Witchcraft in societies in transition

- The case of Bafokeng -

Kyuta YAMAMOTO

Department of Anthropology and Archaeology
University of Pretoria

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Abstract

The primary aim of this study is to examine witchcraft beliefs and practices in the Royal Bafokeng Nation in the North West Province of the Republic of South Africa. Social transition is in progress and witchcraft beliefs are flourishing in this region. Paying close attention to the present social context of the Nation, I try to answer the question: how and why do people in the Bafokeng Nation hold witchcraft beliefs?

While many prior studies deal with witchcraft beliefs, the data these studies tend to rely on primarily derives from informants' narratives. They therefore cannot provide insight into actual practices related to the beliefs. By examining dialogues occurring between a *ngaka* (traditional doctor) and patients who suspect witchcraft in their lives, this study attempts to analyze actual practices surrounding witchcraft. In addition, I examine witchcraft stories and rumours collected in the Bafokeng Nation as collective expression of these beliefs.

These examinations establish that the Bafokeng people are generally frustrated by the uneven distribution of wealth directly or indirectly derived from platinum mines in their

community. They wonder how one person succeeds while another fails. People's frustration sometimes turns into jealousy towards individuals' success and may result in accusations of witchcraft.

A rumour about the secretive relationship between platinum mines and *Kgwenyape*, a snake-like mythical creature, is examined and then employed to illustrate that modern things such as mining as well as traditional things can be explained through people's beliefs in witchcraft and supernatural powers.

After analyzing the findings, I present an answer to the question above. One of the reasons why the Bafokeng people hold witchcraft beliefs is to help them cope with hard-to-understand and hard-to-accept realities, such as poverty in the midst of great wealth.

Key terms: Royal Bafokeng Nation, witchcraft beliefs, traditional doctors, rumour, wealth, platinum mines

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Terminology

Prior to further discussion I would like to state my standpoint concerning the definition of "sorcery" and "witchcraft". Moore and Sanders (2001:3) point out that anthropologists have often distinguished between witchcraft as "a mystical and innate power", and sorcery as "an evil magic consciously practiced against others, sometimes deploying objects, 'medicine' or 'tools'". However, Moore and Sanders (2001:3-4) see this definition as problematic because 'witchcraft' and 'sorcery' are both western terms, and cannot therefore interpret indigenous, non-western beliefs and practices. Geschiere (1997) alternatively uses 'occult forces' to avoid such misinterpretation. Although he is aware of the issue of interpretation, he only replaces inconvenient terms, 'witchcraft' and 'sorcery', with 'occult forces'. In other words, the problem of interpretation is kept on the shelf. In this thesis I do not distinguish 'witchcraft' from 'sorcery' as early anthropologists did. The more salient distinction for my purposes is between "traditional medicine" and "witchcraft", which I will discuss at greater length below.

1.2 Background of the study

Practices of witchcraft have attracted a great deal of attention from anthropologists. Anthropologists have studied these phenomena all over the world. In the book edited by Marwick (1970), *Witchcraft and Sorcery*, the broad scope of witchcraft and sorcery studies is evident. For example, one will find chapters dealing with witchcraft beliefs amongst the Navaho and Pueblos in North America, to witchcraft among German and African peoples.

Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the regions that has been considerably researched with regards to witchcraft. From the turn of the nineteenth century, anthropologists undertook research to examine the functions of sorcery and witchcraft in society and the ideas that underpinned the practices of sorcery and witchcraft (Evans-Prichard 1937). These studies pay attention to the way people practised sorcery and witchcraft in 'traditional' societies. Furthermore, they studied witchcraft accusations. For instance, Douglas (1963, 1967) examined witchcraft accusations among the Cewa in Central Africa, Gluckman (1965) among the Zulu, and Hammond-Tooke (1974) among the Cape Nguni in South Africa. In these studies the function of witchcraft and the explanations of witchcraft accusations were explored.

Schapera published several articles in which he discussed the practices of witchcraft and witchcraft accusations amongst Tswana-speaking people in the area which we now know as Botswana (Schapera 1952, 1955b, 1969). In those works, Schapera demonstrated how people defined witchcraft, what kinds of witchcraft cases were adjudicated in traditional courts, and what kinds of sentences were delivered. He pointed out as objective evidence the occurrence of dozens of witchcraft cases in which close relatives battled amongst each other, and in most cases, the guilty were punished by banishment (Schapera 1969). These findings enable us to illustrate how people in Tswana society accused people of witchcraft and adjudicated witchcraft disputes in the past.

However, in these studies anthropologists tended to emphasize the political-stabilizing impact of witchcraft accusations in relatively small communities. In other words, they were inclined to overlook the impact that social and economical transitions had on witchcraft belief systems.

In recent years, numerous articles, papers, and books have been published that deal with the practices of sorcery and witchcraft (Comaroff, J. and Comaroff, J.L 1999,

Geschiere 1997, Moore, H. L and Sanders, T 2001, Niehaus 2001a, 2001b).

