hard cases make bad law'. They destroy the justice of the system of justice by distorting the relationship or balance between the diverse offences and penalties.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

One might almost ponder whether witchcraft is the shadow or negative pole of the ideal of a justice system. That ideal would be a system in which there was a rational and transparent relationship between offences and penalties based on the actual harm done and the liklihood of reoffending. And justice would be blind (to the demands of the victims; though not necessarily to the actual harm done to them). On the contrary witchcraft is institutionalised vigilantism (victims for vengeance); justice is unblinded, offences and penalties reflect the public concerns of the moment and emotional responses to them and any coherent system of law is made impossible.

Another aspect is that in its search for cause and retribution it tends to penetrate into the mind and imagination spaces of the suspected perpetrators. Imagination as opposed to acts becomes a potential offence. In the Tudor times there was an offence called Equivocation which amounted to harbouring the thought of the death of the King; in other words to think of the death of the King or to say anything that could be interpreted as an indication that one was, was sufficient to establish guilt. The penalty for this was to be hung, drawn, and quartered (if you are unfamiliar with this English punishment for treason, I will describe it for you). This is not too far removed from contemporary Muslim cleric's fatwas for blasphemy.

The move to defining offences in terms of intention (alone rather than actual harm as a result of intention) and potential is probably an inevitable consequence of unblinding justice to the clamour of `victims'; whether individuals or nations.

WITCHCRAFT MEMORIES

Norman,

The early memories you were talking about are most likely to be conditioned responses, attitudes, or prejudices, such as `Witches are bad and must be killed', `snakes are dangerous', `odd looking people are likely to be witches', `Catholics are evil and the spawn of the devil' etc etc. These could be instilled by classical and operant conditioning via reward and punishment. The most potent tools for conditioning being the threat of exclusion or loss of belonging.

Later, episodic, memories are those that depend on a sense of oneself and being there, living through the experience. These require a developed sense of self and metacognition; knowing that one knows.These probably develop with Theory of Mind at about the age of four.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

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From that point it is a shorter step to thinking of words in terms of representations and metaphorically saturating our languages with visual images and models. Words then acquire an enhanced utility as artifacts that enable us to think about them and the world.

So looking back from this side of the watershed we may not be able to appreciate how different spoken words were on the other side.

If this is so what is the missing ingredient that inhibits the transition from parataxis to hypotaxis and figurative language?

LANGUAGE OF WITCHCRAFT

*Norman,

I don't think you can avoid using the term witchcraft (or witch), because of the inertia of tradition that has developed around it. To try and do so would create all kinds of confusion.

The situation is similar to that created by psychiatrists who hijacked the familiar term depression from its standard usage for a common, everyday, mostly innocuous, and frequently instructive mood and applied it to a much less common major illness. The result has been a great deal of confusion between the mood and the illness and has led, on the one hand, to the illness being occasionally overlooked and its symptoms and signs misinterpreted and much more commonly the mood being mistaken for the illness resulting in inappropriate `treatment' for quite appropriate responses to events. It is often more comfortable to attribute ones `depression' to illness than to the fact that one has been behaving badly, or that the world is frequently cruel and life hard.

I have often mused about trying to encourage the use of more appropriate terms, perhaps the near archaic `melancholia' for the illness, but have always come to the conclusion that it would be futile and that the inertia of usage is simply too great. All that one can do is point out the importance of always qualifying the term to make its intending meaning clear. And in another field the relative inefficiency of the QWERTY keyboard

is also the result of the inertia of tradition and has confounded all attempts to introduce a better.

Instead, what you must do is to make it clear to the reader at the beginning of the book that you have concerns about how the terms are and have been used; then in the body of the text you can highlight occasions where the usage is unsatisfactory; and finally at the end try and tie your reservations together and suggest better alternatives. These would be either new terms or new definitions of the old.

I believe that redefinition or redescription is preferable to trying to introduce neologisms. The problem is that although new terms might be taken up by the more obsessional and punctillious academics I am pretty sure that everyone else would stick with the familiar ones and all that will result is an extra layer of confusion. It would therefore be better to accept the traditional terms and attempt to offer a more coherent and consistent definition of them. If you succeed there is a good chance that it will replace the old, as Gresham's Law only applies to money based on precious metals and there is no reason why good definitions should not displace the bad. I would for example hope that the supernatural aura would find a more comfortable home among the adherents of Wicca.

But whatever you decide to do the first step is to assemble as complete a list as possible of the different definitions of witchcraft that have been used in the literature. I don't think I have ever seen one, so it might be a task that your researcher would find interesting.

Next, one has to determine what the core characteristics of witchcraft are, or might be, and use them as a measure against which to assess the earlier usages on your list. This will also allow you to be more precise as to their deficiencies and the general problems with the term witchcraft.

The problem and the motive is that although I am sure the term has all kinds of ethnocentric and historical biases and has been applied to many phenomena that are marked more by differences than similarities I do believe that there is also a significant kernel waiting to be uncovered.

The alternatives, however, are either that the phenomena described are so diverse as not to justify a single term, but have for various reasons come to exist in name only; in which case your task is reduced to forensic etymology. Or, and this is what I prefer, that they have been so inadequately defined that

the core phenomena have become obscured by a baroque encrustation of biases, cross cultural contamination, and distortions. And that what have been taken for descriptions of facts in the main amount to little more than value judgments. If that is the case then your task is more archaeological and amounts to uncovering or excavating the kernel so that its real nature and implications can be determined.

To try and help that task I will attempt to tease out what I believe to be the most important characteristics of witchcraft. These should amount to a basis for at least a provisional or operational definition.

In what follows it is important to keep in mind:

1. The distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions.

2. The distinction between object perception and fact perception.

I may drive for many miles and remember little of the journey and yet I have clearly perceived and negotiated bends and objects safely. I have perceived objects but not the fact of perceiving them.

I may be aware of something on the floor in front of me but may not register the fact that it is a cat sitting on the mat.

I may walk the Dorset coast near Lyme where the cliffs are unstable and landslips reveal fossils from the Jurassic. If I were able to walk with a colleague from several hundred years ago we would each see objects, but whereas he would be aware of them as rocks with cute patterns on them, I might be aware of them as fossils of animals that had died 200 million years ago. Our perception of objects would probably be the same but our perception of facts would be different.

And something shaking on the ground may to one person be someone possessed by an evil spirit to another someone having an epileptic fit.

Facts are simply objects described in a particular way and in terms of a particular frame or context; which is usually a classification system or structured body of information. And the problem is that it is very common to confuse features of reports or descriptions with features of the things reported or described. When this happens the classification on which the facts perceived are based tends to be overlooked and their

relativity is not taken into account. Change the conceptual context and the same object can become different facts.

I suspect that much of the literature about witchcraft is at the level of facts, and not even descriptions of objects, but of other facts or descriptions. And, to make matters worse and compound the possibilities for confusion, descriptions of descriptions in one culture of descriptions, or facts, in another with a completely different world view. Or facts about facts in one culture about facts in another. That is why the terminology is inconsistent and the whole field confused and inconclusive.

3. That the terms `science' or `scientific' refer not to the content of beliefs, but the method by which they were selected from among possible alternatives. The difference between the `Traditional Witchcraft' and `Modern Scientific' interpretations of how the world works is the difference between two hypotheses or models. Each attempts to account for the fact of changes.

In our familiar modern world view there are two major causes for changes in the world: those that are the result of the impersonal action of natural or physical law (examples might be volcanic eruptions, avalanches, floods, hurricanes, epidemics, and prairie fires), and those that are the direct result of human or animal behaviour and actions.

In contrast, according to the traditional and witchcraft world view, most if not all changes that we would attribute to impersonal forces, are considered to be the result of the behaviour of humans and human-like entities such as ancestors, spirits, and gods. The world of causes is therefore different and extends beyond the one that we usually allow; it goes into the past and perhaps the future, includes territories not apparent to the ordinary senses, and contains disembodied entities such as dead ancestors spirits and other kinds of agents. The characteristic of these is that their motives for action are like those of humans, wishes and desires, and they can be emotional, malevolent, or benign. And for that reason in order to influence changes one has to enter into a personal relationship with them and try to manipulate their `minds' as we might those of other people.

Now that view is not in itself, or by virtue of its content, `unscientific'; atoms and energy, neither of which can be seen by ordinary senses, might simply be considered as impersonal agents of change. But when the implications of each hypothesis have been worked out and made the basis for a test to determine

which is more effective in accounting for the changes that are not the result of ordinary human behaviour we find that our modern world view is superior. The scientific method has made clear that trying to account for change in terms of the wishes and desires of spiritual agents is less useful in predicting the future or changing outcomes than an understanding of physical law.

To put it more concisely the scientific method has established that there is no evidence for the existence or causal effectiveness of spirits; as they cannot be seen or touched in order to establish their existence one would need some evidence that they had detectable effects. And as far as predicting and influencing change is concerned an understanding of impersonal physical or natural laws is more effective. However, when the physical laws are not known, belief in the causal effectiveness of spirits may be better, in the sense of increasing survival, than having no hypotheses at all as to how the world works. And that may account for its being well nigh universal in all but small well educated sections of the population in America and Europe in the very recent past.

Or, even more succinctly: our `scientific' world view accounts for change (not obviously due to human action) in terms of impersonal forces, while in contrast the traditional or `witchcraft' world view does so in terms of the motives of `personal' agents (humans, ancestors, spirits, demons, gods etc).

The Characteristics of Belief in Witches and Witchcraft

Background Conditions:

Witchcraft phenomena can only occur in a community that believes in them and has a world view that allows them.

The characteristic feature of that world view is that many, if not all, of the changes that we would account for in terms of impersonal physical or natural laws, would instead be attributed to the actions of non-human agents, such as the ancestors, spirits, demons or gods. In other words whereas we would distinguish between and contrast the causal effectiveness of human action and impersonal physical forces, the witchcraft and traditional world view would distinguish between the causal effectiveness of human action and that of non-human entities such as spirits. As a result the world of possible causes

extends beyond the boundaries of the ordinary senses that we have found useful in order to accomodate the dead and other disembodied agents or entities.

Such beliefs are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the existence of witchcraft phenomena. It is possible to imagine and probably to find communities or cultures that share these beliefs and yet do not exhibit the kinds of phenomena that you are considering. And because the belief in spirits and the `supernatural' is ubiquitous, used to explain all kinds of change, and is not unique to witchcraft it cannot be used to distinguish it from other phenomena within the culture.

Local Provoking Conditions:

Outbreaks of witchcraft accusations seem to be related to unusual anxiety provoking events of a kind that we would probably consider random. But they are also associated with times of major social change; particulary when the conception of the individual as a member of the community, as a part of a greater whole, is being replaced by that of singletons, of one among many. This occurred in Europe around the Renaissance and Reformation and most recently in Southern Africa, where in recent years there have been a number of vicious witch killings. Such transitions are often marked by increased economic uncertainty and inequality.

What distinguishes witchcraft; the core content of the belief system:

That individuals and communities can be harmed and endangered by the actions and malevolent intentions of individuals among them acting either alone or in collusion with others living or dead, human or not. The key being that whatever powers, unusual forces, or supernatural agents may eventually be involved there has to be a human with malevolent intent, living in the community and acting as the primary perpetrator. It is they who are motivated to take out contracts (with ancestors spirits demons or gods) on their victims and serve as a focus and conduit.

They are able to do this because they have inherited or acquired unusual knowledge or power that enables them to elicit the help of what we would consider supernatural agents. If their powers are inherited it is considered possible that they are not at first aware of them; this induces an endemic sense of FUD (Fear Uncertainty and Doubt) that makes epidemic witchfinding more effective and rewarding. If learned, they will probably include

knowledge of the actions of healing herbs and poisons. But it is important to remember that given a world view that interprets change in terms of supernatural agency what we consider simply chemicals will have supernatural associations and explanations; poisons in witchcraft believing communities are not what we think they are.

The danger and malevolence can be reduced removed or neutralized in a number of ways, often involving the eradication of witches, but sometimes their identification punishment and re-education or rehabilitation. Could you classify witch related practices in terms of - prophylaxis, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation? And around these activities institutions rituals and job descriptions have developed. Once established these are incorporated and absorbed into the prevailing power structures and become available as tools that political agencies or players can manipulate to their advantage. They also provide powerful secondary gains for the community in that they help maintain and restore equilibrium when it has been disturbed; reaffirming traditional beliefs and world views and explaining and offering a resolution for anxiety provoking events. And overall they will tend to enhance the relative power of community and offset the trend towards greater individuality.

Suggested Exercise:

Take descriptions of witchcraft phenomena and replace references to witches with `terrorist' and their magic or tools with variations of `weapons of mass destruction' or the means of anticipated outrages.

Witchcraft phenomena can only occur in a community that believes in them and has a world view that allows them.

But because that world view will include interpretations of events (ie how the world works and what causes change; viz will and desire, including malevolence, rather than impersonal physical forces) that our sciences have dismissed as illusory and these are used as an explanation for everything and not confined to the phenomena for which witchcraft is offered as an explanation, it cannot be used as a defining characteristic of witchcraft. In other words although a world view based on belief in what we consider the occult is a necessary condition for belief in witches it cannot be sufficient; because it is possible to imagine and find communities that interpret the

world in terms of supernatural agencies, but do not exhibit the kinds of 'witchcraft' phenomena you are considering.

So, in order to distinguish witchcraft from other phenomena, and thus make it clear to the reader what the term means to you and in the context of the book, you will have to define it not in terms of judgements about the ultimate validity of different beliefs about how the world works but given and from within what we would consider a supernatural world view what is it that dlstinguishes witchcraft from all other social phenomena?

Characteristics of Witchcraft

Background Conditions
+ Belief in existence of witches
+ Worldview sympathetic
+ Agents vs physical law

Content of belief
+ That individuals and communities can be harmed and put in danger by the acts and malevolent intentions of individuals within them acting either alone or with others living or dead human or not. These individuals may or may not be aware of their power, but act for their own selfish interests and motives against those of the community. They may bring about harm in a variety of ways including what we would consider poisons (but remember that whilst for us poisons are simply chemicals in wc vulnerable communities their world view will not make a clear distinction between chemicals and other carriers of power because that power will be explained in terms of ancestors spirits etc) and other means that we might describe as implying supernatural magic or occult powers. These would include powers personal to the witch whether learned or inherited but more often involve seeking or eliciting the help of ancestors spirits demons or other disembodied agents in a wider universe of disembodied entities than our science allows.

The danger and malevolence can be reduced removed or neutralized in a number of ways mostly involving the eradication of witches but sometimes their identification punishment and reeducation or rehabilitation. Could you classify witch related practices in terms of - prophylaxis, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation? And around these activities institutions rituals and job descriptions have developed. These once established are incorporated assimilated and absorbed into the prevailing power structures and become available as tools that political agencies or players can manipulate to their advantage. They also acquire secondary gains for the community in that they restore

equilibrium when it has been disturbed restoring and reaffirming beliefs and world views and explaining and offering a resolution for anxiety provoking events. And overall enhance the relative significance and power of community over individuality.

Local Provoking Conditions
+ Unusual anxiety causing events
+ Transitional experiences
+ individuality vs community

PRE-HISTORY OF WITCHCRAFT

*Norman,

Some thoughts about our conversation last night.

I don't think you should waste too much time on the prehistory of witchcraft for the following reasons:

First, the most that you can say is that the conditions and beliefs that are associated with wc today were probably similar to those that have existed for tens of thousands of years. (But with the proviso that I believe for reasons that I have given before that it is far more prevalent and is provided with a better culture medium by farming than hunting and gathering. This is related to the necessary conservatism of farmers and implies that wc would have been much less common before 10,000 years ago.) So it is possible that similar phenomena also existed.
These beliefs and conditions include:
+ Animism (in the broadest sense) as an explanation of how the world works. The point is that until Newton published his Principia in 1687 some form of animism was probably the best, in the sense of having the most survival value, explanation available for many phenomena. And is only in error from our point of view because we believe we have found a Science that has better survival value.
+ Schizophrenia: many experts (eg Tim Crow) believe that this occurs with an incidence of around 1% in all populations and presumably all times. But even today this is controversial and it is known that the DIAGNOSIS of schizophrenia is more common among immigrants and certain ethnic minorities in UK (eg West Indians). Also it at the very least calls for considerable faith, many would say foolhardiness, to extrapolate from a few recent studies to tens of thousands of years ago.

+ Hallucinogenic and mind altering substances: It is almost certain that these were not only known but used throughout human history. But their use does not seem to be unique to witchcraft beliefs or more common at times of witch epidemics (with the possible exception of ergot from mouldy rye at the time of the European witchhunts).
+ Shamans et al : in any society there will be some people who acquire, or have an aptitude for acquiring, knowledge about the effects of substances and methods of healing. If they have that skill they can put it to good or bad use; just as Shipman or George W or the NRA can.

Second: Before you start speculating about the interpretation of sparse and obscure archaeology consider what archaeological evidence (as opposed to written) there might be that would validate or confirm witchcraft beliefs in 16th century Europe, Salem, or the recent history of Africa; how much could we know without written accounts? I would speculate that there is very little that could support more than the possibilty that something unusual might have happened. And if that is the case you must question how useful archaeology would be for your book. It could rouse too may red herrings.

But there are wider considerations.

The recent anthropological accounts of witchcraft are unique in one way; for the first time in history accounts and interpretations of the phenomena are being published by people who have a very different world view and theories about how the world works.

It is important to distinguish between different levels of the phenomena being reported:
+ The phenomena-in-itself (Kantian). What actually happened, whatever that might be and usually unknowable.
+ Perception: What those around perceived or thought they experienced.
+ Description: What they said they experienced
+ Interpretation and publishing: what is written, broadcast, published.

Now until the 20th century I would suggest that those who perceive, describe, interpret, and publish would be likely to have shared a common view as to how the world works and what was conceivable within their equivalent of physical law, or the laws of nature. Even Christian missionaries although they would have different myths would probably have had little difficulty in taking accounts of transormations and `supernatural' events more

or less at face value. Only with 20th century anthropology would one have interpreters and publishers who did not believe that any of the strange phenomena alleged and described actually happened.

If this is the case then in Europe until the Enlightenment and in Africa until recently the interpretation of events would be within and not break the existing worldview. At most, witchcraft phenomena would be equivalent to the observations of events that are not quite consistent with expectations, but are presumed to be accountable by some minor adjustment in our understanding of physical law; that after all is how science progresses. The orbit of Mercury does not quite match the expectations of Newtonian physics, but does match those of Relativity (Relativity may be odd but it is not supernatural; Quantum theory is very odd but is not supernatural).

In the context of a shared belief the phenomena of witchcraft are not miraculous any more than a camera is miraculous to those who have not seen one before. And the status of witchcraft becomes a breach, not of the laws of nature, but of the prevailing Social Contract that governs human interactions. It is more akin to a breach of etiquette that physics; even if the techniques used required some special knowledge. Mohammed Atta and his playmates did a very bad thing, but did not breach any physical laws, even if they used them for perverse ends.

There is another problem. Anthopologists came on the scene in Africa hanging on the coat-tails of missionaries and so the scene of the alleged crime is no longer virgin: they are like detectives trying to work out what happened on ground that has already been well trampled by their colleagues and themselves. And what they imagine to be the footprint of the criminal may well be that of a policeman.

And what missionaries probably added was an accentuated moral valency, the idea of a more intense polarity between the powers of good and evil, between God and Satan and tacitly sanctioned the fears that already existed and motivated reaction to them. I therefore suspect that what we see in Africa is not purely African but a hybrid of local and Christian demonologies.

The effect was to transform breaches of prevailing social contracts into something much more sinister and serious; bad manners becomes treachery and treason. In this context what is relevant is not the assumption that certain people might have unusual powers or abilities, but that they are prepared to use them for anti-social ends. This is what links the phenomena of

witchcraft and all modern `witch-hunts'. Anyone has it in their power and choice to be a `communist', or a sex-offender, or a terrorist, the important issue is whether or not they choose to exercise that power, NOT the means they use to any particular end.

It is for this reason that I believe that the important message about witchcraft is that it is NOT miraculous or supernatural, it does not imply or entail breaking any indigenous physical laws. Within all but the most anthropologist infested cultures witchcraft is not occult or mysterious, it is consistent with and an example of ordinary local physics; albeit maybe requiring specialist skills (whether inherited or acquired). The airliners that crashed into the WTC were not occult, nor was the skill to fly them, even if most people could not; what is significant about them was that in crashing them Atta and his mates broke what had been assumed, with hindsight naively, to be powerful, and almost universal social contracts. And the real message of `terrorism' is that henceforth all such contracts must be considered local and context dependent. This flies in the face of the Enlightenment belief in the inevitability of progress. See John Gray's `Straw Dogs'.

The Enlightenment agenda on which most of our modern scientific attitudes and values are still based, following the premises of Newtonian Science, presumed the existence of a universal context within which all peoples, alike and equal in ability and liberty, could progress towards a common goal . The fatal flaw was that this did not take into account the extent to which local and individual contexts can dominate the universal; for most practical purposes there is no universal context, or it is foolhardy to base one's policies on there being one. Each individual and group (it is not the place to distinguish them) sees the world through the lenses of their peculiar history and experiences, and this far more than any context-neutral rules, determines their behaviour. We are still suffering from the effects of neglecting that.

The supernatural and miraculous are will-of-the-wisps that will lure you into a quagmire from which you may be unable to escape. Repeat after me: in witchcraft the techniques are of no more than secondary importance. The real centre of gravity is the maintainance of social contracts.

duncan

ECONOMICS OF WITCHCRAFT

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Norman,

Re economics of witchcraft:

I think as in most fields one has to distinguish between the primary, original, motivating systems and secondary institutions and roles that develop from them.

In the case of wc I believe the context to be one in which all events no matter how unusual have to be accounted for as the prevailing model of how the world works does not acknowledge the agency of chance or random events.

As a result the system of explanation is likely to be able to cope with events within a broad range or band around a mean between accountable limits of good fortune and bad. Think of a graph of the normal range of weight or height. However, problems arise when events occur outside of that range. They cannot be accounted for by the day to day conventional wisdom that can explain events within the normal range eg the feelings and attitudes of ancestors. So when something apparently out of the ordinary occurs how is it to be explained?

TERRORISM
Suggested Exercise:

Take descriptions of witchcraft phenomena and replace references to witches with `terrorist' and their magic or tools with variations of `weapons of mass destruction' or the means of anticipated outrages.

ECONOMICS

Norman,

Two thoughts.

First, I think the pivotal change is not simply HG to farming but what follows somewhat later when surplus production leads to the development of markets and trade and hence towards cities and more complex political organization. In fact the key may be trade and the notion of alienable property that it implies. And trade also leads to the mixing and interacting of different

peoples and communities with all the potential stresses that that entails.

I am interested in the way that the discovery of alienable property influences the idea of the individual and the projection of personal characteristics like wickedness or evil. The notion of alienable property whether implicit as in the development of markets or explicit in social and formal contracts, is critical to development. A metaphoric extension may be that parts of the self also become alienable. And that as a result people are increasingly considered as being composites made up of alienable parts that may lead a life of their own and follow different masters.

There may be a tendency in thinking of witchcraft, that I am aware of myself, to consider a community in isolation as if it were under a bell jar and had little contact with others. Yet there is probably a case to be made that witchcraft is not indiginous to a single community but only occurs when that community is impacted on by others or interacts with them as in trade relations, or even tangentially by being near trade routes. In other words it occurs in a world that has begun to trade and interact - even if the community concerned is on the margins. A stagnant pool or backwater rather than a running river.

Second. What is the difference between evil and ordinary bad or wicked behavior? There is a tacit difference that justifies a separate word, and I think it is that evil is considered somewhat alien. It is badness that one denies or finds difficult to accept in oneself and so projects onto an alien or other, usually an outgroup or individual who is considered in some way different.

So from this perspective one has a cluster of ideas and phrases of which the following are, in no particular order, only a sample:

the incarnation of evil
the personification of evil
the projection of evil
the externalization of evil

I think the problem with all of these is that it is not evil that is projected but more ordinary badness that people find difficult to accept in themselves or their true kin, and that they transform into evil. In other words evil is not the

beginning but the product or end. The following may therefore be preferable:

the discovery of evil
the generation of evil
the manufacture of evil (too mechanical)
the creation of evil
the invention of evil
the emergence of evil
the incarnation of evil (incarnation could be in each group)

or:

the projection/externalization of the alien/other
the invention of the alien
the denial of the alien/other
the alienation of the bad

or:

the kernel of ism (racism)
the seeds of ism

According to Richard Kieckhefer in `Magic in the Middle Ages' (Cambridge UP) the following problems have emerged as basic to the study of witchcraft in Western Europe.
Why did the witch trials in Europe occur when they did - between C15 and C17?
Why did so many of the intellectual and religious leaders encourage them?
Why were the overwhelming majority of accused and executed women?
Why was witch-hunting less virulent in countries with tightly centralized judicial apparatus, such as Spain and Italy?

As far as I know you have so far shown insufficient interest in what I consider to be the two questions that are fundamental, and an essential prelude, to any study of witchcraft deserving of the name. Until these are addressed I do not think it is worth continuing.

First, is witchcraft a universal phenomenon, or is it local to specific times, places, and hence contexts?

Although I believe it to be local, the only evidence I have is my analysis of the titles of papers in the British Museum collection and that is terribly weak. Surely this is an ideal

topic for one of your students? It requires only a literature search from a good academic library and the help of a competent librarian - I am sure that someone has already addressed the issue. The only problem is filtering out the works of all the New Age and Wiccan riff raff.

Second, what models or explanations have so far been suggested to account for the phenomenon?

I know that you have considered various biological variables, but I am sure there are more sociological and anthropological models than I know about. I only found about social amplification and moral panic by chance in exploring ideas of risk, and the application of moral panic to witchcraft was in the work of an academic specializing in English Literature. We need a comprehensive list of alternatives. That does not require reinventing the wheel. Again I am pretty sure the work has already been done and again seems ideal for a student with access to a first rate library with subscriptions to all the relevant journals.

I am still fearful that you are persevering in the forlorn hope that the `data' you have collected is sufficient to allow the induction of a model of witchcraft: that hypotheses will somehow fall out from it almost spontaneously, `like shining from shook foil'; or as though you had scattered a bag of scrabble pieces on the floor and discovered that they had formed approximations to poems and proverbs.

The difference between us is that you still seem to believe that science is based on induction, whilst instead I consider it to depend on abduction. You think that the world is made from scrabble pieces that click together to form words, I think it is just dry bones waiting for a diviner. Science is not a means of discovering hypotheses that lie ready to hand in data that is waiting to be found. It is distinguished from other intellectual activities simply as being a systematic method, the best so far developed, for choosing between hypotheses that originate, in much the same way as all works of art, in the imagination. And that there is no such thing as facts or data without theories and models - there is no such thing as an `innocent eye'. In Goodman's paraphrase of Kant:

ALTHOUGH CONCEPTION WITHOUT PERCEPTION IS MERELY EMPTY, PERCEPTION WITHOUT CONCEPTION IS BLIND (TOTALLY INOPERATIVE).

In my opinion, the provenance of your data is too uncertain to generalize from it to truths about populations. And, in the case

of the newspaper clippings it is not even robust enough to draw reliable conclusions about the contents of newspapers; because you have very little idea what factors led to inclusion or exclusion, and hence none as to how representative is your collection.

So, if your study is to be more than a more or less arbitrarily or variously and loosely categorized collection of interesting snippets and images around the theme of witchcraft in Africa, the only thing that you can do is to use the data to illustrate a model of the witchcraft phenomenon derived from other sources - the work of earlier historians, sociologists, and anthropologists; fundamental aspects of human psychology and behaviour; more general philosophical and logical principles. For this purpose your material is excellent and would add life and colour to what would otherwise be a terminally dry and boring dissertation. It might also be strong enough to allow the preference for one model over another.

What you have is a pile of leaves, you do not have the trunk, and cannot reconstruct the tree without finding one, there are just too many plausible alternatives. Distasteful as you will probably find it, you must start by addressing the possible alternative models, and taking all your experience into account, choose the one, or at the least a general type, that you feel is most appropriate. To do this you have to go beyond your data and only then can you consider how best to fit it all together. There is no shame in this - it is how the best creative scientists, as opposed to the journeymen, work. To paraphrase Jerome Bruner we have to go `beyond the information given'.

Science is not about discovery but selection - between models derived from a wide variety of sources, most only tangentially related to the matter in hand. Science is about testing and follows an earlier phase based on metaphor and analogy from which the hypotheses to be tested are developed. Your approach is far too mechanical and discounts the crucial importance of imagination and creativity. And you tend to be blind to the fact that what you privilege as `reality' is only one among many.

29/04/97

Dear Norman,

Hav'nt thought of witchcraft for years so will take time to get back in tune. What follows are not so much suggestions as tools I have found helpful elsewhere and which might form part of a

context within which the real nature of witchcraft might be made clearer. For I have a hunch that the problem so far has been that anthropologists have been acting like drunks looking for their lost keys, under the nearest lamp post rather than where they dropped them, because `the light is better here'. Or trying to fly a plane without reading the flight manual or even knowing if it has wheels or floats.

Framework:

1. Humans have big brains to understand other minds rather than make tools (David Premack).

2. What distinguishes humans from all other species and their cousins such as neanderthals is an ability not only to form representations of the world, but to form higher order representations of intrinsic/primary and lower order representations. This allows us not only to represent the representations used by others which determine their behaviour ie other minds (an ability thought to be deficient in autism and possibly schizophrenia), but also in forming representations of our own thoughts enables a unique form of consciousness and what is called episodic memory. These abilities develop fairly late sometime between 2 and 4; before then few people have more than a few fragments of memories (infantile amnesia).

3. Human beings are still at the beta-testing phase of their development and after 100,000 years evolution has still not debugged the product sufficiently for a shrink-wrapped release. What we are is a rather untidy bundle of special purpose sub-programs and patches loosely cobbled together. But, like Frankinstein in movies, the joins still show and become visible from certain angles. These are revealed as conflicting or less than seamless dispositions to act in particular ways and a rather lumpy set of abilities whose relative lack of homogeneity usually goes un-noticed until it catches us out.

4. Following on from these is a default tendency to explain the behaviour of everything in terms of will, representations and purpose. Representationally neutral explanations such as in terms of physical law comes much later and are probably closely linked to a hands on experience of relatively complex machines.

5. This implies that one should consider the world as consisting of two broad categories of things distinguished by what determines the outcome of their interaction,

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First, things like falling apples (or men falling to earth), avalanches, floods, stones, and glass whose interactions are completely determined by physical law. When a stone hits glass or a body the ground the outcome is determined by physics and owes nothing to whatever the parties to the interaction may feel about the matter or how they choose to represent it.

Second, those things which, whilst still governed by physical law, interact according to how they represent their circumstances including the minds of others. Playing poker might be an example. Until recently the vast majority of these were living animals but especially humans and this may explain why the importance of the distinction has been overlooked; it was hidden in the animal/ vegetable & mineral, animate/ inanimate, or human/ animal distinctions. It was also rather more the province of artists (novelists in particular) rather than scientists.

6. An ability to understand other minds would seem to be a pre-requisite for the development of farming (only 10,000 yago). Hunters and gatherers can usually move around and put distance between themselves and others thus reducing conflicts. This is possible because generally they only need to invest for short periods into the future mistakes or what is lost in moving can be made up in a few days. But farming is another matter to reap many months ahead what you have sown today calls for more than faith or an estimate of risk but a notion of inalienable possession (private or at least communal ownership) and an understanding of the minds of possible competitors and usurpers. Farming is only possible (helps survival) if one can establish some form of social contract which will provide mutually secured tenure between neighbours. This must like all friendships be kept in constant repair.

Because a stolen apple or farm is physically indistinguishable from one with the benefit of formal title, any notion of ownership and social contract must presuppose more than primary (first order) or intrinsic representations; metarepresentations are required.

Also in the absence of an understanding of scientific biology the safest strategy for successful farming and survival is likely to be extremely conservative, rely heavily on ritual and any deviation cause great anxiety and possibly violent retaliation. A powerful central tendency or regression towards the mode will be the result.

Suggestion:

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Witchcraft is associated or correllated with:

1. A innate natural disposition or preference for causal explanation in terms of agency; minds and higher order representations.

2. A relatively poorly developed, acquired rather than innate, understanding of representationally neutral physical law and a lack of hands-on experience of relatively complex law-governed technology (what Popper refers to as World 3). This is important as to overcome the inertia of explanation in terms of agency takes considerable effort and has to be acquired rather than being innate.

3. Together 1 & 2 result in a tendency or preference for controlling the world indirectly by acting on minds rather than matter. Associated with this is understanding in terms of recipes rather than descriptions. By this I mean that instead of trying to describe the taste of a dish you give instructions how to create it. This is the default when the vocabulary of conceptual tools, such as written language, arabic numbers, or alienable possession (what Dennet calls external prostheses of mind, or Cassirrer, referring to culture as the minds place in nature) is restricted (science is restricted in relation to culture and vice versa because no matter how extensive their range each tends to exclude the other).

4. The existence in any community of a minority who are relatively challenged in terms of an ability to use metarepresentations (relative as in schizophrenia rather than absolute as in severe autism). Because this makes it difficult for them to distinguish between themselves and others they are prone to experiences such as hallucinations which suggest the existence of a wider invisible world. This is further reinforced by the discovery of hallucinogenic and other mind altering substances.

5. A deep seated horror and anxiety generated by any deviation from powerful tradition and ritual. This probably based on a fear of risky innovation as opposed to safe repetition; what worked in the past is likely to work at least as well in the future.

6. A relative, sometimes local, weakening (or lack) of any overarching explanatory framework (whether tradition, religion or science) which has evolved to contain anxieties generated by the above. This is probably seen at present in SA where

traditional codes of conduct are being threatened and superceded by the rough and tumble of market economics; and what appears to be a lottery of success and failure associated with it. In at least one outbreak the accused were largely the newly successful.

What is normally thought of as witchcraft is really the tip of an iceberg; based largely on the neurotic exogamy like preference of anthropologists to study human nature in fancy dress and far from home (funny clothes and warmer climates). The underlying phenomena are universal and to the unblinkered eye can be identified in even the most sophisticated societies. Their natural habitat are the interstices between scientific explanation; those areas where suggested explanations seem inadequate to account for perceived deviations which are considered peculiarly threatening and abhorrent. Usually this is culturally determined and may be the result of an overvaluation of accepted norms. Hence the precise focus varies with time and place. Look and ye will find.

The identification of witches: Pointers to the existence of witchcraft explanations:

+ There is little or no objective evidence of physical damage, or there is no plausible causal chain between the accused and the alleged harm.

+ In the absence of evidence of physical harm the focus shifts towards representations and ideologies, but mostly deep rooted ideals and new categories of harm are defined in terms of them. These differ from those already on statute books which formalise well established codes of conduct governing, for example business and finance. As these are largely conventional, change over time, and are culturally dependent history has to be rewritten in terms of these new post hoc mechanisms so as to account for the alleged harm, which is by implication widespread, having been overlooked for so long. New professions are built on these foundations and career opportunities appear.

+ The special nature of the alleged crime and initial difficulty in obtaining successful prosecutions lead to calls for rules of evidence, found necessary to protect against miscarriages of justice, to be relaxed or waived. Any resulting increase in the number of convictions is then taken as evidence of the extent of the problem and justification for the removal of even more legal safeguards.

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+ The focus of concern has to be such as to be capable of raising at least a faint frisson of guilt or doubt in the minds of the majority. This is likely to be the case with any behaviour which has been forbidden by most cultures and at most periods in history as the need for such proscription suggests the presence of at least some instinctual drive in its general direction. The best examples probably involve an absolute ban on actions whose boundaries are difficult to define without ambiguity. The difficulty results in a conflict between what George Lakoff in his book `Women, Fire and Dangerous Things' calls classical Aristotelian categories which are defined in terms of clean boundaries and inclusion and exclusion criteria, and prototypical categories which, following Wittgenstein, are defined in terms of `family resemblances' with a prototypical core surrounded by a fuzzy penumbra which blurs seamlessly into those of its neighbours. The problem is that law presupposes and aspires to classical categories assuming they are attainable whilst nature does not seem to have read the same books and muddles along quite well with family resemblances.

By this standard killing another, despite being considered in absolute terms the most serious of all crimes, is not a good example, as it can be cleanly defined and no society has denied itself the right to kill people under any circumstances. Hence society may punish `unlawful killing' but does not get overexcited about murderous thoughts which are largely left a matter of individual conscience. Nor in most societies is there much enthusiasm for depriving its citizens of access to the means by which one might murder another, or to restrict their viewing of depictions, or re-enactments of killing. The fact is that any strong urge to kill another is the exception rather than the rule and alien to almost all people almost all of the time.

Sexuality on the other hand is ideal: regulated, although in different ways, everywhere and when; concerned with behaviour which is instinctual, driven, universal and almost impossible to categorise in classical terms, it is prototypically prototypical rather than classical. In addition, or because of this such boundaries as exist drift like sand as does the legislation and case law which attempts to formalise them. The whole field is full of ambiguities with the result that many behaviours are capable of multiple interpretations ranging from innocence to deviance.

But, even if there are no instinctual drives to send the unwary crashing headlong against our communal ideals a substitute can easily be found. This is based on an almost universal fear of

loss of control which originates in the common experience of doing things without full conscious awareness; an experience which must be much more common in places where the lack of effective medicines for relatively common illnesses results in acute disturbances of consciousness such as delirium. All that is required is to suggest that something in which the majority believes such as, for example, maleficia, could have been carried out by someone without any conscious intent or insight into the corollary that they were in fact a witch.

Just as after any well publicised crime false confessions are common, so many people have a deep anxiety about being rejected and will do almost anything to be accepted back into the bosom of their family. Hence many of those accused of witchcraft correlated behaviour will be easily persuaded to reduce the intolerable cognitive dissonance and confess. This is further support for the importance of the witchfinder.

+ The resulting system is self sustaining, autopoietic, and tends to go through a characteristic cycle. In the first phase the witchfinders are in the ascendant, multiply and succeed in muzzling the sceptics by intimidating them through simple implications that dissent is suspicious of offence and discretion the better part of valour. But, eventually, the success of the witchfinders results in such glaring anomalies and injustices that the sceptics can no longer be ignored and counterattack becomes the only effective defence from irrational accusations.

As to your questions:

I think poisoning could play a part by being something poorly understood, vaguely occult, difficult to detect or guard against, and providing a superficially plausible technical explanation around which witch accusations could be elaborated.

Non verbal communication and control via indirect manipulation of minds is an integral part of the whole process. Non-verbal and verbal control mechanisms can complement each other, but are equally often alternative tactics which can easily become mutually exclusive. This can be the basis for my preferred definition of what has been called hysteria, which would be something like: a maladaptive overemphasis or over-reliance on non-verbal manipulation of the minds of other people in order to achieve goals which are usually poorly defined and difficult to express in words. But that is another story.

more clearly later

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

duncan

Witchcraft and Terrorism (draft for discussion)

To understand witchcraft and terrorism one must consider them not in terms of actions but reactions. In each case the phenomena is defined not by the acts of `terrorists' but by the reaction of the community and its authorities to whatever has become described or classified as an act of terrorism. Like property, terrorism exists at the level of descriptions, representations, and signs. It belongs in the realms of intensionality nor extensionality. It is a metarepresentation.

What witchcraft and terrorism have in common.

A perceived threat
A belief in the existence of `WMD' (extraordinary power or resources)
A belief in individuals with and able to use extraordinary power
A majority threatened by a minority
A majority in terror
An authority under threat (of being perceived as impotent)
A clamour for something to be done to reduce public anxiety
A clamour for changes in law
A clamour for restriction of due process in order to increase the liklihood of conviction,
An acceptance of suspension of habeus corpus
A clamour for increased severity of punishment
An acceptance of restriction of human rights
A belief in the existence of `evil', either as an an external force, or as an attribute of certain human beings, setting them apart from others, making them irredeemable and justifying their death or indefinite incarceration.
An acceptance of restriction of freedom of speech and the flow of information
An implication that `good' and `evil' are so clearly defined and unmistakable that anyone expressing uncertainty or sympathy for those accused or suspected is likely to be one of them.

As a consequence, by reacting to a threat that they may have themselves inflamed, the power and survival of the prevailing authority is greatly enhanced and ipso facto that of the commons diminished - with thanks and due deference.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

The clamour for changes in laws, due process, sentencing and human rights is a warning sign and marker of the developing phenomena.

The belief in the scale of the threat is always exaggerrated and in general vastly greater than reality or liklihood. For example, in spite of the possibility that terrorists may gain control of genuine WMD in a form that they can deploy effectively, and in spite of the outrage of 9/11, the reality is that fewer people have died as a result of terrorism than by family homicides, road traffic accidents, medical accidents, or the effects of alcohol, tobacco, or hamburgers. Or, perhaps ironically if not tragically, as a result of counter-terrorist activities and adventures. However, the latter victims are mostly foreign, darker skinned, of less economic value, and hence not worthy of counting.

As an example of the incongruity between the public perception of risk and the reality, in preparing a report on public anxiety about the risk of children being abducted and murdered by strangers, one of the TV news programs recently carried out a survey of parents. They found that on average parents believed that in the UK 170 children a year were abducted and murdered and for 30% the number was over 450. In contrast the reality is that each year in the UK 6 children are murdered by strangers (the vast majority are killed by their parents or families) and this number has remained the same since 1980.

Similar discrepancies between public opinion and reality are to be found in the case of `muti' murders (killing or mutilation to harvest human body parts for use in withcraft related rituals), and homicidal cults such as lion or leopard men. In almost every case under investigation the evidence melts towards zero.

I am now convinced that the human tendency to misperceive and exaggerate the reality of risk can provide the explanatory centre of gravity that your book has lacked. Moreover, it is completely compatible with your preferred focus on wc as a 'Fear System', as that emerges as an implication and consequence, if not a special case, or one among several others. Risk misperception and amplification underpin fear mechanisms, explain them, and provide their cause. It is the foundation that they were wanting.

The tendency, in relation to some issues, for the perceived risk to be vastly greater than the real is a relatively recent

discovery, as it could only be recognized once statistical and quantitative methods for determininq risk had been developed. Until then perceived risk and danger was the only reality and that must have been based on narratives, stories, and myths. This would have been especially significant before writing made it possible to provide more formal and standardized descriptions that could be compared with others from different times and places. But only quantification could reveal the extent of the difference. And it is important to appreciate that what is remarkable and provides an explanatory model for a range of troublesome phenomena of which wc is only one, is not the fact that perceived risk differs from actual, but the scale of the difference between them. For if the perception of danger is an alarm mechanism that facilitates survival one would expect it to be biased towards false positives rather than false negatives - it is better for a smoke alarm to react to a passing smoker than wait for a smouldering fag-end to set the furniture alight.

But, there is a certain irony in the fact that the mathematics that has enabled us to understand how the world works, quantify risks, and hence reveal the extent to which our perception of risk is so often distorted, seems on its own unable to correct it. This may explain both the seemingly surprising persistence of so many 'pre-scientific' beliefs that science has shown to be wrong, and our difficulty in perceiving risk accurately. In ordinary life we seem to make decisions, not on the basis of numbers, but of our affects. This suggests that the world of number and the world of affect are relatively independent, which is scarcely surprising as the former is a very recent construction, that could come into our consciousness only after the development of writing and widespread literacy, a few thousand years ago. Until then risk could only be based on feelings and these cannot be disproved - only reinterpreted from a different context that is always relative. Without the benefit of numbers we are utterly dependent on contexts of interpretation, or sub-cultures, that are mostly incommensurable. Our perception of risk is always local and a function of a consensus. And that in most cases means some kind of authority or tradition.

In order to show how the amplification of risk can illuminate wc it is best to begin with one of the related phenomena. For our purposes the problem with wc is that it has such a long history that its roots probably precede literacy and are unrecorded, so that they can only be implied from general principles. And even in areas such as Africa where it is still endemic all that we can observe is an elderly tree in an ecosystem it has itself

shaped - the conditions that allowed it to germinate and the sapling it once was are gone forever.,

Fortunately, terrorism shares sufficient similarities with witchcraft for them to be considered tokens of the same type and being younger and less monolithic its development is easier to study.

The most important difference is that whereas in the case of wc the focus of concern is part of a long tradition of conventional wisdom whose validlty has long been taken for granted, in that of terrorism it has to be consciously and ostentatiously created. What they have in common is that the events that define them have certain characteristics (insert list from Slovic and ?Douglas = surprise, shock and awe, dread, uncontrollable - external locus of control - unpredictable, malevolent, source an enemy within, hidden, alien, ?guilt identification: -> paranoia or sense of being a victim, helplessness and loss of control) that are almost guaranteed to amplify the perception of risk and increase the gap between perceived and actual danger. It is probably clearer to put the resulting sequence of events as a list.

The Ontogenesis of Terrorism and related phenomena:

1. A minority with a grievance against a majority ostentatiously commit an outrage that produces shock and awe in the larger community.

2. The nature of the outrage increases the sense of danger in the general population out of proportion to what would be appropriate to the actual risk.

3. This leads to a clamour for a response that will reduce the danger and the volume is proportional to the perceived rather than the actual risks.

4. This creates a threat to the credibility and existence of the prevailing authorities who are in danger of being perceived as ineffectual or impotent if they do not react to the dangers as perceived by their subjects. They are forced to act in ways that may, from a wider perspective, seem precipitant and inappropriate if not actually counterproductive.

5. Fortunately for the authorities they have little to lose; at least in the short term. They can use the momentum of concern to win support for measures that, while ostensibly addressing the concerns of their subjects, increases their own power and

control over them - resulting in a rolling back of established rights and safeguards and eroding privacy and autonomy.

6. These changes will rapidly become institutionalised, with the creation of new organizations and roles that soon become their own justification, vested interests, and attest to the reality and significance of the phenomena, to which they are a reaction rather than a viable solution.

Witchcraft, at the level of the local community in Africa and in Europe in C17, differs from this pattern only in the first item, in that the event that causes concern and triggers a response will, in most cases, be natural rather than the result of a malevolent act, and the causal link to a perpetrator - the witch - is justified and validated by a traditional world view within which it is believed possible. And that world view receives extra if circular support from the very existence of the institutions and roles that flowed from it.

The aim of this exercise is to provide a coherent account of witchcraft. The approach taken is to consider the witchcraft phenomenon as consisting of two parts, the larger of which is made up of secondary manifestations, which account for most that is observable. The smaller and more important is the central core of kernal from which the others are derived and is the engine of the phenomenon. This is made up of three components:

1. Events that induce feelings of anxiety and concern, usually amounting to fear, shock, and awe.

2. A doctrine, in the original sense of an explanatory or interpretive framework, that is believed to account for the phenomena. It is important to understand that without the doctrine there is nothing unique about, or intrinsic to, the events requiring explanation that could identify them as having anything to do with witchcraft. In the same way there is nothing about a stolen apple to distinguish it from one that is not.

3. Behaviors, roles, social structures and institutlons that are implied by and flow from the doctrine, and evolve as a means of damage limitation, prophylaxis, and retribution for alleged harm. These secondary phenomena are the only tangible manifestations of witchcraft that can be studied and being

context dependent and conventional are variable in form. From the point of view of the overall concept these variations are trivial, but unfortunately have been and still are the cause of much wasted time and thought. Like the notions of energy, gravity, capital, and property (and perhaps consciousness) witchcraft itself is invisible and intangible and known only through its manifestations and effects. It has a hollow centre and a nose of wax. On a smaller scale it is like the Roman Catholic Church a grand and complex organization that has a long history and spawned many variations and yet is built on an illusion or misunderstanding of how the world works. The reality of the witch is in the eyes of her accusers and the institutions that give them authority.

Doctrines vs Theories

Doctrines are higher order or meta-theories that provide frameworks for explanation and interpretation. Unlike ordinary theories, that are scientific only to the extent that they are refutable, doctrines are not directly refutable, but depend for their status and survival on the richness and utility of the questions and theories that they facilitate and that can be derived from them. "By their fruits ye shall know them, do men gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles?" The best term for this richness of consequences is fecundity, or that suggested by Peirce `uberty'; from the Latin ubertas for richness, fecundity, and copiousness. Doctrines are judged by their uberty.

This sense of doctrine is similar to the notion of a paradigm as used by Kuhn in `The Structure of Scientific Revolutions'. And the distinction between doctrines and theories or hypotheses helps to explain the difficulty in changing attitudes towards religion, risks, and danger. All of these are based in doctrines and yet most attempts to change attitudes rely on education based on presenting alternative and better validated theories. In general a doctrine is like a faith one cannot change it by providing alternative` evidence', but only by making believers conscious of the critical cases that cannot be explained by the doctrine. Doctrines are largely self-contained explanatory systems and those that survive do so because they are able to account for phenomena. They differ not in their fecundity in terms of the sheer number of hypotheses generated, but in the extent to which these hypotheses are refutable and hence capable of provisional scientific validation - which is the best that can be hoped for. But these scientific criteria are unique to the scientific doctrine or world view and satisfy only those who believe in it. Other doctrines offer different satisfactions.

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The problem is that witchcraft like psychoanalysis is not easily refutable, as William James said of the psychology of Wilhelm Wundt `it's like a worm, you cut it up and every fragment crawls'. In general you cannot attack a doctrine with evidence, you have to try and replace it with another. And to do that you need to attack its utility.

The misunderstanding of how science works

Pitfalls that reveal the racist dispositions of conventional anthropology.

The single greatest obstacle to an understanding of witchcraft is the notion of the supernatural. First, because it encourages the popular and prurient association of witchcraft with the occult, in the sense of magic rather than simply hidden, and thus obscures the more general form of the phenomenon. Second, and more important, because it has become an asymmetric moral judgement made by one who has come to consider their viewpoint superior to the other. This would be clearer if the form was brought into line with the sense and supernatural changed for subscientific or prescientific. In most cases supernatural has colonialist and racist connotations. And so all definitions of witchcraft of the form `harm caused by supernatural or magical means' should be abandoned. Thirdly, when used as part of a definition it displaces the focus away from the communal structure of the phenomenon to an illusory emphasis on mechanisms and perpetrators - from witchcraft as a communal phenomenon to witches and their alleged powers.

The engine(room) / powerhouse of witchcraft

The Provoking events

The Doctrine

The Response

The Derivatives

Implications
If witchcraft as a doctrine is widespread why are its manifestations less so?

WITCHCRAFT
Comparative witchcraft

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Hunter-Gatherers (HG)
Pastoral Herders
Subsistence Farmers
Communal farming?
Individualist Surplus Farmers
Industrialists

Witchcraft is mostly a feature of farming communities

HUNTERS		FARMERS
Zero Sum	ZS 2	NZS
Shamans		Witches
Healers		Witches?
Healing		Retribution
Extrinsic		Intrinsic
Flexible?		Normative

Especially transition from zero-sum to non-zero-sum

Core Characteristics

+ Belief in supernatural is widespread and not unique to WC
+ Animism is default explanation for how world works
+ Folk psychology takes precedence over folk physics

+ Distinguish between reality and beliefs
+ Between things and statements about things
+ Between representations and metarepresentations
+ Distinguish between belief and institution

+ Institutions can take on life of own (autopoietic)
+ Most WC phenomena are institutional (formal or informal)

+ Zero-sum (ZS) vs non-zero-sum (NZS) societies/economies

+ Justice as retribution vs justice as healing (Navajo)

+ Impact of outside (eg invasion colonialism)

+ The idea of evil nature vs bad acts (intrinsic vs extrinsic)

+ The idea of contagion

+ The notion of unconscious acts

+ The defense mechanisms especially projection
+ Individual vs communal projection
+ Anthropology as projection

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+ Witchcraft vs treason vs conspiracy
+ Evil by nature
+ Conspiracy with others especially supernatural
+ Illegitimate use of Agents rather than natural laws

+ A response to weakness and need for powerful allies

FEATURES OF WITCHCRAFT AS INSTITUTION

+ Supernatural agency
+ Idea of evil
+ Evil as intrinsic to individual (evil person vs evil acts)
+ Treason and conspiracy
+ Unconscious volition
+ Contagion and threat
+ Need to change law and rules of evidence or proof

Doctrines or Paradigms
To appreciate why I have introduced the notion of doctrines as frameworks for interpretation and consider them the key to understanding the nature of witchcraft you need to think of them not as passive frames - as for pictures or photos - but active processors of information. They take as input an unexpected event, that causes concern or alarm, and processes it (ie transforms it) into an interpretation in terms that the community will find acceptable and conforms to their expectations - that are of course also shaped by the same dominant doctrine.

Imagine demonstrating one of those Sony robotic toy dog - Aibo - to people from different historical periods. In the middle ages it might be thought to be moved by demons, in the C18 by clockwork, in the mid C20 by valves and servoes, and in the last few decades by microprocessors controlled by computer software. The point I am trying to make is that the 'scientific' explanations would not be available or meaningful to someone in the middle ages and the 'demonic' interpretation would not even be considered by most people in UK/USA today. And, to control the beast, in the middle ages one would seek the help of a priest or even a 'white witch', but today a software or hardware engineer. The demonic, like the witch, is a subset or subdoctrine of the animistic while the mechanical or computer is a subset of the atomic or scientific doctrine. In each case the overall, dominating, doctrine and its subdoctrines process the information and interpret it. Conceptual and social structures

are really computing systems that process information and select those interpretations and explanations that are meaningful to the community. They determine what can be said and done in much the same way that syntax determines the permissible patterns of words, or the rules the permissible moves in a game like chess or Go.

To the extent that people in societies with animistic and atomic doctrines interact with the same things, which in practice means parts of nature (because in the atomic most interactions are now with man made artifacts) they are likely to make similar observations and learn HOW to do similar things, such as hunt, cook, grow, kill, etc and some will become expert in more specialised fields like toxicology, but this will be knowledge by experience (or acquaintance) and HOW to do things. In contrast, these societies will differ much more dramatically in their preferred explanations of WHY things happen - in knowledge by description. In the case of the scientific it will be in terms of amoral physical laws often expressed in math equations. In the case of the animistic it will be in terms of the intent, will, and desires of various kinds of living and mindful agents only some of whom are embodied and enfleshed. Another way of putting this is that the scientific doctrine is amoral and descriptive whilst the animistic is saturated with moral judgements, FORENSIC (identifies a culprit or someone who can be held responsible), and prescriptive. It answer the question WHY with a WHO (dunnit).

The behavior of, or changes in, the scientific world is the result of the MINDLESS interaction of atoms in accordance with physical law - and points to MECHANISM. That of the animistic is the result of the MINDFUL interaction of living entities in accordance with the vagaries of folk psychology (explains behavior in terms of the notions of belief, desire, and will) and points to and implies forensic RESPONSIBILITY.

And because the animistic and witch worlds are essentially moral and based on forensic processes they are much more often and severely scary than the scientific. Physical law is much more reassuring, consistent, and predictable than folk psychology.

And the problem with changing witch related behavior is not like teaching someone better moves in chess, but rather changing the game being played to another such as Go.

A good, or promising, way to think about doctrines is that they are less like hardware and more like software scripts. This can be in two senses. First, like the outline of a play that leaves

lots of room for improvisation. Second in the sense of computer programs. Nowadays most of these are built by connecting standard (prewritten - off the shelf) modules (often called objects - as in object oriented programming systems or OOPS) together, with scripts which are usually written in a higher level and more natural like language (Python, Ruby, PERL, etc., are much easier to read and understand than C or FORTRAN). These scripts are, however, just programs that transform inputs, such as fear inducing events, into outputs, such as explanations and prescriptions for action. And, as in that for a play, scripts contain roles that in the case of the witchcraft subdoctrine, or script, includes that of the witch as perhaps the principal producer of (motive force producing) bad things happening.

Within a world dominated by the animistic doctrine and its witchcraft subdoctrine the witch is considered to be as real and causally effective a force as gravity is in that dominated by the scientific doctrine and its physics subdoctrine.

And another important property of a computer script is that it can be set to run automatically when given the appropriate trigger or signal event. In the context of a animistic/witch doctrine an unexpected event can trigger a witch script (adapted to the local culture) that will then run automatically. In a somewhat similar way a sportsman who at first had to practice individual moves can eventually string these all together into a sequence about which he does not even have to think. A professional tennis player has to return serve far faster than he can consciously think about it - `return of serve' is a kind of script, triggered by his opponents serve.

The problem with most interpretations of witchcraft is that they are based on assumptions that are like a freshwater fish's understanding of the nature of water - fine so long as it stays in the fresh, but potentially lethal if it makes assumptions about the nature of the sea.

The will of the people vs the self interest of authority and politicians.

The two faces of populism:

My personal take on populism would be that on the one hand, insofar as it is a reaction to mercantilism it is positive, but on the other, it has immense potential for exploitation into kindling into moral panic and illiberal changes to law and due process. The first signs of this are clamour for changes that

reduce safeguards and make conviction easier. The role of the media is clearly crucial.

I suspect that a major factor in populism becoming malignant is a sense of impotence and exclusion.

Russian Narodnik movement hoped to bypass the horrors of capitalism and move directly to socialism via communes or Mir.

This was championed by the revolutionaries Bhakunin and Tkachev, and one of my favorite Russians, Alexander Herzen who wrote the wonderful `My Past and Thoughts' -

Childhood, Youth and Exile comprises the first two parts of My Past and Thoughts, one of the greatest monuments of Russian literature, comparable to the major works of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev.

He was recently a central character in Tom Stoppards acclaimed trilogy about pre revolutionary intellectuals - `The Coast of Utopia' based on Berlin's book `Russian Thinkers'.

"The Coast of Utopia", which can be enjoyed as a whole or as three separate plays, follows a group of young intellectuals from the country houses and cafes of the 1830s, through the European revolutions of 1848-9, to exile in London in the 1850s. The trilogy as a whole tells an epic story of romantics and revolutionaries caught up in the struggle for political freedom in an age of emperors.

Populism often seems to be a reaction to a perceived failure of ordinary democracy to address issues that have become of intense concern to the public. And this can provide opportunities for exploitation by politicians such as McCarthy who built a power base on popular right wing fear of socialism and communism. While on the other wing Senator La Folette's Progressive Party hoped to realize a more socialist agenda. Populism can therefore take left and right wing forms.

The major danger with populism seems to me (here I am winging it on the back of my own concerns) to be the ease with which it can be exploited and the origins of concern manipulated by the media. The result is the `social amplification' of fear and anxiety and the sense of risk and danger. This has been described as the creation of `moral panics' and `folk devils'. The characteristics of moral panics are (according to Nachman and Ben-Yehuda) -

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Heightened Concern about a perceived danger
Hostility towards a group or category believed to be involved
Consensus about danger
Disproportionality
Volatility - they erupt suddenly and subside quickly - though they can lie dormant

The defining markers of disproprtionality are -

Figures (statistics) exaggerated
Figures fabricated
Relative neglect of other more harmful conditions (deaths from heroin vs deaths from alcohol or smoking)
Importance at one time greatly different from that at another

To these I would add a clamour for a change in the law that would remove safeguards and reduce concern for due process and add new laws to the statute book. Realizing the old adage that `Hard cases make bad law".

This is in fact the social phenomenon that lies at the core of witchcraft - it is witchcraft without the baroque magical ornamentation. And this is why I have described witchcraft as an extra - legal system of criminal law. The statute law of countries like Tanzania is imported and incongruent with the conerns of most of the people in that it does not recognize the danger and harm done by witches. This leads to heightened fear, dissatisfaction and a sense of exclusion and the persistence of informal laws that seek to address genuine anxieties. The difficulty for the government is how to address these anxieties about dangers that the scientific doctrine on which the formal legal system is based considers without foundation. And this must take account of the fact that the scientific doctrine or paradigm considers the world to be made up of inert atoms, whilst the informal paradigm on which witchcraft believing societies are based is animistic and made up of entities with minds. Changing one to the other is not simply a matter of providing new and better evidence in favour of science but something more like religious conversion or even revolution.

Bringing about such change might be made easier if your recipe for enlivening capital were to reduce the sense of economic exclusion.

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November 20, 2004¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitchcraft - background¬∏Q1
Are witch events universal or local in time or space?
Q1a
Are they ubiquitous but mostly harmless only occasionally becoming pathological and manifesting themselves as discrete episodes, or against a background of facilitating beliefs are they discrete phenomena?¬∏¬∏¬∏November 20, 2004¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitchcraft types¬∏History European
Anthropology African
Modern New Age - cult = self assigned¬∏

November 20, 2004¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitchcraft again!¬∏Pelagian heresy? That evil can be eradicated by projection and termination?¬∏¬∏¬∏December 7, 2004¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùLanguage learning and TOM¬∏Might the ease with which children learn languages be a function of an undeveloped TOM. When I try to practice French or Spanish I am acutely aware of what I am doing and that awareness inhibits me.¬∏¬∏¬∏November 20, 2004¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitchcraft Project¬∏
Witchcraft is about beliefs and descriptions of how the world works rather than how it does. It is about what are considered to be accepted facts rather than things?

Range = distribution in space (global vs local) + time (endemic vs epidemic) - are episodes quantitatively or qualitatively different, kindling or exacerbations of an endemic pattern of explanation. Look for epidemiological models carriers and sporadic outbreaks vs discrete illnesses.
Depth = significance or = costs
Cost:
- legal
- economic = increased transaction costs and loss of information re market
- social = scapegoating
- political = negates democracy
- health = mortality + morbidity
Definition = a response to the fear of harm done by occult (hidden) or extraordinary means.
Approach = wc as extralegal legal system - view wc as amounting to an extralegal system of criminal law that is incongruent with the formal law. Unlike informal economy whose extralegal institutions are mostly congruent with the formal legal system.
Mechanism = social amplification of risk, danger, or simply fear.
Model

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Key variables
Intervention
Key players and nodes¬∏¬∏
DEFINITION
November 22, 2003¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùCarlS#01¬∏The definition of witchcraft.
Most popular definitioas of witchcraft are variants of 'Harming others, or their possessions, by magical or supernatural means'. Most definitions of witchcraft are variants of - harm done to others by magical or supernatural means. And though not made explicit it is implied that the origin of the harm is a person acting with malice and usually, though not necessarily, with forethought.. Sometimes the focus of harm is extended to include the victims possessions but that simply raises additional questions about the nature of ownership. So perhaps for present purposes a provisional working definition that captures the sense of the most common might be:

Harm done to an individual or group by another, either directly or indirectly, using magical means.

I will try to show why I consider this definition to be misleading.

The problem is with the notion of magic. In our modern scientific culture there is a conceptual space for the notion of magic and its several synonyms as the complement or negative of scientific explanations for specific phenomena. In other words magic is used as a possible explanation or mechanism for events that cannot be accounted for by current scientific theories or models. In addition, instead of using it as an explanation of last resort some believe it to be more significant, a fact of how the world works, and prefer it to others.

This duality is buttressed by that between science and the powerful religious beliefs in which a majority of the population still have faith. And so in countries that have the most advanced science and technologies scientific and religious belief and explanations cohabit warily around a decidedly fuzzy border. But, even before the emergence of science in the C17 there was an earlier duality not only between religion and magic but within religious attitudes a distinction between magic used for good and evil purposes. And this was not considered a particular problem to the Church until in the late C14 magic came to be associated with the practitioner having entered into a pact with the devil and receiving their powers from her. This led to the setting up of the Holy Inquisition and over the next

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200 years a large number, perhaps 200,000 people were killed as witches.

¬∏¬∏¬∏December 7, 2004¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùRevised definition of witchcraft:¬∏
Harm done to an individual or group by another, either directly or indirectly, using extra-ordinary means.

These are considered to involve mechanisms beyond the control and abilities of ordinary people, to be difficult or impossible to discover, and to be indifferent to distance or other ordinary obstacles or limits. But, it is important to recognize that they are not considered as being inconsistent with the conventional wisdom about how the world works.

