Witches of the Transvaal Lowveld and their Familiars. Conceptions of Duality, Power and Desire
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Abstract

In the Transvaal lowveld of South Africa witches are commonly associated with animals. With reference to fieldwork conducted in the village of Green Valley, this article considers the symbolic meanings of the relationship between witches and two witch-familiars—the apelike tokolose and the snakelike mam-lambo. I argue that this relationship resonates with the duality between a person's body and its animal-like instincts and desires. Whereas the tokolose symbolizes the desire of unconstrained sexual expression, the mamlambo symbolizes people's desire for money. These familiars comment on contemporary conditions of life in the Transvaal lowveld which are marked by migrant labour, the separation of spouses and by severe economic deprivation.

Résumé

Sorciers de la région du lowveld au Transvaal. — Dans la région du lowveld au Transvaal (Afrique du Sud), les figures de sorciers sont habituellement associées à celles d'animaux. Procédant d'un travail de terrain mené dans le village de Green Valley, cet article examine les rapports symboliques existant entre les sorciers et deux entités qui leur sont familières: la figure simiesque du tokolose et celle du mamlambo associée au serpent. L'auteur postule que cette relation fait écho à la dualité existant entre le corps d'une personne, et les instincts et désirs sauvages de celle-ci. Alors que le tokolose symbolise le désir d'une sexualité sans entraves, le mamlambo représente le désir d'argent. Ces entités familières témoignent des conditions de vie difficiles de la population de cette région du Transvaal, marquées par les migrations de travail, l'éloignement des épouses et un niveau de vie très bas.
Ethnographic studies conducted at different points of time on Tsonga and Sotho-speaking groups of the Transvaal lowveld have associated witches with a large and varied group of mystical animals. Known as *dithuri* in Sesotho, these animals are usually referred to as witch familiars in the literature.¹ At the turn of the century Tsonga witches were thought to use nocturnal birds, hippopotami, crocodiles, lions, leopards and even duikers (Junod 1966: 506-515). In the 1930s common witch familiars among the Lobedu were polecats, skunks, snakes, elephants, birds and owls (Krige & Krige 1965: 251-255). In the 1960s the Pedi associated baboons, wild cats, dogs and bats with witches (Monnig 1988: 73-75), whilst the Kgaga singled out ambiguous animals such as polecats, genets, mongooses and hyenas as familiars in the mid 1970s.²

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1. Hammond-Tooke, Deborah James, Peta Katz, Adam Kuper, John Middleton, Eliazaar Mohlala, Edwin Ritchken, Kally Shokane, Owen Sichone, Jonathan Stadler and Robert Thornton commented on earlier drafts of this paper. I acknowledge their helpful suggestions.

2. See little merit in the distinction between witchcraft as mystical power innate to individuals, and sorcery as the use of herbs to harm others. The SeSotho term *baloi* and the Tsonga one *valoyi* encompass both ideas.

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It is not merely the persistence of the relationship between witches and familiars through time and space which is striking, but also the confusing and contradictory nature thereof. Often the familiar and the witch are represented as distinct beings. For instance, witches may capture, tame and feed familiars. Once tamed, they are trained to carry out the witch's evil wishes. Familiars are sent to steal from victims, attack, injure and kill them. Great intimacy develops between the witch and the familiar: indeed, the familiar can become the witch's lover or child (Krige & Krige 1965: 251). Elsewhere in the texts human and animal identities merge through a complex series of transformations. Junod (1966: 507, 515) writes that Tsonga witches change their victims into leopards, hyenas and snakes. Elsewhere witches themselves acquire animal-like features such as wings or are transformed into animals. Pedi "night witches" actually become familiars: "They can transpose themselves into one of their familiars, particularly a baboon, a dog or a bat. They can thus acquire the physical appearance of any animal and go about unhindered to cast a spell upon a person which will cause him to waste away slowly or to go mad" (Monnig 1988: 75). Moreover, familiars can become people. The Kgaga do not conceive of *dithuri* as real animals. "They can change shape and metamorphose into human form" (Hammond-Tooke 1981: 99).

This article considers the symbolic dimensions of the complex relationship between witches of the Transvaal lowveld and their familiars. A comprehensive account of the various familiars encountered in different historical periods and areas of the lowveld is beyond the scope of this article. My aim is much more modest. With reference to the village of Green Valley, I focus on the symbolic constitution of only two witch familiars—the apelike *tokolose* and the snakelike *mamlambo*.

The article draws on a synthesis of etic and emic symbolic interpretations. I argue that, structurally, the meaning of this confusing relation-
ship can only be adequately grasped with reference to local concepts of duality, power, and desire. Witches and familiars constitute a duality in which human and animal identities are different manifestations of a single form. As anomalous beings witches and familiars stand betwixt-and-between the opposed categories of motse (human settlement) and thhaga (nature). They exist simultaneously in the village and the forest, but are not fully part of either realm. Witches are identified with familiars, have the attributes of animals, and actually metamorphose into familiars. This duality lies at the heart of the conception of witchcraft as a dangerous, superhuman, power. Because witches combine elements from different realms in a disorderly mixture they transcend the limitations of ordinary humans. Duality also underlies concepts of personhood. The relation between the witch and the familiar resonates with the duality of the person's body and its animal-like instincts and desires. Unlike cultured persons, witches are consumed and dominated by their desires.

In Green Valley the structural meaning of witches and familiars has remained fairly constant. However, there have been important discontinuities in the types of witch-familiars that have been encountered through time. Lions, hyenas, owls, baboons and wild cats were the most common familiars during an early period of subsistence agriculture. The tokolose and the mamlambo are not indigenous to the lowveld, but were incorporated from Nguni speakers since the 1960s. Subsequently, they have become the predominant familiars in Green Valley. The reason for this dominance is their capacity to provide appropriate symbolic comment on transformed situations of life in the lowveld, marked by the demise of agricultural production and by people's total dependence on wages and migrant labour. The apelike tokolose symbolizes the potential animal-like craving for unconstrained sexual expression. This familiar provokes thought about the separation of spouses and the sexual deprivations that accompany labour migration. The snakelike mamlambo objectifies the desire for money in a context of social and economic deprivation. It also highlights the destructive social effects brought about by the endless quest for wealth.

My discussion is in three parts. The first contains a brief description of the research setting and examines witch-beliefs in Green Valley in relation to changing political, economic and social circumstances. In the second part I explore the structural meaning of witch-beliefs. The meaning of witches and familiars are considered in relation to other symbols in a larger system or totality. In the third and most substantial part of the article, I turn to the particular symbolic features of the tokolose and the

4. My approach draws on Douglas's structuralist method (1970, 1973) of symbolic interpretation. She insists that pattern give meaning and that items do not carry meaning by themselves in isolation from other items.
mamlambo, and to emic points of view, and I emphasize the explanations that social actors, themselves, gave for these animals. The ethnographic information I present derives primarily from open-ended interviews and discussions with ten key informants: two women diviners (ngaka), a female Apostolic healer, four male teachers and three elderly men. These informants were particularly knowledgeable about witchcraft and freely discussed their theories with me, relaying stories of events which purportedly happened in the distant past, and providing detailed accounts of specific episodes of witchcraft. My information is slightly biased in that men's accounts of the sexual aspects of witchcraft were more detailed than those of women. The discussion also draws on accounts of thirty instances in which local individuals were accused of keeping either toko-lose or a mamlambo. From these accounts the operational meanings of these familiars becomes apparent.