Jean and John Comaroff (1999) discuss how people use the idea of witchcraft to account for and interpret the uncertainty resulting from the radical change of regimes and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor in South Africa.

Geschiere (1997) discusses how, in Cameroon, people recognize and exercise two different kinds of 'occult forces' in respect of social inequality. One is a levelling force, another is an accumulating force. The poor employ 'occult forces' to intervene in others' success, whereas the wealthy people use it in order to protect themselves from others' envy and intervention. According to him, almost all misfortune, social inequality, and success are attributed to 'occult forces'. Moreover he points out that these days the accumulating force seems to be magnified because of unprecedented social inequality caused by radical social change.

In his study on witchcraft beliefs in "Green Valley" in the then Northern Province of South Africa, Niehaus (2001a) tries to understand witchcraft beliefs within the broader context of social transformation, especially with respect to power and politics. In

conjunction with political power shifts, authority of witchcraft accusations shifted too. Moreover, he discusses how radical social change resulting from Christianization, the influx of European commodities, and the decline of the subsistence economy penetrated by the Apartheid government caused transformations in the witchcraft belief system.

The common characteristic shared by these new studies is that they no longer assume that witchcraft beliefs and practices in small communities have a politically stabilizing impact. Instead, they emphasize the impact of "globalization". By introducing the idea of globalization into the analysis of witchcraft, these anthropologists started to investigate new interpretations of witchcraft. In summary, they propose that flourishing witchcraft beliefs and practices in the contemporary world are a manifestation of frustration over unequal distribution of wealth and power. This inequality is fundamental to globalized capitalism. Flourishing rumours of "zombies" and other supernatural creatures are also said to be creative explanations of the uncertainties surrounding capitalism and modernity.

1.3 Aim and rationale of the research

Although the introduction of the idea of globalization and modernity into the analysis of witchcraft gives rise to new and intriguing interpretations, there is a good reason to be sceptical of these interpretations. Firstly, and most importantly, the relationship between flourishing witchcraft beliefs and globalization or globalized capitalism, as anthropologists propose, is highly theoretical. Their proposals certainly provide us with a new way of interpreting witchcraft in contemporary Africa but many other possible interpretations still remain. Secondly, concerning the interpretation of "zombies", it seems less than reputable to take them as creative explanations of the uncertainness about capitalism and modernity because the question of who believes in the existence of these creatures does not explain their beliefs as such.

It is clear that to value and make use of these new approaches to witchcraft in contemporary Africa, more detailed case studies are needed. This study, therefore, firstly aims to serve this purpose. This study demonstrates the witchcraft belief system held in villages of the Bafokeng Nation, near a mining city, Rustenburg, in South Africa's North West Province, where social transition is in progress and witchcraft beliefs are flourishing. By doing so, I try to answer the question: how and why do

people in the Bafokeng Nation hold witchcraft beliefs?

1.4 Research sites

The Bafokeng Nation, situated near Rustenburg in the North West Province is famous for its rich platinum reef. According to Manson and Mbenga (2003) there was a struggle between mining corporations and the nation over ownership of the land since the 1920s. However, in 1999 the Nation and Impala Platinum reached an agreement to settle the long dispute. Since then the nation has received royalties from the platinum mines and has accumulated considerable wealth. In Phokeng, the capital of the nation, a huge civic centre was erected and a stadium was built, both financed by funds drawn from the royalties. It can be said that as a rural, black community, the Bafokeng Nation has accumulated significant wealth. However, at the same time, redistribution of wealth has been an issue amongst the Bafokeng people. Since the nation acquired the higher royalty rate in the 1999 agreement, the uses to which the money is put causes conflict between people. Furthermore, the nation has seen growth in the number of mineworkers residing in Bafokeng villages. These "ethnic strangers" cause tension in the villages (Manson and Mbenga 2003: 47). In a semi-annual meeting of the community called "*Kgothagothe*" held on 10 December 2005 the issue of ethnic

strangers attracted a great deal of attention from the audience. The Bafokeng leaders publicly accused villagers who rent or sell their land to foreigners of being unpatriotic. The participants also questioned the nation's policy against foreign migrant workers who were allegedly accused of stealing jobs and resources from villagers. Moreover, the abrupt death of *Kgosi* (King) Lebone Molotlegi II in March 2000 led the entire Bafokeng Nation into an unforeseen situation. Thus, the social transitions in progress in the Bafokeng nation have been dramatic and often hard to understand from the perspective of ordinary villagers.

Alongside these social changes, witchcraft disputes have been taking place in the Bafokeng Nation. To cite only one example, a few years back, in the village of Mamerotse, two "witches" were accused and nearly burnt to death. An elderly woman on pension who came back to the village from Johannesburg was allegedly keeping a witch familiar, a baboon. Another woman on pension who had been residing in the village was also accused. When these two women were almost burnt by villagers, police took them into custody to protect them from the mob[1].