They should be considered analogous to people with exeptional or unusual abilities or knowledge whether innate or acquired. Examples might be idiot savants, prodigies, and 'geniuses' in particular fields.¬∏¬∏¬∏November 23, 2003¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùThings to consider:¬∏
Illnesses like cancer that are viewed as being almost mystically different from others.

Why is witchcraft considered so evil when the actual harm is often not out of the ordinary? This seems likely to be related to the inconsistencies in sentencing and attitudes to offences when greater actual harm often attracts lesser punishments. The harm seems to be largely symbolic? Also the use of such extraordinary means as witchcraft is considered to be seems to threaten the equilibrium or safety of the whole community. It is as if a system of conventions and agreements on which the balance of forces between the living and the dead or spirit realm had been dut in question? For if you believe in other worlds or obscured parts of this one and that boundaries are porous then the behaviour of the other side must be taken into account.

I do not feel that energy needs to be expended by me to keep the sun in the sky. Nor that anyones active intervention maintains it. But for a born again christian her tenure in heaven or hell depends on the active intervention of God in sacrificing his son. The world of animism is a world of agreements of active relationships of persuasion of active intervenzion? Of extended social contracts that include ancestors and spirits. In other words a very different world from one ruled by physical law.

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¬∏¬∏¬∏November 23, 2003¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitchcraft reasoning¬∏+ I am a victim
+ This could not have happened by ordinary means. Therefore extra-ordinary must be involved.
+ Extraordinary means require extraordinary powers and those require the help of ancestors or spirits
+ These do not act without invitation, therefore someone is responsible for my misfortunes.
+ This threatens others in the community therefore the perpetrator must be found.¬∏¬∏¬∏November 23, 2003¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùThe overemphasis on magic in the definition of ¬∏witchcraft has masked an important question: Why is witchcraft considered so evil when many of its alleged (primary) harms are relatively minor?
That others are major?
Secondary Muti killings?
Symbolic injuries?
Cultural offences?¬∏¬∏¬∏December 7, 2004¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitchraft Aspects¬∏+ There is no such thing as an innocent eye or naive observation. See Goodman quote and WWW
+ The world of witchcraft is the world of descriptions and minds.
+ If the validity of wc depended on really turning a man into a crocodile or similar wonders, it could never have become established. So since all evidence is against the reality of shapeshifting etc and yet wc is a weil established and widespread phenomenon it must be causally effective in some other ways. And by exclusion these cannot be directly in the physical world - although they may have secondary effects there. The only plausible mechanisms are the manipulation of minds - of beliefs and expectations. Witchcraft is a means of manipulating and controlling minds and only secondarily, via human action, the physical world. Witches exist only in the minds of their accusers, but their bodies are broken and burned.
+ The stability of the physical world is explained in terms of physical laws that are, by definition, context dependent and unaffected by our thoughts or feelings or whims.
+ By contrast the stability of the world of interacting mlnds depends on contracts and conventions and hence is significantly affected by human thought, feeling, and action
+ The dichotomy between science and magic is an aspect of our western world view. It is not necessarily indiginous or intrinsic to other cultures.
+ The world of witchcraft is one in which everything is alive and interacts not according to physical law but will and desire and beliefs. It is a living psychologically structured world.

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+ The world of witchcraft is wider than that of science in that it includes causally effective entities for which science has found neither need nor convincing evidence.
+ It may be misleading to think of the parts of the world of witchcraft rejected by science as occupying a separate and exclusive territory like the christian heaven or hell. Better perhaps to consider it as interwoven with the ordinary and spirits and the dead ancestors wandering through our world unseen. According to the Koran or a Hadith, Allah is closer to you than your jugular vein. And recent theories in physics suggest the possibility that other universes may be separated from our own by an infinitesimally thin membrane.
+ Terms to avoid Art, Ceremony, ..,
+ Categorization: Classical vs Family Resemblance / Aristotle vs Wittgenstein
+ Do not base classification on internal features. Look also at differences between witchcraft and other phenomena. What do wc artifacts have in common and how do these differ from those associated with other activities?
+ Witchcraft and epidemiology -depression DSM and other bestiaries.
+ Definitions of wc are misleading because most are based on the science vs magic dichotomy that I have already suggested is extrinsic and an imposition. For example, most definitions are variations on 'harm done to someone by magical means'. The problem is the sense of magic. A better would be 'harm done to others by extra-ordinary means.' In each the force of magjc or extra-ordinary means reduces to: that they are difficult to detect or identify, that they are beyond the capacity and control of the ordinary people, and perhaps that they often seem to be relatively unaffected by common constraints of distance or time?
+ When the focus on magic is removed new questions are revealed. For example, many published reports on wc related incidents are probably unrepresentative and refer to only the most dramatic and noteworthy cases. Less interesting cases probably go undocumented. But even if only the most serious cases, in the sense of either the significance of the alleged harm done or the punishment exacted on the assumed perpetrator, are reported it is reasonable to ask why the response to allegations of wc often seems out of proportion to the actual harm that triggered the allegations? For the media are interested in reporting mostly the most extreme cases in the sense of response or retribution. For example death as punishment for lesser or greater harm. What is less likely to be reported are responses to relatively trivial harm that do not result in death or severe injury but yet may be disproporionate in social and non physical effects on the indlviduals involved.

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¬∏¬∏¬∏December 7, 2004¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùNotes for H. 08/12/2003 09:57:14¬∏In the following notes I want to consider the following topics.

+ Why maybe usually means no.
Your passing remark that when I say maybe I usually mean no is apposite. I have often thought that if there is such a thing as reincarnation then I was probably East Asian in an earlier life. That is based on a tendency to second guess and defer to the feelings of others and a sense of unease almost amounting to a phobia about confrontation and self assertion. And suggests the possibility of a previously unreported psychopathology of excess Theory of Mind to complement those attributed to its deficiency.

November 22, 2003¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùCarlS#01¬∏The definition of witchcraft.
Most popular definitioas of witchcraft are variants of 'Harming others, or their possessions, by magical or supernatural means'. And most of the problems associated with the subject are the result ¬∏¬∏¬∏November 22, 2003¬∏¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitchcraft¬∏Most definitions of witchcraft are variants of - harm done to others by magical or supernatural means. And though not made explicit it is implied that the origin of the harm is a person acting with malice and usually, though not necessarily, with forethought.. Sometimes the focus of harm is extended to include the victims possessions but that simply raises additional questions about the nature of ownership. So perhaps for present purposes a provisional working definition that captures the sense of the most common might be:

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This duality is buttressed by that between science and the powerful religious beliefs in which a majority of the population still have faith. And so in countries that have the most advanced science and technologies scientific and religious belief and explanations cohabit warily around a decidedly fuzzy border. But, even before the emergence of science in the C17 there was an earlier duality not only between religion and magic but within religious attitudes a distinction between magic used for good and evil purposes. And this was not considered a particular problem to the Church until in the late C14 magic came to be associated with the practitioner having entered into a pact with the devil and receiving their powers from her. This led to the setting up of the Holy Inquisition and over the next 200 years a large number, perhaps 200,000 people were killed as witches.

TERRORISM AND WITCHCRAFT
October 8, 2005¬∏Computer¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitch vs Terrorist¬∏Differences are features of those individuals identified as terrorists or witches

Terrorists have intent to harm
Terrorists have real means to harm
Terrorists act on behalf of others - but, on the whole those who they act for are mythical in that most terrorists do not participate in ordinary and real movements for change ie they are not politically active and have only vague agendas
Terrorists are consciously willing to be classified as such

Witches have no clear intent
Witches have no real means and if they have some (herbs?) they are on a tiny scale in comparison to the allegations and beliefs of their accusers
Witches do not act on behalf of others they have no quasi political agenda
Witches are not consciously willing to be classified as such

**Similarities are mostly in the perceptions of others and the reactlon of the community to the possibility of terrorists or witches. It is a majority feeling threatened by a largely hidden minority

They are perceived as a threat and an ever present danger
They are believed to have extraordinary power

They are a threat to authority
They tend to be considered as qualitatively different from others and an alien embodiment of evil - they are different in kind and for ever ie not in degree or temporarily
They are believed to be difficult to detect and identify
They may be in alliance with alien powers
They make people feel vulnerable and victims
They kindle moral panics
Their existence and the sense of danger they induce leads to a clamour for changes in law and due process that threaten long established rights and undermine safeguards
Clamour to change laws and due process are warning signs of moral panics

October 8, 2005¬∏HdS¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùThe Relativity of Evil?¬∏Norman has found that among pastoralists such as Masii witchcraft only appears or is used as an explanation when cattle are lost or absent ie without cattle, when cattle are present witchcraft is not significant. This is similar to way that amongst HGs like San or Pygmies witchcraft is unimportant until or while they are in contact or living close to Bantu for whom witchcraft is endemic. In other words witchcraft is context dependent and incidental.

In case of suicide bombers there is a tendency to make relative evil absolute so that whilst a bomber pilot might kill thousands and could be considered at least an agent or accessory to evil they would not be considered irredeemable. On the other hand SBs tend to be considered as if a species that is evil by nature.

Evil is relative.¬∏

ON SCIENCE
Norman,

I'm not surprised that you cannot find much relevance in my speculations (or Kirby's) about memes and languages as parasites. Nor that you consider it science fiction. I am not at all sure that it is relevant to your present purpose and it would be far too speculative to use. There are two issues here.

First, and in the immediate term more important is that we have different views about the nature of the world and man's place in it and from time to time this causes confusion and makes communication difficult. I intend to address this separately, but for the moment this will have to do. You, in common with most people, including most scientists, brought up in what is essentially a protestant culture (from which they have imbibed

with their mother's milk as it were, the kind of deep attitudes that may contribute to wc) have an indequate appreciation of the nature of science and of facts as opposed to fiction.

This is because you assume that most, if not all, perception is, or can be, theory-neutral, and that the scientific interpretation of the world is inferred from observations either by deduction (all men are mortal, this is a man, therefore he is mortal), or scientific laws, arrived at by induction, or generalizing from individual cases (all the blackbirds I have observed are black therefore all blackbirds are black). But induction can never provide certainty as only a single albino blackbird is sufficient to refute the hypothesis, and in the case of deduction the conclusions are simply unpacked from the starting premise or observation, nothing new is added.

Now one of the greatest of your intellectual forerunners Charles Sanders Peirce pointed out about a 100 years ago that in addition to deduction and induction there is a third essential component that he called either abduction or retroduction. The role of retroduction (I prefer abduction but it has more common usages) is to generate the models or hypotheses from which deductions can be drawn and these deductions can be used to test the validity of different models. It is essentially a process of imagination or guessing or reasoning to the best explanation. This creative process is the foundation of all science, it is the basis of paradigm shifts and requires creativity, the rest is for journeymen and technicians. It guides induction and suggests how its results can be tested. To understand how the world works you have to be able to imagine as many of the possibilities as you can. This is why figurative language, methaphor, metonymy, simile and fictions are so important. Without them there would be no science they are how we think creatively adn what makes us different from and superior to computers. The only thing wrong with science fiction is that most of the writers do not understand people they cannot create plausible characters, but their ideas are often highly original and ahead of their time. To be compared to them is an honour.

Second, to return to memes and parasites.

Perhaps the most intriguing and important feature of language is how it is possible for young children, almost independently of their intelligence, to learn it so quickly and so well. This is a feature of all children in all parts of the world and for all languages and so is likely to be one of the oldest and deepest features of human beings. This is not a cultural or local or recent phenomena.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Chomsky suggested what is now almost conventional wisdom that humans must have a part of their brain specialized for the understanding and learning of languages in the critical early years. At the time he first made the suggestion the dominant, behaviourist, view was that language was learned by a process of conditioning and from exposure to and reward for useing words and sentences. But this overlooks the fact that no child is exposed to more than a tiny subset of all possible sentences and yet is still able to create and understand constructions/ sentences that they have never heard and for which they have never received reinforcement.

So what we have is the model of a biological brain evolving an ability to invent sounds or marks that can be used as raw materials and assemble them using rules to express and communicate ideas. The center of gravity and focus of this process is the brain and language is an aggregation or accumulation of external artifacts including rules.

What Kirby seems to be suggesting is an alternative that may account for the ease of learning language without presuming quite so much specific and complex machinery in the brain. He does this by pointing out how brain and language might co-evolve (like sexual selection) and each have a structure and a degree of independence. Language might evolve into a kind of parasitic structure that in the context of a human brain could generate linguistic behaviour.

Think of a computer program or DNA. Each is really little more than a string of code that is only able to do interesting things in a specific context; a computer or a cell respectively. The Chomskian view of language is close to the idea that the computer could on its own assemble the code that makes it work from whatever was ready to hand. Kirby's view might be that once a little structure was created a process of natural selection acting on both the brain and the language would lead to each evolving to become more efficient at generating linguistic behaviour. And from this point of view a language should be better regarded as an entity with a partially independent existence.

In this context there are now relevant electronic computer technologies that generate electronic circuits and computer programs not by calculated design but by setting up a process that generates as many variants as possible and then selects the best for a particular purpose and `breeds' from them until after many generations the desired outcomes are achieved. By such

methods electronic circuits have been evolved that do things in ways that are completely unlike those used by electonic engineers, in some cases it is not clear how they work, but the fact is that they do and fulfil the design brief. Likewise with computer programs.

What I am exploring is the possibility of applying these approaches not to language but to concepts and complexes of ideas (concepts). I am suggesting that some widespread and complex systems of ideas and ways of interpreting the world are not entirely the product of our brains but of a co-evolution between the brain and external structures of ideas. In other words that ideas are not scattered around at random like grains of sands on a tray, but have `shapes' (as atoms do) that lead them to form structures (as molecules form from atoms) and these structures will have an ability and tendency to evolve in interaction with brains and some of the resulting structures will be more likely and stable than others and so persist and appear in any of many different environements. Witchcraft would seem to have a good chance of being one of these.

Norman,

The duality of good and evil seems to be a special case of a tendency to classify and describe things and events in absolute and binary terms; quantitative variations are made into qualitative distinctions (eg subtle variations of good and bad become translated into absolute good and evil).

One can see the implications of this in the difference between analogue and digital instruments. For example, most cars have an analogue speedometer that allows one to see easily how speed is building up or down and proximity to speed limits. A few cars (Citroens were probably first) had digital speedometers that gave the speed as a number, but this was usually in increments of about 5mph so in effect all the information within the 5mph segments was lost. This is a general characteristic of digital devices information smaller than the digital `grain' is lost. Imagine a fuel meter that only gave you a warning when you had a gallon left as opposed to an analogue meter that gave you a continuous account of fuel usage.

This (duality) would seem likely to be independent of a sense of injustice (which is older and probably prelinguistic) and presupposes a sophisticated language. In other words it is not

based on feeling but on a form of description: absolutes only exist in language descriptions and definitions.

I would therefore add duality or binary descriptions as a precondition for witchcraft.

MORAL PANIC

The phenomenon of `moral panics' although universal and a function of human nature, has only been identified and analyzed as such in the last three decades - usually dated from the publication of Stanley Cohen's `Folk Devils and Moral Panics' in 1972. According to Erich Goode and Nachman Ben Yehuda it has the following characteristics.

1. A heightened concern about a perceived danger
2. Marked hostility towards a group, or category, believed to be involved.
3. A popular (not necessarily universal) consensus about the reality of the danger.
4. Volatility - they erupt suddenly and subside quickly - though they can lie dormant for long periods.
5. Disproportionality - that is marked by:

- Figures (statistics) tend to be exaggerated and misinterpreted
- Figures (statistics) tend to be fabricated
- The relative neglect of other more harmful conditions (deaths from heroin vs deaths from alcohol or smoking)
- Inconsistency in variation over time: the importance and reaction to the same issue varies greatly from one time to another (attitudes to alcohol, before, during, and after prohibition).

DEFINITION

I have said that the importance of witchcraft is that it helps us to be aware of patterns of behavior that are discernible in our own lives and in scientific based societies. The mechanism is transparent and the same as that used by satire and related kinds of humor to exaggerate aspects of people and the world in order to point to particular truths. To call someone a thief may allow them to sue you for slander etc but to call them sperm of the devil, or a warlock, or some completely implausible kind of awfulness would be permissible because it could be argued that it could not possibly be taken to be literally true. The point I am making is that although to describe certain patterns of

behavior as witchcraft is not literally true the template or pattern of witchcraft like that of a colored filter can help to reveal patterns that would otherwise have been obscure or easily overlooked.

From my definition of witchcraft the phenomenon depends not on magic but ultimately on a mismatch between real and perceived danger and in order to determine what is real calls for a notion of probability and chance and accident.

In our cultures over recent years there has been a progressive erosion of the practical notion of accidental or chance events which have been replaced with notions of negligence and unintended culpability. This has been associated with increased litigation, paranoia, grandiosity, and narcissism. And in general a reduction in tolerance of behavior on which social life used to depend. The result is that behavior that results in misfortune or harm even though not intended and unlikely to be repeated is being treated as culpable and judged as though it were intentional.

What one is seeing here is the re-emergence of witchcraft attitudes and because these have been demonstrated time and time again to be malignant in the sense that one released they tend to grow like a cancer and metastasize widely it seems likely that they will do much harm before the pendulum swings back.

The principal motivation for witchcraft, the question to which it is thought to be the answer, is the attempt to prevent bad things happening. It therefore presupposes the existence and experience of misfortune, of things happening that cause discomfort and fear, that make one feel helpless, and that one would prefer to avoid.

To control something one has to have some kind of theory about how it works, and the nature of that theory will determine whatever action seems appropriate. But in the case of witch related phenomena this creates an almost insuperable conceptual problem that has led to much confusion and rendered much academic work on witchcraft worthless. Briefly, I believe that it is very difficult, if not impossible, for someone brought up in what might be described as the modern scientific tradition to understand what it must be like to live in a world with witches, or to escape the tendency to subsume witchcraft under the scientific model of how the world works. According to this view witchcraft is an intrusion, an aberration, that does not fit the accepted scientific view of the world. But what this fails to take into account is that for people living in a world with

witches it is not a question of incongruity, for there is none, and the issue is not how to reconcile witchcraft with science. In such a world there is no science, no scientific world view with which witchcraft can be contrasted, and without that contrast what, from the scientific point of view and assumptions, is witchcraft becomes something very different indeed, something that most scientists will be unable to experience and hence understand. And, what points to this failure and is one of its important manifestations is the extent to which most discussions and definitions of witchcraft are focused on the idea of magic, the supernatural, or the occult, which seems to function as an intellectual black hole into which all rational discussion spirals and from which no light or information can escape.

The outcome amounts to a tissue of judgements masquerading as descriptions, which is in effect a definition of prejudice and superstition. Descriptions are observations based on, and presupposing, a common and agreed context, or frame of reference. In contrast judgements are redescriptions that map observations from one context, or frame of reference, to another. In the case of law judgement maps behavior from the frame of reference of the accused, a human or legal person, onto that of the law that rules. And in the case of witchcraft most academic work maps from a local and traditional frame of reference onto that of modern science. Sadly, however, there is no independent or agreed exchange rate, or function, to control the mapping, and the relation is asymmetric and unilateral with the relative power heavily biased in favour of science. From the point of view of science witchcraft and tradition exist as in a bubble within an all encompassing scientific view that assumes its universal hegemony. But from the view of tradition there is nothing outside the bubble, which amounts to there being no bubble at all.

To some extent this may seem a doctrine of despair that should bring the discussion to a halt. However, although it may be impossible to experience in full what it is like to live in a world with witches, we can reduce the gap in understanding by doing our best to avoid confusing descriptions with judgments. This can be done by becoming more sensitive to judgments and doing our best to avoid them. First, by avoiding terms that imply multiple frames of reference, and hence judgments; and by far the most important of these are the various synonyms for magic. Second, one can to a considerable extent sidestep the problem by shifting focus away from the traditional concern with what witches are alleged to do onto the responses that such

beliefs provoke, or what people do about witches and the structures and institutions that have developed about them.

To be more specific, what prevents us from understanding what it is like to live in a traditional world with witches is not the emotions experienced, as all evidence suggests that these do not differ greatly between cultures. This will certainly be true in terms of the physiological correlates of emotion such as heart rate, blood pressure, galvanic skin responses, and other indicators of sympathetic nervous system activity. Instead, what distinguishes traditional from scientific experience is the content . When I experience an emotion it is usually about something: I am angry with someone or about something, I am in love with someone, I am afraid of something, I am disgusted by something, and so on. In contrast what we usually refer to as moods may be similar in feel, happiness, sadness, anxiety, whatever, but will have a less clear and specific focus and be more pervasive and difficult to pin down. And in thinking about the relation of emotion to action what emotion does is motivate a response, but the form that that will take will be determined by the content, which in turn will be determined by whatever models or theories we have about how the world works. The scientific world view may enable us to identify some of the features that distinguish its foundations and content from that of the traditional, but by its very existence it will not allow us to experience what it feels like to live in a world without science. Once the genie of science has escaped from the bottle it is, like toothpaste, devilishly hard to get it back in. To be able to do so would be like being able NOT to think of an apple. Or, if God exists and is omniscient and omnipresent, how could he experience his non-existence, or a world without him, or men and women who did not know him, without, perhaps, being incarnated as some kind of Christ? Christianity may be God's way of exploring and experiencing his own non-existence.

I suggest that one of the ways in which we may be able to reduce the significance, if not the existence, of the gap between the experience of the scientific and traditional, or witch based, view of the world, is to set aside the content, in the sense of what witches may be and what they may be able to do, and instead focus only on those aspects of experience that must be more or less independent of world view and hence common to both the scientific and traditional. This means abandoning all concern with and reference to the occult, or magical, for these are unilateral, and focusing instead on the experience of emotion and what develops from it. We will concern ourselves not with what witches do, but only with what is done to witches. We will bracket out the question of whether witches exist as a distinct

kind of thing, and whatever they are alleged to do, and instead concentrate only on what people who believe in their existence feel and do about them. This will allow us at the very least to arrive at some kind of estimate about the intensity of the emotions they engender.

From this point of view witchcraft becomes much easier to understand and can be seen to be simply a special case of a more general phenomenon that has in the last few decades been described as occurring regularly and in many forms within our own scientific culture and hence cannot be dependent on a belief in the occult. And this gives the study of witchcraft an added value, for it is no longer of interest only to alienists and exotics such as anthropologists, but helps us to reach a better understanding of our own lives, even if we feel no interest in, or need for, other than an orthodox scientific view of how the world works. What has become almost universally regarded as a defining feature of witchcraft is from this perspective revealed as simply the stain of local color. Witchcraft is universal, but it is not occult, and has been made so only by the careless way in which it has been described.

All that anyone needs to know about witchcraft.

Witchcraft presupposes and is motivated by the experience of misfortune and the fear that it engenders. It takes its form from the existence of a belief that the world is moved by agents rather than atoms. In a strong sense this belief amounts to agents being the building blocks from which the prevailing theories about how the world works are constructed; in other words in this traditional world view agents take the role of atoms in the scientific. There is, however, a weaker sense in which agents can be considered as made up from atoms, and this accounts for the existence of the structures and processes of witchcraft being identifiable within cultures that are predominantly scientific. The existence of witchcraft does not assume any particular view about the ultimate building blocks of the universe, but only that bad things that happen are caused by agents. What distinguishes witchcraft from more ordinary crimes is simply a matter of degree; specifically that some people exist who have access to and the motive and malice to use extraordinary powers to harm (extraordinary in either extreme degree or kind, extreme quantitative or qualitative). These powers are ultimately technologies, in the case of traditional witchcraft the technologies of magic (judged from a scientific perspective), but in the cases that occur within scientific cultures the exotic technologies that are often abbreviated to WMD, and in each case are sufficient to induce feelings of

extreme fear, terror, horror and feelings of helplessness. As an aside I would suggest that what is usually described as terror is simply fear plus feelings of helplessness, or impotence, to which horror adds disgust (impure, unclean).

The fear that witchcraft engenders and provokes results in attempts to reduce it and the development of attitudes, responses and processes, that rapidly become institutionalized, in rituals, processes, procedures, and roles (extend as necessary), that are thereafter available for manipulation and exploitation by opportunistic moral entrepreneurs in the fields of media, religion, and politics, and also as motive and mitigation for a variety of criminal acts and misdemeanors. It is therefore important to distinguish the core components of witchcraft from the secondary and higher order derivatives with which it soon becomes layered and encrusted. In effect witchcraft amounts to a form of criminal law which is in most places informal or extralegal.

From this perspective witchcraft is revealed as a special and rather exotic form of moral panic. Moral panics are populist reactions to fear and are distinguishable from ordinary anxieties by virtue of the degree to which the experience of threat or risk on which the fear is based and to which it is proportional is out of proportion to the objective or actual risk. And they can be quantified in terms of the difference between the perceived and actual risks. Witchcraft is moral panic of the most extreme kind and this implies that it is most likely to become a significant problem when the difference between perceived and actual risks are extreme.

NB Insert somewhere around here perhaps a distinction between ordinary and paranoid fear. The essence of paranoid fear is that the object feared is hidden rather than manifest. In the case of paranoid illnesses what the patient feels threatened by is to varying degrees hidden from themselves and always to others around them. The voices or experiences they have are not manifest to anyone else and the subject may be unable to provide any objective evidence for their existence. Paranoia is based on a feeling of threat and the associated fear without objective cause. Now what is important is that the experience of fear does not require an objective cause, we can feel fearful without being able to say precisely why, but the definition of paranoia rests not on the reality of fear but on a comparison between the beliefs of an individual and that of a consensus of his peers. Hence though in our scientific culture hearing voices is likely to be considered hallucination and an abnormality in the context of certain religions and cultures it may be accepted as real and

meaningful. Culture can trump diagnosis; what in one culture may be considered diagnostic will in another context be irrelevant or insignificant. And this is why huge cultural artifacts and institutions of great complexity can be based simply on what can most kindly be considered imagination. If enough people believe in a particular interpretation of fear it becomes real and causally effective. This is what happens with witchcraft. Another way of looking at this is that what is considered real or objective in our sense is ultimately culturally determined.

The fear associated with witchcraft and that provokes the whole phenomena, or what is done about witches, is a paranoid fear. It is the fear of the hidden and occult (in the proper sense of what is not manifest), what Adorno identified as `the readiness to relate the unrelated'. And this is a feature of all moral panics, the perpetrator believed to wield extraordinary power is always to a greater or lesser extent hidden and hence occult. This is also why poisoning is so often associated with witchcraft - poison has two aspects on the one it is simply applied biochemistry (interaction of chemistry and physiology), or toxicology, on the other it is by the nature of its use occult or hidden. If terrorists and pedophiles always wore uniforms or were marked out by a unique skin color of other identifying mark they would no longer be feared, or at least the fear would be ordinary and similar to that which might be experienced by the appearance of a snake or tiger in a busy mall. A large part of the fear and paranoia surrounding the focus of a moral panic from witches to terrorists is that they are the enemy within who is at least superficially or physically indistinguishable from anyone else and maybe as in the case of witches unconscious of their power and malevolence.

Now this suggests another reason why the nature of witchcraft has been misunderstood and more or less exiled to former colonies and the backwaters of tradition. In order to identify moral panic, in the sense that I am using, one must be able to distinguish between experienced and actual or objective risk, but to do this it is essential that the latter can be quantified and that calls for an awareness of probabilities and statistics and acceptance of things happening as a result of chance combinations of events. This is only possible with an atomistic theory about how the world works.

If one considers the differences between a traditional agent based and scientific atomic based world view, the latter has not replaced the former but has developed within it. The traditional was until only a few hundred years ago, for practical purposes, the universal world view, and since then has only been partially

displaced in a few places centered on the North Atlantic rim (according to a recent Gallup Poll 78% of Americans believe in guardian angels). And a marker of the new scientific view has been the recognition that a large proportion of bad things that happen are due to chance or natural causes.

The distinction implied here is between forensic and natural causes. For example, if someone dies in the USA, or other scientific based cultures, the first question that the authorities want to answer is whether the death was due to natural causes. In this context natural causes are those for which no one can be held accountable, whilst unnatural or forensic causes are those for which someone can be held responsible. And in most cases that can be described as natural, random or chance processes dominate. Science has opened up the possibility and space of natural causes and has defined them as being more or less mutually exclusive in relation to unnatural or forensic - with few exceptions what is natural cannot be forensic and vice versa.

In contrast a traditional world view based on agents tends to have only a very limited conception of natural causes, or of random and chance events. The result is that if natural causes exist they are not mutually exclusive in relation to forensic and this implies that the cause of a misfortune, no matter how clear it might seem to a scientific outsider, can never exclude the action of an agent, there is always the possibility, indeed liklihood, of a `second spear'. The first outcome of this is that science cannot convincingly refute allegations of witchcraft.

However, there is a second that is even more important. I have suggested that witchcraft is a special case of moral panic. But the identification and analysis of moral panic depends on an estimate of the difference between subjectively experienced and actual, or objective, risk, and the latter presupposes a scientific view of the world and the methods and technologies (including math) that that entails. Yet, in the traditional world view there is no concept of chance, no probability, no statistics, and therefore no accepted methods of quantifying risks and moral panic objectively.

Even in modern cultures it is devilishly difficult to counteract moral panic. When parents in UK believe that 400 children a year are abducted and murdered by pedophiles and experience fear proportional to that estimate, it is very difficult to convince them that the reality is about 7 and has been so for over 40 years. And in a traditional world there are no objective

measures of risk and all fear is as experienced and sensitive to manipulation. Hence, although it seems certain that the number of deaths that are due to powers that witches are believed to control (as opposed to a few that may be due to secondary effects, such as fear inducing heart disorders, or occasional poisons whose effects are no different from those used by criminals in UK which do not merit a separate description) is zero, the risk and hence fear experienced is proportional to a vastly greater number and is effectively quarantined from refutation, or adjustment.

One way of summarizing this is to say that, in an ideal science-based culture, fear would be proportional to actual risk, whilst, in contrast, in a traditional witch-ridden culture the perceived, or believed, risk is proportional to the fear that is experienced. The direction of cause and effect is reversed.

From this I will suggest a testable hypothesis:

The prevalence of witchcraft activity will be inversely proportional to the percentage (or proportion) of bad things that local conventional wisdom allows can be exclusively explained by natural causes (such as chance or random events). Or in other words witchcraft or belief in witches is inversely proportional to belief in chance.

In the modern world witchcraft diminished with the development of probability theory and as the distinction between forensic and natural causes developed and was made increasingly mutually exclusive and the proportion of those considered natural increased.

I would therefore suggest the following definition:

Witchcraft is the structure of behaviors that develop in response to the fear caused by the belief that certain individuals have extraordinary power, motive, and malice, to harm. It amounts to an extreme form of moral panic.

There is another very significant characteristic of witches - they are the enemy within and indistinguishable from anyone else; moreover they may not know that they are witches, their abilities are considered to be largely or potentially unconscious. Phillip Cole in `The Myth of Evil' refers to `the most intense evil of all - the enemy who looks just like us, talks like us, and is just like us.' In other words anyone might be a witch. This is why there is a link between witches and the

notion of treason, and hence identification with a place, people, or state (in several senses of the term).

This definition identifies all that one needs to understand about witchcraft, it locates it's center of gravity as a reaction to fear, of which the fear of magic is a merely a special case, and the processes and institutions that flow from it as variants of moral panics that include reactions to the rhetoric of terror. And, insofar as it is based on an incongruity between emotion and reality, it's importance is that it can serve as an early warning of populist agitation for inappropriate action.

In an ideal world the term witch would refer to only one of the several kinds of perpetrators that are the objects of witch-hunts. And if the subject has any significance it is to identify a dangerous equivocation in the concept of hunting: deer-hunting would not survive without deer, but the existence of witch-hunting demonstrates that one can hunt what does not exist.

A Note on the distinction between atoms and agent based interpretations of how the world works (this really merits a more detailed treatment).

Atoms are inert, lifeless, without internal structure or motivation, and move according to external forces and relationships. Their behavior is accounted for by physics and physical law.

Agents are living, internally motivated (have complex internal structure and representations), and move according to their internal processes, representations, and interpretations. They range from computers, to animals, to humans, to disembodied ancestors, spirits, demons, angels and gods. Their behavior is primarily accounted for by folk psychology, based on belief, desire, and will.

In a world based on atoms, although agents can evolve or be created, physics rules - and always takes precedence over psychology.

In a world based on agents there are no atoms and effectively no physical law. Instead change and behavior is explained in terms of psychology which always takes precedence over physics. In such a world pigs can fly, people can change shape, be in more than one place at a time, and in effect anything is possible. Physics sets no limits that psychology cannot trump.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

I think there may be a better way of describing this distinction. Agents are in effect entities that are sensitive to and process information. So one might better distinguish, not between atoms and agents, but between atoms and information - its and bits. Atoms `feed' on energy, agents `feed' on information - they are informavores. But, I am not sure how much that would add?

The real nature of witchcraft.

The motivation for witchcraft, why it developed and the question to which it is an answer, is to explain why bad things happen, especially to seemingly good people.

It is arguable that if bad things did not happen, if Eve had not given in to temptation and we lived in a Garden of Eden without knowledge of good and evil, science and most intellectual activity would never have been invented - with woman came unanswerable questions. But, with the Fall bad things started to happen and with them the question why began to seem important. Why sickness, pain, hunger, death, storms, crop failures, and all kinds of misfortune - some absolute, many relative, but all clamouring for explanation. And this amounts to a search for an explanation as to how the world works or what accounts for changes.

Adorno on the occult tradition - `the readiness to relate the unrelated'.

Key Features
- Experience of bad things
- Experience of fear or danger
- Experience of impotence and victim
- Idea that some people have unusual power to harm
- World view that is based on agents
- Poorly developed notion of chance
- The enemy within

WASHINGTON, D.C.-- A new Gallup report shows Americans say they are just as religious today as they were in 1947, despite widespread belief society has become more secular in recent decades.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Based on several surveys conducted in recent months, 96 percent of Americans today say they believe in God , 71 percent profess belief in an afterlife, 90 percent say they pray, and 41 percent say they attend religious services frequently ("almost every week" or "at least once a week").

In a landmark 1947 Gallup survey, 95 percent said they believed in God , 73 percent professed belief in an afterlife, 90 percent said they prayed and 41 percent said they attended religious services frequently.

"A comparison of the religious climate today with that of 50 years ago ... does not support the contention of social observers who maintain that America is far less attached to religion than a half- century ago," says the report in the April edition of Gallup's "Emerging Trends" newsletter.

Rather, the report continues, the new findings "support the contention that the last 50 years have been the most ‚Äòchurched' half-century in U.S. history."

However, the report also notes that while Americans may profess broad belief in religious ideas, their faith appears to lack depth.

In an interview May 14, George Gallup Jr., executive director of the Princeton Religion Research Center, which publishes "Emerging Trends," said his organization's past surveys have identified three "gaps" that point to a lack of religious depth.

Americans, he said, do not generally live up to the ethical standards of their faith ("the ethics gap"), nor are they generally aware of their faith's basic teachings ("the knowledge gap"). The third gap, said Gallup, is "between believers and belonging," which contrasts the number of Americans who profess a belief in God with the number who frequently attend religious services.

RACISM AND WITCHCRAFT

Date: 14 December 2006
Topic: Reply to NM

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

this helps, thanks.Give me your thoughts on why witchcraft as a term is racists. Are some of our other no nos also racists. Magic, supernatural, mystical, occult...I want to slay those words.

I don,Äôt think I have said that the notion of witchcraft is racist, at most I have suggested that, if it is defined in terms of magic (which I will use here for the notions of supernatural and its synonyms), then it can easily approximate to being racist and lend itself to racist use - as if it were a spacecraft being captured by the gravitational field of a sun, or a black hole. The idea of racism has this characteristic, that like a black hole it can capture things that get too close. In contrast, if you define witchcraft without reference to magic, as I have been at pains to do, it is not racist and is much less likely to become so abused.

You can, however, present an argument that the notion of witchcraft in Africa (the sense in which you are using it) is potentially racist. I will put this in a traditional logical form (Barbara).

* The solution is simple. Outlaw the terms magic, occult, supernatural, mystical, or any near synonyms from definitions of witchcraft and replace them simply with extra-ordinary. The advantages of extraordinary or praeternatural are twofold. First, they narrow the gap between us and them and hence the possibility of racism. Second, they allow some flexibility in what is now or may later be considered `natural,Äô; which avoids futile and sterile arguments as to whether there are really paranormal abilities like precognition or psychokinesis, etc. In addition they allow the focus to be shifted to the real issues of concern and the real mechanisms that when understood may allow some kind of effective intervention. In this context I believe that the only useful interpretation is in terms of moral panic.

Terms such as occult and supernatural function as context shifters and are thus completely different from ordinary descriptions and in my sense are benignly and usefully metaphysical.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Date: 25 November 2006
Topic: Reply to Norman

Duncan, this is very helpful and very good thinking on your part. I want to restudy it for more gems but the question still remains, how can I (we) make this book interesting to the generala reader....not to fall between the stools as you so darkley warn....are there ways? Hooks? incentives to read on? A more integrated story line that goes from point A to B. Not chapeters about the political, economic social uses. I fear I cant write a mystery, Sherlock, but there may be a better way to hook the audience into the material. The four "solutions" or codes...seen as underlying "myths" that that explain to the African how witchcraft works...to the Africans!!!!! There are in my language transformation, inversion-pollution, transgression, empowerment.f we do not reveal these save by little clues to the end, then in Chapter 11, we have a section called "Closing the case files"...then we reveal the codes...is this a structure that might hook em?

The popular interet lies in mysteries of witchcraft, cases, photos, art objects. The task you see: finding the witchcraft "in for theyou" dear reader. This isgood, but a hard task. Hold up a mirror. George Peter Murdock, studied 189 samplecultures in the world----AROUND THE QUESTION WHAT IS THE CAUSATION OF ILLNESS. He divides the 12 answers into natural and supernatural lanswers; the last three answers are : spirit agression, sorcery, witchcraft. Combining all three he gets these theories of illness' causes to be in 186/189; with Soecery and Witchcraft only it is in 178, with witchcraft only it is 101. These are cultures around the world, including scots, japs, etc. Like you he finds the origins to be in the Circum-Mediteraineam (sp) zone and found in ancient Babalyon, in the tablets, etc. and he thinks brought to the outlying areas, save for north Asia, but the Spainards, out of the Med-based ideas (Duncans idea)

Can you get a 1980 book by George Peter Murdock on Theories of Illness, U of Pittsburgh Press? It may be on line as its very thin, i.e. 76 pages> He has three brief chap[ters we should talk over...he is the famous ethnographer...counter of cultural traits, author of Peoiples and Cultures of Africa, map of 900

ethnic groups from Africa, big project at Yale. Check Human relations area files, on line.

Best, Norman

Classifications:

As far as I can find the Murdock book is not available on the internet although it is from second had bookstores. However, as far as I understand your summary of his conclusions his conclusions are probably consistent with my own. His classification into witches, sorcerers and aggressive spirits is simply the three possibilities of an agent based view of how the world works:

1. Witches = innate and embodied
2. Sorcerers = acquired or learned and embodied
3. Aggressive spirits = innate and disembodied

The fact that these severally or together seem to be so common is also unremarkable if you believe, as I do and have stressed so many times, that the agent based interpretation of how the world works is the oldest and even today by far the most common even within the gated enclaves of the scientific world. If, in the USA today over 80% of the population, most of whom are entirely dependent on science and technology for a living and quality of life and many of whom profess and use scientific concepts hourly, believe in spirits (God, Devil, angels, souls, etc) then it would not be surprising if more than 99% of the world believes in them too. What is clear that the scientific atom based and the spiritual agent based world views are not mutually exclusive but can cohabit and even breed in much the same way as in marriages between ethnic groups. There is really nothing very surprising here.

Turning to your four way classification. My problem with many of your classifications is that I do not understand on what they are based. Are they intended, as I believe classifications should, to partition the space of possibilities so that as far as possible not gaps are left - or more important allow us to detect gaps? Or are they simply keywords that others have used as headings in their books, or as approximate translations of what they think their informants are talking about, often without taking sufficient account of the fact that the informants may be using words within a totally different understanding of how the world may work? I would like to suggest

that if you do not have a framework that makes sense of classification it can only lead to confusion, both about what should be included and how one category is related to another. Of course this comes back to the old question of the status of universals - are universals more than words? Is there such a thing as `horsiness,Äô that all horses share?

Taking your four concepts or dimensions as given, this is how I would approach them.

1. Transformation
2. Inversion~Pollution
3. Transgression
4. Empowerment

My first impression would be that there are not four but three because I suspect that Inversion~Pollution and Transgression could be combined as instances, or manifestations, of a moral or ethical dimension. If that is the case then one has a tidier three-fold classification that could be considered as three dimensions along which examples or cases could be quantified. And these three would be:

1. Physical (changes in the physical world - folk physics)
2. Mental or psychological (changes in the minds of others i.e. at least one sense of empowerment)
3. Moral or ethical or normative (Inversion~Pollution and Transgression)

Now, if you approach the matter in this way what you are doing is mapping witch related phenomena, and how they differ from those with which we are familiar, onto what is a fairly standard `scientific,Äô classification of how the world is to be understood. That view is of course essentially Cartesian and dates only from around 1600 (Descartes `Discourse on Method,Äô was published around 1640), and although dualism is generally disapproved of by scientists and modern philosophers it is in spite of that almost the folk philosophy or metaphysics of the modern world. And it is at least sufficiently close to the conventional wisdom to make a reasonable basis for a rough classification of the ways in which witches (as they are popularly believed to be) differ from and change the familiar everyday world.

If I wanted to distinguish witches from ordinary folk I would soon come to the conclusion that any observable differences in their anatomy and physiology were subtle and difficult to detect and so if I would have to focus on what they are alleged to do

and be capable of doing and that means what they are able to change and in what ways. I would suggest at least as a first draft that the only ways in which witches could change the world would be the following:

1. Physical: Alter the laws of physics: by changing the nature and behavior of physical things - `move mountains,Äô, change shape, change natural kinds (men into animals), act at a distance without clear physical causal linkages.
2. Mental: Alter the minds of others: by changing how they think and feel and behave
3. Moral: Break moral conventions and laws: by behaving in ways and doing things that moral laws and normative conventions forbid.

Now, in our world view these three dimensions are more or less, though not completely independent. By definition minds on their own cannot change the laws of physics and moral conventions do not take precedence over physical law, nor do they have any power to change how people think or feel or wish as opposed to how they actually behave or what they do. They are not completely independent because anyone who had the power to change the laws of physics would, almost certainly, not only have the power to change minds, but would also acquire psychological and social power because of the reverence in which they were held by their less accomplished neighbors. However, conceptually the three dimensions: physical, mental, and moral make some sense and provide a framework for thinking about the subject.

You will of course have spotted a potential flaw - that the classification is based on and presupposes an atomistic interpretation of the world. It is a `western,Äô or scientific classification and is not strictly or transparently applicable to an agent based world such as the one in which witchcraft occurs and requires. However, the fact that in an agent based world the categories of physical, mental, and moral, are not mutually exclusive, have very fuzzy boundaries, or even do not exist in any useful sense, can be an advantage, because it allows one to explain to your readers how living in the world of physics differs from living in a world with witches. And without that incongruity, without having a clear classification with which to contrast the one applicable to a world with witches it is difficult to imagine how one would enable your readers to understand the difference.

One way of considering the nature of an agent based world is that in contrast to the atomic, what from that point of view is

considered physical or mental does not exist as distinct dimensions, but they are assimilated into and subordinate to the moral, ethical, or normative dimension. In that kind of world there are no rules of nature but only rules of behavior based on normative conventions established by tradition and the wishes of the greater living community of disembodied agents (spirits and ancestors). It might be described as one in which, unlike our concept of physical law, laws and rules are negotiable and subject to the democracy of the dead (a title for a book Ames and Hall borrowed from G K Chesterton).

There is one additional category that might be worth including, I am at present uncertain about its value. It is that of entities that are socially constructed.

Socially constructed entities, such as writing (and perhaps spoken languages as opposed to Language which is probably given), number systems, accounting, law, property, capital, money, restaurants, banks, governments, states, etc, function as the gears that connect the engine of the mental to the wheels of the physical and are responsible for most of the activity in the world. They are what Dennett and Haugeland referred to as prosthetic extensions for minds, what others have referred to as mind tools, and probably occupy the domain that Popper referred to as World 3. They are a discrete category in that they are not given but constructed and function to extend the range and power of our minds to bring about changes in the world and structure the ways in which we relate to each other.

To an extent they include, but on the other hand may even be included by, morals which are certainly one of the most important kinds. From the point of view of your approach to witchcraft, socially constructed entities include most of the artifacts that you are interested in using as illustrations. The masks and `guns,Äô are not entities that have any intrinsic power to change the world, as gunpowder, or avalanches, or fires, or tsunamis, or meteors, do, nor do they connect the physical body to the rest of the physical world directly as a knife or hoe does, but instead can only function indirectly by changing the minds of others. And that is what socially constructed institutions and entities do. However, as in the earlier case that is looking at the classification from the scientific atomic point of view and what according to that interpretation is a distinct domain and kind of action (indirect rather than direct) will from the point of view of an agent based interpretation be meaningless or indistinguishable from the moral order of the world and how it works.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

On Tradition - G.K.Chesterton

Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death.

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Sun Jan 12, 2003 11:48:49 Europe/London
To: Norman Miller <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject: Witches in the White House

Norman,

Here is my current view on the origin and foundations of witchcraft.

I believe that its Classical form as manifest in C16/17 Europe and Africa to the present is the tip of an iceberg and the most conspicuous manifestation of an underlying process that shapes many social and political events. The difference is that, in comparison to the Classical, Contemporary witchcraft does not rely on animistic interpretations of how the physical world works; it does not rely on or report magic or occult phenomena.

In formulating my view I have concentrated on processes that are very old and fundamental to humanity. It is, however, important to bear in mind that what may be secondary in terms of origins or ontogenesis may become primary in later established or institutional manifestations.

If I am right about the antiquity of the presuppositions then the possibility of witchcraft is universal and the question becomes what causes its manifestation at particular places and times? I believe that to be the result of its secondary benefits for authorities or those in power.

PRECONDITIONS:

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

A sense of injustice (mechanism for detection of cheating; of imbalance between tit and tat)

This is very old, has an anatomical brain basis, and from my own model of emotion would justify being considered a primary emotion like fear, anger, lust, disgust etc. Its basis goes back before culture, before language and before homo sapiens, maybe even before the primates. But it is, of course, only articulated and becomes accessible to thought with language; by which it is shaped thereafter. Its significance may have been overlooked because it was considered culturally determined and because most conceptions of the nature of emotion are grossly superficial and inadequate.

It forms the kernel for the polarization of good and evil that is dependent on language and in its most extreme form probably monotheism.

A Theory of Mind

This is a distinguishing characteristic of homo sapiens, has a brain basis, and precedes language and culture. It predisposes to an interpretation of how the world works in terms of agency (animism, minds, and intentions, resulting in what I have called a mindful world). In Classical forms of witchcraft this provides the basis for occult ornamentations and reports of physical manifestations, such as shape-shifting. In Contemporary witchcraft its scope is limited to other minds.

A Sense of being a Victim and justification of Vengeance

This is deep rooted and based on the sense for, or experience of, injustice and a Theory of Mind. One of the functions of witchcraft is to convert the sense of being a victim into a disposition to and motivation for vengeance. Or from passion (in its original sense of passivity as also found in `patient') to action.

The Incarnation of Evil

This transcends notions of good and bad and, based on psychological defenses such as projection, externalizes and personalizes evil into other people or groups. This is a late development dependent not only on language but a religion that is approaching monotheism. It can probably be traced to the precursors of Zoroastrianism before 2000BCE. My own view is that you will not get clear manifestations of `classical witchcraft' before that time.

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TRIGGERS:

A Threatened Authority

Once the more fundamental factors in the genesis of witchcraft interpretations are in place they provide a mechanism that is well suited to being used for control by authority. And although in terms of the origins of witchcraft this is a secondary manifestation, once recognized and established, it becomes a primary motivation and trigger for witchcraft epidemics. It is necessary though not sufficient for most manifestations of witchcraft. It does not create witchcraft mechanisms, but it uses them and sustains them by the invention of institutions that give them objective existence. In a similar way Christianity is sustained by its rituals, institutions and architecture.

Although my earlier emphasis on witchcraft as an evolved mechanism for stabilizing and ensuring social equilibrium may be correct in the earliest stages, in historical times it is of most value to the authorities, the powerful, and minority elites.

This is the case because it is rooted in such ancient and fundamental human characteristics that are present in everybody, everywhere, throughout history. In the same way today the tabloid press sell newspapers and TV shows by tapping into the same universal human dispositions and emotions.

Nowadays `Witchcraft Lite' stripped of its gaudy occult ornaments is a preferred, though desperate and destructive, mechanism of control by the powerful. It externalizes evil and amplifies it by mechanisms of the sense (emotion) of injustice and theory of mind to create anxieties for which it offers solutions in exchange for its retention of authority.

In C16/17 Europe the traditional authority was under threat from the Reformation, Renaissance, and the development of Science. In Africa today the traditional world views are being threatened by capitalism and derivatives of globalization. In earlier times they were threatened by the explorers, merchants and anthropologists that confronted them with alternative ways of interpretion and behaviour.

I think this is what Greenblatt had in mind when he said that self-fashioning, or the emergence of individuality (from being defined as simply a part of a greater whole), occurs when an

alien confronts and authority. In the case of witchcraft the alien is the possibility and immanence of changes that are incompatible with the conventional wisdom or tradition.

To understand instances of witchcraft you need only ask one question: Who feels under threat here? And the place to look is not the weak and vulnerable who are disposable, but the powerful, for only they have sufficient to lose. This is the beauty of the mechanism; for the weak and vulnerable who experience themselves and others as victims and perpetrators of injustice and clamour for vengeance divert attention from those who have most to lose from the changes going on around them and can use that concern to their advantage. Turn over any witchcraft stone and underneath you will find not demons but our old friends the mercantilists (people who use wealth and power to divert and subvert the Law to their advantage and against that of the commons).

The Dangers of Witchcraft and Witchcraft Lite

Because the mechanism is grounded in such fundamental human dispositions it is difficult to control. It is like starting a fire to put out another. It can sometimes work in the short term but there are costs and often it can be like pouring on fuel to put out a fire. A long time ago I had a patient who went into a local pub and set fire to himself. It is reported that the other customers did what they could to put him out by throwing their drinks over him, including spirits.

This may be happening today with regard to the `war' against terrorism which seems in danger of becoming a crusade against Islam. What is not sufficiently appreciated in the West is that Islam is essentially not an intolerant but an egalitarian religion with an acute sense of injustice that is, as is often the case, most acutely felt by the young. The whole rhetoric of `War' seems to divert attention away from the real injustices that are experienced not only by the poor and disadvantaged in Muslim countries on account of their situation there, but also by injustices suffered by Muslims anywhere. Islam is much more a supranational `state' than Christendom. Our governments' approach seems guaranteed to increase the sense of injustice and seems built on the externalization of evil, the creation of both witches and witch states will do little to address the underlying causes.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

NB this does not address otuer important aspects of fundamentalism most noteably devaluation of theory of mind and distrust of figurativs language and especially irony.

DEFINITION

From my point of view I believe that notions of witchcraft are closely associated with the side effects of the economic changes that followed the development of agriculture and the shift from hunting and gathering, and to a lesser extent herding, to settled farming. These effects were particularly changes in the linked notions of property and the individual - alienable property presupposes the existence of owners and these have increasingly been individuals. Also, any individual self or alienable property presupposes language as it can only exist as a description. And witchcraft too presupposes the existence of language and could not exist without it.

It is also important in thinking of witchcraft to remember that it is not a thing or a substance but a process that exists as a dynamic tension between different components and to discriminate between the background conditions that it requires, the fundamental processes that motivate it and set it in motion, and the later elaborations that account for its more bizarre and baroque ornamentations. By this I mean that, if I am right in considering that witches are created out of the confrontation of an authority and a perceived threat to its existence, this will be clearest only in the earlier stages of its development and triggers a process that rapidly leads to elaboration and increasing complexity that takes on a momentum and life of its own. Among the more unfortunate effects of this has been a tendency to focus on the witch as primary rather than the process out of which the notion emerges as a secondary phenomenon.

There are three main approaches to witchcraft that appeal to differing temperaments and failure to distinguish between them can lead to confusion and confounded expectations. These are:

1. Witchcraft as practice. This tends towards a religion like Wicca and has the psychological benefits of religious practice - an explanation for troubling events and rituals to reduce anxiety .

2. The mechanisms used by witches. This appeals to those who seek wonders and are dissatisfied by what they perceive to be the reductionism of modern science. They tend to focus on the

content of beliefs and any alleged phenomena that scientific orthodoxy excludes or is unable to accept.

3. The functions of witchcraft within society. This approach is that of most anthropologists and social scientists. It is less concerned with the ontological status of phenomena and focuses not on the content but the consequences of beliefs and practices and the role that they play in the functioning of the society.

It is probable that 1 and 2 which are not exclusive account for most of the interest in witchcraft and the majority of books written about it.

The following model of the origin and development of the idea of witchcraft can best be understood in terms of a timeline of human development divided into three principle stages the middle being further subdivided into two or three substages. The timeline starts with the nature of hunting gathering societies and ends with that of modern science - especially the nations of the North Atlantic rim and those whose worldview has been influenced by them. These extremes bookend a transitional phase divided into two or three stages, and it is during these that the phenomenon of witchcraft emerges and becomes elaborated.

The best way to illustrate the relations between the different stages would be by a table comparing and contrasting the differences in terms of a number of headings. The following are suggestions:

Size =
Cosmology =
Ontology =
Mechanisms = How the world works
The nature of the individual =
Property =
Social Structure =
Leadership =
Justice =

Sun 22 Jun 2003 10:02

Witchcraft and the notion of property?
In witchcraft believing community property, possessions, status, wellbeing are a function of relationships and of the whole of which the individual is a part. And so events or good fortune

that cannot be interpreted as coming from the official or legitimate whole must come from another darker side.

But what is the origin of the dark side? Where does the dichotomy of good and evil come from?

Sun 22 Jun 2003 9:25

Attribution Fallacy
Humans seem to have a disposition to treat each other as members of a group; to see individuals as parts of a whole - metonymically perhaps.
This is basis of the notion of treason, witchcraft, the holocaust, ethnic cleansing, penal policies and attitudes. There may also be a link to attitudes to sexual offences. Why is bad behavior re Sex considered so much more serious than others that cause greater and more lasting harm eg knee-capping, shooting, etc? Is it because the prototypical whole is blood relations? And is the blood line so important before settled farming and the notion of property? To what extent is individuality based on notions of possession and property?

The root would seem to be the ancient problem of universals.

And in practice how to realize the emergent benefits of individuality without generating destructive tension in community?

In a sense the capitalist system as I envisage capital - as inter-mental analogue of energy - is a replacement or alternative system based on ability to change minds. The difference with others is that they were based on inter-personal relations to gods spirits priests kings nobles etc so the structure was made up of whole objects whereas the capitalist structure is made of mechanical or at best part-objects. And that in the individual is related to psychoses.

Sun 27 Jul 2003 17:48

Kakia - what one desires to avoid

The Greek idea of evil was not moral but more like illness what is bad (for you) and that you desire to avoid eg misfortune and every kind of harm.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

In the case of WC does the moral dimension come in when an increasingly complex structure of power and authority assume responsibility for the welfare and well-being of the community? Before as among HG the source of general misfortune would be less easy to attribute to individuals? Also from the point of view of authority if a scapegoat for harmful events could not be found the justifiction for authority would be in question?

Sunday, 2 December 2007 16:18:07

Norman

One way of expressing my perspective or interpretation of witchcraft is that the technology, whether the `science' on which it is implicitly based is real or imagined (transformation, poison, or an AK47), is irrelevant. All that matters is what people believe to be possible and what seems to them to be able to explain why bad things happen. The real focus of witchcraft is not technological but rather economic, not physics but economics, in the special sense of a moral economy. And the focus of witchcraft behaviors is the functioning of a moral economy and amounts to an attempt to right or restore the equilibrium and balance of a moral economy that has become disturbed.

Sunday, 30 March 2008 09:28:47

Witchcraft - the remix

If you have picked up this book in the hope of learning about the extraordinary things that witches are believed to be able to do then you are likely to be disappointed. This book is not about wonders that are reported from distant times or exotic places but about processes that can be observed anywhere and anytime. Indeed it is the main contention of the book that the principal and perhaps only impediment to understanding witchcraft is its forced association with what is referred to as the occult, supernatural, magic, or any other poorly defined notions of their kind. To understand witchcraft and to benefit from its study one must first rescue it from occultists and fabulists. Only then after its baroque encrustations with magic have been removed can its real nature be perceived and its proper significance appreciated.

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In the not too distant past most fairgrounds worthy of the name would include an exhibition of natural oddities and grotesques such as the elephant man, conjoined twins, and two headed snakes. And in all medical schools there would be anatomical museums, usually only open to professionals, containing hundreds of specimens of abnormal foetuses and body parts, floating pale, pickled, and forlorn in their glass coffins. Now the difference between the public show and the `occult' museum is that while the former emphasized and was motivated entirely by abnormalities, the more grotesque the better and more profitable, the purpose of the latter, in spite of its extraordinary content, was instead the understanding of the mundane and everyday by way of the abnormal. For what the anatomical abnormalites on display were intended to show was what happened when ordinary processes went wrong. In other words how nature's errors helped to illustrate the processes that in the vast majority of cases got it right and led to normal structures. For any normal process includes the possibility of specific errors and the existence of these errors, even when rare, is in a sense an affirmation of the real nature of the process and can tell us useful things about it.

One can also discern two broad approaches to the study of any subject, whether amateur or academic. On the one hand you have those who are fascinated by the particular and unique, the tail of the peacock or the trunk of the elephant, or become experts in differences, while on the other are those who while not unimpressed by the unusual consider it's interest mainly in relation to what is commonplace, how the peacock's tail and the elephant's trunk are related to other anatomical variations, or the wing of a bird to the leg of a lizard or mouse. Or while one stamp collector might be interested in the potential monetary value of errors another might be more concerned with what these indicated about the processes by which stamps were normally made. Or book collectors who seek copies of bibles containing misprints, such as the Wicked Bible which renders the commandment as `Thou shalt commit adultery', or the Fool's Bible which renders the psalm as `The fool sayeth in his heart there is a God', because of their rarity while other scholars might be more interested in what the reaction to such errors might teach us about the nature of religious belief and observance.

These diverse approaches are two ends of a spectrum united by the fact that what is commonplace and considered normal can too easily become taken for granted or for practical purposes invisible, but when viewed from the perspective of the extreme can be discerned more easily. So it is with witchcraft. The fundamental processes involved are by no means exceptional and

do not require a suspension either of beliefs or the laws of nature. That they have largely been overlooked is simply because the equivocation of witchcraft with magic and the occult has diverted attention onto it's incongruities with the conventional wisdom of science and hence to implied mechanisms so extraordinary that they make it almost impossible to make out the relatively ordinary processes in which they are actually grounded. In essence the focus has been shifted from the existence and consequences of beliefs onto their content which far too many foolish people are inclined to consider as fact. The issue is similar to that described by John Searle as a mistake endemic in linguistic philosophy - `confusion of features of reports, with features of the things reported'.

A note on the distinction between processes and systems:

In general a system refers to an entity, that has a distinguishable identity that is maintained and sustained over reasonable periods of time and across different contexts: an example might be a living cell or an institution like government or law. In contrast a process need not be maintained; examples might be a fire, storm, explosion, chemical reaction, erosion, or decay. But in practice the differences tend to be relative and more flexible, and what is regarded as a system at one level might well be a process at another.

At the simplest level several processes each of which is in isolation unsustainable may when combined constitute a system with an identity and within which individual processes become sustainable. In the case of life, or living systems, how individual chemical reactions could come together to make up living cells remains something of a mystery - at least in detail. In the case of an organism some of its parts may be described as systems, such as the nervous, cardiovascular, respiratory, or nervous systems, yet although each is made up of many cells that might individually have a separate existence, as in a culture, none of these subsystems can survive as a system independently of the organism of which it is a part.

I think the best way to think about the distinction is that systems are self sustaining entities made up of parts that have identities that are not independently sustainable. Hence, in a simple system, like the simplest cells, these parts might be simple chemical reactions, whereas in others they might be systems of cells that could not exist as a sub-system or entity apart from the larger entity of which they are essential parts. At this intermediate level the functions of processes and systems become blurred but in practice subsystems can be

regarded as processes. Another way of looking at this might be in terms of functions rather than `anatomical' structures, with the structure and function of the higher level systems or entities being defined in terms of the functions of parts that might structurally be considered systems that function as processes. Or, perhaps more succinctly - the primary focus of interest in systems is structure whilst in processes it is on function? And consistent with this formulation is the fact that it is often easier to distinguish higher order entities in terms of their structure than function. For example, there is probably less variation in the function that mammals, insects, reptiles, birds, etc, seem to have than in their structures.

In the case of witchcraft there are cultural contexts in which it can be self sustaining and may constitute a system with a recognizable and persistent identity, but in others it can be absorbed or assimilated into a larger entity as prokaryotic cells are considered to have been absorbed to form eukaryotic. Hence, in traditional societies with poorly articulated religious institutions - those without a written canon of sacred texts and poorly defined hierarchies of religious job descriptions - witchcraft phenomena may approximate to religious practice, whilst in the context of more complex and established religions it can become assimilated and exapted by them, becoming in that process a process.

It is also relevant to remember that in modern science systems can be divided into two different kinds - open and closed. In the case of a closed system, such as our universe is supposed to be, there are no inputs of energy, information, or matter, and according to the second law of thermodynamics the entropy of the content must inevitably increase, with a break down of structure and order, into a state of maximum disorder or entropy. In contrast, open systems are transparent to inputs of energy that can be used to reduce entropy and maintain order and structures far from thermodynamic equilibrium, at least locally and for short periods. An example of an open system is a living organism such as a cell or human being. Considered as a system witchcraft would have to be open, for to maintain its structure energy and work would be essential.

Notes on the notion of supernatural:

In the following paragraphs I take supernatural as being a synonym for magic, the occult, and similar terms.

The world is made up of things. It does not contain and is not cluttered with the myriad of things that do not exist or that

could not exist. To say that some things do not or cannot exist is to shift focus from the world of things to the world of facts or statements or reports about things - and that is the world in which we lead most of our lives.

To say that some thing or event is natural is to imply that it exists in the world of things. But to say that something is supernatural is to locate it in the world of facts, statements, and opinions, about the world. It amounts to a judgement about the contents of the world that excludes something.

Now, if something exists or is possible we can, at least in principle, find it. We may not be able to do so instantly. The coelocanth was known to exist in the past but was for a long time considered extinct until one day it was found to have survived its obituaries. Other things that at present we think do not exist may yet turn out to do so. But insofar as their existence is not established they exist only in the limbo of the realm of opinions and statements. And, if in the case of things that exist I can trump any arguments against their existence by producing or pointing to them, in the case of opinions any judgement about their validity must depend ultimately on argument and that in turn on an authority that is based either on logic, or reputation. In every society there is a consensus, which may fall short of encompassing all, about who has the authority to make a judgement about the validity of statements about what exists and is considered possible and therefore plausible. Hence all arguments about the supernatural come down to matters of opinions and the status of the authorities on which their validity ultimately rests.

The confusion that bedevils most writing on witchcraft is at root an equivocation between things and statements about things and ultimately about the validity of the authorities on which any resolution of conflicting statements must depend.

And the great concern about any writing about witchcraft that chooses to focus on the supernatural is that the conflicting authorities will reduce to the modern and scientific and the traditional and ascienfific. Which in practice means between largely white north atlantic males and the rest of the world. Which raises the ever present probability that any conclusions might plausibly be considered racist or racially distorted.

