

William C. Olsen

## “Children For Death”: Money, Wealth, and Witchcraft Suspicion in Colonial Asante

In the Gold Coast Colony in 1937, a tribunal was held near Kumase in which 13 persons offered testimony concerning their involvement with the Senya Gupo witch-finding shrine at Kwaman in the District of Asante. In particular, the testimonial of one defendant provides insight into “the agency of her witchcraft”. After taking the medicines and oaths prescribed at the witch-finding shrine, the woman describes her deeds while acting as a witch. She also discloses the effects of shrine medicines on her capacity to perform some of the most offensive and heinous actions in the Asante normative ethos.

“My name is Essie Twiwah, am of clear and sound mind. I don’t suffer from any delirium tremens. I am a witch, as [are] the rest of the accused. I know them well. I myself testify and verily state before the Court that all I have mentioned their names are undoubted devils, which means they are all possessing witchcraft. We all go to chop in the night of human flesh on the top of the Oyan tree at Kwaman. I used to take somebody’s child and each of the accused also used to bring some and we eat it. I killed my own two children and ate them with the accused together because I take someone’s child and on my turn I send mine also. So with each of us. I have killed Kobina Ata, one of the twins of the accused. I take the heart of every person that is killed with a knife and give it to the men to divide it. I eat the middle body, and the accused eats the head; and the rest is divided or shared among the rest accused. On flying up at night, I turn as Akroma. Kwesi Gyan also turns as Osaasa and some snakes, tigers and many other forms of wonderful animals. On eating in cassava, corn and cocoa farms, we turn or changed into [these beasts] — we set fire on some of the cocoa farms. Hence you see some cocoa farms are spoiled. We have eaten corn, cassava and cocoa farms of Chief Kofi Donkor. My witchcraft is a snake, [and] lies on my breast, in my eyes and in my private. My waist beads are also [witch-like] as well as my hairs. We eat human flesh on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and eat in farms on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. On Sundays we rest. Persons killed: my own two children, and caused abortion. I killed my late grandfathers Chief’s son and daughter, [and another’s] son and daughter, [as well as] two [other] sons, their names I have forgotten. I shared the persons and children killed with all the accused. They are all possessing witchcraft as myself. I can know them because I am possessing [witchcraft]. None of them can defy me; neither can they deny me. We have set fire on Ekua

Edu's cocoa trees. I am possessing witchcraft. When we [take] medicine [by drinking from the fetish], I can lose some of my snakes. I ask Nana to find some medicine to cure me. I beg him to do so. I have killed many people with the rest of the accused" (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886).

British colonial regulations against witch-finding began in 1906. The ineffectiveness of legal mandates in stemming the profusion of new shrines was evident in new rulings of 1922 and finally the "Native Customs (Witch and Wizard Finding) Order" of 1930. Though they served a diplomatic purpose with offended and outraged clergy and with some government officials, none of these administrative orders appears to have made much difference in dissuading Africans that they should not seek out the mystical capacities of witch-finders. Instead, the accused often chose to endure either fines or limited jail time, if a conviction could be made at all<sup>1</sup>. The above testimonial is consistent with Asante and other African concepts of power involving the individual's capacity to be creatively linked with its limitless mystical resources (Arens & Karp 1989). The statement also illustrates the deep sense of personal affiliation with power in many African communities, a connection which may include human physical transformation into beasts or beastly forms which inhabit the wild and which pose a consistent threat to the lives, health, and wealth of others in society (Jackson 1989, 1990; Lindskog 1954). It is, in fact, a pronouncement of the powers of witchcraft.

This article is intended as a contribution to the growing body of literature on the modernity of witchcraft in Africa. I argue that witchcraft—along with its counter-measures of witch-finding—while hardly a creation of the 20th century, assumed forms of political and economic realism which reflect the engagement of Asante in expanding global economies and western produced commodities. Witch-finding in Asante should be viewed historically as an attempt by ordinary persons to deal with unanticipated misfortunes; but more than this, the wide complex of cults which arose in the early 20th century address the economic inequities in social relations which were often viewed as the result of witchcraft activities and power. I suggest that while riches gained through the advancement of contact with global economies and commodities were vigorously pursued by some, that they were generally perceived as potentially embodying malevolent and precarious associations with witchcraft.

In traditional Asante, pain, illness, death, and all manner of suffering were regarded not as anomalies of life but as basic features of embodied

---

1. The difficulty in either bringing charges or in obtaining convictions over witch-finding was extremely difficult in colonial Africa. In British colonies, there is no precedent for recognizing the illegality of witchcraft within English common law. In the Gold Coast, and in other areas, the proof of wrongdoing was rarely credible before colonial magistrates. For further reading, see FISIV (1990); OLSEN (n.d.).

existence. Affliction and disease, including mental illness, were considered as either natural occurrences or as part of a fluid Asante cosmology which brought human life within repetitive proximity to its nemesis, the wild. Unfortunate events and illness were viewed as causal results of this contact. The body was, in turn, viewed as one form of conveyance of this dialogue between the individual and the cosmological world. It has been well documented in African society and history that illness and disease are means of apprehending ruptures and discord within social relations. In Asante history illness was also considered as a manifestation of the infiltration of nature within culture or the confines of human existence. This reality was true in pre-colonial Asante history; and the idea continued, although modified, into the British era. Rather than viewing illness exclusively as a kind of cosmic justice which lacked human or supernatural agency, Asante regarded assault on the body as replete with human and witch induced causes and with mystical power. Basic to action and experience at this level was the creativity of power, and human capacities to recreate personhood with the ritual of witch-finding shrines (Olsen 1998).

Asante witchcraft in the early 20th century was fashioned by the uses and abuses of money, Western goods and their consumption, and by the desire for and misuse of power. Witches were individuals who demonstrated envy, especially among kin, insatiable sexual desire and lust, and especially unsatisfiable greed for the property, land, and material goods of family and members of the matrilineage. This scenario during colonialism remains consistent with post-colonial and contemporary conditions<sup>2</sup> in Ghana (Parish 2000). New, sudden wealth and the conspicuous consumption which it afforded were associated with the contradictory identities of modernity and individual social prestige. Such dubious statuses were suspect because of their associations with unexplained powers and because of their dissociation with the Asante past and its normative social and stately ethos. I argue that in early twentieth century Asante, witchcraft became a token of this transformation which was noted at the level of individual greed and avarice and which was also particularly realized within relations of kinship, specifically the Asante matrilineage, or *abusua*. Indeed, the Asante Twi word for witchcraft is *bayi*, derived from *ɔba*, or “child” plus *yi*, to “take away or remove”. The most common effects of witchcraft were physical symptoms of illness and death. When witchcraft was suspected, it became incumbent

---

2. While most informants readily identified *bayi* as a source of illness and death, other persons under 22 stated that they were not familiar with the effects of witchcraft. One male of 21 years who was Christian stated that he “learned a little bit about *bayi* and *akomfoɔ* and *abosom* in school” (Interview: Eric Darko, Jan. 1, 1997). Another Asante male of 54 years said in Kumase, “Tigare is not found in the cities. You have to go out to the villages where maybe a few elders practice. It is something our grandparents did. But now there are too many churches-churches everywhere, especially Christian churches” (Interview: Phillip Adjie, Jan 2, 1997).

on the patient or bewitched individual to seek the patronage and healing assistance of witch-finding priests. Such witch-finding cults rose dramatically in numbers during the first three decades of the twentieth century. These shrines and their healers have been active as government controlled sources of medicine since the early 1940s.

In the late nineteenth century, Expanding European goods and cash increased the personal wealth and material possessions of several persons in the Gold Coast. These successes were icons of the modern individual. While some Asante embraced the rising tide of capitalistic gain as entrepreneurs<sup>3</sup>, many viewed it with skepticism and suspicion. The accumulation of manufactured goods, particularly all forms of conspicuous consumption, along with personal, and sudden, financial triumphs were rife with innuendo. The problem was that as soon as new economic horizons arose for individual Asante, they were besieged by suspicions of witchcraft. It was commonly assumed that the rich person had connections to the occult. It was this association which made him or her wealthy. Like a Weberian premise, wealth became a marker of connection to mystical resources. The latter explained fortunate events of a materialistic and monetary sort. Nowhere were these presumptions more pronounced in social life than among one's kin. I argue that these effects were most strikingly realized within the matrilineage, and that the matrilineage was the focal point of witchcraft confessions.