[1] Ellah Masike, personal communication

1.5 Methodology

This case study involves the detailed examination of witchcraft related experiences of relatively few persons. In order to gain access to the witchcraft related experiences and stories, I carried out fieldwork in Kanana and in other villages in the Bafokeng Nation. The term of fieldwork was approximately four months from February 2006 to May 2006. In advance of the fieldwork, I spent three months from November 2005 to January 2006 in Rustenburg studying the Setswana language and preparing for the fieldwork. During the preparation and fieldwork term, I resided in the city of Rustenburg and travelled to the villages in the Bafokeng Nation for the research.

During the fieldwork, I collected witchcraft related experiences and stories. I conducted semi-structured and open-ended interviews with three different informant groups of traditional doctors, traditional doctors' customers, and ordinary villagers. There are solid reasons to choose these three groups as informants for this study. Firstly, in the targeted villages, the people who know the most witchcraft related stories are traditional doctors who give people consultations on problems allegedly caused by witchcraft. Therefore, pursuing these stories led me to traditional doctors. Secondly, having traditional doctors' customers as informants meant that I could access the stories

from a firsthand perspective, i.e. not as gossip or rumour. Thirdly, ordinary villagers provided me with general ideas and perceptions about witchcraft.

To recruit informants, I used snowball sampling. I first asked various people to introduce me to traditional doctors or people who know witchcraft stories. Some of them took me to traditional doctors. After interviewing the doctor I then asked him or her to introduce me to other traditional doctors or their customers. In this way, I contacted approximately five to seven persons of each group[2]. Interviews were conducted primarily in Setswana employing a translator/research assistant. Some of the interviews were tape-recorded. These interviews were transcribed and translated into English afterwards.

Due to the nature of the research topic, I relied heavily on villagers' narratives. However, I also tried to acquire data using other methods. Participant observation was conducted for the purpose of understanding the life of a traditional doctor in the villages. I observed the daily activities of a traditional doctor in one of the Bafokeng villages from early morning to late afternoon for two weeks. During the observation I

[2] Interviews with ordinary villagers were more like conversations. I rarely taped these conversations but took notes.

conducted interviews and took field notes. I also tape-recorded quite a few dialogues between a traditional doctor and her patients in healing sessions. I therefore obtained two different types of data, namely first hand and second hand data. The former consists of data obtained through observation and the tape-recorded dialogues held between the traditional doctor and her patients. The latter consists of data obtained through interviews with the informants. These data help us to understand people's understandings, explanations, and perceptions of witchcraft and witchcraft beliefs.

Finally and most importantly, as I am a first-language Japanese and second language English speaker, I employed an interpreter to translate between English and Setswana. Furthermore, in order to gain access to the key informants and tribal authorities in the village, I needed research assistants too. Fortunately my Setswana tutor Paul was able to serve as an interpreter and research assistant throughout the research. I occasionally recruited another research assistant but due to his availability and capacity to understand what is important for data collecting, Paul acted as my main assistant through the research.

1.6 Ethical considerations

Undertaking research on witchcraft, I had to consider several ethical issues. First of all, in contemporary South Africa, tragic murders and violence related to witchcraft accusations are reported (Ralushai eds. 1996). I had to be aware of the risk that could arise from revealing stories and experiences of witchcraft in the targeted village and try not to expose people to any further physical and social violence. Asking questions about witchcraft experiences and disputes could also cause suffering to people who were implied in witchcraft accusations and involved in disputes. I needed to avoid further stigmatization and trauma which could arise from the research.

For these reasons, I had to protect my informants' right to remain anonymous and their right to privacy, and to protect them from any future harm that might come from the risk of disclosure of their experiences. Prior to interviewing relevant parties I informed them of the purpose of my study and asked for their consent to participate as far as possible. Permission to take notes and record interviews were acquired to ensure my right to use them for research purposes.

1.7 Limitations of the research

Several limitations have arisen in the course of this study. Firstly, this study cannot be considered a thorough investigation of the witchcraft belief system in the Bafokeng Nation. The number of informants is relatively small and they only reside in one part of the Bafokeng Nation. The findings should not be over generalized.

Secondly, I found myself more comfortable with female informants when asking about witchcraft related stories. Generally women were more open to the issue of witchcraft. Moreover, female informants tended to introduce me to other female informants. Although I tried to supplement the data with men's experiences, my data relies largely on female experiences and accounts of witchcraft.

Thirdly, this study does not refer to the role or experiences of priests of African Churches in the study area. As the field work progressed, it became clear that people not only consult with traditional doctors but also with priests over witchcraft related problems. However, due to limited resources I could not obtain much data to discuss the role and experiences of the priests on this particular issue.

Lastly and probably most importantly, limitation around communication arose. During the fieldwork, I was not able to conduct the interviews in Setswana, the local language. In spite of my three month crash course, my ability to speak and understand Setswana did not achieve a satisfying level so I decided to use interpreters in the interviews. Although I tried to convey my intentions and questions as precisely as possible, this might impoverish the quality of the data and cause misinterpretation.

1.8 Structure of the dissertation

In pursuit of the goal of this study, this dissertation is structured into five chapters.