The following book is essential reading for anyone working with Africans

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Worlds of Power

Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa

Stephen Ellis Gerrie ter Haar

With Christian revivals (including Evangelicals in the White House), Islamic radicalism and the revitalisation of traditional religions it is clear that the world is not heading towards a community of secular states.

¬†¬† Nowhere are religious thought and political practice more closely intertwined than in Africa. African migrants in Europe and America who send home money to build churches and mosques, African politicians who consult diviners, guerrilla fighters who believe that amulets can protect them from bullets, and ordinary people who seek ritual healing: all of these are applying religious ideas to everyday problems of existence, at every level of society. Far from falling off the map of the world, Africa is today a leading centre of Christianity and a growing field of Islamic activism, while African traditional religions are gaining converts in the West.

¬†¬† One cannot understand the politics of the present without taking religious thought seriously. Stories about witches, miracles, or people returning from the dead incite political action. In Africa religious belief has a huge impact on politics, from the top of society to the bottom. Religious ideas show what people actually think about the world and how to deal with it.

¬†¬† Ellis and ter Haar maintain that the specific content of religious thought has to be mastered if we are to grasp the political significance of religion in Africa today, but their book also informs our understanding of the relationship between religion and political practice in general.

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Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

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I think that the approach I outlined to you earlier today has the greatest potential so far. It addresses a number of issues and is both comprehensive and coherent. Remember that there are very few original ideas and what we are concerned with is how best to repackage and re-present the old. In this case we are shifting the primary focus from witches to witchcraft and from individual to the community.

The following notes define the context and the processes that I think are involved.

Witches are not primary but secondary - they are not causes but effects of witchcraft.

Many, if not most, accounts of witchcraft take the existence of witches as the primary focus and are then forced into treating the surrounding phenomena of witchfinding and `legal' processes as a reaction and secondary. In other words there would be no witchfinding without witches. This is reinforced by defining witchcraft as causing harm by magical means. The contradictions that are implicit in the notion of magic and the occult

encourage the view that witches exist and are the primary focus. They also attract, like blowflies to carrion, those who are titillated by the idea of the occult and hope that the mechanisms that witches alleged activities imply may force a rethinking of what they perceive as the rigid and reductive boundaries of conventional sciences.

Witchcraft and witches coevolve and together make up a spontaneously emergent structure of beliefs and institutions.

WITCHCRAFT DEFINITION

As you may have guessed I have become increasingly dissatisfied with the traditional approach to witchcraft and feel that something new (at least to me) is needed.

I have come to the view that witchcraft is nothing more than an archaic, older, and earlier, version of criminal law. As found in Africa it appears extreme and exotic, simply because it developed during the period between the emergence of modern humans 150,000 years ago and the Enlightenment 200 years when the dominant framework for understanding the world (the prevailing doctrine or paradigm) was animistic, and all the paraphernalia of that heritage persist, as in a stagnant pool, cut off from the ever faster flowing river of scientific explanation. And only its exotic ornamentation and colouring, which dazzle and blinder, have obscured its essential nature and kinship with more mundane institutions like criminal law.

Bad things, those that one would prefer to avoid, have always happened to good people and from the formation of the earliest groups and social contracts societies would have had to distinguish between those that were to be expected and clearly acts of nature, for which nobody could be held responsible, and the others for which an individual or group could be held accountable. I will refer to those events that can be considered acts of nature as `natural' or `accidental' and those that are the result of human agency `forensic'. This fundamental dichotomy will be found in all societies throughout history and is the foundation of criminal law.

However, the partitioning of events between natural and forensic will vary from one culture to another and over time. In the early stages of human history, long before the development of the notion of physical or scientific laws, almost every event

would have had to be interpreted as the result of some animistic agency. But, even then it seems likely that a significant proportion would be considered `natural' because they were predictable. For example, the death of old people or animals would be more natural than that of the younger and fitter. And even if the sun were thought to be moved by the breath of spirits, or demons, its rising and setting would in practice attract less comment than an eclipse, or a supernova. What required most urgent explanation was the unexpected, and what was considered natural could not be events that were explicable in terms of physical law, for none existed at that time, but those that could be modelled, by generalizing from instances in which a causal chain could be observed linking a perpetator to harm done.

For example, if I were to see a neighbour spear my goat, or my son, I would probably not consider it necessary to invoke some hidden disembodied agents, or ancestors, in order to explain the death. Likewise, if I saw him administer a substance that I knew to be poisonous, perhaps because it was used to poison arrows for hunting. In these, exceptional, cases the causal chain is obvious and the addition of extra animistic agents redundent. But, in a world made up from entities with minds, rather than inert atoms, and in which the majority of adverse events have no physical explanation it will seem very plausible, and only natural, to fill in the unknown causal links with the actions of disembodied agents and to link their activity to the malevolence of a living person, who is able to elicit their help. In an animistic society the realm of forensic explanation is therefore likely to be far greater than in a modern scientific one. And so where we would seek a physical or biological explanation they would look for what is essentially a (folk) psychological one that would link the alleged perpetrator with the harm in ways that we would consider to be impossible.

One of the consequences of the development of the scientific doctrine has been that the realm of natural events has increased at the expense of the forensic, because with increased knowledge more and more links between physical causes and bad events have been found, and as a result the realm of animistic explanations has shrunk considerably. In the case of personal interpretations it has been largely confined to the field of religion, and in the case of the law it has been abandoned as an acceptable explanation for events. And as the scientific explanation of events becomes more and more sophisticated the boundary between natural and forensic explanation becomes increasingly clear and the two sides of the dichotomy mutually exclusive.

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Whereas, under the scientific doctrine an event can be considered either natural or forensic but not both (i.e. exclusive `or' - logical XOR), under the animistic it can be both natural and forensic (i.e. inclusive `or' - logical OR). XOR reduces the number of cases in each category, whilst OR can increase them - in this case the forensic.

The first and primary question to which the institutions of criminal law, including witchcraft, is the answer is: Who is responsible for this event? And the second is: What is to be done about it? Everything else about witchcraft is ornamentation and contingent on the local context and history.

NB There is a general issue here. When faced with an unexplained social phenomenon it is usually worth asking: What is the question to which this is the answer?

So, as a first approximation, witchcraft is simply the most extreme and exotic form of criminal law, as found in the context of societies in which the overwhelmingly dominant doctrine or paradigm (the framework for interpreting how the world works) is thoroughly animistic. And that form persists and is further accentuated by processes of exclusion, as a result of which the general population feel excluded from effective law - because their concerns and anxieties are neither acknowledged nor addressed. When this occurs vigilantism is inevitable, and in this case takes on the exotic form and masks of witchcraft as the archaic law on which it is modelled.

Only one additional component is required to complete the picture; and this too is found in all societies and in association with all variations of criminal law. The mechanism that has been referred to as the social amplification of risk also applies to the experience of danger: risk is related to danger as objective to subjective and as the sides of a coin. This does not apply to all risks or dangers, but is selective, as is the effect - which can be positive in some cases and negative in others. For example the risk and danger of nuclear power stations is usually amplified, whilst that of smoking is diminished - at least by smokers. It seems therefore that some risks that vary with culture and with time are liable to amplification and that this can lead to the kindling of what has been described as moral panics, where anxiety flares into a conflagration of terror and is experienced as threatening the whole population. As a result the scale and extension of risk and danger is distorted with serious consequences for the optimal allocation of scarce resources - and in the worst cases the Rule of Law.

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The factors that focus amplification onto specific issues and that kindle, enhance, sustain, and constrain moral panic therefore need to be studied. I believe that these are likely to depend on subdoctrines or attitudes that unite people of like minds into loosely defined groups and control the flow of information within and between them. If this is the case then one of the implications is that in order to control amplification and panic intervention may have to be directed not at evidence (better facts or information) but less directly at the underlying attitudes and communication networks. Here `Small World Theory' may be of crucial importance.

The exotic masks of witchcraft have blinded us to the underlying processes that are not unique to animism but are also detectable in societies under the scientific doctrine. These can be thought of as functioning like image intensifiers that reveal links and relationships that are hidden to the naked eye. The problem is that the mechanism can generate false positives and suggest the existence of things and relations that are at best exaggerrated and at worst simply do not exist. There is a computer model of a process called synaptic pruning that some experts think may account for some of the symptoms of schizophrenia. Using this one finds that as the synaptic connections are reduced by pruning the system is able to make increasingly accurate guesses as to what it is `seeing' when exposed to less and less information. The equivalent of an expert ornithologist being able to identify a bird from a fleeting glimpse of only part, or an intelligence officer identifying weapons of mass destruction in Iraq from reconnaissance photographs. However, there comes a point where the ability to identify patterns from minimal information passes over into the invention of patterns that do not exist - a possible model of hallucinations and delusions.

One of the factors that focus social amplification and may generate false positives and moral panic, is the belief in the existence of some individuals deemed responsible for forensic events as having extraordinary powers that are either innate (witches and those with dangerous personality disorders), or acquired - either in the sense of learned techniques (such as paedophiles control of their victims), or alliances with external forces including foreign powers (communists and other traitors), spirits and demons (witches), or from specialist dealers (terrorists). Once profiled and stereotyped these are then the subject of demands for changes in due process and statutes in order to ensure convictions on minimal evidence.

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The relatively recent literature on moral panics fits neatly with that on risk as it is almost certainly the social amplification of fear risk and danger that results in moral panics. Also the notion of scripts as used in modern computer programming provides an illustration of the role of scripts and modules in social processes like those of witchcraft.

This is how I see it -

An unexpected event causes anxiety
The anxiety is processed by the doctrine of paradigm and interpreted as a witch phenomenon
This triggers the witch and/or moral panic script
The resulting anxiety is amplified and feeds back into the doctrine creating a positive feedback loop / vicious circle
This script, evolving over time, generates the shell manifestations or derivatives that are the tangible visible presentation of witchcraft and what can most easily be recorded and studied.

In modern computing most programming is done using scripting languages that link standard modules (usually written in faster languages) drawn from standard libraries. In the past when computers were less powerful most programs were written in fast languages like C and fine tuned for speed. But the speed of C came at the price of being difficult to write, debug, and maintain. The beauty of scripting languages like Python or PERL is that although slower they can be used to link standard modules written and optimized for speed by others and it is relatively easier to see what they are actually doing. And the loss of efficiency becomes irrelevant as the speed of the hardware increases. So they allow you to develop reliable applications much faster and to adapt and maintain them over time with less danger that a small change will have disastrous unintended consequences.

In the case of phenomena like witchcraft, scripts bind basic modules and processes into larger wholes and generate the behaviors that we can actually observe. Once triggered the script runs the program of witchcraft or moral panic and these become the conventional wisdom and relatively immune to change or alternatives.

The victims of the witch hunt history would rather forget
(Filed: 16/03/2003)

HISTORY OF WITCHCRAFT

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Damian Thompson reviews Male Witches in Early Modern Europe by Lara Apps and Andrew Gow

Between 1450 and 1750, approximately 110,000 people were tried for witchcraft in Europe and America, of whom 60,000 were executed; the trendy name for this persecution is the "witch craze". Towards the end of the 20th century, historians fell on these statistics in their own form of witch craze, and came away with the sort of neat and provocative theories that give history a bad name. The witch hunts were produced by mass hallucinations, economic insecurity, early modern state-building or religious fundamentalism. Take your pick.

The hypotheses were mutually incompatible, but they usually made room for one central assumption. The witch craze was directed against women, and therefore expressed misogyny and patriarchy. Feminist historians pioneered this approach, then the usual suspects jumped on board: Margaret Murray, Barbara Ehrenreich and Andrea Dworkin. In all this, an inconvenient detail was overlooked. Between a fifth and a quarter of those executed for witchcraft were men. This is not news to historians; they just don't want to know about it.

"With few exceptions, modern scholars see the witch as essentially female," write Lara Apps and Andrew Gow. "The male witch vanishes quickly from view, as he is made invisible by a combination of rhetorical strategies." Male Witches in Early Modern Europe is the first book on the subject, and it is an outstandingly good one. You will find no suspiciously neat theories here. But it is provocative - savagely so in places, as these two young Canadian historians blaze away at an older generation of doctrinaire feminists.

Take Anne Barstow, the author of Witchcraze: a New History of the European Witch Hunts (1994). Apps and Gow begin by quoting Barstow's view that non-feminist historians such as Hugh Trevor-Roper and Keith Thomas, by refusing to recognise the misogynistic dimension of the persecution, were like chroniclers of the Holocaust who didn't mention anti-Semitism, "thereby implying that it was 'natural' for Jews to be victims".

Apps, herself a feminist, and Gow, an observant Jew, spell out the poisonous implications of this comment: "Barstow casts these scholars in the role of Holocaust deniers and, by implication, Nazi sympathisers." Who were the male witches? Many scholars, anxious to tidy the men away, have claimed that they were prosecuted as associates of female witches. But this claim

cannot be true for those regions of Europe, such as Burgundy, Normandy and Iceland, where men comprised the majority of those accused.

Even when men and women were tried together, there is often no evidence to suggest that the men were seen as accomplices: William and Margery Skelton, for example, convicted of murder at Chelmsford Assizes in 1573, were accused of bewitching one child each.

At least in that case there were real bodies; most male "witches", like their female counterparts, had done nothing more than annoy their neighbours. "Innocent I came to jail, innocent I was tortured, innocent I must die," wrote one condemned man in 1628. "They stripped me, bound my hands behind me, and drew me up in the torture. Then I thought heaven and earth were at an end." Similar testimonies make the witch craze seem like a wicked delusion. But Apps and Gow sound a note of caution. It is easy to exaggerate the pathological dimensions of the panic; we need to remember that, for early modern Europeans, the existence of evil magic was a foregone conclusion, as self-evident as the earth's orbit around the sun is for us. They did not "believe" that witches existed: they knew it, and they acted accordingly.

And who is the fellow historian Apps and Gow cite in support of this view? He is Dr Ian Bostridge, author of Witchcraft and its Transformations (1997). If you think you've heard that name before, you're right: he does a bit of singing on the side.

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This is not my memo about the possible relevance that the phenomenon of witchcraft, when considered as a system of extra-legal criminal law, might have for the work of the ILD.

It is my personal interpretation of populism, but insofar as populism and witchcraft have common aspects and are based on similar mechanisms, which I will try and explain, it may also serve as a prelude.

Until you raised the subject I had not really thought about populism other than as a rather vague manifestation of `the will of the people' and hence close to the basis of the democratic process. Now, having considered it more seriously, as far as I can reason, the notion of populism is only meaningful as a reaction to something to which it is defined in terms of

contrast or opposition. And, as is always the case when something is defined in opposition, it inevitably takes on many of the characteristics of that to which it imagines itself to be opposed. The negative of a monochrome photograph differs from the positive only in that dark and light are reversed, the overall patterns are the same. Similarly in the case of psychopathology the victims of abuse frequently take on characteristics of their abusers - Freud's notion of the identification with the oppressor. And the rebellion of an adolescent against his parents is usually shaped by their characteristics.

Witchcraft could be described as a phenomenon that is nothing but a reaction, in that the concept or category of the witch that motivates it is empty, because, from our PE (Post Enlightenment) or scientific framework of interpretation, no known kind of being can have the powers and abilities attributed to witches, and hence there can be no causal chain linking someone accused of witchcraft to the harm that they are alleged to have caused. This has not, however, prevented the development of a complex structure of behaviours and institutions whose function is the identification, control, and punishment of witches. From the point of view of an unbeliever, this is no more remarkable than gothic cathedrals, the Inquisition, or other arifacts of christianity as a great organization.

In the case of populism, however, the category in relation to which it is defined is far from empty. In the most general terms it is a perception of unfair privilege, or more concretely the existence of a privileged group that uses its power to manipulate the law in its favour and against the interests of the rest of the population. This seems to me close to your usage of mercantilism in EOS, and hence I would suggest that populism might be considered as a reaction to the perception of mercantilism, and as a corollary depends on and is motivated by the experience of exclusion. And, if the above analysis is correct would seem likely to have some similar characteristics.

I believe that these would be that, in spite of its name, populism like mercantilism is not representative of the commons as a whole, but only of a minority, even though that may be greater than in the case of mercantilism. And, like mercantilism, it tends to distort economic and political functioning, by a partisan and less than optimum allocation of resources and priorities. So, on the one hand you have mercantilism, and on the other a larger and more fluid grouping that has formed in reaction to it (in this it is close to a cult - as defined by Mary Douglas). Each is partisan and can easily

be provoked into actions that are against the wider interest. But it is the kindling of opposition into extreme policies that is perhaps the greater danger. For, whilst mercantilism tends to have diachronic roots that make it stable, populism tends to be synchronic, fickle, and volatile. That is both its attraction and danger for opportunistic journalists and politicians - it is a bandwagon from which it is difficult to escape. Or, a bush fire that is easy to start, but difficult to extinguish. And, because, superficially, it seems to be so close to the principle of democracy its costs are far too easily overlooked. The perceptions and wishes of a substantial proportion of the population is taken to be representative of the whole.

The significance of this will differ depending on the basis of exclusion. Within LDCs where the mercantilist minority enjoy their privileges under the shelter of the bell-jar of law, from which the majority are excluded, any populist desire for equal access would seem to be natural and almost completely benign. Although exclusion will inevitably faciliate feelings of resentment and other `emotional' reactions that are likely to be less than optimal and could be made volatile.

By contrast, in the more developed world, where the glass of bell-jars is perhaps thinner and clearer, and the rule of law is not confined within them, the effects of populism may be more problematic. This is because such societies tend to have developed a media industry that behaves in most ways like individuals with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) - overactive, short attention span, and hyper-reactive - and this can contribute to phenomena that are broadly similar to what has come to be described as `moral panics' and the `social amplification of risk'. The literature on both of these is relatively recent and I believe describes related phenomena - or that social amplification is the engine of moral panic. This is probably because to a large extent they presuppose the existence of techniques of data collection and interpretation that allow a meaningful comparison and quantification of `real' as opposed to `perceived' risk and danger.

The social amplification (and diminution or negative amplification) of risk (discussed by Mary Douglas et al) refers to the phenomenon of the misperception and differential response to risks that have a very low probability, but potentially severe consequences. And the well established difficulty in finding ways of changing attitudes and bringing public perceptions of risk into line with the reality. Examples include the almost universal tendency to overestimate the risks of

nuclear power, of terrorist atrocities, and children being murdered by strangers.

In the case of the first, James Lovelock believes that we may have less than 20 years to prevent the climate reaching a tipping point into irreversible warming, and that only the rapid deployment of nuclear power can prevent it. And that even if nuclear power were associated with a few Chernobyl like accidents that led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands, the alternative at this stage is that without nuclear power millions or billions will die from the wider effects of climate change. In the case of the last, a recent POP by ITN News in the UK asked parents to estimate how many children are murdered by paedophiles in the UK each year. Over a third estimated in excess of 450, whilst the actual figure has been 6 for over thirty years. An example of diminution, or negative amplification, is heterosexual attitudes towards the risk of HIV infection and `unsafe sex', or of the dangers of tobacco and alcohol. In the case of witchcraft in Africa the public perception of harm done by witches would be vast, the reality zero.

The phenomenon of `moral panics' although universal and a function of human nature, has only been identified and analyzed as such in the last three decades - usually dated from the publication of Stanley Cohen's `Folk Devils and Moral Panics' in 1972. According to Erich Goode and Nachman Ben Yehuda it has the following characteristics.

1. A heightened concern about a perceived danger
2. Marked hostility towards a group, or category, believed to be involved.
3. A popular (not necessarily universal) consensus about the reality of the danger.
4. Volatility - they erupt suddenly and subside quickly - though they can lie dormant for long periods.
5. Disproportionality - that is marked by:

- Figures (statistics) tend to be exaggerated and misinterpreted
- Figures (statistics) tend to be fabricated
- The relative neglect of other more harmful conditions (deaths from heroin vs deaths from alcohol or smoking)
- Inconsistency in variation over time: the importance and reaction to the same issue varies greatly from one time to another (attitudes to alcohol, before, during, and after prohibition).

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I think if one examines some of the issues that have become part of a populist agenda, whether political or economic, and related debates like that between the pro and anti globalization movements, one will be able to identify the above components even if somewhat attenuated. And it is the ease with which such a constellation can be identified or kindled that is the dark side of populism, and makes it so important to distinguish it from democracy.

And the difficulty that is immediately apparent, whenever attempts are made to change minds about these issues, is the same as that found in trying to change perceptions of risk. The processes that lead to social amplification seem to be linked to resistance to change. Specifically it seems that it is rarely sufficient to provide better evidence - whether data or facts - because it is not the facts, but their interpretation, that is pivotal.

Here I want to introduce a distinction that will help explain the source of the difficulty in changing minds and will be important later.

The scholastics drew a distinction between two different kinds of questions that they referred to as scientia and doctrina. Scientia referred to questions that could be answered with empirical evidence, whilst doctrina were questions that could not. Scientia were based on data or facts, whereas doctrina were related to frameworks for interpretation and explanation. In modern terms doctrina questions would be similar to Kuhn's paradigms, and unlike ordinary theories or hypotheses are not themselves easily refuted. Instead, their validity rests on their performance, on the fecundity of the questions that they suggest as well as help to answer, and it is rare for, one or a few, `facts' to be sufficient to lead to their being abandoned. Usually they are replaced only after a protracted period of increasing difficulty in accounting for new data in their terms.

For this reason I have found it useful, especially in considering the nature of witchcraft, to distinguish two major frameworks for interpretation: the scientific or PE (Post Enlightenment) and the animistic. It is important to appreciate that the scientific is both recent (less than 400 years and perhaps more accurately less than 200) and local (North Atlantic Rim and its former colonies and influences). And that, in contrast, the animistic is not only alive and well and living at times uneasily alongside the scientific (80% of USA believes in god and the power of prayer) but has been the framework of

interpretation for far more than 99% of the human beings who have ever lived.

I refer to these frameworks of interpretation as Doctrines in order to distinguish them from the common or garden theories that are framed and shaped by them. And from this point of view attitudes can be considered sub-doctrines of more restricted scope.

The relevance for the present argument is that the difficulty in changing perceptions of risk, which lies at the core and sustains `moral panic', and the extremes of populism, is due to the fact that these reflect and are gounded by attitudes or doctrines, rather than facts. They are far higher level constructions that have been found meaningful in coming to terms with such a wide range of issues that it is extremely difficult to abandon them without replacing them with something of equal or greater extension. And in any case exceptions are usually capable of reinterpretation - one does not readily give up a familiar doctrine or frame on account of isolated inconsistencies. As can be demonstrated by considering ideologies, religions, or psychoanalysis.

To reduce social amplification, the intensity of moral panics, and the extremes of populism one needs to change attitudes rather than providing alternative facts. It is more like a process of conversion in the religious sense than what is usually considered education. A successful approach is likely to be indirect and involve non-linear processes.

This may account for the success of your approach. You do not call for the elimination or termination of mercantilists as such, but simply for the removal of the barriers that lead to the experience of exclusion. And simply by doing that you weaken the motivation for social amplification, more partisan populism, and the generation of even attenuated forms of `moral panic'.

I am not pretending that this is a simple solution or the only one, nor that my analysis of the issue is correct, but I think it does point in a direction that might prove useful to explore.

Witchcraft:

As a prelude to a more explicit discussion of witchcraft it will be helpful to get used to the following ideas:

First, it is essential to distinguish the underlying form or structure of witchcraft from the local and contingent

manifestations. They are as genotype to phenotype. Specifically, the basic structure of witchcraft has nothing to do with what has been variously described as magic, the supernatural, or the occult.

The almost universal tendency to consider witchcraft as related to magic is due to the fact that in the present day its most dramatic and exotic manifestations are reported in areas where the prevailing doctrine is animistic, and hence the phenomenon is interpreted in different terms from those found in the context of a more scientific doctrine. The problem is that, like water for Einstein's fish, we are only occasionally aware of the doctrines by which we live and that shape our interpretation of the world. And the description of an event as magic or occult is in most cases `colonial', external, and from the point of view of the target meaningless. In trying to understand a phenomenon like witchcraft one has to try and see it from the point of view of those who believe in it. In a similar way you do not pass negative judegments on an extralegal property system because it does not conform to post enlightenment European statutes.

However, when one gets beneath the local coloration, what one finds is a mechanism that can exist under any doctrine that allows the interpretation of misfortune in terms of the action or intent of humans, or other agents that have mind and will. And so, as our lives are increasingly lived in interaction with and through artifacts that humans have built and control, witchcraft like phenomena can be recognized as if in a bubble of neo-animism floating in a sea of scientific doctrine. As a result in many cases the description of events as ` a witch hunt' is not just metaphoric, but descriptive and a literal truth.

Second, and what relates it to my interpretation of populism, is that the fundamental mechanisms that generate witchcraft are the same - those of social amplification of danger and the kindling of moral panics.

Third, the reason why the extra-legal law of property is congruent with the legal law, whilst the extra-legal criminal law in relation to witches is not is that in the case of property the concerns of the community are broadly isomorphic with those of the legal law and are not sensitive to the prevailing doctrine that provides a framework for their interpretation. By this I mean that the variables that influence the notion of property are likely to be more or less the same whether one believes in a scientific, post enlightenment, atomic, doctrine of how the world works, or an animistic one

according to which the world is made up from living mindful entities with beliefs, will, and desire - like humans, spirits, and the dead. In either world and under either interpretation there is some notion of property and harm and a perceived need for some kind of regulation.

DEFINITION

Thu 22 May 2003 9:28

Witchcraft phenomena can only occur in a community that believes in them and has a world view that allows them. But because that world view will include interpretations of events (ie how the world works and what causes change; viz will and desire, including malevolence, rather than impersonal physical forces) that our sciences have dismissed as illusory and these are used as an explanation for everything and not confined to the phenomena for which witchcraft is offered as an explanation, it cannot be used as a defining characteristic of witchcraft. In other words although a world view based on belief in what we consider the occult is a necessary condition for belief in witches it cannot be sufficient; because it is possible to imagine and find communities that interpret the world in terms of supernatural agencies, but do not exhibit the kinds of 'witchcraft' phenomena you are considering.

So, in order to distinguish witchcraft from other phenomena, and thus make it clear to the reader what the term means to you and in the context of the book, you will have to define it not in

terms of judgements about the ultimate validity of different beliefs about how the world works but given and from within what we would consider a supernatural world view what is it that dlstinguishes witchcraft from all other social phenomena?

Characteristics of Witchcraft

Background Conditions
+ Belief in existence of witches
+ Worldview sympathetic
+ Agents vs physical law

Content of belief
+ That individuals and communities can be harmed and put in danger by the acts and malevolent intentions of individuals within them acting either alone or with others living or dead human or not. These individuals may or may not be aware of their power, but act for their own selfish interests and motives against those of the community. They may bring about harm in a variety of ways including what we would consider poisons (but remember that whilst for us poisons are simply chemicals in wc vulnerable communities their world view will not make a clear distinction between chemicals and other carriers of power because that power will be explained in terms of ancestors spirits etc) and other means that we might describe as implying supernatural magic or occult powers. These would include powers personal to the witch whether learned or inherited but more often involve seeking or eliciting the help of ancestors spirits demons or other disembodied agents in a wider universe of disembodied entities than our science allows.

The danger and malevolence can be reduced removed or neutralized in a number of ways mostly involving the eradication of witches but sometimes their identification punishment and reeducation or rehabilitation. Could you classify witch related practices in terms of - prophylaxis, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation? And around these activities institutions rituals and job descriptions have developed. These once established are incorporated assimilated and absorbed into the prevailing power structures and become available as tools that political agencies or players can manipulate to their advantage. They also acquire secondary gains for the community in that they restore equilibrium when it has been disturbed restoring and reaffirming beliefs and world views and explaining and offering a resolution for anxiety provoking events. And overall enhance the relative significance and power of community over individuality.

Local Provoking Conditions

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+ Unusual anxiety causing events
+ Transitional experiences
+ individuality vs community

But, although that is sufficient reason to discard the notion, it does serve one useful purpose. It helps us to appreciate that the notions of evil and witch are located within a fairly sophisticated complex of abstractions that would be unthinkable without a well developed language. In other words witchcraft is not about things, but about the ways in which things and events are described, and amounts to value judgements about descriptions. It is not about things, nor does it inhabit the world of things, but descriptions of things and propositions about them. And, as such, witchcraft and witches exist only in the eye and mind of the beholder, they are experienced not as primary, or secondary, but at the very least tertiary qualities and in most uses of an even higher order.

This world of entities defined in terms of tertiary and higher order qualities is the human world of selfhood, of mind and individuality and self-identity. And this is another reason to believe that the history of witchcraft is quite short and unlikely to be more than 5k to 10k years. It is mostly a neolithic phenomenon and it's development presupposes and requires the existence of humans with a conception of autonomous individuals with at least some freedom of choice, an inner life, and an expectation of moral responsibility. At the very least it presupposes some kind of embryonic and emerging individuality, or quasi independence from the community - perhaps of the witch as part of another alien network of relationships.

Although it would take too long to cover the history of notions of the self, it is important to appreciate that the modern notion of the individual probably only came to maturity in the Renaissance (see Appendix 1), and that up to the time of Homer explanations of action were in terms of bodies acted upon by external influences such as the whims of the gods, rather than a self with internal motivations. See Appendix 2.

HISTORY OF WITCHCRAFT
Summary:

1. Anything earlier than 50k is on the other side of a genetic or memetic mutation that resulted in a quantum shift upwards in symbolic thinking. As the rules of translating across this

boundary are unknown, in either case, it is not possible to say much that is useful or safe about the nature of beliefs or content of thought before that time. Silence is therefore called for.

2. Any relation between witchcraft and the occult is accidental and context dependent. The false assumption that the occult is a defining feature of witchcraft has resulted in generations being blindered to and therefore neglecting the more general and vastly more important phenomenon of which witchcraft thus conceived is at most a special case and a small and trivial one.

3. Witchcraft, in the only useful sense of what is done about witches, is a notion with a hole at its centre in that it is a reaction to a postulated entity which either does not exist at all, or not in the terms with which it is defined. It is a monument to the power of the imagination.

4. If the notion of the witch were as old as you are inclined to suggest then it should be well nigh universal. If it is, and it one of the most surprising and suspicious things about the subject that there does not seem to be any authoritative work, or even interest, about the epidemiology of witchcraft, on how its prevalence varies between different cultures, then it is certainly the case that it's effects are very different in different times and places and in most, if the belief exists, it does not create many problems and is not a problem or hot topic, as it was in C15-C17 Europe and more recently in Africa.

5. If, in contrast to the above, one shifts focus from witches to what is done about them and recognizes any links to the occult to be no more than the form that the phenomenon assumes in the context of particular beliefs about how the world works, then one is able to see the outlines of a much more sinister phenomenon that if neglected threatens to undermine the basis of our civil society. The danger is not witches or terror but our reaction and habits of describing the things that we fear and would like to avoid.

6. Please do not waste your time on the costumes that witchcraft assumes, you are not a fashion correspondent, and we have too little time left for useful work. Only the associations between witchcraft terrorism and other kinds of moral panic are worth pursuing. A threadbare and highly speculative prehistory of witchcraft is a waste of time, only the here and now and future matters.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Appendix 1. This is more romantic than accurate but is very beautiful and remains true in general even if some qualification is required.

From Jacob Burkhardt `Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy".

"In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness --that which was turned within as that which turned without-- lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession, through which the world and history was clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation-- only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the State and of all the things of this world became possible. The subjective at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual individual, and recognized himself as such.

Appendix 2:

According to Charles Taylor in `Sources of the Self', on the basis of the work of Bruno Snell, ER Dodds, who was influenced by Benedict, between Homer and Plato one sees the beginning of an evolving morality from the prototype of the Warrior Hero to the Rational Man.

In Homer the standard by which men are judged is Fame and Glory and yet the mistakes and bad behaviour of heroes is not always considered a fault or culpable. Instead it is the result of the influence and infusion of power from the gods and even if this results in a mania that allows them to do great deeds they are worthy because they are such that the gods are able to influence. Perhaps as if an athlete who broke records by taking steroids was considered worthy of them because she was such that steroids worked for her.

Plato rejects the value of fame and glory and lays the foundations of a view of the self or soul as a locus and container for reason and desire (here it is worth remembering that the origin of passion is not activity but passivity as patients are made passive and helpless by illness). Desire leads to confusion and chaos, reason controls desire and leads to unity, calm and self-possession. Later spirit (possible translation of thumos) was introduced as the auxiliary warrior for reason.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

In contrast to the unity of reason the pursuit of fame and glory and the dominance of desire and the passions leads to fragmentation, compartmentalization and dissociation? Is dissociation a function of shame?

The point of this is that even today you can see these two clusters - the focus of fame and shame and belonging to networks, and the reason guilt and self as container - existing side by side in our culture.

DEFINITION

Witchcraft is simply the most extreme and exotic manifestation of the common process that is the basis and motivation of systems of law. This identity and its real nature has been obscured by its form being shaped by three factors.
First, the social amplification of the perception of risk and the experience of danger.
Second, the belief in the existence of extraordinary powers - either innate or external and acquired.
Third, the context of a prevailing and dominant framework for interpreting how the world work that is intensely animistic.
This, especially, gives witchcraft its more exotic features. However, these are superficial - like the pink of the flamingo or the decorations of a bower bird's nest - contingent.and a product of environment.

The characteristics of witchcraft are:
1. A forensic interpretation of harm anb bad events.
2. A belief in the existence of extraordinary powers.
3. Social amplification of fear to terror with the generation of moral panic.
4. The animistic doctrine is not essential but gives the phenomenon its traditional appearance and makes it stand out from less extreme manifestations of the same process. The effects of animism are to greatly extend the realm of the forensic, make the dichotomy between the natural and forensic not exclusive, and encourage the belief in the existence of extraordinary powers that can be controlled by exceptional individuals. The result is a far less predictable world in which events are not determined by blind physical law but the whims of mindful agents only some of which have ever been embodied and enfleshed. The uncertainty that this creates make the world very scary.

02/01/03

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Norman,

Further to talking with you yesterday.

In thinking about wc and most things it is important to distinguish three levels or domains of explanation:

1. The level of physical things and primary qualities (like radiation of a particular frequency as opposed to light of a specific colour). At this level we are talking about things interacting according to physical law, eg energy and matter, manifest in chains of cause and effect. And not necessarily noticed by anyone.

2. The level of things as objects of thought; objects in a world of other experienced objects. This is also the level of secondary qualities (colours rather than radiation of different frequencies). This can include things that don't or cannot exist.

3. The level of things as signs that point to other things. This is the level of interpretation and semiotics and is what most of our lives are about; most of our behaviour is determined not by brute forces facilitating or opposing our actions, but by the interpretations of signs; traffic signals make us stop and start, walk or not walk; weather forecasts, ie numbers, determine whether we go out, the route we take, and the clothes we wear etc etc. In Bruner's terms we go `beyond the information given'.

Semioticians distinguish three types of sign:

Icons are based on similarity (the men and women on restroom doors, and most traffic signs eg deer running, rocks falling down slope)

Indexes are based on cause and effect, eg smoke indicates fire.

Symbols are based on convention eg the word `cat' and a furry feline mammal.

Relating this to a possible witch. Some people have extra breasts or nipples.

At the level of physical things these are related to differences in development and genetic inheritance and they exist as a part

of a causal chain that goes back before birth and will end at death or continue throught future generations.

At the level of objects of thought and experience they exist alongside other experienced objects that may or may not be recognised for what they are. They may not be recognized as nipples, but considered moles or other skin tumours, attractive or unattractive, but always part of the contents of the mind experiencing them.

At the level of signs they can be identified by a particular person in a particular way; eg a witchfinder would consider them as sufficient for a diagnosis, an interpretation, that the person with the extra nipples is a witch and should therefore be burned.

Another example (knowing how much you appreciate them) might be a blade of grass bent by a passing animal. The bending is simply the result of physical laws and can be explained by them. It is noticed by a weekend walker and experienced as an object of thought; the grass is noted as bent. But, to a skilled tracker, it is a sign of the recent passage of an animal of a particular kind, age and size.

At the level of physical things there are always links of cause and effect; there cannot ordinarily be smoke without some kind of fire. And this is also the case at the level of objects of thought (experience) where there is a causal chain connecting patterns of brain activity to the object experienced (smoke, bent grass, nipple like protruberence), which can also include things like unicorns or witches that have no physical existence; there is the conscious experience and the underlying brain activity that causes it in some way not fully understood, but unlike the experience of smoke there need be no fire; there is nothing beyond the experience and the brain activity.

But, at the level of the sign there is not necessarily any physical or causal connection between the sign and the thing it represents; a road sign may indicate a bridge that no longer exists; an astronomer's sketch may indicate canals on Mars; and a sequence of spoken sounds or marks on paper may indicate some event that never took place, it is a fiction only; etc.

The power of conventional signs or symbols is that they enable the imagination, we can create alternative realities and, in the words of Karl Popper we can let our ideas die in our place. What he means is that we can in our imagination run and test out plans and practice activities that might be dangerous in real

life. Another is that it makes narrative and visual art possible.

The obverse is that it makes us capable of misinterpretations, lies and deceiving. This is why I consider lying to be a fundamental characteristic of being human. And why a provisional title for my book is `Changing Minds and Telling Lies'.

Witchcraft exists at the level of conventional signs and symbols and as an object of thought, but like unicorns it has no physical existence. But, until a few hundred years ago unicorns were thought to exist and in theory might be possible. They have been dismissed because scientific investigations have found no evidence of them now or at any other time and there are very few places left where they could still be hidden. In the case of the alleged phenomena of witchcraft there is also no evidence for it as a physical reality and we have simpler explanations for any events for which witchcraft is offered as an explanation. And the mechanisms claimed for witchcraft would be incompatible with these explanations (laws, models) that can account for a vast body of demonstrable phenomena that could not be accounted for by witchcraft.

This knowledge was only acquired slowly and arduously over the last three hundred years and it is significant that in the developed world, it has been associated with the decline in the belief in witches (not to be confused with Wiccans). The basis of this knowledge is the development of ways of testing hypotheses and standards of proof or validity.

The first step is the identification of a phenomenon for which we seek an explanation, we imagine a model of mechanism that would account for it, but there might be several alternatives, so what we have to do is deduce the consequences of each and from these work out tests that will distinguish between them. In the case of swords, you have observed that steel tempered in water is softer than steel tempered by plunging the red-hot blade into a captured warrior. Your first approximation is that the courage of the unfortunate warrior has been transferred to the steel. If that is so then one might predict that steel produced from a brave prisoner should be harder than that from a coward and you might set your psychologists to create scales that would quantify courage. This would show that courage had nothing to do with it. Another approach would be to try adding things to the water being used when you might find that tempering steel in water in which asses skins had been soaked, or a good meat stock, worked as well and saved many prisoners for ransom (which pleased the beancounters at HQ no end).

The result has been an increasing ability to distinguish things that exist only at the level of objects of thought from those that also have physical existence, and it is the latter with which science has been most interested and successful.

It should also be born in mind that much of the success of science depends on quantification and the ability to measure accurately. I suspect that in African communities the number systems are not robust or complex enough to allow measurement.

In a sense witchcraft is fabricated from symbols (conventional signs) that are confused with, or not distinguished from, indexical signs.

Now what is significant about witchcraft is that within the communities where the belief is endemic (including Europe up to the C17) the conventional wisdom and ways of thinking about the world and how it works (as opposed in Africa to foreign ideas) probably offers no better explanation. And that may be sufficient to account for its survival. I am talking here about the view from within the communities not from the outside or future.

In confusing symbols with indexes an important factor may be the development of means of forming images. How do you think about or imagine something bad? The first object of thought (when I refer to an object you should always add `of thought' to locate its existence at the correct level) is likely to be fairly innocuous as in general even Hitler, Stalin, or any of their peers would pass unnoticed in a crowded street. But, when you have the ability to create artifacts or body decorations you can start to elaborate and develop the notion of evil into something much more dramatic. And as you do that you transform your inner world and at the same time give the whole notion a reality that it previously lacked. Evil evolves with your make-up or communal doodles. And with that development so does your spoken language become more complex to accomodate it and you probably elaborate narratives and myths about your creations. So it seems easy to imagine how what might start out as a few minor differences could be evolved into much more polar oppositions and contrasts. The world of demons and devils comes into being on the walls of your cave or whatever. This is an example of the significance of what Dennett and Haugeland referred to as external prostheses for minds. Artifacts are for thinking.

This is important

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In considering and trying to evaluate evidence of cultural practices from a few scattered archaeological sites there is a great danger that you will underestimate the difficulty of interpreting what artifacts and events meant to people at a different time. It is, as Vico suggested, difficult to understand the minds of civilisations, like the Greeks and Romans, for which we have relatively abundent written records, and whose languages are the basis of our own. So it is much more difficult to make judgements about more distant times for which there are no written texts of any kind.

Personally I do not see the utility of trying to locate witchcraft in much earlier communities and all that need be pointed out is that the environment was consistent with it as it seems to have been almost everywhere. To go much further would be pure speculation and serve little purpose.

Having said that if you must try and draw out links then you should concentrate on features that are closely linked to what is likely to be the most fundamental characteristics of human beings; ie those features that are likely to be biologically based, have a developmental history, and are unlikely to have changed much in at least 100,000 years.

The problem with this is that in my view many of the experts in the archaeological and anthropological evidence show very little sign of having considered what is really fundamental about homo sapiens ie what distinguished him from every other species including his near relatives and accounts for his enormous and unparalleled success in evolutionary terms.

From my own conclusions the following would seem relatively safe features to assume:

1. The existence of spoken language is so closely linked to what distinguishes homo sapiens (although I do not think it the most fundamental) that it has probably been a feature for most of human history.

2. Theory of Mind (or other minds). This I think may well predate language, at least as a means of communication as opposed to a tool for thought (inner language).

3. The tendency to ask questions about events and seek explanations for them.

4. The ability to tell stories; and that is likely to be the preferred form of explanation.

5. A bias towards explaining phenomena (physical, animal, and human behaviour) in terms of agents. Whereas we tend to explain physical phenomena in terms of inanimate and impersonal forces and entities such as atoms, gravity, and energy of various kinds, most if not all peoples now and in the past tend to think in terms of spirits, souls, ghosts, ancestors, demons, devils, gods, etc.. What these agents all have in common is that they bring about changes by thinking feeling and willing (cognition, emotion, and conation). What is often referred to as `Folk Psychology' and used as a term of abuse by narrow minded and shallow neuroscientists explains human behaviour in terms of beliefs desires and will. If I believe there is gold at the end of the rainbow or Fort Knox and I desire gold enough I will try and get it by going there, always assuming that my desire and will is strong enough to overcome whatever obstacles are in my way. This kind of explanation is the one used by most of us in trying to understand each other and is overall pretty successful which is why it is so common. Agents generalise this perception and are the basis of animism.

I believe that for most people most of the time, until the C17, this was the best and safest (in terms of survival value) explanation for significant events in the physical world.

6. Related to TOM is probably a built in ability to detect cheats (see the work of Tooby and Cosmides).

7. A tendency to binary thinking ie to evaluate events in terms of polar oppositions (good/bad, hard/soft, light/dark, etc).

But, although I think that binary or bipolar thinking is likely to be a fairly fundamental aspect of human abilities and as such to have been present for most of human history, I suspect that it has evolved and become more pronounced with the ability to consistently manipulate external artifacts such as images. This not only provides illustrations of inside/outside, boundaries etc, but also provides a means of accentuating evil in particular (as described above).

8. A tendency to think of the individual as part of a greater whole? It is not generally understood (for the reason that we tend to see the past through modern spectacles) that from Greece and Roman civilisations until the late Middle Ages the individual tended to be considered as fitting into an alloted place in a greater whole, a great order or chain of beings. Since the C17 the notion of the self has developed through a process of disengagement from the external world and being

relocated largely in the mind; what Weber called the `disenchanting of the world'.

Relating this to Witchcraft:

I think that the notions of umwelt and lebenswelt are helpful. The umwelt that is compatible with and to be necessary though NOT sufficient for the development of witchcraft beliefs and practices and institutions, will have the following features:

1. A belief in agency or animism. That the behaviour of everything including what we think of as the physical world can be accounted for in terms of the action of agents who unlike atoms are moved by passions, beliefs, desires and will. A corollary is that they form relationships with each other and with humans. They can be described in narratives or stories rather than formulas. And perhaps unlike (traditional, or pre Quantum, views of) atoms their behaviour is interlinked and the boundaries between them permeable.

2. A highly developed sense of good and evil to the extent that the world is thought of as being the location of a battle between rival powers one good the other evil with whom humans can form alliances.

My reason for stressing the degree of the dichotomy is that I doubt if witchcraft could depend on ordinary or less extreme forms of dichotomy. Good and bad experiences and behaviour are common what is required for witchcraft is the development of a whole complex storyline and demonology that pushes the dichotomy into fairly extreme and dramatic form.

I think this would have followed the development of imagery and matured over a long time. What one sees in Zoroastrian myths and institutions is the end stage and thus must go back much further than 4000BP.

Once you have given evil and good physical form in decoration, costume, and other artifacts it becomes a readily accessible object for thought and the basis for secondary institutions such as religions and witchfinding movements along with their associated job descriptions.

In pre C17 Europe there was a well developed notion of the world as a battleground between the forces of God and the Devil and this was manifest in the extreme form of witchfinding institutions and practices. Some of the residues of these attitudes carried by missionaries probably accentuated somewhat

similar beliefs in Africa and each can probably be traced back to residues of Zoroastrian beliefs formed in the Middle East and distributed from there via trade routes. But these would have had a much longer history and their roots in characteristic features of homo sapiens that are also related to the content of symptoms of guilt seen by psychiatrists in depression and OCD.

The very act of trying to define what is good conjures into existence what is bad; one to one as the polar opposite of each specified good. Hence inside every good man lurks the implicit existenced of evil and that is more pronounced the better the person fashions themselves to become. Good and evil are conjoined twins.

I think that these two features alone are sufficient to lay the foundations for witchcraft, but they do not guarantee that it will develop; because that and the form it takes will depend on associated factors and secondary gains which shape it into patterns of perception, belief, and practice that may have long term benefits as well as costs. It is probably significant here that the C16/C17 epidemics of witchfinding and those now found in Africa seem to be related to situations where a traditional system of belief and practice that sees the individual only in terms of a place in a whole is under threat, or changing to one in which the individual has greater autonomy and is able to enjoy disproportionate good or bad fortune in comparison with the community as a whole. In this context what is good fortune for an individual (gained by distance from a tradition) may appear as bad fortune for the rest of the community who are relatively less prosporous. It is relative and the differentials that count. For most of human history, or at least that part that depended on communal activities, individuality (or what we would describe as such) even if poorly articulated has probably been considered one of the greatest threats to survival.

Grave goods and ornaments

Ornamentation almost certainly predated imagery (drawing etc) and can serve two functions which probably always coexist.

Difference/differentiation: It can distinguish a person as being different from others, in rank, status, etc

Similarity/assimilation: It can reveal one's identity or allegiance as member of a particular community (in opposition to others).

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These are always linked because I would doubt if anyone considers themselves, or could succeed in becoming, completely unique, what they mean by individuality is of a type to which they belong. On the other side of the coin of an individual identity is membership of a minority.

Hence ornaments presuppose the ability to classify, categorize and higher levels of representations (types rather than simply tokens). And these mental manipulations are probably also required for belief in agents and afterlife.

Grave goods at the same time affirm a belief and reinforce (and even shape) a hope. They imply a sophisticated and well developed world of objects (of thought as opposed to physical things).

Witchcraft becomes articulated when a belief in animism or agency becomes sufficiently complex, as a result of the elaboration of stories and images shaped by an ever increasing polarity between good and evil; considered as real forces of varying degrees of organization. This results in a world of objects of thought of considerable sophistication, but at the expense of confusion between reality in thought and physical existence. And it is likely to continue until more effective forms of explanation take its place. Disenchanting.

duncan

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Sun Jan 05, 2003 03:15:09 Europe/London
To: Norman Miller <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject:

Norman,

Below is an attempt to set out the principal components of witchcraft phenomena. It is a bit terse as it was done on my Palm PDA which does not encourage too much elaboration.

The idea of evil is based in all major religions on the separation of what at one time was and should still be one (eg Satan as the fallen angel once beloved of God) and this is also realized in its tendency to manifestation in projection, externalization, polarization, and personification. It also

explains its relationship to individuality and its amplification or augmentation at times when there is an emergence of the individual from the group. This occurred at the Renaissance and currently in Southern Africa. The individual can emerge either because of forces that encourage individuality, or the weakening of group forces; though because individuality and community are tightly bound as sides of a coin (inversely proportional) the precedence of one over the other is relative and so a single mechanism can account for the ascendency of either.

In the Zohar (written ?1295) the root of evil is in God and emerges when Din, stern judgment (the left hand of God), is separated or out of harmony with Hesed, Mercy (the right hand of God).

Do not get too entangled with my ideas about the importance of negation. The terminology is complex and I have not yet found the best form of expression. Moreover, there is no other source that I have been able to find, so you would be relying on my judgment alone. I am still working on the idea. All that you can say with confidence is that in defining good or evil we automatically define its polar opposite (they are the two sides of one coin; evil is what is not good and good what is not evil) and so good implies evil and vice versa. I believe that this accounts for much of the content of the anxieties and guilt feelings experienced by people with severe obsessional and depressive illnesses; and possibly some of the effects (on content of thoughts) of hallucinogenic and mind-altering substances. The more detail with which you specify what is good the clearer the form you give to evil.

Worth remembering that according to Zelecki the content of Near Death Experiences recorded in the Middle Ages was much more dark, diabolic, and frightening than the optimistic experiences reported nowadays. This suggests that such experiences are congruent with the beliefs and perceptual vocabulary of the subject and their time.

Remember too what the French historian Febvre (quoted by Trevor Roper) said; that the mind of one age is not necessarily subject to the same rules as the mind of another. (in my usage mind is constructed from signs rather than molecules although it uses and in a limited sense depends on the latter in the same way as a TV program uses and depends on the electrons of a TV tube)

I think that all the important features of witchcraft can be derived from three basic components; the implications of:

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Theory of Mind
Evil as separation (and separating)
The creation of a victimarchy (based on sensitivity to injustice and the detection of cheating)

Each of these is almost certainly biologically (rather than culturally) based and hence dates from the emergence of homo sapiens and applies to all peoples. Everything else is an unpacking of the implications in different contexts.

What I refer to as Classical witchcraft are the historical European and African descriptions. Contemporary are the Holocaust, McCarthyism, and later manifestations such as Satanic Abuse. I am pleased that by my formulation all that one has to do to derive the latter from the former is to limit agency to human minds. This has the effect of stripping away all the shape-shifting, magic, and other occult phenomena and what you are left with is a structure that is significant and more common than you may have imagined. There is also a relative tendency to locate the power focus of the feared subversive within rather than outside the community, but this is not absolute as in the case of McCarthyism the focus was in Russia.

I believe that the real significance of witchcraft, for anyone other than a historian, is the revelation and identification of a small set of powerful biologically based tendencies that are constantly in danger of undermining efforts towards realizing a more enlightened notion of justice. Note, incidentally, that by my definition the Holocaust was a manifestation of a Contemporary witch-hunt. `Terrorism' seems well on the way to becoming another. And the USA is probably close from the point of view of Al-Quaeda (the only question is of scale, the extent to which there is an internal arm to the threatening group - ?CIA and its agents and allies - and the degree to which AQ considers itself as representative of a community of victims - which it seems to do).

And I also believe that one of the best early warnings of the emergence of new forms of witch-hunt is pressure to change well established principles and processes of law designed to safeguard the innocent from wrongful conviction. This is always justified because a particular type of crime is causing great public concern (making people feel victims or as-one with victims) and there is a belief (often erroneous) that the existing legal processes are allowing perpetrators to escape justice (vengeance). In most cases the real reason is that there is insufficient evidence to ensure a safe conviction.

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One of the effects of this process is the shifting of the center of gravity of attitudes towards crime from understanding, which focuses on the individual and causes, to diagnosis (labeling or classification for disposal) which focuses on descriptions in terms of types and standards. One of the results is a loss of sensitivity for the differences between the individuals convicted of similar crimes, with less scope for flexibility in sentencing. And a consequence is an increasing number of prisoners, with pressure on the prison service and knock on effects on many other crimes; while in spite of harsher sentencing there is an apparent continuing increase in the number of offenders (identified and suspected).

It would be my hope that by making the underlying witchcraft mechanisms more apparent by stripping them of their occult encrustations, then better safeguards of human rights (pace Bentham's stilts) can be put in place. It may be because these processes have not been specifically identified that the approach to the construction of some human rights legislation has been less clearly focused than it might have been; or even that important `democratic' threats to rights have been neglected.

Preconditions for witchcraft

A. Theory of Mind (biological) disposing to
- Agency or animism leading to:
- A mindful world

B. Evil as separation (individual from community) given form; or realized in human and other forms (eg spirits and devils)
- Polarization of evil as opposite of good (helped by language's tendency to bipolar classifications)
- Projection of evil onto individual as a type: a member of a subversive group with external allegiance
- Personification of evil. First, at level of an individual. Second, at level of a group of which the individual is alleged to be a member. That can be either an external power (Communism or Satan), or internal (terrorists, satanic abusers, paedophiles)
- Elaboration and redescription of evil (imagery, ornamentation, words)

C. Sensitivity to injustice or cheating (biological, see Tooby and Cosmides) leading to

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- The creation of victims
- Polarization of victims and perpetrators
- Formation of a victimarchy
- Fomalization of Vengeance

What do Classical and Contemporary forms have in common?

Projection and externalization of evil
Focus on individual as type and member of threatening outgroup or ingroup
Threat from opposing underground conspiratorial groups; individual seen as `tip of iceberg'
Amplification or augmentation of menace by association of individual with a feared group
Victimization
Vengeance
In spite of increasing retribution perceived threat and numbers of perpetrators multiply

What distinguishes Classical from Contemporary witch-hunts? In Contemporary (Western):

Agency restricted to human minds and therefore no shape shifting an other exotica
Relative focus on internal rather than external - ingroup rather than outgroup (but McCarthy focussed on outgroup)

Evil

You may feel confused about my use of the notion of evil. What I have in mind is that every individual and society uses the contrast of good/bad as a higher order judgment applied to a wide range of phenomena. But in these cases the notion of good or bad is used as a predicate, an attribute, or aspect of a whole. It is not an independent force or entity. And this is also the case insofar as evil is simply regarded as a more forceful term for bad.

But, there is another usage, almost certainly deriving from monotheistic or dualistic religions, where evil is incarnated in an agent with which it becomes synonymous (eg Satan) or regarded as an independent force or variable rather than a predicate (but almost always personified at least by implication). This is the sense that I am interested in and that I think may be necessary for the phenomenon of witchcraft as described in Africa and C16/17 Europe and N America.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Some years ago an infant called Jamie Bulger was abducted and murdered by two boys aged about ten. For months after, and still whenever the story is remembered, the popular press gets in a great lather over the question about the incarnation of evil and whether it is a `reality' by which they mean an independent variable with an existence apart from that of the people whose behaviour is considered very very.... very bad. And this also usually displays confusion between three slightly different ideas: That the child murderers were incarnations of evil (like witches were thought to be); that there is an independent power or `force' of evil (like gravity or magnetism or plague) that overwhelms the perpetrators (which might then leave them alone and thus offer hope of redemption); or that evil is just a very extreme form of wickedness, or just quantitatively different from more mundane varieties. As the implications for punishment differ the press thrashes around the issue of culpability; especially as in this case the behaviour of the boys conflicted with the sentimental presumption of childhood innocence.

When I was a child psychiatrist I had a small patient who had drowned one of his playmates (pushed him in a canal and held his head under). His father was from West Africa had been a medical student, but dropped out, and was working as a mortuary assisant. He was in the habit of bringing home bits of bodies for the interest and amusement of his several small children.

The question is what kind of conception of evil, if any, do African societies have? Is it congruent with their other conceptions and if not could it be an import? And is there any evidence that variations in the conception of evil co-varies (positively or negatively) with the phenomena of WC?

Norman,

Here is my current view on the origin and foundations of witchcraft.

I believe that its Classical form as manifest in C16/17 Europe and Africa to the present is the tip of an iceberg and the most conspicuous manifestation of an underlying process that shapes many social and political events. The difference is that, in comparison to the Classical, Contemporary witchcraft does not rely on animistic interpretations of how the physical world works; it does not rely on or report magic or occult phenomena.

In formulating my view I have concentrated on processes that are very old and fundamental to humanity. It is, however, important to bear in mind that what may be secondary in terms of origins

or ontogenesis may become primary in later established or institutional manifestations.

If I am right about the antiquity of the presuppositions then the possibility of witchcraft is universal and the question becomes what causes its manifestation at particular places and times? I believe that to be the result of its secondary benefits for authorities or those in power.

PRECONDITIONS:

A sense of injustice (mechanism for detection of cheating; of imbalance between tit and tat)

This is very old, has an anatomical brain basis, and from my own model of emotion would justify being considered a primary emotion like fear, anger, lust, disgust etc. Its basis goes back before culture, before language and before homo sapiens, maybe even before the primates. But it is, of course, only articulated and becomes accessible to thought with language; by which it is shaped thereafter. Its significance may have been overlooked because it was considered culturally determined and because most conceptions of the nature of emotion are grossly superficial and inadequate.

It forms the kernel for the polarization of good and evil that is dependent on language and in its most extreme form probably monotheism.

A Theory of Mind

This is a distinguishing characteristic of homo sapiens, has a brain basis, and precedes language and culture. It predisposes to an interpretation of how the world works in terms of agency (animism, minds, and intentions, resulting in what I have called a mindful world). In Classical forms of witchcraft this provides the basis for occult ornamentations and reports of physical manifestations, such as shape-shifting. In Contemporary witchcraft its scope is limited to other minds.

Norman,

Re economics of witchcraft:

I think as in most fields one has to distinguish between the primary, original, motivating systems and secondary institutions and roles that develop from them.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

In the case of wc I believe the context to be one in which all events no matter how unusual have to be accounted for as the prevailing model of how the world works does not acknowledge the agency of chance or random events.

As a result the system of explanation is likely to be able to cope with events within a broad range or band around a mean between accountable limits of good fortune and bad. Think of a graph of the normal range of weight or height. However, problems arise when events occur outside of that range. They cannot be accounted for by the day to day conventional wisdom that can explain events within the normal range eg the feelings and attitudes of ancestors. So when something apparently out of the ordinary occurs how is it to be explained?

The most obvious way is to atribute it to the will or mischief of some extraordinary person who either on their own or in alliance with more powerful forces manages to overule the rule of the ancestors (or whatever). And the way of resolving the tension aroused by such exceptions is to bring the miscreant to justice. This may not reverse the damage done but has succeeded in bringing the events back within the range of normality in the sense of accountability and explanation. The mystery is thereby solved. The economy of good and bad fortune is brought back into balance.

If something like that could account for the origins of wc then many of the current manifestations are secondary accretions. Once the possibility is established institutions and job descriptions develop around it and secondary gains become apparent and are exploited. At this level the system becomes auropoietic and there is considerable intertia to maintain it and on the other hand it is very difficult to eradicate completely or quickly.

Witchcraft accusations and events cluster around change because that inevitably throws up anomalies of both kinds of fortune that the prevailing explanations cannot address adequately. Hence the witch deaths of members of the community who have left to make their fortunes in a different kind of economy and on their return arouse anxiety and resentment.

Norman,

Some thoughts about our conversation last night.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

I don't think you should waste too much time on the prehistory of witchcraft for the following reasons:

First, the most that you can say is that the conditions and beliefs that are associated with wc today were probably similar to those that have existed for tens of thousands of years. (But with the proviso that I believe for reasons that I have given before that it is far more prevalent and is provided with a better culture medium by farming than hunting and gathering. This is related to the necessary conservatism of farmers and implies that wc would have been much less common before 10,000 years ago.) So it is possible that similar phenomena also existed.
These beliefs and conditions include:
+ Animism (in the broadest sense) as an explanation of how the world works. The point is that until Newton published his Principia in 1687 some form of animism was probably the best, in the sense of having the most survival value, explanation available for many phenomena. And is only in error from our point of view because we believe we have found a Science that has better survival value.
+ Schizophrenia: many experts (eg Tim Crow) believe that this occurs with an incidence of around 1% in all populations and presumably all times. But even today this is controversial and it is known that the DIAGNOSIS of schizophrenia is more common among immigrants and certain ethnic minorities in UK (eg West Indians). Also it at the very least calls for considerable faith, many would say foolhardiness, to extrapolate from a few recent studies to tens of thousands of years ago.
+ Hallucinogenic and mind altering substances: It is almost certain that these were not only known but used throughout human history. But their use does not seem to be unique to witchcraft beliefs or more common at times of witch epidemics (with the possible exception of ergot from mouldy rye at the time of the European witchhunts).
+ Shamans et al : in any society there will be some people who acquire, or have an aptitude for acquiring, knowledge about the effects of substances and methods of healing. If they have that skill they can put it to good or bad use; just as Shipman or George W or the NRA can.

Second: Before you start speculating about the interpretation of sparse and obscure archaeology consider what archaeological evidence (as opposed to written) there might be that would validate or confirm witchcraft beliefs in 16th century Europe, Salem, or the recent history of Africa; how much could we know without written accounts? I would speculate that there is very little that could support more than the possibilty that

something unusual might have happened. And if that is the case you must question how useful archaeology would be for your book. It could rouse too may red herrings.

But there are wider considerations.

The recent anthropological accounts of witchcraft are unique in one way; for the first time in history accounts and interpretations of the phenomena are being published by people who have a very different world view and theories about how the world works.

It is important to distinguish between different levels of the phenomena being reported:
+ The phenomena-in-itself (Kantian). What actually happened, whatever that might be and usually unknowable.
+ Perception: What those around perceived or thought they experienced.
+ Description: What they said they experienced
+ Interpretation and publishing: what is written, broadcast, published.

Now until the 20th century I would suggest that those who perceive, describe, interpret, and publish would be likely to have shared a common view as to how the world works and what was conceivable within their equivalent of physical law, or the laws of nature. Even Christian missionaries although they would have different myths would probably have had little difficulty in taking accounts of transormations and `supernatural' events more or less at face value. Only with 20th century anthropology would one have interpreters and publishers who did not believe that any of the strange phenomena alleged and described actually happened.

If this is the case then in Europe until the Enlightenment and in Africa until recently the interpretation of events would be within and not break the existing worldview. At most, witchcraft phenomena would be equivalent to the observations of events that are not quite consistent with expectations, but are presumed to be accountable by some minor adjustment in our understanding of physical law; that after all is how science progresses. The orbit of Mercury does not quite match the expectations of Newtonian physics, but does match those of Relativity (Relativity may be odd but it is not supernatural; Quantum theory is very odd but is not supernatural).

In the context of a shared belief the phenomena of witchcraft are not miraculous any more than a camera is miraculous to those

who have not seen one before. And the status of witchcraft becomes a breach, not of the laws of nature, but of the prevailing Social Contract that governs human interactions. It is more akin to a breach of etiquette that physics; even if the techniques used required some special knowledge. Mohammed Atta and his playmates did a very bad thing, but did not breach any physical laws, even if they used them for perverse ends.

There is another problem. Anthopologists came on the scene in Africa hanging on the coat-tails of missionaries and so the scene of the alleged crime is no longer virgin: they are like detectives trying to work out what happened on ground that has already been well trampled by their colleagues and themselves. And what they imagine to be the footprint of the criminal may well be that of a policeman.

And what missionaries probably added was an accentuated moral valency, the idea of a more intense polarity between the powers of good and evil, between God and Satan and tacitly sanctioned the fears that already existed and motivated reaction to them. I therefore suspect that what we see in Africa is not purely African but a hybrid of local and Christian demonologies.