Earlier generations of anthropologists presented witchcraft as a form of "primitive mentality", alternative realities (Nadel 1954), or comparative rationalities. Witchcraft was regarded as a means of social control (Gluckman 1965: 69), the normative release of tensions among kin (Turner 1957), and as representative of conflict within the village (Douglas 1963). African witchcraft was assumed as part of a set of beliefs and cosmological precepts. Most notably, the Azande of the Sudan regarded witchcraft as an explanation of misfortune. The question Azande put to someone or to someone's kin experiencing illness, death, or other catastrophes was "Why this person and why now?". Indeed, segments of the above quote dealing with death—especially the death of children—illustrate that witchcraft in Asante was also used to explain the occurrence of unfortunate events. Additional dimensions of witchcraft are revealed, however, in the statements by

3. Arhin (1980) describes the new economic class of entrepreneurs which emphatically embraced the rising trends in economic opportunities brought about through trade with the British. These *akonkofoɔ* were seen by Europeans and by other Asante as *anibue*, or "civilized" persons who were connected culturally with other wealthy Africans from the coast. Their status was strictly in the wealth they owned as a result of trading natural resources such as gold and cocoa. The wealth was tenuous as they needed British patronage in order to be protected from civil sanctions within the borders of Asante. Many *akonkofoɔ* had exiled themselves to the coast. From there they pleaded with the British government to be effective in defeating the Asante king, which would enable them to enjoy their successes back in Kumase.

the accused concerning the ruin of corn, casava, and cocoa farms as the result of mystical forces. Such statements concerning the modernity of witchcraft are similar to hundreds of others found within the National Archives of Ghana. They indicate a justification for the expansion of witchcraft in post-colonial Africa, not for its decline.

Recent scholarship situates witchcraft and witch finding within the political and economic realities of the colonial and post-colonial state (Ashforth 1998; Ciekawy 1998; Geschiere 1988; Rowlands & Warnier 1988; Shaw 1997; West 1975), including national elections (Ferme 1999). Witchcraft is presented as integral to the strategic and financing strategies of businessmen and politicians (Geschiere 1997; Niehaus 1993), as part of the normative patterns of literate and urban life (Bastian 1993; Meyer 1995), as an inevitable result of a breakdown of politics and of the codes of purity which they controlled (Chidester 1991), as a means of competing between genders for labor, capital and resources (Apter 1993; Austen 1993; Ciekawy 1999; Drucker-Brown 1993), as a duplicitous means of the destruction and rational accumulation of wealth (Ferguson 1999; Sanders 1999), as a representation of the incongruities and antipathies between village and town populations (Kaspin 1993; Parkin 1991), as a means of memory in disreputable forms of gift giving and exchange of objects (Masquelier 1997), as a source of etiology and causation in cases of HIV and AIDS and other epidemics (Bond 2001; Yamba 1997), as encapsulating the problems inherent in labor migration and capitalist endeavors (Auslander 1993; Weiss 1996), as a confirmation of the ambiguities of advancing Western economies and commodities including land reform (Delius 1996; Matory 1994; Schmoll 1993), as the meeting place between individual and occult powers over the desire for wealth (Ferme 2001; Niehaus 2001), and as an explanation for the chaos and more powerful military hand in civil war (Behrend 1999; Ellis 1999; Shaw 2002). As Bayart (1993: 248-249) has recently noted, witchcraft:

“far from being an ideological tool of lineage in the hands of the elders, as Althusserian anthropologists used to argue, is equally manipulated by the ‘small men’ who are anxious to defend their interests and to make sure (with varying degrees of success!) that the rich honor their obligations to redistribute wealth. It is as much a sign of the incompleteness of power as of the inaccessible totality of it.”

In short, witchcraft and witch-finding were forms of power which manifested themselves between the material and mystical worlds. In some cases, the consequences of witch finding and accusations are most severe. Mesaki (1994) reports that between 1970 and 1984 in the 13 regions of Tanzania, at least 3,692 persons were killed as a result of witch related activities.

A central point of all these post-colonial contexts of African witches is that they always contained a human face—often the recognizable profile of a sibling or fellow lineage or clansmen—and an experiential context. This point was established by Evans-Pritchard (1937: 73) when he said that

witchcraft was “a social fact, a person”; and again, witchcraft is found only “in particular places, at particular times, and in relation to particular persons” (*ibid.*: 72).

Through dramas with particular political realities, Asante witch-finders sought to reshape the intruding ambiguities of colonial encounters into techniques of empowerment. These techniques were effective because of the historical settings in which they were produced. They did not retreat from the presumed potency of new commodities. Instead, they engaged the power of money and wealth, and gave it meaning within the local community, the market, the farm and the household. Witchcraft came to be known indeed as the nightmare of kinship, as Monica Wilson stated. But witchcraft and witch-finding were also forms of historical consciousness, since both were, at least in the 20th century, born of the shocking encounter between the “strange”—and thus potentially dangerous—and recognized local modes of action. As noted by the Comaroffs, “This juxtaposition of the unfamiliar with more enduring tropes establishes new fields of signification, newly nuanced notions of evil and affliction, new incipient identities, new modes of practice” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993: xxii).

### A Brief History of Witch-Finding in Asante

Witch finding cults were ritual-centered voluntary organizations that used divination and forms of mystical healing and therapeutic cleansing as a means of disclosing and curing witches, and to neutralize their potency. The cults proliferated in the Gold Coast during the early decades of this century, and are found by the hundreds—perhaps thousands—throughout tropical Africa today. Cult shrines were the centers of lesser Asante deities, known as *abosom*. Because *abosom* originated in and were beings of nature—a realm categorically opposed to the world of culture and of human life—their behavior was dangerously ambiguous. While mystical cooperation or patronage was possible, human existence was often met with effects of *abosom* which were antagonistic, duplicitous, mocking, and vengeful. The human representatives or shrine officiants were diviner/healers known as *akɔmfɔɔ*, literally meaning “one possessed”, but often translated as “priest”. The first record of a witch finding movement in Asante was in 1879 by the Basel missionary F. A. Ramseyer; and it was named *ɔdomaŋkama* (“The Creator”). It was also known as *abonsamkɔm*, (derived from *abonsam*, or sorcerer/witch plus *akɔm*). This movement attempted to reveal those who carried *bayi* within their bodies, and to kill them or subject them to fines and retributive medicines. The aims of the members of *ɔdomaŋkama* were almost exclusively political in their efforts to repudiate the corruption of *asantehene* (King) Mensa Bonsu and the state. The state and its royalty were seen by the larger population as increasingly misguided and predatory due to the terrorism of the state on its citizenry beginning with the reign

of Kwaku Dua I in the second quarter of the nineteenth century (Terry 1994; Wilks 1975: 519-523).

In this case, witchcraft and witch-finding were intricately involved with the “misfortune” of the state. However, after the annexation of Asante by the British, the nature of witchcraft and witch-finding began to change. While always capable of explaining misfortune—and it remains so today—witchcraft assumed qualities of modernity<sup>4</sup>, including the accumulation of vast amounts of wealth and the production of new, Western commodities. Despite British attempts to make practices of witch-finding illegal, including the formal Orders in Council of 1906, 1922, and 1930, their numbers arose at an astounding rate throughout the Colony. Often seizing upon the effectiveness of Islamic medicines and of the absence of witchcraft in the Northern Territories, anti-witching shrines, or fetishes, were imported by the dozens from Cote d’Ivoire, Wa, Gonja, and other northern locations connected to Asante by trade routes<sup>5</sup>. These shrines arose throughout Asante and the Gold Coast in successive appearances. Their apparitions contained a wide range of meanings for those who solicited their powers and for their clients who sought out the capacities of shrines to heal and to administer protection from the malevolent forms of witchcraft which abounded in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Contrary to the wishes of Methodist and Catholic clergy and many in the British government, witchcraft accusations did not disappear during colonialism’s attempts to create a rational and civil society. Witchcraft may be seen as a window into the individuation and fragmentation which appeared full scale with the annexation of Asante in the late 19th century. Busia (1951), Tordoff (1965), and Kimble (1963) have written of the emergence in Asante of a new “class” or “new types of social personality” which came about through mission catechism, formal education, wealth from the cocoa business and a general spread of “liberal ideas”. The arguments of Busia and Tordoff in particular assert that economic and social change on a large scale in Asante began only after the foundations of colonial rule were established. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, new expanding economies—including the changes from subsistence to wage labor—were a major source of social transformation. New retail trades and urban producing markets were also established within and around Kumase. Historians and economic anthropologists who analyze this period assert that specific cash commodities brought about substantial social change. The money from these goods also produced economic and social effects on the surrounding rural agricultural areas. Products which dominated this new

- 
4. The concept of modernity has reference to the forms of social and cultural life which, on a daily basis, have become connected with the rise of European industrial capitalism beginning in the sixteenth century and which were disseminated by various means throughout much of Africa by at least the nineteenth century.
  5. Migration of shrines from north to south is also noted by Rosenthal in her material on healing shrines in Togo (ROSENTHAL 1998).

export horizon of cash crops and commodities were primarily cocoa, kola, rubber, gold and timber production (Allman & Tashjian 2000; Arhin 1980; Dumett 1971; McCaskie 1986). This transition had implications for economy and for the perception of the personhood of all Asante. “The movement of the economy from subsistence to cash is said to have produced advocates of individualistic approaches to the pursuit of wealth as against the communalism of pre-colonial times” (Arhin 1974: 80).