In Chapter Two I closely review the anthropological literature that deals with witchcraft beliefs and then clarify the rationale and scope of this case study.

Chapter Three offers background information on the Royal Bafokeng Nation, where the fieldwork was conducted. The chapter reviews the history, socio-economical and political situation of this community, which are necessary in order to consider witchcraft beliefs and practices in their broader social contexts.

Chapter four examines witchcraft beliefs in narratives and practice. It firstly brings us a picture of witchcraft belief systems as an explanatory model revealed by villagers in the Royal Bafokeng Nation. Secondly, data obtained through observation as well as through recorded dialogues held between a *Ngaka*, or traditional doctor, and her patients in healing sessions are carefully examined. This chapter attempts to illustrate aspects of witchcraft beliefs and the way people bestow meanings on various situations.

Chapter Five deals with witchcraft stories heard as rumours or gossip. Unlike the stories and experiences which I examine in Chapter Four, these stories are not based on interviewees' own involvement. Even though these stories have less credibility, they serve to depict people's perception and fears of being victims of witchcraft. Among other gossiped stories, I particularly scrutinize a story of *Kgwenyape* which is an imaginary creature that exercises supernatural powers. It suggests some ways in which people perceive mines and wealth in the Bafokeng Nation.

The final chapter provides a concluding discussion of the findings. I analyze the witchcraft beliefs the Bafokeng people hold, paying attention to the social context the Bafokeng find themselves in. By doing so, I try to answer the questions of why and

how the Bafokeng hold witchcraft beliefs.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with an examination of previous studies on witchcraft. I discuss the approaches followed by various researchers and I categorize their accounts of witchcraft belief systems in order to introduce their major achievements and highlight the challenges they encountered. I then introduce the theoretical orientation used in this study to approach witchcraft beliefs in the Bafokeng Nation. In doing so, I aim to clarify that we distinguish between people's narratives (their expressions of witchcraft beliefs) and their actual practices. Finally, I discuss the aim of this study and its importance.

2.2 Embarking on a witchcraft study

The most prominent study of witchcraft belief systems was done by Evans-Prichard (1937). In *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937) he claims that witchcraft beliefs are an attempt to account for the incomprehensible via terminology, logic, and rituals shared by members of society. Turner summarizes Evans-Prichard's claim as follows "A major feature of witch[craft] beliefs is … that they are attempts to

explain the inexplicable and control the uncontrollable by societies with only limited technological capacity to cope with a hostile environment" (1964: 315). In short, Evans-Prichard views the witchcraft belief system as a logical thought process which enables the believer to find order in a chaotic world. However, it differs from the scientific thought of Westerners. His analysis of witchcraft beliefs was welcomed by academics and shifted the paradigm for interpreting those beliefs from being meaningless stories to being part of a logical thought process.

However Evans-Prichard's analysis contains contradictions, even in the Zande society. In the same book, Evans-Prichard reveals that Zande people seem to have so-called "rational" and "irrational" thoughts at the same time. According to Evans-Prichard, with the exception of witchcraft beliefs, Zande people see causal connections between various phenomena that are familiar to Westerners. Moore and Sanders (2001:6) point out that Zande people know how they develop certain injuries and diseases. They therefore follow the same rational thought processes as Westerners. Therefore, the witchcraft belief offers Zande people explanations of why a specific person encounters a specific problem at a specific moment. Moore and Sanders claim that Azande witchcraft beliefs therefore deal with the "Big Questions in life. … questions that called

for answers of quite a different order to the narrow answers 'science' could provide" (ibid).

The following question then arises: how can Zande people reconcile rational or scientific thought concerning causal relationships in the material world and a belief in witchcraft, which follows its own rationale, and sometimes contradicts scientific thought? Ashforth (2005: 113) claims that "[t]wo basic modes of squaring the circle of rationality and witchcraft – allowing rational people to have irrational beliefs – were developed by Evans-Prichard and have remained standard in scholarly approaches to this subject ever since". The logic behind witchcraft belief is rational, and consistent, but when it is applied to the actual material world, this belief inevitably becomes irrational if taken literally (ibid).

Evans-Prichard (1937) also offers the famous dichotomy between witchcraft and sorcery which has remained a key issue in witchcraft studies: intentionality in using evil forces and their taxonomy. Turner (1964: 319) summarizes the discussion thus:

> Witchcraft … may be unconscious and involuntary, though it is often intentional, inherited, and inherent. Sorcery is always conscious and voluntary, and is taught

and often bought. Witchcraft operates directly and sorcery indirectly through spells, rites, and medicines.

Although Evans-Prichard claims that his system for categorizing witchcraft and sorcery effectively applies to the Zande belief system, he is aware of its limitations. He cautions that the categorization is only temporary and sometimes does not fully correspond to the Zande's own taxonomy and should therefore not be applied to similar belief systems without serious inspection (Evans-Prichard 1937).

