

## Biopolitical Security and Witchcraft in Africa

Joe-Kodzo HOMEZO

[jozataka@hotmail.com](mailto:jozataka@hotmail.com)

Mobile: +41797345024

Fixed: +41227317120

Geneva, 23th August 2010

Sorcery is a phenomenon universally acknowledged in the primitive, the modern and, in the contemporary society. Ordinary people, as well as scholars and, institutions, admitted the existence of such a social construction of power. During the colonial era, Administrations used to prosecute witch crimes in Africa. The Christian church also dealt with sorcery in terms of demonology; while the charismatic and the new Pentecostal churches were exorcizing people they supposed were living in darkness, under the possession of Devil. In his surveys among the Azande, Evans-Pritchard opposed "Witch" and "Sorcerer" and, concluded, like most specialists of the Manchester school of anthropology<sup>1</sup> and some neo-Cartesian scholars, that wizards can never achieve the loads of which they are very often accused to accomplish<sup>2</sup>: « What I doubt is that such beings have autonomous supernatural power to hurt or kill, and I personally do not think it right to prosecute anyone for evildoing of which no proof is possible »<sup>3</sup>. Evans-Pritchard's doubt inspired many African states. After independence, African leaders advocated the modernization and development theory to expel witchcraft issues out of the public sphere, from fifty to the seventies.

However, sorcery is neither a religion, nor a system of belief, but a metapolitical strategy to domination exerted throughout extraordinary control mechanisms. Witchcraft confraternity (congregation, calabash-ship, mystery-hood, etc.) are secret and parallel system of society ruled by children who sit together with adults of both gender. Sorcery systems are dictatorships aimed at destructive governmentality<sup>4</sup>. But, rare are the studies available on the relationship between sorcery, and politics. Such a deficit seemed partly related to the functionalist influence disseminated by ethnologists who closed any debate on this subject by their suspicious approach<sup>5</sup> to sorcery. Research with societal approach to sorcery scrutinized those issues from the "ideal type" perspective bequeathed by the Max Weber<sup>6</sup> sociology. Thus, they raised question with essentialist connotation and asked if sorcery had never existed. Some of them asked definitely if sorcery is a trustable subject. Most of the time scholars defined the possibility condition to the existence of sorcery they analyzed in systemic<sup>7</sup> and in eastonian<sup>8</sup> terms.

<sup>1</sup>Foucault, M., 2004b [1979], *Naissance de la biopolitique*, Paris, Gallimard/Seuil, Hautes Études.

<sup>2</sup> Evans-Pritchard, E. E., *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, London: Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1937, p. 418. Turner Victor Witter, *Three symbols of passage on Ndembu circumcision rituals*, Manchester University Press, 1962. Cf. Kuper Hilda, *A Witch in my Heart. A play about the Swazy People*, (with a Foreword by Max Gluckman), *International African Institute*, 1970.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Mary, "Sorcery accusations unleashed: The Lele revisited, 1987", *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol.69, 1999, pp. 177.

<sup>4</sup> Dean, M., 1999a, *Governmentability: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, London, Sage. Cf. Searle J., 1998 [1995], *La construction de la réalité sociale*, Paris, Gallimard. Foucault M. (Ed.), "Résumé du cours Du gouvernement des vivants", in *Dits et écrits, II, 1976-1988*, Paris, Gallimard, Quarto, pp. 944-948.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Mary, "Sorcery accusations unleashed: The Lele revisited, 1987", *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol.69, 1999, pp. 177.

<sup>6</sup> Weber M., *Le savant et le politique*, Plon, 1959. *L'éthique protestante et l'esprit du capitalisme*, 1904.

<sup>7</sup> Coleman A., *The politics of developing areas*, Princeton, New York, Princeton University Press, 1960, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Easton D., *A framework for political analysis*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prenticed Hall, 1965 ; *A system analysis of political life*, New York, John Wiley & sons, Inc., 1965.