Expansion of money and commodities among the poor and among slaves also threatened the power of the traditional elite’s ability to control income and the flow of wealth. The power of the state was thereby vastly limited. It was rumored at this time that “common men and slaves are ruling the country” (quoted in McCaskie 1981: 134). This sentiment stood the hierarchy of the pre-colonial state on its head. This period was also wracked by civil war and by the arrest and exile by the British of the Asantehene Agyeman Prempe in 1896. With this succession to colonial rule came the end of state performances of *odwira*, or the royal ritual control over Asante production and reproduction, health and illness, the body, and all elements which defined the Asante past, present and future. In sum, “there existed in early colonial Asante a widespread sentiment that society no longer ‘worked’ as it once had done, and that in its present uncertainty it was somehow unreliable, and ultimately threatening” (McCaskie 1981: 134). This background of unprecedented wealth and of social discontinuity became the setting for the rise of witch-finding shrines (McCaskie 1981; Parish 1999). These movements accommodated the sufferings and uncertainties of many Asante and other peoples of the Gold Coast. They supplied healing powers for physical symptoms associated with illnesses. But they also increasingly legitimized mystical powers associated with the avoidance of personal bankruptcy, bad harvests and financial failure. Devotees to the various named shrines widely used them to expose the identity of others who acquired their wealth through the powers of witchcraft, since it was commonly assumed in Asante that personal economic windfall was a sign of assistance from occult sources<sup>6</sup>.

### Importation of Shrines From Outside of Asante

Six of the earliest witch-finding movements of the colonial period were *Aberewa*, which meant “The Old Woman”, *Hwe me so*, or “watch over me”, Kunde, Tongo, Senya Gupo—which was named for its village of origin, Senyan, and Tigare, which maintains a large following in Ghana today and

6. One informant provided me with a representative list of reasons for calling on the powers of a priest. These included “sickness, prosperity in life, needs improvement and more money, healthy baby, avoid death, high position in work or in government, and protection against witchcraft” (Interview: Victor Ofori Attah, January 1, 1997).

which migrated to other parts of West Africa. None of these movements originated in Asante. Instead, all six forms of witchcraft eradication appear to have migrated into Asante from the northern territories. In 1945, Meyer Fortes noted in his diaries that witch-catching shrines were imported by Asante from the northern territories for the simple reason of potency. “The indigenous fetishes have not power of ‘catching’ witches, and ‘catching’ adulterers and thieves” as do those objects brought down from the north (Fortes 1945b). The tribal peoples near Wa and Bole were renown for having a social and geographic landscape which was devoid of witchcraft of any sort. Asante tried to replicate the mystical realities and powers of these societies. Moreover, the absence of witches in orthodox Islam in the Northern Territories was well known in Asante. Thus, early in the 18th century, T. E. Bowdich (1966: 271) noted how Asante kings used the powers of Muslim medicines and religious objects in order to enhance their powers in wartime and in subduing the evils of witches:

“The most surprising superstition of the Ashantees, is their confidence in the fetishes they purchase so extravagantly from the Moors, believing firmly that they make them invulnerable and invincible in war, paralyze the hand of the enemy, shiver their weapons, divert the course of balls, render both sexes prolific, and avert all evils but sickness, and natural death.”

Similarly, Margaret Field (1960) notes the Muslim origins of fetishes and associated objects in a letter to Eva Meyerowitz. “All the new shrines from the Northern Territories: Tigare, Nan Tongo, Senya Kupo, etc., bring a collection of Northern Territory spears and tunics. I don’t know that they are of Moslem origin, but I daresay they might be” (Field 1960: EMP). These imported shrines appeared in Asante as early as 1906.

Aberewa was the first identified witch-finding shrine of the twentieth century in Asante. However, due to evangelical colonial repudiation of this fetish shrine—mostly Catholic and Methodist clergy asserting their influence over British administration—Aberewa as a named shrine was short-lived. Colonizers found shrine associated behaviors offensive because of their erotically suggestive dancing and loud music and because of their influential persuasion over members of various Christian congregations. By 1930, witchcraft accusations and suspicions had become more focused on those who profited from cocoa harvests and other modern economies; and witch-finding had become a lucrative cottage business.

Tigare was renown among other shrines for its mystical and medicinal capacities. “Its superiority of healing disease of all kinds is very recommendable, which coupled with excellent powers of catching witchcraft and persons who try to endanger human life with obnoxious medicines” (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61). The same observations of the fame of Tigare were made seven years later in Bekwai:

“Tegari has shrines in many villages throughout this district, and like nearly every *abosom* that has been brought from the Northern Territories to Ashanti, its whole

function is to protect those who serve it from harm, and, when one of its servants has suffered unusual or unnatural harm, to point out from among those who have already come voluntarily to serve it, the *human agent by whose spiritual interference the harm has been caused*" (Emphasis added) (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61).

Tigare also had capacity for catching "devils, thieves, *persons who curse their friends with juju*" (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622) and other persons who were capable of swearing innocence of theft or witchcraft in front of the shrine, but whose actions proved otherwise. Like many witch-catching shrines of this era, Tigare was also known to provide "protection against the practice of noxious medicines", in "helping barren women to procreate", and "is for the general protection of the people at large" (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622). Tigare was also known to bring "happiness and prosperity into a town". By 1935, one report concluded: "Most of the villagers are having this fetish". Margaret Field (1960: 405-406) reported that the healing abilities of Tigare were noted to be more powerful than other shrines. One young woman is encouraged by her mother to seek out Tigare after having patronized another shrine.

### Kunde Shrine and Its Obligations

Sometime around 1908, during a dramatic surge in religious, healing and popular movements in the Gold Coast, an anonymous author wrote twenty-six of the proscriptions which were demanded of those who committed themselves to the Kunde shrine in southern Asante. This list is a typical example of the restrictions, sanctions, prohibitions and penalties which were placed upon the adherents of any particular fetish or of its *ɔkɔmfɔ*. The list, therefore, provides an illustration of contemporary dealings of fetish priests and their followers in the early twentieth century Gold Coast. The items included the following:

"Regulations in connection with Kunde:

1. If you steal, Kunde shall catch you.
2. If you are a witch or wizard, Kunde shall catch you.
3. If you charm somebody to die Kunde shall catch you.
4. If you persuade somebody's wife to divorce her husband so that you might marry her, you are to be affected by Kunde.
5. If you have drunk this fetish & join with somebody who does not drink it and you swear any other fetish, Kunde shall affect you.
6. If you are called as witness in any tribunal you must pray to Kunde before you speak. If you swear any other fetish, Kunde shall affect you.
7. If you over charge your brother or any man, Kunde shall affect you.
8. If you take something from your neighbor's farm and you forget to tell him—to confess it—when asked, Kunde shall affect you.
9. If the wife of any man who has drunk Kunde commits adultery and does not tell—or confess—it to the husband, she shall be affected by Kunde.

10. If you have drunk Kunde and then go to somebody's wife, you will not escape when her husband arrives. If you escape, Kunde shall affect you"<sup>7</sup>.

These admonitions were scribed by either European administrators who witnessed shrine performances first hand, or by literate Africans who transcribed the requirements as a testimonial to the government of their lacking any illegal content. The proscriptions are behavioral precepts which devotees of the Kunde shrine were obliged to follow when seeking its protective abilities and medicinal healing powers. Control of witchcraft and detection of witches in Asante were important powers held by traditional healers, shrine priests and mystical agents. Asante recognized that they individually lacked the power to prevent or control witchcraft. Instead, *abosom* and their human counterparts, were acknowledged as having such capacities. Contrary to state controlled access to mystical powers prior to British overrule, this power was accessed by ordinary humans after ritually enabling the *abosom* as having the capacity to protect and to heal.