The application of the criteria against Evans-Prichard's scepticism results in a taxonomical discussion. For example, Moore and Sanders (2001:3) point out that anthropologists have often distinguished between witchcraft as "a mystical and innate power", and sorcery as "an evil magic consciously practiced against others, sometimes deploying objects, 'medicine' or 'tools'". However, Moore and Sanders (2001:3-4) see this definition as problematic because "witchcraft" and "sorcery" are both Western terms, and therefore cannot be used to interpret indigenous, non-western beliefs and practices. Geschiere (1997) uses "occult forces" as an alternative to avoid such misinterpretation. Although he is aware of the issue of interpretation, he only replaces

two inconvenient terms, namely “witchcraft” and “sorcery”, with “occult forces”. In other words, the problem of interpretation is put on the shelf.

2.3 The inventory approach

Some anthropologists analyse belief systems including witchcraft, sorcery, and traditional healing practices as closed systems and try to understand their logic. For example, Schapera (1955b, 1969) demonstrates how Tswana people define witchcraft, what kinds of cases related to witchcraft are adjudicated in courts headed by traditional authorities, and what kinds of sentences are delivered. In addition, he lists the major components of the belief system and categorizes them according to their features, such as different types of herbs, bewitching arts and witches. He therefore tries to present a comprehensive picture of the witchcraft belief system in Tswana society in the early 20th century.

Several problems are found in these early studies. Firstly, their informants are seen to be representatives of stable and bounded entities, i.e. the Tswana or the Zande people, and by doing so, they assume independent, isolated, autonomous, and bounded societies. Secondly, these studies postulate rules that organize seemingly arbitrary

beliefs and practices. By examining the elements of these beliefs, they try to extract the rules that underpin them. This approach is problematic for the following reasons.

Regarding the study of belief, a large proportion of the information has been derived from informants' narratives. It seems fair to imagine that there is variation with regard to such beliefs within any given community, and that there is a difference in knowledge between individuals concerning their belief systems. For both anthropologists and laymen, it is irrelevant to seek the picture of a belief system from interviewing someone who lacks the necessary knowledge. Although what "the necessary knowledge" is, is a separate issue. Therefore, information has been derived from influential role players in a community such as chiefs, headmen, senior male villagers, and traditional healers. These role players tend to have systematic knowledge of their beliefs or the ability to present it as a system. They tend to be relatively powerful and are therefore able to represent their interpretation as the dominant belief amongst ordinary people. The researchers therefore rely on these role players' assertive tone as a guarantee of the legitimacy of their information. The belief systems thus tend to be presented, by these role players as well as by anthropologists, as norms broadly held in a community by all its members.

By systematically formulating the structure of belief systems, earlier scholars failed to acknowledge the ambiguous aspects of these beliefs. Voices of powerful and influential people only represent certain aspects of such beliefs. The difference in knowledge, perhaps the difference in practice as well, between these elites and ordinary people could show us a range of understandings of such beliefs.

2.4 Structural-functionalism

Ashforth (2005: 114) in his ethnographic study of witchcraft in Soweto, South Africa, claims that "during the middle decades of the twentieth century … anthropologists studying witchcraft in Africa concentrated on the relationship between witchcraft beliefs and social structures, examining the strains introduced by 'culture contact,' 'modernization,' and 'development,' especially as they were evidenced through accusations and witch-finding movements". These anthropologists' approaches were influenced by structural-functionalism, a theoretical movement flourishing in British anthropology at the time that is premised on the equilibrium of a society. Although any society is full of contradictions, they postulate that an equilibrant force maintains the society (Hunter 1936, 1951; Gluckman 1965).

For instance, Mary Douglas (1967: 78-9) classifies African witchcraft beliefs into three categories: First, a situation "in which witch accusations between men fall within a very small-scale area within a complex and far-reaching social structure"; second, a situation "in which there is no complex superstructure and in which the effective decision-making sectors of society embrace only very small village units" and third, a situation in which women face witch-accusations. Douglas continues "we seem to have here the possibility of a classification of witch-belief systems according to how they engage with the social system, a classification which at the same time gives an index of degree of organization" (ibid: 79). In other words, she claims that there is a correlation between the witchcraft belief system and the degree of organization in a society. A question arises: what is the rationale for this assertion? Her discussion is based on the examination of the impact on societies of witchcraft accusations. In the early part of her essay she examines whether witchcraft accusation is the means to interfere in the order of society or not. In her discussion, the reason for the existence of the witchcraft belief is reduced to its alleged socio-political function. Therefore, her study of witchcraft is not an enquiry into the belief system itself, but a study of the impact of such a system on the society in which it exists.