Admittedly, Pels<sup>9</sup> and Thomas<sup>10</sup> moderated the Evans-Pritchard theses, while Rosny<sup>11</sup> and Rev. Hebga<sup>12</sup> asserted convincingly that wizards exist. Since eighties, sorcery accusations were recorded everywhere in Africa, in the media, court and village palaver. Some countries appointed tribunals who prosecuted and sentenced children and adults with diverse charges of magic cannibalism, witch attack of innocent family members, and participation to nocturne banquets in which the soul and the vital force of future victims were eaten or/and drunken. Beyond the accusation of sealing people's fate by sorcery mechanisms, some people deliberately acknowledged their affiliation to witchcraft obedience. Most of them claimed the usage of other persons' resources to energize their witchcraft, achieve enrichment<sup>13</sup> and to exert domination over local community members: « witchcraft as an authentic source of power »<sup>14</sup>. But how do witch and wizard matter and effect?

In 1881, Christaller, a Methodist Church Pastor carried out a survey on sorcery, in Ghana and wrote: « The natives describe a wizard or a witch as a man or a woman who stands in agreement with devil. At night, when all are asleep, he (or she) rises or rather leaves his (her) body, as a snake casts its slough, and goes out emitting flames from his eyes, nose, mouth, ears, armpits; he may walk with his head on the ground and his feet up; he catches and eats animals, or kills men either by drinking their blood or by catching their soul, which he boils and eats, whereupon the person dies; or he bites them so that they become full of sores. Some change themselves into leopards, snakes, antelopes; some apply their witchcraft also to trade when selling things »<sup>15</sup>. In this regard, sorcery and witchcraft are modern and contemporary phenomena<sup>16</sup>. Those who participate in such a system make use of mystical energies to destroy ordinary people they don't like.

Analysts who explored sorcery issues were marked by our usual tool of knowledge. They explored parallel secret congregations in ordinary ways. In fact, witches and wizards can act simultaneously on various realm levels of consciousness and, at the same time, in different spheres. In destabilizing others, witchcraft systems must be identified as banditry.

It is necessary to provide policy makers and the development interveners with methodological tools that could integrate normal and meta-societal phenomena. Analogical instruments could usefully strengthen leaders' capacity in their approach to physical and the quantum reality. To overcome witchcraft banditry, one must undertake bio-political approaches to security and human rights<sup>17</sup>. To tackle sorcery wrongdoing mechanisms, one must characterize such secret grassroots society as they are and, understand how such organizations function beyond our time-space paradigms. The appropriated methodology would consist in implementing "society centered approach" to power relation encompassing together individuals, people and communities. In strengthening Bio-political Human Rights Policy (BHRP) and Bio-political Security, one could sustain wellness and safety strategy to the contemporary society.

<sup>9</sup> Pels Peter, "Critical Matters, Interactions between Missionaries and Waluguru in *Colonial Tanganyika, 1930-1961*", Thèse, Université d'Amsterdam, 1993, p. 202.

<sup>10</sup> Kuhn Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England*, Londres, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971, p. 465.

<sup>11</sup> De Rosny E., *Les Yeux de ma chèvre. Sur les pas des maîtres de la nuit en pays Douala*, Paris, Plon, 1981.

<sup>12</sup> Hebga M.P., *Sorcellerie, chimère dangereuse... ?* Abidjan, Institut national pour le développement économique et social, 1979.

<sup>13</sup> Geschiere Peter, *Sorcellerie et politique. La viande des autres*, Karthala, 1995, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Masquelier Adeline, « Witchcraft, Blood-Sucking Spirits, and the Demonization of Islam in Dogondoutchi, Niger », *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 2008/1-2 - n° 189, p. 136.

<sup>15</sup> Christaller, J. G., 1933 (1881), *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language*. Basle: Evangelical Missionary Society.

<sup>16</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff eds., *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> Foucault, M., 2004b [1979], *Naissance de la biopolitique*, Paris, Gallimard/Seuil, Hautes Études.