However, to retain the full force of the witch-finding shrine's protection, the individual had to covenant to live the restrictions of the shrine (Bannerman-Richter 1982: 108). Such oaths and precepts, referred to by Rosenthal (1998) as "laws", represent an example of the kinds of taboos on behavior which were common in Asante witch finding movements. Once affiliated with a shrine, the individual relied on its spiritual power for protection, health and prosperity. Protection from witchcraft of one's "soul" became the work and responsibility of the shrine (Bannerman-Richter 1982: 108). Persons who pledged an allegiance to shrines for protection, and who thereby covenanted to live according to the laws of the fetish shrine, were often asked to swear an oath to the shrine. Such oaths were commonly known as "drinking fetish". Oaths supposedly had the power to both protect and to kill. This accord between oaths and their sworn consequences was consistent with Asante practice of basing oaths on particularly heinous circumstances. In the event that someone swore an oath, and was lying, something similar would befall him. Thus the sacred Oath of Asante, *Memeneda Akromanti*, is derived from the death in battle of an Asantehene, who died on a Saturday (*Memeneda*) (Priestly & Wilks 1960: 91). Swearing an oath of allegiance to a shrine fetish and its medicinal powers recalled the power of such acts of allegiance during the pre-colonial State.

The Great Oath of Asante was instituted by Opuku Ware, the nephew of founding king of Asante, Osei Tutu, as a national pledge of allegiance, "not only to assure the Asante that Osei Tutu's spirit continued to guide the nation, but also to reunite and rekindle their fighting spirit and to achieve the purposes for which the Asante Union had been called into being" (Flynn 1971: 60). The sanction of the Great Oath was characteristically political and religious. The King replied to the chief who had sworn the Oath, "Se

---

7. See the Whole Kunde list of obligations, sanctions and law in annex.

woyε me dɔm da a, abosom nku wo”; “If you ever rebel against me, may the gods kill you” (Aidoo 1975: 32). Transgression of the Oath was therefore both an offence against the gods, and an open act of political rebellion and defiance. Capital punishment for open rebellion was decisive. Power of the shrines retrained this same immediacy of conviction for defying an oath to the abosom. Thus, if one “goes contrary to them [oaths and laws of the fetish] a punishment of sickness is preferred by the fetish which, if not quickly attended by the fetish priest, death becomes the result” (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/213).

Kunde was thus described by a devotee named Kwadu Tawia as “drinking medicine against witchcraft, poison medicine, and bad medicine”. Those who would “drink fetish” of Kunde were required to submit to its powers of surveillance of witchcraft and anti-social behaviors.

“When you are about to drink of this you ought to be assured if you are in possession of any of the above mentioned [medicines] and if you do not tell the whole truth before drinking, the medicine will then catch you. If you are in possession of any of the above [medicines] and stop doing it, after you have drunk the medicine it will do you no harm...If he fails to report all what he has done with his bad medicine, then he will die through his bad doings” (NAG: A.D.M. 229/1923).

Shrine powers were regarded as both mightier than witches and as the only mystical power capable of controlling witchcraft and disclosing witch identities. Once an individual swore such an oath, they could identify a witch by the red color in their eyes. Witches, in turn, knew immediately when they had been identified. Consequently, they fled from the powers abiding within the oath-taking person. Debrunner (1961: 66-67) quotes a chief who forced Christians in his town to undergo drinking the poison ordeal in order to reveal witches.

“What else could I do? The blessing has departed from our town. We work hard but never achieve anything. The fertility of the soil declines. Snails are nowhere to be seen nowadays—and they were our main trading product and the food we like most. Less children are born and more babies die. We are afflicted by many diseases. There must be witches about. Therefore I have told the fetish man to find the guilty ones”.

Dozens of similar movements appeared throughout the entire Gold Coast, particularly in those areas which were strongly influenced by European expansionist tendencies of capitalism and Christianity. The coastal Ewe, for example, used the mystical abilities of the yewe shrine to “alleviate barrenness and to provide protection in war” (Greene 1996: 95) during the German and Danish colonial era of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Other movements making use of shrines to protect or reveal witches were registered from coastal communities into the twentieth century.

## New Imagery of Witchcraft

By the 1920s and 1930s, witchcraft and witch-finding came to be identified through new imagery. This imagery became both modern and contemporary to effect trends of capitalist expansion and production of colonial economies. Abosom and their priests were now more than a generation removed from being controlled exclusively by state authorities for the pursuit of state concerns. Rites were identifiable as conditions relevant to modernity: prosperity, wealth, status by economic class, money, and safety. These themes fell under the shield of defense against witchcraft. All appeared to have involved imagery, use, and protection of the person. Understandably, one document from 1935 outlines four reasons for pursuing the protection of anti-witching:

“Anyone who has undertaken to drink the medicine of the fetish Tigare is free from:  
 1. His or her cocoa farm becoming destroyed by any witchcraft.  
 2. His wife becoming deprived from breeding by witchcraft.  
 3. Becoming cursed by anyone with whom he or she has a dispute.  
 4. Becoming poisoned by anyone who may desire to do away with his or her life”  
 (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1).

Two documents from the summer of 1938 demonstrate that witchcraft was having an effect on the reproductive capacities of men and women within the lineage, and upon the ability of women to bring forth living children at birth. Witchcraft was also affecting the productive yields of farms, particularly those found within the rising cocoa industry in the Gold Coast. Cocoa was imported to the colony by the British in the early part of the 20th century. It was a means of employment for men who were previously tradesmen or who had market stalls in coastal towns and throughout the annexed hinterland regions such as Asante. These men experienced dramatic increases in wealth. As a result, they were noted as being entrepreneurs who had the capacity, through innate business skills but also through compliance with witchcraft, and making their businesses flourish.

Suspicion of witchcraft increased in the new economic environment. Often these entrepreneurs anticipated the cultural associations between wealth, success and mystical forces such as witches, which were presumed by their neighbors and kinsmen. In advance of any direct accusations they sought out their own protection through mystical means. They purchased the guarding and protective abilities of witch-catching shrines. Thus, while witchcraft and witch-finding had been part of Asante pre-colonial history and culture in the domains of kinship—maternity, the lineage, and procreation—they were increasingly used as tools for understanding the economic and political successes and failures of the early 20th century. On June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1938, a deposition before magistrate stated that Senya Gupo and Tigare shrines allowed people to “drink for protection of their lives and their personal effects—preferably cocoa and foodstuff farms—from destruction by evil means”. Two months

later, a similar statement was given regarding Tigare: "My intention to get this medicine is to protect myself from witch and wizards and also to assist my farms so that the foodstuffs and the fruits will grow smoothly. And since I got this medicine nothing as bad *juju* [mystical harm] has dared to touch me. This fetish helps the town and it prevents witch and wizards" (NAG: A.D.M. 1/12/213).

The protection of witch-finding medicines came mostly in the forms of economic and material successes, like a form of occult insurance. Businessmen or women who seriously considered their investments and riches also purchased the powers and assistance of witch-finding shrines in protecting their assets and property. The reality of this support is illustrated with the fame of Tigare. A woman at Bekwai in Asante was overcome with a profound inclination to kill her own children and those of her sister. She also suffered from soreness in her head and swollen joints. This affliction was brought about through her witchcraft, as she also harbored desires to "curse" her in-laws for bringing devastation upon her farming operations and for her husband's desire to divorce her for another woman. The witch-finding caught her and punished her through physical affliction (Field 1960: 405-406).

"The onset [of illness] was on the day her last child was born. Labor was so long and difficult that there was talk of taking her to hospital. When it was over she suddenly felt she wanted to kill the baby. Ever since, she has had almost daily urges to attack all her children with a farm cutlass. The impulses come suddenly and terrify her. She often weeps because she 'had always been good and liked children'. She enjoyed helping her sisters to deliver and look after their children. These also are now included in her urge to kill. She thinks she is being punished by the *obosom* Tigari (whose medicine she has drunk) because she once cursed her husband's relatives to God for spoiling her plantain farm (all cursing is against Tigari's rules)".

The remarkable data gathered by Margaret Field in the 1930s add support to the assertion that witch-finding became a thriving cottage industry through its adaptive capacity to mystically protect businessmen who sought to avoid the witchcraft and cursing of others. Field's statistics describe the reasons why clients sought out the assistance of these shrines. Of the 47 categories listed, the highest numbers included economic assistance by witch-finders or the protection against ruin and danger through witchcraft (Field 1960: 105-106).