Generally speaking, structural-functionalists such as Douglas ascribe the existence of the belief system and its practice to its function in maintaining the social order. Marwick (1952) discusses accusations of sorcery in Cewa society and concludes that the accusations enable the young ambitious Cewa to cast elders from positions of authority. His discussion makes it seem as if this is the reason for the existence of witchcraft. Functionalists present reasonable explanations for the existence of an irrational belief system and its application by ascribing the application to its alleged functions. However, this theoretical perspective has serious defects. First, the belief system itself does not necessarily aim to function as an apparatus for socio-political stability or instability. Second, there seems to be no direct correlation between the belief system and the socio-political system as structural-functionalists have assumed. Unfortunately, we cannot separate these two systems in order to examine the correlation between them. An actual society is far more complicated than any model of society and includes innumerable variables not often considered such as climate change, conflict with neighbouring ethnic groups and the influx of missionaries. Therefore, the postulated correlation between the belief system and the socio-political system cannot be established. Thirdly, these arguments do not distinguish between the two different domains, namely norms and action, as Ashforth (2005: 85) rightly points out. The

belief system itself contains non-observable norms as well as a social structure. These norms and structures are only revealed through the manifestation of the belief by a member of the society. On the contrary, a witchcraft accusation is a directly observable action. Therefore, one inevitably needs to bridge the two domains in order to see a correlation between them. But how is this possible? A member of a society, as I noted above, does not admit to such a correlation. Structural-functionalists arbitrarily assume that such correlations exist.

2.5 Structuralism

The structuralist approach postulates that culture is structured like language. Therefore, culture and belief systems represent people's integrated epistemology and world view. Levi-Strauss (1963) argues that the components of a belief system found among North American Indians, namely totems and corresponding taboos, are nothing but focus points for wider belief systems. He claims that each component of the belief system does not make sense alone, but it makes sense only in its relationship with other components. Taussig (1977: 152) summarizes the view thus:

> [T]his is to say that the significance of the individual terms does not emerge when they are viewed as having meaning as isolates, disconnected from other isolates.

Rather, as individual terms they are relational terms which embody the meaning established by the set of relationships of which any term is part.

Therefore, to pursue the meaning of, for example, a totem in a belief system will not be fruitful. One can only find its meaning in relationship to other totems. Structuralists also claim that by analyzing the structured system of the relationship between components of a belief system, one can obtain a picture of how people perceive the world and how they transform the chaos in everyday life into an ordered system of thought. However, people who hold these beliefs cannot recognize or present the system as structuralists see it. This approach mainly examines the ideology of the belief system and reinforces the rationality of an apparently irrational belief system. In other words, this approach claims that the same intellectual activities are involved in scientific thought and magical thought but they are projected towards different concerns.

2.6 The symbolic approach

Turner (1967) sees belief and ritual as a symbolic system that only makes sense to members of the society in which the system is held. Each component of the system

represents a norm to be followed or carries a message to be understood and is essential to the members. In the structural-functional framework, the study of belief systems and ritual merely served to illuminate the social structure of beliefs and its role in maintaining social equilibrium. However, Turner claims that the study of belief systems and ritual is valuable in itself by arguing that the cosmology extracted from the examination of symbols appears both in belief systems and ritual. In short, he reveals that witchcraft beliefs cannot be merely described in conjunction with social structure and function.

The symbolic approach also claims that the mythology employed in the belief represents various socio-economic impacts. Niehaus (2001a) tries to understand witchcraft beliefs in the broader context of social transformation, especially with regard to power and politics. In conjunction with political power shifts, the authority of witchcraft accusations has also shifted. Moreover, he discusses how radical social change resulting from Christianization, the influx of European commodities, and the decline of the subsistence economy that occurred under the Apartheid government caused transformations in the witchcraft belief system. Concerning the pervasive motif of witch familiars, such as zombies, found in the discourse on witchcraft, Niehaus

(2001a) employs an emic model which "explains the ideology or behaviour of members of a culture according to indigenous definitions" (Barnard 1996:182). He examines people's interpretation of familiars by conducting interviews and concludes that these witch familiars not only express "cultural ideas of power and personhood, but also cast light upon important social transformations in village life" (Niehaus 2001a: 61). In other words, he suggests that symbols such as witch familiars leave us clues to analyse social transformation.

Although the symbolic approach seems to offer a symbolic world from an insider's viewpoint, there is an obstacle to the symbolic approach. The model offered by the emic approach presented by Niehaus, "is not necessarily a model held consciously by indigenous thinkers" (Barnard 1996:182). Although a subconsciously held model offered by an anthropologist could be legitimate, it can also merely be an interpretation guided and limited by the anthropologist's background, standpoint, ideology, and so on. Furthermore, accounts of symbols, beliefs and rituals presented by indigenous people vary depending on the context in which the accounts are placed. The accounts are usually either inconsistent or controversial. Therefore, anthropologists inevitably have to choose which version is more relevant and trustworthy. Criteria to establish the

accounts' trustworthiness almost always attribute their legitimacy, if in question, to the anthropologists' expertise or as we have discussed above, to elites' systematic knowledge of beliefs. Therefore, the possibility of misinterpretation remains though the anthropologists deny or fail to mention it. The explanation or meaning discussed is therefore a conjecture which is by definition derived from an analytical model.