Green Valley: The Social Setting of Witchcraft

Throughout the history of Green Valley the occurrence of many inexplicable instances of misfortune have been accounted for in terms of witchcraft. Despite important continuities, witch-beliefs have presented a dynamic, ever changing, assemblage of ideas drawn from Sotho, Shangaan and Nguni traditions. Witch-beliefs prevailing during an early period of subsistence agriculture have differed from those of subsequent years when villagers have relied upon migrant labour for their livelihood.

Since the turn of the century Green Valley has been the political centre of the Setlhare chiefdom, which derives its name from Kgosi Setlhare Chiloane, the grandson of Maripe Mashile who, in 1864, led the Pulana in their defeat of Swazi invaders at the battle of Moholoholo (Ziervogel 1954: 104). In terms of the 1913 Land Act, Green Valley was sold to the European and African Investment Company and was scheduled for exclusive occupation by Africans. Annually households paid rents to agricultural officers of the company for the right to reside, cultivate land and let stock graze. The residential pattern in the village was

5. Researches into witchcraft are beset by methodological difficulties. Hammond-Tooke (1981: 101) found his informants hesitant to talk about witchcraft. This is because it is an offence under the Witchcraft Act to accuse someone of practising witchcraft and because such accusations cause great social disruption. Villagers were reluctant to discuss witchcraft with me for similar reasons. Moreover, some thought their knowledge of witchcraft might lead me to suspect them of being witches. My close acquaintance with my key informants over an extended period of time offsets some of these difficulties. Many interviews were conducted in English. Where informants used SeSotho and Tsonga, the deputy headmaster of a Green Valley school assisted as translator and interpreter. As the information I present is of a sensitive nature, I use pseudonyms to protect the identities of my informants.
one of scattered homesteads, fields were generally as large as households could cultivate, and no stock limitations were imposed. During the 1930s, some larger households harvested up to thirty bags of sorghum and kept herds of over hundred and fifty cattle. Although some men were employed as mine workers by the Transvaal Gold Mining Estate (TGME) in Pilgrim’s Rest (Bonner & Shapiro 1993), migrant labour remittances remained less important than agriculture until the late 1940s.

Throughout the period of subsistence agriculture witchcraft had a broad frame of reference. Witches were associated with a large variety of familiars including lions, hyenas, snakes, owls, antelope, baboons and wild cats. Both personal misfortune and disasters affecting the entire community were blamed on witchcraft. The former included prolonged sickness, poisoning, and untimely deaths. The latter comprised quarrels affecting large sections of the village, pestilence and death among cattle, crop failures, and drought. It was believed that witches could send lions to kill one’s cattle and that they could place sibeka herbs in the veld to drive away the rain clouds. On occasions the chief’s councillors and dinsteadon (subordinate political officers) organized parties to hunt rain stoppers. The people accused of causing drought were often outsiders who had recently arrived in Green Valley (see Niehaus 1993a).

After 1948, the implementation of apartheid policies in Green Valley systematically eroded subsistence agriculture and curtailed effective chiefly rule. In 1948 the Setlhare chiefdom became part of the Bushbuckridge Trust land. As such the area became the reception site for numerous households relocated from the eastern Transvaal countryside. These relocations occurred due to the afforestation of arable land toward the west, and the increasing mechanization of production operations on nearby white-owned farms. In 1960 Bantu Authorities were introduced and the Setlhare chiefdom became a Tribal Authority under the surveillance of the Bushbuckridge magistrate. In the same year a “betterment” scheme was implemented in Green Valley and the existing residential arrangements were reordered. Arable fields and grazing camps were enclosed and all households were moved onto demarcated sites in residential locations. The vast majority of households lost their fields as a result. Moreover, stock limitations of ten head of cattle per household were imposed. In the wake of these processes households came to rely almost entirely upon the remittances of male migrant labourers employed on the Witwatersrand. Relocations and labour migration placed women in a precarious and vulnerable position. Whilst women had made the greatest contribution to agricultural work in the years preceding relocation, they now became dependent upon the remittances of migrant labourers.

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6. For detailed discussions of the destructive impact of “betterment” schemes in South African rural areas, see De Wet (1989) and McAllister (1989).
men for their livelihood. Relocations also generated increased social tensions between neighbours. As one's neighbours were likely to be strangers, pre-existing networks of reciprocal cooperation often gave way to competition and strife, exacerbated by the increased economic pressures.

Informants were adamant that witchcraft had greatly increased after "betterment". Yet, since the 1960s, villagers have not blamed witches for communal misfortunes and for pestilence among cattle. Instead, witches have been held responsible for the deaths of youths and those resulting from suicide, lightning and motor car accidents. Witchcraft has also been seen as the cause of many personal misfortunes and afflictions such as snakebites, vomiting blood, abdominal pains, loss of appetite, paralysis, swollen limbs, infertility, insanity, convulsions, and epileptic fits.

There has been a further change. Contemporary witches are believed to employ fewer familiars than witches of the past. Recent stories of witchcraft no longer mention lions, hyenas and antelopes; and only occasionally refer to owls, baboons and domestic animals. In some ways these animals have been replaced by new familiars such as the tokolose and the mamlambo. Informants said it is only since the 1960s that witches have purchased these familiars from ngaka baloi (doctors of witchcraft) in Durban. The perception that these familiars are not indigenous to the lowveld is supported by the ethnographic literature. Whilst studies on Nguni speakers describe the tokolose and the mamlambo (cf. Hunter 1979, Hammond-Tooke 1974, McAllister 1985), they are not mentioned in ethnographies on Northern Sotho and Tsonga speakers.

Although the magistrate in Bushbuckridge had forbidden chiefs to organise witch-hunts, informants generally believe that an increasing number of witches have been expelled from Green Valley in recent years. During the 1960s and 1970s, families were at the forefront of witch-hunting. More recently youth groups associated with national liberation movements such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) and African National Congress (ANC), known as the Comrades, have organized witch-hunts. During 1986 and 1987 Comrades killed thirty-six suspected witches in the wider Mapulaneng area (SAIRR 1988: 907). With the unbanning of the ANC in February 1990 adults have assumed the leadership of political struggles and have brought an end to the execution of witches. However, witch-hunting has proven hard to suppress. After the untimely deaths of nine Green Valley residents during December 1990 youngsters apprehended many suspected witches and took them to a witch-diviner (mongoma) near Swaziland who accused thirty-four of the suspects of witchcraft. Although senior ANC members intervened to prevent the killing of witches, youths destroyed the homes of many of the accused and forced them to burn the herbs they possessed. The involvement of political actors in witch-hunting does not signify an attempt to intimidate political opponents. It has been in their quest for political le-
itimacy that the Comrades have intervened in the management of personal misfortune: through witch-hunting they have sought to eliminate evil and to prevent the future occurrence of misfortune.7

Nature, Culture, Witches and Familiars

Through time cosmological ideas in the lowveld have expressed a symbolic opposition between two encompassing categories, motse and tlhaga. Both terms have a wide frame of reference: motse can be translated as “village” or “family” and refers to the realm of human settlement. Motse is the public domain of political and ritual action, it is associated with civilization (hlabolologileng) and culture (setho). Tlhaga refers to the wild, untamed, realm of nature, it is the domain of vegetation and animals. Tlhaga also denotes that which is primordial. This is evident in the phrase O tlhaga kae? (“Where do you originate from?”).8

Comaroff (1981: 370) detects a similar contrast between “village” and “bush” among the Tswana. She describes the categories as “opposed yet complementary, mutually threatening yet essentially interdependent”. These categories, she maintains, have remained intact under the impact of colonialism. A continuing opposition is expressed between the local Tswana community and the chaos (if no longer “wild”) beyond. Likewise, the symbolic opposition between motse and tlhaga has remained very prominent in Green Valley after “betterment”.