The effect was to transform breaches of prevailing social contracts into something much more sinister and serious; bad manners becomes treachery and treason. In this context what is relevant is not the assumption that certain people might have unusual powers or abilities, but that they are prepared to use them for anti-social ends. This is what links the phenomena of witchcraft and all modern `witch-hunts'. Anyone has it in their power and choice to be a `communist', or a sex-offender, or a terrorist, the important issue is whether or not they choose to exercise that power, NOT the means they use to any particular end.

It is for this reason that I believe that the important message about witchcraft is that it is NOT miraculous or supernatural, it does not imply or entail breaking any indigenous physical laws. Within all but the most anthropologist infested cultures witchcraft is not occult or mysterious, it is consistent with and an example of ordinary local physics; albeit maybe requiring specialist skills (whether inherited or acquired). The airliners that crashed into the WTC were not occult, nor was the skill to fly them, even if most people could not; what is significant about them was that in crashing them Atta and his mates broke what had been assumed, with hindsight naively, to be powerful, and almost universal social contracts. And the real message of `terrorism' is that henceforth all such contracts

must be considered local and context dependent. This flies in the face of the Enlightenment belief in the inevitability of progress. See John Gray's `Straw Dogs'.

The Enlightenment agenda on which most of our modern scientific attitudes and values are still based, following the premises of Newtonian Science, presumed the existence of a universal context within which all peoples, alike and equal in ability and liberty, could progress towards a common goal . The fatal flaw was that this did not take into account the extent to which local and individual contexts can dominate the universal; for most practical purposes there is no universal context, or it is foolhardy to base one's policies on there being one. Each individual and group (it is not the place to distinguish them) sees the world through the lenses of their peculiar history and experiences, and this far more than any context-neutral rules, determines their behaviour. We are still suffering from the effects of neglecting that.

The supernatural and miraculous are will-of-the-wisps that will lure you into a quagmire from which you may be unable to escape. Repeat after me: in witchcraft the techniques are of no more than secondary importance. The real centre of gravity is the maintainance of social contracts.

duncan

The development of a victimarchy (a sense of being vulnerable and becoming a victim)

This is probably a function of two related factors.

First a developing sense of justice in which a primitive internal sense of empathy, which helps bind small family groups into larger bands, is being transformed into a more rigid and explicit external rule based system. I am inclined to think that this is what makes communities dominant over individuals. The problem being that it may not scale easily to larger groups and so empathy has to give way to rules which do. This is associated with individuals considered morally responsible and culpable.

Second, a primitive sense of paranoia. This too seems associated with a sense of individuality. In his book on `Renaissance Self-fashioning', Greenblatt, suggests that the sense of the self (or

individual) as something that can be fashioned rather than given and taken for granted arises out of the confrontation of an authority and an alien. He lists a number of characteristics of the process that include:

- Self-fahioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien strange or hostile. This threatening Other - heretic, savage, witch, adultress, traitor, Antichrist - must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed.

- One man's authority is another's alien

- Self-fashioning is always though not exclusively in language (witchcraft would not exist without language)

- If both the alien and authority are located outside the self, they are at the same time experienced as inward necessities, so that both submission and destruction are always already internalized.

- ... the alien is always constructed as a distorted image of the authority.

- The power generated to attack the alien in the name of the authority is produced in excess and threatens the authority it sets out to defend. Hence self-fashioning always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, some loss of self.

... any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss.

The template of treachery and treason

When the field of community has been replaced by the particles of individuality then the possibility of treason against the newly constructed society becomes more threatening.

And perhaps for linguists -

Tradduttore traditore = `translators are traitors'

But - and it is a BIG BUT

A question that neither I, you, or what I have seen of Vansina's work, seems to answer is whether witchcraft is a universal

phenomenon or local to specific times and places? And if it is universal why has it attracted so much more attention in some places and historical times than others? Principally C15- C16 Europe and Africa to the present day?

The problem is that the characteristics that I have listed above are almost certainly universal and common to all cultures. The only one that might account for local effects would be the tension associated with the emergence of the notion of the individual and the decline in a sense of community. That might account for witchcraft phenomena being a frontal system like electric storms that are associated with transitions rather than equiibria. However, I am not sure that that is sufficient.

What seems to me to be essential if you are to pretend to explain and interpret witchcraft is to try and settle the question of whether witchcraft occurs in all societies at least occasionally. And the corollary of why it is reported and considered more important at some times and in some places than others.

I do not think that you have any choice but to do some comparative research looking for manifestations of witchcraft in India, China (East Asia Confucian including Vietnam, Korea, Japan etc), Native America, etc. And to establish similarities and differences.

One way of looking at the problem might be to compare it to different societies relation to substances of abuse. Alcohol and drugs can cause harm but attempts to regulate their use and prohibit them are always unsuccessful and on the whole do far more harm than good. In attempting to reduce one kind of harm one (to individuals) causes others (to the fabric of society - organized crime, terrorism etc). As you found with prohibition and we have all found with opiates. See Berridge and Edwards `Opium and the People' Yale UP and Berridge alone for the 2nd edition. This is a fascinating account of the history of opiate use in UK where it was legally available and widely used until about 1914.

The point I am making is that witchcraft-like social mechanisms may be endemic in all societies and only becomes epidemic when attempts are made to control them through the invention of formal legal mechanisms. Left as informal they may do much less harm?

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

My use of victimarchy developed as part of my analysis of witchcraft and is explained in a section of the following memo to Norman. I thought it may have originally been used in connection with the notion of `Moral Panics', but have found this of the internet. It was originally used in relation to feminism.

VICTIMARCHY: Word coined by Warren Farrell in The Myth of Male Power to describe a society which conceives of its members as victims -- perpetually unable to direct their own affairs or to control their own destinies. In other words, both men and women are victims of patriarchy. See new masculinity.¬†

Memo to NM - Jan Vansina is an expert on African witchcraft etc
Response to an internet fax from NM containing an excerpt from and article by Vansina
Filed under Faxes 21/04/2004

Vansina's approach to witchcraft seems entirely compatible with mine and might be broken down into the following parts - that are not intended to be exclusive:

Worldview - `everything is full of spirits'.

A prevailing worldview that explains how the world works in terms of living agents - ancestors, spirits, demons, gods etc. This implies also that the world of witchcraft is a wider world than that of modern science. In Classical Chinese `The World' as shijie is expressed literally as `the boundaries between one's generation and the tradition'. But the world of witchcraft, or the world of explanations about how it works includes the wider tradition.

Community vs. Individuality (from fields to particles)

A tension between an older sense of community and sharing and a probably more recent new emerging notion of individuality accompanied by its implications about property and economic inequality and prosperity that favours only a minority. This probably coincides with the development of surplus farming and markets and perhaps a change in the primary use of language. It is also manifest in a variety of ways and structures including not only economic inequality but hierarchical power relations.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

It represents a shift from a view of the self as one with the field of forces that is the community to the self as a lonely particle - atoms that have to be bound into molecules by external social contracts and rules.

Evil as embodied.

Evil is harm done by one person against others. It is always embodied. It must be distinguished from bad things like accidents or disasters - though this may be more significant for us. In contrast bad things or kakia (that which one would prefer to avoid) is disembodied - like floods and famines and earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Though it is arguable that the distinction is weaker in most societies where what we would consider the random effects of physical processes are explained by living agency (even if some of the agents are dead).

Witches may not act alone, may not be self-sufficient?

Although some witches may be considered powerful enough to cause harm by themselves, I suspect that most are considered to require the assistance of more powerful spirit helpers e.g. the European witches got their power from the devil whose agents they were.

WITCHCRAFT PHILOSOPHY

I think you are confusing a technical problem - how best to organize your book - with an analysis of the topic, or issue that the book is about. Or allowing the structure of your book to distort the structure of the world.

Witchcraft, in the only sense that is interesting, is not about what witches are alleged to do, but the consequences, or manifestations, of the belief in the existence and power of witches.

In many ways these manifestations of witchcraft are similar to those of homosexuality. In our societies witchcraft has become, like homosexuality, a life-style preference, and is perfectly legal. In the past homosexuality was, as Oscar Wilde discovered to his cost, illegal, and when, in my lifetime, it was decriminalized in the UK it was at first only permissible `between `consenting adults in private'. Now it is acceptable in public, gay weddings are possible, and expressions of homophobia a crime.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Homosexuality has, like your categorization, implications for religion, politics, law, media, health, national security, and was associated with treatment and punishment. Because it was a crime it made homosexuals vulnerable to blackmail and other forms of abuse. It led to the development of underground networks of relationships and communication. It created opportunities for criminal, legal, and medical, entrepreneurs. It was institutionalized and coded in police and legal departments concerned with `vice' and `public decency'. For a time it was recognized by psychiatrists as an illness, encoded in DSM3 (but dropped from DSM4), and a useful source of income. It became a favorite subject for media with its own vocabulary and resulting in a `refining' and shaping and caricaturing of homosexuals and what they did. And it influenced the perception and valuation of other related activities such as sexual behavior and gender relations. In contrast, decriminalization brought about many changes not only in law but attitudes and made it possible to consider new implications and associations - e.g. homosexual health, homosexual publications, homosexual leisure, etc.

Aside: The media do not only report and broadcast but also shape and define and facilitate the development of attitudes. And by juxtaposing homosexuality with political and other items it suggests that it is of equivalent importance - it raises its profile.

The point I am trying to make is that although it is possible to consider homosexuality in relation to all these areas, that does not change the nature of homosexuality. And these different viewpoints are meaningful only because they are the conventional components of our understanding and ordinary analysis of the social structure in which we live. And although it is in principle possible to challenge the conventional wisdom and say that one is not happy with how social scientists have analyzed societies, it would seem rather ambitious to offer an alternative in a book on witchcraft.

? As I have suggested before witchcraft is like an extra planet being introduced into the solar system. It will change the behavior of all the other planets. But the effect on them is not Jupiter witchcraft, or Venus witchcraft, but the effect of witchcraft on the behavior of Jupiter or Venus. The direction of fit is important.

Witchcraft is like a tsunami that from a fault off Indonesia can affect shorelines from there to Kenya and beyond. Yet the

effects of the same wave depend on local context and conditions, from catastrophic to insignificant. And the shorelines it batters are independent of it.

Another, related, way of thinking about this is that witchcraft is like the wave of a tsunami, it is the observable and tangible cause of devastation, but it is only an interface between the shore it batters and the hidden submarine and subterranean events that caused it. The only difference is that in the case of witchcraft the ultimate source is not geological but psychological and the wave is a sociological event. The witchcraft interface is between the existing institutions (local or imported) and structures that social science has identified as useful in trying to understand how the social world works, and the beliefs of people and communities about the reality of witches and what they are capable of doing.

Think of how the iPod is changing the structure of the music industry. Ten years ago there were CDs and music played on radio and TV. Now, with the combination of computers, the internet, and a walkman that can record lots of music, CD shops are disappearing as more and more people download music from online services like iTunes. Instead of buying a CD with 20 tracks they now buy individual tracks and make their own compilations, and small independent bands and companies can now produce recordings and offer them on the internet with home computers and at a fraction of the cost of distributing and marketing CDs. In addition the iPod is changing education as lectures and courses can be distributed to students in a transportable and compact format. Students will be able to choose the lecturers they find most interesting and abandon those who are boring. And the radio and tv industries are also changing radically. Instead of arranging to sit down and watch, or listen, to a particular broadcast at a particular time, one can download only the items one wants, store them on an iPod and enjoy them anytime. And as a result a new format, the podcast, has emerged within the last year. Instead of broadcasting indiscriminately to anyone who happens to be listening, one now offers a range of items that may be of interest to only a minority. And these podcasts can be produced by anyone at insignificant cost and so a new kind of broadcaster emerges, more like a writer than a film producer. All this has emerged within the last few years and the changes that it has brought about are only the beginning. It will have an impact not only on music but also education, health, politics, religion, media etc..

Witchcraft is not a high level domain of enquiry like philosophy, anthropology or medicine. In the way it has been set

in context by writers like Evans Pritchard it is clearly a part of a greater whole alongside sorcery and other forms of magic. And although it might be interesting to discuss or develop a taxonomy of witches, witchcraft, considered as the belief in witches, has to be considered in the context of other beliefs and the institutions that are associated with them. The belief in justice leading to law, in democratic institutions manifest in politics, in freedom of information motivating media, in human rights to health leading to medicine, to prosperity leading to economics, etc etc. To a significant degree our culture and social organization is a product of beliefs rather than physics.

* Essentially, because witchcraft is about beliefs it will have its primary impact on other beliefs. Or, in other words it will act via minds and representations rather than things. Hence, although the incidence and prevalence of witch accusations might be affected by geography (if ergot poisoning associated with rye as a staple food is found to facilitate abnormal perceptions interpretable as witch related), there will be no direct effects of witchcraft on physics, or geology, or geography, or chemistry, or biology in the context independent sense that we understand them. On the other hand, witchcraft will have implications for beliefs and affect tangible products derived from them including architecture and dress and ornamentation - for example, there are houses in Cornwall built as circular and without right angles that might create corners in which witches hide.

? Politics, media, religion, health, law, etc. are not parts of witchcraft, nor are there different kinds of witch associated with each (any meaningful taxonomy of witches would be in different terms). The dominant direction of fit, or influence, is from witchcraft to institution - witchcraft creates and changes institutions. And although new institutions grow around witchcraft and can shape it these are secondary to its effects on pre-existing institutions. Think of the notion of a crime like theft which simply means something like taking what does not belong to you. There are many different kinds and these change over time - identity theft, mugging, bank robbery, fraud of various kinds, picking pockets, stealing cars, etc etc - but they are all the same in principle. But, the effects of crime are manifested differently in different fields and in different kinds of technological and institutional prophylactic and reactive procedures.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

**As you are aware I feel that in order to account for its persistence witchcraft must have beneficial effects.

One possibility is that it serves as a lightning conductor that dischargss accumulating tensions to earth.

In this case the tensions are associated with the emergence of symptoms of individuality that threaten the integrity of the community as a whole. These are of two kinds. The first and potentially constructive are related to changing economic relationships and behaviors such as are associated with the development of trade and markets. These threaten more communitarian values. The second are focussed on the more marginal members of the community who may stand out as different and a source of anxiety and unwelcome obligation. These may also be perceived as a problem because the trend towards individuality and market economics is in tension with traditional community obligations.

The resulting tension and communal dysphoria is discharged by displacing its focus from new economic relations that are potentially powerful and fecund to marginals who for other reasons are conspicuous as problems that do not fit into the community or threaten its complacency.

Hence the witch hunt reunites the community in pursuit of individuals who have become symbols for vaguely perceived dangers that the witch mechanism purges from the community in ceremonies that have some of the dramatic features of Greek tragedy in that they arouse in the audience who are also the cast intense feelings of terror. And if not pity the dread that they too might have the mark of a witch.

Men fear death as children fear to go in the dark. And the intensity of public reaction to a crime is directly proportional to fear uncertainty and doubt that anyone might be a perpetrator. One only abhors what one can imagine, but disowns by projection onto another.

Wed 1 Oct 2003 8:56

Animism vs Panpsychism
Ehret's view of religion and evil is superficial.
I do not think that animism can or should be dismissed without definition. From my point of view although I would agree that the word is imperfect it is simply the best I know for what is

presumed and is a necessary condition for religion: that the universe behaves as it does not as we assume because of the laws of physics that are indifferent to the concerns and sensitivities of humans, but is essentially alive and motivated by psychological mechanisms such as belief and desire and will. An alternative word might be panpsychism.

Wed 1 Oct 2003 9:04

Evil vs Ethics or Moral Economics
Again Ehret's view of evil seems superficial and incomplete. The dark side of living has several components or possibly levels.

1. Bad things happen

By this I mean natural events that we do not like and seek to avoid, but nowadays attribute to the working out of physical laws that are indifferent to our comfort or preferences. In a sense this implies that we accept bad things as facts of the way the world works and not in terms of morality or justice. It may be questionable if this has ever been a spontaneous way of experiencing the world - as opposed to an attainment and the conclusion of an argument about it

2. The injustice of good and bad

By this I mean that bad things happen to good people and good things to bad. Life is often unfair. This is what Ehret seems to mean by evil. It only makes sense in a world that is controlled by psychological rather than physical mechanisms and in which there is an articulated or explicit notion and sense of fairness, or justice.

3. The incarnation of evil

The hierarchy of religious agents or entities that Ehret mentions or implies is uncontroversial.

- The abstract unity, who plays little part in day to day events affecting humans, is the One of Neoplatonism, the Atman/Brahman of the Hindoo, the Pure Light of Buddhists etc.

- The monotheistic creator God who is psychologically reactive or responsive to human behavior is the prototypical monotheistic God, like Yaweh, and a generalization derived from henotheistic gods of local jurisdiction.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

* - Spirits of place etc are also related to a henotheistic perspective and perhaps a more feudal conception of the spirit world.

- Spirit ancestors are self evidently part of a world based on psyche rather than soma, or minds rather than matter. As Descartes pointed out bodies are extended and delimited in space and time but minds or spirit are by definition not and hence can transcend the limits of the body.

- Then there are humans.

* To explain bad things happening in this system one has to look to psychological mechanisms and motives - to beliefs, desires, whims, expectations, emotions and moods . These can be considered at two levels:

First, relations between individuals that are probably most commonly thought of in economic terms of balanced obligations that have been codified by custom into rules of coduct. Though sometimes, as in the Greek pantheon, what cannot be explained in terms of the breach of rules can be put down to the sport of the gods. Hence bad things will usually happen if God, gods, spirits, or ancestors, are upset by human action.

Second, there may be some notion of individual psychology and internal motivation. This may be hinted at in the Greeks acceptance of the gods playing with the lives of men 'so are we to the gods, they kill us for their sport'.

The emergence of the possibility of internal motivation implies a new notion of individuality and with it the possibility of bad things being caused not by general rules of physics or conduct / behavior but personal motivations that may not always be obvious to others.

And this probably also suggests that the cause of bad things can be incarnated and externalized in individual humans, or more rarely and later, in spiritual agents like the Devil or Satan. But remember that the christian devil is a fairly recent invention (the New rather than Old Testament).

This creates a new view or kind of badness that is personal, insidious, and at the same time alien. This is what I think the notion of evil should refer to. And where links to notions like treason are implicit. It is this concept of evil that is alzive in witchcraft.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Wed 19 Nov 2003 10:33 - Unfiled

Dimensions of Witchcraft
1. Ability = Congenital or genetic vs Acquired
2. Motive = Unconscious vs Conscious
3. Method =Special or Extraordinary in varying degree - the usual description as magical, mystical, or supernatural is parochial, ethnocentric, and racist. It is essential to remember that the scientific view of the world is and always has been that of a minority (arguably much less than 20% in USA today). For the majority what academics dismiss as supernatural is the orthodox model of how the world works. It therefore cannot serve to distinguish witchcraft - unless you want to claim that >80% of your fellow citizens are witches? What witches or sorcerors may be considered to demonstrate is an unusual, or highly developed, or extraordinary ability to do harm BY MEANS CONSISTENT WITH THE LOCAL CONVENTIONAL WISDOM AS TO HOW THE WORLD WORKS. This ability is simply analogous to what we consider idiots savant, or prodigies, or precocious talent, or natural genius.
5. Scene = Local and among neighbours NOT natural enemies. Hence witchcraft is like treason and Traitor vs Enemy or Opponent. Hitler was a very bad man and an enemy, but he was not a traitor to my country, or a witch.
6. In European Witchcraft C15 - C17 the power of a witch comes from a pact with the Devil (the negative of God) that turns on or bestows the power, and was treated as a heretical religion. This is what distinguishes it from African.
7. It is worth considering a possible relation between the development of witchcraft and the inclusion, as a result of migration, of a minority that are as yet relatively unassimilated and retain their identity and beliefs. The effect of these is indirect and operates by providing a concrete metaphor for treason AND for the conception of self or individuality as a container that could accommodate evil. This might work with individuals as well as groups.
8.The attritution, projection, or externalizing of bad things happening and harm onto individuals. The incarnation of malevolence. The great danger of such a belief, as with much in psychoanalysis, is that it can be used to account for anything and everything. It prevents individuals from accepting responsibility for ANY misfortune that befalls them AND impairs the development of a notion of random events, chance, or probability. In other words a view of the world consistent with modern science. Viz - that there is a single coherent reality

governed by impersonal physical law in which the interaction of large numbers of partially independent processes can lead to accidents or unpredictable outcomes. These may be unpredictable individually but predictable statistically eg the outcome of a single toss of a coin may be unpredictable but that of a thousand will be to a high degree of accuracy, or within a small margin for error.
9. ART is not a description but a value judgement and a category of mostluse to accountants and bean counters. Applied to artifacts associated with witchcraft it has no useful purpose, but is a source of confusion, acting as a distorting lense that imposes our aberrations on others.
10. There are interesting similarities between the notion of a witch as innately but possibly unconsciously evil and the christian notion of original sin. This is demonstrated in the mudern (1930s onwards) witch cleansing movements of Central Africa whose form seems to have been shaped by chrisianity.
11. All artifacts are overdetermined in that they have multiple functions. What are usually described as tools, the prototypical tool, is causally effective in changing the physical world. It is a prosthetic extension of our body and the toolkit that provides. But that is only one end of a spectrum at the other are tools for thinking and communication. These include a range from pens or brushes for drawing and writing to the abacus and computers. Each of these have a dual function. On the one hand they help us think and on the other they help us communicate and add authority to the product of our thoughts. If I tell my teacher the result of a calculation she may be more impressed if I can show how I arrived at it. And will give more credit for using a calculator or a recognized algorithm than a drug induced vision.

Some tools like hammers, knives and guns act directly on the physical world, others act primarily on other minds and only through changing them secondarily on the physical - I persuade you to dig my garden. The latter include ornaments, pictures, music, poetry, stories, masks, and rituals and rites.

Witchcraft and its artifacts are causally effective, but only on the world of minds. Which from the viewpoint of a society that believes in animism or hylozoism is the whole world.

Wednesday, 24 October 2007 23:19:19

Please remember that the figures I sent you yesterday are not directly related to the incidence of witchcraft accusations or

events, they are simply a reflection of academic interest in witchcraft in different regions as reflected in the number of papers about witchcraft. Although one might hope that this would have some relation to the actual incidence, albeit very indirect, it would be like assuming that the number of papers in medical journals about a particular disease was an indicator of the incidence or prevalence of that disease. In the case of medicine that is far from being the case as there are often many more papers about quite rare diseases than about very common ones.

Region	Witch	Shaman	Population M	w/m	s/m	w+s/m
Europe	158	49	730	0.22	0.07	0.29
A&P	59	10	30	1.97	0.33	2.3
Asia	105	319	2400	0.04	0.13	0.17
America	58	260	835	0.07	0.31	0.38
Africa	215	30	800	0.27	0.04	0.31
India?	105		1000	0.11		
Melanesia?	55		6.5	8.46		
correlation	-0.41			0.56		

Remember these figures are for publications about witchcraft or shamanism in these areas not actual incidents - they are an indicator of relative interest more than of possible prevalence

The figure for witches in Asia is probably almost entirely due to South Asia and mostly India

The figure for A&P is due to an unusually high number for witchcraft in Melanesia for which it is an underestimate as the population base used is for the whole of Oceania (30M). Referenced to that of Melanesia (6.5M) it is 8.46. Small area very popular with anthropologists??

It seems to me that the evidence suggests that witchcraft as a phenomenon studied by anthropologists is most common in Europe

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(past) Africa and to a lesser extent India and South Asia. Melanesia is exceptional.

But the following questions remain. What is the relation of Witchcraft to Shamanism and how much do they overlap? And is the exceptionally high interest in witchcraft in Melanesia a function of the number of investigators/studies or does it suggest that other areas might have the same levels but been relatively neglected by academics?

What is usually referred to as witchcraft is really nothing more than the most extreme and exotic manifestation of the ubiquitous process that has resulted in our notions of justice and law and the institutions that have developed from them. What makes it appear qualitatively different, and hence obscured its origin, is simply a matter of differences in motivation and context.

Our notion of justice and hence law is based on a fundamental classification of harmful events, according to whether or not someone can be held accountable for them. Those that are considered accidents of nature and for which nobody could reasonably be considered responsible I will refer to as natural - as in death by natural causes. Whilst those for which somebody can be held to account I will refer to as forensic - as in death by homicide or manslaughter. And it is worth noting that the notion of the self has to a large extent been shaped by forensic considerations. The result is a dichotomy between natural and forensic that lies at the root of all our moral judgements.

The most important consequences of the distinction between natural and forensic events is to identify a large number of harmful events deemed to be the result of human action and to create institutions, such as the legal systems, designed to minimize them.

The number of forensic events and the intensity of the response to them will be a function of two factors: the perceived risk of harm, based on liklihood and scale, and whether the dominant framework for interpreting how the world works is atomic (scientific) or animistic.

In the context of the atomic, the natural and forensic will tend to be treated as mutually exclusive categories (related by

exclusive or - XOR = x or y but not both x and y) whilst in the animistic context the natural and forensic can readily coexist (related by inclusive or - OR = x or y or y and y). This has the effect of increasing the relative numbers of forensic events and reducing those considered exclusively natural. And the size of the forensic category is further increased by allowing a far greater range of causal influences.

Within the category of forensic events a further sub-classification develops from a universal phenomenon referred to as the social amplification of risk, and its subjective complement, or obverse, the experience of danger. This refers to the observation that the subjective experience of danger and estimates of risk are often distorted and far greater or less than the calculated probabilities of the unwanted outcome. And social amplification can facilitate the escalation of ordinary anxiety into terror or dread and hence kindle moral panic.

The processes of social amplification and the generation of moral panics are fundamental to witchcraft transforming the ordinary forensic interpretation of events into something qualitatively different. In the forensic context - amplification can affect natural events - this usually occurs when the alleged perpetrators are considered to possess or have access to extraordinary powers. These can be innate - as the powers attributed to witches - or acquired - either by training or by gaining control of external weapons.

Witchcraft is simply the most extreme and exotic manifestation of the common process that is the basis and motivation of systems of law. This identity and its real nature has been obscured by its form being shaped by three factors.
First, the social amplification of the perception of risk and the experience of danger.
Second, the belief in the existence of extraordinary powers - either innate or external and acquired.
Third, the context of a prevailing and dominant framework for interpreting how the world work that is intensely animistic.
This, especially, gives witchcraft its more exotic features. However, these are superficial - like the pink of the flamingo or the decorations of a bower bird's nest - contingent.and a product of environment.

The characteristics of witchcraft are:
1. A forensic interpretation of harm anb bad events.
2. A belief in the existence of extraordinary powers.

3. Social amplification of fear to terror with the generation of moral panic.
4. The animistic doctrine is not essential but gives the phenomenon its traditional appearance and makes it stand out from less extreme manifestations of the same process. The effects of animism are to greatly extend the realm of the forensic, make the dichotomy between the natural and forensic not exclusive, and encourage the belief in the existence of extraordinary powers that can be controlled by exceptional individuals. The result is a far less predictable world in which events are not determined by blind physical law but the whims of mindful agents only some of which have ever been embodied and enfleshed. The uncertainty that this creates make the world very scary.

Introduction

* The study of the phenomena that are usually referred to as witchcraft has been constructed higgledy piggledy on insecure foundations and held together precariously by the popular appetite for reports of signs and wonders - exotic events that defy scientific authority. This is because, as far as I can gather, the subject has been approached unsystematically and arse over tip - it has, in general, been more concerned with meeting a popular demand for answers than in considering the value of the questions. As a result the nature and existence of the phenomenon has been largely taken for granted and nobody has addressed the fundamental issue of its epidemiology. How is the phenomenon distributed in space and time? Is it endemic or epidemic? Global or local? If it is endemic and global, why does it sometimes flare into acute panics that transcend the boundaries of local communities? If based on universal processes, why has it been considered much more significant in some times and places than others? And, as it seems to be associated with so many disruptive and dangerous effects, why has it persisted? What sustains it? What benefits might be associated with it?

* In considering what has been written about it, once one gets away from meticulous studies of carefully circumscribed events, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that it is largely a product of projection, based on the presumption of a dichotomy that distinguishes us from them, good from evil, modern from primitive, science from superstition, and as such is saturated with religious, racist, and gender prejudice.

But, before succumbing to the understandable temptation to declare it politically incorrect and purge it from the bowels of academia, it is worth considering whether anything is worth saving. Is the problem with the subject, or those who have studied it, or those who have over-generalized from their conclusions? And, whether it is possible to arrive at a re-description, an alternative formulation, that will allow us to see it for what it is, as for the first time, and without the shit with which it has been so conscientiously encrusted.

* I believe that this is possible and that the notion of witchcraft can be cleansed to reveal something that is not only simpler and less exotic, but also universal, and as such not only discernible in our own culture, but capable of illuminating dangers to which we are vulnerable, and without the notion of witchcraft might be blind.

At the end we will understand the real nature of witchcraft, how it affects us, and what we can learn from it. In particular, we will learn that witchcraft is not something that is exotic and alien, occurring only in remote times and places, nor is it merely a life-style choice like Wicca and other New Age chaff. In contrast we will discover that it is a potentially universal process, normally dormant, but which, given certain conditions, which I will describe, can kindle into epidemics that, if unchecked, will corrode the foundations of human rights, civil liberties, social justice, and democracy itself. It is not a trivial matter.

It is hoped that by revealing its true significance, the study of witchcraft will be considered worthy of the funds that are required to make good the deficiencies of earlier studies.

A Note on Epidemiology

Definition and epidemiology, if not related as the sides of a coin, are inextricably linked. Without a definition epidemiology is impossible, without epidemiology any definition must be suspect. It is a variant of Catch 22 that most writers have failed to avoid.

Ideally, only a first approximation of a provisional definition should be constructed a priori, thereafter the process of refining the definition and the epidemiology must proceed hand in hand, in a recursive fashion, by which each definition is tested in the field against various populations and the data collected fed back into better definitions, until one is

developed that meets criteria for reasonable confidence. Only by such a process can one discover if the definitions preferred have more than local application and relevance.

To an outsider, one who is neither an anthropologist nor a historian (though historians are perhaps less culpable because they tend to address issues for which there is documentary evidence and limited to clearly defined periods), the failure to consider the epidemiology of witchcraft seems strange. How is it possible, for anyone who pretends to be a thinker, to study any phenomenon without first considering not only what its characteristics might be, but how these are distributed over time, place, and cultures? If definition and relative prevalence are as interdependent as I believe them to be, one simply cannot study one without considering the other. And if you try your conclusions are going to be well nigh worthless.

* The most charitable conclusion would be that anthropologists are realists and cut their coats to match their cloth. They do not presume to draw universal conclusions from their studies, but are content to describe what happens in a particular place at a particular time. But, the problem with this assumption is that insofar as they relate their findings to `witchcraft' they are referencing them to a concept that implies a generality whose validity is as yet unproven, and thereby making tacit claims to a wider relevance than can be justified. What they are producing are the equivalent of holiday diaries, or essays on `what I did in my holidays', written in a subject-incestuous jargon that attempts to mask their triviality. The sad and brutish fact that one has insufficient cloth for more than a waistcoat does not make sleeves less desirable.

The less charitable might consider that the motivation of most studies is not knowledge, but publications, citations, or degrees, and that the whole process is autopoetic rather than allopoetic. Just as the primary product of bureaucrats is bureaucracy, so the principal product of anthropologists is anthropology (and more anthropologists). Or, in other words, anthropology is essentially an auto-erotic activity that tends to make the perpetrators blind and without fertile issue.

These depressing suspicions are made only more plausible by the data in one of the few online sources that may give hints about the epidemiology of witchcraft. The website, Anthropological Index Online, provides a searchable index to current periodicals (1957 - present) in the Anthropology Library at the British Museum, which incorporates the Royal Anthropological Institute library. This allows one to search the collection over a number

of fields including region, country, author, publication, date, title and keywords.

What it provides is an indication of the number of papers that contain the string `witch' either in the title, or the keywords, and broken down by country, region, etc. To extrapolate from this in an attempt to draw any conclusions about the incidence or prevalence of witchcraft is therefore extremely hazardous. The publications are not really about nature but the recent fads and fancies of professional anthropologists - and where they prefer to spend their holidays.

* Hence, searching this database raises far more questions than it answers, but suggests strongly that the distribution of witchcraft and related phenomena is very uneven, and provides no evidence at all that it is universal. Accepting that the evidence that it can offer is extremely difficult to interpret and is likely to reflect the interests of anthropologists rather than the prevalence of any particular phenomenon, it suggests that witchcraft was common in Europe in the past, and in the present is most common in Sub-Saharan Africa and Melanesia - particularly Papua New Guinea. In contrast it is virtually unknown in Islamic countries or in Central and East Asia. And although it is mentioned in South Asia and South America it is less common there and seems to have different characteristics from Africa.

* The relative absence of publications about witchcraft in Islamic countries is at first puzzling, as witchcraft is judged a capital crime in Sharia law (or the Koran). The reason is probably that the overwhelming power of Allah leaves relatively little freedom for individual misbehavior of the kind usually attributed to witches, and what is described as witchcraft seems to be mostly the creation of confusion and illusions concerning love and marital relations. In other words, in contrast to Africa where witches are believed able to bring about changes in the physical world, in Islamic cultures the emphasis is on altering minds; by changing perceptions and feelings and creating doubt and confusion. And the range of crimes available to witches is limited by the fact that it cannot encroach upon the power of Allah, and those that remains open to them are of a kind that is probably difficult to prove.

* In the case of Central and East Asia papers about witchcraft are rare and inversely related to those on shamanism. At first sight this might suggest differences in convention and that what is described as shamanism in Asia would be described as witchcraft in Africa, and vice versa. However, against this

attractive possibility, is the fact that in the index there is a list of keywords associated with the papers in the collection, and whilst cross references are provided for alternative terms for witchcraft and shamanism. neither includes the other, nor is there any overlap between the alters suggested for each case. This seems to me to suggest that whatever the relationship between the terms they are not equivalent, or interchangeable.

Shamanism - see also Exorcism, Spirit possession, Trance
Witchcraft - see also Demonology, Evil eye, Magic, Suffering and misfortune
Witch - no alters

Although the evidence is sparse I get the impression that accusations of witchcraft in South Asia are sporadic, local, and rarely amount to the scale of the phenomena reported from Africa. And that this is also the case in South America. In each of these cases the dominant religions allow the existence of spirits and demons and in the case of India a veritable pantheon. However, in most the basis of religious beliefs limits the possibility or plausibility of the power of the witch to do harm.

It also seems probable that witchcraft phenomena are relatively little reported among hunter gatherer cultures, including those in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the possible exception of Papua New Guinea - about which more later.

My overall impression, from very inadequate data, is that the current distribution of witchcraft related phenomena suggests an interaction and possible potentiation between the beliefs and behavior of indigenous peoples, without a written language or canonical religious texts, and those of colonists and missionaries whose world view was saturated with the demonology of christianity and whose first contacts dated from a time when the witch crazes in Europe were contemporary, or recent memory. The beliefs of Africans resonated with and confirmed the demonology of the Europeans and in turn the fear of Satan that had become more clearly articulated as a result of innumerable witch trials and the diligence of the Holy Inquisition provided Africans with new notions to express old fears. Each potentiated and shaped the other. In contrast, where christianity came into contact with cultures that had both written language and a well formulated and institutionalized religion with canonical texts, the impact of christian demonology was less and witchcraft either rare or of less serious import than in Africa today.

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The case of PNG is interesting because, on the one hand, in relation to population, it has a far larger number of publications concerning witchcraft than any other country; including regional neighbors. This contrasts with the otherwise plausible view that witchcraft is relatively uncommon among hunter and gatherers. On the other hand I understand that most of the first contacts between peoples who have had no contact with modern culture are usually made by christian missionaries, mostly from proselytizing `fundamentalist' sects. And it is not clear whether a distinction is made between witchcraft and belief in spirits as causally effective agents active in the physical world.

* It is quite common to find a blurring of boundaries between the belief in the causal efficacy of spirits and the notion of witchcraft. However, it must be remembered that, for all but a tiny minority living in the countries of the North Atlantic rim over the last few hundred years, spirits provided the preferred explanation of how the world worked. The scientific revolution began in the C17 and has transformed the material world, yet today in the USA, which is the most scientifically advanced country in the world, over 80% of the population believe in the causal efficacy of spirits, and institutions associated with religion account for a large part of the GDP and shape the political, social, and physical architecture of the culture. For most practical purposes the belief in spirits is universal and therefore cannot be used as a marker for witchcraft, that would distinguish it from any other phenomenon. The fact that anthropologists in general belong to the tiny minority who do not believe in spirits, amy be a disadvantage and is only likely to confuse and encourage projection. Anthropologists should not be released into the wild before they have undergone a personal analysis.

This highlights two of the major problems with studies of witchcraft.

First, definitions that emphasize and make explicit references to magic, occult, or supernatural mechanisms. In the most common form these are variations of `harm done by magical means'. Even if this is modified to the more sustainable `the fear of harm done by magical means', or even `the consequences of the fear of harm done by magical means', it is still a snare for the unwary and by focussing too much attention on mechanisms that defy scientific authority, attracts the kind of reader that has given the subject such a bad name. This may help sales, but tends to corrupt even the more serious students and writers. Hence, the first rule in approaching the study of witchcraft should be that

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`magic' has nothing to do with the kernel of the phenomenon. And, although the notion of magic, or the supernatural, has largely been responsible for spotlighting witchcraft, it is a function of the context in which the phenomenon is usually identified rather than its core. Indeed, its most serious effect has probably been to facilitate projection and thereby blind us to the variations in the phenomenon that occur within our own culture, but are not associated with the occult - at least in its most popular usage. As a result what is commonly referred to as witchcraft is only part of a much larger, though simpler, phenomenon. Which highlights the importance of epidemiology in determining the range of the topic being examined.

Second, a very general failure to make allowances for the effects of different frameworks (doctrines, or paradigms) for interpreting how the world works and accounting for different events. The tendency has been, while acknowledging differences in beliefs, to take the modern scientific framework for interpretation in terms of `atomic' mechanisms as a reference that takes precedence over the vastly older and more popular one that interprets events in terms of the spiritual agents operating within a far broader landscape of possibilities than science has found useful. Whereas science explains events in terms of the behavior of inanimate atoms, acted upon by external forces in accordance with the strict rule of physical law, the spiritual view is made up of mindful agents whose actions are determined not by external forces only, but by `folk psychology', or belief, desire, and will. These living agents include not only the currently embodied, but others that were once, but are no longer, embodied or enfleshed, and others that have never been either.

The result of taking the scientific, atomic, mechanical, paradigm as reference, is that supposedly occult mechanisms stand out as exotic and are made more salient than they deserve. In contrast, if the alleged mechanisms of witchcraft are referenced to the spiritual agent frame of reference, they are revealed as far less exotic, playing the role, in the conventional wisdom of witchcraft believing communities, that atoms and energy play in the scientific. They are interpretations - formulae rather than facts. And their principal function is to authorize the linking of actions into chains of cause and effect that are considered legitimate. And justify whatever actions are suggested by them.

From the spiritual point of view harm done by spirits is entirely comparable to harm done by any physical phenomena from tsunamis, or fires, or hurricanes, to the failure of crops or

disease, or death. It only appears exotic from the outside, and a viewpoint that is essentially racist. And the fear that the power witches kindles is exactly comparable to the fear of al-Qaeda with WMD.

The real nature of witchcraft (dogmatic version)

Because the following interpretation of witchcraft is based on a number of distinctions that may be unfamiliar, I will list them up front as a reference.

1. The importance of distinguishing paradigms, or frameworks for interpretation, from the beliefs and mechanisms that they allow.

The scholastics made an important distinction between doctrina and scientia. Originally, scientia referred to all of human knowledge, whilst doctrina referred to the subset of questions that could not, in principle, be answered by empirical testing or experiment. An example might be the existence of gods or spirits. Gradually the scope of scientia became more focussed and it came to refer to those questions that, in contrast to doctrina, could be answered by experiment. This distinction is somewhat similar to that between the premises or postulates on which mathematical and logical systems are based, and which are accepted as givens that are true without proof, and the theorems and conclusions that they allow.

But, what is often overlooked is that every culture must have a view as to how the world works and these too are based on very general frameworks for interpretation. These frameworks determine what is conceivable and acceptable and hence the specific beliefs and theories that are, and can be, held. Choosing between alternative beliefs is a matter for empirical testing, aided by procedures such as the scientific method that have been developed for that purpose. However, determining which framework for interpretation is most useful is much more difficult, as each is consistent with many conflicting beliefs. In practice, the choice is generally unconscious and based on `faith', or emerges slowly with an accumulation of evidence that one framework is more fruitful, in the sense that it generates more useful beliefs and theories, than another. This is the process that Thomas Kuhn referred to as a `paradigm shift'.

There are, however, two factors that have rendered our overarching doctrines, or frameworks for interpretation, virtually invisible. First, they are so pervasive that they are like water to fish or air to humans - usually only noticed in their absence. Second, there has, in practice, been only one

dominant framework for interpretation. And though recently a rival has emerged that has shown itself to have vastly greater utility it has only replaced the former among a significant minority mostly living around the North Atlantic rim in only the last hundred years.

The traditional and still dominant framework explains the behavior of the world in terms of the folk psychology, beliefs, desires, and will, of spiritual agents that are believed to be causally effective in the physical world, either by acting directly on matter, or indirectly by changing human minds. In contrast, the modern scientific framework explains behavior in terms of inanimate atoms acted upon by external forces according to the rule of physical law.

Now, though the spiritual doctrine is more sympathetic to the notion of witchcraft and gives it characteristic form and color, this is largely in contrast to the scientific doctrine that considers such beliefs to be without foundation. The result is a tendency to view witchcraft as exotic and alien to our own culture in any form except as a relatively eccentric `life-style choice'.

2. The distinction between, and universal coexistence of, formal, or legal, and informal, or extra-legal, legal systems and Law.

Beyond a certain low threshold of complexity, every culture develops a system of laws that regulate behavior within it. In the early stages these are based on informal social contracts and consensus, but when, later, these are institutionalized in statutes and courts and rituals and roles, the informal, now extra-legal, systems do not disappear, but coexist to a degree that varies with scale, and circumstances. At the smaller scale these persist, relatively benignly, as the ways in which interpersonal behavior is regulated within families and small communities. For example, how parents punish children. But, on a larger scale, they can also re-emerge when the formal, legal, legal system fails and there is a breakdown in the Rule of Law, or when the legal legal system fails to address the experienced concerns and needs of the community. When that happens the result is vigilanteism and the development of extra-legal legal systems complete with quasi legal institutions that are isomorphic with the formal.

It is my contention that witchcraft is first and foremost an example of an extra-legal legal system motivated by

dissatisfaction at what the legal legal system recognizes and allows.

3. The distinction between a core, or kernel, and a context.

This distinction is about definition, between a core concept, that is usually simple, general, and of universal application, and specific contexts that flesh out the core and give it characteristic forms and colors, which are specific to the context. It is not uncommon for the local, context dependent, characteristics to be confused with those of the core. That is why witchcraft has so often been defined in terms of spirits or magic which are contingent and not essential features.

4. The distinction between proximal, or primary, and distal, or secondary and higher order, effects or consequences.

Motor vehicles were invented to provide a means of transporting goods and passengers from one place to another. But, in order to do this efficiently they required the development of roads and gas stations and repair shops and motels. Then they led to accidents and facilitated the expansion of medical and legal services. Further downstream they provoked the emergence of various pressure groups for and against the consequences, each allied with political agendas. And in the end they changed the shape of the countryside and towns and maybe in the long term will contribute to their extinction. A parasite that kills its host. So it goes. And similar processes are easily discernible in relation to medicines and any technology complex enough to have unintended consequences.

As in the case of equivocation between core and context many studies of witchcraft confuse and fail to distinguish between proximal and distal effects. In practice, most of the features considered to be attributes of witchcraft are not primary but secondary or higher order (downstream) effects.

5. The distinction between processes that can only develop in larger groups, but once discovered feed back to change and become an integral part of the functioning of smaller groups.

In this country in the past, and to this day in many others, a husband could not be accused of raping his wife, and much internal family violence was effectively ring fenced from the criminal law. What would, between strangers, have been regarded as assault, or grievous bodily harm, was traditionally often discounted as `merely' a domestic dispute. But, increasingly, crimes that were initially defined in a wider context are being

considered applicable within families and this must have an effect on how at least some families function. A variant is where the punishment for certain crimes differs depending on the relation of victim to perpetrator. For example, so called crimes of passion, or the killing of an errant wife or daughter would be treated more leniently than the murder of a stranger. Again punishments considered appropriate in the wider context are being applied to smaller.

The relevance of this to witchcraft is that it is possible that the apparent increase in accusations within families, such as the identification and extrusion of children as witches, and the violence that it provokes, might be a result of a process that began within families and was then amplified by projection onto a wider stage. Or, the result of the importation and use of explanatory concepts that were formerly more commonly applied to relative strangers.

We will see later that many of the processes associated with witchcraft are critically sensitive to naming and the way in which they are described. For example, many moral panics follow the coining for a catchy new name for what is often an ancient phenomenon; there was street crime long before mugging, stalking is nor a new phenomenon, and children were neglected long before `home alone children' were publicized by the media.

What witchcraft is:

So, if the notion of witchcraft has been muddied and obscured by confusion with features of the context, and its primary function with secondary and higher order consequences, what is it's kernel?

Confusion with features of the context have led to a misleading over-emphasis on `magic' and supernatural mechanisms. And, that in turn, has led to witchcraft being considered exotic and alien, hence obscuring its manifestations in our own culture.

** Confusion between primary and secondary effects has led to a misplaced emphasis on the institutions, roles, rituals and artifacts that have developed reactively and to facilitate its primary function.

I propose that when these confusions are dissected away, what is left amounts to little more than an informal, or extra-legal legal, system of criminal law, that has evolved to address major concerns of a particular culture that have not been acknowledged, assimilated, or satisfactorily metabolized, by the

prevailing legal legal systems, that are predominantly alien and colonial impositions, designed to meet the needs of the former colonists, long since departed.

Once it has developed beyond a relatively low level of complexity, one of the first and most urgent tasks of any society is to distinguish between natural events and those that are the result of human mischief. This is best illustrated in the distinction that our legal system makes between murder and death due to natural causes. The distinction is between death as a result of the actions of someone, with malice aforethought, who can and should be held accountable, and death as the result of natural events that are completely independent of human intervention. Although the boundary is made fuzzy by the increasing concern with deaths that, although not intended, might have been prevented, i.e. negligence, the fact that our legal system has assimilated the scientific framework for interpretation has allowed us to assign most unwanted events to one of two exclusive categories - natural or criminal causation. And, to stress the point, what this amounts to is that in the vast majority if cases if something is considered a natural event cannot be a crime and vice versa. This is one of the under-appreciated boons of modern science.

In contrast, in a society that interprets the working of the world in terms of spirits, it is much more difficult, and may be impossible or considered meaningless, to make a clear-cut distinction between natural and criminal causation. For, if the category of natural causes has any meaning, it is unlikely to be mutually exclusive, and hence natural and criminal causation can coexist. So, though in our culture if a man walking the wild is struck by lightening nobody would be considered accountable, in a spirit based society, although the immediate cause of death would be accepted as `natural', this would not necessarily exclude anyone from being accountable. The lightening bolt would be considered necessary but not sufficient to explain the death, because it would leave so many questions unanswered. Why did the lightening strike at that particular moment? Why was the victim at the precise point where the lightening came to earth? etc etc ..

This is one of the main reasons why witchcraft accusations are more common and conspicuous in societies that are dominated by the spiritual framework for explanation. It is not simply that the belief in spirits provides plenty of room for witches. It is that spirits can explain far too much to be useful - in fact like psychoanalysis they can explain anything, which amounts to their explaining nothing. It is that when events are believed to

be the result, not of the strict rule of physical law, but of the psychology and whims of spirits, it becomes impossible to distinguish cleanly between natural and human or criminal causes. And, therefore, there is no refuge for innocence.

The acceptance of scientific explanations based on the rule of physical law provides two related boons. First, by making the two categories mutually exclusive, it allows a much clearer distinction between natural and criminal responsibility. Second, it provides clear and objective methods for assigning a particular event to one or the other. The result is that in any case it is usually possible to decide unequivocally whether a crime has been committed and someone should be held accountable - even if the perpetrator remains unknown. And, as the other side of that coin, to establish innocence objectively, independently of personal opinion, or any community consensus.

However, the distinction between criminal and not criminal that is now ideally based on forensic science, is far older than the scientific method and has its origins in notions of justice and human causation, that are based on some mental functions that predate and others that are characteristic of homo sapiens, and have presumably been an important component of communal life for at least as long as there were words to distinguish between them. And, in the absence of forensic science, the distinction between natural and criminal causes, which is equivalent to non-human and human causes, can only be based on an authority, or consensus, that is saturated with spirits. In such circumstances innocence is much harder to establish.

But, this mechanism does not depend on spirits. There is another aspect of forensic science that is too often overlooked. It is principally concerned with physical events, with things that have been done, that actually happened, rather than intentions - psychology does not have the same authority, or as convincing a track record, as physics. Until recently, too, the law was much more tightly concerned with actions than intentions. Someone might say that they wanted to do something, but until they did there was relatively little that the law could do about it, for in most cases no crime would have been committed. That is changing and with the new emphasis on the psychological effects on victims, the intentions of suspected terrorists and their sympathizers, and concern that certain kinds of personality disorders are more likely to commit crimes, there is a growing trend towards `preventive' detention and the punishment of intent and word rather than actual physical harm.

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The effect of these changes and proposals is to reduce the clarity and objectivity of the distinction between criminal and non criminal; these are no longer mutually exclusive but overlap and coexist. Instead of the former being based on objective physical evidence of a crime, the burden of proof is reduced to a suspicion, a mere probability, that offers little protection against prejudice. Innocence becomes much more difficult to prove and decisions are wide open to media amplification, political opportunism, and the power of consensus. The inevitable result will be an increase in the incidence of cases of witchcraft without magic. For we are recreating the conditions that allow witchcraft to flourish.

The witchcraft process:

1. Something bad happens that causes concern, fear, and uncertainty.

2. In order to reduce the sense of danger there is a demand that a cause is found and something be done about it.

3. In our culture, based on scientific premises, when something bad happens there are objective procedures that will quickly classify any event into one of two more or less mutually exclusive categories: Either it is due to natural causes, the result of natural processes that are independent of human action, or intervention, or it is the result of human action for which somebody should be held accountable.

However, in a culture based on animistic or spiritual premises, the category of natural causes, if it exists at all, will be much smaller and will not be considered mutually exclusive in relation to criminal behavior and human action.

The belief in a world based on the intentional behavior of spirit agents provides the following:
a) Spirit mechanisms that can be involved in every event - in other words the categories of natural and criminal causation overlap and are not considered mutually exclusive.
b) Because they are not mutually exclusive the category of criminal responsibility is much larger.
c) The belief in spirit agents provides not only mechanisms to explain events but extraordinary powers that will make anyone using them for malevolent intent be perceived to be as dangerous as a terrorist with WMD.

The result is that the realm of potential criminal behavior is vastly expanded, the alleged perpetrators are experienced as being immensely dangerous, and because in the absence of plausible natural causes based on objective evidence diagnosis or detection must be based on consensus or authority, innocence is difficult to establish and accusations difficult to refute.

4. Once the possibility and likelihood of `witchcraft' has been admitted there will be demand for action.
This will lead to the evolution of the following functions:
a) Diagnosis and detection = experts and authorities. These are most likely to be existing `healers' or wise people respected in the community.
b) Healing and cleansing = again healers and related specialists
c) Executioners, in a broad sense of those who specialize in carrying out the prescription of the authority. This may involve punishment, exile, or killing.

5. Once witchcraft is established as an explanation it will grow and be used with increasing frequency to explain any unexpected and unwanted events. And this will provide opportunities for:
a) Entrepreneurial activity in diagnosis, detection, healing, and execution.
b) Political opportunism. Politicians will find it prudent to acknowledge the concerns of their constituents and use the power of their emotions for political ends.
c) The furtherance of external agendas. The settling of old grievances, the finessing of criminal activities, the use of witchcraft as mitigation for crime, the creation of cults and hybrid organizations that use witchcraft as an excuse to facilitate a wide variety of activities, including rival religions like christianity.

What this demonstrates to my satisfaction is that the kernel from which witchcraft develops is really very simple and that most of the features that have been used to define witchcraft by academics and new age chaff are peripheral and secondary.

The kernel is the question, fundamental to any society that has a glimmer of the rule of law, of whether an unwanted event is the result of or independent of human action and hence accountability. Has a crime been committed? If so, who is responsible and what should we do about it?

The use of `magical' mechanisms to explain the event is peripheral and simply part of the context in which the majority of cases of witchcraft behavior have been described. Magic is contingent and external to witchcraft and is not a part of its

essential nature - it should not be part of the definition. Hence, witchcraft can occur in any society including those like our own that is based on scientific premises. The supernatural coloring that witchcraft has acquired is a function of the environment not the phenomenon itself.

In a similar way the artifacts, roles, rituals, and other institutions and behaviors that are associated with witchcraft are simply the working out of the process that the kernel question has kindled. In a particular environment they are logical consequences of the question. But they are a function of the environment.

One of the major processes that is triggered by witchcraft attributed behavior is Moral Panics. These account for many of the secondary manifestations and provide much of the fuel energy to maintain the phenomenon.

At its core witchcraft is simply a form of extra legal criminal law in an environment where the boundaries between natural and criminal events have either not been developed, or are not considered mutually exclusive, or where the boundaries between them are fuzzy and overlap to a a significant extent.

Conditions that facilitate witchcraft and allow it to flourish:

A framework for explanation that makes it difficult to distinguish between criminal and natural causes.

There is only one that is fundamental - the blurring of boundaries between adverse events attributed to natural causes or crime. And, as a corollary the replacement of objective scientific proof of actual harm with suspicion of future crime and the opinion of authority and consensus. This is particularly likely to be significant when the definition of crime is expanded to include intention as opposed to completed action.

Another is a religious belief that creates a dichotomy between agents of good and evil. In practice the christian religion is dualist not monotheistic.

Conditions that are likely to restrain witchcraft and prevent it from flourishing:

a) Beliefs like Karma that attribute misfortune to the earlier actions of the victims, and discourage projection.
b) A truly monotheistic God like the Muslim's Allah who is believed to be unlikely to cede much power to another including

witches. To some extent this may also be the case where religion is well formulated and has canonical texts whose interpretation is the responsibility of specialists. In most cases these seem to discourage epidemics that might threaten their authority and the stability of the system they control.
c) A clear distinction between natural and criminal causation. Ideally these should be considered mutually exclusive.
d) Objective `scientific' criteria for classifying events as natural or criminal. Where the boundary is fuzzy classification must depend on community consensus and the opinion of authorities. These are far too likely to be vulnerable to media amplification and pressure from partisan groupings and economic and political opportunism. The result will be positive feed back loops that will inflame the problem rather than cool it.
e) The reconciliation of formal with informal laws. In practice this may be difficult, but if the formal law does not address the major concerns of the population it will not be respected and the result will be the emergence of extra legal legal systems and vigilanteism.

Magic has nothing to do with the kernel of witchcraft - it is peripheral and contingent.

We can expect the witchcraft process to become much more common and apparent in our culture in the future as government policies are blurring the boundaries between natural and criminal causation and events.

What's wrong with witchcraft?

Most popular definitions of witchcraft take the form of variants on `harm caused to people or their possessions by magical (or supernatural) means'. This has resulted in so much confusion

that any study that relies on it should be treated as defective at root.

The confusion arises from the implied validity and relevance, in this context, of a distinction between natural and supernatural in which the natural is equated with `scientific' and considered superior intellectually, and even morally, to the `magical' or supernatural. In some cases the natural or `scientific' world view is also described as `causal', the implication being that the supernatural or `magical' is in some way acausal. This is presumably based on the belief that the `scientific' is causally effective, whereas the `magical' is not; but that begs the question of how effectiveness is to be measured. For, although if the aim is to bring about changes in the physical world directly `scientific' methods will certainly be superior, if the aim is psychological (with indirect effects on the physical as a result of human action) the `magical' might well be more effective - remember the power of the placebo effect.

The emphasis and reliance on a scientific vs. magical dichotomy is blindered and evidence of an ethnocentric, specifically eurocentric, and elitist bias, as it ignores, or is ignorant of, the fact that what is regarded as the scientific world-view is little more than 200 years old, predominantly localized to the North Atlantic rim, and although it has shaped the education systems and institutions of former colonies in other parts of the world, it is still the belief of only a minority of the population even in the most scientifically and technologically advanced countries. For example, in the USA more than 80% of the population claim religious beliefs that include spirits, devils, and angels that could not be considered `scientific' in the sense implicit in most definitions of witchcraft. And, if one considers the whole history of homo sapiens then the scientific world view cannot have been held by more than a tiny fraction of one percent of the total population. To dismiss the beliefs of the vast remainder seems at best perverse. For, at the very least, although their beliefs, and the behaviours based on them, may not be as causally and predictably effective in interacting with modern technologies they may well have other significant and beneficial effects that account for their persistence.

It is my contention that the distinction between the scientific and magical is not helpful in understanding the phenomena of witchcraft, because it is a view from outside, from a presumed privileged position, and amounts to a negative value judgement against the societies being studied. It also neglects the fact that for witchcraft to be a significant phenomenon requires that the belief in witchcraft is common to at least a greater

majority of the population. It is not enough that a minority regard themselves as witches and having extraordinary powers, if the rest regard them as eccentric, or unscientific. This is why the scientific vs. magical dichotomy is meaningless - it does not discriminate between witches and any others in the population. It is not that one part of society believes in magic and the other does not - within, everyone believes in magic in the sense of the definition. In all epidemics of witch accusations the belief in witchcraft is shared by witches, witchfinders, the informal institutions that regulate belief and behaviour, and the alleged victims. Witchcraft is not an alien intrusion into the body of the society, like a virus or bacterial infection, but more like autoimmunity, or cancer, when the cells of the body turn against it or themselves.

In the context of understanding witchcraft the dichotomy between science and magic is simply irrelevant - though not impotent of causing harm by the confusion it has engendered.

This raises the question of why the significance of the scientific / magical distinction has lingered for so long. I believe that the reason is that it is due to a misunderstanding about the limits of the scientific world view and the nature of that which it has, at least in part, superceded. And that the proponents of the distinction have a glimmer of an idea about the real distinction but have missed the point and chosen inappropriate terms. They have drawn the boundary in the wrong place.

Weber described the modern scientific view of the world as `disenchanted', by which he meant mechanical in contrast to spiritual or organic. Now it is characteristic of what is regarded as the most successful modern sciences, such as physics and chemistry, and the technologies based on them, that they imply a model of the world that is by definition rule-following and predictable, and that they have selected for study those parts of the world that are consistent with that model and in terms of it as predictable as mechanisms like clockwork. And according to this view the world is made up from components like atoms and forces like gravity whose behaviour is consistent, predictable, and will remain so for ever irrespective of our whims or attitudes. To a very considerable degree this `scientific' world is context independent.

But, contrary to a frequent misunderstanding that amounts to a prejudice, this model of science is not universally applicable (the scientific method may be universally applicable but the models that it has helped select for one field may not be

applicable to another), and its success depends on limiting what is appropriate for study and application to those issues for which it has been proven to be effective and neglecting or dismissing the rest. And these happen to include the greater majority of human behaviours and the interpersonal interactions on which social life depends. For, in contrast to the world of physics and engineering the behaviour of that concerned with psychological and social interaction is exquisitely context dependent and such predictability as can be discovered depends not on transcendent and universal physical laws, but more locally negotiated contracts and conventions. In contrast to physical reality, social reality is to a considerable extent constructed and an attainment.

So, whilst the `scientific' world view is mechanical and built up from neutral and impersonal atomic components and forces, that of the `pre-scientific' (including 80% of Americans) is organic and includes the living, the dead, and the never having been alive, and its behaviour accounted for, not in terms of neutral energy or forces, but interpersonal relations, personal will, emotions, and psychological drives. And in contrast to the `scientific' world whose horizons are set by the range of the senses and bracketed by life and death, those of the `prescientific' are far wider and more porous. In this world entities other than the living can also mix and mingle, and birth and death are not clear limits, but more like the boundary between the field of a spotlight and the surrounding dark. Within this world if compartments exist their walls are thinner and easier to cross.

This is the world in which almost all human beings have lived and found familiar. And we would too, for although not one in which advanced technologies were so likely to develop it has proved compatible with their use, and it had its own technology that was in many aspects not very different from our own. Even in the most `scientific' cultures most people know how to use technologies rather than understanding them. They accept the word of authorities usually without question. When they feel sick they visit doctors and accept medicine without much explanation or evidence of its likely effectiveness. And everyone knows people who prefer less orthodox or `alternative' therapies for which there is no clear evidence base, nor any explanation compatible with the scientific principles that have been so successful in the physical sciences; and perhaps ironically many find computers indispensible to research such treatments. In what ways would the `prescientific' world be different?

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Apart from differences in the available technologies, perhaps the most important would be that more phenomena would be less easily predicted or explained and so the world might seem rather more precarious and threatening. And yet it is not difficult to find debates about the dangers of the present age and nostalgia for supposedly preferable pasts. We would still seek the help and advice of authorities, and they would offer many of the same forms of solutions. Medicines would still be taken by mouth or rubbed on the body. The contents might be different and there might be more ritual involved in their use, but that would scarcely be noted. There might also be more rituals and ceremonies, although to an anthropologist from Mars these might be difficult to distinguish from our aerobics, yoga, gyms, etc.

What would be different would be a greater awareness of context and the importance of relationships, including especially those with different kinds of spirits and ancestors. And to maintain relationships there would perhaps be a greater sensitivity to the uniqueness of individuals and psychological mechanisms. The essential differences in how one interacts with machines and people would be clearer.

Numbers of results produced by searches on Amazon for:
Magic 33300 12704 22704
Occult 22400 766 1905
Supernatural 3200 860 1886
Evil 4000 2835 6096
Devil 5100 3708 7683
Witchcraft 3200 956 1714
Witch 3800 3137 5653
Wicca 2100 238   267
Wizard 2200 1732 3296
Terrorism 7200 1910 5617
Terrorist 1200 393 2031
Terror 3500 2660 5868
Vampire 2200 1951 2984
Vampires 1400 344 2984
Monsters 4200 1907
Monster 3700 2849
Assassination 1500 350 1442
Killers 1000 598 4437
Mafia 1000 435 1146
Murderers 1200 125 765
Murder 14500 8202 16812
Treason 617 364 1065

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All other related terms like sorcerer, werewolf, shaman, etc, are in the mid to low hundreds.

If the numbers of titles listed on Amazon containing specific terms are an indication of interest and demand then that for witches and witchcraft is comparable to that for evil, the devil, monsters, and the supernatural and greater than that for terrorist, vampire, assassination, mafia, or murderers. And though there are about twice as many titles about terrorism, perhaps not surprising in the context of the `war on terror', witch is three times as common as terrorist and three or four times more common than killers, murderers, or mafia. Also interesting is that, whilst magic and the occult are about ten times more common than witchcraft, that is also the case with supernatural which is roughly as common as witchcraft and witch and evil. I do not wish to make too much of this but simply use it as an indication that making allowances for current affairs and dangers witchcraft seems to be of comparable interest to terrorism and other forms of `evil' and to be of greater interest than specific forms of supernatural or supernormal activities.

This seems to me surprising as for most people witchcraft little more than a part of popular culture, of folk stories and horror movies, and with the same degree of reality as vampires, were-wolfs, Jedi knights, Star Trek, hobbits, or Harry Potter.

The single greatest impediment to an understanding of witchcraft is the notion of the `supernatural' or `occult'. It is responsible for what are at root thinly disguised racist attitudes and by shifting the focus from motives to mechanisms allows the alien investigators to maintain an unwarranted attitude of condescension and superiority towards their subjects that enables them to externalize and project processes onto the other that are in fact common to all. It is impossible to reach a meaningful understanding of witchcraft until one has learned to overcome being titillated by the `occult' or the `exotic'.