2.7 The modernity approach

Witchcraft studies flourished in the middle of the 20th century, especially studies focusing on witchcraft accusations (Douglas 1967; Marwick 1952; Schapera 1952, 1969). However, witchcraft studies seemed to go out of fashion after that. Relatively limited numbers of articles or books on witchcraft were published in the late 20th century. However, on the verge of 21st century, the topic of witchcraft seemed to make a comeback.

Jean and John Comaroff (1999) criticize the concept of modernity which inevitably reminds us of linear development from the savage to the civilized state and therefore blinds us to possible forms of "modernity" which differ from conventional modernity. Their standpoint invalidates the question: "why do people still believe in witches?"

(Ashforth 2005: 116). Living in modernity can mean living in a world with witches.

Although the discussions about the relationship between modernity and witchcraft caused a new wave of witchcraft studies in the 21st century, Moore and Sanders (2001) argue that there are similarities between the structural-functionalist approach and the modernity approach to witchcraft. The structural-functionalist approach looked into relatively small and allegedly closed societies and postulated teleologies of development. On the other hand, the modernity approach emphasizes the broad connection and interrelation with outside societies and claims multiple modernities. There are differences in their strategies, but both approaches see a relationship between witchcraft and social change, an influx of commodities, the emergence of a new form of economy and they attribute the increase in witchcraft accusations and the escalation of witchcraft violence to these changes. Therefore, neither approach is free from teleological thought about modernity. Concerning the problem involved in the modernity approach, Ashforth (ibid: 117) claims the following:

> A major problem with talk of modernity and witchcraft … is that writers in the modernity of witchcraft school (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997; Moore and Sanders 2001) often seems to want to have it both ways: on the one

> hand, they acknowledge the fallacies embodied in the old ways of distinguishing tradition and modernity, the ideological project of celebrating modernization as the eradication of "non-Western" cultural difference in the name of "enlightenment," while, on the other hand, they invoke the notion of progress in the guise of a multiplicity of "modernities," each arrived at on its own distinctive "path".

In short, even though the writers in the 'modernity of witchcraft' school are not free from teleological thought about modernity, they suggest that witchcraft beliefs and practices are meaningful for people in a globalized world.

2.8 Norms and actions

We have briefly examined the major approaches to witchcraft and related issues in anthropological literature. Each of the approaches has its own aims, achievements and challenges. Regarding the limitations of these approaches, it is useful to study the details and make use of them to cope with the challenges we face in this case study of witchcraft beliefs. Holy and Stuchlik (1983: 41) list the dominant approach to the notions, theories, and explanations of people's own reality, such as sorcery and witchcraft belief systems, as follows:

The first set refers to the societies or people studied by anthropologists:

1. The people observed may have satisfactory (to them) explanations, but these are rarely, if ever, true explanations, since the people have no adequate knowledge of the causes and consequences of their behaviour.
2. The explanations the people have are, in fact, devices "used to summon behaviour as much as to explain it" (Wilson 1970: xi). That is, their explanations are, in fact, legitimizations, rationalizations or justifications of the phenomena they purport to explain. Therefore, the people have no means of assessing the truth of an explanation, other than the observable or believed in effectiveness of a given behaviour.
3. The explanations the people have are particularistic and contingent, not generalizing; therefore, they cannot have any standards of critical discussion and refutation by contradictory evidence.

The second set refers to the anthropologists and can be formulated as almost a word for word reversal of the first set:

1. The anthropologists' knowledge is adequate, or can be made adequate, for true explanations, since it discerns, through observation and induction, causes and

consequences of particular events.

2. Their explanations are intended to account for phenomena – not to rationalize or justify their occurrence; therefore they can be assessed as true or false on the basis of the comprehensibility of that account, regardless of what the people observed take as right or wrong.
3. Their explanations are, or can be, generalized and independent of the phenomena explained; therefore, they are able to discover contradictory evidence, assess its importance and either refute the explanation or reidentify the phenomena previously taken as contradictory evidence.

The main problem, found in witchcraft studies, is that the rationale behind interpretations and attributions of witchcraft beliefs is unclear. Holy and Stuchlik (1983) question the legitimacy of anthropologists' explanations of witchcraft beliefs. They go even further by calling into question the adequacy of the study of belief systems, such as witchcraft, by arguing a phenomenological condition:

> … to inquire whether they are rational or not seems to us to be an illegitimate question, since it does not even try to understand the reality. It merely asks, whether it has, in our eyes, the right to exist. Moreover, such a question does not

> make sense: if we want to account for the existence of such a set of beliefs, we have to start considering them as rational, because irrationality cannot be explained anyway. So, though we might personally consider these beliefs irrational, such an evaluation is completely irrelevant to an anthropological analysis (Holy and Stuchlik 1983: 40).