TABLE I. — ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINTS AND REQUESTS MADE AT ROUTINE SHRINE.

Complaints of "not prospering"	397
Routine thanks for protection	350
Requests for unspecified protection	94
Requests for help in new enterprises	93
Money urgently needed	55
Requests for help in lawsuits	27

Jahoda (1966) has suggested that by 1930, Ghanaian witch-catching movements were consulted by individuals who were utilizing the mystical powers of the shrines in order to overcome personal conditions of poverty, and to seek economic investments and personal financial prosperity. He noted that only five per cent of literate Ghanaians no longer believed witchcraft was real or needed to be controlled. The other 95% thus considered their own personal material and financial successes and failures to be the result of witchcraft, at least to some extent. Witches were believed to be tormenting these individuals by causing business decline, crop failures, trading disasters, and so forth. On the other hand, witch finding shrines were utilized to improve personal effectiveness in matters of business. Shrine powers were petitioned to influence sales or monetary transactions in favor of shrine devotees, or to use magic involving natural phenomenon such as a harvest (Jahoda 1966: 205). When purchased, such a move would allow the cult members great successes in business. "All I know", wrote one administrator in 1938, "is that people drink [fetish] for protection of their lives and their personal effects—preferably cocoa and foodstuff farms—from destruction by evil means" (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/213).

Increases of material wealth by the end of the nineteenth century began to produce new statuses of persons based on class. Entrepreneurs were making their fortunes in rubber, gold and cocoa. Gracia Clark (1994) has noted that personal wealth is not inconsistent with values of the matrilineage, or *abusua*. Indeed, a vital aspect of social personhood for men, women and children is the ability to "control autonomous resources" (Clark 1994: 107). Nevertheless, sudden and excessive wealth of a member of one's matrilineage, particularly when the wealth was not shared with other kinsmen, brought suspicions of witchcraft. When the income and status of investors changed as a result of newly acquired cocoa money, people began to suspect them of using magic to achieve success. The rich also attempted to protect their assets against the witchcraft of jealous people (Obeng 1996: 115). A similar remark was given in 1945 by a shrine priest to Meyer Fortes (1945c):

"Ashanti people are full of jealousy. Whenever they see that someone who is below them in age or rank succeeds in doing any great thing, they become envious and wish him ill, and then find means to kill him. No one but a person's own *abusua* [clan or lineage mate] can kill him. A man's own sister may try to kill him in order that her son could inherit his property."

### Witchcraft within the Matrilineage

The setting for these sentiments was almost exclusively within the matrilineage. One informant told Field (1960: 115) "my kinsmen envy me and have sent me a sickness". Kinship disputes, especially between members of the same *abusua*, were a main cause of anxiety from which came accusations

of witchcraft. A brother would not pay back a loan; a young man was fed by an uncle but refused to return the duty through work; a man incurred the anger of kinsmen by giving his son 450 pounds sterling to buy a lorry; another man constantly enraged family members through his arguments about money. The latter was told that his kinsmen had “given him a river”, meaning they had “implored the river-god to destroy him”. These stories provide a context for the assertion that “money and cocoa-farm inheritance are the commonest bones of contention” (*ibid.*).

Busia (1951) argues that cocoa was so lucrative for so many people that it introduced elements of instability into the matrilineage. The lineage derived strength from the solidarity of siblings. A man often had closer ties to his sister than his own wife. Increases in wealth from new global markets brought a stronger sense of divesting this wealth to one’s own children. As a result, ties between siblings and other matrikin became tenuous. Tensions strained relationships of kinship especially those between siblings, and quarrels were manifest between a man’s wives and his sisters who were the potential mothers of those who would inherit from him (Busia 1951: 127). These tensions often led to accusations or even confessions of witchcraft. Accompanying such disclosures would be a sibling’s declarations of having the power to bring ruin on the economic enterprises of a brother or other member of the abusua. It is thus not unusual to find in the National Archives of Ghana citations to testimonials of mass murder, where a sister or a daughter confesses to the witchcraft murders of several kin relations, even those of unborn fetuses and of the deaths of one’s own children. Related to these murders is the confession of having destroyed the cocoa harvest of a brother or cousin (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61).

Tensions and envious attitudes over the prosperity of one member of the clan or lineage instead of another were often the basis of witchcraft accusations. Financially successful men and women lived in fear of envious kinsmen who may inflict illness or calamity “by means of bad magic or witchcraft” (Field 1960: 87). In one testimony before a magistrate in 1929, a self-disclosed witch-finder testified of the power of the Tongo fetish in its abilities to protect persons and property from the effects of witches. “It protects lives and properties which might have been instantaneous victims to the colossal effects of the envious practices of witches and sorcerers” (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886).

Speaking of Senya Gupo in 1930, one new businessman from near Kumase stated, “this medicine is no faith at all but a means of acquiring fortune” (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886). He claimed to have taken his grievance to local officials but received no relief. “All the political officers have accepted bribes and therefore do not make any endeavor to investigate the affairs at all.”

Conversely, unsuccessful lineage members were convinced that witchcraft and “envious malice is the cause of their failure”. Or, the witchcraft may render them incapable of giving birth to living children. Such was

the case in 1933 when a testimonial was offered by the brother of a dead man suspected of witchcraft (NAG: A.D.M. 23/1/622).

“Last Saturday I went with the deceased to consult the Kunde Fetish. The family had been suffering an undue amount of trouble in death and debt. After we had consulted the fetish Asabre [the deceased] confessed that he was the cause of the trouble in the family. He mentioned the name of five members of the family whom he had killed by witchcraft. He did not say by what means he had used his supernatural powers. There are some members of the family who are barren and the deceased admitted that he was responsible for this. He said this when he went to the Kunde Fetish. I do not know how he made these people barren; he works in the darkness when I am asleep. Before the Kunde Fetish, deceased said he was going to kill me among others. Before he went he was the only one who knew he was acting evil...Although I knew deceased was a witch, I was very grieved at his death.”

In 1945, Meyer Fortes recorded an interview with a witch-finding priest, or *ɔkɔmfɔ*, described as “one of the most prosperous men in the town”. This interview provides a remarkable glimpse into the livelihood and wealth of this man. It also demonstrates that “within the abusua conflict may result in witchcraft accusations...There are conflicts, often due to envy, between educated and uneducated members of the same matrilineage” (Warren 1974: 127-128). Fortes describes the *ɔkɔmfɔ*. “One does not have to talk long with him to know that he is a very shrewd business man. He speaks of his profession as if it were a sacred duty, but it is very obviously a highly profitable business.” It also shows that this healer, like any other worker or professional, was not immune to kin accusations of witchcraft. Following his financial windfall as a healer, he took out mortgages on five homes and a cocoa farm. The properties were rented out to brothers and their sons. However, the kin were known to not pay their bills, and this resulted in contractual defaults. “In Ashanti”, he said, “money is everything. If you have none you are nobody; if you have *sika* [gold] you are a man, and you can be proud” (Fortes 1945a). In the end it is thus not surprising to learn that the income of witch-finders was astoundingly high. In some cases, the amount came to over 800 pounds per year (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61).

The fate of the brothers is not revealed; however, after telling of the defaults, the *ɔkɔmfɔ* gave an amazing confession about his own protection from witchcraft, and how these matters are found mostly among fellow members of an abusua (Fortes 1945a):

“I first decided to get the medicine because I wanted to protect myself. [There are] not many people here who love me. Supposing I put on a cloth, people see and get jealous, wish one ill. I decided to get something that would protect me. If you are in a place where people’s eyes are following you about everywhere you must be careful or you may die suddenly. I got this medicine to protect myself against evil people.”

The imbalance of income from new businesses between members of the same lineage has been shown to create tensions resulting in suspicion of

witchcraft. Within this context of commodities and money, women were most often either victims of witchcraft or were supposed to be witches. Bodily symptoms of witchcraft were directly tied to the capacities of women as child bearers. Several residents of the village of Bekwai wrote a letter dated April 30, 1930 to the Asante District Commissioner. Their concern was with government regulations which prohibited witch-finding as the only recognized power to limit witchcraft (NAG: A.D.M. 11/1051).