From a purely practical point of view it will not be possible to eradicate witchcraft from Africa or Arkansas by attacking the reality of `supernatural' processes - these are the folk science that has been used for thousands of years by 99.9% of the human race and at least 70% of modern Americans. But, if that issue is sidestepped and the focus is shifted from the status of mechanisms to the more fundamental processes that are universal

and occur in both `scientific' and `supernatural' systems of explanation, then there is a chance that one might be able to devise strategies that minimize its adverse effects. To do that we need to be humble and acknowledge that though we may disagree about specific beliefs we are able to acknowledge and share concerns about the effects of processes that are common to all cultures and do much harm. In this context the occult is simply one of the more obvious mechanisms of projection, marginalization, and exclusion of minorities and dissenters. Read USA and UK government pronouncements about terrorists and substitute witch for terrorist and you will see what I mean.

Alternatives:

Best:
ordinary / exceptional (and unacceptable means)
ordinary / extraordinary
usual / unusual
common / unusual or exceptional

Second:
ordinary / specialized
normal / abnormal
normal / pathological

These also carry the implication that the methods used are illicit or socially unacceptable. For example in the UK although causing grievous bodily harm is always a crime not all means of causing harm are illegal; e.g. fists and golf clubs are not illegal, only certain types of knife are prohibited, but although one can obtain a licence for a shotgun or rifle under some circumstances all handguns are illegal.

It is therefore necessary to distinguish clearly between the status of means and outcomes. If I punch someone hard enough I may be guilty of unlawful killing, but my hands are not illegal. If I have a licenced firearm and kill someone by accident I may be guilty of a crime but the gun in itself is not illegal. But in some circumstances a means may be legal and in another not. Nor are guns or other weapons considered `supernatural'. Neither are the tools of witchcraft.

One of the major problems with the notion of the `supernatural' is that it tends to divert the focus of attention from motives to mechanisms. Another is that it has drifted from being a description to judgement made from a position of presumed superior authority about what is implicitly considered alien and

inferior. In other words it is in the context of witchcraft in Africa essentially racist - and in that of Wicca condescending.

What is in definitions of witchcraft described as `supernatural' or occult is only so from the perspective of western science. From the point of view of the victim culture as opposed to the perpetrator it is simply the analogue of the scientific system of explanations as to how the world works. What is supernatural to one is science to the other.

When one gives up one's racist viewpoint and enters the world of the culture being studied one no longer needs to get entangled in the thicket of speculations about allegedly paranormal phenomena and instead can focus on the real issues which are about psychology and motives and social and economic relationships and the mechanisms that regulate them.

acceptable means / unacceptable means
legal means / illegal means
licit means / illicit means

The abilities of a genius, a prodigy, an `idiot savant', a record breaking athlete, are not considered supernatural, but part of the normal continuum of abilities resulting from the interaction of many different factors. Hence in the case of a trait like intelligence (not a very good example in terms of IQ because that has been deliberately normalized to conform to an ideology) you will have a distribution in which a few will be very clever a few very stupid and the great majority somewhere in between. In the case of intelligence there will be a secondary hump at the lower end, because in addition to the multiple factors accounting for the normal distribution there are specific causes of brain damage, e.g birth injuries, that lead to an excess of impaired individuals over and above those accountable by the distribution.

One of the differences between us that leads to confusion is that your main interest is in writing a book, whereas mine is simply to understand the nature of the phenomenon of witchcraft, and I am now satisfied that I have done so. However, the problem is that for me understanding implies stripping away most of the accidental and context dependent colour and detail with which witchcraft has been encrusted, and with which most students have

become enchanted, in order to get down to the underlying structure model or skeleton. Only by doing this can one see what witchcraft is really about, how it is manifested in different contexts and what it's essential features really are. When this has been achieved one discovers that what is usually considered witchcraft is no more than a special case of a more general phenomena, or process, that can be observed in almost any time and place, including our own. And that the interesting question is not the content of beliefs about witches, but how these work themselves out and shape and distort behavior in different contexts. Why, specifically, although the potential for witch fear and witch hunting is ubiquitous it varies so greatly with time and place, even within cultures with very similar belieifs and histories. I believe that my model of witch related phenomena can do this and also enable us to see the sticky fingerprints of the basic structure of beliefs and attitudes within our own culture. From this perspective we are better able to see what previously we had overlooked and identify dangers that we would be prudent to avoid. In short I believe that my interpretation of witchcraft helps towards a clearer vision and better understanding of the modern world.

First a note on Behringer.

* I have not found anything in his book that is incompatible with my interpretation. As you know my view of witchcraft is grounded, not on field or case studies, but very basic and general principles about human behavior and it implies that the potential for witch beliefs should be very general and present at most times and places - especially since the beginning of the neolithic period and settled agriculture. The real problem is not the existence of witch related beliefs, for I consider these natural and inevitable, but why these are associated with problems and maladaptive disturbances in some places and periods, but not others.

Behringer implies that belief in witches is universal and can be detected in all times and places. I have no problem with this, but I am wary of his conclusions and sources because he glosses over the huge differences in the number of reports from different places and periods, makes no attempt to relate these to population, and does not take account of relevant cultural differences, such as whether a society is oral or literate and the degree to which it has institutionalized record keeping. Instead he buttresses his argument with the assumption that existing reports represent only the tip of an iceberg and that huge numbers of relevant cases are unreported. That may well be the case, but not necessarily, and what is not reported is by

definition not available for examination. It is not inconceivable that what is assumed unreported might melt under closer scrutiny as many alleged cases of muti murders are said to, or might be found to be better interpreted in other ways.

The bottom line is that the number of reports from Africa today and Early Modern Europe are many orders of magnitude greater than those from much larger populations in other parts of the world, some of which have a much older culture with a sophisticated literature and history of record keeping. That witchcraft can be found there I do not doubt, but what I do is the extent of it and the degree of concern and harm with which it is associated. To go beyond the evidence, simply on the basis of the iceberg analogy, is at best weak and at worst extremely dangerous, as it is the usual justification for every kind of conspiracy theory and moral panic. It is not refutable and therefore not scientific and it should be considered as no more than one possibility among others.

In short Behringer suggests that witchcraft (in both senses - what witches do and what is done about them) is universal and ubiquitous. This is probably true. But, in addition, he goes beyond the evidence and implies, probably deliberately, that its incidence and prevalence is fairly evenly distributed across cultures. This is at best arguable but almost certainly not the case. And that casts a little doubt on his judgment and general conclusions. What seems clear is that evidence from other parts of the world are rather patchy and difficult to quantify.

My view is that though the potential for witch based beliefs and explanations is universal and endemic their manifestation and negative consequences are not, but instead vary widely and rarely achieve epidemic proportions.. Consequently the important question, and the only one worth asking, is not why people explain the working of the world in terms of witches, the answer to which is trivial, but why this only creates problems in a few places. In other words what are the local conditions or variables that cause a well nigh universal disposition to kindle into a dangerous epidemic? Or, to put it another way, what are the local conditions that contain witchcraft and limit the harm that it can do? I think that my interpretation of witchcraft can point to useful answers.

The real nature of witchcraft.

The motivation for witchcraft, why it developed and the question to which it is an answer, is to explain why bad things happen, especially to seemingly good people.

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It is arguable that if bad things did not happen, if Eve had not given in to temptation and we lived in a Garden of Eden without knowledge of good and evil, science and most intellectual activity would never have been invented - with woman came unanswerable questions. But, with the Fall bad things started to happen and with them the question why began to seem important. Why sickness, pain, hunger, death, storms, crop failures, and all kinds of misfortune - some absolute, many relative, but all clamouring for explanation. And this amounts to a search for an explanation as to how the world works or what accounts for changes.

Now, in general terms, there have only been two bases for explanations of this kind. The oldest, and even today by far the most common, is to explain the behavior of things, including everything from rocks, through fire and water, to human beings, in terms of living wilful agents, active and internally motivated, that behave in accordance with belief and desire. This amounts to an explanation of how the world works that is based on what we would nowadays describe as folk psychology rather than physics. In contrast, the younger, in practice little more than 200 years old, and mostly centred on the North Atlantic rim and the intellectual networks that have grown from it, builds its explanatory models from inanimate atoms without internal structure or motivation, whose behavior is the passive result of the action of external forces according to the strict rule of physical law. In terms of this system psychology is subsumed under physics, whereas in the other physics is essentially subsumed under psychology. However, they share one important feature: in order to explain most changes in the world each has to presume the existence of entities that are hidden from the ordinary senses. In the case of explanations in terms of psychological agents the hidden variables are networks of spiritual entities including gods demons and the spirits of the dead and of animals, in the case of phyical atoms they are concepts like energy and gravity. All of these intangibles can be correctly called occult, which simply means hidden. And it is interesting to remember that Newtons conception of gravity was criticized by Leibniz and others as 'an occult quality'. Although the implications, fecundity, and utility of modern scientific and animistic interpretations of the world are very different they are at root essentially isomorphic. They differ mostly in the nature of their fundamental components: active, internally motivated, agents in the case of animism; passive, inert, externally motivated atoms in the case of modern science.

However, it is important to appreciate that the contrast between agent based and atom based explanations of how the world works are not, in practice, mutually exclusive; for agents exist within a world of atoms and exhibit behaviors that cannot be easily, efficiently, or economically, accounted for in terms of atoms alone. There is nothing occult about this, any more than the behavior of my computer whose behavior while completely determined by the behavior of atoms is to a large extent much better described in terms of rules expressed in its software. Or, as in the case of human behavior, that we cannot yet talk of the subtleties of human behavior in terms of neurochemistry, or neurophysiology, but find it more meaningful, and in practice unavoidable, to refer to psychological constructs such as beliefs, desires, and other forms of intentionality. In modern scientific explanations a clear distinction is drawn between behaviors that can be completely accounted for in terms of atoms and others that are mediated by the behavior of brains and intentionality, or information. If you fall from a great height what happens to your body will be a function of the laws of physics, but why you jumped or were pushed might require a psychological explanations in terms of the behavior of agents. This distinction will be important when we come to consider the range of witch related phenomena and behavior. Witchcraft is always associated with agent based explanations, and can occur when the agents are ordinary human beings whose behavior is subsumed under an atomic explanation of the world, but it is manifested in its most dramatic form where the explanation of how the world works is in terms of agents rather than atoms. Failure to realize this has led to the range of witch related behavior to be restricted and a large part of it misinterpreted, because the relationships between structures that are essentially the same have been obscured and broken, with the result that a parts have been misclassified.

So, the existence of witch explanations of how the world works presupposes:

1. The experience of bad things happening.
2. The belief that certain individuals, either severally or as a group, have the capacity and will to cause extraordinary harm.
3. A feeling of relative powerlessness to escape such harm and the experience of being a victim.
2. That an explanation of change, including bad things happening, in terms of the behavior of agents is given precedence over one in terms of atoms. In traditional, or what might be called pre-atomic or pre-scientific, world views agents are for all practical purposes everything, and the role of atoms, if any, is insignificant.

3. That agents do not act (are not causally effective) in isolation, but form relationships with others. These can take the form of alliances, or contracts, to do things that would be beyond the capability of a specific or single agent. Hence the language of agency is one of obligations, and intentions, and responsibilities, and trustworthiness. In other words it is essentially ethical and fits easily with notions of loyalty, deceit, treachery, and treason.
4. That, unlike atoms, agents can choose the effects they produce on others. The Earth does not choose it's effects on the Moon, or vice versa, that is determined by the external physical relations between them. In contrast human beings can, to a considerable degree, choose the effects that they have on each other, and can to a lesser extent take advantage of the laws of physics to control the behavior of atoms. However, in the latter case, physical law always takes precedence. But, in a world dominated by agents this is not the case and psychological, or intentional, relations have precedence and dominate physical. Indeed in such a world the notion of physical law can have little meaning and is probably inconceivable.
5. A contrast with atomic or scientific explanations. Without atomic or scientific explanations witch based explanations would not exist as a distinguishable entity. They would be the only kind available and as much taken for granted as air, or water to a fish.

The alternative views of witchcraft are either that witchcraft refers to what witches do and is a crime with the witch as perpetrator, or that witchcraft is what people do about witches in order to protect themselves and others from harm.

The likelihood and and severity of the reaction to witchcraft will be inversely proportional to the relative range of bad things that can be accounted for by accident or natural causes. The more can be so accounted for the less chance will there be that local (within family and near neighbors) suspicions and accusations will escalate into an epidemic or major witch eradication movement.

DEFINITIONS

Note: in the following section I will for convenience use witchcraft to refer to all witch related phenomena. In other words not only what witches do but the whole complex of

reactions to the belief in the reality and existence of witches. Later I will make the distinction between witches and witchcraft clearer.

The first question that must be answered by any study of witch related phenomena is that of definition. What does the word witch mean, to what does it refer, and how has its meaning varied over time and place? This is surprisingly difficult as not only have some places and periods been studied far more intensively and comprehensively than others but from the outset one finds oneself in a Catch 22 situation: without an adequate definition one cannot quantify the distribution of the phenomena, yet at the same time how can one formulate a definition without some idea of how the phenomena are distributed? Too rigid a definition will make it difficult to find the wood, too loose will render the leaves invisible. Although in principle it would be possible to set up an international study of related phenomena in different countries, along the lines of the famous WHO study of schizophrenia, this would still presume some idea of the subject and it would only be applicable to existing communities. The only alternative is therefore to start with existing definitions, what other writers have thought it to be, and from them derive a core set of features or lowest common denominators for the notion. And to this can be added additional peripheral features that are contingent or context dependent and do not occur in every case. When this is done we will find that many features that have been thought characteristic of witches and witchcraft are in fact peripheral or secondary and that the core points to a phenomenon that has far wider implications and relevance.

The core definition of a witch is an individual living person who is believed to have extraordinary power to harm. The peripheral or second rank characteristics which are not present in every case are that the witches are usually, but not exclusively, female, that they may be unaware of their powers which are usually inherited and part of their nature, rather than learned, and hence are difficult to change. This makes the possibility of rehabilitation uncertain.

In the majority of cases reported the extraordinary powers.are derived from unembodied spirits and interpreted in terms of an animistic paradigm in which the world of the senses is only a small part of a greater whole that includes not only the living but the dead spirits and gods. The behavior of this world is understood not by the interaction of inert atoms according to the laws of physics, but by the psychology of living agents whether bodied or disembodied. And this feature of the more

ostentatious forms of witch behavior has led to most definition linking the source of the witches powers to the occult, paranormal or supernatural. As in 'a person who causes harm by magical means'. There is however a problem with linking witch activity to the occult for such a belief does not distinguish witches from anybody else in a community that understands the working of the world in terms of a wider world of spirits. What it does is highlight that the designation occult or supernatural is not a description but a judgement made from a position outside in space time or paradigm. And historically that has usuallyamounted to racism and colonialism. During the European witch crazes between 1450 and 1750 what distinguished witches from their accusers was not a distinction between normal and paranormal beliefs but between good and evil action or intent and evidence of breaching moral commandments. The ascription supernatural is always made from the self satisfied security of an enlightened world view and is usually a marker of contempt.

From my scientific interpretation of the world I do not think of physics when I switch a light or start the engine of my car I just do it taking the science and technology for granted. Likewise for those who interpret the world in terms not of physics but psychology. For them the wonders of magic and the occult are simply the technologies of a world with spirits. And they are taken for granted as air or a fish does the water in which it swims. In order to understand witches one must demote the connection to the occult, hence it is not part of the core definition.

PRE-CONDITIONS
Witches vs Witchcraft

Preconditions for witchcraft
1:Theory of mind disposing to -
A mindful world - agency v animism
2: Evil as separation
The polarization of good and evil to -
The personification and elaboration of evil. Evil as independent variable
3: Sensitivity to cheating (T& C) to -
The creation of victims to -
Vengeance
4. Is a feeling of being victim an emotion? And primary?

I have the feeling that one of the difficulties you have with my ideas about the development of the concept of the witch - for the witch is a concept not a physical organism - is that you tend to think of the stages as being too rigid - like a

clockwork mechanism that can only do one thing, as opposed to a higher living organism that can adapt to changing conditions and learn new tricks.

The following are some of the notions that I find useful and use repeatedly in thinking - even if I do not always refer to them explicitly:

Economics

In this context economics refers to the costs vs benefits that determines whether or not a change in an organism will increase or diminish its chances of survival. For example, the human brain is a very expensive organ that uses perhaps 30% of the energy required by the body. It also is so large that in order to allow a baby to pass through the female pelvis it has to be born at such an immature state in its development that it cannot survive without an extended period of dependency on its parents. Both of these factors should lead to a decrease in survival and that this is not the case is an indication of the considerable benefits that such a brain must provide.

Exaptation

This refers to something that has evolved for one purpose being taken over and adapted for another completely different. A good example is feathers, which originally evolved as a means of insulation and keeping warm and only later were exapted for the purpose of flight. The initial economic benefits of superior insulation were further enhanced or trumped by those of being able to fly hence the motive for the exaptation.

Co-evolution

As is the case with witchcraft it is a mistake to consider the emergence of, or changes in, an organism in terms of the organism alone. Any organism not only adapts to, but also changes its environment, and hence to appreciate and understand it is only possible by considering it in context. This means considering it not in isolation but as part of a system consisting of the organism and its environment. And as a dynamic rather than static system - a movie rather than a still.

Varieties of co-evolution:

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

One can consider co-evolution as made up of at least three kinds depending on the characteristics of the co-evolving context or environment:

1. The general physical environment. An illustration (by analogy) might be the co-evolution of motor vehicles and changes in the environment that they interact with - the network of roads and motels and gas stations and repair shops and showrooms that did not exist before their invention. Or beavers effects on the waterways they call home.

1. a) A special case is the co-evolution of language and the human brain. And there is an argument that it is helpful to consider language as if it was a co-evolving organism or coherent entity or whole.

2. The environment of other organisms. An example is the relation between predators and prey that over time has the characteristics of an arms race.

3. Sexual Selection - the environment of sexual and reproductive partners. If you were an evolving peacock and Judy a peahen and happen to have developed an unusually long tail, being herself a no-tail she is attracted to yours and so you mate and make more peacocks and hens. Although long tails are expensive - they make you less agile and more vulnerable to predators - if they are attractive to potential sexual partners they may lead to more sex and hence offspring and that may be sufficient to offset their costs. But when viewed as a system there is another factor involved. When reproduction is successful not only are the long-tail genes of the peacock passed on and preferred, but also the genes of the peahen that result in her having a preference for long tails. Hence the development of long tails is accelerated because it is not just dependent on the selection of male genes but also the genes for female preferences. Male and female co-evolve towards longer tails in the male and lust for longer tails in the female.

The co-evolution of witch and authority:

We are speculating that the economic motivation for the process that leads to the development of the concept of the witch was the experienced need to reconcile the potency of a leader and hierachical authority (emerging bureaucracy) and the existence of bad things such as natural disasters that are outwith human control and might be seen as rendering him impotent. In the early stages the preferred scapegoat might be expected to be someone who has comparable power to the leader - otherwise one

would have created the problem of how to reconcile the potency of the leader and that of a relatively insignificant person. A worthy opponent of comparable power is essential. The most likely might be the shamans or healers who are supposed to have direct contact with spirits and other worlds. But these are almost certainly valued, rare, and difficult to replace. And so the cost of accusations against them are probably very high. This would almost certainly lead to a rapid drift in the preferred characteristics of a scapegoat away from the potent shamans and healers towards the weaker and marginalized whose exclusion might have direct economic benefits. However, for that to work would require the alliance of the insignificant scapegoat with some greater and `supernatural' agents; such as Satan in the case of European witches.

A corollary of this would probably be a change in the status and function of the shamans and traditional healers toward their becoming witchfinders and eventually priests.

Hence the mechanism I am proposing might also account for the development of more formal religion and religious hierarchies often as complementary to the state.

WITCHCRAFT AND DEPRESSION

This is about one possible factor that may be important in accounting for the distribution and resiliance of witchcraft. Why, given its malignant effects on individuals and communities, is it so common and so difficult to change? What possible benefits does it provide that offset its negative effects?

So far, we have tended to consider those who believe themselves to be victims of witchcraft assaults to be unfortunate victims of circumstances - of blind chance and natural processes. This is undoubtedly the case when the bad things - kakia - being experienced are of a kind that affects communities, such as natural disasters and epidemics, and these are the kind of events that may lead to the larger scale of witchcraft phenomena. But what is associated with and leads to the small scale family focused manifestations - endemic rather than epidemic - that were probably the origin of the phenomenon, the seed from which it developed, and now account for its sustenance between epidemics? To try and gain a better understanding we must focus on the characteristics of the victim.

I would like to suggest that the prototypical victim is not randomly selected by fate, but is depressed, or suffering from

depression. And that, as in the case of depression in the West, the description has diffused beyond the boundaries of its original sense (more accurately reference or extension) and come to be applied more widely and indiscriminately.

In the USA today approximately 10% of the population take antidepressants and it is estimated that about 5% suffer from what might be called major depression. Note that like antibiotic prescribing there are more people being treated than is justified by their diagnosis. Being labelled depressed, or taking antidepressants, is popular with many patients. Note also that depression is more common in women than men.

Now it is a commonplace among doctors in Africa that Africans tend not to complain of mood disorders. Instead of being 'depressed' they will complain of weakness, impotence, or other physical symptoms. And generally these are of a kind that they, and native healers, would consider typical effects of witchcraft. Although it is to be expected that major or endogenous depression - thought to be associated with major neurotransmitter abnormalities in the brain rather than a simpler reaction to adverse circumstances - is no less common in SSA than USA, the model for depression that would seem most appropriate is that of Seligman's Learned Helplessness.

My impression is that another characteristic of depressed Africans is that, in addition to complaining of physical rather than emotional or mood symptoms, they are, perhaps ipso facto, relatively less likely to admit to feelings of guilt - in other words they are less likely to attribute their perceived misfortunes and dysphoria to their own history and behaviors, or to take personal responsibility for them (?). Instead they tend to a more paranoid interpretation attributing bad things happening to the malicious behavior of others - such as witches. This may contribute both to witchcraft and endemic abuses of human rights from violent crime all the way to genocide.

This is not unique to Africa. In my professional life I have noticed that fewer and fewer severely depressed patients complain of strong feelings of guilt. I believe that this is a sign of declining moral standards and that today few Brits and Americans have the moral maturity to experience guilt - they are more likely to sue. Paranoia cannot be far behind and the love of litigation only the first rumblings of the approaching front. Without more Prozac, perhaps even compulsory, genocide may return to haunt us.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Helplessness is the core of depression. In the case of major, or 'endogenous', depression it is probably a consequence of neurotransmitter imbalance and brain dysfunction, but it can also occur as a result of any circumstances that overwhelm the coping capacities of the sufferer. Bereavement, losses of every kind, and any insurmountable difficulties. In addition I would speculate that the constraints of tradition and the relative reduction in individuality and autonomy that it implies must dispose towards helplessness. The question is therefore: What can be done to reduce feelings of helplessness and 'treat' what our healers would probably label depression?

If helplessness and depression are linked as I have suggested, and in the absence of Big Pharma, Prozac, and formal therapies, or 'counseling', the best and indeed only option is to reformulate the problem in such a way as to reduce the feeling of helplessness and futility, or 'impotence', by suggesting an interpretation of events that points to things that can be done and people to be held accountable.

From this point of view witchcraft is probably adaptive and overall beneficial for the community. The cost is merely injustice and destruction of the human rights of a minority that is disposable.

The benefits are that it reduces the sense of helplessness and hence the liklihood of depression that might be an understandable effect of the insecurity of life in SSA. In doing so, by transferring the focus of accountability onto one or more others, it projects dysphoric feelings of self-doubt and responsibility onto them - depression is reduced at the expense of paranoia.

The costs include an underdeveloped sense of (moral) responsibility for ones own actions, a greater vulnerability to conform to group pressure, and a tendency to blame others for anything that one would prefer to avoid. The fact that it can also be used, unconsciously at least, to get rid of social obligations and marginals who are an embarrassment and perhaps a drain on resouces, is a bonus.

However, this solution has limits, because as the definition of 'depression' becomes more diffuse and more and more perpetrators have to be found and punished the security that paranioa provided is weakened and the increasing liklihood that one will oneself be accused leads to increasing insecurity, helplessness, and 'depression'. The 'treatment' has become a cause of the 'disease' it was intended to cure. Paranioa may be a partial

defense against depression, but it is never a satisfactory solution. And there are strong indications that it has become a major impediment to economic development and hence creates and maintains another, secondary, positive feedback loop - or vicious circle - poverty to helplessness to paranoia to witchcraft to retarded development to poverty. So it goes.

By providing a mechanism whereby endemic experiences of helplessness can be transformed into pseudo-effective procedures and activity the tradition of witchcraft reduces and contains the possibility of 'depression' albeit at the expense of justice and individual human rights. From the point of view of the community this is acceptable because it assumes and reinforces a view of the individual as a minor part of a greater whole that should always be given precedence. In the words of John Mbiti, 'I am, (but only) because we are'. My brackets.

These speculations are potentially testable in a number of ways. These are only three.

Study relation between prevalence of witchcraft activity and markers for depression.

Take two comparable communities in which witchcraft is endemic. Treat one with Prozac and the other with placebo. Observe markers for wc and depression. (this would of course be unethical).

As the prevalence of depression is different in men and women study the sex differences within populations of victims and alleged perpetrators.

There are conceptual links between witchcraft and fundamentalism and hence with terrorism. And hence the problem of how to change witchcraft is the same as how to reduce fundamentalism and eradicate terrorism.

First, because of features that I have discussed before, animism is relatively immune to contradictory evidence and essentially relies for support and sustenance on authority which beyond small populations is its inevitable outcome.

Second, according to Karen Armstrong one of the few factors that all fundamentalists share is a fear of annihilation. Islamists, fear the annihilation of their faith beneath the economic juggernaut of Disney and McDonalds. Christians fear annihilation by the forces of Satan, etc.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

It seems to me that much the same could be said of the fear of witches who are experienced as threatening the whole community and if unchecked will destroy what is considered precious.

I have found an American philosopher of the last century, Stephen C. Pepper, who has written about what seems to be the same notions as I call frameworks for interpretation. His book is called `World Hypotheses' and in it he argues that these are founded and grow around one of only a few basic metaphors.

WITCH AND TRAITOR

What is characteristic of the traitor as opposed to the spy is that the traitor is believed to act against his natural community for individual gain or advantage. A traitor gives individuality precedence over community.

Witchcraft can be viewed as a mechanism that neutralizes individuality and reasserts the power of community consensus.

Witch as individual and traitor
individuality as treason

BELIEFS

Witchcraft is the manifestations of a belief in the existence of witches
Witches are kinds of human beings postulated in order to explain why bad things happen. In this sense they are like a number of things that science has postulated in the past. These include the luminiferous aether that before Special Relativity Theory was considered necessary to explain the behavior of light; phlogiston to explain fire; and a number of sub-atomic particles that have been predicted by mathematical theories, but so far are undetected.

Witches and entities, like spirits, are essentially hypothetical, or postulated, entities that are thought to explain why and how the world works or behaves in ways that people would prefer to avoid. They differ from postulated scientific entities only in that like religions, or psychoanalytic concepts, they are not defined in a form that allows definitive disproof, and survive as conventional wisdom in local areas because of social or group pressures. The characteristics of a non-scientific hypothesis, like the existence of god, is that believers can always formulate an

explanation, from within their hypothesis, for whatever happens in an experiment. For example: if a researcher predicts that if x happens then god does not exist, the believer will point out that god could have willed x to happen in order to confuse the experimenter and maintain the precedence of faith. Likewise in psychoanalysis it is probably impossible to refute a proposed explanation for behavior, or to find any behavior that could not be explained by psychoanalysis.

Luminiferous Aether

In the late 19th century the luminiferous aether ("light-bearing aether"), or ether, was a substance postulated to be the medium for the propagation of light. Later theories including special relativity suggested that an aether did not have to exist, and today the concept is considered an obsolete scientific theory. (The word "aether" stems via Latin from the Greek ≈í¬±≈íœÄ≈í,àè≈í,àë≈ì√Ö, from a root meaning "to kindle/burn/shine", which signified the substance thought in ancient times to fill the upper regions of space, beyond the clouds.)

Ether, or luminiferous Ether, was the hypothetical substance through which electromagnetic waves travel. It was proposed by the greek philosopher Aristotle √î√∏¬∫ and used by several optical theories as a way to allow propagation of light, which was believed to be impossible in "empty" space.

It was supposed that the ether filled the whole universe √î√∏¬∫ and was a stationary frame of reference, which was rigid to electromagnetic waves but completely permeable to matter. Hooke √î√∏¬∫ endorsed the idea of the existence of the ether in his work Micrographia (1665), and other several philosophers of the 17th century, including Huygens, √î√∏¬∫ did the same. At the time of Maxwell's mathematical studies of electromagnetism, ether was still assumed to be the propagation medium and was imbued with physics properties such as permeability and permittivity.

In 1887, a crucial experiment was performed by Michelson √î√∏¬∫ and Edward Morley √î√∏¬∫ in an attempt to detect the existence of the ether. The experiment, named the Michelson-Morley experiment in honor of its authors, shocked the scientific community by yielding results which implied the non-existence of ether. This result was later on used by Einstein to refute the existence of the ether and allowed him to develop special relativity without this artificial (and non-existent) constraint.

phlogiston theory , hypothesis regarding combustion. The theory, advanced by J. J. Becher late in the 17th cent. and extended and popularized by G. E. Stahl, postulates that in all flammable materials there is present phlogiston, a substance without color, odor, taste, or weight that is given off in burning.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

,Äö√Ñ√∫Phlogisticated,Äö√Ñ√π substances are those that contain phlogiston and, on being burned, are ,Äö√Ñ√∫dephlogisticated.,Äö√Ñ√π The ash of the burned material is held to be the true material. The theory received strong and wide support throughout a large part of the 18th cent. until it was refuted by the work of A. L. Lavoisier, who revealed the true nature of combustion. Joseph Priestley, however, defended the theory throughout his lifetime. Henry Cavendish remained doubtful, but most other chemists of the period, including C. L. Berthollet, rejected it.
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Introduction

The aim of this exercise is to provide a unified account of the phenomenon of witchcraft. It is not based on original research, nor a detailed reading of the specialist literature, but amounts to a reformulation, or redescription, using general principles and information that is ready to hand.

The approach taken is that witchcraft is essentially a framework for interpretation and should be considered to have two major parts: a central kernel, or nucleus, that is the powerhouse, or reactor, that drives the phenomenon, and an outer shell of manifestations that are derivatives of the kernel. Only the latter are visible or tangible and hence easy to study. Most descriptions of witchcraft focus on features of the shell.

Whereas the kernel is universal and does not vary in form from one culture to another, or with stages of economic development, the modules that make up the shell are relatively plastic and reflect the form, fashions, colours, and technologies of the cultures in which they occur. An implication of this approach is that the nucleus of witchcraft is active in all societies and at all times. This has been obscured by colonialist or xenophobic attitudes that have identified the phenomenon with features of the shell, manifestations that are contingent on the peculiar characteristics of selected cultures that are remote and alien in time or place.

Because the working out of the derivatives that can be unpacked from the kernel in specific situations is relatively straightforward task, this account will focus mostly on the characteristics and functioning of the kernel.

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In summary: the nucleus of witchcraft is a framework for interpretation.

DEFINITION

The Kernel

The kernel of witchcraft can be analyzed into three necessary and interacting components: an event that causes concern, a doctrine that provides a framework for interpretation, and a response that is shaped by it.

The Provocative Event.

Witchcraft is essentially a response to a question about how best to respond to events that cause concern and that one would prefer to avoid. It starts from an event that is unexpected.

It is a universal characteristic of animals and especially humans that most unexpected events will lead to an increase in arousal accompanied by anxiety and in many cases fear. Examples should not be necessary, but think of the response of cats or dogs to thunder, or your response to loud or unexpected noises, or near collisions. The significance of unanticipated events will vary from innocuous to ominous, but in general the latter will include those that are difficult to explain or understand. And where the event is not simply unexpected, but involves disease, death, destruction, hunger, or helplessness fear will be more likely than mild arousal or anxiety.

As a general rule the first line in containing and reducing anxiety is to understand or explain the cause. In many cases that alone will be sufficient, and most people who consult psychologists about anxiety will do so either because the cause is not apparent, so called `free-floating' anxiety, or because the anxiety is disproportionate to the cause, as in phobias. The first human to put his hand in a fire presumably experienced distress and anxiety, but once the characteristics of fire were understood it was possible to avoid burns and use it for our benefit with relative equanimity. Likewise with water, electricity, horses, wild animals, guns, explosives, hand grenades, and nuclear weapons.

One of the important characteristics of our modern scientific and technology based culture is that it attempts, with increasing success, to reduce unexpected events to a minimum, or to contain them to carefully controlled situations such as horror movies or fairground rides. And those aspects of nature that are difficult to control are extruded to the margins. This was far less so in the past and in other parts of the world.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Nowadays, we, a privileged minority, tend to live in a society where most of what happens is the result of human action and intent. This has significant implications of that will be discussed later.

In summary, what is unexpected and causes concern clamours for an explanation and motivates us to seek a better understanding of how the world works.

The Doctrine.

In their original sense doctrines were frameworks for explanation or interpretation. As such they have to be distinguished from hypotheses (or theories or models) to which they are related as higher order or meta-hypotheses, similar to the paradigms made famous by Thomas Kuhn in `The Structure of Scientific Revolutions'. Doctrines or paradigms determine the hypotheses and models that are considered acceptable and hence the facts that make up our description of the world in which we live.

As a general rule it is much easier to change hypotheses than doctrines, perhaps because we take them for granted and are less conscious of them. They are like water to fishes. As Einstein observed: "What does a fish know about the water in which he swims all his life?" As a result attempting to change a doctrine requires a different approach from that for changing a hypothesis.

In the case at hand the events which provoke or kindle witchcraft fears and accusations are in themselves relatively neutral as to their cause. In particular, there is nothing intrinsic about their nature that would identify them as being examples of witch related phenomena. In the same way there is nothing about a stolen apple that would identify it as such, or distinguish it from one that was not. It is only in the context of a doctrine of witchcraft that an event is interpreted as being an example of witchcraft, and a doctrine of property law that an apple can be considered stolen.

Doctrines and paradigms filter out a particular understanding of the world from the `buzzing, blooming, confusion' of our experience. And changing the doctrine changes the filtrate and the facts about the world. To a considerable extent, that leaves the possibility of a transcendent reality open, our world is not given but motivated and constructed for a purpose. And it would be more accurate to express this in the plural - our worlds are

not given but motivated. See Nelson Goodman, `Ways or Worldmaking'.

The phenomenon of witchcraft is a product of a doctrine that determines and allows it. And that doctrine is a part of a larger one, one among several alternatives, that provides a more general interpretive framework for how the world works.

Doctrines vs Theories

Doctrines are higher order or meta-hypotheses that provide frameworks for explanation and interpretation. Unlike ordinary hypotheses, that are scientific only to the extent that they are refutable, doctrines are not directly refutable, but depend for their status and survival on the richness and utility of the questions and theories that they facilitate and that can be derived from them. "By their fruits ye shall know them, do men gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles?" The best term for this richness of consequences is fecundity (or that suggested by Peirce `uberty'; from the Latin ubertas for richness, fecundity, and copiousness: see `One Two Three Uberty' in Umberto Eco and Thomas Sebeok, `The Sign of Three'). Doctrines are judged by their fecundity.

[This sense of doctrine is similar to the notion of a paradigm as used by Kuhn in `The Structure of Scientific Revolutions'. And the distinction between doctrines and theories or hypotheses helps to explain the difficulty in changing attitudes towards religion, risks, and danger. All of these are based in doctrines and yet most attempts to change attitudes rely on education or presenting more and better facts. In general a doctrine is like a faith and one cannot change it by providing alternative` evidence', but only and perhaps by making believers conscious of the critical cases that cannot be explained by the doctrine. Doctrines are largely self-contained explanatory systems and those that survive do so because they are able to account for phenomena. They differ not in their fecundity in terms of the sheer number of hypotheses generated, but in the extent to which these hypotheses are refutable and hence capable of provisional scientific validation - which is the best that can be hoped for. But these scientific criteria and values are unique to the scientific doctrine or world view and satisfy only those who believe in it. Other doctrines have other values and offer different satisfactions.]

The problem is that witchcraft like psychoanalysis is not easily refutable, as William James said of the psychology of Wilhelm Wundt `it's like a worm, you cut it up and every fragment

crawls'. In general you cannot attack a doctrine with a mass of evidence, because a successful doctrine will be able to absorb and transform it into its own terms. Instead you have to try and replace it with another by finding and highlighting those critical cases where the old doctrine is found wanting. And even then it is exceedingly difficult for the cost of the benefits that a doctrine offers is an attentional blindness for any incongruity, or cognitive dissonance, that might threaten it.

Hypotheses are more focussed than doctrines and can often be changed without threatening the integrity of the latter. On the other hand doctrines are thickets of relationships between hypotheses facts and attitudes and hence are much more difficult to change. All mammals have the same set of organs and in principle it should be possible to transplant the organs from one species into another, but we do not yet know how, or why, we might transform one species into another.

The Response.

The concern generated by the provoking events leads to a search for an explanation in terms of a prevailing doctrine of how the world works that includes and permits the existence of witchcraft interpretations (the nature of that doctrine will be discussed later). And when the events are interpreted in terms of witches and witchcraft these are further categorized as dangerous and the doctrine suggests ways in which the danger can be treated and avoided in the future. The working out of these implications results in the formation of the outer visible shell of the phenomenon.

[Behaviors, roles, social structures and institutlons are implied by and flow from the doctrine, and evolve as a means of damage limitation, prophylaxis, and retribution for alleged harm. These secondary phenomena are the only tangible manifestations of witchcraft that can be studied and being context dependent and conventional are variable in form. From the point of view of the overall concept these variations are trivial, but unfortunately have been and still are the cause of much wasted time and thought. Like the notions of energy, gravity, capital, and property (and perhaps consciousness) witchcraft itself is invisible and intangible and known only through its manifestations and effects. It has a hollow centre and a nose of wax. On a smaller scale it is like the Roman Catholic Church a grand and complex organization that has a long history and spawned many variations and yet is built on an illusion or misunderstanding of how the world works. The reality

of the witch is in the eyes of her accusers and the institutions that give them authority.]

The animistic doctrine has a place for witches and witchcraft is one of its sub-doctrines or paradigms. And according to the doctrine of witchcraft witches are conceived as having a causally effective role in channeling and directing powers that produce changes in the world. In an animistic world they function like energy in physics, but unlike energy they are not morally neutral. Although the powers available can produce good or bad effects those used by witches always result in bad outcomes.

The Kernel in Action

The Nature of Doctrines

The core of the whole phenomenon of witchcraft is the doctrine or paradigm. As a first approximation it might be considered a processor of information with the provoking events as input and the response, including the creation of the shell derivatives, as output. More accurately, to use Dennett and Haugelands' term, doctrines are a (conceptual) `prosthetic extension of the minds of those who use them' that support and facilitate, or catalyzes, the processing of information by the brain. In this it is similar to the abacus, computer, or pen and paper. But whereas these support only one, or at most a few processes, the functions of doctrines are far more extensive and approximate to a global view of how the world works.

In what follows it is important to remember that what we experience through our ordinary senses has never been sufficient to make sense of the world; whether explaining the past or making reliable predictions about the future. To develop a reliable model of how the world works requires the addition of hidden variables that are not accesible to our senses. In the past these have taken the form of disembodied agents - the dead, spirits, demons, and a panthoen of gods. In the scientific world they take the form of unseen entities like atoms and subatomic particles, or the four fundamental forces - gravity, electromagnetism, or the strong and weak forces.

As such, their first function is to help pre-process experiences by filtering and `holding a (distorting) mirror up to nature'. They do this by providing a framework for interpreting events. After Kant we do not experience anything `in itself', or as with the eye of God, but only aspects of things, or a thing AS

something. I never see my table in itself, only the table from a particular point of view that reveals some aspects while obscuring others, or one function, such as eating or writing, among many alternatives (how many uses can one think of for a table, or a brick?). Doctrines help us to do this by transforming experiences into components of a view, or more accurately a conception, of the world and how it works, that privileges some aspects at the expense of others. And in doing this it determines not only what we are aware of but what we can and will actually perceive. For according to Goodman's paraphrase of Kant - `although conception without perception is merely empty, perception without conception is blind (totally inoperative)' (Ways of Worldmaking).

In addition to providing frameworks for interpretation, explanation, and perception, doctrines allow us to represent, or see, things that are invisible to our ordinary senses. These are the things that one can only `see' with the `eye' of reason - why Plato regarded reason as a sense (?). These include:

First: Things that cannot be detected by our unaided senses, but might be in the future with the development of new prostheses. Examples from the past might include micro-organisms, the structure of living cells, molecules, and atoms.

Second: Things that cannot or have not been seen, but are predicted from their effects on others that are known. Examples might include unknown planets predicted from their gravitational effects on those that are known, and elements (atoms) whose existence was suggested by gaps in the periodic table. When that was first constructed it had many gaps for atoms that were at the time unknown. The table not only provided evidence for their existence, but also suggested their properties and how they would react with others, which made finding them much easier. Electricity might be another example.

Third: Things that can never be seen, but that are required for the working of our models of how the world works and that help us to predict outcomes. Among these are mathematical constructs (which some mathematicians consider to be more real than anything we see) and notions like energy and perhaps electricity and magnetism. The concept of energy allows us to develop a unified understanding of the behaviour of many different things, and make use of that knowledge to create new devices and technologies. Yet `pure' energy is completely `invisible' to the senses and cannot be revealed by any conceivable prostheses. All that we can see are the various forms, manifestations, or stores of energy (mountain lakes, electricity, wood, coal, oil, gas

etc) and its various effects. In a similar way Quantum Theory which is regarded as the most accurate and best validated of all time, and on which the whole of our modern technology depends, can be represented and hence understood only by someone who has a sophisticated familiarity with advanced maths. To the traditional educated layperson its elegance is forever hidden; even to the eye of reason and love. Energy and the mathematical notions that are fundamental to Quantum Mechanics are heuristic devices that allow us to build reliable models of the world. And in naming and using them we conjure them into some kind of reality.

To borrow from Shakespeare: doctrines facilitate perception and creative processing, "and as imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown, the poet's pen turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name".

But, there is no such thing as a free lunch and the many benfits of doctrines come with a price - that for every aspect of the world that a doctrine reveals, others will be concealed, and sink below the level of our awareness. There is no single doctrine or paradigm that will reveal all that there is, or could be. To transcend the blinkers of a particular doctrine involves not just tinkering with its components, but replacing it with another. That is why it is so hard to change the doctrines that have become part of the local conventional wisdom. No quantity of new or better information can guarantee success as well meaning educationalists have discovered to their cost. For the most common models of education are linear, involving the gradual accumulation of information, whilst the replacement of one doctrine with another is non-linear and revolutionary. The difference between changing a hypothesis and a paradigm is not one of education, but conversion in the religious sense.

Another way of looking at this is that doctrines are higher order forms of conceptual organization; they are meta-hypotheses and as such determine what kind of hypotheses are possible, permitted, and how they are related. Doctrines organize and structure the knowledge contained in many hypotheses. And to change them you have to operate at the level of doctrines rather than hypotheses. Any doctrine that has survived for more than a moment will relatively easily ingest, digest, and incorporate any conflicting hypotheses.

The Relation between Anxiety Fear Danger and Risk

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In the context of witchcraft the function of the doctrine is to process the dystonic experience of arousal and anxiety that results from unexpected events, into fear, danger, and risk.

Arousal is a non-specific response to the unexpected and is usually associated with anxiety. In circumstances where anxiety is severe the most effective and least costly means of reducing it is to locate its cause and by understanding it gain some control over it and find ways of preventing it recurring. This process transforms anxiety into fear. Fear is anxiety that has been grounded and focussed in a cause and an explanation.

When this has been achieved the objective cause, that grounds the chain that leads from it to the unexpected event and the experienced anxiety, becomes classified as a danger.

Whilst risk is simply danger quantified.

According to this model, anxiety and fear are related to danger as the two sides of a door. Fear and anxiety on the side facing inward and subjective, danger on that facing outwards and objective. Fear and anxiety are inner or brain states and danger objective, in the sense that, although not a thing but a description, it is grounded in things.

It is the doctrine of witchcraft that processes anxiety into fear and creates something dangerous - the witch to account for them.

The Doctrine of the Witch

The two major doctrines that have shaped our understanding of how the world works and the institutions that we have developed to help us interact with it, are the animistic and the scientific. Of these the scientific has been in the ascendent for only the last few hundred years, starting about four hundred years ago, but becoming dominant in only the last two. And although it has been outstandingly effective in transforming our lives both materially and intellectually, it has remained the doctrine of a minority.

It is essentially the doctrine of the countries of the North Atlantic rim and those cultures colonized or influenced by them. And even in the USA and Western Europe where it developed, and that have until now benefitted most from it, no more than 20% of the population accept it exclusively and without reservation. The remainder retain at least some belief in some form of

animism and there is little evidence that their number is diminishing. For example, regular surveys of beliefs in USA indicate that 96% believe in God, 71% in an afterlife, 90% pray and 41% attend religious services. These figures have remained constant for the last 60 years. And regarding the origins of human beings, a survey in 2004 revealed that only 13% believed that they developed without divine intervention, whilst 45% believed that they had been created in their present form by God alone within the last 10.000 years.

Hence in spite of its relative lack of success in transforming our world the animistic doctrine has been that of the vast majority of human beings who have ever lived and remains the preference of far more than 95% of the present world population. And, although it is not compatible with the development of the kind of technologies on which we now depend, it clearly allows the evolution of complex sustainable civilizations and cultures with high levels of intellectual activity and artistic attainment.

So, the scientific doctrine is both recent and local.

The Scientific Doctrine.

According to the doctrine of science the world is made up of inert, inanimate, atoms that for practical purposes cannot be created or destroyed. All the many kinds of stuff with which we interact, and on which we depend, are combinations of less than a hundred different kinds of atoms. These come together, move, and change according to the constraints of the conservation of energy and the strict rule of physical laws that are considered to have been the same, constant, predictable, reliable, inviolable, since the origins of the universe and everywhere other than in the centre of singularities such as black holes.

These laws are blind to the whims of humans and so can define what is possible, make predictions precise, and account trails and quantification consistent. That is what makes it possible to construct hypotheses that are capable of refutation and hence enables us to select those that best fit the world of our experience.

Our technology and culture is utterly dependent on a nature that is deaf to our prayers. We can learn to work with nature, but cannot change the rules by which it operates.

The Animistic Doctrine.

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In contrast to the scientific, the animistic doctrine considers that the world is not made from tiny, inert, lumps, of matter moving passively according to blind physical laws, but living entities with minds, only some of which are embodied. These interact, as people do, according to folk psychology based on attitudes, beliefs and desires and according to conventions such as man made laws. Instead of inviolable natural laws that are deaf to human prayers everything is negotiable and trust in the consistency of the future is the expectation that a promise will be kept rather than the certainty that a physical law will be obeyed.

This is a world not of things but of descriptions of things, some of which like minds are not always acknowledged in the scientific doctrine. It is intensional rather than extensional and follows intensional logic that has different characteristics. Most importantly the truth of statements or descriptions is not truth-functional, i.e. the truth of a statement is not dependent on that of its component parts, but that of each is exquisitely sensitive to its context. Hence the truth of a statement cannot be known without taking the knowledge of the speaker into account. Sentence meaning is not necessarily congruent with speaker meaning. This makes prediction difficult and largely rules out the development of hypotheses that meet scientific standards by being capable of definite refutation. Hence it is almost impossible to build up a systematic and coherent structure of knowledge. Within the doctrine too many incongruent hypotheses can be imagined without easy refutation. The same problem that prevents disciplines like psychoanalysis from being considered scientific and providing convincing evidence for their utility and effectiveness. And this makes it extremely difficult to move from the closed world of animism to one that is more `scientific'.

There is a related problem. One of the most important questions which any doctrine that attempts to explain how the world works must answer is how to account for change. According to the scientific doctrine change results from differences in energy and the relentless beat of the Second Law Of Thermodynamics. But in an animistic doctrine change is accounted for by the will of intentional agents with complex and whimsical internal states. And as in the history of religions there is a trend from pantheistic, through henotheistic towards dualistic or monotheistic conceptions of deity, so there is a tendency for the power of many competing agents to be brought together into a monolithic hierarchical organization. As this happens the action of the system of gods or agents becomes increasingly like that of a physical force.

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The difference between a scientific force and an animistic one is that the latter attempts to answer a second important question that the scientific doctrine tends to ignore: How can one account for bad things happening to good people? This question is only relevant under an animistic doctrine and a culture that is moving towards monotheism where it takes the form: How could a good God allow bad things to happen to good people?

Under a scientific doctrine such a question is meaningless, because considerations of good and evil are external to physical causes and effects, they are in essence meta-physical, and the outcome of often random events are without intention and will sometimes please and at others displease humans. Good and evil are ex post facto moral judgements on events rather than intrinsic to their nature.

In contrast, under an animistic doctrine the actions of agents that account for change are intrinsically moral and conceived in terms approximating to a moral force of nature that is bipolar. And there is a further tendency for the forces for good and bad (or evil) to be conceived as external like energy or gravity - though usually described in terms of the actions of good and bad agents such as the Holy Spirit and Satan. It may be that this observed tendency, in cultures where the scientific and animistic doctrines co-habit, to explain the existence of bad things as being like an external force is due to a looping back from notions like energy or gravity drawn from physical science. In more purely animistic societies such as foragers - the `prescientific' view would be in terms of the actions of agents.

To summarize the differences between a scientific and animistic doctrine. The scientific is based on the notion of inert atoms that move in accordance with physical laws that are inviolable, amoral, and blind and deaf to human wishes. In contrast, the animistic is based on the behaviour of mindful agents, bodied and disembodied, whose actions are determined by beliefs, desires, and how they represent the world including their own place in it. In contrast to the scientific it is intrinsically moral and there are no laws that would allow certainty in prediction. Instead there is only folk psychology, rules, conventions and man made laws that are frequently broken. And though the latter attempt to make prediction as reliable as possible by suggesting that compliance is in accordance with some kind of natural moral code, it is never completely successful.

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The difference between a physical and a moral law or force is that the latter acts on the world only indirectly, through the behaviour of agents.

Primary and Secondary Animism.

This terminology is not completely satisfactory but attempts to draw out similarities between worlds ruled by animistic and scientific doctrines.

We have already noted how the scientific doctrine is fully accepted by only a small minority, even in those countries that have used it for longest and gained most from it. Part of this may be accounted for by the fact that its utility has not been universal. In particular although it has been essential for the development of the physical sciences, on which most of our technological culture and comfort depends, it has been much less effective at dealing with psychological and social problems. This is primarily because these are not about things, but descriptions of things and depend of how things are represented. Their logic is therefore intensional, and one could consider that many of our most important tranditional institutions such as the Law are attempts to overcome the idiosyncracies of statements that are not truth functional.

Many scientists ignore this and despise what they have come to rerfer to, rather patronisingly, as folk psychology. But, though no one would suggest that predicting behaviour in terms of beliefs and desires is as reliable as predicting the movement of the planets with the help of Newton's laws, it is not at all clear that replacing mental states with levels of neurotransmitters in the brain ("my serotonin is 9 today") would be any more useful than trying to tell you what I am doing at this moment, or its worth, in terms of the states of transistors and capacitors in my computer. So those who cannot accept the scientific doctrine as exclusively sufficient for an understanding of the world, or even to make one's way through it, may have a point. The scientific doctrine may not allow the best solution to all questions.

But there is a second sense in which one can defend the notion of secondary animism. As mentioned earlier we live in a society in which most of the things, both tangible and intangible, with which we interact are made and controlled by humans and in which the less predictable natural world is pushed to the margins or coralled for our safety. As a result whenever unexpected things happen that are considered bad, in that they cause some kind of harm, there is an increasing tendency to blame someone, as

either negligent or malicious, for what would in the past have been accepted as an accident. The significance of the notions of the self or individual is becoming increasingly forensic. This tendency, that can be thought of as a kind of secondary animism growing on top of a scientific doctrine, creates an environment in which the kernel of witchcraft can grow and thrive. That this has not been noted, other than as a metaphor or trope, is because of the tendency to link witchcraft to alien cultures that believe in the supernatural. In reality, although an enchanted world makes the developement of witchcraft phenomena easier, it is neither necessary nor sufficient.

It might be objected that what I am describing as secondary animism is no more than ordinary human behaviour and would be so under any conceivable doctrine. And if that is so what would be added if sometimes it were called witchcraft? The answer is the notion of the social amplification of risk and also fear and danger. The significance of this phenomenon has only become apparent in the last few decades, as under the scientific doctrine techniques have been developed that allow risks to be measured with some objectivity and hence the differences between real and perceived risk to be quantified. This has revealed that the perception of risk is often distorted by a significant margin. In some cases such as AIDS or tobacco the real risk tends to be diminished, but in others such as the dangers of nuclear power or global warming it is greatly increased. The same goes for child abduction and murder by paedophiles, and for becoming a victim of terrorism. It is possible to put figures on these, but the bottom line is that witchcraft phenomena are more likely to be noted where the perceived risk of becoming a victim and associated fear and sense of danger of something bad happening is greater than the real. This is most likely to happen in cultures where knowledge about how the world works is based on agents rather than atoms. An animistic world is an unpredictable world; one in which it is difficult to ground the anxiety induced by the unexpected in causal mechanisms that do not include malice and the liklihood of recurrence. And in these cases not only are there likely to be a far larger proportion of unexpected events, but the availability of witchcraft as an explanation further amplifies the anxiety. We need to know more about the variables that facilitate the amplification of fear and danger and how best to neutralize them; simply relying on education, in the sense of providing more and better information is unlikley to be sufficient.

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There are conceptual links between witchcraft and fundamentalism and hence with terrorism. And hence the problem of how to change witchcraft is the same as how to reduce fundamentalism and eradicate terrorism.

First, because of features that I have discussed before, animism is relatively immune to contradictory evidence and essentially relies for support and sustenance on authority which beyond small populations is its inevitable outcome.

Second, according to Karen Armstrong one of the few factors that all fundamentalists share is a fear of annihilation. Islamists, fear the annihilation of their faith beneath the economic juggernaut of Disney and McDonalds. Christians fear annihilation by the forces of Satan, etc.

It seems to me that much the same could be said of the fear of witches who are experienced as threatening the whole community and if unchecked will destroy what is considered precious.

I have found an American philosopher of the last century, Stephen C. Pepper, who has written about what seems to be the same notions as I call frameworks for interpretation. His book is called `World Hypotheses' and in it he argues that these are founded and grow around one of only a few basic metaphors.

Witch and traitor

What is characteristic of the traitor as opposed to the spy is that the traitor is believed to act against his natural community for individual gain or advantage. A traitor gives individuality precedence over community.

Witchcraft can be viewed as a mechanism that neutralizes individuality and reasserts the power of community consensus.

Witch as individual and traitor
individuality as treason

Witchcraft is the manifestations of a belief in the existence of witches
Witches are kinds of human beings postulated in order to explain why bad things happen. In this sense they are like a number of things that science has postulated in the past. These include

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the luminiferous aether that before Special Relativity Theory was considered necessary to explain the behavior of light; phlogiston to explain fire; and a number of sub-atomic particles that have been predicted by mathematical theories, but so far are undetected.

Witches and entities, like spirits, are essentially hypothetical, or postulated, entities that are thought to explain why and how the world works or behaves in ways that people would prefer to avoid. They differ from postulated scientific entities only in that like religions, or psychoanalytic concepts, they are not defined in a form that allows definitive disproof, and survive as conventional wisdom in local areas because of social or group pressures. The characteristics of a non-scientific hypothesis, like the existence of god, is that believers can always formulate an explanation, from within their hypothesis, for whatever happens in an experiment. For example: if a researcher predicts that if x happens then god does not exist, the believer will point out that god could have willed x to happen in order to confuse the experimenter and maintain the precedence of faith. Likewise in psychoanalysis it is probably impossible to refute a proposed explanation for behavior, or to find any behavior that could not be explained by psychoanalysis.

Luminiferous Aether
In the late 19th century the luminiferous aether ("light-bearing aether"), or ether, was a substance postulated to be the medium for the propagation of light. Later theories including special relativity suggested that an aether did not have to exist, and today the concept is considered an obsolete scientific theory. (The word "aether" stems via Latin from the Greek ≈í¬±≈íœÄ≈í,àè≈í,àë≈ì√Ö, from a root meaning "to kindle/burn/shine", which signified the substance thought in ancient times to fill the upper regions of space, beyond the clouds.)
Ether, or luminiferous Ether, was the hypothetical substance through which electromagnetic waves travel. It was proposed by the greek philosopher Aristotle √î√∏¬∫ and used by several optical theories as a way to allow propagation of light, which was believed to be impossible in "empty" space.
It was supposed that the ether filled the whole universe √î√∏¬∫ and was a stationary frame of reference, which was rigid to electromagnetic waves but completely permeable to matter. Hooke √î√∏¬∫ endorsed the idea of the existence of the ether in his work Micrographia (1665), and other several philosophers of the 17th century, including Huygens, √î√∏¬∫ did the same. At the time of Maxwell's mathematical studies of electromagnetism, ether was

still assumed to be the propagation medium and was imbued with physics properties such as permeability and permittivity.
In 1887, a crucial experiment was performed by Michelson √î√∏¬¬ and Edward Morley √î√∏¬¬ in an attempt to detect the existence of the ether. The experiment, named the Michelson-Morley experiment in honor of its authors, shocked the scientific community by yielding results which implied the non-existence of ether. This result was later on used by Einstein to refute the existence of the ether and allowed him to develop special relativity without this artificial (and non-existent) constraint.

phlogiston theory , hypothesis regarding combustion. The theory, advanced by J. J. Becher late in the 17th cent. and extended and popularized by G. E. Stahl, postulates that in all flammable materials there is present phlogiston, a substance without color, odor, taste, or weight that is given off in burning. ,Äö√Ñ√∫Phlogisticated,Äö√Ñ√π substances are those that contain phlogiston and, on being burned, are ,Äö√Ñ√∫dephlogisticated.,Äö√Ñ√π The ash of the burned material is held to be the true material. The theory received strong and wide support throughout a large part of the 18th cent. until it was refuted by the work of A. L. Lavoisier, who revealed the true nature of combustion. Joseph Priestley, however, defended the theory throughout his lifetime. Henry Cavendish remained doubtful, but most other chemists of the period, including C. L. Berthollet, rejected it.
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FREQUENCY OF WITCHCRAFT
In an attempt to find out how common witchcraft phenomena might be in other parts of the world I have been doing some rather crude research using Google and the Amazon (UK and USA) and Abe books databases. Whereas Amazon searches on books in print Abe Books includes second hand and hence out of print titles. There is also a difference between the search tools for Amazon UK and USA. In UK one can search on titles that include several different terms. In the USA because many books have their contents indexed one can search on books whose contents contain the several terms used - hence the results of Amazon USA are more like those of Google.

This would be easier as a spreadsheet but here is the explanation.

1. To the left of the = are the two keywords used for searching (witchcraft + africa etc).

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2. To the right of the = is first the results of a Google search for sites that contain both the keywords. As you will know from using Google this is always an inflated figure that includes lots of irrelevant results. So I next searched Google for pages that included the keywords in the title and as you will see this dramatically reduced the numbers of hits. The Google results are given as Sites containing the keywords / keywords in title only.
3. The figures in the first set of brackets are for the results of search for keywords in the title of books listed by Amazon UK which are in print or recently so / And those listed by Abe Books that include books that are out of print but available second hand.
4. The second brackets contain the numbers of books listed by Amazon USA that contain the keywords in their text. Hence these are closer in kind to those of a simple Google search.

key1 + key2 = Google text/title (in book title Amazon UK inprint/ Abe all) (Amazon USA in contents)

wc + europe = 144000/766 (45/217) (8971)
wc + africa = 96000/98 (12/87) (7163)
wc + india = 118000/32 (1/22)(6838)
wc + asia = 58300/19 (1/38) (5836)

wc + china = 110000/6 (0/0) (6621)
wc + indonesia = 24000/2 (0/0) (1726)
wc + malaysia = 12000/3 (0/0) (1272)
wc + micronesia = 2650/0 (0/0) (284)
wc + japan = 132000/0 (0/0) (4899)
wc + islam = 47200/0 (0/0) (3253)
wc + muslim = 25700/0 (0/0) (3485)

Of these figures the ones I consider most informative and meaningful are the Google title (after the forward slash) and those for Amazon UK and Abe - books with the keywords in the title.

They suggest strongly that the only areas that have considered witchcraft significant enough to merit a book or titled paper are Europe, Africa, India and/or Asia (I suspect that you would find that most of the results for Asia referred to India). The large numbers of Google hits almost certainly consist of weak links based on a context of a general interest in the occult and mysticism.

Given the size and importance of China and its long history of study by sinologists it seems remarkable that there do not appear to be any books published on witchcraft there.

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They also suggests that there is probably a link between witchcraft and christianity as the African and Indian continents were colonies of European Christian countries. I have not been able to find a significant link to the Dutch East Indies but there may well have been a different relation there between the Europeans and local population? Is there any evidence for differences in prevalence within Africa between areas colonized by different European countries?

The figures for Europe and Africa are certainly underestimates as they would be vastly increased by considering witchcraft in relation to individual countries, peoples, areas - these would be more likely to appear in the titles of academic papers than more general regions like Africa e.g. Azande.

It would be worth finding a good researcher who could access more detailed databases and produce more reliable results.

Finally these are not for publication as they are only an informal preliminary attempt to validate the view that witchcraft is largely a European and African phenomenon. They are a pointer to a more meaningful study.

Witchcraft is a side issue as far as the work of the ILD is concerned, but it is the most exotic form of extra legal criminal law as it has emerged in societies whose framework for interpreting how the world works is amost exclusively animistic. It is likely to be found in any African country south of the Sahara correlated with economic issues including property. But, to a much lesser extent elsewhere - hence the importance of being aware of it when working in Africa.

In order to understand it one should start not with its `magical' adornments, but universal ways of explaining how bad things (things that one would prefer to avoid) happen and what can be done to correct and prevent them.

In every society there will be two major kinds of possible explanation:

1. Natural or Accidental - Events that are caused by physical or natural law and outwith human control. Hurricanes, floods, volcanic eruptions etc.

2. Forensic - Events caused by human agency and for which responsibility can be attributed. Murder, violence, burglary etc.

In our culture these are treated as being more or less exclusive categories and, in the case of the forensic, responsibility will depend on establishing a causal link, based on accepted physical or scientific law, between a perpetrator and the alleged crime, or the harm done. Hence, were I to claim that, at a time that I was tucked up in bed in Truro, I had murdered someone in Lima using some magical means not recognized by science, I would only be liable to being charged with wasting police time.

In contrast, in a culture that is based on an animistic, rather than an atomic or scientific, interpretation about how the world works, the Natural and Forensic categories will not be exclusive, and the proportion that are believed to be adequately accounted for as Natural will be far smaller. For example, while it might be accepted that someone died as a result of being caught by a landslide, that would not be considered a sufficient explanation. Instead of being satisfied by an explanation of how the victim died the question would be: Why? Why was he in the path of the landslide at the particular time? And the conclusion implied is that someone is responsible for bringing that conjunction about.

In thinking about the causes or explanations for events there is a tendency to confuse the questions HOW? and WHY? In ordinary usage we tend to ask why something happens and yet be satisfied with an explanation of how it did. How is a question about causal chains, whilst why is about motivation and implies an agent; usually human individuals or groups. The natural and scientific is concerned with how things happen; the forensic and ethical is concerned with why they did.