The logic expressed by this contrast shapes the perceptions of humans and animals. Maitshwaro is the major attribute of personhood which sets people apart from animals. The concept refers to virtuous conduct and character. The phrase motho yo o na le maitshwaro means “a person can conduct him/ herself well”. It is because people possess maitshwaro that they are deemed cultured, responsible, honest and able to control and suppress (gatella) their self-centred desires. Animals lack maitshwaro, their behaviour is solely the product of tlhaga (nature, but also instinct) and of dumá (innate and natural desire). Hence, animals are incapable of discipline and constraint, they are governed by their desires for food and sex, which they cannot suppress nor control. One man explained: “If an animal sees something it wants, it just runs after it. Animals wait. They have food and sex at any time”.9

7. In an earlier paper (Niehaus 1993a), I examine the politics of present-day witch-hunting.
8. The distinction between motse and tlhaga in the lowveld resonates with the popular opposition in anthropological literature between “nature” and “culture” (see Levi-Strauss 1970, Ortner 1974, McCormack & Strathern 1980).
9. There is a clear distinction between animals of the forest (diphoofofo ya tlhaga) and domestic animals (seruiwa). The verb ruiwa (“to possess”) indicates that domestic animals are perceived as human possessions.
The sets of symbolic oppositions in this classificatory scheme can be summarized as follows:

- **motse** ("settlement") / **tlhaga** ("nature")
- **motho** ("person") / **phoofolo** ("animal")
- **hlabologileng** ("civilization") / **lesoka** ("wilderness")
- **maitshwaro** ("calculated conduct") / **duma** ("instinct")

With reference to the Lele of Zaire, Douglas (1970: 198) suggests that sorcerers occupy an anomalous position betwixt-and-between the categories of village and forest. The Lele sorcerer constitutes a "dangerous mediating bridge" between the contrasting domains of humans and the wild:

> "The dangerous bridge is made by a wicked transfer of allegiance by humans who become sorcerers. They turn their backs on their own kinds and run with the hunted, fight against the hunters, work against the diviners to achieve death instead of healing. They have moved across to the animal sphere and they have caused some animals to move in from the animal to the human sphere."

Sorcerers and familiars straddle the two domains and symbolize the inverse of moral order.

In the lowveld witches and familiars are also anomalous vis à vis the categories of **motse** and **tlhaga**. These beings exist simultaneously in **motse** and **tlhaga**, but are not fully part of either realm. Witches are people who reside in the **motse**, but they move to the edge of the village by night, they meet under trees at the liminal place where village borders the bush, to plan their evil deeds. Many features of witches indicate a symbolic affinity with animals. As babies, witches have the ability to cling to walls like bats, like nocturnal predators and cats, they are unhindered by the darkness and easily move about at night, like birds, they are capable of flight, before committing their hideous crimes, they undress and shed the trappings of culture and civilization and despite their nakedness, they feel no shame. Women may head gatherings of witches. This contradicts women's subordinate status in the male dominated social order of the **motse**.

Familiars are animals in appearance and are primarily located in the realm of **tlhaga**. However, unlike ordinary wild animals, they intrude into human settlements. Elderly men described the lions which invaded their cattle kraals in the past as "artificial" and "owned". In recent years people identify the snakes, baboons and owls encountered in residential locations as familiars. They also possess human attributes: unlike wild animals, they have **seriti** (shade, aura, character and spirit). They do not fend for themselves, but are fed like human infants. Familiars are also capable of human-like communication, they listen to and understand their master's instructions.

However, the affinity between witches and familiars runs deeper than
a mere association or even the shared possession of certain features. In
witchcraft human and animal identities are not clearly separate, but appear
as different manifestations of a single form. Stories of witches who meta-
morphose into the form of their familiars express a confusing duality.10

A forestry worker told a story of a young man who discovered myster-
ious muti (magical herbs) at his fiancee’s home. She warned him not to
use the muti as it would cause him “to see miracles”; however, the young
man disobeyed and washed his face with the muti one evening. Suddenly
he heard people shouting and found that he was in the midst of witches.
Being scared, the man pretended that he too was a witch, and underneath
a large tree the witches taught him how to bewitch others. They gave him
switches to hold in each hand, he was instructed to threaten his victims
with the right hand, but to beat them with the left. Instead, the young
man beat the witches with his right hand and, as he beat them, they died.
The next morning many villagers, including the chief’s wife, were reported
missing. Because the chief was greatly concerned the young man relayed
the full story to him. He then escorted the chief and village elders to the
tree where he had beaten the witches. There they found the witches lying
motionless in the tree’s shade. The chief pleaded that the young man
should revive them. He again held the switches in his hands, threatened
with his left, but beat the witches with his right. As he beat them they
metamorphosed into baboons, snakes and owls and ran toward the village
and, inside the village, they again changed into human form. The chief
praised the young man, but advised him that he should never again visit his
fiancée’s home.

A teacher told two stories of metamorphosis. At a time when Green
Valley was still very bushy, cattle herders regularly saw a duiker in the for-
est. They often chased it with dogs, but it always disappeared behind the
same tree. As they approached the tree an old man appeared and told
them he had not seen any duiker. Eventually the herders realized it was
the old man himself who had assumed the form of the duiker. The
second story is that of a man who awoke at midnight and saw that his wife
was no longer in bed. He heard the sound of a sewing machine emanat-
ing from the room next door. When he went to investigate he saw that it
was being operated by a large baboon. Shaken, he returned to the
bedroom. Later he again went to investigate. This time he saw his wife
sitting behind the machine who told him he had not seen a baboon: “It was
me. You did not see very clearly”.

Duality is crucial to the conception of witchcraft as a form of superhu-
man power. Ethnographic studies describe witches as evil, but also as
“superior” and “intelligent” (Junod 1966: 506). Hammond-Tooke (1981:

10. These narratives resemble those of shape-shifting among the Kuranko of Sierra
97) comments that the Kgaga witch is "a person with superhuman qualities. She can fly through the air in a flash of time, can enter a hut through the crack in the door". Such power is one aspect of the anomalous positional status of witches betwixt-and-between motse and tlhaga. Anomalous phenomena are widely associated with pollution and danger (Douglas 1970). This is evident in the cases of the Swazi and the Tswana who perceive a condition of impenetrable and destructive power resulting from the entanglement of spheres normally kept apart (Beidelman 1966, Comaroff 1981). Witches of the lowveld combine attributes from the realms of motse and tlhaga in a unique configuration, and therefore they transcend human limitations.11

Duality and shape-shifting is also intimately related to conceptions of personhood. The duality of person and animal in witchcraft resonates with the duality of a person's visible natural body (mmele) and its invisible, libidinal, and animal-like desires (duma). At times illicit desires are suppressed, at other times they manifest themselves, dominate and consume the body. Persons such as rapists, womanisers and sexually promiscuous women who succumb to their desires and violate the proprieties of marriage are described as inhuman (bo hloba) and as lacking maitshwaro. They and others who behave unacceptably may be described as animals, people who turn against their kin are called dogs (dimpsa), those who are cunning, dishonest, untrustworthy and who gossip are called snakes (dinoga). In the case of witchcraft such animality is deemed particularly intense. Witches, like animals, completely lack maitshwaro. They do not merely succumb to their desires at times, but are totally dominated by their cravings for food, sex, money and revenge. Envy (also duma) of the property and position of others is perceived as the most common motive for witchcraft. This explains why accusations of witchcraft are usually directed against those who are, socially and economically, the most deprived.