Before the late Governor Guggisberg took over the government of the Gold Coast there was a serious infantile mortality and also a deplorable loss of mothers after child-birth. The incidences were so alarming that large sums of money were spent by the government on infant clinics and maternity hospitals in order to arrest the loss of life. These losses in infants and mothers are the work of witches all over the country. It is regrettable to remark that the majority of the witches are refuged in the Christian churches of the Colony, notably in the Wesleyan Churches of the Colony and Ashanti. Recently the depredations of the witches are becoming so alarming that a certain big fetish has been set up at Suhum and branches at other places to catch and punish these human devils. It is interesting to note that it is only through fetish methods that these witches can be successfully caught and dealt with. It is rumored that the Christian Churches are trying to persuade government in order to interfere or put a stop to the actions of the Fetish. We beg to ask Government not to do such a thing. The duty of the Christian Missions is to try to induce or to teach members to give up such evil practices, but if they are unable to do so the Suhum Fetish must stay to rid the country of such destructive beings. An exhaustive enquiry by Government into the mystery of how and why women become witches will enable Government to understand the destructive powers of such people. An attempt by the Christian Missions of the colony to induce the natives to give up such evil practices would have been far more beneficial to the country than their serious attempt to prohibit the liquor traffic. Liquor is not taking a toll on infant life as witchcraft is doing at present.

Similar to the Brong-Ahafo, who live just north of the Asante, witchcraft in Asante "is believed to be an evil spirit found in the vagina of the witch, allowing her to attack the soul of her victims undetected, causing an endless number of ailments" (Parish 1999: 434). As one witch-finder explained in 1995, witches influence people to be sexually profligate, the result of which may be that you may "become morally weak" and may have an AIDS patient "directed at you to contract the disease". Or, witchcraft may "castrate you to make you lose the desire to go for a woman. You may go for a man instead". A witch may "physically come and put something in your food, water for your destruction. They can influence you to become a drug addict or a hard smoker, drinker, etc. They sometimes put something called *kukuo* in your stomach that can motivate you to be persistent in whatever you

may be prescribed by them". Or it may result in death. Its "spiritual powers", in fact, possess the ability to "endanger or destroy human life, or to hurt, aggrieve, or annoy any person" (NAG: A.D.M. 11/886). In the event of death, especially multiple deaths, an assessment of witchcraft was often inevitable. In one case in 1935, "the deceased's relatives came to the conclusion that there was a witch in their family, because of eleven adult members of the family, he, Kweku Kyingyan, was the eighth to die" (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61).

Children and the unborn were the most common victims of witchcraft. One testimonial of a woman who was deceased was that by her witchcraft she had killed a child of three days, a child of eight days, and that "all cocoa farms of Kwasi and Kwabina [were] spoilt by her" (NAG: A.D.M. 266/61). Asante children perpetuated the future of the matrilineage. In no other areas of Asante life was witchcraft more pronounced than in the incapacities of women to bear children. Witches were known for their abilities to make women barren and men sterile. In the women's cases, their wombs were believed to be turned upside down by witches. She is thereby incapacitated from any natural flow of childbirth. This disruption sometimes results in fetal death or stillbirth, all of which are considered the result of witch attacks. A woman may thus become "awo ma wu, one who brings forth children for death, meaning the children all die prematurely in infancy" (Debrunner 1961: 43).

In other cases, young women were known to bring forth dead children, and to confess they had eaten the child within the womb. Witches were also known to steal the womb of a fertile woman in order to use it for themselves. Suspicions of witchcraft among kin—especially women—show the centrality of the matrilineage in how these confessions and accusations were made. Sexuality, childbirth, fertility, and posterity were all part of a person's identity within the abusua. Barrenness and sterility, impotence and the death of children were all symptoms of witchcraft; and all were manifest within the matrilineage. Protection from witchcraft thus also came in the form of saving the lives of babies and unborn fetuses, and of sheltering members of one's own matrilineage. This same data is noted by Field (1960: pp. 105-106):

TABLE II. — SHRINE REQUESTS BY CATEGORY.

Requests/thanks for the birth of a child	219
Complaints of long childlessness	100
Complaint that children born always die	51
Reporting of the death of a child	34
Maliciously caused abortions	24
"Pregnancy does not grow"	9

\*

Witches and witch finding thus served as a litmus test in the multi-faceted phenomenon of the moral dimensions of “community” in a post-colonial atmosphere. Witchcraft was, and remains, a phenomenon framed in the shifting populations of country and city in West Africa. It responds to the unsettling movements of persons, including social status and power, which were radically transformed through new colonial commodities. Witchcraft in colonial Asante was very much like the dimensions of sorcery as described by Kapferer in Sri Lanka (Kapferer 1997: 261).

“Sorcery manifests the dynamics of power. Most fundamentally sorcery is power, power in its totalizing essence. It draws its awful and dreadful force from the fact that it is the energy underlying both creation and destruction. The heat of sorcery, its potencies, is generated in its virtual fusion of contradictory or opposing forces which the practice and idea of sorcery reveals as locked in close relationship with one another. The fusion of forces integral to sorcery constitutes the totalizing power of sorcery.”

Witches embody the changing and challenging features of new forms of wealth and commodities within designated human motives and identifiable social persons. As such, witchcraft and witch-finding in Africa, “tend to figure in narratives that tie translocal processes to local events, that map translocal scenes onto local landscapes” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 286). The effectiveness of healing medicines in rural areas was expressed by one informant to Fortes (1945a) in 1945: “My medicine is kept in village where farms are—doesn’t agree to be in the town—patients taken to village for cure. With the help of Nyame I can cure all things of illness, but specialize in the two that are most dreadful for Ashanti, ‘fainting fits’ and barrenness in women.” In this visceral, bucolic voice, we are reminded of Asante values: farm, fertility (matrilineage) and power.

Impairments in procreation, impotence, sterility and even death may be seen as signifying the abuses of social reproduction within the lineage or clan. Thus, a witch finder told Fortes in 1945, “No one but a person’s abusua can kill him. A man’s own sister may try to kill him in order that her son could inherit his property. Most harm is caused by witches. If a man does not put preventive medicines in his new house a witch may fly in the night and drop something into the yard. When that is done people living in it will die” (Fortes 1945c).

Cannibalism, mutation, dismemberment, and mass homicide came to be associated, even identified, with the accumulation of wealth and greed and with the human capacity of envy. Murder of one’s own children and grandparents signified the destructive presence of colonial powers and of intrusive economies. Witch distortions of the human image convey a displacement of social entitlements within abusua and of personal capacities of personhood, or Bkra. As bodies—labor, wealth in people and social reproduction—fed

the demands for development, wages, individual success and prosperity, accumulation and personal enrichment, human figures were transformed into distorted images of witches and assumed unnatural qualities of evil supernatural entities. Where new forms of economics—especially regarding the individual status and prestige which comes with wealth—opened a space, presumptions of witchcraft immediately filled up the space with its suspicions of evil and associations with malevolent forces.

Witchcraft in Asante reversed the natural tendencies of the body and of social reproduction and history and prevented them from becoming fulfilled in ways which had previously been socially recognized and historically valued. The same argument may be stated for madness, hysteria, and spirit possession in many African communities (Parkin 1985).

Witchcraft was associated with a range of terms and human qualities: greed, lust, envy, anger, jealousy, malice, suspicion, spite, resentment. In Western terms, we might say that on such occasions emotions are controlling the individual. However, in such conditions Asante recognized at work the forces of nature and the powers of supernatural beings. In most cases, these forces are not limitless in scope and may be restrained. Persons may undergo healing within witch-finding rituals; and personhood may be restored. Such a process is performed in healing rites of the body. These rites were administered within colonial times, as they are done today, by the special powers of the *akɔmfɔɔ*. Ritual is thus a common response to the contradictions and ambiguities created and advanced by processes of cultural, mystical, political and economic transformation.

In the scramble for Africa, and its subsequent cultures of colonialism, Africans have been irreversibly drawn into a world of capitalist commodities. While Western influences have not entirely recreated Africa in their own image, they have induced and forced changes within domestic economies, the landscape of the household, the economic sphere of the family, functions of the matrilineage, and identities of men and women.