The animistic world is predominantly a forensic world of `why' explanations because it is based on entities that unlike atoms are not inert but living and minded and motivated by will and desire and representations. Instead of being ruled by blind and predictable physical law it is governed by living beings whose minds can be changed by negotiation and manipulation. Instead of gravity you have intentions and promises and preferences. It is a much scarier place.

But when you strip away, or factor out, the local colorations that make it seem so exotic to our scientific senses, what one finds is that the underlying model of witchcraft is perhaps closest to the notion of treachery or treason - individuals and groups experiencing themselves as being the victim, or vulnerable to, the malevolence of others who are hidden or excluded from them and often in their midst.

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The manifestations of extra legal criminal law, vigilantism of all kinds, are motivated by the experience of being excluded from the protection of the legal law; of the failure of the legal law to acknowledge and address the concerns of the people, and the remedies tend to be the same whether the criminal is perceived as a thief or a witch.

There is, however, one other distinction to make. It is essentially quantitative but in practice becomes qualitative.

Some individuals are believed to have unusual or extraordinary powers either by nature, as in the case of a witch, or by access, as in the case of a terrorist who has acquired control of WMD. And though whenever extra legal criminal law develops there is a tendency towards social amplification of the sense of danger and the kindling of moral panics, that is even more likely to happen in those cases where extraordinary powers are considered to be involved.

The mechanisms by which extraordinary powers are attributed to individuals and groups, and the way in which social amplification generates moral panics needs to be investigated.

In general the understanding of witchcraft has been confused by the tendency to give undue importance to the exotic or magical associations - a symptom of ethnocentricity is the majority who have written about it - and to overlook the fact that the basic mechanisms are universal and are present in all societies including our own. The magical clothing of the witch is simply like the pink of a flamingo or the decorations on a bowerbird's nest, the coloration that the phenomenon takes on in a particular context.

J S Mill, in his essay on Coleridge, notes that, in contrast to Bentham, he "considered the long or extensive prevalence of any opinion as a presumption that it was not altogether a fallacy",

but the result of its first authors struggle to find words for something that had a reality for them. And that " The long duration of a belief ... is at least proof of an adaptation in it to some portion or other of the human mind; and if, on digging down to the root, we do not find, as is generally the case, some truth, we shall find some natural want or requirement of human nature which the doctrine in question is fitted to satisfy: ..."

The following figures are based on the number of papers with the root `witch' in their titles found in the Anthropological Collection at the British Museum 1950 -2004

From: post@macdw.demon.co.uk
Subject: revised figures for epidemiology of witchcraft
Date: 24 April 2004 05:47:04 BST
To: Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU

Region	Witch	Shaman	Population M	w/m	s/m
Europe	158	49	730	0.22	0.07
A&P	59	10	30	1.97	0.33
Asia	105	319	2400	0.04	0.13
America	58	260	835	0.07	0.31
Africa	215	30	800	0.27	0.04
India?	105		1000	0.11	
Melanesia?	55		6.5	8.46	

There are no references to witchcraft in North Africal or Middle Eastern Countries - even when `witch' is replaced by `sihr' or `saahir' which are the relevant islamic / arabic terms.

Remember these figures are for publications about witchcraft or shamanism in these areas not actual incidents - they are an indicator of relative interest more than of possible prevalence

The figure for witches in Asia is probably almost entirely due to South Asia and mostly India

The figure for A&P is due to an unusually high number for witchcraft in Melanesia for which it is an underestimate as the population base used is for the whole of Oceania (30M).

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Referenced to that of Melanesia (6.5M) it is 8.46. Small area very popular with anthropologists??

It seems to me that the evidence suggests that witchcraft as a phenomenon studied by anthropologists is most common in Europe (past) Africa and to a lesser extent India and South Asia. Melanesia is exceptional.

But the following questions remain. What is the relation of Witchcraft to Shamanism and how much do they overlap? And is the exceptionally high interest in witchcraft in Melanesia a function of the number of investigators/studies or does it suggest that other areas might have the same levels but been relatively neglected by academics?

Hernando,

Further to our conversation the following notes may explain the possibility that witchcraft may be an indication of an informal or extra-legal system of criminal law. The context is my interfering in Norman's attempt to write about African witchcraft. Norman has some reports from an African academic that indicate a gross mismatch between the number of serious crimes associated with belief in witchcraft and the number of prosecutions and convictions - in one region 3000 deaths and only 7 prosecutions or convictions. Although witchcraft is dismissed as `cultural', `primitive', `criminal', a problem of enforcement, etc. it is endemic in Africa and PNG and has a malign effect on the possibility of democracy, politics, and every aspect of life - including sport. It is also associated with a significant number of deaths, in addition to exile, torture and assaults. It is a delicate subject and needs to be approached as though walking on egg shells - but I wonder if it might be relevant to the problem of facilitating the rule of law.

My interest apart from that of hindering my friends work, is in the form of witchcraft behaviour which I believe to be discernible in modern societies where belief in witchcraft is uncommon and no longer part of the conventional wisdom. But also as side issue to my interest in conceptions of the self and individuality - one cannot have the idea of alienable property without the linked notion of an individual or legal person as owner - and related modes of thinking. Specifically the differences between China and East Asia and the West. I believe that there is a tension between two modes of thinking that can

be referred to as analogical vs causal or logical. And that only the latter is associated with and helps to develop ideas of evidence and proof. But this is too complicated to discuss here.

The following are notes and the characteristics of hunter gatherers and the conditions for the emergence of withcraft are preliminary and would already be expressed differently. But they are not central to the main issue.

The documented cases of witchcraft may be no more than the tip of an iceberg that amounts to an extensive system of extra-legal or informal criminal law built around the notion of the witch as a prototypical criminal. This is the result of an incongruity between the concerns that are the motivation for formal law and those of the majority of the population on which that law has been imported and imposed. This raises the question of whether the limited overlap between the formal and informal systems has been restricted and reduced by the general lack of formal property that might have been expected to provide a scaffolding of shared interest between the concerns of the majority and that of the formal law. And whether increasing access to formal property might function as a seed crystal from which a more general acceptance of the benefits of formal law could grow. This might be expected because the documentation and accountability associated with formal property systems are an illustration and example of the application of procedures for determining evidence and establishing proof and thus serve as models or prostheses for a kind of thinking that is not generally applied in the context of witchcraft related explanations, and on whose absence the persistence of belief in witchcraft depends.

Implications of the existence of endemic witchcraft beliefs are profound:

They make democracy extremely difficult and maybe impossible. This is because if there is widespread belief in the existence and power of witches then there can be no such thing as a secret ballot or any possibility that electors can make decisions independently and without fear of coercion.

Because of their nature the alleged phenomena attributed to witchcraft cannot be proved in the way that alleged crimes that are defined by a causal chain linking perpetrators and victims. Where such proofs are attested they are based on evidence of belief and consensus and hence social constructions rather than truly causal. They amount to politics without the checks hoped for in modern democracy.

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A consequence of this is that the emphasis of extra-legal or informal criminal law is on the alleged harm and the victim rather than a proven crime. It is possible that recent trends in sentencing and approaches to criminal behaviour that give more emphasis to the needs of victims and tend to reduce the burden of proof required for `hot' crimes that attract public reactions have similarities to witchcraft mechanisms.

By this I mean to consider that a major distinguishing factor between formal and informal criminal law may be a standards of proof and causal chains linking alleged perpetrators and the harm they are alleged to have caused. With an increased emphasis on reducing the victims suffering rather than establishing proof of cause.

.....

I am copying this to Hernando for information and in case it resonates with his experiences in the extra legal sectors - though the most relevant cases would be in Africa and hence prospective.

All the evidence that I have found suggests that witchcraft is not a global but a local phenomenon unequally distributed in place and time. On the basis of the titles and keywords of published papers (in online database of The Anthropology Library at the British Museum - incorporating the former Royal Anthropological Institute library) it is in the present time most common in Africa and PNG and to a far lesser extent in South Asia (probably referring to India). It appears to be virtually absent in China, East and Central Asia, and the main Islamic countries. It also seems to be relatively unknown in the surviving hunting and gathering peoples. Whilst the extensive literature on Europe is historical and referenced to the period of the great witch hunts around the Renaissance and Reformation. Although it is possible that this distribution tells us more about the holiday preferences of anthropologists it would require too great a degree of cynicism to believe that would be sufficient to account for it.

My first hunch was that this distribution was a result of colonization by christian countries and the missionary activity that accompanied it and which in Africa had begun at a time when concern about witchcraft in christendom was far more intense than now. But that would not account for the lack of evidence in China where there had been quite extensive missionary activity. A more plausible explanation is that witchcraft seems to be

reported most often from cultures that did not have writing and an established literature on philosophy and religion. As a result local practices and beliefs would be more susceptible to being perceived, interpreted, and redescribed in terms of a complex of witchcraft related concepts with which the colonizers were familiar. This did not create witchcraft but probably helped to shape it and the terms in which it was described and this in turn was passed into the system of formal laws that were imported and imposed from outside the community. And under the skirts of these laws was smuggled in an alien conception of what it is to be human and notions of truth, falsity, responsibility, and motive. It is not clear to what extent these were congruent or compatible with the local or if any consideration was given to making them so. But, if there were noble intentions they failed and the result is exclusion and the existence of a massive extralegal system of informal criminal law that is only partially obscured by being described in terms of practical difficulties in enforcement rather than exclusion and coexistence or rivalry. What one is faced with is not the failure of a single coherent system of law, but the uneasy coexistence of parallel systems based on radically different beliefs about motivation and mechanism that can be traced back to differing conceptions of truth and individuality. And the question is if and how these can be reconciled. It would certainly seem to be substantially more difficult than reconciling informal and formal legal interpretations of real estate of the kind that Hernando has studied.

In what follows I am outlining some of the key ideas for Hernando's benefit but may not be giving sufficient detail to make them completely clear.

Witchcraft is a social construction and could not exist without spoken language. Although it is most commonly defined in variations of `harm done by magical means' that is misleading because in this context the notion of magic is not a description, but a value judgement that tends to distort perceptions in the same way that considering the extralegal sectors of the economy as `black markets' and problems of enforcement rather than exclusion. For the modern or `scientific' world view in which we, a minority both geographically and historically, take such pride is a very recent phenomenon largely of the North Atlantic rim and dating from the Enlightenment, and the modern sense of atheism is even younger dating from the mid C19. For the rest of time and for most people today `magic' is believed to be causally effective and how most of the world works. That is so for both witches and witchfinders and does not distinguish between them. And in the

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USA today more than 80% of the population claim to believe in a supernatural `God' and the `shape-shifting' of bread and wine into the body and blood of his son. Hence in order to understand the phenomenon of witchcraft one has to factor out the notion of magic - which is like water for fish. When that is done one is left with a structure of beliefs and practices that is to a large extent independent of specific mechanisms and whose form can be distinguished in cultures that do not accept magic as a legitimate part of the official consensus on which law is based. As an example consider the rhetoric about the `war against terrorism'. If you change all references to terrorism and terrorist to witchcraft and witch, and magic to WMD, you will find something very close to official attitudes to witchcraft in C17 Europe - including the arguments for changes to the law and the waiving of due process.

This, pace you Norman, is what I believe the importance of witchcraft to be - not something alien and relevant only to other times and places and peoples, or the dustier corners of tenured academia, but here now and always with us - up close and personal. And why I believe that it is essential to identify its marks so as to recognize and avoid a structure of attitudes that like a strange attractor distorts perceptions and encourages exclusion.

What I am suggesting is an approach to witchcraft without magic and with the emphasis not on mechanisms or wonders, but on motives and morality, and a definition closer to that used by Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar in `Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa', `a manifestation of evil believed to come from a human source'. And further, the usefulness of exploring the possibility that witchcraft in Africa amounts to a system of informal criminal law that coexists uneasily and overshadows the formal one that originated in the colonial period and was shaped by alien philosophies and attitudes. Witchcraft persists in Africa because the informal and formal systems of criminal law are incongruous and out of alignment.

Bearing in mind the importance of distinguishing the origins from the later elaborations of the phenomenon, the approach I will take involves a shift from witches as the primary focus to being a secondary and contingent product of an authority that creates them. Witches are constructed out of the confrontation of an authority and events that threaten to expose it as impotent. To explain this one must consider the ontogenesis or developmental history of human societies. For certain implications of the notion of the witch suggest that it can only

exist after human society has reached a particular stage of development and in quite specific situations. And that stage of development required for its origin is almost certainly greater than that needed for its subsequent spread and persistence. For once the notion has been delineated and elaborated it can be applied widely and find roots in much simpler societies. If those conspiracy theorists are right in believing that HIV originated in a laboratory it has spread very happily and killed millions without further technological assistance. And even if that is not so, others less paranoid have legitimate concerns that a new virus might be created in a laboratory and spread throughout the world to threaten the very existence of human life.

The developmental context required for the origins of witchcraft includes, interlinked and in no particular order: a state of economic development that allows groups sufficiently large to require a dedicated ruler or ruling hierarchy with a `job description' that includes some responsibility for the well-being of the community; the notion of alienable property; the notion of individuality, or a self as in some sense more than being a unique part of a greater whole and with some emerging sense of an `inner' life that can be hidden from others; the existence of other communities in potential or actual competition for scarce resources; the notion of treason and a henotheistic awareness of spiritual powers associated with rival communities. The conditions required to create something are often different and more demanding than those for its survival and dissemination.

.....

The transition from foraging, or hunting and gathering, to settled farming had far reaching implications and effects. From an economic point of view it allowed the production of surpluses that made possible larger communities, encouraged the development of markets, and hence towns and cities with division of labour and new technologies. But in addition it led to changes in the way in which individuals and communities thought of themselves and interacted with each other, and it accelerated the realization of abilities that distinguished humans from every other species.

Now dependent on investing in the produce of a specific piece of land and in potential competition with others for scarce resources there was a choice between conflict or cooperation with an increased number of strangers - including neighbours, potential usurpers, and traders. Conflict would always be

expensive diverting energy from farming and so the balance of advantage would be for cooperation and that would be facilitated by the ability to represent the thoughts and intentions of others - in other words a `theory of other minds'. That would provide a relatively secure basis for mutual trust and enable such fundamental institutions as centralized markets - without it might be imprudent for a land user to leave his plot unattended and require more time for its defense. An effective theory of other minds is the foundation of all social contracts.

The existence of long distance trade in small transportable items, such as flints, sting-ray barbs, and shells, would already have suggested the notion of alienable property and that would be further facilitated by the production of surpluses, specialization, and the development of markets that could realize the benefits of what we know as Ricardo's law of comparative advantage. And the development of the notion of alienable property is inevitably accompanied, as the other side of a coin, by new ways of thinking about the individual - for property is meaningless without an owner, either an individual or legal person.

In a hunting and gathering community the individual is conceived as a unique node in a network that constitutes the whole world, or gaia. With the move to farming that network world is demoted to one among many of similar kind. And with farming and the creation of alienable property the node tends towards becoming a container capable of owning property and with a boundary that can potentially hide the contents from others in the network. A new conception of the individual person or self is born apart from the network. Identity as a unique part of a whole, an ordered set of external relations, is traded for the free-floating individuality of a container with internal structure and relations, defined by its contents, and in competition with others as one among many. This is a slow process as the history of the self in the West demonstrates, nor is it inevitable as that of China suggests, but even if incomplete it creates tensions between the expectations associated with tradition and the implications of the new.

Introduction

Many books have been written about witches. Exactly how many is uncertain, but a quick search on Amazon returns more than 3500 titles, and though that includes duplicates, it does not take account of those that are extinct, or the many items in newspapers, magazines, and academic journals. It would therefore

seem safe to assume that the subject still has a place in our collective consciousness.

Like religion, attitudes to witchcraft can be distributed on a continuum from complete disbelief and rejection, through agnostic indifference, to belief and committment. But, in addition to attitudes, there is an important difference of focus. Those at the believing end of the spectrum are principally concerned with witches and what they are alleged to do, whilst those at the other are concerned, if at all, with what others do about witches, and the wider social effects of believing in their existence and powers. And this is also the basis of a common confusion in the usage of the term witchcraft, which is used, on some occasions, to refer to what witches are believed to do, and on others, to the effects of that belief.

[But, there are deeper implications: most academics, who are almost by definition outsiders, are concerned with what is done to witches, whereas most people who live with witches are far more concerned with what witches do to them. So the distinction is the basis of an ethico-legal conflict between those within the community who consider witches criminals and themselves victims, and the outsiders who consider the witches victims and their accusers criminals. This alone must weaken the rule of law by creating a conflict between legal, formal or statute, law, and extra-legal, informal, populist law. This in effect creates an extra-legal legal system of criminal law.]

A further source of confusion is that, although a rare disposition and ability to cause harm has always been a defining characteristic of witches, in recent times there has been a movement to redescribe them as part of an older and benign tradition in which the ability to harm is not central, but simply the obverse of healing - in much the same way that any doctor, or medicine such as paracetamol, powerful enough to heal, is also capable of harm.

Another feature of modern witches, such as the Wiccans, that sets them apart from others, is that they are self-identified and claim the name with pride, as if it were a professional title - a gift, achievement, or life-style choice, rather than a burden, or worse. In contrast, where witches are feared and considered so dangerous that they are liable to retribution, exile, or death, the vast majority of those accused would neither claim to be witches, or even recognize themselves as such. This is not incongruent with cases in which someone may claim to be a witch, for any of a number of motives, ranging from mental disorder, attempted coercion, self-aggrandizement,

or to avoid torture. Even today, whenever there is a high profile crime, the police anticipate having to deal with a number of false confessions.

This book is concerned with the consequences of believing in witches as evil and dangerous. It is not concerned with Wiccans, or whether what witches are alleged to do is possible, but considers the occult associations with which the notion has become encrusted (?tainted) to be contingent and a function of context. It considers the witch to be a social construction, rather than a natural kind with identifying, or pathogonomic, characteristics. From this point of view the only justification for distinguishing the notion of a witch from anything else is its effects; and as those of believing in a softcore Wiccan witch are very different from believing in the traditional hardcore kind, there seems no reason to consider them closely related. Later it will offer an alternative classification of related phenomena in which Wicca can find a more appropriate place.

A secondary aim of the book is to show that when witchcraft is stripped of irrelevant New Age agendas and accidental occult (supernatural) associations, a leaner and more interesting phenomenon emerges, that is no longer exotic and alienated (?projected) to remote times and places, but is common and easily identified in our own and every other culture. And the value of this is a warning about the ease with which complex roles, rituals, and institutions can develop and thrive, like a virus corrupting its host, without any roots or substance beyond words and the human imagination. It is what happens when fantasies are allowed to (curdle?) fester and clot.

Atoms and Agents: Atomic and Animistic Cultures

But first, a note on terminology. I will refer to modern scientific cultures as `atomic', because their models of how the world works are, mostly, constructed from inert particles, or `atoms', whose behavior is believed entirely accountable in terms of physical law. And I will refer to traditional, or non-scientific, cultures as `animistic', because their models of how the world works are constructed from living agents, embodied and disembodied, whose behavior is accounted for in terms of intentionality, or folk psychology, based on internal representations, belief, will, and desire. To oversimplify, slightly, the atomic world is interpreted in terms of physics, the animistic world in terms of psychology.

However, a proviso is necessary: in the real world there are no pure atomic cultures - all are hybrids. Even in the most scientifically advanced societies, the majority of the population are at least partial `animists', insofar as their model of the world includes the existence and causal efficacy of spirits or disembodied beings. In the USA, in 2001, only 14% claimed to have no religious beliefs and less than 1% identified themselves as agnostic or atheist. And, in the USA in 1997 45% of the general population believed that God had created human beings in their present form by divine fiat within the last 10,000 years, 40% believed in some kind of evolution guided by God, and only 10% believed in evolution without God. Among scientists, however, these figures were almost reversed, being 5%, 40% and 55% respectively. It is important to recognize that the vast majority of human beings are, or have been, `animists', in the broad sense defined here, and lived in an animistic culture. Only in a few countries, in the last few hundred years, mostly the last hundred, have `atomists' formed a significant and influential minority within what are still predominantly animistic cultures.

Note:
In a recent survey in UK (January 2006) over 2,000 participants were asked what best described their view of the origin and development of life:

22% chose creationism
17% opted for intelligent design
48% selected evolution theory
13% did not know.

[A corollary of this is that, whereas atomic cultures are based on deductive logic, including the law of excluded middle, and classical, or Aristotelian', categories (see Lakoff) with clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, animistic cultures are based on intensional logic, with less (without?) emphasis on the law of excluded middle, and categories based on Wittgenstein's `family resemblances' with fuzzy boundaries. The significance of this distinction can be appreciated by considering what questions are asked when someone dies unexpectedly. In an atomic culture, the first question that the coroner will seek to answer is whether the cause of death was natural, or forensic. These alternatives are conceived as contraries and, according to the law of excluded middle, if the cause is natural then it is not forensic and vice versa. In principle, the boundaries are clean and precise, though in practice they may become slightly fuzzy as the exact definition of forensic evolves - e.g. as the concept of negligence develops. In contrast, in an animistic

culture, even if the cause of a death was clearly natural, e.g. a heart attack, that does not exclude a forensic cause, for there is always the possibility of a `second spear' that contributes to the death. For example, everyone knows that the death was caused by a falling tree, but that does not explain why the victim was under the tree at the time it fell.]

The significance of the distinction between atomistic and animistic cultures is that the former allows the development of the scientific method and the systematic building of a coherent body of knowledge about how the world works, while the latter does not. This does not imply that an animistic culture cannot reason or accumulate knowledge, but it sets limits on what it can achieve. The information and skills accumulated will be less coherent and less fecund, they will amount to an accumulation, or aggregate, rather than a system and will have less predictive power. In atomistic cultures knowledge develops exponentially, while left alone animistic cultures stagnate, or grow sluggishly, and reason is hobbled. If knowledge in an atomistic culture is like a fast flowing river that can irrigate and generate, in an animistic culture it is more like a meandering wetland with many stagnant pools.

The reason for this difference, is the nature of the fundamental entities on which they are based, and the logic it allows. The scientific method requires an active imagination to generate hypotheses, what Peirce called abduction, and deductive logic to derive implications in the form of propositions that are capable of refutation and hence testing. But, for this to be possible, for abductions to be expressed in propositions to which deductive logic can be applied, they must be based on clearly defined entities whose behaviors follow coherent and predictable laws. This is the case with the atomistic interpretation of how the world works. The behavior of atoms is clearly specified and can be expressed in terms of rules that are independent of context - that is, the factors affecting behavior are accountable and are not sensitive to the intentionality, wishes, desires, or beliefs, of the experimenter, or any other entity or agent.

In contrast, in an animistic interpretation of how the world works, the entities are living agents with intentionality and minds of their own. Their behavior is not determined by explicit and unequivocal rules, but is exquisitely context dependent and influenced by their whims, beliefs, desires, and internal representations. As a result, it is simply not possible to develop hypotheses, or predictions, that are capable of refutation in any clear and useful way. For, as with

psychoanalytic formulations, it is always possible to imagine an alternative account for any result by referring it to the fluctating intentions of the agents involved. Nothing can be excluded and as a result nothing systematic can be built. Or, as William James said of the psychology of Wilhelm Wundt `its like a worm, you cut it up and every fragment crawls'.

Another way of expressing this is that the deductive logic used to develop scientific hypotheses is truth functional, in that the truth of a complex statement is a function of the truth of its several parts. But, when one is dealing with living agents with minds of their own, including internal representations and emotional states, an extra and undefinable layer of complexity is added. We are no longer considering propositions about things, but about attitudes, or propositions about propositions about things - hence propositional attitudes. In this case the relevant logic is intensional and no longer truth functional. And other features of intensional logic illustrate the difficulty. If I say that `Cicero was a Roman orator', then you can assume that if  that is true, then `Tully was a Roman orator' is also true, as Cicero and Tully refer to the same person, and furthermore it would be reasonable to assume that such a man existed. However, if instead, I say `I believe, that Cicero was a Roman orator', you cannot assume that `I believe that Tully was a Roman orator' is also true, because the focus is no longer on the man referred to, but my belief about him, and I may not know that Tully and Cicero are the same. Nor can you be so confident in assuming that either Cicero or Tully existed as the statement could be true even if they did not. A veil of intentionality (will, desire, and belief), or internal representation, obscures what we are talking about. And, in a world whose behavior is dependent on agents, the behaviors observed are not about any coherent and rule governed world of inert physical things, but a function of the will and intentions of living agents, projected as on a screen. The agents are either all there is, or stand between us and a more coherent world, distorting our perception of it and rendering it opaque to reason.

In contrast to the referential opacity (Quine) that prevents the animistic culture from achieving a clear view of the nature of the world, the atomic culture is transparent and allows the eye of reason (like an image intensifier) to see more and more clearly. If you list the number of significant discoveries in each decade you will find that with the gradual emergence of the scientific method, around 1600, the increase has been more or less exponential.

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Quote

It is wrong to think that the task of physics is to find out how Nature is. Physics concerns what we can say about Nature.

-- Niels Bohr

What science does is validate facts, descriptions or propositions, about a world that is conceived as rule following and having an existence and becoming that is independent of human whim; and this allows the building up of a coherent body of information about the world. People can use the laws of nature to change the world, but neither they, nor any other agent, can change the laws themselves. This was alien to the principles of the animistic cultures within which science began to bubble (ferment), and its significance was acknowledged explicitly at the very beginning by Descartes, in the early C17, who, in trying to establish what he could know with certainty, considered the possibility that anything he believed, for however good a reason, might be the deception of a deceiving demon. Which is almost exactly the kind of confounding agent or variable that I have suggested makes animistic cultures antithetical to science. At the time, as now, the view of the established religions was that, although God was able, at any time, to intervene directly and change the way the world worked, he did so only exceptionally; perhaps because without a background of regularity, miracles and his presence would be undetectable. For the majority of the time, at least sufficient for practical purposes, nature could be considered to be rule following and predictable. But in other animistic cultures that did not have a dominant deity matters were much more fluid, and in the absence of the strict rule of physical law, knowledge of the world must depend on what whimsical agents allowed, either by revelation, or the authority of their local representatives. In an atomic culture knowledge is guaranteed by the rules that reason discovers, in an animistic culture it depends on revelation and authority.

A consequence of this difference is that whereas, in an atomic culture the principal concern is how to validate descriptions, or propositions, what we can say about the behavior of the world, in an animistic culture it is how to validate propositions about what is right and wrong and how people ought to behave. Atomic cultures are about facts and descriptions, animistic cultures are about values, morals and prescriptions.

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My suggestion that in an animistic culture reason is hobbled, does not imply that those living in such a culture are in any way intellectually challenged. The problem is not about ability but opportunity. All human beings are born with a capacity for reasoning and there is no evidence that the variation between cultures is greater than that within. What does differ, however, is what is reasoned about. The work of Cosmides suggests that people are much more adept at reasoning about social issues than about abstract logical problems. This can be demonstrated by presenting subjects with what is exactly the same problem in either an abstract logical form, or in terms of a familiar task involving reasoning about a social situation, such as identifying cheating. On average, subjects perform far better on the social task. And this would seem consistent with the possibility that as human reasoning evolved in animistic cultures it is better tuned to reasoning about values and morals than about the kind of decontextualized, abstract, models on which scientific progress depends. Indeed, I suspect that the genius of the Greeks was to exapt what had been a social adaptation for more general purposes by applying reason to symbols and other prosthetic extensions of the human brain. Geometry is an example. This provided the foundation for what was to become the scientific revolution of the 17th century and Enlightenment. Another factor was that they developed a notion of eternal metaphysical truths that could be relied upon irrespective of the whims of the gods. Perhaps an unexpected outcome from an animistic system in which the predictability of the world's working could only depend on a stand-off, or uncertain truce, between rival divine factions, rather than the eternal rule of laws. Greek philosophy undercuts and quarantines the whims of the pantheon, by developing the notion of laws that even the gods could not change. And this may have fertilized the theology of monotheism where the omnipotence of God, while allowing him to break the rules he had created, at the same time guaranteed them, in all but a few exceptional circumstances - the exceptions that prove the rule. The regularity and predictability of nature was a function of the rationality of God and therefore the study of his laws in nature was a form of theology. In the Scottish Universities physics was traditionally called Natural Philosophy. This is also consistent with Rodney Stark's contention that the success of the scientific cultures was made possible by their monotheism. (`For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery`).

Nor is my suggestion that animistic cultures tend to stagnation and are incompatible with modern science, imply that they cannot accumulate a great deal of knowledge about how the world works,

or that they are technologically challenged. Tradition can, given enough time, identify the regularities of nature and put them to practical use; it can nurture craftsmen and technologists of the most remarkable kind, and learn many things that we would be extremely foolish to ignore. But, I do contend that the knowledge gained will be relatively unsystematic and context bound, rules of thumb rather than theories, in other words it is not scientific in the modern sense, and any developments will be haphazard and fragmented. For this reason I consider the hopes of some politicians that witchcraft related phenomena are indications of an indiginous African science to be wishful thinking. It is not knowledge, but the scientific method, that supercharges discovery: no matter how hard you try you cannot supercharge a horse, and no matter how many you harness they will not exceed the maximum speed of the slowest. There is an old saw that an engineer is someone who can do for $5 what any fool can do for $50, and one might paraphrase this by suggesting that tradition requires generations to achieve what modern science can do in a few weeks. Animistic societies also tend to have a rather selective and limited curiosity for in them innovation is permanently outvoted by what G. K. Chesteron referred to as `the democracy of the dead'. The 17th century English physician Thomas Sydenham, who might be considered a pioneer of evidence based medicine, said `so I closed my books and opened my eyes'. He was probably referring to the tradition whereby the anatomist sat at the end of the dissecting table, reading from classical anatomical texts, that told the students what they would, or ought to, see, while an underling, at a safe and fragrant distance, did the actual dissection; he must have realized that much of what his master was expounding was tosh (stercus), but he may not have had the latin, or security of tenure, to interrupt the flow. The reason why curiosity in traditional societies is selective may be that they have no books to close.

Why witchcraft has very little to do with the occult

It seems certain that a good deal of the popular interest in witchcraft is a special case of the more general interest in the occult, supernatural, paranormal, mystical, or magic. The usage of these terms, which have come to be used in connection with witchcraft, and often feature in definitions, requires some clarification as they have become confused and treated almost as synonyms.

For present purposes I will reject `mystical' as it is properly about an experience of communion, or union, with the divine and seems in the context of witchcraft to be used to express a whiff

of mild disapproval - as one might feel about a maiden aunt found playing with a ouija board, vibrator, or naked civil servant.

I will also reject `magic' as it usually implies a degree of conscious manipulation and ritual that is more typical of sorcery than witchcraft; and later I will want to draw a distinction between these ideas.

The distinction between `supernatural' and `paranormal' is rather fuzzy. Both are defined in contrast with science, but whereas the paranormal may refer to what might one day be reconcilable with science, the supernatural may be forever separate. And in each the emphasis is more on science than religion.

Another possibility is `praeternatural', which refers to something beyond what is regarded as natural. This would include the same reference as supernatural, but also covers what is simply extraordinary. If one were starting with a clean slate this might be the most useful term.

In this context, however I think that the most appropriate term is `occult' because, in addition to the scientific reference of `supernatural', it also has moral and religious connotations that are relevant to understanding attitudes to witchcraft. Historically, attitudes to witchcraft were shaped, not by its relationship to accepted views about how the world worked in a proto-scientific sense, but by how people ought to behave. It was defined, in contrast to religious rather than scientific orthodoxy, as sinful and blasphemous, rather than fanciful or improbable. But it has also a parallel development in relation to science, Leibniz criticized Newton's notion of gravity as an `occult quality' in that it was invisible, hidden, and difficult to understand, or reconcile with the conventional wisdom of the time. Francis Bacon suggested that an explanation in terms of an occult quality was no explanation at all. From being hidden and insensible occult moved to being unintelligible. And today it is used as a near synonym of supernatural. It therefore captures both the moral and scientific associations of witchcraft.

Unfortunately, the traditional association between the occult and witchcraft, that is manifest in the number of writers who include references to the notion in definitions, has led to confusion, obscured the real nature of witchcraft, and provided a cloak for chauvinist and racist tendencies.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

In an atomistic culture the notion of the occult is defined in reference and contrast to science with which it partitions the space of possible explanations. Science and the occult are contraries that are defined in relation to each other, and mutually exclusive, what is natural is not supernatural and what is scientific is not occult. Each refers, not to phenomena, but descriptions and hence explanations or interpretations of phenomena. What people experience is neither scientific or occult, it only becomes one or other according to how it is described. And one of the major sources of uncertainty, that allows the status of many occult descriptions to remain uncertain, is that whilst scientific interpretations are replicable, reproducible and consistent, almost all occult `phenomena' are sporadic and almost impossible to reproduce. This is why in the academic study of parapsychology most research involves the meticulous and tedious repetition of carefully designed experiments, that attempt to establish whether or not there is anything going on that cannot be accounted for by conventional science.

Now, if the occult only exists in contrast with science, and as I have suggested animistic cultures are inimical to scientific methods, it is difficult to imagine what exactly the notion of the occult could mean within a culture in which everyone believes in the existence and causal efficacy of disembodied agents, or spiritual entities, and that the world works in ways that science finds unintelligible. And, if that is the case, then the question must be asked: what, if any, notions within an animistic culture are being translated as occult?

The ease with which mistranslations and confusions can occur has been pointed out by Ames and Hall in relation to China, where translations of what may be misclassified, or oversimplified, as religious and philosophical works have often been made using bilingual dictionaries, compiled by early missionaries who distorted the meaning of Chinese words to fit Western philosophical and religious assumptions. For example, translating `tian' as Heaven, and interpreting notions such as `dao' in terms of a belief in a transcendental unity that is alien to Chinese thought. This was in a culture that had a long literary tradition and canonical writings, but as Jack Goody has pointed out there is a common assumption among historians that oral cultures are more resistant to change than written, when the opposite is the case. Cultures without a tradition of writing are much more porous to outside influence and new ideas, than one whose texts provide a reference of systematically worked out ideas. This probably accounts for the dramatic and dynamic spread of christian cults and sects throughout sub-

saharan Africa in the last fifty years. And it must be remembered that Africa was first explored and settled by people who had come from a Europe smoldering with a terror of witches that over and over again flared into witch hunts that claimed the lives of nearly 100,000 - a huge number in relation to the population of the time. It would be remarkable if these events did not color the earliest perceptions of the cultures found in Africa, or failed to infiltrate deep into its oral traditions. Christian demonology and African traditions were probably made for each other and neither could be the same again after they had intercourse.

If the occult has any meaning, in the animistic cultures where the stereotypical forms of witchcraft are reported, it is not in contrast to science but to moral and religious orthodoxy; as it had been earlier. And it does not distinguish witches, or witch-perceivers, or witch-finders, or witch-killers, from anyone else. So, if the term cannot distinguish, adds nothing that clarifies, but only obscures, why not simply abandon it? Only by doing so will one be able to see clearly what lies beneath the nonsense with which it has become encrusted over the centuries of missionary influences.

But, there is an even more important reason for abandoning the notion. In the context of witchcraft, it is rarely descriptive, but more commonly a value judgement, pregnant with colonialist and racist implications. Even in modern Europe and USA, where a few university departments have been created to study paranormal phenomena in a rigorous way, it would probably be fair to say that, for most scientists, anything classified as occult, paranormal, supernatural, or magic, would be considered at best suspect, and in most cases a justification for keeping a cautiously tenured distance. And if that is the case within a culture that is ostensibly based on a modern scientific interpretation of how the world works, how could it be less so when it is applied to phenomena in a different culture based not on an atomic, but an animistic metaphysics? In practice, terms related to the occult are condescending, privilege the speaker, and signify exclusion.

This is why it is so important to get rid of the occult cobwebs. They have accentuated differences at the expense of similarities, obscured and distorted our perception of the phenomenon, and made it far too easy to distance ourselves from it. In spite of the term witch-hunt having an appropriate reference, in the case of witchcraft, in any of its several senses, we have allowed the occult colorations, that are context dependent and accidental, to be considered essential; and what

is a merely a special case, prototypical. As a consequence we perceive witchcraft as eccentric, exceptional, and localized to a few exotic times and places - something that happens elsewhere, to other people, and fit only for anthropologists and other academics who feed below the salt. This has blinded us to the fact that the sinews of the phenomenon can be felt in all cultures, including our own. For, although it may be given different names and cause different kinds of harm in different contexts, it is not dependent on any specific view about how the world works. Instead it shapes and shades culture, is the basis for moral panics of every kind, defines and distorts our responses to terrorism, and is at the root of ethnic cleansing and genocide. It is not a trivial matter, and only when we learn to discern its features emerging, dimly, as in a mirror clouded by our own breath, will we be able to avoid its baleful implications. The principle aim of the book is to draw these out and suggest ways of anticipating the dangers that invariably follow.

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Religion, Witchcraft, and Intentionality: Why the Atomistic interpretation is an achievement.

Notes:

Dunbar's views about religion and levels of intentionality
Witchcraft and the hobbling of intentionality and theory of mind - the loss of empathy

Dunbar suggests that although only 3 levels of intentionality are required for personal religion - I believe that God loves me, is 2 levels, but to add an expectation by God that would imply that he wanted to help or guide us requires another level - I believe that God wants us to love one another
For social religion another 4th level is required
I believe that you share my view that I believe that God wants us to love one another
The sharing of internal representations binds people together into groups

[
1. I want
2. You to know that
3. We both believe that
4. God loves us and wants

5. Us to love one another
]

Question: does intentionality always imply a hidden, possible, postulated, or counterfactual state or content? Or only the possibility of such a state or content?

Like nested dolls each contained within another. Or, imagine your mind like a screen within which is another screen (picture within picture) containing your theory about another mind, and that in turn has a screen that can contain a theory about yet another, and so on ...

1 Level - most extensional science - contains propositions about the world
1. I believe the Volcano is erupting / Unicorns are difficult to find / The King of France is bald

2 Levels - proposition about a proposition (= metarepresentation threshold)
1. I believe that (God exists) and that
2. God loves me / Witches harm me
2. God intends to influence me
2. The volcano is angry = base level for animistic culture
And 2nd level intentionality is probably tacitly present in chimpanzees, but not necessarily consciously articulated, as the inner representations are also manifested in body language. Body language is interpreted in terms of postulated inner content.

A religion has to influence the future for us - this requires at least 3 levels

3 Levels
1. I believe that
2. God understands what (Or, witches are angry, malevolent, and harm others)
3. I desire and will help me (and will use it to harm me = possible Islamic witches?)
This is probably sufficient basis for a personal sense of religion, or mysticism, but it is not enough to account for communal religion - as a social activity. From rituals and shared beliefs to community.

4 Levels
1. I believe that
2. You think that there is a
3. God who understands what
4. You desire and intends to help you

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This is the minimum required for communal religion - you must be able to represent the belief of others or read their minds. But, it may not be sufficient.

5 Levels
1. I believe that
2. You think that
3. I know there is a
4. God who understands what
5. We desire and will help us
This implies not only that I know what you believe. but what you believe about my beliefs - reciprocal mind reading. And requirement for shame guilt superego.

Witchcraft seems at most to require no more than 2 levels of intentionality. Which is less than is needed to exploit it? Do witches read minds? In Islam they seem to - love magic mind games. Sorcerers and Shamans do.

1. I believe that
2. I may be a witch / I hate and may be a witch? / witches hate? (but witches are often said to be unaware of their state)

1. I believe that
2. You consider that
3. I am a witch==========

In modern scientific cultures, which I will refer to as atomic, because their models of how the world works are built from inert `atoms', terms like occult, supernatural, or paranormal, are primarily descriptive and delimit a particular range of phenomena that are considered anomalous, unproven, and not compatible with scientific orthodoxy. From this point of view the differences between occult and ordinary phenomena are epistemological - whether or not the phenomena are real or imaginary.

In contrast, in a culture that is not based on science, which I will refer to as animistic because its models of how the world works are based on living, usually disembodied, agents, if the terms have any meaning they are distinguishable from others not in terms of epistemology status, but moral value only. And the important questions are not whether certain phenomena are real, which is not questioned, but whether they are right or wrong.

And this creates an asymmetry and source for confusion. Within the atomic culture the term occult is mainly descriptive, whilst

within an animistic culture, if it exists, it is entirely ethical.

Second,

Definition

This raises the first question that any study of witches and witchcraft must address: what is the definition of a witch? Sadly this is not easily answered, for although witches and witch activity have probably been reported from almost every country and throughout history, it is not always clear that what is being described by the name is in fact the same in all places and times. As a simple example, the victims of the witch craze in Europe were accused of having intercourse with the devil and their behavior interpreted with reference to Christian concepts that would be unlikely to be used in other cultures. Yet without a reasonably clear definition it is difficult to quantify the epidemiology of witchcraft, how it varies with time and place, and without information of its distribution and variations it is difficult to arrive at a satisfactory definition. Catch 22.

In principle it would be possible to design an international multicultural study to try and clarify the issue, perhaps along the lines of the famous WHO study of schizophrenia, but in practice the costs and logistics would be formidable, and such a study could not take account of historical variations. Instead, the best solution is to examine the definitions that have been used by other writers and try and extract, or develop from them, a common core, or lowest common denominator of features that are context independent and present in all cases. And, in contrast, to distinguish these from more peripheral characteristics that, though important, and maybe even sufficient in the imagination of many, are context dependent, and not present in every case. For example, if you asked a witchfinder in Essex in the C17 to define a witch, intercourse (of some kind) with the devil would almost certainly be considered essential, but that would be dismissed by todays Wiccans (who are happy to call themselves witches whereas in almost every other case the title is an accusation made by others) and members of other cultures.

The problem is that as the majority of studies of witch related phenomena have been concerned with very specific times and places, such as contemporary Africa and historical Europe, to the exclusion or neglect of many others, amounting to almost all

other parts of the world, there is a clear danger that some of the features reported will be context dependent, accidental, and contingent. And, if that is the case then definitions derived from them will be too narrow and obscure common features that might reveal patterns of phenomena that are of much more general and contemporary significance.

Giving a nod to a distinction that used to be considered important in the diagnosis of schizophrenia I will refer to the core characteristics of a witch as First Rank (FR) criteria and the more peripheral and context dependent as Second Rank (SR).

At this stage I do not intend to produce a long and repetitive list of definitions (I will leave that to NM) and to avoid tedium will simply present what I believe the FR characteristics to be.

The core definition (and FR characteristic) of a `witch' is a living person who is believed to have and use extraordinary power to cause harm in pursuit of evil. Although they are inseparable it will be helpful to distinguish between the ability to use extraordinary means, and an extraordinary disposition to pursue evil ends. In the context of witches, evil often seems like an independent entity, embodied like satan, rather than simply the worst kind of bad behavior, or like original sin a defining characteristic of every human being. And on occasion means and end vary independently, so that one can have relatively ordinary means used for unusually evil ends, or very unusual means used for mundane ends. These alternatives being united in the conceptual body of the witch, as a qualitatively different kind of being.

And the core definition of `witchcraft' is the social consequences of believing in the reality of these powers and interpreting adverse events in terms of them.

The peripheral, or SR characteristics, are that witches are usually, but not exclusively female, and that they may be unaware of their alleged powers, which are usually inherited and part of their nature, rather than learned. As a result they are difficult to change, control, or eliminate, rehabilitation is uncertain, and the only sure prophylaxis against witches is to kill them before they harm anyone else. `Though shalt not suffer a witch to live' (Exodus 22:18). Or, in modern Islam:

The saahir should be forced to undo what he has done, if his identity is known. It should be said to him, ,Äöv√Ñv√∫Either you undo what you have

done, or you will be executed.,Äö√Ñ√π After he has undone it, he should still
be executed by the authorities, because the saahir should be killed
without being asked to repent, according to the correct view. This is what
was done by ,Äö√Ñ√≤Umar, and it was narrated that the Messenger (peace and
blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: ,Äö√Ñ√ÍThe punishment of the saahir is
to strike him with the sword (i.e., execute him).,Äö√Ñ√π When Hafsah Umm
al-Mu,Äö√Ñ√¥mineen (may Allaah be pleased with her) found out that a slave woman
of hers was dealing with sihr, she killed her.¬¨,Ä†¬¨,Ä†

However, the notion of the saahir, or witch in Islam is very different from that in Africa or Europe. Allah is jealous of his power and what the saahir can do is constrained. And usually seems to be mainly concerned with `love magic' playing mind games so that a husband sees his wife as ugly and rejects her, or vice versa. It is notable that there are virtually no academic papers on witchcraft in Islamic cultures.

An additional factor that I suspect most people would consider essential would be an association with the occult. In the majority of cases reported the witch's extraordinary powers are believed to be derived from unembodied spirits and interpreted in terms of an animistic paradigm in which the world of the senses is only a small part of a greater whole that includes not only the living, but the dead, spirits, and gods. The behavior of this world is understood not by the interaction of inert atoms according to the laws of physics, but by the will and acts of living agents, whether embodied or disembodied. And this feature of the more ostentatious forms of witch behavior has led to most definitions linking the source of the witch's powers to the occult, paranormal or supernatural (consider using one term as portmanteau for possible synonyms). As in 'a person who causes harm by mystical means'.

There is however a problem with linking witch activity to the occult, for such a belief does not distinguish witches from anybody else in a community that understands the working of the world in terms of spirits. What it does is highlight that the designation occult, or supernatural, or paranormal, or magical, is not a description but a value judgement made from an assumption of authority centred outside in space, time, or paradigm. And historically that has usually usually implied

racist and colonialist attitudes. During the European witch crazes between 1450 and 1750 (when the first Europeans began to live in Africa) what distinguished witches from their accusers was not beliefs in normal or paranormal explanations, but between good and evil actions or intentions, and evidence of breaching divine moral commandments. Everyone believed in a world of spirits, they differed only in their perceived intentions and conceptions of right and wrong. In practice the ascription `supernatural' is always made from the self satisfied security of a world view that is relatively but unilaterally `enlightened', ours contrasted with theirs, and is usually a marker for conceptual chauvinism.

From within my `scientific' interpretation of the world I do not think of physics when I switch a light, surf the internet, or start the engine of my car, I just do it, and take the science and technology for granted. Likewise for those who interpret the world in terms, not of physics, but `psychology' and will (the actions of agents rather than atoms), the wonders of magic and the occult are simply the appropriate technologies for living in a world with spirits. And are simply taken for granted as we all do air, or a fish the water in which it swims. In order to understand witches one must discount the connection to the occult, and hence it is not part of the core definition. Witchcraft in general has very little to do with magic. Any association with `occult' phenomena is accidental and part of the context in which the more dramatic allegations of witch behavior often occur.

Relationship and confusion with other terms

In order to understand the definition of a term it is essential to know not only what it is but what it is not; to know how it is related to and differs from other similar notions. In the case of 'witch' the literature refers to at least three terms with which it might and has been confused :

witch
sorcerer
shaman or diviner (used by Evans Pritchard?)
healer

The relations between them can be understood with the help of a simple two dimensional matrix showing the relation between two constructs - in Kelly's sense of a bipolar concept. One dimension is for the construct good - evil. The other for nature - nurture or inherited - learned which overlaps almost completely with unconscious - conscious. Although it might be

thought that more than two constructs would be required, when I attempted to construct alternative matrices not only did that lead to a rapidly increasing number of cells, but most seemed to collapse onto the four cell matrix identified below. As the relevance of these distinctions to informants is uncertain it seems unlikely that adding more would help.

This matrix results in 4 cells. These should not be thought of as exclusive, but as centers of gravity with fuzzy boundaries between them. In this scheme:
inherited - evil = witch
inherited - good = shaman or diviner
learned - evil = sorcerer
learned - good = healer (can function as witch-finder?)

Those who have read EP will remember that among the Azande sorcerers are the users of evil magic, which is the use of substances and rituals - techniques that would seem to require considerable conscious training rather than, or in addition to, natural ability. And this is an appropriate point to discuss the notion of substances and how they are related to ritual.

Substances and rituals

In a modern scientific model of how the world works, based on the notion of inert atoms, abstractions like energy, and physical laws that are unresponsive to human whim - they can be worked with but not changed - the behavior of substances whether chemicals or poisons is, within known limits, independent of context. But that is not always the case in a world where the psychology of embodied and disembodied agents takes precedence over physical law. For although it is possible to conceive a world in which the behavior of such agents is more orderly, so far the folk psychology on which the dynamics of animistic societies are based is far less predictable than folk physics and chemistry. And even in our world folk psychology is still a better guide to the behavior of people in ordinary situations than most behavioristic models. To overcome this difficulty we have developed institutions such as laws and rules to regulate human behavior and make it more predictable. And in animistic societies ritual has a similar function, though it is a wider one, as it has to regulate, not only what we would accept as minds, but also substances or things whose behavior we predict with our models of physics and chemistry.

In an animistic world substances as we understand them do not exist, because hardly anything is context independent. Instead the behavior of everything is exquisitely dependent on its

context, which includes, not only its immediate setting, but the mental, spiritual, and ritual state of everyone involved, whether user, recipient, or observers. In this world a substance without a ritual is incomplete and likely to be unpredictable or useless.

Much of the confusion surrounding the use of these terms is due to the fact that though distinguishing between them may be possible and seem meaningful to observers with a scientific agenda, that may not be the case for their informants. For, long before notions become encoded explicitly in context independent words and propositions, they will have been emerging, or burrowing, slowly into consciousness, via tacit, non verbal, and distributed representations; manifested in rituals, dances, and visual artifacts that are experienced as having powers that cannot be described in other ways. In that context prematurely explicit distinctions may well be destructive in the same way that higher criticism can be inimical to religious experience. What is meaningful to colonialists may be meaningless to the colonized. And we should remember that anthropology, like amateur dramatics, is usually more enjoyable and meaningful for the actors than their audience.

I suspect that for most people living in a world with witches the distinction between witches and sorcerers is as academic as whether the gun with which you are shot is licenced or unlicensed.

Natural and forensic causes.

In a culture governed by physical law the first question that is asked when someone dies is whether the death was due to natural or unnatural causes. The implication is that natural causes are accidental manifestations of physical law for which no one can be held accountable whilst unnatural causes are those for which someone can and should be held accountable - whether through negligence or malice aforethought. And this distinction between natural and forensic causes is in the great majority of cases taken to be exclusive - if a death is natural it cannot be forensic.

However, this is not the case in a culture based on animism. For, although the immediate causes of a death may be known to be natural and transparent there is, as the Azande knew, always a second spear - not how someone died but why. If a man is killed by a falling rock the immediate cause of death is clear, but what is still unknown is why the man was at the place of his

death at the time the rock fell. In such a world the existence of a natural cause of death does not exclude a forensic. And the second spear that can be detected in almost every case is witch activity. To fail to take this into account, or to restrict investigation to ordinary criminal behavior, will be experienced as forensic neglect. [In neurology a lesion in the parietal lobes of the brain can result in a state of spatial neglect where the victim is unaware of anything happening in half of his visual fields. In dramatic cases this can lead to a patient only eating food from one half of his plate, oblivious to that on the other.

WITCHCRAFT INTRUSION

Human beings are storytellers. We understand and link with the world through or in terms of narratives. As we become more sophisticated our narratives get pared down to more abstract patterns in the same way as in algebra situations involving men digging are reduced to equations made up of patterns on paper.

In the beginning we understand the world as made up of agents whose behaviour is motivated by belief and desire. As we become more sophisticated agents are replaced by atoms and belief and desire by fixed moves along energy gradients.

At the level of agents patterns are identified with standardised stories or scripts whose archetypal status is acknowledged by their being classified as myths. They are the analogue of equations in physics. Myths are a store of possible patterns like possible plots for stories. They are like an empty costume or the script for a play waiting for actors to fill it out and bring it to life.

Faced with uncertainty or anxiety people try to explain it in terms of myth and seek actors to fill the roles that these require and that will link the mythical and every day worlds and allow the disturbing situation to be acted out and thus resolved. By bringing the present and mythical worlds back into alignment.

It may be worth considering witchcraft as one of many mythical scripts whose characters' roles are assigned by the community to specific members. In this context the witchfinder who may be playing a more or less permanent part in another overlapping and higher level script becomes an actor-manager or actor-director in moving events from the chaotic towards a myth-congruent conclusion.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Myths are to culture what equations are to physics.

Witchcraft

Key Points (incomplete)

1. Most definitions are defective and obscure more than they reveal.
Most definitions of witchcraft are variants of 'harm done by occult means' - for occult read magic supernatural etc. Unfortunately this locates the centre of gravity or principal focus in the wrong place from which it is impossible to get a clear view of the phenomenon. It is like trying to understand diseases by classifying spots, or coughs, or other symptoms as ends in themselves without considering the underlying pathology that makes sense of them - all studies based on this kind of definition are trivial and lack general significance or application.

1a. One of the consequences of defining witchcraft in terms of the nature of witches and the mechanisms that they are alleged to use to cause harm, is that the occult powers and mechanisms implied are well nigh now and until recently were universal. Yet all the evidence points to the fact that as a problem witchcraft is localized to only a few specific times and places and cultures. And even if most people in most places believe in witches it does not seem to cause problems on more than a very local and intermittent scale. The fact that this seems to have attracted so little attention or interest, and that there are so few, if any, comparative studies or what might be called an epidemiology of witchcraft is an indictment of those who claim to study the subject and casts great doubt on the validity, utility, integrity, and significance of their conclusions. It is yet another sad example of not being able to see the tree for the bark, or learning more and more about less and less.

2. Witchcraft has nothing to do with the occult. Associations with the occult are accidental and not essential. They are simply local color - the form that the phenomenon takes in and from specific contexts.

3. The study of Witchcraft is not concerned with what witches are alleged to do, but what is done to and about people who are alleged to be witches.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

4. The proper and only useful definition of witchcraft is (draft):

'Witchcraft is the reaction to the fear caused by the belief that certain indlviduals have an extraordinary power to harm.'

It is a characteristic of the feared harm anticipated that people feel helpless, victims, that existing controls and laws are inadequate, and that they thus put pressure on the authorities to do something about it. This suggests that witchcraft will be associated with and may require a hierarchical structure of authority in which the majority expect a minority to ensure their safety and security. Witchcraft will be correlated with situations where authority is immature, poorly developed, perceived as weak, or vulnerable. And fear of it will both threaten and provide opportunities for politicians and religious leaders to exploit and manipulate the general population to their advantage.

4a. Defined in this way witchcraft is revealed as not confined to the alien exotic and other, but alive and well in our own backyards. And, from this perspective its fingerprints can be detected in a range of phenomenon including those often discussed as manifestations of moral panic and perceptions of and responses to terrorism.

4b. The relative absence of a hierarchical structure and small group size of hunter gatherer societies probably accounts for the relative lack of witchcraft problems amongst them.

In contrast witchcraft is also likely to be relatively uncommon among peoples with a well developed, strong, and confident hierarchical authority structure. If the authorities do not feel vulnerable, impotent, or at risk of being replaced by opportunistic rivals, witchcraft conflagrations will be unlikely and local small scale outbreaks will be unlikely to kindle beyond the family and local community level. This will be especially the case if the mores of the community are enshrined in a canon of written authoritative texts.

In general although a well established religion may accept the existence of persistence of belief in witches it will not be in its interest to give the impression that it is at all threatened by it. It may discourage and punish what it regards as morally wrong or sinful, but its God is not threatened nor is its authority put in doubt. This seems to have been the case with the RC church before the Reformation and in Islam today where witches can only exist with the permission of Allah.

5. From this viewpoint the basic form of witchcraft is universal and one of the most extreme manifestations of moral panic, and the most important question is what are the local conditions that allow and facilitate fear kindling into l the conflagration of a witch hunt?

6. And one of the important implications is that by realizing that witchcraft is based on a general mechanism with which we are or can be made familiar, it becomes less exotlc and reactions to it are seen as dlstorted and disproportionate. This knowledge can help to immunize us against dlseased politicians who may try to exploit our fears to our disadvantage, and prevent them from making disastrous decisions that have serious unintended consequences - `Hard cases make bad law'.

7. It could also enable us to seek and discover the warning signs of over-reaction, among which one of the most important is a clamor, spontaneous or contrived, for changes in the law and restrictions of long established and hard won rights and safeguards in order to deal with `new' outrages.

J S Mill, in his essay on Coleridge, notes that, in contrast to Bentham, he "considered the long or extensive prevalence of any opinion as a presumption that it was not altogether a fallacy", but the result of its first authors struggle to find words for something that had a reality for them. And that " The long duration of a belief ... is at least proof of an adaptation in it to some portion or other of the human mind; and if, on digging down to the root, we do not find, as is generally the case, some truth, we shall find some natural want or requirement of human nature which the doctrine in question is fitted to satisfy: ..."

Norman,

A. The benfits of witchcraft.

If the above quotation has any validity, which I believe it to have, then one must counteract the tendency to consider witchcraft simply as a problem, and concentrate on its malignant aspects only. If, as we believe, it has survived for thousands of years, and is still accepted as true by 120% of the rural population in Africa, then it must offer some advantages or benefits. And before trying to change it we should try and find out what these are. In medicine the survival of many diseases that reduce the number of offspring and would therefore be

expected to be eliminated by natural selection is explained because they are either linked, as the sides of a coin, to some more important ability that offers a greater survival advantage - e.g. language and schizophrenia - or offer some protection from a greater threat - e.g thalassaemia and malaria - and in therapeutics there are virtually no effective drugs that do not have potentially serious side effects - anything powerful enough to cure is ipso facto powerful enough to harm. When I hear people say that counselling, or psychotherapy, or odd alternative medicines, will be unlikely to do any harm, my immediate reaction is to think that if true they can do no good either. Would you prefer to be thought of as harmless or a wee bit dangerous?

So, it should be a priority to discover the benefits that witchcraft offers.

B. The limits of social justice and universal rights.

According to Bentham the notion of natural rights is `nonsense on stilts'. I am concerned that the approach of your anthropological friends to social justice and rights, will start from the assumption that they are universal and transportable to any part of the world not only as an ideal but a policy for immediate action. That might please your backers, but I suspect that it is both inappropriate and counter-productive.

The problem is that any notions of social justice or rights that are considered to be natural or universal must start with the belief that they apply to all - in other words that everyone within a defined population can claim them simply by virtue of belonging to that population. This is a very advanced notion and I cannot see how it can have ever been practical in any population that had not reached a high degree of development and fiscal efficiency.

Maybe, it applies to a limited degree among small kin based groups of foragers and pastoralists. Though I suspect that among these you will find practices - e.g. abandoning superfluous infants, and those too sick, or too old, to be sustainable - that bracket any rights and facilitate the survival of the greater group.

But, when, with the invention of farming, these small groups of 30-50 came together to form larger, with growing division of labour and competition for scarce resources, what might have been considered and achievable as a right among kin would almost certainly have needed some better justification - it would no

longer be sufficient to be a member, one would have to earn one's rights. Rights would no longer be accepted as a function of belonging - they would granted only in return for acting and doing what was of benefit to all. And they would have limits. The notion of obligations and responsibilities would become of far greater importance and move centre stage. The emerging social contract would set conditions and include get-out clauses.

The question is what form would these take? What mechanisms could be introduced that would remove and limit rights and exclude individuals from any benefits that they might offer? What would be the costs and benefits of different strategies?

My suggestion is that at least one among several of the powerful motivations for the institutionalization of witchcraft might well be the weeding out or pruning of those who had, or were likely to, become a burden to the society. Think about it. If in order to survive you must get rid of some of the members of the group is there a better way of selecting them? Although to our eyes it seems unjust to kill old ladies or other marginals who cannot be guilty of the harm attributed to them, in a more general sense of being a burden, or a source of conflict and tension in the community, they are almost certainly not entirely free of guilt. They are at the very least identified as a focus of concern - even if that is a euphemism for the guilt felt by the community. Let us not pass judgment about justice without considering it in the widest context - to be killed or exiled for something one could not have done is unjust but for being a burden in this context less so. Witchcraft accusations are likely to overlap with more general perceptions about the relative worth and importance of individuals and support conventional wisdoms about what are considered desirable behaviours and attitudes. I have to say that I cannot think of a better way - at least in the circumstances of the kind of communities within which witchcraft must have evolved. This would not be the primary cause of the phenomenon but it could be a powerful factor in its survival and flourishing.

And if that is the case then if, with economic development and prosperity, the need to prune obligations becomes less pressing, then perhaps witchcraft might lose one of its major sources of nourishment.

From my point of view witchcraft is at the same time both a marker of tension and transition between individual as

independent agent, a self, and a part of a greater but sub whole, as electric storms mark the passing of a frontal system, and the process by which the newly fashioned self is reined in and drawn back into community.

It is for these reasons that I believe that the phenomenon of witchcraft is much more interesting and relevant than most anthropologists have been capable of understanding and why concentrating on the exotic ethnographical paraphernalia and razzle-dazzle could do your work a disservice and either consign it to the incense saturated shelves of Wicca and the New Age (I'm not against people dancing naked in moonlight), or the danker unread shades of sociology (which I am).

MacJournal 2.1
Journal: Witchcraft

Date: August 18, 2002 09:23:17
POISON
Topic: Poison

I have felt a little uneasy about your use of the term poison in relation to WC. I may be misunderstanding your intention, but at times it seems as if you are clutching at the notion as a way of domesticating a troubling concept that is difficult to assimilate into our conventional notions about how the world works. And that you are trying to reduce WC, by an act of translation or re-description, to being little more than a naive or primitive way of dealing with the use of what might popularly and informally be described as poisons.

First, I would recommend that you read the beginning of Isaiah Berlin's essay, `The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will', in his collection `The Crooked Timber of Humanity: the revolt against the myth of and ideal world' which is in print and easily available. In it he points out how recent many of our attitudes and fundamental beliefs that we now tend to take for granted really are. How the assumption that Truth is one and error multiple and hence that one is good and many bad was historically dominant until only a couple of hundred years ago. And that variety is preferable to uniformity, tolerance to intolerance, warm hearted idealism to cold realism, and that integrity and sincerity are valuable independent of the truth ot validity of the beliefs or principle involved, are very new ideas, some might say conceits, that would seem very strange and threatening to most of our ancestors

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

No Catholic of the 16th century (or Calvinist) could say `I abhor the heresies of the reformers but am deeply moved by the sincerity and integrity with which they hold practice and sacrifice themselves for their abominable beliefs'. On the contrary the deeper the sincerity of the beliefs of Muslims, Jews, atheists, or witches the more dangerous they were bound to be considered; the more likely they were to lead souls to perdition because heresy is `surely a poison more dangerous to the health of society than even hypocrisy or dissimulation, which at least do not openly attack the true doctrine. Only Truth matters, to die in a false cause is wicked or pitiable'.

Notions of heresy and WC overlap in the mission statement of the various inquisitions. What they have in common may be that some express beliefs that are considered wrong and dangerous to the good of society. These are punished but there is the assumption, indeed the certainty, that there are others as yet undetected. The fear that this generates finds a focus in the behaviour or existence of individuals or groups that in some way stand out from the norm for that community and do not `fit'. These are then cleansed.

Witch cleansing is a means of dealing with troubling beliefs and intentions - not substances.

The problem is that the notion of poison has become a metaphor for ideas that we fear and its current use is often more figurative than scientific.

I remember in my childhood that medicines and substance that were potentially harmful were referred to as poisons and that classification marked by their containers; heavily built and embossed bottles in dark and dangerous colors; the shape designed to be easily distinguished from those containing benign substances in an age when the only light at night was from the moon or candles. In this sense a poison was any substance that might cause harm if used inappropriately; eg killing rats was good but killing people bad, and arsenic might treat syphilis but could also kill if used carelessly.

As it is now used poison is not really and certainly far more than a biological term, and the sense in which I first learned of it would probably now be better referred to simply as a toxic substance.