Familiars of the Lowveld and their Symbolism

Despite the special insights it yields, the structural approach to symbolic interpretation has definite limitations. Structural interpretations rely greatly upon the anthropologist's inferences about the implicit and unspoken, but give little weight to the explicit intent of people themselves (Werbner 1986: 155). These interpretations also obscure the ideological implications of symbolism in terms of political power and systems of social control (see Morris 1987: 149). The structural approach thus

11. In this respect the cultural construction of witches resembles the captivating American fictional representation of super-heroes. Spiderman and Batman derive uncanny powers by appropriating the attributes of spiders and bats.
needs to be complemented by an analysis of emic interpretations of symbols. It is also necessary to contextualise the emic meanings of witch-familiars by considering the manner in which they are evoked in specific instances of witchcraft accusation.\footnote{KAPFERER (1987: 4, 43) argues that myths do not exist “out there”, but are an integral part of the world of lived experience. Myths provide a framework through which experience achieves significance and they find articulation through the flow of social action. They motivate action, but gain determinance through the social and political structures and processes of which there are part. These comments are very pertinent to the analysis of familiars as symbolic formulations.}

Based on an analysis of emic points of view, the following discussion investigates the symbolism of the tokolose and the mamlambo. These familiars have characteristics which set them aside from ordinary animals, they are comparable to the “monsters” encountered in Ndembu initiation rites. Turner (1967: 106) argues that through the exhibition of bizarre monsters, complex aspects of life are communicated to initiates: “Monsters startle neophytes into thinking about objects, persons, relationships, and features of their environment they have hitherto taken for granted”. By combining animal and human form in unique configurations Ndembu monsters are effective multifocal symbols. It is the exaggeration of certain features in monsters which is particularly thought-provoking, features which “stand out” are objects of reflection. For instance, a man’s head on a lion’s body encourages novices to think about lions and brute force.

It is through the configuration of such features that the tokolose and the mamlambo objectify the illicit desires for unconstrained sexuality and money. They also comment upon contemporary situations of life in the Transvaal lowveld.

The Tokolose and the Construction of Sexual Desire

In South African ethnographic literature the belief in the u-tikoloshe or thikoloshe (in Xhosa) has been associated with the Cape Nguni. Soga (1931: 185-186), who conducted research among Xhosa speakers of the Eastern Cape in the 1920s, wrote: “Tikoloshe is supposed to be formed after the pattern of a human being, but is very diminutive, is thickly covered with hair, and though visible to some is invisible to others. He lives in some pool of a river, from which he issues to carry out some playful or mischievous action”.

Later accounts of this familiar have emphasized its sexual features. On the basis of her fieldwork in Pondoland during the 1930s, Wilson (formerly Hunter 1979: 275) described the thikoloshe as:
“A small hairy being, having the form of a man, but so small that he reaches to a man’s knee. He has hair all over his face and coming out of his ears, and his face is squashed up like a baboon. The penis of the male is so long that he carries it over his shoulder, and he has only one buttock [. . .] A woman igqwira [witch] [. . .] has sexual relations with him”.

These features are also evident in Hammond-Tooke’s account (1962: 280-281) of the belief in the thikoloshe among the Bhaca in 1949. Like Wilson, he found that accusations of possessing the thikoloshe were usually directed against women.

Sexuality and sexual desire are central themes in Wilson’s (1951a) and Hammond-Tooke’s (1974) explanations of the Cape Nguni thikoloshe. Wilson relates the Pondo belief in the thikoloshe, with its exaggerated sexual characteristics, to women’s illicit desires. Among the Pondo, she argues, women’s sexual desires tend to be repressed because rules of clan exogamy exclude many potential mates resident in local areas from marriage. She contrasts the Pondo thikoloshe to the Nyakyusa idea that pythons exist in the bellies of witches. As Nyakyusa age-villages are not constituted on the basis of kinship, witches are motivated by a lust for meat, not for sex. Although this comparison is insightful, it is hard to assess the specific merits of her claim. Hammond-Tooke (1984) shows that Cape Nguni lineages and clans are not, and were not in the past, local groups. Pondo women thus had a wide choice of marriage partners from within their local areas, but it is true that married women could not easily take lovers.

Hammond-Tooke accounts for the thikoloshe in terms of men’s perceptions of inter-sexual relations. He maintains that Cape Nguni men are uneasily aware of women’s deprivation. As daughters and wives, women are “perpetual minors”. They may not appear in court, hold political office, be polygynous, take lovers or be disrespectful to any senior man. There is dissonance between this construction of reality and men’s suspicion that women are, in fact, more important than they are. Women’s fertility is unambiguously located, they dominate the hearth and fields, and are “the sturdy container of lineage interests” (ibid.: 131). This contradictory perception of women’s meaning is associated with guilt. Men imagine that women respond with resentment and cherish negative emotions. By conceptualizing the witch in the image of a woman this dissonance is given concrete form. Men view the crux of deprivation as sexual because it is here that manhood finds most convenient expression. Women are thus imagined to take daemon lovers to fulfill their sexual needs and to wreak vengeance on men. The most obvious symbol of women’s resentment is the compensatory image of the enormous penis of the thikoloshe. In this way the witch myth transmutes guilt into “righteous indignation” and provides an ex post facto rationalization for discrimination (ibid.: 132).

Informants were adamant that Green Valley’s witches only began
using the tokolose after the population removals of 1960. It is likely that this familiar was introduced to the village by migrants who worked on the Witwatersrand. However, there have been important local modifications and adaptations of the belief. Despite certain similarities, conceptions of the tokolose in Green Valley during the 1990s differ significantly from earlier descriptions of the Cape Nguni thikoloshe.

As in the case of the Eastern Cape, informants believed that the tokolose usually goes about invisible and has pronounced sexual features. Only an Apostolic healer claimed to have seen the tokolose (she saw it at 10 p.m. one evening, but said it assumed the form of a dog). A teacher explained that the male has an enormous penis which can stretch to any size: “Its penis is like an elastic [...] Before it enters a home the tokolose will first use its penis to feel if it is safe [...] The penis will push the gate aside and the tokolose will enter”.

However, informants believed that the tokolose has two buttocks and resembles a large baboon (tshwene) more closely than a small man. “Like the baboon it is a horrible creature with horrible teeth”, I was told, its only human feature is that it walks on two legs. Informants also insisted that the tokolose could be of either sex. The female tokolose was said to have huge breasts. Unlike the situation in the Eastern Cape, men were regularly thought to practice witchcraft and to use the tokolose. In fact, six of the twelve Green Valley residents accused of keeping this familiar were men.13

A prominent theme of local narratives is the metamorphosis of roots, fat, animal and human form. Accounts of how witches obtain the tokolose are inconsistent. According to some informants the identities of the witch and the tokolose remain separate. They thought that witches acquire the familiar from dingaka baloi in the form of a root. At home the root changes into the tokolose by its own volition. Else, they thought, witches manufacture the familiar from animal fat. Witches use the fat to change domestic animals, such as dogs, into the tokolose. Other informants were of the opinion that the identities of the witch and the

13 Patterns of witchcraft accusation in the Eastern Cape differ considerably from those prevailing in the lowveld. Wilson’s impression (1951a) was that during the 1930s mainly women were accused of witchcraft in Pondoland. During the late 1960s, Hammond-Tooke (1970: 26) recorded 121 cases of witchcraft in Grahamstown and in the Ciskei. Hundred and five (87 %) of the accused were women. In the Transvaal men are more frequently accused of witchcraft. Between 1936 and 1938, the Kriges (1965: 264-267) found that eighteen (45%) of the forty persons accused of witchcraft among the Lobedu were men. Recent fieldwork in the lowveld support this trend. I recorded information on 133 people who were accused of witchcraft in Green Valley—60 (45 percent) were men and 73 (55 percent) were women. Twenty seven (63 percent) of the people accused of witchcraft in the nearby village of Timbabati were men (Stadler 1992).
tokolose are inseparable. They said witches smear animal fat on their own bodies to transform themselves into the tokolose.