Finally, Birgit Meyer has remarked that the recent numbers of studies in African witchcraft may reinforce the presumptions of many in the West concerning the irrational character of African mentality and societal formation (Meyer 1992). Westerners assume, for example, that nothing is more fabricated than witchcraft and spirit possession. These practices are relics of a cultural world which are part of the pre-modern age or which reside in the minds of persons living a non-Western, irrational, superstitious existence. The conceptual connections between witches and the associated antiquity and superstition of tropical Africa may be all too easily assumed. It may be useful to recall the prominent place of demonic personae and of counter-vailing motivations within modern Western social and cultural imagination. A quick review of assorted characters in American popular culture provides some telling illustrations. The savage cannibalism of Hannibal Lector confounds the intellectual psychiatrist and terrorizes the innocent in *Silence of the Lambs*—a film which is currently making its second sequel. In the

film, *Eye of the Beholder*, the body and sexuality are viewed within the duplicitous and devious female blackmailer whose femininity charms and then seduces only in order to harm the innocent and allure all who are unsuspecting. Moreover, the shape-shifting of film star Nastasia Kinski in *The Cat People* demonstrates the capacity to kill as sexuality and power become objects of uncontrollable—and innate—bodily domination. The body and human reproduction become contrived objects through the voracious sexual appetites of the techno-female, whose uncontrollable lusts destroy the natural forms and functions of her own sexuality and reproductive organs. Her own *Species* dismembers, kills, and consumes the life blood of her victims and brings death to her procreative partners. The body and labor are combined within the unexplained yet meteoric success of the female corporate climber; her intentions appear to be unscrupulously consistent with others in the business world but her clandestine methods for success are, in reality, *To Die For*.

Witches and vampires are the monsters—or monstrous persons—of a modern age (White 2000). They supply a haunting and disconcerting image, often draped in the embodied female and associated with denying the powers of reproduction and the nurturing of children. The humanity of human beings is erased or destroyed by greed, terror, savage hunger and power. It is then transformed into commodities, its rationality becomes located in the market, and in the unquenchable desires these forms invoke.

Brigham Young University, Provo (USA).

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AIDOO, A. A.  
1975 *Political Crisis and Social Change in the Asante Kingdom, 1867-1901* (Unpublished Dissertation).
- ALLMAN, J. & TASHJIAN, V.  
2000 *"I Will not East Stone": A Women's History of Colonial Asante* (Portsmouth, NH: Heineman).
- APTER, A.  
1993 "Atinga Revisited", in J. & J. COMAROFF (eds), *Modernity and its Malcontents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press): 111-128.
- ARENS, W. & KARP, I.  
1989 "Introduction", in W. ARENS & I. KARP (eds), *Creativity of Power* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press): xi-xxix.

ARHIN, K.

- 1974 "Some Asante Views of Colonial Rule: As Seen in the Controversy Relating to Death Duties" *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 15: 63-84.
- 1980 "The Economic and Social Significance of Rubber Production and Exchange on the Gold and Ivory Coasts, 1880-1900" *Cahiers d'Études africaines*, XX (1-2), 77-78: 49-62.

ASHFORTH, A.

- 1998 "Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in the New South Africa" *Cahiers d'Études africaines*, XXXVIII (2-4), 150-152: 505-532.

AUSLANDER, M.

- 1993 "Open the Wombs!" in J. & J. COMAROFF (eds), *op. cit.*: 167-192.

AUSTEN, R.

- 1993 "The Moral Economy of Witchcraft", in J. & J. COMAROFF (eds), *op. cit.*: 129-166.

BANNERMAN-RICHTER, G.

- 1982 *The Practice of Witchcraft in Ghana* (Winona, Minn.: Apollo Books).

BASTIAN, M.

- 1993 "Bloodhounds who Have no Friends", in J. & J. COMAROFF (eds), *op. cit.*: 129-166.

BAYART, J.-F.

- 1993 *The State in Africa* (New York: Longman).

BEHREND, H.

- 1999 *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits: War in Northern Uganda 1985-97* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press).

BOND, G.

- 2001 "Ancestors and Witches: Explanations and the Ideology of Individual Power in Northern Zambia", in G. BOND & D. M. CIEKAWY (eds), *Witchcraft Dialogues* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press): 131-157.

BOWDICH, T. E.

- 1966 *Travels from Cape Coast to Ashantee* (London: Cass).

BUSIA, K. A.

- 1951 *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

CHIDESTER, D.

- 1991 *Shots in the Streets* (Boston: Beacon Press).

CIEKAWY, D.

- 1998 "Witchcraft in Statecraft: Five Technologies of Power in Coastal Kenya" *African Studies Review*, 41: 119-142.

- 1999 "Women's 'Work' and the Construction of Witchcraft Accusations in Coastal Kenya" *Women's Studies International Forum*, 22: 225-235.
- CLARK, G.  
1994 *Onions are my Husband* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- COMAROFF, J. & COMAROFF, J.  
1993 "Introduction", in J. COMAROFF & J. COMAROFF (eds), *Modernity and its Malcontents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press): XI-XXXVII.  
1999 "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony" *American Ethnologist*, 26: 279-303.
- DEBRUNNER, H.  
1961 *Witchcraft in Ghana* (Accra: Presbyterian Book Depot).
- DELIUS, P.  
1996 *A Lion amongst the Cattle* (Portsmouth, NH: Heineman).
- DOUGLAS, M.  
1963 *The Lele of the Kasai* (London: Oxford University Press).
- DRUCKER-BROWN, S.  
1993 "Mamprusi Witchcraft, Subversion and Changing Gender Relations" *Africa* 63: 531-549.
- DUMETT, R.  
1971 "The Rubber Trade of the Gold Coast and Asante in the Nineteenth Century: African Innovation and Market Responsiveness" *Journal of African History*, 12: 79-101.
- ELLIS, S.  
1999 *The Mask of Anarchy* (New York: New York University Press).
- EMP: Eva Meyerowitz Papers (Herskovitz Library, Northwestern University).
- EVANS-PRITCHARD, E. E.  
1937 *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- FERGUSON, J.  
1999 *Expectations of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- FERME, M. C.  
1999 "Staging *Pblitisi*: The Dialogics of Publicity and Secrecy in Sierra Leone", in J. & J. COMAROFF (eds), *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press): 160-191.  
2001 *The Underneath of Things* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- FIELD, M. J.  
1960 *Search for Security* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press).

FISIY, C. F.

1990 *Palm Tree Justice in the Bertoua Court of Appeals* (Leiden: African Studies Centre).

FLYNN, J. K.

1971 *Asante and its Neighbours 1700-1807* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press).

FORTES, M.

1945a *A Sono Suman — Talisman War by Sick Child* (Cambridge: Asante Social Survey Materials (ASSM), Unpublished Manuscript).

1945b *Diary of Daily Activities in Akyenakrome* (Cambridge: ASSM, Unpublished Manuscript).

1945c *Fetish—Anti-Witchcraft Cult, Including an Interview with Mununkum Bosomfo* (Cambridge: ASSM, Unpublished Manuscript).

GESCHIERE, P.

1988 "Sorcery and the State" *Critique of Anthropology*, 8: 35-63.

1997 *The Modernity of Witchcraft* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press).

GLUCKMAN, M.

1965 *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* (Oxford: Blackwell).

GREENE, S. E.

1996 *Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast* (London: James Currey).

JACKSON, M.

1989 *Paths Toward a Clearing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

1990 "The Man who Could Turn into an Elephant: Shape-shifting among the Kuranko of Sierra Leone" in M. JACKSON & I. KARP (eds), *Personhood and Agency* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell): 59-78.

JAHODA, G.

1966 "Social Aspirations, Magic and Witchcraft in Ghana", in P. C. LLOYD (ed.), *The New Elites of Tropical Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 199-215.

KAPFERER, B.

1997 *The Feast of the Sorcerer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

KASPIN, D.

1993 "Chewa Visions and Revisions of Power." in J. & J. COMAROFF (eds), *op. cit.*: 34-57.

KIMBLE, D.

1963 *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850-1928* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

LINDSKOG, B.

1954 *African Leopard Men* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell).

MASQUELIER, A.

1997 "Vectors of Witchcraft" *Anthropological Quarterly*, 70: 187-198.

MATORY, J. L.

1994 *Sex and the Empire that Is no more* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

McCASKIE, T. C.

1981 "Anti-Witchcraft Cults in Asante" *History in Africa*, 8: 125-154.

1986 "Accumulation: Wealth and Belief in Asante History: II The Twentieth Century" *Africa*, 56: 4-23.

MESAKI, S.

1994 "Witch Killing in Sukumaland", in R. ABRAHAMS (ed.), *Witchcraft in Contemporary Tanzania* (Cambridge: African Studies Centre): 47-60.

MEYER, B.

1992 "If You Are a Devil You Are a Witch and If You Are a Witch You Are a Devil" *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 22: 98-132.

1995 "Delivered from the Powers of Darkness" *Africa*, 63: 236-255.

NADEL S. F.

1954 *Nupe Religion* (London: Routledge).

NAG: National Archives of Ghana (Accra, Cape Coast, Kumase)

NIEHAUS, I.

1993 "Witch-Hunting and Political Legitimacy" *Africa*, 63: 498-530.