But, as it is now used, poison is to a toxic substance as murder is to death.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

I would suggest that poison has the following defining characteristics:

1. A substance usually chemical or biological that can cause disease or death.
2. That is difficult to detect without special knowledge and resources.
3. That can be used by `experts' (those who have access to knowledge and resources) to harm others, usually specific individuals but sometimes groups, in ways that are difficult to detect and therefore to defend against; ie without warning and therefore contravene tacitly accepted codes of conduct or `chivalry' - it is wrong to shoot someone in the back.
4. That it can be used with malice aforethought.
5. That it is used with malice.

The main reason for my doubts about the importance of poisons, at least in any scientific sense, is simply that knowledge of the properties and virtues of different plants and substances is widespread and ubiquitous. To claim for it a causal role in explaining outbursts of witch related behaviors would seem to require an explanation as to why such knowledge would wax and wane over relatively short periods. And I doubt if there is any evidence that that is the case.

And if most peoples have a working knowledge or awareness of potentially dangerous substances why bring the more exotic aspects of witchcraft into any explanation? Why not simply say that the incidents that are causing concern are the result of `poisons' and the role of the finder is that of the detective who will find the perpetrator? No. The real poisons are in the mind and any physical poisons are metaphors for psychological contagion and intent.

There are, however, other aspects of potentially toxic substances that may be relevant. The use of hallucinogens is widespread by shamans as a means of altering consciousness and giving access (the doors of perception) to the world of spirits. And it has been suggested that in Europe the location of the great witch outbreaks was that where rye was a staple food and the chronology might be correlated with weather conditions that would favor the growth of the fungus ergot that is well-known to produce hallucinations of a type that might be interpreted as the kind of events that witches were believed to participate in. But again although there is some evidence in support and the notion cannot be dismissed at present I think it probably runs into the same kinds of reservations that I have already expressed, and even if hallucinations were necessary to kindle a

conflagration that was already primed they would not be sufficient to account for it all.

Witchcraft is primarily a psychological or social psychological phenomenon and poisons play only a minor explanatory role if any.

Maybe one can relate this to other phenomena of more recent concern, like substance abuse and particularly the way that perceptions, preferences and habits change. You are probably aware that opium and cocaine were not only legal but widely available in this country until The Defense of the Realm Act 1916 and the Dangerous Drugs Act of 1920 which were the first legislative measures to establish the control of narcotics as social policy. Until then it had been more or less an integral part of the life of ordinary people - added to beer in the fen lands and children would be sent to the corner shop for supplies. It was used by Prime Ministers and one who fretted about his consumption was told by his physician `better a touch of laudanum than grumbling guts in The House'. Around 1850 the average consumption is thought to have been about 3-4lbs/1000 population and at that time deaths attributed to opium were around 5 per million. Compare these levels of consumption and mortality with current tobacco and alcohol.

Very roughly in EU in 2000 average consumption is about 9 litres of pure alcohol per annum (14.2 in Eire). USA around 2.2-2.5 gallons (?8.3 Litres). USA deaths from Cirrhosis alone 30/million; ie does not take accidents RTA etc into account.

The changes that have taken place since then have very little to do with medical evidence of harm and drug related policies are incoherent and illogical. As during Prohibition the vast majority of the harm correlated with drugs is the result of legislation which is almost completely ineffective. If that were not the case then, in what is perhaps the purest market economy, successful control would be marked by an increase in price. This is not the case. In the UK `ecstasy' is available to infants in school for around ¬£1 per tablet or about the same price as a large bar of chocolate or a fizzy drink. Which would you prefer? And I was often told by patients that they could have any drug delivered to their door in Falmouth within 5 minutes of a phone call - far quicker than a pizza.

I have no time to go into the history of opium in UK but see `Opium for the People' by Virginia Berridge (Free Association Books ISBN 1-85343-414-0) or the earlier edition written with

Griffiths-Edwards. Also Marek Kohn, Narcomania. If you are interested I can give you a more up to date bibliography.

My point here is simply that in substance abuse you have active pharmacological substances but on their own these are not sufficient to account for the actual social phenomena observed; these are psychologically determined. Even to the extent that there is good evidence that a large part of the supposed effects of the different substances is more closely correlated with expectations than differences in pharmacology. And that the placebo effect is related to changes in the brain similar to those also caused by the substance that the patient thinks they are taking.

You will not understand the phenomena of substance abuse if you confine your focus to pharmacology, and you will not understand witchcraft if you blinder down onto poisons or even hallucinogens.

Nor, will you understand witchcraft if you try and break the phenomenon onto the Procrustean bed of those concepts with which we feel at ease today. I think rather that we have to try and consider them as a system; a gestalt anchored in specific times and places. Witches are atomic constituents of specific world-views. In a sense they are virtual and in other world-views they take different forms or are hung like clothes on different things such as communists or alleged ritual or satanic abusers of children. The regalia of the witch is the wardrobe with which we clothe our deepest fears. And as with all fears of that type they are projections and their origin is within us rather than outside. They are manifestations of our unconscious which is also our unknown and undescribable.

Though the basic rules of pharmacology may not vary with time and place their social and psychological context, interpretation, and effects certainly do and it these that we must address.

Date: August 12, 2002 12:02:43
Topic:

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Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

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The Burning Times
by Winter

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* Joan's Witch directory
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* Burning Times
* The Witching Hours

Misconceptions about the Great Witch Hunt

There are many misconceptions about the Great Witch Hunt during the Burning Times. I would like to dispel some of them. Most of the information here can be found in the well documented study of Kurt Baschwitz: Hexen und Hexenprozesse ("Witches and witch trials", 1966, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH & Co, N√∂rdlingen, Germany, translations should be available).
A distinction will be made between trials of heretics and the witch trials proper that were derived from them.

In a heresy trial, the aim was to exterminate heterodox ideas, generally in the service of the authorities. To reach this aim:
Leading heretics, recidivists, and those who did not renounce their ideas were executed. Heterodox ideas were discredited by forcing heretics to renounce their ideas in public . Potential followers were intimidated by demonstrating the savage torture and severe punishments that awaited heretics.
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In such a trial, torture and execution were not inevitable, Joan of Arc was not tortured (1431, this would have made any confession of her useless to the English). Even in famous cases, like that against the Knights of the Temple (1305-1313), the rank and file of the followers were not executed if they renounced their ideas.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Because the prosecution was genuinely interested in the ideas that were on trial, transcripts and protocols of these trials are of great historical value.

In a proper witch trial, the aim was to exterminate the witches as conspirators with the devil.

No mercy was ever shown. Both torture and execution were deemed necessary. Witch hunters were often "self employed" and hired by the local authorities.

Because any connection with reality was lost in these trials, and the prosecutors were not interested in the believes of their victims, transcripts and protocols offer little help in the study of witchcraft and paganism at these times.

A sophisticated myth was developed around the Witches Sabbath. The use of this myth can be seen as the defining feature of a witch trial. It combined conspiracy theories against the Christian world, old (recycled) accusations of human sacrifice, more specific: the sacrifice of newborns, cannibalism, and a very distorted image of old Celtic shamanic practises involving a night-time hunt with the Goddess in animal form or riding animals. A beautiful analysis of the development of this idea of a Witches Sabbath and the religious background of these shamanic practises can be found in Carlo Ginzburg's book Ecstasies.

In the following we will list some of the basic facts about the Great Witch Hunt, which is often confused with the great heresy trials and the crusades against heretics that preceded it. Together these constitute the Burning Times.
Remember that the Burning Times lasted for 500+ years (1200-1750) and took place in the whole of non-Orthodox Europe. Any sweeping statement about this period is bound to be a simplification with many exceptions.
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* The Great Witch Hunt did not take place in the middle ages, but started in the 16th century, i.e. after the rediscovery of America. Its development started at the end of the 15th century in the western Alps, i.e., the Savoie and the north of Italy. The same region (and the Mid-South of France) had seen earlier mass persecutions of Lepers, Jews, and Heretics. But only around 1500 all the ingredients of the Witch Mass Hysteria came together and spread around Europe.

The Great Hunt really took off only after 1600 and most people were executed between 1600 and 1750. The last victim in Europe was Anna G√∂ldi, who was convicted in 1782 in the Swiss town of Glarus.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Note that this is the age of Descartes, Newton, and Leibnitz and the colonization of the Americas.

* Before the Great Witch Hunt, in Medieval times, individual witches or members of specific, heterodox, movements were tried before inquisitory courts, because they were considered heretics, or were accused of specific crimes (e.g., treason, murder attempts). Being a witch or sorceror was never more than instrumental to the crime in these times, although it could be used as incriminating evidence.

Considering the low quality of the legal system in these Pre-Hunt times, the trials can be considered reasonably effective and efficient in squelching heterodox movements and practises in blood. That is to say, a lot of those convicted were indeed heretics or sorcerors. It must be remembered that magick was considered on a par with any other useful craft.

During the Great Witch Hunt, any relation between the "guilt" of the accused and the outcome of the trial was lost.

Other groups, like Lepers and Jews faced bouts of horrible persecutions (and mass executions) that showed all the signs of the witch hunts, except that these were readily identifyable marginalized people.

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* During the Great Hunt, witches were accused of "impractical" and "traceless" crimes. They had intercourse with the devil and various demons at unlikely places and times. "Unregistered" babies from hidden pregnancies (i.e., no known babies were missing) were sacrificed and/or eaten, with no remains ever found. Sacred objects of unspecified origin were spoiled and misused. Global disasters were caused that brought no profit whatsoever to the accused, e.g., hail, caterpillars, droughts, floods, plagues. All in all, accusations were identical irrespective of time and place of the trial, but no solid evidence ever turned up.

Furthermore, the conspiracy of the witches was always boundless. The number of people thought to be involved could reach really absurd proportions. For instance, in 1609, the witch hunting French official Pierre de Lancre was convinced that all 30,000 inhabitants of Labourd, a Basque speaking region in the SW of France, were witches, priests included. He actually tried to execute all inhabitants and tortured and burned around 600 women and some men. He was stopped only after their male relatives returned from a fishing expedition of the coast of Newfoundland and started a revolt after which the Bishop of Bayonne (Bertrand d'Echaux) intervened. De Lancre was not tried or imprisoned after this feat but lived to an old age and was proud of his achievements.

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Incidently, the people who had fled to Logrono, in the Spanish part of Navarra, for safety, triggered a true witch hunt there. Hundreds of people were tried. However, the Spanish Inquisition intervened and only a few women were actually executed. As a result of this witch hunt, witch trials were prohibited in Spain (1614). What makes this case even more remarkable was the fact that it was admitted that those that had already been executed at Logrono (1610) were innocent and the judges were arrested (not for executing innocent people, but they had acted illegally by starting the trials and executions).

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* Witch hunts invariably started with a departure from normal and proper legal procedures. In general, every accused person was found guilty and was executed. Whenever normal legal practises were upheld, few or no people were executed and the witch hunt died down quickly. Witch hunts were only found where central power was weak (e.g., in Germany) or indecisive (e.g., the Salem case in Northern America). Where central power was strong (e.g., Spain, The Netherlands, both South and Nord, France since Mazarin), witch hunts were prevented or stopped (1600 in the Netherlands, 1610 in Spain and Belgium, 1647 in France).

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* Witch hunts were often instigated and perpetuated by hysterical children, adolescents, or nuns who accused relatives (even parents) and neighbors of outrageous crimes (does this ring a bell). When these "witnesses" were steered properly, anyone could be accused of anything. When they were isolated from each other and from the prosecutor, accusations quickly became unconvincing.

Isolating these "victims" of witch crimes was often used as a method to smother raging witch hunts.

* After the start of a witch hunt, any woman (or man) could be tried and executed as a witch. Sometimes, there was a serious risk that, indeed, each and every woman in the community would actually be executed (Labourd, France 1609; Fulda, 1603-1606; Offenburg, 1601-1631; Cologne, 1629-1636, Germany). Any real witch that was executed was caught only by accident. Only at the early start of a hunt were the victims the old, lonely women and mid-wives of lore. As a consequence, it is incorrect to speak of witches being executed during these witch hunts.

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* The most reliable estimations of the number of people killed during the witch hunts are (well) below the 1,000,000

mark. The actual number of documented executions is generally considered to be under 100,000. The difference between these two numbers is the (very unreliable) estimated number of lost reports.

Only a fraction of the victims of witch hunts were men, mostly those who tried to protect women or who resisted the witch hunters. By far the most victims were made in what is now Germany. A German witch hunt could kill hundreds in a single city (250 in Fulda, 1603-1606; 900 in Bamberg and 1200 in W√ºrzburg 1627-1631).

Note that 1,000,000 executions in 2 centuries (1550-1750) would mean 5000 executions a year: almost all of which had to take place in Germany, France, and England

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* The Catholic church was very sympathetic with those who hunted witches, but was not actually involved in the hunts. However, officials of the Catholic church occasionally were involved both in starting witch hunts and in terminating them. Occasionally, priests and nuns were even victims of the hunts.

Do note, that the Spanish Inquisition executed people by the thousands, but not because they were witches, only because they were heretics or (converted) Jews (actually, around 1600 only 1-1.5% of those tried were sorcerors o r witches). As a result, only few witch hunts were reported from Italy, Spain and the Spanish Netherlands (i.e., Belgium).

There were probably not as much people executed in witch hunts led by Protestants as were in hunts led by Catholics but the believe in witches was not less in the protestant regions.

Note: in Orthodox and Islamic countries, no proper witch hunts have ever taken place

* Witch trials were mob justice, steered by genuine believers, opportunists and demagogues. The man in the street actually believed in a conspiracy of the devil to destroy the Christian world. No matter how many they had killed, witch hunters were never brought to justice (not quite, there are two or three exceptions, e.g., Balthasar Ross, Fulda, Germany 1603-1606; the witch-judges in Logrono, Spain 1610). Any freed suspects often had to move away for fear of being lynched by their neighbors.

Note that the possessions of convicted witches were often confiscated and the hunters would get their share, fueling their efforts.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

In a culture whose preferred framework for interpreting how the world works is predominantly animistic, one that is saturated with spirit agents that are causally effective, spiritual influences will be a natural component of understanding how bad things happen. In HG cultures and the earlier stages of farming, when communities are small and kin based, if these explanations include people, the consequences and implications are probably fairly benign.

However, as communities increase in size and bump up against others as rivals for scarce resources the problem may become more malign. I have seen films of HGs in Africa who seem to fear wc, not within their community, but as a fearful power associated with other communities. In other words when bad things happen they are attributed to others - projected onto alien communities who are perceived as potentially threatening rivals. A distinction should probably be drawn between inter-community witchcraft and intra-community.

I would speculate that as communities become larger and more settled that the projection of danger onto others will be re-assimilated as fear of `traitors' and enemies within, who work against the community either with the help of enemies or spirits. This would make a fertile cultural environment for the generation of moral panics. And these would have the effect of hardening the conceptual boundaries around the explanations and facilitating the development of roles and institutional structures - the witch script if you like.

Once the institutions are well established the witch script will then be triggered more easily - it will have a lower threshold - and it will be applied more widely and within families where the effects will now be much more malignant.

Moral panics thus act as the mechanism whereby the witch script becomes institutionalized and more clearly articulated. And forms a cycle, or spiral, of malignancy, from small scale kin based and benign. to larger scale and more rigid, then back within families and smaller communities eg children as witches.

From: Duncan Macdonald <post@macdw.demon.co.uk>
Date: Sun Jan 05, 2003 03:15:09 Europe/London
To: Norman Miller <Norman.N.Miller@Dartmouth.EDU>
Subject:

Norman,

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Below is an attempt to set out the principal components of witchcraft phenomena. It is a bit terse as it was done on my Palm PDA which does not encourage too much elaboration.

The idea of evil is based in all major religions on the separation of what at one time was and should still be one (eg Satan as the fallen angel once beloved of God) and this is also realized in its tendency to manifestation in projection, externalization, polarization, and personification. It also explains its relationship to individuality and its amplification or augmentation at times when there is an emergence of the individual from the group. This occurred at the Renaissance and currently in Southern Africa. The individual can emerge either because of forces that encourage individuality, or the weakening of group forces; though because individuality and community are tightly bound as sides of a coin (inversely proportional) the precedence of one over the other is relative and so a single mechanism can account for the ascendency of either.

In the Zohar (written ?1295) the root of evil is in God and emerges when Din, stern judgment (the left hand of God), is separated or out of harmony with Hesed, Mercy (the right hand of God).

Do not get too entangled with my ideas about the importance of negation. The terminology is complex and I have not yet found the best form of expression. Moreover, there is no other source that I have been able to find, so you would be relying on my judgment alone. I am still working on the idea. All that you can say with confidence is that in defining good or evil we automatically define its polar opposite (they are the two sides of one coin; evil is what is not good and good what is not evil) and so good implies evil and vice versa. I believe that this accounts for much of the content of the anxieties and guilt feelings experienced by people with severe obsessional and depressive illnesses; and possibly some of the effects (on content of thoughts) of hallucinogenic and mind-altering substances. The more detail with which you specify what is good the clearer the form you give to evil.

Worth remembering that according to Zelecki the content of Near Death Experiences recorded in the Middle Ages was much more dark, diabolic, and frightening than the optimistic experiences reported nowadays. This suggests that such experiences are congruent with the beliefs and perceptual vocabulary of the subject and their time.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Remember too what the French historian Febvre (quoted by Trevor Roper) said; that the mind of one age is not necessarily subject to the same rules as the mind of another. (in my usage mind is constructed from signs rather than molecules although it uses and in a limited sense depends on the latter in the same way as a TV program uses and depends on the electrons of a TV tube)

I think that all the important features of witchcraft can be derived from three basic components; the implications of:

Theory of Mind
Evil as separation (and separating)
The creation of a victimarchy (based on sensitivity to injustice and the detection of cheating)

Each of these is almost certainly biologically (rather than culturally) based and hence dates from the emergence of homo sapiens and applies to all peoples. Everything else is an unpacking of the implications in different contexts.

What I refer to as Classical witchcraft are the historical European and African descriptions. Contemporary are the Holocaust, McCarthyism, and later manifestations such as Satanic Abuse. I am pleased that by my formulation all that one has to do to derive the latter from the former is to limit agency to human minds. This has the effect of stripping away all the shape-shifting, magic, and other occult phenomena and what you are left with is a structure that is significant and more common than you may have imagined. There is also a relative tendency to locate the power focus of the feared subversive within rather than outside the community, but this is not absolute as in the case of McCarthyism the focus was in Russia.

I believe that the real significance of witchcraft, for anyone other than a historian, is the revelation and identification of a small set of powerful biologically based tendencies that are constantly in danger of undermining efforts towards realizing a more enlightened notion of justice. Note, incidentally, that by my definition the Holocaust was a manifestation of a Contemporary witch-hunt. `Terrorism' seems well on the way to becoming another. And the USA is probably close from the point of view of Al-Quaeda (the only question is of scale, the extent to which there is an internal arm to the threatening group - ?CIA and its agents and allies - and the degree to which AQ considers itself as representative of a community of victims - which it seems to do).

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And I also believe that one of the best early warnings of the emergence of new forms of witch-hunt is pressure to change well established principles and processes of law designed to safeguard the innocent from wrongful conviction. This is always justified because a particular type of crime is causing great public concern (making people feel victims or as-one with victims) and there is a belief (often erroneous) that the existing legal processes are allowing perpetrators to escape justice (vengeance). In most cases the real reason is that there is insufficient evidence to ensure a safe conviction.

One of the effects of this process is the shifting of the center of gravity of attitudes towards crime from understanding, which focuses on the individual and causes, to diagnosis (labeling or classification for disposal) which focuses on descriptions in terms of types and standards. One of the results is a loss of sensitivity for the differences between the individuals convicted of similar crimes, with less scope for flexibility in sentencing. And a consequence is an increasing number of prisoners, with pressure on the prison service and knock on effects on many other crimes; while in spite of harsher sentencing there is an apparent continuing increase in the number of offenders (identified and suspected).

It would be my hope that by making the underlying witchcraft mechanisms more apparent by stripping them of their occult encrustations, then better safeguards of human rights (pace Bentham's stilts) can be put in place. It may be because these processes have not been specifically identified that the approach to the construction of some human rights legislation has been less clearly focused than it might have been; or even that important `democratic' threats to rights have been neglected.

Preconditions for witchcraft

A. Theory of Mind (biological) disposing to
- Agency or animism leading to:
- A mindful world

B. Evil as separation (individual from community) given form; or realized in human and other forms (eg spirits and devils)
- Polarization of evil as opposite of good (helped by language's tendency to bipolar classifications)

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- Projection of evil onto individual as a type: a member of a subversive group with external allegiance
- Personification of evil. First, at level of an individual. Second, at level of a group of which the individual is alleged to be a member. That can be either an external power (Communism or Satan), or internal (terrorists, satanic abusers, paedophiles)
- Elaboration and redescription of evil (imagery, ornamentation, words)

C. Sensitivity to injustice or cheating (biological, see Tooby and Cosmides) leading to
- The creation of victims
- Polarization of victims and perpetrators
- Formation of a victimarchy
- Fomalization of Vengeance

What do Classical and Contemporary forms have in common?

Projection and externalization of evil
Focus on individual as type and member of threatening outgroup or ingroup
Threat from opposing underground conspiratorial groups; individual seen as `tip of iceberg'
Amplification or augmentation of menace by association of individual with a feared group
Victimization
Vengeance
In spite of increasing retribution perceived threat and numbers of perpetrators multiply

What distinguishes Classical from Contemporary witch-hunts? In Contemporary (Western):

Agency restricted to human minds and therefore no shape shifting an other exotica
Relative focus on internal rather than external - ingroup rather than outgroup (but McCarthy focussed on outgroup)

To: Norman Miller 04/04/03

Fundamentalism Witchcraft Heresy and Treason

Hypothesis: There is a continuum from treason through heresy and witchcraft to fundamentalism. These have a common basis; the differences being accounted for by the situations in which

they occur. We are most concerned with witchcraft and fundamentalism.

Fundamental Features
Reaction to change
Disenchantment (with new)
Fear (of annihilation)
Projection of threat
Nostalgia for old ways
Adapt old to new

Present as table?

The major differences between witchcraft and fundamentalism are related to the situations in which they arise.

Witchcraft has its epicentre in smaller local communities, although later it may become institutionalised and generalised to regional or even national scales by being taken up and exapted by central authorities. An example might be the relation of witchcraft and heresy in 16th 17th century Europe.

It occurs or emerges from a background of supporting and facilitating beliefs in reaction to significant social change. In Europe these changes were internal; mostly conceptual and ideological. In Africa the trigger was probably external; the impact of contact with alien peoples and cultures and political systems.

Changes of the types involved are unlikely to benefit the majority of people at the beginning, no matter what the long term advantages may be. For example, in Europe the epidemics of witchcraft accusations were related to the Reformation, The Renaissance, and the beginning of modern science. These would have been experienced by most ordinary people as threatening. In relation to religion there was confusion, fear, and a loss of certainty; the danger of eternal damnation increased, while defences and protection decreased. Instead of the security of the mediation of a priesthood believers found themselves naked before a stern vengeful God. The practical benefits of science were still some way off and their interest as concepts not accessible to the general population. Whilst the individuality that was manifest by the Renaissace was not significant for all or everywhere.

For most people the past must have seemed more attractive.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

And all the time people had to respond and cope with all the usual traumas and threats 'that flesh is heir to'. Illness accident epidemics natural disasters deprivations etc, that in the past would have been fitted into and explained by more familiar traditions. These would have been experienced most acutely in local communities. How could they respond?

The most likely would be to attribute blame to someone the question is who? Where an external enemy was already identifiable they might be a target. But for most communities they would be quite distant or remote and might not be seen as an obvious perpetrator of the kind of natural dangers that were most problematic; especially as it would be fairly clear that they too suffered in similar ways and were not immune. However, what they and the crime of Treason could provide is a template or prototype to which other more exotic characteristics could be added and elaborated.

Nor, in a hierarchical top down society could blame be safely attrituted to authorities. So the most likely victims or targets would most likely be the weak, odd, and marginalised. These might be considered causes of misfortune in ways that were consistent with and reaffirmed older traditions that as a result of being used in this way would themselves be changed and adapted to modern concerns. And this approach would offer elites and authorities ways of reaffirming their roles and status within their communities.

This interpretation would also seem to be consistent with the phenomenon in Africa.

And the model can also fit fundamentalism simply by shifting the epicentre of concern from smaller local communities in hierarchical political structures to larger modern centralised but shallower and democratic or quasi-democratic societies. Whereas in the smaller communities splitting into factions or groups would be destructive and not sustainable. In larger, the more likely outcome would be the formation of contrasting groups.

This seems to be consistent with the evidence. Fundamentalism arises in situations of changes which do not improve the wellbeing of ordinary people and may be associated with a deterioration in their quality of life. They experience their identity as being further threatened by others who have perhaps benefited more from the changes and this at first internal projection of threat onto another part of the community is only later associated with external institutions or forces. This may

be a way in which the potential for schism and civil war may be contained.

From this perspective fundamentalism can be seen as related to witchcraft, the major differences being in scale and degree of local variation in form. I suspect that the form of witchcraft or what became so-called began as much more varied and local and was shaped into its later pattern by the Inquisition and central authorities creating a legal, standardized, or orthodox narrative into which later cases were fitted.

The common pattern is
change
disenchantment
fear
projection within community
extrusion - external projection of threat
reaffirmation of tradition and adaptation or reinterpretation to accommodate changing times

NB this does not address otuer important aspects of fundamentalism most noteably devaluation of theory of mind and distrust of figurativs language and especially irony.

I don't think I am really helping Norman with his book on witchcraft and if I were ever mentioned it would be along the lines of `... without whose help this book would have been finished many years ago'. But I am certainly getting more out of it than he as it has helped me to focus on issues that have more general relevance.

What interests me is that if you strip away the occult associations with which the subject of witchcraft has become encrusted, you find a much leaner and more interesting phenomenon that could help us to understand many others- from all manifestations of moral panic, through `witch hunts' (the only phenomenon that justifies the notion), to terrorism, ethnic cleansing, and genocide.

Essentially the notion of the witch is used as an explanation for bad things happening, for all kinds of misfortune including accidents, illness and death. And it has acquired an occult aura simply because it was formulated in what I call an animistic culture where the world works and is moved by the whim of willful spirits rather than inert atoms that follow the strict rule of physical laws. The definition I use is simply that a witch is someone who is believed to have the ability and

disposition to cause extraordinary harm. And the phenomenon of witchcraft is the whole structure of behaviors and institutions that develop in response to the fear induced by believing in witches as an explanation for bad things happening (kakia, or things that one would prefer to avoid). The focus is therefore on beliefs, or ways of representing and describing the subject, and hence is entirely in the eye of the beholder. Witches do not exist as a natural kind of being, but witch-believers, and witch-finders, and witch-hunters both exist and do real harm. Witches are social constructions.

This has resulted in a confusion between two usages of the term witchcraft: on the one hand witchcraft is used to refer to what witches (are believed to) do, on the other to what is done to or about (those who are perceived as being) witches. Most popular interest in witches is about what they do, whilst most academic studies are about what is done to them. And in cultures that believe in witches the common people feel threatened by them and are desperate for help from the law, whilst the formal authorities and legal system do not acknowledge the existence of witches and are concerned instead with the activities of witch-hunters.

The ordinary people experience their misfortunes as a mark and result of living in a world with witches who make them feel victims. From their point of view witches are criminals who should be punished and yet the formal, legal, law not only denies the existence of witches but prosecutes and punishes any who seek redress. This incongruity is experienced as exclusion and can only undermine the rule of law and encourage the development of extra legal legal systems that seek to provide the protection and `justice' that the legal law denies.

But, what interests me particularly is that witches are an example of how behaviors and institutions and even great organizations can come into existence as a response to a misunderstanding, misperception, misinterpretation, or simply something that does not exist.

The distinction between a thing and what is done about it, has more general relevance although probably uncertain significance. It is the distinction between the characteristics of a motor vehicle and the reaction to its existence - the transport infrastructure that grows around it. It is the distinction between the poor and what is done about them. And although one would like to think that the stimulus and response, or object and reaction, were both causally and logically and proportionately related, the relationship is often complex and

confused. The problem is that what we are dealing with are not naturally given kinds of thing, like planets or dinosaurs, but at least in part social constructs, whose nature is in large measure a matter of beliefs, desires, and interpretations - in other words of descriptions. This means that there is always the possibility of confusion and hence the link between object and reaction can be corrupted by either misinterpretation, or failures of reason, or both. At one extreme one can have, at least in principle, a relatively logical and coherent transport system based on motor vehicles, at the other complex structures of behaviors and tangible institutions based on belief in entities that may not even exist, or have been misinterpreted - such as witches, or the founders of the great religions.

The common theme is that there is often a mismatch of proportion, or scale, between an adverse phenomenon and the structures that develop as a response to it, whether as therapy or prophylaxis. In most cases the consequences are trivial or short lived, but in a few cases they become malignant and metastasize far and wide to threaten the whole body. The key to the process is that the malignant response is shaped by the way in which the provoking stimulus is described, rather than whatever reality it may have - which may, as in the case of witches, be none. In general, all institutions are based on descriptions which, if inappropriate, can obscure the reality of what they are all too easily presumed to describe. The existence of religion as great, tangible, organizations may suggest the existence of gods, but by the variety and vagaries of description renders their reality opaque and distorted. And the institutions of aid and poverty too often distort and obscure the nature of the poverty. There is a confusion and often incongruity between the reality of the poor and the reality of the institutions that have developed to do something about them.

It might be argued that in writing EOS, by a process of re-description, you changed the relationship between the poor and what should be done about them. Before they were considered a problem, or burden, afterwards an opportunity. Before, the markets were on the defensive in gated communities for protection against being over-run by the hordes of passively dependent, or actively criminal, disadvantaged. Inside entrepreneurs were noble adventurers, outside scavengers, or criminal black-marketeers. After, the gates defended, not markets, but privileges and the disadvantaged became more like hunters and gatherers surviving as best they could in a hostile area of exclusion. In one sense nothing changed overnight, the gates still divided an inside from an outside and the poor were as poor as ever and still excluded. But the implications and the

solutions had changed completely, what had been a problem of exclusion and law enforcement, became one of opening, or embracing, and empowering. What had changed was perception and interpretation, in other words descriptions. That is the basis of the distinction between what witches do (or are) and what is done about them. What they are, or are believed to be, how they are perceived, will determine what is done about them, and generally the link will appear proportionate, logical, and rational - so long as the description is accepted. The old lady accused of being a witch has none of the powers attributed to her but so long as she is believed to have them her life is chaff and a motivation and justification for the rationally structured institutions associated with doing things about witches. And maybe Jesus was just a regular guy whose existence had a butterfly effect that resulted in Chartres and the the Inquisition and the Requerimiento. Mistakes can have real and vast consequences. The foundations on which institutions are built are shared beliefs, not `realities' in any more substantial sense. There is usually a mismatch of scale between cause and consequence.

The great organizations that are ostensibly designed to do something about the poor, do not necessarily tell us anything useful about what the poor are really like. Most interpret and construct what they appear to treat. They are like distorting mirrors. And so it is in other fields, responses to terrorism, to certain crimes, to communism (in the past), and to rival ethnic groups. Witches are useful because they are an extreme from of the phenomenon of complex responses to stimuli that have no independent existence.

Now I appreciate that much of this is commonplace and not at all novel, and yet I still think it is important because in so many cases the failure to establish a proper and proportional link between stimulus and response is simply excused. Programs to aid the poor fail to deliver, projects that are estimated to cost 1 million end up costing 20, the war on drugs fails to prevent the price dropping, the war on terror increases discontent and alienation, and there are always excuses based on technical issues, when the common fault is a misinterpretation of evidence and a dissonance between the reality and the perception of what is needed.

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It is possible to think of wc in this way. One would find lots of little dots that represented family and neighborhood

suspicion and accusations. These are relatively discrete and contained, flaring up and dying down without spreading to the wider community. But sometimes these will come in contact with a hub, probably a healer or other authority or expert, whose traces will be found linking many others and when this happens traces of wc grow and link increasing numbers into a characteristic pattern - probably more like that around a prostitute or brothel than a trucker, or former US President.

These hubs are the amplifiers. They are the major problem. Accusations are no more significant than the expression of a wish, or even threat, to kill or injure someone who has annoyed or wronged you. They represent conventional or cultural wisdom about what is possible. And they only kindle into something wlder and more dangerous when they are endorsed and shaped by an authority. Every country has jokes against some of their kind: in England about the Irish, in SA Boers or Africans, in Nigeria the Ibo, and in many countries Jews. But it is only rarely that these amount to more than causing offense. But if, as in Germany, a familiar stereotype marking one as different from another is endorsed by a powerful authority a holocaust can ensue.

However, if in the case of wc healers are major hubs, it is probably not possible and would be difficult to elicit their help in eliminating wc accusations and counter wc activity. This is for the simple reason that without belief in wc their relative impotence to heal would be exposed and they would lose status and power. For what they mostly heal is the fear of witches. It is possible that among their activities is the use of herbs etc that may have some therapeutic effects, and some among them may be more knowledgeable than others, but I am certain that most get their reputation by providing explanations based on wc beliefs.

POLICY

So policy suggestions:

1. Do not put your faith in asking traditional healers to deny what is probably the foundation of their influence. That would be like asking a doctor to heal without laboratory tests or drugs. Or asking a creationist to believe in evolution.

2. Map (without a satellite) the structure of authority and confirmation that amplifies wc accusations into actions and epidemics. Focus on the hubs and ignore accusations, as you will have no greater liklihood of stopping them in the short term

than sexist and racist jokes, or expletive and phatic expressions of homicidal longings.

3. Start pilot schemes with the aim of identifying the kinds of misfortune that are most likely to trigger wc interpretations that lead to harm (most do not). Then if possible develop intensive and effective programs to ameliorate them - always testing in small local areas. For example, infant health services. Another might be re-presenting those most likely to be accused of wc as assets eg by paying old people an allowance and/or better give something to the community for every vulnerable person unmolested. This might be similar to attempts to persuade villagers to conserve rather than kill elephant or tiger.

4. I now have serious reservations about the utility of working through traditional healers. It would probably be better to train new medical assistants in Western medicine targetting their activities to problems on which they could have maximal effectiveness in the hope that this would highlight and expose the impotence of the traditionals. Though this would not address many issues for which wc would remain the favored explanation, over time the reputation and authority of the new healer should increase relative to the traditional.

5. The problem with encouraging innovations such as shaving is that it can only endorse the interpretations and authority of the traditional healers that are the hubs that amplify folklore and gossip into behaviors that threaten rights. Instead the aim should be to identify, marginalize and neutralize the amplifiers and hubs.

6. What is required is not changing isolated beliefs but attitudes and frameworks of interpretation. Time and brainwashing are needed. Religious conversion rather than education is the goal.

PS - the semenscope (TM) would be great fun for parties.

DEFINITIONS

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Witchcraft
Key Points
1. Definition Defective. Most definitions of witchcraft are variants of 'harm done by occult means' - for occult read magic supernatural etc. Unfortunately this locates the centre of gravity or principal focus in the wrong place from which it is impossible to get a 15clear view of the phenomenon. It is like trying to understand diseases by classifying spots or other symptoms as ends in themselves without considering the underlying pathology that makes sense of them - all studies based on this kind of definition are trivial and lack general significance or application.
2. Witchcraft has nothing to do with the occult. Associations with the occult are accidental and not essential. They are simply local color.
3. The study of Witchcraft is not concerned with what witches are alleged to do, but what is done to and about people who are alleged to be witches.
4. The proper and only useful definition of witchcraft is: 'Witchcraft is the reaction to the fear caused by the belief that certain indlviduals have an extraordinary power to harm.'

It is a characteristic of the feared harm anticipated that people feel helpless, victims, that existing controls and laws are inadequate and put pressure on the authorities to do something about it. This suggests that witchcraft will be associated with and may require a hierarchical structure of authority in which the majority expect a minority to ensure their safety and security. Witchcraft will be correlated with situations where authority is immature, poorly developed, weak or vulnerable. And fear of it will both threaten and provide opportunities for politicians and religious leaders to exploit and manipulate to their advantage.

5. From this viewpoint the basic form of witchcraft is universal and one of the most extreme manifestations of moral panic and the most important question is what are the local conditions that lead to fear kindling into l the conflagration of a witch hunt?

6. And one of the important implications is that by realizing that
witchcraft is based on a general mechanism it is less exotlc and reactions to it are dlstorted and disproportionate. This knowledge can help to immunize us against dlseased politicians who may try to exploit our fears to our disadvantage.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

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Subject:

HISTORY OF WITCHCRAFT STUDIES

WITCHCRAFT IN MODERN AFRICA

AS VIRTUALISED BOUNDARY CONDITIONS OF THE KINSHIP ORDER

Wim van Binsbergen

Version 2000-12-08 text only

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1. INTRODUCTION1

For many decades, anthropologists have dominated the academic study of African societies and cultures, and for a similar period most anthropologists have scarcely bothered to investigate the epistemological premises of their discipline. The common assumption was that prolonged fieldwork would take care of whatever nasty questions epistemologists could ask. In the first half of the twentieth century, anthropologists were busily engaged in a professionalisation process which made them surround their juvenile discipline with high walls of institutional and paradigmatic isolationism - through which general developments on the intellectual scene only selectively and reluctantly penetrated. Moreover, the mainstream of Western philosophy had been remarkably Eurocentric, philosophers had their hands full with one language and one culture, and were not particularly equipped to illuminate the interlingual and intercultural quest for knowledge of which anthropology and African Studies form part. From the early 1970s onwards, the epistemological complacency of anthropology has been increasingly assaulted by a series of debates on the imperialist background of anthropology, on decolonisation, on orientalism, on alterity or otherness, on male-centredness, on ethnographic authority, on Afrocentrism, and so on. The title of the panel of the international African Studies Association Annual Meeting

where the present chapter was presented for the first time: 'Epistemological and ideological approaches to witchcraft analysis within African Studies: A critical assessment' indicates a new phase of reflection on the problems and possibilities of academic knowledge production in the modern world. Since Marx, Mannheim, and Michel Foucault we have been deeply aware that power relations largely determine - often inconspicuously - any production of knowledge. In the context of African studies this observation is of crucial importance. For here a massive volume of knowledge is being produced by outsiders who cannot by any standards identify as Africa. Moreover, this knowledge addresses a part of the world which was subjected to outside domination for long periods, and whose dependence and marginalisation in the contemporary period of globalisation is only increasing. As Africanists we must constantly consider the foundations of our knowledge production, and we must be prepared to thresh out the contradictions in this production in genuine debate with those of our colleagues who (as Africans, as African Americans, as members of Asian, South American, and Oceanian societies) occupy strategically different positions in a world which is at the same time globalising and under North Atlantic hegemony.

The study of witchcraft occupies an important place in this endeavour, since for a long time Africa has been singled out as the proverbial abode of witchcraft. This started in Late Antiquity, when Egypt was already singled out in similar terms in the Graeco-Roman perception.2 More recently, throughout the colonial period, witchcraft featured in racialist and imperialist constructions of alterity and inferiority as projected onto members of African societies. A number of phases may be discerned in the academic study of witchcraft as a major topic in African studies:

,Ä¢ the insistence on witchcraft as a manifestation of Africans' alleged fundamentally different modes of thought as compared to inhabitants of the North Atlantic (L√©vy-Bruhl, Evans-Pritchard, 1920-40s)

,Ä¢ the vindication of the African subject's rationality by insistence on the logic of social relations behind witchcraft, against the background - considered to be more or less table and timeless - of the stable institutions of African village society (Gluckman, Marwick, the Manchester School in general, 1950-70s)

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,Ä¢ witchcraft as one of the symbolic expressions of the African subject's active confrontation of problems of evil, meaning and competition in a context of rapid social and political change (e.g. the study of African religious change centring on Ranger, 1960-1980s; also my own work situates itself here)

and, after a slack period during the 1970s and '80s,3

,Ä¢ the massive insistence on witchcraft in modern Africa interpreted as an African path to modernity in the context of globalisation (Geschiere; the Comaroffs c.s.).

Witchcraft has meanwhile featured in specifically philosophical arguments. These initially reiterated L√©vy-Bruhl's position or Frazer's contention that witchcraft (and magic in general) was misguided proto-science - an alternative theory of the natural world and its inner workings. A major breakthrough occurred in this field when the philosopher Winch,4 a follower of the later Wittgenstein, cogently argued the fallacy of the Frazerian approach. Far from expounding a theory of the natural world which is demonstrably false - which would call in question Africans' capability of empirical observation and logical reasoning, therefore would be in conflict with the anthropological tenet of the unity of mankind and with the epistemological principle of charity;5 and would be academic-political dynamite under contemporary conditions - Winch argued that African witchcraft, like any other religious beliefs the world over, comes in where knowledge (the knowledge of members of an African society, but also the knowledge of cosmopolitan natural sciences) runs out. African witchcraft is no more a theory of the natural world than that the Christian and Islamic dogma of Divine Providence is - what these three belief systems have in common is that they seek to articulate what is beyond empirical knowledge; but all may be pushed to a point where they imply the possibility of miracles, i.e. incidental departures from physical laws. African witchcraft is a way of speaking about the unspeakable, and as such perhaps understandable to believers, poets, philosophers and anthropologists, but outside the realm of natural science testing. If we accept this position, epistemology takes away our political embarrassment since clearly our study of African witchcraft no longer implies

that Africans' intellectual capabilities are in any way different or deficient as compared to those of the rest of mankind. But for the great majority of Africanists like myself, who did not need Winch to arrive at this insight in the first place, this does not exhaust the potential of African witchcraft as a topic of research.6

Meanwhile the study of witchcraft in Africa poses the same epistemological problems as any other attempt to study religious beliefs and practices with the concepts and theories which the social sciences have developed in the course of the twentieth century. Personally I have recently made the transition from a chair in anthropology to one in philosophy because I am convinced that without such epistemological reflection anthropology is not going to fulfil its promise, at a time when - with globalisation and the rise of multicultural societies in the North Atlantic - the intercultural knowledge production which anthropology promised to deliver is more needed than ever. However, at this stage I feel I have more to offer as a long-standing anthropological and historical student of witchcraft, than as a novice philosopher.

The steps in my argument are inspired by two excellent recent texts written by my long-standing colleagues and friends7 Peter Geschiere and Matthew Schoffeleers,8 both in the forefront of the Dutch contribution to African religious studies. Geschiere's argument is contained in a beautiful and thoughtful book,9 which has been widely acclaimed in its French version and whose English version is now playing a major role in the current revival of the study of witchcraft in a context of globalisation - signaling, in Geschiere's words, the 're-enchantment of Africa'. Matthew Schoffeleers' paper serves to suggest the perspective from which I can focus on Geschiere's.

The present argument operates at a high level of aggregation and generality. I try to contribute to the construction of an analytical context for the description and analysis of witchcraft beliefs and practices. But admittedly I scarcely enter into a discussion of specific descriptive details; this is to be reserved for a later study.

Throughout the argument I shall deploy the concept of virtuality, which in my recent work I have found helpful towards the definition of relationships of broken reference and meaning gone astray, such as characterise social and cultural phenomena in Africa today. Therefore, let me begin by defining the concept of virtuality and provisionally indicating its use for the study of contemporary Africa.

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2. VIRTUALITY AND THE VIRTUAL VILLAGE

2.1. Virtuality defined10

The terms virtual and virtuality have a well-defined and instructive trajectory in the history of ideas. In its broad sweep of space and time, its multi-lingual aspect and its repeated changes of meaning and context, this trajectory reminds us of the context we seek to illuminate by the use of these terms: that of globalisation.

Non-existent in classical Latin (although obviously inspired by the word virtus there), virtual and virtuality are late-medieval neologisms. Their invention became necessary when, partly via Arabic versions of Aristotle's works, his concept of dv∫namis ('potentiality, power, quadrate') had to be translated into Latin. While the Scholastic/ Aristotelian philosophy, with its emphasis on general potential to be realised in the concrete and the specific, gradually retreated from most domains of North Atlantic intellectual life, the terms found refuge in the expanding field of physics, especially mechanics, where virtual velocity, virtual moment, virtual work became established concepts around 1800. This was a century after optics - another branch of physics - had formulated the theory of the virtual image: the objects showing up in a mirror image do not really exist in the place where we see them, but they are merely illusory representations, which we believe to observe at the end of the refracted light beams connecting the object, the surface of the mirror, and our eye.

In our age of information technology the term virtual has gained a new lease of life. While in the context of contemporary automatics virtual largely takes its cue from the meaning given to the term in optics ('illusion'), it has also incorporated the mechanics sense of 'potentiality capable of actual realisation'. In the globalisation perspective we frequently refer to products of the electronic industry; the

furtive, intangible projection of texts and images on electronic screens is an obvious example of virtuality. Virtual reality has now become a clich√© of the post-modern experience: computer games and simulations which - with extreme suggestions of reality - conjure up, for the consumer, experiences which are as real as they are vicarious.

Guattari has introduced a related but significantly different use of the term virtuality: for him the term refers to new, unprecedented worlds, which are conjured up by creativity - contrasting science as knowledge of the real with philosophy as knowledge of the virtual. The evocation of these forms of virtuality in the context of art and philosophy is the most inspiring and hopeful aspect of Guattari's work, who however tends to ignore the structures of domination prevailing also in the production of art and philosophy.11

We need a further abstraction in order to make the concept of virtuality amenable to the analysis of modern Africa. Let virtuality stand for a specific relation of reference as existing between elements of culture (A1, A2, ..., An). This relation may be defined as follows:

Once, in some original context C1, Avirtual referred to (i.e. derived its meaning from) Areal; this relationship of reference is still implied to hold, but in actual fact Avirtual has come to function in a context C2 which is so totally dissimilar to C1, that Avirtual stands on its own; and although still detectable on formal grounds to derive from Areal, Avirtual has become effectively meaningless in the new context C2, unless for some new meaning which Avirtual may acquire in C2 in ways totally unrelated to C1.

Virtuality then is about disconnectivity, broken reference, de-contextualisation, through which yet formal continuity shimmers through.

Such an approach to virtuality allows us to study the process of the appropriation of globally available objects, images and ideas in a local context, which constitutes itself in the very process of such appropriation. Under conditions of globalisation, this process occurs everywhere in the world today. However it takes on a particularly marked form in Africa, where new technologies, like the computer, television and video,

appear to be particularly discontinuous vis-√†-vis pre-existing social and technological practices, and where the economic situation moreover imposes exceptional constraints on the introduction and spread of these new technologies. Far better than the classic research tradition which imagined bounded and integrated local 'cultures' to be drawn into contact with the wider world, the concept of virtuality offers a context for the analysis of contemporary African actors' production and sustaining of meaning in a context of globalisation. Virtuality equips us for the situation, which the global spread of consumerism and electronic technology has rendered increasingly common also in Africa, that meaning is encountered and manipulated in a context far removed, in time and space, from the concrete social context of production and reproduction where that meaning was originally worked out; where meaning is no longer local and systemic, but fragmented, ragged, absurd, maybe even absent.

But let us not forget that virtualising appropriation need not be limited to new forms coming in globally from very distant places. When today in South Central African towns there is a revival of girl's puberty rites whose imagery celebrates a rural cosmology no longer operative any more even in the rural areas, this is an instance of urbanites appropriating a virtualised rural model. It is my contention in the present chapter that a similar process is at work in modern African witchcraft beliefs and practices as found among African elites and middle classes.

2.2. The virtual village

We are all familiar with the obsolete classic anthropological image of a multiplicity of African 'cultures', where 'each' culture was taken to be holistic, self-contained, bounded, integrated, locally anchored, effectively to be subsumed under an ethnic name. This image was deliberately constructed by ethnographers from the 1930s onwards so as to constitute, for the people supposed to adhere to one such culture, a local universe of meaning - the opposite of virtuality. Such a culture was thought to form an integrated unity, so all its parts were supposed to refer to that same coherence, which in its entirety gave the satisfactory illusion of localised meaningfulness. Marxist anthropology of the 1970s and 1980s represented only a partial, not a radical departure from this holistic classic

position.12 Both the Marxist and the classic position would tend to agree that African historic societies have offered to their members (and largely in order to accommodate those very contradictions) a fairly coherent universe, in which the human body-self, interpersonal relations, the landscape, and the supernatural all featured in one composite, comprehensive world-view, whose symbolism and ritual elaboration where to reconcile and conceal, rather than articulate, such internal contradictions as constitute the whole and render it dynamic. The agreement between the classical and the Marxist anthropological position should not be taken as a sign of validity, or as a sign of agreement on my part, given the theoretical position I hold today. African historic societies in the present millennium have invariably displayed cleavages in terms of gender, age, class, and political power, revealing comprehensive historical and structural factors which cannot be meaningfully approached within a narrow spatial and temporal horizon. Classic anthropological theory as well as Marxist modes-of-production analysis is not incapable of casting light on these factors, but when doing so fail to justify the classic obsession for the local and presentist horizon, while even Marxist anthropology in the African context has tended to concentrate on specific social formations whose confinement to narrow spatial and temporal horizons was taken for granted. However, what is involved here is socio-cultural forms of production and reproduction which are very widespread in space (over much of the African continent, if not beyond) and time (several millennia) , not only because of their typological similarity, but also and particularly because they form part of one comprehensive historical transformation process from the Beolithic onwards. Moreover, historic African societies and their cultures have always contained elements whose local integration was only partial: beyond the local society, they derived from, and partially still continued to refer to, other cultural complexes which were often remote in space and time. Both the classic and the Marxist approaches have been incapable of coping with these continuities through time and space. 13

In this context, the meaning of an element of the local society and culture may be said to consist in the network of referential relations at the centre of which that element is perceived and conceptualised by the participants;14 through this relational network the element is taken, by the actors, explicitly or implicitly, as belonging to that general socio-cultural order, cognitively and emotively linked to many other aspects of that order - a condition which produces a sense of proper placement, connectivity and coherence, recognition,

identity as a person and as a group, aesthetics, bodily comfort and even healing.

In Africa, village society still forms the context in which many present-day urbanites were born, and where some will retire and die. Until recently, the dichotomy between town and village dominated Africanist anthropology. Today we admit that, considering the constant movement of ideas, goods and people between town and village, and the increasing economic, institutional, political and ideological continuity between the two, the dichotomy has lost much of its explanatory value. Town and village have become complementary, even converging options within the social experience of Africans today; their difference has become gradual, and is no longer absolute. However, while of diminishing value in the hands of us analysts, the dichotomy between town and village remains relevant in so far as it informs African actors' conceptualisations of their life-world and social experience. Here the idealised image of the village stands for an imaginary context (no longer to be found in the real villages of today) where production and reproduction are viable and meaningful, pursued by people who - organised along the lines of age and gender divisions, and historic ('traditional') leadership - are turned into an effective community through an un-eroded kinship system, symbolism, ritual and cosmology. Vital in this set-up is that - largely through non-verbal means - ritual manages to construct the bodies of the members of the residential group as charged or inscribed with a shared meaning, a shared identity, and while the body moves across time and space this indelible mark yet remains, to be carried over into new contexts.

Even in the village context the effective construction of community cannot be taken for granted. Central African villages, for instance, have been described15 as the scene of an uneasy truce between strangers, only temporarily constructed into community - mainly through kinship rituals which take up an enormous part of available resources and even so barely conceal or negotiate underlying contradictions among the village population. Such rituals of kinship (some articulating reconciliation after conflict, and more others articulating over such life crises as pregnancy, birth, adolescence, marriage, and death) transform biological human individuals into competent social persons with a marked identity founded in the local community (or in the case of death transform such social persons into ancestral spirits or transfer them onto living heirs in the face of physical decomposition). Kinship rituals construct, within the overall community, specific constituent identities, e.g. those of gender and age.

They refer to, and to a considerable extent reproduce and perpetuate, the productive and social organisation of the village society. Perhaps the central characteristic of the nineteenth-century village order was that the construction of community was still so effective that in the villagers' consciousness their actual residential group, despite periodic conflict, self-evidently appeared as the realisation of the community ideal.

It is crucial to realise that in the twentieth century, even with reference to rural settings, we are not so much dealing with 'real' communities, but with rural folks' increasingly problematic model of the village community. Perhaps we could say that throughout the twentieth century, the village in South Central and Southern African discourse has been in the process of becoming a virtual village. During the heyday of studies of African religious history, rural ideological change in Africa during the twentieth century16 came to be regarded as a process of people actively confronting the erosion of that model, its becoming irrelevant and impotent in the face of political and economic realities. Employing numerous forms of organisational, ideological and productive innovation combining local practices with outside borrowings, rural populations in Africa struggled to reconstruct a new sense of community in an attempt to revitalise, complement or replace the collapsing village community in what was remembered as its viable nineteenth - century form. The ideological history of twentieth century Africa could be largely written from this perspective. Peasants have been constantly engaged in the construction of new, alternative forms of community on the basis of rather new principles such as derived from political, cultic, productive and consumerist ideas introduced from the wider world. Many of these movements have sought to re-formulate the notion of the viable, intact village community in new terms and with new outside inspiration and outside pressure. Healing cults, prophetic cults, anti-sorcery movements, varieties of imported world religions and local transformations thereof e.g. in the form of Independent churches, struggles for political independence, involvement in modern national politics including the recent wave of democratisation, ethnicity, involvement in a peripheral-capitalist cash economy with new symbols of status and distinction, - these have been some of the strategies by which villagers have sought (often against many odds) to create and bring to life the image of a new world, and a continued sense of meaning and community, when the old village order was felt, or said, to fall apart. And that old village order, and the ethnic cultures under which it was usually subsumed, may in itself have been largely illusory, strategically underpinned by

the ideological claims of elders, chiefs, first-generation local intellectuals, colonial administrators and missionaries, open to the cultural bricolage of invented tradition on the part of these comparatively actors.17

If the construction of community in the rural context has been problematic, the village yet represents one of the very few models of viable community among Africans today, including urbanites. It is the only model which is part of a collective idiom pervading all sections of contemporary society. As such it features massively as a nostalgic reference in ethnic identity construction. Whatever alternative models of community are available, are shallowly rooted and reserved to specific sections of the society: Christians or Muslims (the local religious congregation as a community; and by extension the abstract world-wide collective of co-religionists), cult members (the cultic group as a community), members of a specific ethnic group (where the - usually newly invented - ethnic group is constructed into a community, often with emphatic reference to the village model as a focal point of origin and meaning), the elite (for whom patterns of consumerism replace the notion of community-through-interaction, with the notion of virtual or vicarious global community through media transmission and the display of appropriate manufactured symbols - status symbols in clothing, transport, housing etc.).

Having identified the village featuring in contemporary African expressions of self-identity and meaning, as a virtual village, let us proceed to examine two recent Dutch approaches to African witchcraft and healing, one by Peter Geschiere, the other one by Matthew Schoffeleers.

3. TWO RECENT DUTCH DISCOURSES ON WITCHCRAFT AND HEALING IN AFRICA

3.1. A Malawian healing movement

Schoffeleers deals with a recent and short-lived healing cult in Malawi, around the healer Billy Goodson Chisupe.18 During a few months in 1995 - grabbing an opportunity which fell away with

the aged protagonist's death - tens of thousands of people flocked to Chisupe's village home in order to obtain the cure for AIDS which had been shown to him - an ordinary villager until then - in a dream only a few months earlier.

In terms of the story of the prophet's calling, and the massive pilgrimage to his rural dwelling, the cult replays a scenario that is familiar to students of popular religion in South Central Africa in the twentieth century, from the Ila prophet Mupumani who appeared in the midst of drought and effective colonial penetration in the 1910s, to the Bemba prophetess Lenshina in the 1950s and '60s; both attracted a following of many thousands of people in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and even adjacent territories.19 In the most admirable and convincing way, Schoffeleers situates the brief contemporaneous history of the Chisupe's both within the time-honoured cosmology of the Malawi countryside of which he has become the principal living ethnographer;20 and within the national political and social developments in Malawi during the 1980s and early 1990s. Predictably, considering the accumulated literature on religious movements in South Central Africa, Schoffeleers interprets Chisupe's cult, beyond its claimed therapeutic effectiveness against AIDS, as an attempt to revitalise the country: i.e. the nation-state.

Chisupe dispensed a reddish herbal solution. The Malawian public and the media - contrary to the healer's own choice of words - insisted on calling this medicine mchape. Of course Schoffeleers would be the first to realise that mchape is the central concept which, while retaining its basic meaning of 'ablution', in the colonial history of Malawi and adjacent parts of South Central Africa has acquired a more specific meaning: that of 'witchcraft - cleansing medicine'; by extension it has come to denote the young men, often returning migrants, who would come to the villages forcing people to surrender their witchcraft materials and to be cleansed.21 However, in the context of Chisupe's cult, references to witchcraft have been so minimal that Schoffeleers sees no reason to refer to them.

Let us now turn to Geschiere's analysis of witchcraft in Cameroon today.

3.2. Witchcraft in Cameroon today

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

We are all aware of the unsatisfactory nature of 'witchcraft' as an analytical ('etic') term; yet the term is acceptable since, far from being an alien imposition, it is the (inevitably defective) translation of a 'emic' concept found in many African languages and consciously informing actors' practices. Geschiere rightly argues that we should not waste time over terminological issues before we have considered the actual language usages of the people we write about. In his recent work, as well as in his earlier book on the Maka of Cameroon, he proposes to use a term which he suggests to be more neutral, 'occult forces'.22 However, the intra-disciplinary dynamics of anthropological labelling have persuaded him to largely retain the term witchcraft, and that is what I shall do.

We may distinguish at least four different contexts where various sets of actors make pronouncements concerning witchcraft:

,Ä¢ the village and the local language prevailing there;

,Ä¢ the popular culture of the town with its oscillation between local African languages, one or more urban linguae francae of African origin, and an intercontinental language such as French and English;

,Ä¢ the national elite and its preferred intercontinental language; and

,Ä¢ the domain of intercontinental scholarship, expressing itself again in intercontinental languages.

Geschiere now implies - and this lends to his argument its unique quality - that these four contexts are intimately interrelated and even overlapping in the case of contemporary Cameroonian beliefs and practices relating to witchcraft.

Witchcraft is the central issue in Geschiere's argument, and at first glance he appears to confirm the image well-known from the literature written by missionaries and colonial administrators from the late nineteenth century till the middle of the twentieth century:23 an Africa which is the abode of witchcraft. But, contrary to the expectation of these earlier European observers and actors on the African scene, Geschiere proceeds to demonstrate at length: that witchcraft has

not disappeared under the onslaught of modernity, but has installed itself at the very heart of modernity. Geschiere argues that the African actors' discourse concerning power in the post-colonial state, and concerning the acquisition and use of modern consumer goods, hinges on their conception of witchcraft. Whereas witchcraft cases in the colonial era, especially in former British Central Africa, were based on the official dogma that witchcraft is an illusion (so that people invoking witchcraft would be punished as either impostors or slanderers), in contemporary legal practice in Africa witchcraft appears as a reality and as an actionable offence in its own right. In Geschiere's view, the inroads of modernity and postmodernity in Africa have not rendered witchcraft obsolete. For Geschiere, however, witchcraft is, no longer a concept tied to a rural cosmological order - for that order no longer exists. Instead, new regional and national settings have emerged in which witchcraft has managed to insert itself as a central aspect of the discourse and the experience of modernity - having severed all connections with the village and its once viable kinship order.

3.3. Problems raised by a view which stresses the prominence of witchcraft in contemporary Africa

A number of problems present themselves at this point.

Not so much at the descriptive empirical level. Those of us who, as Africans and/or as Africanists, have participated profoundly and extensively in contemporary African life, will tend to agree with Geschiere's observation as to the conspicuous prominence of witchcraft in the discourse of the middle classes and the elites, whenever these seek to describe power relations that have to do with the access to and control of modern consumer goods and the state; but also when they seek to define their position vis-√†-vis their rural area of origin, which then often emerges as an avoided abode of witches - as an Africa within Africa.

Not all researchers working in this field however may agree with Geschiere that such witchcraft discourse in contemporary Africa is a manifestation of the existence of a variety of paths towards modernity. If we loosely define modernity as the routinisation of the heritage of the Enlightenment, does then contemporary African witchcraft

discourse constitute a path to modernity at all? Or does it simply manifest the fact that, to the extent to which there are witchcraft practices and witchcraft beliefs, no path to modernity is taken or can be taken?

As a characteristically late echo from developments in such provinces of intellectual life as philosophy, literary criticism, art criticism in general, cultural anthropology in the 1990s has been obsessed with defining modernity, its pluralities and contradictions, its limitations, its defeats by postmodernity. Here anthropology occupies an intrinsically problematic position in that it in itself straddles the line between modernity and postmodernity: modernist in its method and scope, postmodernist in its emphasis on identity, locality, plurality, relativism and stress on situationality. It is therefore unlikely that the dilemmas of African witchcraft research as identified here can be resolved from anthropology alone.

The matter is further complicated by the fact that North Atlantic modernity and postmodernity have had their own share of occult images - ranging from zombies and vampires to astrology and other forms of divination, shamanism, UFO-ism, gaiasophy, the teachings of South Asian gurus processed for North Atlantic consumption, and whatever the constantly innovating spiritual fashion industry of New Age will bring. Are these beliefs in the proper sense of the word, comparable to nineteenth-century Dutch villagers' beliefs in the invisible world claimed by their version of Christianity, or nineteenth-century African villagers' beliefs in the powers of their ancestors to effectively interfere in the visible world? Or are these North Atlantic postmodern beliefs rather 'make-beliefs', with a characteristic high level of virtuality and performance, true and compelling on the video screen but not necessarily so in everyday life? Might not the same apply to contemporary African witchcraft beliefs as circulating at the regional and national level? What if these can be shown to be 'virtual' as well? And what about the relation between such a 'virtual' national and regional discourse on witchcraft, and witchcraft as an aspect of the time-honoured kinship order at the village?

Another problem concerns, not anthropological interpretation, but the political and ethical implication of such interpretation. As my friend and colleague Peter van der Veer, the South Asianist, never tires of observing, one or two decades after the debates on the imperialist nature of anthropology and on orientalism,24 it is rather amazing that the mainstream of Africanist writing continues to reinforce the

image of Africa as the abode of witchcraft - as the continent where even under conditions of modern technology (including advanced equipment in the domains of armament, information and communication), modern science, modern organisation (the modern state; the formal organisation as the dominant expression of civil society), and the effective inroads of Islam and Christianity as major world religions, witchcraft remains (or has become?) a dominant discourse among, of all people, those Africans participating more than others in modernity and postmodernity. Is this a true rendering of the descriptive reality of contemporary Africa? Or is it in the first place, as van der Veer suggests, a 'localising strategy' (Richard Fardon)25 on the part of Africanists: an intra-disciplinary consensus according to which it is fashionable and appropriate to write on Africa in terms of witchcraft, in the same way as South Asianists are in the habit of writing on South Asia in terms of sharply conflicting communal identities (between Muslims and Hindus - reified categories which the orientalism debate has urged us to deconstruct)26, and on the Middle East in terms of a constant pendulum-swing between formal and popular Islam?27

At this point in my argument we can only raise these questions. Let us continue our juxtaposition of Schoffeleers' and Geschiere's argument, in the hope that this will help us clarify the theoretical issues raised in this section.

3.4. The absence of witchcraft in Chisupe's movement

In Schoffeleers' argument, by contrast to Geschiere's, the witchcraft element is absent. I am inclined to think that this is a valid rendering of the actual situation. Schoffeleers is the Malawi specialist, there is corroborating evidence from Probst, van Dijk and other recent ethnographers, and most importantly: the extensive research on religious transformations in South Central Africa - the massive research output over the past three decades - certainly has revealed the existence of a limited number of interpretative options open to African actors besides witchcraft.