The idea of duality is expressed by the notion that witches can assume the form of the tokolose and vice versa. Witches are believed to set off at night as the tokolose to commit evil deeds and to rape sexually desirable women and men in the neighbourhood. In this form they are invisible and possess exceptional strength and sexual prowess. One informant argued that witches were more inclined to act themselves in the form of the tokolose than to send it out by itself: “If a witch sends the tokolose to have sex with his neighbour’s wife the witch will not enjoy it. The tokolose will. If he wants to fuck your neighbour’s wife at night he himself has to change into a familiar—the tokolose”.

The tokolose can also assume the witch’s image. When witches leave their homes to bewitch others they use strong muti to lull their human lovers or spouses into a deep sleep. They may also leave a tokolose, which assumes their appearance, behind. I was told of a young man who slept with the daughter of a well-known witch, whilst making love to her he felt that she was ice cold and hairy. When he spoke to her, her voice responded from outside the room. The young man fled, thinking that he had made love to a tokolose which looked like his girlfriend.

Informants’ accounts of the end of the relationship between witches and tokolose are also inconsistent. Some emphasized a distinctiveness of identities. They insisted that the tokolose can kill the witch. If the witch sends it to a fortified home and it repeatedly fails to gain entry, it may be angered, turn around, and attack the witch. Other informants portrayed an essential unity between the witch and the tokolose. They maintained that if the familiar is killed the witch would also die. This is because the witch assumes the form of the familiar, uses the same fat as it does, and because there is a mystical interdependence of their identities.

Neither Wilson’s (1951a) nor Hammond-Tooke’s (1974) analysis of the Cape Nguni thikoloshe is sufficiently general to account for the ethnographic peculiarities of the tokolose in the lowveld. Clearly it is inadequate to interpret the tokolose in terms of women’s illicit desires or men’s perception of women’s intolerable position. This is because men are frequently thought to use the familiar. It seems more plausible that tokolose symbolizes illicit sexual desires which are very general. This interpretation is supported by the image of the tokolose as a large baboon, the duality between the witch and the familiar, and by descriptions of the uses to which it is put.

The apelike tokolose presents an apt symbol for unrestrained sexual desire. The meaning of this association derives from the local perception of the baboon as sexually promiscuous and as an appropriate human dou-
In a sense baboons are liminal. They differ significantly from other animals and share many features with humans. It is certainly much harder to imagine other animals initiating sexual intercourse with humans. Moreover, baboons display a childish morality. They are considered to be children's peers and are thought to entertain a mystical relationship with them. Any contact with a baboon is seen as endangering a child's health. Adult speakers never speak the word tshwene ("baboon") in the presence of children, but use the euphemism selo sa thabeng ("thing from the mountain"). If a child or a pregnant woman walks on the same path as a baboon, or eats food it has touched, the child or foetus will contract the disease bagwera ba bana ("peers of children") and experience convulsions. Herbalists use grass from the paths where baboons walk and the skins of baboons and monkeys to heal the disease. The association between baboons and children does not pertain to sexuality per se. Of greater significance is that baboons, like children, are not socialized and lack the restraints culture imposes on their wants and desires. The symbolic appropriateness of the baboon as the instigator of unwanted sexual intercourse also derives from the perception that baboons are dangerous, strong and ugly.

Witches are believed to use the tokolose for various purposes. It can guard and protect their homes, steal goods and money from neighbours, and can be kept as a lover. A teacher and a middle-aged taxi owner were rumoured to keep the tokolose for the latter purpose. The teacher's former husband reportedly realized the tokolose lay in bed with his wife when he reached out to touch her, but felt the fur of a hairy creature. He claimed that the tokolose kicked him on the shin and slapped him unconscious. The taxi owner, who consistently refused to marry, allegedly preferred the tokolose as a companion because it brought him wealth. However, its predominant use was to molest, rape and abuse men and women in the neighbourhood. Unlike moral sex, which takes place for the purpose of procreation, sexual intercourse with the tokolose causes infertility. The tokolose makes women abort or to give birth to horrible, deformed, creatures. A young tokolose sometimes sucks milk from the breasts of women, leaving none for their own infants. When it visits men it plays with them in their sleep, sucks their blood, castrates them, or injects them with muti to make them impotent and sterile. The very idea of sexual intercourse with the tokolose provokes revulsion and disgust. Women fear that a tokolose had visited them during the night should they feel "wet" in the morning, find their panties mysteriously wet, and be afraid that they might menstruate.

14. The local perception that baboons are exceptionally sexually active is not supported by zoological studies. Studies by Eimerl and DeVore (1969), and Girolami (1989) show that for the Chacma baboon (Papio ursinus), which is commonly encountered in the lowveld, sexual activity is dictated by the female's hormonal cycles.
removed, or notice that their husbands lie aside from them, as if they had been pushed. Diviners tell youngsters who dream of sex and of baboons that the tokolose is troubling them.

The idea that the tokolose objectifies sexual desire is also evident from information on the individuals who have been accused of using this familiar. The victims of such accusations are often sexually promiscuous persons. Lacking matshwaro and having succumbed to their sexual desires, witches exceed the bounds of acceptable conduct. This is shown in case 1, below.

**Case 1. — The sexually promiscuous neighbour**

One evening Sipho Maatsie, a 23-year-old man who works as a teller at an Acornhoek bank, dreamt of a large female baboon circling his home. The baboon then entered his room and ran around his bed. It seemed as if the baboon dug around the garden and in his room. As he looked at the baboon he tasted bitter herbs in his mouth.

The next morning Sipho inspected his garden and floor, but could not find any holes. He was very disturbed by the dream and consulted an Apostolic prophet that afternoon who told him that one of his neighbours wanted him to marry their daughter. Although he was unaware of it, they had sent her to sleep with him on several occasions. They also gave him muti which made him cough.

Sipho was convinced by these revelations as he regularly experienced wet dreams. He immediately thought that Elizabeth Sekgobela, his next-door-neighbour who is 19 years old, had visited him at night in the form of the tokolose. This is because her mother had long been suspected of witchcraft and because Elizabeth always behaved strangely in his presence. She never greeted him but always stared at him. Elizabeth has had several lovers and had an abortion two years before. Sipho recalled that she was once found naked at the Green Valley market.

Patterns of witchcraft accusation point to the profound conditioning impact that the system of labour migration has had on the belief in the tokolose. It is significant that this familiar became prominent in Green Valley only after the betterment removals of 1960 had destroyed subsistence agriculture and enhanced villagers’ dependence on wage labour. Migrant labour clearly has a more potent effect in curtailing sexual expression than the “traditional” proprieties of exogamy and polygyny. The system of labour migration, which obliges spouses to live apart from each other for the greatest part of their lives, generates intense fears of marital infidelity. Gordon (1977: 224) describes migrancy as a vicious circle: “The husband suspects the wife of being unfaithful and does not send remittances, whilst the wife justifies acts of unfaithfulness precisely because she does not receive remittances from her husband”.