2001 *Witchcraft, Power and Politics* (London: Pluto Press).

OBENG, P.

1996 *Asante Catholicism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill).

OLSEN, W. C.

[n.d.] *Health and Human Disservices: Witchcraft Trials in Colonial Asante* (Unpublished Manuscript).

1998 *Healing, Personhood and Power: A History of Witch-Finding in Asante* (Unpublished Dissertation).

PARISH, J.

1999 "The Dynamics of Witchcraft and Indigenous Shrines among the Akan" *Africa*, 69: 426-448.

2000 "From the Body to the Wallet: Conceptualizing Akan Witchcraft at Home and Abroad" *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 6: 487-500.

PARKIN, D.

1985 "Reason, Emotion and the Embodiment of Power" in J. OVERING (ed.), *Reason and Morality* (London: Tavistock): 135-151.

1991 *Sacred Void* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

PRIESTLY, M. & WILKS, I.

1960 "The Ashanti Kings in the Eighteenth Century" *Journal of African History*, 1: 83-96.

ROSENTHAL, J.

1998 *Possession, Ecstasy, and Law in Ewe Voodoo* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press).

ROWLANDS, M. & WARNIER, J.-P.

1988 "Sorcery, Power and the Modern State in Cameroon" *Man*, 23: 118-132.

SANDERS, T.

1999 "Modernity, Wealth, and Witchcraft in Tanzania" *Research in Economic Anthropology*, 20: 117-131.

SCHMOLL, P. G.

1993 "Black Stomachs, Beautiful Stones" in J. & J. COMAROFF (eds), *op. cit.*: 193-220.

SHAW, R.

1997 "The Production of Witchcraft/Witchcraft as Production" *American Ethnologist*, 24: 856-876.

2002 *Memories of the Slave Trade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

TERRAY, E.

1994 "Le pouvoir, le sang et la mort dans le royaume asante au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle" *Cahiers d'Études africaines*, XXXIV (4), 136: 549-561.

TORDOFF, W.

1965 *Ashanti Under the Prempehs, 1888-1935* (London: Oxford University Press).

TURNER, V.

1957 *Schism and Continuity in an African Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

WARREN, D. M.

1974 *Disease, Medicine, and Religion among the Techiman-Bono of Ghana* (Unpublished Dissertation).

WEISS, B.

1996 *The Making and Unmaking of the Haya Lived World* (Durham: Duke University Press).

WEST, M.

1975 *Bishops and Prophets in a Black City* (Johannesburg: R. Collings).

WHITE, L.

2000 *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

WILKS, I.

1975 *Asante in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

YAMBA, C. B.

1997 "Cosmologies in Turmoil: Witch Finding and Aids in Chiawa, Zambia" *Africa*, (67): 200-222.

### **Annex: The Kunde list of obligations, sanctions and law**

1. If you steal, Kunde shall catch you.
2. If you are a witch or wizard, Kunde shall catch you.
3. If you charm somebody to die Kunde shall catch you.
4. If you persuade somebody's wife to divorce her husband so that you might marry her, you are to be affected by Kunde.
5. If you have drunk this fetish & join with somebody who does not drink it and you swear any other fetish, Kunde shall affect you.
6. If you are called as witness in any tribunal you must pray to Kunde before you speak. If you swear any other fetish, Kunde shall affect you.
7. If you over charge your brother or any man, Kunde shall affect you.
8. If you take something from your neighbor's farm and you forget to tell him—to confess it—when asked, Kunde shall affect you.
9. If the wife of any man who has drunk Kunde commits adultery and does not tell—or confess—it to the husband, she shall be affected by Kunde.
10. If you have drunk Kunde and then go to somebody's wife, you will not escape when her husband arrives. If you escape, Kunde shall affect you.
11. You must not ask any seller of meat whether the meat was a dead animal. If you ask this before you buy the meat, Kunde shall affect you.
12. If somebody puts poison in rum—any drinkable—for you, you shall freely drink it but Kunde shall affect that man.
13. If a child, through anger, refuses to take food but afterwards comes to eat it, you are not to ask that child anything. If you do, Kunde shall affect you.
14. If you marry two wives, you will share all things to them. If one's share is greater than the other's—if you sleep with one more than the other—Kunde shall affect you.
15. If you commit adultery, you are not to lie together with your wife—or husband as the case may be. If you lie with her (or him) Kunde shall affect you.
16. If you say to your son or daughter—your offspring—he or she is a wizard or witch, Kunde shall affect you.
17. If a husband or a wife refuses a present from the wife or from the husband but takes it afterwards, that party shall be affected.
18. The one who swears Kunde on his neighbor and the neighbor dies, is liable to pay a fine of 5-plus one cow, and he alone shall bury the dead.
19. If any property of a person who drinks Kunde is lost, he should ask the "gongon" beater to beat "gongon" for him before he commits it to Kunde.

20. If anyone who drinks Kunde is bitten by snake, he should first pray to Kunde, and if he does not get well he can then resort to any other medicine.
21. If the wife of any man who drinks Kunde gets conceived, the husband should not tie string "Fuke" round her waist.
22. The Kunde Priest must not force any man to drink Kunde. It must be drunk from free will.
23. If the man who drinks Kunde shoots at an animal, and the animal tries to catch him, he shall call Kunde to kill the animal for him. If Kunde kills the animal, he shall throw some pieces of the meat in the field (bush) before bringing the rest home. If he does not do this and somebody eats of the flesh of this meat, that man shall die.
24. The drinker of Kunde can entrust his farm to Kunde; the cola must be thrown into your own and not another man's farm.
25. If you and your neighbor drink this fetish Kunde, you must not go to disclose his secrets (confessions). If you do this, Kunde shall affect you, for you have ways to make your neighbor incur debt.
26. If the Kunde Priest calls (has dealings with) someone's wife, he is liable to a fine of 5, two bottles of gin, and one cow. The same shall be paid by anyone who is with his wife (NAG: A.D.M., 23/1/213).

#### ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the changing cultural values of the matrilineage as kinsmen are integrated within the emerging conditions of economic transition in the early decades of British colonial domination and capitalist expansion in the Asante zone of the Gold Coast. Conditions of the modernities of colonialism, especially the rise of capitalist enterprises with its cash economies and consumption of European goods, bring about increasing tensions within the lineage as the allotment of wealth became unevenly distributed among kinsmen. Money symbolized new kinds of power, a power which was both occult and materialist in nature and which was associated with the nefarious deeds of witches. Witches, in turn, were consistently destructive within the realms of kinship and within other social relations, and were capable of committing the worst atrocities within Asante cosmology. Witchcraft maintained a physical presence in its abilities to bring about sickness, a material capacity to generate sudden levels of income, and a social tendency to ruin relations among kin. The destructive powers of witchcraft were subject to domination by the medicinal remedies and ritual performances of witch-catching shrines and the healer priests who owned and operated them. The numbers of such shrines greatly proliferated within Asante between 1906 and 1940. The article is based on fieldwork undertaken in 1994, 1995, 1997 in Kumase and within the National Archives of Ghana in Accra, Cape Coast and Kumase.

#### RÉSUMÉ

«*Les enfants de la mort*» : monnaie, richesse et accusations de sorcellerie dans l'Asante colonial. — L'article étudie le changement des valeurs culturelles du matrilineage lié à l'insertion des membres de la parentèle dans les nouvelles conditions

économiques qui marquent les premières décennies de la domination coloniale britannique et de l'expansion capitaliste dans le pays asante de Gold Coast. Les nouvelles caractéristiques introduites par le colonialisme, notamment l'essor des entreprises capitalistes et de l'économie marchande ainsi que la consommation de produits européens, provoquèrent des tensions accrues en raison de la redistribution inégale de la richesse au sein du lignage. La monnaie en vint à symboliser une nouvelle sorte de pouvoir, pouvoir à la fois matériel et occulte et associé à l'action maléfique des sorciers. Ces sorciers, à leur tour, exerçaient leur talent destructeur au sein de la parenté et des relations sociales en général et étaient, de surcroît, capables de commettre les pires atrocités dans le cadre de la cosmologie asante. Les pouvoirs destructeurs de la sorcellerie pouvaient être contrecarrés par les plantes médicinales et les rituels anti-sorciers accomplis dans les sanctuaires par les guérisseurs. Le nombre de ces sanctuaires s'est grandement accru en pays asante entre 1906 et 1940.

Keywords/*Mots-clés*: witchcraft, kinship, colonialism/*sorcellerie, parenté, colonialisme.*