Yet in his oral presentation of the text on which I base my argument here,28 Schoffeleers admitted, of course, that in Malawi the term mchape carries general connotations of witchcraft; and regardless of the issue whether witchcraft might

have been a more prominent aspect of the Chisupe movement than his argument suggests (apparently it was not), he also pointed out that given the primary audience he had in mind for his paper (notably, producers and consumers of African Theology) he could not afford to enter into a discussion of witchcraft if he did not want to lose that audience.29

Let me elaborate.Witchcraft was the main issue in some religious expressions which, having become fashionable, swept as cults across the region - but not in all. Ironically, witchcraft - eradication movements do not constitute the crucial limiting case their name would suggest, for the active confrontation of the witchcraft in others presupposes, not an interpretative alternative, but a firm belief in witchcraft as the central explanatory factor in evil. The prophetic idiom represented by the prophet Mupumani addressed an ecological i.e. productive concern with rain and vegetation; none of our sources suggest that his cult addressed witchcraft at all. Cults of affliction, which have formed the major religious expression in western central Zambia during much of the twentieth century, represented the African actors' radical departure from the theory of witchcraft as an explanation of evil: not human malice, but capricious non-human alien spirits, were cited as the cause of illness and distress; these spirits were reputed to emulate the spatial displacement, to travel the very roads, of regional population movements, long-distance trade, labour migration, colonial penetration and mass consumption of foreign-produced manufactured goods. Christian churches, to cite another major alternative to witchcraft as an interpretative religious idiom, have operated a theory of evil which not so much accepts witchcraft as a mode of explanation, but offers an alternative explanation in terms of sin and salvation, and by doing so provides a shelter for many of those fearing the witchcraft of others as well as the witchcraft inside themselves. All this does not mean that the people practising cults of affliction or Christianity ceased believing in witchcraft or engaging in witchcraft practices - but at least they had access to a religious variant where witchcraft was not the all-overriding mode of explanation of evil.30 But whereas in my earlier work - following Horton31 rather than Winch - I have stressed this aspect of witchcraft beliefs as a theory of evil, I now feel that this approach was too intellectualist, smacked too much of the European theological and philosophical discussion of the problem of evil in terms of the theodicee, Job's predicament, etc. African witchcraft beliefs, although potentially leading on to a theory of causation, would now seem to have been primarily a labelling device: naming, not explaining, evil from the perspective of the kinship order and its narrow, nearby horizon.

3.5. The construction of a discursive context for analysis: (a) the village as the dominant locus of cosmological reference

A crucial difference between the arguments of Geschiere and Schoffeleers lies in the way in which each constructs a discursive context for his analysis.

For Schoffeleers this is a regionally embedded context: the argument moves back and forth between, on the one hand, post-colonial Malawi, whose socio-cultural and political outlines we need to know in order to understand the story - and on the other hand some generalised Malawian village environment, which constitutes the setting for cosmological notions around trees and their healing power, and for the typical biography (including temporary death, a visit to the underworld or heaven, and rebirth on earth) of the prophet and the healer.32 The village is the very place where ancestors may yet appear in dreams dressed in bark-cloth (the standard pre-textile clothing in East Africa and South Asia). Emic meaning is implied at the level of the actors, and etic interpretation is rendered possible at the level of the academic writer and reader, by Schoffeleers' dextrous juggling between these two regionally nested sets of references - the nation-state and the village. Much of Schoffeleers' argument is by imputation: the two spheres are suggested to be distinct yet continuous and interconnected, so that meanings and conditions applying to one sphere can be carried over to the other. Is not the crux of the Chisupe's dream-derived message that there is a cure for every ailment, including AIDS, including perhaps the ailment of the post-colonial state?33

3.6. The construction of a discursive context for analysis: (b) leaving the village and its cosmology behind, and opting for a globalising perspective

Geschiere as an author can be seen to struggle with the same problem as Schoffeleers does: where can we find a locus of meaning and reference, for the African actors, as well as for

the academic discourse about their witchcraft beliefs and practices?

Both our authors derive their inspiration and their analytical confidence, rightly, from their years of participant observation at the village level. But for Geschiere the village and its cosmology is no longer a dominant reference.

Which village, in which region, anyway? Geographically, some of the data which Geschiere presents as having triggered his analytical curiosity may derive from a Cameroonian village, but on closer inspection his corpus highlights the discourse and practices among African elites and middle-classes, and between anthropologists and selected Africans who, employed as anthropological assistants, may be considered middle class. I deliberately used the word corpus, whose textual and finite nature, with its sense of procedural appropriation and processing rather than contingent and dependent immersion, differs considerably from the standard anthropological material based on prolonged participant observation. After all, Geschiere frequently boasts that his first professional identity was that of historian, not anthropologist. These methodological procedures constitute deliberate and strategic choices on Geschiere's part. Having previously written on occult forces at the village level, in his monograph on the Maka and in a number of shorter pieces, in his recent book he emphatically seeks to move away from the village setting. He wishes to explore how witchcraft operates in a context of 'modernity': the state, the district capital, the city, modern consumption, elite behaviour. It is here that he has a chance of making an original contribution to the already vast literature on African witchcraft, where village contexts predominate. These choices inevitably have an effect on the nature and the quality of the data at the anthropologist's disposal: they direct the research to contexts which are geographically dispersed and structurally far more complex than most African villages; contexts moreover which feature social actors endowed with such social and political power that they can effectively impede participant observation; and finally, contexts which are often downright intimidating, involving threats of inflicting occult injury.

It is not only the choice of a national or even international level of variety and comparison, impossible to cover by any one investigator's participant observation, that gives the specific flavour of displacement, of operating in an uncharted no man's land, to Geschiere's discourse on witchcraft in modern Africa. Having studied the village, and with his first

monograph many years behind him, he is now operating at a level where the meaning which actors' attribute to their witchcraft practices is no longer informed by the cosmology of some original village environment.

Or is it, after all? When we compare Geschiere's approach to that of Schoffeleers, the difference may be tentatively expressed thus:

,Ä¢ Schoffeleers has access to the village cosmology and appeals to it in order to partially explain the meaning of contemporary events at the national level, even if he does not argue in detail the interrelations between town and country and the interpenetration of rival cosmologies in Malawi today;

,Ä¢ Geschiere on the other hand plays down the village cosmology and therefore, despite the close attention - throughout his published work - for the interpenetration between the village and the wider national political and economic scene particularly in contemporary Cameroon, is no longer interested in identifying (or may we say: is at a loss to identify) the original locus (the village) where witchcraft beliefs and practices once took shape and meaning.

It is this particular orientation of Geschiere's work on witchcraft which allows him to capture a crucial aspect of contemporary African life: the extent to which the village is no longer the norm, - no longer a coherent, consistent and explicit point of reference and meaning in the African actors' discourse. In contexts of modernity, (in cities, in the formal organisations of the state, churches and economic life), the African actors express themselves in an idiom of witchcraft which has become virtualised -- although Geschiere does not use that term. While operating in a social context which is very different from the village, and which is informed by very different structural principles than the village, these actors have appropriated into their situation of modernity the concept of witchcraft from the village, have transformed it, have given it a new meaning, and constitute themselves in the very process of such appropriation.

However, it is my contention that such new meaning as the modern African discourse on witchcraft may entail,

however transformed, is likely to be illuminated by a proper understanding of witchcraft in its more original rural context.

3.7. Possible lessons from a rural-orientated cosmological perspective on witchcraft

Much of the well-known anthropological and historical Africanist literature on witchcraft is cited by Geschiere;34 but his insistence on the African middle-class and elite subjects' fragmented modernist social discourse outside the village may render him less perceptive of the extreme antiquity, and the fundamental significance, of the witchcraft discourse in the village context.

This is especially manifest in Geschiere's claim that the older ethnographic discourse on witchcraft is so very moralistic in the sense that it can only present witchcraft as something evil. Geschiere chides the older authors on African witchcraft for failing to realise that in the African experience witchcraft is ambivalent, also capable of inspiring excitement, admiration, a positive sense of power; brainwashed as it were by this older ethnography, as he feels he has been, Geschiere regrets that he had to discover personally, as a serendipity, that his African companions could be positively fascinated by witchcraft. No doubt there is an element of truth in Geschiere's critique: there is in the older ethnography of African witchcraft a tendency of constructing the African subject - along familiar missionary and colonial lines - as depraved, given to immorality, with limited powers of abstract thought , with a system of thought moreover not conducive to the idea of transcendence; represented in this manner so that 'the African' would appear to be incapable of rising above the limitations of the human condition, hence to be inclined to attribute misfortune to human malice and not to such a supernatural principle as a High God actively intervening in the visible world. Yet Geschiere's attempt to relegate the moral dimension in African witchcraft at the village level to a North Atlantic ethnographic imposition and nothing more, suggests that he has only a partial understanding of the place of witchcraft in the village-based kinship order. Moral ambiguity does not imply amorality but is its very opposite.

Whatever the difference between acephalous societies and those with centralised political leadership, and whatever

the variations across time and space, South Central and Southern African historical cosmologies tend to converge on this point, that they have important moral implications, defining witchcraft as primarily the transgression of the code of social obligations defined by the kinship order. The entire cosmology is an evocation of a kinship-based social universe, whose normal and beneficial flow of life force and fertility depends on a precarious balance between opposites: heaven and earth, life and death, the living and the dead, men and women, nature/forest and culture/the village, etc. It is the three mortal sins against the kinship order which are capable of destroying this balance and of blocking the flow of life force: incest, murder and witchcraft within the local (or by extension regional) community.35 By observing the taboos on incest, murder and witchcraft, the community is effectively constructed as based on: a recognition of extensive kinship (hence the incest taboo); on intra-community peace (hence the taboo on intra-community violence, i.e. murder); and on sociability and reciprocity (hence the taboo on witchcraft as a celebration of individual desires and powers at the expense of one's kin). Witchcraft has been the boundary condition of the construction of the African village community in the very many centuries that this community was the basic context of production and reproduction. I suggest that it is the individual challenge of the non-violent, sociable, reciprocal kinship order that is really at the heart of the original notion of witchcraft in the village societies of South Central and Southern Africa.

The ambivalence of village witchcraft which Geschiere rightly notes is not a modernist innovation but is inherent in witchcraft as a boundary condition of the kinship order. Before modernity, the kinship order was not virtual in the sense of defined above: it was not a transformative appropriation into a totally different setting; but even then the kinship order was certainly problematic. It needed to be continuously constructed and reconstructed. New-born individuals, in-marrying spouses, captives and migrants needed to be drawn into it and kept within it through socialisation and social control. Even so, in South Central and Southern Africa, villages as localised, spatial contexts of production and reproduction tended to have a life-span of only a few decades. They declined demographically and in terms of internal social contradictions, and new villages were constantly formed. All this required a leadership which oscillates between sociable arbitration and gentle coaxing, and occasional outbursts of assertiveness and initiative. Individuals were constantly on the move from one village to another and from one patron (a senior kinsmen) to another, fleeing the disrupted social relations in a

previous place of residence and being attracted by the promises of sociability, care and protection in the next place of residence. Both in an individual's life, and in the life of a village community, there was a continuous movement back and forth between the moral ideal of community (through sociability, non-violence, and the absence of witchcraft) and the embarrassing reality of individual assertion (through anti-social egoistic behaviour, leadership initiatives, challenges, physical violence - which all implied, and usually were cast in the secret ritualistic and symbolic trappings of, witchcraft). This contradiction, and the contingent dynamics it takes on over time, is the heart-beat of village society in South Central and Southern Africa. The moral premium on non-violence and sociability, and against individual assertiveness, is only one side of the medal; its counterpart (conceptualised in the village discourse as witchcraft, locally expressed by such vernacular concepts as wulozi, buloi, etc.; see below) is as necessary and as common as it is normatively sanctioned. The fact that witchcraft often implies a violence which is hidden, still reflects the strong taboo on violence within the kinship order, as characteristic of many African societies.

Not only is the kinship order internally divided and juxtaposed against individual assertion (whose symbolic conceptualisation and ritualistic procedures are those of witchcraft). In addition, the kinship order, and the villages which it calls into being as contexts of production and reproduction, is set off against other structural modalities in South Central and Southern Africa, which while parasitic upon the village-based kinship order, do not derive from that order, cannot be reduced to that order, and in fact in their socio-economic structure and their symbolic elaboration challenge the kinship order by a recourse to a different socio-cultural 'logic' (in the sense of coherent world-view) altogether. Whatever the cosmological and mythical elaboration of the kingship, the kingship order is never coterminous with the kinship order, hence royals' often extreme reliance on violence, social separation, emphatic denial of the very kinship ties to which they owe their lives and social position, on royal incest, and on close association with witchcraft. The single most important defining feature of the precolonial African state is not its monopoly of violence (as Weber would have it for the European state), but its radical rejection of the kinship order which informs the local communities over which the state holds sway. In lesser degrees and with different symbolic repertoires, the same departure of the kinship order characterises other specialist positions in South Central and Southern African societies prior to the colonial conquest: the trader, the

blacksmith, the diviner-priest, the rain-maker, the bard, the musician. They exist by definition outside the kinship order, and therefore inevitably share with royals connotations of witchcraft, anti-sociability, and violence. Their reproduction as professional subgroups or ethnicities, meanwhile, implies forms of intra-group non-violence and sociability, which contradict their outsidership vis-√†-vis the overall kinship order, and make for all sorts of symbolic and ritual elaborations.36 It is from these symbolic elaborations, these phantasms, that part of the later imagery of modern witchcraft can be expected to derive.

Witchcraft, one might say, is everything which

,Ä¢ falls outside the kinship order,

,Ä¢ is not regulated by that order,

,Ä¢ challenges, rejects, destroys that order.

As such, witchcraft is opposed to kinship, group solidarity, rules of kinship, incest prohibitions, avoidance rules concerning close kin, kinship obligations concerning redistribution of resources, the repression of intra-kin violence, and the acknowledgement of ancestral sanctions. Outside of the kinship order is the realm of witchcraft; and it is here that we must situate kingship, trade, and the specialities of the bard, the diviner, the magician and the rain-maker.

Probably it is incorrect to assume that witchcraft beliefs and practices sprang directly and exclusively, as transformations, reversals and denials, from the kinship order. The specific forms of witchcraft have a history, so has the kinship order (although its history is difficult to study in contexts where written texts are relatively scarce, like in precolonial Africa), and so has the relation between witchcraft and the kinship order. Ironically (in view of witchcraft's reputation of being hidden, dark, obscure), it is somewhat easier to reconstruct the history of witchcraft. For if witchcraft is everything which challenges the kinship order (such as kinship, trade, specialities), then witchcraft has much to do with social complexes that leave more lasting traces than the ordinary face-to-face kinship domain - social complexes that have much to do with the way in which the wider world is connected with the local societies of sub-Saharan Africa. At present we have a fair general knowledge of the history of the magical tradition of the Ancient Near East (especially Egypt and

Mesopotamia) from c. 3000 BCE. The same applies to the history of kingship. Now, especially in the fields of kingship and the magical tradition there are such specific, numerous and widely distributed parallels between sub-Saharan Africa and the Ancient Near East, that it is now becoming possible to read the history of African magic (and that of African kingship, but that is another story) in part as the diffusion, and subsequent localisation and transformation, of these social complexes from the Ancient Near East. This idea was first launched by Frobenius,37 and in the course of the twentieth century was increasingly discredited in professional Africanist circles along with Frobenius himself. Meanwhile, we should add, that there is also increasing evidence that the civilisations of the Ancient Near East, in their turn, in their emergence and early history, owed a very great debt to Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa

I could not agree more with Geschiere than when he claims that it is the fundamental ambiguity of African witchcraft which allows it to insert itself into the heart of modernity. Such ambiguity however, contrary to what he claims, does not at all explode but implies, as the complementary concept, the morality of the kinship order. Nor can such ambiguity entirely be relegated to some universal, innate quality of the sacred as being both benevolent and destructive, as stressed by Durkheim and Otto.38 The ambiguity is not even adequately captured by a statement, superficially correct, to the effect that 'witchcraft is an idiom of power'. Witchcraft in the time-honoured village context does not describe power in general, but power in a specific context: the individualising self-assertion which while challenging the kinship order, constitutes that order at the same time.

In addition to the requirements of leadership and of the enculturation of new individuals, the ambiguity of witchcraft also seems to reflect the material contradictions between the various modes of production involved in African rural social formations, and the ideological and symbolic expressions of those contradictions. The prominence, in the domain of witchcraft, of references to kingship, trade and specialities which each may be recognised as specific, distinct modes of production, suggests that despite having gone out of fashion, the theory of the articulation of modes of production may yet considerably illuminate African sorcery beliefs and practices39 - as it has been argued to illuminate African ethnicity.40 Nor need this suggestion as to the applicability of modes-of-production analysis to witchcraft beliefs be restricted to Africa, as an analysis, along similar theoretical lines, of

witchcraft and other forms of magic in the Ancient Near East may show.41 Because modes of production ultimately revolve on the appropriation of nature, we can understand why the fundamental distinction, in so many African cosmologies, between the ordered human space ('village') and the forces of the wild ('forest', 'bush'), particularly empowers roles situated at the boundary between these domains: the hunter, the musician, the healer. This brings us near to an understanding of which specific imagery, with which specific origin in real life, is likely to be employed in the domain of witchcraft beliefs.

Meanwhile, the amazing point is not so much variation across the African continent, but convergence.

Extremely widespread in Africa42 is the belief that for any type of excessive, transgressive success - such as attaining and maintaining the status of ruler, diviner-priest or monopolist trader - a close kinsman needs to be sacrificed or to be nominated as victim of occult, anti-social forces. I have extensive reasons to take such beliefs as indicative of actual practices (whose empirical assessment however poses immense difficulties, both of method, of criminal law, and of the politics of knowledge)43. In view of the above discussion of the kinship order and of witchcraft as its boundary condition, these beliefs are understandable as ritual evocations of how specialist statuses challenge the kinship order through their individual assertiveness, violence, and denial of reciprocity and community.

The South-east Cameroonian jambe as a personalised occult force demanding sacrifices of close kinsmen (in what Geschiere calls the 'old' witchcraft idiom) would appear to be closely equivalent - in belief, practice and perhaps even etymology - to the Zambian concept of the chilombe or mulombe, a snake with a human head which is secretly bred near the river, first on a diet of eggs and chicks, later demanding that his human associate nominates close kin for sacrifice in exchange for unrivalled powers and success.44

What however seems to be absent from the Cameroonian scene is the concept as enshrined in the otherwise widespread Bantu root -rozi, -lothi, -loi, with connotations of moral transgression, malice, murder, incest, not exclusively through the use of familiar spirits but also relying on materia magica: herbs, roots, parts of human or animal bodies. The fact that this lexical root is so widespread allows us to adopt a historical perspective: we are led to conclude that over 2000

years ago the early farmers and herders who spoke proto-Bantu already had a concept of

'[abstract noun prefix]+ [root] l/ro[th]i

whose semantic field must have largely coincided with that of its twentieth-century CE descendent linguistic forms. It is quite possible that the Bantu lexical root [root] l/ro[th]i signifies this domain external to, and challenging, the kinship order - that its original sense is alienness rather than moral evil. This hypothesis would then cast light on the puzzling of apparently the same lexical root in the names of the Zimbabwean Barozvi and the Zambian Barotse/Balozi: 'outsiders', 'strangers', 'aliens' with royal connotations, certainly, but not an entire people of 'witches'. The Bantu root vl/ro[th]i would then perhaps be similar to the root vwal underlying such names as Wales, Wallon, Walen, Wallis, Wallachia, in Central and Western Europe - which although often interpreted as 'Celtic' (even Celtic of a particular ethnic group) ultimately means 'alien'. By a very far shot one might even surmise that the two roots [root] l/ro[th]i and vwal are etymological cognates.

Rather more difficult to explain are the extensive geographical continuities attending the new idioms of witchcraft which appeared under conditions of approaching modernity, especially the advent of early-modern consumer goods with the growth of long-distance trade from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries CE onward. What Geschiere describes for Cameroon, in terms of victims being in some occult way captured and made to work as zombies, I also encountered during field-work in both Zambia and Guinea-Bissau (but so far not in Botswana). And the comparative Africanist bibliography on these topics must be voluminous.

If the 'new' forms of witchcraft in the 1980s-90s use (in the zombie imagery) the idiom of the slave trade which has been extinct for almost a century, than this is an anachronism - even if the slave trade belongs to a more recent history than e.g. the establishment of ancestral cults. If instead (and John and Jean Comaroff have argued recently)45 it is not downright slavery but indentured exploited wage labour which the zombie metaphor is referring too, then that too would be anachronistic to the extent to which such labour conditions no longer obtain in Southern Africa today. In other words, the

reference to earlier forms of globalisation (slave trade, indentured labour) is now used in order to express and contest, in a witchcraft idiom, newer forms of globalisation, such as the differential access to consumer goods and post-colonial state power. This is comparable to the processes of selective borrowing between time frames which I tried to capture in my analysis of South Central African cults of affliction; also these I interpreted as referring, in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century CE, to the complex of long-distance trade which by then had already become obsolete.46

3.8. Modern African witchcraft as an instance of virtuality

My insistence on the kinship order as the long-standing and widespread historical basis of village-centred witchcraft beliefs and practices in South Central and Southern Africa enables us to identify the virtualised and transformed nature of the modern regional and national witchcraft beliefs and practices as studied by Geschiere. This is the case even although Geschiere does not employ the concept of virtuality nor stops to explicate the remarkable features as captured by this concept. Although he does recognise the kinship nexus of witchcraft, he refuses to make his discourse on witchcraft ultimately dependent upon some local village scene in the past or the present. Rather, he describes witchcraft as part of today's national culture of Cameroon, much in the way as one might describe, for instance, sexual permissiveness, xenophilia, and democracy based on institutionalised sub-national negotiation as parts of the national culture of The Netherlands today. Geschiere does not deny that the village context may once have engendered or incubated the witchcraft beliefs and practices which today have such an impact on middle-class and elite life in Cameroon and throughout Africa, but he stresses that today such a rural reference, far from being a determining factor for the actors, has lost all conscious significance for them.

Being virtualised, the urban, national and elite witchcraft beliefs in Cameroon are suspended in the air. They are not endowed with meaning by any direct reference to actual, concrete practices of production and reproduction within the horizon of social experience of the actors carrying such beliefs. Instead, the conceptual and social basis of these beliefs is fragmented and eroded: a loose bricolage of broken

myths and ill-understood rumours about power and transgression, fed by two main sources:

,Ä¢ on one side by the faint and disconnected echoes of a rural discourse and practice;

,Ä¢ on the other by the selective recycling of detached, de-contextualised images of African life, including witchcraft, as produced by Europeans (anthropologists, missionaries, colonial civil servants) as well as by African elite and middle-class actors, and subsequently recycled even wider in present-day African national societies.

Admittedly, whatever their rural origin, 'modern witchcraft beliefs' in Africa may share hardly more than their lexical designation with the time-honoured concept witchcraft as a boundary condition of the kinship order. That kinship order and its implications no longer seem to form part of modern witchcraft beliefs. What has instead been co-opted, appropriated, of ancient witchcraft beliefs into the modernist collective representations at the national and regional level, among elites and middle classes operating in the formal organisations of the state, industry and civil society, are notions in which individual power is celebrated, and is adorned by imagery of extravagance, violence and transgression. In a modern social world where whatever is alien to the rural kinship order, has gained ever greater dominance, witchcraft is no longer a boundary condition, but has become the central norm. Modern life is the kinship order virtualised: turned inside out, invaded by, subjugated by, the outside world against it was once an effective refuge. Modern life, in short, is witchcraft.

The subjective experience, reported from many parts of nineteenth and twentieth century Africa, according to which people signalled a dramatic increase of witchcraft in recent times, then - far from necessarily corresponding with an actual increase of witchcraft practices - should be interpreted as scarcely more than a tautological expression for the fact that social experiences would be less and less governed by the kinship order, yet at the same time would for the time being continue to be judged from the perspective of that order.

Geschiere seeks to interpret modern witchcraft by playing down the village nexus and its perspective of the longue

dur√©e. Thus he is offering us a new version of Max Gluckman's influential but one-sided adage: 'the African townsman is a townsman', whose social and cultural existence should primarily be interpreted by reference to modern urban conditions which by implication are supposed to render all rural and historical referents obsolete. If we yet try to bring in the rural and historical dimension, we appreciate that modern witchcraft is an instance of virtuality as an essential aspect of the modern African condition.The beliefs and practices of modern witchcraft clearly have the formal characteristics that one would associate with the counterpart, in African cultural production, of the virtual reality of electronic media and games. Modern witchcraft lacks precision and detail, and neither reveals nor claims profound cultural competence. Despite an element of regional variation (which Geschiere lists, beside the kinship link and the ambiguity, among the three major features on witchcraft beliefs in Cameroon today, and of which he shows the potential for ethnic articulation), these beliefs and practices tend to blend into broad blanket concepts, situating themselves in some sort of national or international lingua franca of concepts, ideas and rumours which (also because of the effect of the recycling of North Atlantic reformulations) can hardly be traced back to any specific regional or ethnic rural source of conceptualisation and meaning. Most significantly, Geschiere tells us that actors (for reasons which he does not go into, but which revolve on the virtuality I have pinpointed) often prefer to discuss witchcraft matters not in any of the original Cameroonian languages but in French or English! What a relief for an anthropologist who does not know any Cameroonian language except these to intercontinental ones.

Recent media research47 has stressed the fact that contemporary forms of art and the consumption of images derive their impact particularly from a transformation of the temporal basic structure of human perception. In the creation of virtuality, time plays a key role. Witchcraft beliefs and practices in contemporary Africa provide an example of this time dimension of virtuality. Geschiere's discussion carries the strong suggestion that these beliefs are situated in some sort of detached no-man's-land, and do no longer directly refer to the village - they are no longer rooted in the productive and reproductive processes there, nor in their attending cosmology. Part of that cosmology, fragmented, disintegrated, ill-understood, and exposed to vaguely similar globalising influences from elsewhere, has been exported to function, more or less, outside the village. Middle classes and elite use English or French to discuss its blurred and collapsed notions. The reference to the village is absent, perfunctory, or

meaningless. Modern Africa, inventing its own witchcraft idioms tailored to the tune of the town and the formal organisation, can do without the actual village, and in its conceptualisation of power does not even necessarily take recourse to the image of the virtual village any more.

3.9. The continued relevance of the old kinship order

Still we are left with a sense of dissatisfaction. Does not an interpretation of modern witchcraft in terms of virtuality simply restate the old opposition between town and country in a new idiom? If in the live of African middle classes and elites the village has been left behind for good, this is a sign that the mechanisms of social control by which the village environment seeks to enforce the kinship order as a basis for viable community, no longer effectively extend into the life of the village's successful descendants in town and abroad. In the course of the twentieth century Africanist research has monitored the succession of strategies through which the village has tried to retain a hold over its emigrants: tribal elders in town, marital ties, monetarisation of bridewealth, initiation cycles, rural-based regional cults, cults of affliction and other forms of therapy which could only be extended to urban migrants at the village, parental curses, the lure of prestigious traditional office (as headman, court assessor, chief) after retirement from a modern career, the lure of rural land as an urban migrant's ultimate security the norm of building a house in one's village of origin,, and the widespread norm of being buried in the rural home. All these strategies have consisted of power games between generations and genders, and inevitably they have constituted a fertile context for older and newer forms of witchcraft.

Let us grant that an increasing number of middle class and elite Africans have sought to escape from village-based strategies and no longer actively participate in village life - although often at the cost of cultivating a fear of the village as a an imagined place of intense witchcraft, which one tries to avoid at all costs and visits to which - if absolutely inevitable - have to be cut short to the extreme. These fears already betray a measure of acknowledgement of the historic kinship order and the obligations it imposes, especially on the more successful and affluent members of the family,- such as urban migrants. Besides, one may cut one's ties with the distant

village, but that does not mean that one can entirely place oneself outside the reach of kinship - that one can totally ignore one's parents, siblings, and children, not to speak of somewhat more remote ties. This residual kinship may partially be patterned or re-patterned according to North Atlantic and global models, but in the case of African middle class and elites is also likely to reflect their childhood socialisation into recent versions of the historic kinship order whose boundary condition has been witchcraft.

We could go full circle and assess what the insights attained by on Geschiere's part mean in terms of a possible re-assessment of Schoffeleers' picture of the Chisupe movement.

Schoffeleers helped us to pinpoint what could have been learned from a rural-inspired reading of the distant, Cameroonian data, while taking for granted that this perspective was eminently applicable to the Malawian healing movement's discourse. But what about the Malawian actors involved? Were they really prepared for such a reading, and did they have the symbolic baggage to make such a reading at all relevant to their situation? Does Schoffeleers' reliance on such rural insights as prolonged participant observation at the village level accords one, yield insight in present-day Malawian actors' conscious interpretations of the problem of evil as expressed in Chisupe's mass movement. Or does Schoffeleers merely reveal the historical antecedents of such interpretations - a background which has perhaps largely gone lost to the actors themselves? Does the analytical return to the village amount to valid and standard anthropological hermeneutics, or is it merely a form of spurious anthropologising which denies present-day Malawians the right to the same detachment from historic, particularistic, rural roots as many North Atlantic Africanists very much take for granted in their own personal lives? It is this very detachment, this lack of connectivity - a break in the chain of semantic and symbolic concatenation -, which the concept of virtuality seeks to capture.

On this point the work of Rijk van Dijk is relevant, and revealing. In the Ph.D. thesis which he wrote under supervision of Matthew Schoffeleers and Bonno Thoden van Velzen,48 the assertive puritanism of young preachers in urban Malawi, c. 1990, is set against the background of the preceding century of religious change in South Central Africa and of the interpretations of these processes as advanced in the 1970s and 1980s. Here the urban discourse on witchcraft already appears as 'virtual' (although that word is not yet used by van Dijk), in the sense that the urbanites' use of the concept of witchcraft

is seen as detached from direct references to the rural cosmology and to conceptualisations of interpersonal power within the kinship order. Similarly, the events around Chisupe may be interpreted not as an application or partial revival of time-honoured rural cosmological notions, but as an aspect of what Van Dijk describes as the emphatic moral re-orientation in which Malawi, under the instigation of State President Banda's successor Mr Muluzi, was involved at the eve of the 1994 elections, and in the face of the AIDS epidemic49 - in other words, as very much the same kind of national-level, neo-traditional, phenomenon which Geschiere persuades us to see in the contemporary discourse on witchcraft in Cameroon.

As a general principle, I claim that the old kinship order is never far away from the personal lives of even the most modern and urbanised Africans, whatever their class position; the free variation of virtualised witchcraft beliefs, fertilised by whatever global images circulate in the way of vampirism, satanism etc., is not totally virtualised but continues to be fed, to some extent, by the historic cosmology on which the village and its kinship order were based.

This is also what I have found, in scores of cases many of which I came to understand in detail as they evolved over the years, among my Zambian associates since 1972, and among my Botswana associates since 1988. Among the middle classes and elites, the adoption of new lifestyles and of new emphases in kinship (a tendency to retreat into the nuclear family, to discourage parasitism from distant kin, to recruit one's political and economic followers not among kinsmen but among client non-kin) often goes hand in hand with family dramas in which the old kinship order turns out to be not so easily discarded, and to strike back with a vengeance. At the same time, witchcraft beliefs and practices are obviously no longer confined to the kinship domain, but have penetrated many aspects of modern life, many instances of competition over scarce resources, and many instances of the exercise of power. This is only what we would expect, in African societies more and more taken over by outside forces, images, people and organisations, if our initial viewpoint is correct that witchcraft of old has formed the boundary condition of the kinship order, has constituted the evocation of all that is foreign and alien. Largely severed from the old cosmological context, the imagery of this new witchcraft follows the symbolic repertoire of the old cosmology only to a limited and diminishing extent, and is open to all sorts of free variation, in which the global supply

of images of horror, alterity and violence (often electronically transmitted) is eagerly absorbed.

4. CONCLUSION

Thus witchcraft in contemporary Africa emerges, not as a timeless, atavistic continuation of an essentially unaltered, historic cosmology right into modernity (Schoffeleers); nor as a predominantly new phenomenon marking Africa's road to modernity (Geschiere); but as the resolution, through a process of virtualising appropriation (amazingly similar converging in many parts of the continent), of the tensions between

,Ä¢ witchcraft as the boundary conditions - in the four of various claims of individual assertiveness - of the kinship order at the village level, and

,Ä¢ witchcraft as the idiom of power struggles in modern situations: the context of urban life, formal organisations, the state

The two poles represent (, in structural implications for production and reproduction, in procedures, and in imagery), largely independent symbolic complexes, yet they are inseparable, in that the 'modern' pole has been constructed on the basis of a specific transformation, towards modern life, of witchcraft as it was - and to a considerable extent continues to be - available in the conception of the kinship order.

In the same way as Winch's re-analysis has exculpated the study of African witchcraft from allegations of slighting Africans' mental capabilities, my argument exculpates the study of African witchcraft from allegations of North Atlantic, alien imposition √† la Peter van der Veer. If today Africa appears to be the continent of witchcraft, this is not because a number of prominent North Atlantic Africanists have colluded to decide that this - despite its suggestion of exotism and imposed alterity - is how African societies are going to be represented, as part of a 'localising strategy'. It is because, on the basis of the historic underlying pattern of kinship-based

village communities of agriculturalists and herdsmen going back to the Neolithic, witchcraft (under whatever local emic term) played an important role in defining the moral and productive order in many parts of the African continent. Witchcraft was therefore available for appropriation and virtualisation by African middle classes and elites in their struggle to create meaning in modernity and postmodernity. Without acknowlegment of this shared heritage of African village society, the modernity of witchcraft cannot be understood unless as an alien analytical imposition _which it is certainly not. Acknowledging this common pool of historic inspiration allows us to admit both the continuity and the transformation in modernity. Witchcraft has offered modern Africans an idiom to articulate what otherwise could not be articulated: contradictions between power and meaning, between morality and primitive accumulation, between community and death, between community and the state. If this insistence on an African witchcraft idiom does not render the African experience of modernity and postmodernity any more transparent, it at least - in the face of the avalanche of alien, imported ingredients of modern life - casts this experience in a mode of expression whose extremely long history on African soil cannot be denied.

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NOTES

1 An earlier version of this paper was read at the panel on 'Epistemological and ideological approaches to witchcraft analysis within African Studies: A critical assessment', African Studies Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, 27th October - 1st November 1998. I am indebted to George Bond and Diane Ciekawy for inviting me to take part in this inspiring session, to all participants for illuminating ideas and criticisms, and to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, for financing my participation.

2 Barb 1971.

3 Which however brought us the seminal: Hallen & Sodipo 1986.

4 Winch 1970. For a complex historical theory of magic combining natural, psychological, social and political factors, cf. van Binsbergen & Wiggermann 1999.

5 Lepore 1993; Davidson 1984; Malpas 1988. Cf. the kindred 'principle of humanity': Grandy 1973.

6 However, see Horton's criticism of Winch in: Horton 1993.

7 Van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985; Van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers 1985.

8 Geschiere 1995;. Schoffeleers 1996.

9 Geschiere 1995; also cf. Geschiere 1996.

10 On virtuality, cf. Jules-Rosette 1990; Jules-Rosette 1996; Korff 1995; Rheingold 1993; Van Binsbergen 1997, 1998; Rheingold 1991; Woolley 1992.

11 Cf. Deleuze & Guattari 1991; Guattari 1992. Cf. Van Binsbergen 1999 and 2000.

12 Van Binsbergen 1998.

13 Cf. Van Binsbergen 1997, 1998.

14 This comes close to the current holistic definition of meaning, which Peacocke cites as the basic stance of global holism:

'The meaning of an expression depends constitutively on its relations to all other expressions in the language, where these relations may need to take account of such facts about the use of these other expressions as [reveals? - WvB] their relations to the non-linguistic world,. to action and to perception.' (Peacocke 1999: 227)

15 Turner 1968; Van Velsen van 1971 ; van Binsbergen 1992.

16 Ranger & Kimambo 1972; Ranger 1972; Ranger 1975; Fields 1985; Bond 1976, 1979; Schoffeleers 1979; Van Binsbergen 1981.

17 Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Vail 1989.

18 Probst 1996.

19 Van Binsbergen 1981

20 Schoffeleers 1992.

21 Redmayne 1970; van Dijk 1992.

22 Geschiere 1982.

23 A few examples out of many: Melland 1967; Mackenzie 1925.

24 And, as I would personally add, at a time when Afrocentrism is becoming more and more an established intellectual stance; cf. Howe 1999; Berlinerblau 1999; Fauvelle-Aymar c.s. 1999. I contributed to the latter collection, and wrote reviews of the former two books in Politique Africaine (93, October 2000), and the Journal of African History (in press).

25 Fardon 1990.

26 Gellner 1989, 1963, 1969.

27 Breckenridge & Van der Veer 1993; van der Veer 1995, 1996.

28 Department of Cultural Anthropology and Sociology of Development, Free University, Amsterdam, 12 April 1996.

29 For a characterisation of African theology as a field of counter-hegemonic knowledge production (and thus by implication as a form of localisation in the academic globalisation process - much comparable to and overlapping with, African Philosophy writ large), see: Schoffeleers 1988.

30 These interpretations have been argued at length in: Van Binsbergen 1981.

31 Horton 1967; Horton 1993.

32 Van Binsbergen 1981: 195, 239.

33 No piece by Schoffeleers has reminded me more strongly, in method and theoretical framework, of the best work by Terence Ranger - for instance the latter's masterly short study of the witch-finder Tomo Nyirenda, also known as Mwana Lesa, a piece which, when I read it in draft in 1972, made a more profound impression on me than almost any contemporary scholarly text, provided me with a splendid model to emulate, and committed me overnight to the study of Central African religious history. Cf. Ranger 1975.

34 Geschiere 1995.

35 On this point, cf. Schoffeleers 1978; Van Binsbergen 1992

36 Cf. Van Binsbergen 1992; Van Binsbergen 1993; For a more general formulation of this theory of the state, with specific African applications, cf. Van Binsbergen, forthcoming.

37 Frobenius 1931.

38 Durkheim 1912; Otto 1917.

39 Cf. van Binsbergen 1981.

40 Cf. van Binsbergen 1985.

41 Cf. van Binsbergen & Wiggermann 1999.

42 It may pervade the discourse and practice of independent churches, e.g. the Botswana case of the Guta ra Mwari church: Van Binsbergen 1993.

43 Cf Toulabor's article on human sacrifice and contemporary African political leaders (Toulabor 2000).

44 Cf. Melland 1967..

45 Comaroff & Comaroff 1999.

46 Van Binsbergen 1992: 262f; 1981: 155f, 162f.

47 Sandbothe & Zimmerli 1994.

48 Cf. Van Dijk 1992

49 Van Dijk, in press.

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Monday, 2 March 2009 13:51:27

Hope you are enjoying your exile.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

So far in your absence I have collected almost 300 reports of witchcraft in countries other than USA. There are usually about two or three a day. And although there is considerable overlap I think they are all significant because of the insight they give into how wc is being experienced perceived and reported. To be blunt if you want your book to have any relevance you will have to take this material into account - not least because it provides contemporary illustrative material.

My impression is that in Africa and PNG the phenomenon is increasing both in numbers and significance and revealing a variety of attitudes and policies on the part of governments, agencies, religions, and media.

Everything I have found has fitted and supports the model and definition I have suggested and provides illustrations of its implications. The frequencies of reports from different parts of the world also supports that suggested by my trawl through the anthropological database of academic reports. The vast majority are in sub Saharan Africa with PNG having an equivalent frequency of cases but for a smaller population, a few in parts of India, and relatively few cases in Islamic countries (and of a different kind).

Hotspots at present are the continuing killings of albinos in Tz, an emerging epidemic of accusations against children in West and central Africa and child sacrifice in Uganda, the killing of elders in the coastal province in Kenya and other parts of the country. Something odd going on in Gambia with government and army support concerning organized and enforced witch identifying and cleansing. And a great deal of opportunistic secondary economic entrepreneurial activity.

To put it bluntly I am horrified and despair of Africa.

What is also relevant and needs your attention is that Google has now accumulated a searchable database of news articles going back to the 19th century and containing about 55,000 items concerning witchcraft. These can also be analyzed in decades and shows a timeline that seems to support increases in cases being reported (probably reflecting the expansion and access to media). For example 2000 reports for 70-79 but 10, 000 for 90-99. However, since 2000 there have been over 9000 every year!

I think you need to change the plan for your book to take account of the contemporary and historical news material. Quite

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frankly I am not sure who would be particularly interested in an anthropologist's introduction to Africa and witchcraft without being able to fit it into a wider context of relevance. The experience of a single individual is too limited and too difficult to assess in terms of how representative they might be. And this is also a problem with most of the academic material which by its nature tends to be focused on local and deep rather than aiming for a truly general theory that can really account for the phenomenon and relate it to the rest of human activity and experience.

What is needed is to use the news stories catalogued by Google and any other relevant resources to present an overview that can engage and orient potential readers to the reality and range of the problem and all its horrific manifestations. What it is really like to live in a world with witches. What the media can provide is a series of vivid snapshots of how witchcraft is experienced and used in contemporary cultures. It does so through a lens whose imperfections are difficult to assess insofar as their relation to the scale of the phenomena because what is not known is the criteria for selection and how the cases reported compare to those that were not. In other words the `selection in' or inclusion criteria are uncertain. However it seems certain that even if the cases reported are exhaustive they represent a significant issue for human rights and present a bleak picture of the cultures involved.

The material that I am collecting for you can do this in a way that allows you to move on to a survey of the academic accounts and criticisms of them and then to the construction of an explanatory model that grounds the phenomena in universal social patterns and shifts the attention of the prurient and those seeking signs and wonders away from a futile preoccupation with the supernatural. Witchcraft has less to do with magic than the human frailties that have led to the credit crisis and meltdown of the financial system.

What is striking in my reading of the material is that the details of the `magical' aspects of the events are more or less taken for granted and accepted without comment. The details of the kinds of differences that you list are less important ¬†than the crimes that they are considered to justify. The details of the `magic' are no more relevant to the interpretations than whether a robber made his getaway by car or bicycle or used a gun or a knife. For most purposes murder is defined in terms of motives rather than means and though there may be a case sometimes for classifying according to weapon used for far more it simply misses the point. Witchcraft begins with the

identification of a perpetrator which is the result of interpreting all events in terms of agency and intent. The baroque explanations in terms of what we colonialists consider `magic' are simply excuses that are believed to justify the treatment of alleged perpetrators. In different degrees the same kind of explanations justify the behavior of christians and muslims and scientists. In every case there is a need for some way of interpreting how the world works and what follows depends on the details of the belief preferred rather than rituals and artifacts that have flowed from it. Rituals and artifacts are always local and accidental (in the sense of being contingent on local history as different).

What is involved here is the collision of several of the universal narratives or plots that humans have found helpful in explaining experience and to which they are now in thrall. The most universal is that which dominates the media - and why I rarely buy or pay much attention to newspapers - is that which sees events in terms of perpetrators and victims - this is related to and results in interpreting the world in terms of agents rather than atoms and to a fear of the bad intentions of others. The second is that of the world as having fluid and porous boundaries: that things can change and flow into each other, that no category is fixed, and that the boundaries of life are permeable so that the living and the dead are not exclusive and neither are the boundaries between what might be considered natural kinds eg humans and goats (see recent Ghana case of police arresting goat as a car thief).

Tuesday, 25 November 2008 20:57:49

I am sorry for becoming ragged on the phone but I have to be blunt.

The problem is that I am becoming increasingly exasperated with your work. It seems to me that it lacks bottom and if it were a rider would be unstable in the saddle and in constant danger of tumbling arse over tip. The narrative of your peregrinations in Africa and encounter with witchcraft phenomena is fine and worth doing, but the rest seems like a toy train wreck. I feel there is a danger that you are sacrificing the possibility of creating something of significance and interest for something that cannot have any.

I think the issue is simple, you do not yet have a clear view about the nature of witchcraft. You do not have a theory or

model of the process that can unify and explain the different aspects - and from which the different manifestations can be derived. Instead you are rather like a scrap dealer who has collected a vast rag bag assortment of parts - wheels, engines, wings, propellors, seats, windscreens, doors, flaps, rudders, instruments, lights, horses, reins, saddles, stirrups, spurs, tools, gas pumps, tills, anchors, windlasses, ropes, etc. But, you are still uncertain how these parts fit together into larger wholes, because you have not yet discovered the unifying concept of transport. As a result you thresh around seeking some center of gravity. At one time you foreground and privilege wings, another rudders, another horses - or senecide, witch violence, vigilantes, economics, etc. But the structure is unstable because the conceptual whole is rickety, fragmented, and lacks a secure foundation. Each of the notions you are attracted to is relevant, but only when seen as an aspect of a greater whole. They are parts and none in isolation is either necessary or sufficient, nor can stand on its own without falling and looking silly. It is the make up rather than the face, appearance rather than reality, or accident rather than substance. That is why I keep thinking that you want to give up and become a curator - because the notion of an exhibition, or display, or museum might provide an external scaffolding that masked the gap where a theory should have been. The problem is that it cannot and what you are in danger of ending up with is a kind of fairground show of wonders and oddities. Which would be a tragedy because you are capable of so much more. Pure curators are not scientists because what they are interested in is heaps, or lists, rather than theories.

I blame their education. It is grounded in a primitive belief that theories follow facts - that one can collect facts and somehow as if by magic a theory will appear, or fall out of them. The problem with this view is that there is not and never has been an innocent eye, naive observer, or a way of seeing that did not presuppose and depend on a concept (and even if there are some hard wired into our brains by natural selection they have been selected for utility or survival rather than literal truth - they are unlikely to mean what they seem). And the issue is not how to collect facts without a theory but how to test the theories that are presupposed by the facts that you think you are observing with an innocent eye - to work back from the supposed facts to the theories that they imply and test them rather than the facts. The issue is not how you see, but how you test whether what you think you have seen makes sense and is congruent with what has already been tested and not yet invalidated. We can never see without prejudice, but we always have the option of testing what we think we have seen. What are

usually considered as facts are more like colors that as such do not exist in nature, but only in the eye of the beholder.

In your case the issue is even more serious because for scientific purposes the facts that you have collected are not only contaminated and distorted by unacknowledged and unexamined assumptions, but of little relevance because they have not been collected in a sufficiently systematic and explicit way that would allow inferences to be drawn from them that might be valid for the population and phenomenon that you are studying. The only way that they are potentially useful is that some might be vivid illustrations of what one might derive from a coherent theory - what one might work out from such a theory. In the same way that from Newton's Laws of Motion one can predict the movement and position of the planets into the distant future or how to make a space craft rendevous with a distant asteroid at a precise time years hence.

If you are not interested in this approach to theory then the only honorable option is to give up and concentrate on your personal narrative.

I suspect that when you were a wee laddie in school your science teacher would have made you play with magnets and iron filings. You would have been told to place a sheet of paper over a bar magnet and then scatter iron filings on the paper. If you then shook the paper the iron filings, as if by magic, would cluster into a pattern of lines that your teacher might have explained were revealing the lines of force around the magnet - the invisible magnetic field around the bar. But the iron filings are incidental and their only significance is that they reveal the magnetic forces that are normally invisible. In the same way the permanent clouds that hang around the summits of some mountains reveal patterns of temperature and pressure - moist air forced up the mountain slope is cooled and condenses into a cloud whose shape is determined by the pattern of temperature around the summit. The drops of moisture are in constant flux and as they are swept over the peak and down the other side they are warmed, evaporate, and hence disappear - the pattern of cloud being constantly replenished by new moisture.

Now if the temperature of the planet were to increase sufficiently that around the peak might become too high for moisture to condense and so the cloud would disappear, but the pattern of relative temperatures would persist in the same form as had at lower temperatures been revealed by a cloud. The point is that the cloud is incidental, or as Aristotle would have described it accidental. The real phenomenon is not the cloud

but the pattern of temperatures, not the iron filings but the magnetic fields that they can, in the right context, reveal.

Almost all writing on witchcraft confuses the iron filings and permanent clouds for the phenomenon - they miss the point and only lead to confusion. And as a result are mostly worthless - they have no relevance in the real world, but only in the tenured debating spaces of academia. Or, socially structured games, like sports and ballroom dancing competitions. What is described as witchcraft is simply a special case of a more general phenomenon, one that is at least ubiquitous if not universal, and represents simply one of its several possible manifestations. What one has to do is to identify the core or kernal of the phenomenon and then explain how it is manifest in different forms in different contexts so that what has heretofore been called witchcraft makes sense. And why it is so easy for iron filings to be confused with magnetism and clouds with temperature patterns. The key is that the manifestations are a function of, or dependent on, the context, whereas the underlying and core phenomenon is singificantly context independent.

In the case of witchcraft this means that the core phenomenon is universal and hence ancient (if a disease is evenly distributed around the world it is likely to be grounded in fundamental human biology, whereas if it is local it is likely to be a function of the environment), but the particular manifestations that most would consider definitive of the phenomenon are in fact local to contexts of belief that are characteristic of specific times and places. This implies that though the manifestations are local and context dependent if the relevant contexts persist over long periods so will the manifestations - it is simply that persistance over time alone does not make them either universal or permanent.

The mistake is to assume that the pattern of iron filings or the droplets of moisture are the phenomena

Tuesday, 25 November 2008 22:25:17

You have a tendency to try and subdivide too much. You need to be ruled by Ockham's Razor. Do not multiply entities unnecessarily.

Your desire to elevate witchcraft related violence to some kind of special status seems too much like hoping that violence done

to people run over by a Toyota is different from that done by a Ford or a Chrysler.

ISLAM

Thursday, 31 July 2008 14:26:58

http://www.textinmotion.com/index.jsp

This is a search engine for the Koran.

The Koran is much more difficult to search because of the variety of translations of uncertain accuracy.

What is clear from this is that there does not seem to be a close link between what in the christian world is considered witchcraft and the nearest equivalent in the Koran. With this search engine there is no reference to a witch as such and though there are a dozen or so to wizards they have the feel of self appointed experts or confidence tricksters who are deluded but often see the error of their ways and are confounded or converted. Their function is to demonstrate their impotence when confronted with Allah and the faithful.

Searching for the witch as root produces 31 results but basically possible or possibly related synonyms like magic, wizard, sorcerer, and bewitched (which seems mostly to be used for misled, confused, bemused, led astray = you have been acted upon and not fully responsible). There also seems a view of magic as a nuisance and love magic - making husbands think their wives ugly etc.

I think the key to the difference with christianity is that in Islam no harm can come to anyone without the permission of Allah. So, if someone is harmed the perpetrator is powerless to do much on their own. Even Shatan and the djinn are subject to what Allah will allow. This is because Islam in a true, perhaps the only true, monotheistic religion. Christianity, in spite of its protestations, is essentially dualistic with a much more powerful evil god in the form of the devil. Though his malevolence is a relatively recent development - in the Bible he is rather more a hinderer or bureaucrat who does God's will in submitting humans like Job to tests of their faith. This would also be consistent with the relative absence of withcraft in the Bible (its significance is that it is not there - not its presence but its absence - like the clue in the Sherlock Holmes

story which was that the dog did NOT bark). I think the notions of witchcraft and the modern evangelical view of the devil is post reformation and a sign of the increasing drift from the pure monotheism of the semitic religions towards a more manichean dualism.

I have also searched the Hadith as best as I could - though again different translators might use different terms - but that added nothing of value.

My conclusion is that though something like witchcraft was probably known it was not a major concern of any of the major semitic religions it was simply part of the cultural environment - one kind of bad behavior or sinning among many equal or worse. Occuring in a context within which `magic' was endemic and an approved explanation for things happening in the world.

To understand witchcraft one has to avoid thinking of it as some kind of strange natural phenomenon and recognize it as essentially not about nature but morals. It is not about scientific `reality' but about good and evil - in other words ethics and psychology.

It is useful to distinguish the notion of a single external `reality' that exists independent of human minds and Jacob van Uexkull's notion of the umwelt. The umwelt is essentially a uniquely species specific world of signs meaningful to that species. Bats live in an umwelt of sounds to which we are deaf. The umwelt of bees includes being able to `see' polarized light and does not include ideas of culture and witches. Each species lives in a world that is only a part of any all encompassing whole universe. And each individual in a personal umwelt of whatever is meaningful to them and helps them survive.

Thursday, 31 July 2008 10:56:24

http://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?quicksearch=witch&qs_version=16

This website allows searches of several different translations of the Bible. It is especially useful as it searches on the root so that you can get results for witch, witches, witchcraft, witchcrafts etc. The original list I sent you was for the 17C KJV. Repeating this for other more modern versions produces even fewer results - about 4 and all in the Old Testament. These are all authoritative translations using the best linguistic and historical scholarship. The one exception is the Bible in

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Worldwide English (New Testament only) which produced 12 results including witch-doctor. The explanation is given in the item from Wikipedia copied below with the search results for that version. It is the work not of a Biblical scholar but a Bible teacher working in West Africa and adapting the language to that of her students.

I think what is significant about this is not that witch is mentioned at all in the Bible but how rarely. The KJV dates from a time in England when witchcraft was current and a hot issue. King James in particular was an active and aggressive witchhunter. Yet the use of the term is clearly a variant on and included with a number of other sins or bad things that people do such as adultery and fornication. It is not treated as being in any way exceptional. And the more modern translations that take advantage of modern scholarship but often including evangelical inputs only use the root about four times and all in the OT. And in a book of around a thousand pages. So if it were likely that witchcraft was a significant issue it would have been referred to more often.

This is consistant with the observation that until the run-up to the Reformation the RC church did not seem to consider WC a major problem but simply a sin like many others to be dealt with by local priests in the ordinary way.

It is important to appreciate that most academic approaches seem to imply a stance in which there is a contrast between a modern scientific world view and another that is irrational and alien. But the reality is that contrast is not between the forces of reason and unreason but rather between cults that share a core of common beliefs about how the world works and differ mainly in details. It is not a contrast between law enforcement and organized crime but a disagreement between mafia families about how to behave. Witchcraft is not a natural but a moral and ethical phenomenon and it is in these terms that it has to be understood. In the majority of cases belief in the technicalities of explanation are common and shared by both opposing parties. They are therefore not essential to witchcraft and do not distinguish it from other kinds of unacceptable behavior.

I think it was Rodney Stark who made the interesting observation that in Europe witchcraft panics were most common in areas where central authority was weak. I think this probably goes some way to explaining the phenomenon in Africa. It occurs in an extra-legal no-man's land on the fringes of legal authority. Essentially folk processes or folk law takes over wherever

central authority is unable to meet the needs of the commons. Hence too the impact of economic adversity which authority is largely powerless to address effectively.

Another important factor is that it seems almost inevitable that in the context of weak or failing governments in which respect for the rule of law is token and the reality is power obtained by any means democracy is likely to facilitate rather than deter witchcraft. This is the case because in a democracy it is probably impossible for a successful politician to ignore populist sentiments and agendas. So there is a hiatus between a government and legal system that has to be seen to discourage witchcraft phenomena and a widespread populist belief in its power and dangers. Attempts like those in Zimbabwe and SA to assimilate native healers etc into the system are bound to fail because they simply reinforce the popular belief that they must be taken seriously.

Another major problem in writing about witchcraft is the almost universal tendency to imply differences and contrasts while ignoring similarities. Instead I think that whenever you discuss a phenomenon you should do your utmost to find similarities with others occuring in our cultures. Hence what is important is not that Africans believe in spirits or transformations that are not accepted by science, but that similar beliefs are shared by all christian believers.

poisoning = poisoning
diembodied spirits = disembodied spirits
demons = demons
shapeshifting = transubstantiation
things can be modified to cause harm = pedophiles can make childrens' keyboards give off gases that make them more susceptible (a TV presenter was persuaded to make an advert warning of this danger)
etc = etc

Evangelicals are certainly capable of vastly elaborating on fragments of scripture. Take the case of belief in The Rapture and the attempts to breed a ritually pure red heifer in an attempt to nudge history towards the second coming. I am appending a couple of articles about this written by christians who are sceptical. But if witches were a major concern for the writers of the Bible there is no evidence that they were considered much worse than fornicators.

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This is important because it illustrates how texts that according to the best scholarship do not have anything to say about witchcraft have been adapted for teaching purposes to include related terms because they are part of the world view of the students being taught about the Bible. This is what I believe must have happened when the first missionaries arrived in Africa around the time when witchcraft was a major cause of concern and panic in Europe.

Bible in Worldwide English
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The Bible in Worldwide English is a New Testament Bible in easy-to-read English. This New Testament was originally prepared by Annie Cressman, who died in 1993. She was a Canadian Bible teacher in Liberia in West Africa. While teaching students in an English-language Bible school, she found that she was spending more time explaining the meaning of the English than she was teaching the Bible itself. Therefore, she decided to write this simple version in easy English so that her students could easily understand.

[edit]

1. Acts 8:9

But there was one man named Simon, a witch-doctor, who fooled the people of Samaria. He tried to make people believe that he could do big things.
Acts 8:8-10 (in Context) Acts 8 (Whole Chapter)

2. Acts 8:11

He had fooled them for a long time with his work as a witch. That is why they listened to him.
Acts 8:10-12 (in Context) Acts 8 (Whole Chapter)

3. Acts 13:6

They went through all the island to the town of Paphos. There they met a witch doctor. He was a Jew named Bar-Jesus. He was not a true prophet.
Acts 13:5-7 (in Context) Acts 13 (Whole Chapter)

4. Acts 13:7

This witch-doctor was with Sergius Paulus, the ruler of the country. Sergius Paulus was a wise man. He wanted to hear God's word, so he called for Barnabas and Saul.
Acts 13:6-8 (in Context) Acts 13 (Whole Chapter)

5. Acts 13:8

The witch-doctor was also called Elymas. He tried to stop them. He did not want the ruler to believe the truth.
Acts 13:7-9 (in Context) Acts 13 (Whole Chapter)

6. Acts 19:13
Some Jews were there who travelled about from place to place. They had power over bad spirits like witch-doctors. They tried to make people free from bad spirits by using the name of the Lord Jesus. They said to the spirits, `I tell you, in the name of Jesus, the one Paul talks about, come out!'
Acts 19:12-14 (in Context) Acts 19 (Whole Chapter)

7. Acts 19:19
Many had been witch-doctors. They brought their books and burned them in front of all the people. All the books together had cost about 50,000 silver coins.
Acts 19:18-20 (in Context) Acts 19 (Whole Chapter)

8. Galatians 5:20
They worship idols. They use witch-power. They hate. They quarrel. They are jealous. They get angry. They want their own way. They do not agree together and they join different groups against each other.
Galatians 5:19-21 (in Context) Galatians 5 (Whole Chapter)

9. Revelation 9:21
And they did not stop their killing, or their witchcraft, or their wrong ways of using sex, or their stealing.
Revelation 9:20-21 (in Context) Revelation 9 (Whole Chapter)

10. Revelation 18:23
No lamp will shine in you again. No one will hear the voice of people being married. Your traders were the big people of the world. All the countries were fooled by your witch doctors.
Revelation 18:22-24 (in Context) Revelation 18 (Whole Chapter)

11. Revelation 21:8
Some people will be thrown into the big fire which burns with sulphur dust that chokes people. These are the people: those who give in to fear, those who do not believe, those who are bad, those who kill, those with wrong ways of using sex, the witch-doctors, those who worship idols, and all those who love lies. That fire is the second death.'
Revelation 21:7-9 (in Context) Revelation 21 (Whole Chapter)

12. Revelation 22:15
Outside the city are the dirty people, and the witch-doctors, and those with wrong ways of using sex, those who kill people, those who worship idols, and all those who like lies and tell them.
Revelation 22:14-16 (in Context) Revelation 22 (Whole Chapter)

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

Miller--Outline

The significance of the contents of this essay is that it made me realize that the notion of poverty as relative rather than absolute and the adverse effects that relative poverty or lack of prosperity has on health and well-being - to the extent that some argue that differences should be reduced or capped - is essentially a zero-sum conception of prosperity. That is probably the oldest and traditional view of prosperity and the basis of the most fundamental conception of justice. It is closely linked to gift mechanisms, lies at the root of witchcraft related phenomena, and almost certainly has acted as an impediment to progress which in contrast is based on a view of prosperity being a non zero-sum or absolute benefit or boon. This, tentatively is how I see the matter.

Prosperity is a zero-sum quality in that differences can only be explained by someone advancing at the expense of another - with the possible exceptions of those changes that are brought about by gods or spirits and that trump natural views of how the world should normally work. This is also consistent with a cyclical view of time.

This view of prosperity is experienced as the foundation of justice which then at different times bifurcates into the two most important manifestations - the economic, or tit for tat, or positive feedback reciprocity model, and the empathetic or negative feedback reciprocity model. The economic view of justice is based on genetic dispositions that precede modern humans and are found in primates and even older species; but become more articulated with language and accounting. The empathetic view is based on the functioning of mirror neurons but for its fullest articulation requires the development of theory of mind, which starts about the age of four, and the functioning of the ability to use metarepresentations.

The existence of the golden rule of ethical behavior which is found in all societies and all major religions points to it having become conscious and stressed in order to counteract or oppose an opposite tendency - the economic view of justice.

The re-emergence of a zero-sum view of prosperity is a symptom of the tension between the two views of justice which has become accentuated by the more recent view of prosperity as a non zero-sum game, and lies at the root of modern free-market economics.

Macdonald-Miller Correspondence

http://www.cis.org.au/policy/spring_06/polspring06_wilkinson.htm

¬∏June 20, 2004¬∏Ideas¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitchcraft as informal law #1¬∏I am copying this to Hernando for information and in case it resonates with his experiences in the extra legal sectors - though the most relevant cases would be in Africa and hence prospective.

WORLD PHENOMENA

** All the evidence that I have found suggests that witchcraft is not a global but a local phenomenon unequally distributed in place and time. On the basis of the titles and keywords of published papers it is in the present time most common in Africa and PNG and to a far lesser extent in South Asia (probably India). It appears to be virtually absent in China, Central Asia and the main Islamic countries. Whilst the extensive literature on Europe is historical and referenced to the period of the great witch hunts around the Renaissance and Reformation. And though it is possible that this distribution tells us more about the holiday preferences of anthropologists it would require too great a degree of cynicism to believe that would be sufficient to account for it.

My first hunch was that this distribution was a result of colonization by christian countries and the missionary activity that accompanied it and which in Africa had begun at a time when concern about witchcraft was far more intense than now. But that would not account for the lack of evidence in China where there had been extensive missionary activity. * A more plausible explanation is that witchcraft seems to be reported most often from cultures that did not have writing or an established literature on philosophy and religion. As a result local practices and beliefs would be more susceptible to being perceived, interpreted, and redescribed in terms of a complex of witchcraft related concepts with which the colonizers were familiar. This did not create witchcraft but helped to shape it and the terms in which it was described and this in turn was passed into the system of formal laws that were imported and imposed from outside the community. And under the skirts of these laws was smuggled in an alien conception of what it is to be human and notions of truth falsity responsibility and motive. It is not clear to what extent these were congroent or compatible with the local or if any consideration was givea to making them so. If there were noble intentions they failed and the result is exclusion and the existence of a massive extralegal system of informal crimnal law that is only partially obscured by being described in terms of practical difficulties in enforcement rather than exclusion and coexistence or rivalry. What one is faced with is not the failure of a single coherent system of law but the uneasy coexistence of parallel systems

based on radically different beliefs about motivation and mechanism that can be traced back to differing conceptions of truth and individuality. And the question is if and how can these be reconciled.¬∏¬∏¬∏December 7, 2004¬∏Witch¬∏¬∏Not PrivateÀùWitchcraft as informal law # 2¬∏According to the modern scientific view the world is primarily inanimate made up from discrete entities that interact according to physical law and from which life emerges as a secondary phenomenon. In contrast that of hunters and gatherers is living through and through and everything is full of spirits that interact according to psychological processes such as will, belief, and desire - folk psychology rather than physics.

Within this network of relations a person is a part of a living whole the network is the whole and the whole is Gaia