Many accusations stem directly from such fears and suspicions. The people who are accused are not migrants, but are those who remain in Green Valley. Migrants fear that, in their absence, locally employed men may engage in sexual relations with their wives, and in fact many men do engage in extra-marital affairs and establish bonutsoi relations.
with their lovers. Migrants regularly accuse such men of adultery. Yet it is elderly and unemployed men who are the most vulnerable to being accused of keeping the tokolose. This is because they are considered to be sexually deprived, envious and resentful. Elderly men have lost their sexual vitality. Being unable to support dependents, jobless men tend to be single and not to be desired as husbands. Such men are thought to use the tokolose to compensate for their lack of sexual fulfilment.

Married women, who remain resident with their parents-in-law while their husbands are at work in the urban areas, face a unique set of frustrations. They often regard the attention of elderly and jobless men as an unacceptable nuisance. Case 2, below, shows how such experiences are related to accusations of witchcraft.

**Case 2. — The troublesome father-in-law**

In 1967 Ngwa Segodi married Mr Moropane and took up residence with her in-laws. When Ngwa Segodi was eight months pregnant she suffered a miscarriage. Although her next pregnancy resulted in the birth of a healthy baby girl, she experienced three further miscarriages.

At the time Mr Moropane worked as a migrant labourer in Johannesburg and was seldom at home. Ngwa Segodi experienced great frustration in the household of her in-laws. In discussion with her siblings, she blamed her father-in-law of using a tokolose to rape her and of causing her to give birth to “horrible creatures”. She had noticed that the old man’s behaviour was very peculiar, he wore an overcoat and hat at all times—even in summer. Many evenings she saw him going about naked in the house. Whenever she asked him why he was undressed, he kept quite and did not reply.

In 1975 Ngwa Segodi’s siblings rescued her from the Moropane home and returned her to the home of her own parents. There she was treated by a herbalist who gave her muti to drink and expelled the tokolose from her body. Ngwa Sekgodi subsequently divorced Mr Moropane and remarried. At the home of her new husband she gave birth to a second child who was normal and healthy.

Similar tensions were apparent when villagers accused a 55 year-old man of using a tokolose to rape women at night and to inject men with a syringe to make them impotent. The man had been unemployed for a very long time and had never been married. At a local shebeen he often made unwanted sexual advances to women.

**Witchcraft, Wealth and the Mamlambo**

As in the case of the tokolose, earlier ethnographies have associated the belief in the umamlambo (Xhosa for “mother of the river”) with the Cape

15. Men tend to view extra-marital affairs as an important component of masculinity, but despise sexually promiscuous women. As in the case of Lesotho, men justify their views by invoking a tradition of polygyny (cf. SPIEGEL 1991).
Nguni. Soga (1931: 193) found that during the 1920s Xhosa speakers perceived the *mamlambo* as a water-sprite which undergoes a constant series of changes. It appeared in the diverse forms of a chain, a goat-skin bag, piece of tin, and a hoe, and it also assumed the form of a snake of unusual appearance, which has the power to mesmerise people.

Hunter's (1979: 286-287) account of beliefs in the *mamlambo* among the Pondo during the 1930s and Hammond-Tooke's (1962: 285-287) description of this familiar among the Bhaca in 1949 also emphasize its ability to change shape. Their accounts include additional details. The familiar is peculiar to male witches who obtain it from Whites at the gold-mines. It is acquired in the form of a hide charm, but changes into a snake with eyes that shine like the lights of a motor car. The *mamlambo* can also become a beautiful girl in European dress to whom the men make love. It will make men rich and give them anything they wish for. Yet the owner of the *mamlambo* must kill his father or mother to appease it. “There is sure to be death in the family if one is brought home” (ibid.: 285).

Hammond-Tooke (1974) argues that the symbolic significance of the *mamlambo* cannot be explained in terms of sexual antagonism—even though it can become a beautiful girl. He rather draws attention to the snake’s ability to change shape, form and colour, and he regards its tendency to attack the witch’s kin as particularly significant. For him, the *mamlambo* mediates between contradictory constructs, resulting from discrepancies between the ideal and the actual state of affairs. There is an ideal of kinship loyalty, agnatic and neighbourly harmony; and an actuality of frequent tension between those locked together in bonds of mutual obligation. “This ambiguity about kinsmen, this cognitive dissonance, is portrayed, and thus objectivised in cultural terms, in the shape (if that is the word!) of beings with ambiguous boundaries” (ibid.: 133).

Like the *tokolose*, the *mamlambo* is not indigenous to the lowveld. The first instance of witchcraft that I recorded in which reference was made to the *mamlambo* occurred in 1957. This familiar also seems to have been incorporated from Nguni speakers via migrant labourers from the lowveld. In local opinion, the first witches who used the *mamlambo* in Green Valley had purchased it from sinister herbalists in Durban. Informants’ descriptions of the *mamlambo* closely approximate the earlier ethnographic accounts of Cape Nguni beliefs. Shape shifting, sexuality, personal enrichment and human sacrifice were prominent themes in local narratives.

Witches were said to acquire the *mamlambo* in the form of a root or as “something like a fish” contained in a bottle. The root has very peculiar qualities. It seems to be alive. Should one try to cut it, it would fall from the table or jump from one’s hands. The root glows at night and casts a mysterious blue or green light throughout the home. After some time the root grows and becomes a large snake which is slippery and
hairy, has awesome fangs, and eyes that shine like diamonds. During the day witches hide the snake in a special trunk or in nearby rivers. The *mamlambo* is also believed to metamorphose into human form. When brought from its place of hiding at night, the snake becomes the witches' supernatural lover. It changes into a white man or a white woman with silver, shiny, hair. Moreover, informants believed that the *mamlambo* can assume the witch's own image.

The complex series of transformations it undergoes can be illustrated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Root</th>
<th>Snake in</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Image of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fish</td>
<td>trunk or</td>
<td>lover at</td>
<td>witch at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>river</td>
<td>night</td>
<td>night</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All informants believed that witches keep the *mamlambo* to satisfy their greed and desire for wealth. A local diviner told me: “The *mamlambo* works for you [. . .] Those who have the *mamlambo* are always rich and have many cattle”. Informants suggested that the *mamlambo* enriches its owners by predisposing them to luck in financial matters and by stealing the possessions and money of others for them.

However, the wealth and hedonistic pleasures derived from the *mamlambo* have great cost. The *mamlambo* was described as greedy, possessive and exceptionally dangerous. No witch can control the *mamlambo* for long, it soon dominates, enslaves and destroys its keeper; it is believed that the *mamlambo* prevents single people from marrying and attacks the spouses of married people. In exchange for the money it brings, the *mamlambo* demands regular sacrifices of chicken, beef and human blood. Should witches fail to satisfy these demands, the *mamlambo* will kill their close relatives. An Apostolic faith healer explained:

“The *tokolose* is better than it [the *mamlambo*]. The *tokolose* only sleeps with people. The *mamlambo* brings wealth, but it kills people. Every year it demands blood and sacrifice. It needs your next of kin. If you don’t feed it with a sacrifice it will turn to you and kill you. It feeds on people and animals.”

Herbalists and Apostolic healers perform a special ritual to remove a *mamlambo* from people’s homes. They place the unwanted twig or root firmly inside a goat’s anus. The goat is then thrown into a dam to drown, being offered to the *mamlambo* as a human surrogate.

Conceptions of the *mamlambo* in the lowveld differed from earlier descriptions of the familiar in the Eastern Cape in two important respects. As in the case of the *tokolose*, informants believed that both men

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16. I discussed, with some informants, a newspaper report of Mrs Mogale from Orlando who claimed she was assaulted by a supernatural force (*The Sowetan*, 25 March 1992). They thought the supernatural force was indeed her husband’s *mamlambo*. 
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and women kept the *mamlambo*. In local accounts the witch and the familiar were also presented as constituting a duality. Their identities were seen as intertwined in a complex and confusing manner. Witches were deemed capable of transforming themselves into the snake, and it was believed that the snake could assume the witch’s image. Moreover, the lives of the witch and the snake were seen to be presented as mutually dependent. I was told that if people killed the snake the witch would also die. Some informants assumed that the *mamlambo* lives in the witch’s stomach.

The mystical dependence between the familiar and the witch is evident in local interpretations of an incident which occurred in Green Valley during December 1992. In that month a large python slivered across a dust road and approached a village settlement. Observers suspected that the python was a *mamlambo* as there are no bushes in the vicinity where large snakes can live. They called a policeman and asked him to shoot the python with his R4 rifle. Within hours after he killed the snake a teacher, who resided in the village settlement, died. Villagers saw the death as an indication that he was the owner of the *mamlambo*.

Hammond-Tooke’s (1974) theory that the Cape Nguni *mamlambo* presents a mediatory construct between the ideal of kinship loyalty and the actuality of conflict among kin does not illuminate ethnographic material from the lowveld. The theory does not posit a specific motive for witchcraft and fails to consider why the *mamlambo* assumes the particular images of a possessive lover and a dangerous snake. It would be more appropriate to interpret the *mamlambo* as symbolizing the illicit desire for wealth. The duality of the witch and the *mamlambo* is similar to the relationship between the person and his or her desires. Moreover, the manifestations of the *mamlambo* can be seen as appropriate symbols of the dangerous aspects of the endless pursuit of money.

Although the *mamlambo* assumes the image of a handsome lover, I believe that Hammond-Tooke (ibid.) is correct in his view that the sexual hypothesis is inappropriate. As a motive for purchasing the *mamlambo* the desire for sexual passion is clearly secondary to the desire for wealth. It is very significant that informants described the lover as a white person. In local perceptions Whites may indeed be viewed as desirable lovers, but are primarily associated with status and money. Whites are also seen as greedy and dangerous. Junod and Jaques (1939: 78) record the well-known Tsonga proverb:

*Mulungu a nga na saka,*

*saka ra yena i mali*  
(“White people have no kin/nation, their kin/nation is money”).

The snake too symbolizes wealth. This meaning derives from its association with water. The *mamlambo* is sometimes obtained in a bot-
tle filled with water and dwells in rivers. During the bygone era of agricul-
tural self-sufficiency, when villagers depended upon rain for their live-
lihood, water was the basic source of prosperity. In the contemporary
situation water is still seen as a source of fertility and life. Its positive,
cooling, qualities are contrasted to the negative attributes of heat (fiša) as
Despite these positive connotations, water is also recognized as danger-
ous. Many people drown in rivers and are struck by the lightning which
accompanies rain. For example, some consider it taboo (diila) to fetch
water at night. This is because water is believed to attract lightning to
your home.17 In lowveld folklore the snakelike beings mmamokebe and
nzonzo objectify the ambiguous qualities of water. Mmamokebe is the
dangerous guardian of water, it is half-woman, half-snake, and resides in
large dams. It is usually peaceful, but may ascend into the dark clouds
when provoked. From here it will cause storms to destroy all trees and
houses in sight. Nzonzo is a serpent which lives in rivers and abducts peo-
ple who venture nearby. Its victims can remain submerged in the water
for a year, but will breathe like fish. If the necessary sacrifices are made
to nzonzo its captives will emerge from the water as powerful healers.
They will be fully equipped with divination bones, drums and herbs.

The fact that Botswana’s official currency is the pula (“rain”) alludes
to the shared symbolic attributes of money and water. Money, like
water, embodies moral and subversive qualities. Money sustains life, but
causes tension, strife and death. The Apostolic healer explained this by
saying: “Money is the thing that caused Jesus to be killed”. For this rea-
son money may become “hot” or polluted. Some diviners cool the
money they earn by rubbing it in ash. Snakes are also associated with
money. There is a perceptual resemblance between the physical proper-
ties of water, coins and snakes. Water shimmers, nickel shines, whilst
the scales and eyes of snakes glisten. A prominent member of the Zion
Christian Church explained the dangers of money with reference to Luke
16, which he said, urges us to choose between the righteous path of God
and the unrighteous path of Mammon. He said Mammon refers to
money, but added: “Some people also say it is the snake”. Money dom-
inates people’s lives in much the same way as the mamlambo enslaves its
keeper. Here the perception that the mamlambo feeds on sacrifices of
human blood is illuminating.18

17. Hoernle (1985: 79) captures the ambivalent views of water amongst the Naman
when she writes: “They believe it to have great protective powers against any
anti-social forces, but at the same time to be extremely dangerous to members
of the society whenever they are withdrawn in any way from the powerful pro-
tection which society gives them”.

18. The Setswana word madi refers to both blood and money. Comaroff (1985:
174) has argued that, in the context of physically threatening working condi-
tions, the association of blood and money is particularly plausible: “Indeed, the
Tensions over money were clearly apparent in the nineteen instances that I recorded of individuals who were accused of keeping the *mamlambo*. By local standards the accused were of average financial means, but were considered to be envious of wealthier residents. They were thought to be particularly eager to attain wealth and positions of influence. Two of the accused were the business rivals of wealthy shop owners. Case 3, will provide an illustration of some of the tensions which are evident in these relations.

**Case 3. — The Cafe owner and the mamlambo**

During the 1950s Mr Searane, who was born in Green Valley, established the Searane Cafe on the western outskirts of the village. For two decades the Cafe was the only business in the vicinity. Mr Searane’s prosperity lasted until 1972, year in which Mr Mokoena, a teacher from Marite, established a second store in the vicinity. Mr Mokoena’s store was financed by his brother, a wealthy bottle store owner, and was much better stocked than the Searane Cafe.

Mr Searane and Mr Mokoena soon became business rivals and fiercely competed for customers. The tensions between these businessmen was most evident in soccer matches. Each man owned a soccer team and matches between their sides were frequently characterized by violent conflict. In 1980 a fierce fist fight erupted after Mr Mokoena’s team lost to that of Mr Searane. The former refused to accept the defeat and claimed that the latter had doctored the field with *muti* and had bewitched his best players.

The businessmen no longer spoke to each other. In 1982 Mr Mokoena’s small van capsized whilst transporting members of his soccer team. Three of the players died in the accident. Mr Mokoena immediately blamed Mr Searane for his misfortune. He claimed that Mr Searane used a *mamlambo* to make his van capsize and to steal goods from his store. After the funeral of his soccer players Mr Mokoena and his brother abducted Mr Searane. They threw him into the boot of their car and took him to a secluded place where they severely assaulted him.

Eight months later robbers shot and wounded Mr Searane near his home. He was rushed to hospital. To the surprise of his kin, he was reluctant to allow surgeons to operate upon him and remove a bullet lodged in his spine. This, I was told, was because he feared that the surgeons would tamper with his snake. When Mr Searane died during the operation it was rumoured that the surgeons had indeed killed his snake. Because the snake was a familiar, and hence invisible, the surgeons failed to detect it.

Self-employed individuals who did part-time work in Green Valley were also likely suspects of keeping the *mamlambo*. They were herbalists, builders, radio repairmen and liquor sellers whose occupations regularly placed them in conflict with other villagers over payments for their services. For example, during the witch-hunt of 1990, the

Tshidi notion of money would seem to parallel closely Marx’s formulation of the commodity that feeds off the subsistence of the labourer*. The linguistic correspondence between money and blood was absent in the lowveld, yet both are similarly viewed as symbolic equivalents (see Niehaus 1993b).
mongoma said a herbalist once successfully cured a woman from epilepsy, because she did not pay him, he sent the mamlambo to kill her.

Five of the seven women who were accused of keeping the mamlambo were involved in domestic disputes over money. Conflicts between mothers and daughters-in-law over the remittances of their wage-earning sons feature prominently among these squabbles. Women who derived financial benefits from the deaths of their husbands and kin were also among the accused. This is shown in case 4.

Case 4. — The ‘happy’ widow

Ngwa Mkhare, a widow who is approximately 65 years old, had long been suspected of practising witchcraft and of keeping a mamlambo. Informants thought that she was motivated by her greed for money to kill her husband and three of her nine children.

During 1974 her husband died in a road accident: whilst he rode home from work on his bicycle he collided with his employer’s car. Informants suspected that his death was due to witchcraft as his employer was always very friendly and helpful towards him. When Ngwa Mkhare’s son told her he wanted to ask a herbalist to kill the witch through vengeance magic she, reportedly, became anxious and told him not to do so. Within the next five years Ngwa Mkhare’s two sons and daughter died. The first son was killed in a motor vehicle accident near Louis Trichardt; the second son was employed as a construction worker and fell from a high building; the daughter died suddenly from a mysterious illness. Shortly after these deaths Ngwa Mkhare’s daughter-in-law became insane and had to undergo psychiatric treatment.

Ngwa Mkhare was compensated for her husband’s death and received the pension money of her sons. She, furthermore, manages the disability pension of her daughter-in-law. Her neighbours were appalled by the fact that she sometimes boasts about her sources of income when she is drunk.

The financial motive was less apparent in only four cases. Three individuals were suspected of keeping the mamlambo after the untimely deaths of several of their kin and neighbours. The fourth individual was a woman who had several extra-marital love affairs. When her husband learnt of her infidelity he beat her up. Whilst he sat at the dining room table the next day a snake bit him. Although family members searched the entire room the snake had mysteriously disappeared. A few weeks later he was again bitten by a snake in his garden. The man accused his wife of using a mamlambo and deserted his family.

Gellner (1973: 36-37, 44) has pointed to the limitations of a contextual approach which assumes the rationality of religious beliefs. The a priori and all-embracing assumption of logical rationality, he argues, may lead us into thinking that there are no beliefs which are absurd, inconsistent
and contrary to common sense. The approach blinds us to the possibility of examining the role of inconsistent beliefs as a form of social control. A theme of this article has been precisely the confusing, and sometimes absurd, relationship between witches of the Eastern Transvaal lowveld and their familiars. This relationship is difficult to comprehend. It is one of duality in which human and animal identities are both two and one, distinct and indistinct.

Political anthropologists have recognized the implications of confusing dualities for conceptions of power. This is evident in the mystical duality between Shilluk kings and the spirit of nyikang (Evans-Pritchard 1948) and in the notion that medieval European kings had two bodies—the Body Natural and the Body Politic consisting of government (Kantorowicz 1957, Giese 1960). The two bodies formed a unity during life, but separated upon death. The Body Politic was then transferred to the Body Natural of the next king. The Body Politic was invisible, immortal, devoid of all defects, and was constituted for the direction of the people. Its powers removed mortal weakness from the king and ensured the continuity of kingship through successive monarchs. Kantorowicz (1957: 7) argues that in this way theological formulations pertaining to the duality of the Christ were expropriated to create a “Christology” of kingship.

In the same manner as nyikang and the Body Politic were vital to kingship, familiars are central to the power of witchcraft. The duality of the witch and the familiar is symbolic of the division of personhood into higher and lower selves. Whereas the higher self is sublimated, cultivated and controlled; the lower self is culturally undefined, but is the source of instinct, life energy, aggression and desire. The lower self is often the focus of fascination. It inspires disgust at one level, but an uncanny and forbidden attraction at another (see Friedman 1991: 155).

The theory of familiars does not merely express local ideas of power and personhood, but also comments on important features in the social lives of villagers. It is significant that the tokolose and the mamlambo only emerged in the Transvaal lowveld in the early 1960s. This was a time of profound social change when the implementation of “betterment” schemes destroyed the last remnants of subsistence agriculture and made people totally dependent upon wage labour. It is in the context of labour migration, which heightened suspicions of marital infidelity, that the idea of the tokolose with its exaggerated sexual features emerged. The tokolose symbolizes the destructive impact of extra-marital sexual liaisons. The accusations that sexually promiscuous, elderly and unmarried persons keep the tokolose constitutes a form of social control. Such accusations also validate the ideal of sexual propriety. The mamlambo highlights the dangers of money. It portrays the selfish pursuit of money as illegitimate and evil, and associates the lust for wealth with infertility and death. Accusations that those who are involved in squabbles over money keep the mamlambo dramatise the need for proper restraint in financial matters.
These familiars are certainly not signs of “protest”. Yet, in so far as they draw attention to structures and processes of deprivation, familiars do constitute a form of implicit “cultural resistance”. Whilst the tokolose provokes thought about the sexual repression which accompanies labour migration, the mamlambo comments on the differentiation and deprivations that are a keynote of the monetary economy. In this respect the tokolose and the mamlambo symbolically delegitimate conventional categories of thought in the political economy of South Africa.

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19. For an important and helpful distinction between “protest” and “cultural resistance”, see Werbner 1986: 153.
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ABSTRACT

In the Transvaal lowveld of South Africa witches are commonly associated with animals. With reference to fieldwork conducted in the village of Green Valley, this article considers the symbolic meanings of the relationship between witches and two witch-familiars—the apelike tokolose and the snake-like mamlambo. I argue that this relationship resonates with the duality between a person’s body and its animal-like instincts and desires. Whereas the tokolose symbolizes the desire of unconstrained sexual expression, the mamlambo symbolizes people’s desire for money. These familiars comment on contemporary conditions of life in the Transvaal lowveld which are marked by migrant labour, the separation of spouses and by severe economic deprivation.

RÉSUMÉ

Sorciers de la région du lowveld au Transvaal. — Dans la région du lowveld au Transvaal (Afrique du Sud), les figures de sorciers sont habituellement associées à celles d’animaux. Procédant d’un travail de terrain mené dans le village de Green Valley, cet article examine les rapports symboliques existant entre les sorciers et deux entités qui leur sont familières: la figure simiesque du tokolose et celle du mamlambo associée au serpent. L’auteur postule que cette relation fait écho à la dualité existant entre le corps d’une personne, et les instincts et désirs sauvages de celle-ci. Alors que le tokolose symbolise le désir d’une sexualité sans entraves, le mamlambo représente le désir d’argent. Ces entités familières témoignent des conditions de vie difficiles de la population de cette région du Transvaal, marquées par les migrations de travail, l’éloignement des épouses et un niveau de vie très bas.

Key Words/Mots-clés: systems of thought/systèmes de pensée, sexuality/sexualité, witchcraft/sorcellerie, animal spirits/esprits animaux, Transvaal/Transvaal, South Africa/Afrique du Sud.