The discussion above might suggest that witchcraft studies lead to an analytical dead end. However as Wittgenstein (1953) claims in *Philosophical Investigations*, we are inclined to invent a correlation between reality and something behind it – otherwise known as the cause – which enables us to think that a correlation is established although this practice only generates illusions. Rationality, as we imagine it, is the product of this practice. The question of whether peoples' beliefs are rational or irrational then seems to become illegitimate since both are the product of the same process, but differ from each other only in the application of language. If one postulates that irrationality cannot be explained as Holy and Stuchlik (1983: 40) argue, the postulate inevitably affirms that, ultimately, rationality cannot be explained either (Kapferer 2003: 6). Holy and Stuchlik (1983: 39) illustrate the bounds of rationality in their discussion using an analogy of a Zande anthropologist studying Western causality,

which is only rational to Westerners. His account of the rationality of irrational Western causality analysis might be acceptable to a Zande, but would be completely irrelevant to Westerners. This analogy shows us the limitations of the rational/irrational dichotomy. The question as to whether they are rational or irrational is therefore illegitimate.

However, the fruitless discussion of rationality does not mean that the study of so-called "irrational" phenomena is irrelevant. Inquiring into how people hold their beliefs and how they apply them in various social contexts still seems to be relevant or at least interesting. To do so, Holy and Stuchlik (ibid) require us to distinguish between two domains of human life: norms and actions. One of the reasons why most witchcraft studies confuse an explanation of witchcraft with the practice of witchcraft is ascribed to their conflation of these two domains. For example, most anthropological data are derived from two different sources: interviews and observation. The former deals with people's expressions, their accounts of belief and ideology, in other words. Actions, on the other hand, have to do with people's observable behaviour. These are two different aspects of human life. However, in anthropological studies the difference between the two different spheres—ideology and practice—is not always fully considered. As Holy

and Stuchlik (ibid) discuss, data derived from interviews is often used to explain people's actions and social institutions, although some anthropologists notice that the "reasoning" behind the action is contradicted by the action. For example, Evans-Prichard (1937) points out that Zande people do account for and act against misfortunes using witchcraft terminology, but also behave in accordance with scientific thought which is acceptable to Evans-Prichard. When anthropologists find a gap between the norms and actions, they employ one of the principles which Holy and Stuchlik (1983) point out in order to bridge the gap as we have discussed above. The most consistent presupposition is that norms, either explicitly or implicitly uttered (or merely guessed at), correlate with actions. Distinguishing between the two domains influencing human life, namely norms and actions, requires us not to carelessly assume such a correlation between them because, again as Wittgenstein claims, human beings tend to invent irrelevant correlations.

2.9 Discussion

This chapter has offered a brief overview of how anthropologists have attempted to understand, interpret and explain witchcraft beliefs and related phenomena. Issues discussed in these studies have been the rationality or irrationality of witchcraft beliefs,

their function to restore equilibrium in society, hidden epistemology, symbolic meanings of witchcraft stories and the relationship between witchcraft belief and modernity. However, flaws were found in how these studies postulated relationships between asserted or discovered norms of witchcraft beliefs and people's actions or social phenomena. In these studies discussions rely on data collected and deal with norms, but the norms are often used to explain people's actions. This confusion inherent in researcher's use of data causes this failure in logic.

Even if they justly avoid such a pitfall, they are forced to discuss witchcraft as a symbolic system, whereby people express their worldview. They therefore inevitably deal with witchcraft belief as discourse (Dover 2002). However, considering the fact that people continue to believe in and practice witchcraft (Ashforth 2005; Niehaus 2001a; Ralushai eds 1996) it seems obvious that witchcraft is not only about discourse but also about practice.

To avoid such pitfalls, we have to distinguish between two different aspects of human life, namely norms and actions. We therefore have to examine them differently. This strategy, in a study of a belief system, starts with an attempt to classify the data

obtained by interviews as narratives and data derived from observations as behaviours. These data can first be examined separately, and then be used to inquire into how people hold beliefs, norms and ideologies and how people deal with them. However, a difficulty found in this attempt at studying witchcraft, is that witchcraft and related experiences are rarely observable. They can only be narrated. We cannot directly observe witchcraft occurring or observe how it causes misfortune or disease in people's lives. This difficulty can be used as an argument to justify why previous studies of witchcraft needed to use people's narratives to explain their actions, leading to the assumption of a correlation between them or strictly limiting their arguments to its ideological aspects.

Although there is relatively rich accumulation of academic study on witchcraft, traditional doctors and herbalists, many of them do not concern the issues which we have discussed above.[3] Therefore, the following chapters, after introducing the social

[3] For example, Ashforth (2005: 56) claims that "[i]n the literature on traditional healing, the healing practices of contemporary *inyanga* (traditional healer as distinct from *sangoma*) are sorely under researched" and implies the richness of studies on the practices of Sangoma, a local term corresponding to "witchdoctor". Although we can find studies of practices of contemporary Sangoma (Ashforth 2000; 2005; Niehaus 2001a) as Ashforth claims, their discussions do not deal with Sangoma's actual healing practices. These discussions reconstruct the healing process by using people's narratives collected after consulting a Sangoma. These narratives on healing practices are not firsthand, but are already interpreted and sorted to be shared with others such as anthropologists. They therefore fail to capture the healing practices as actions and reduce them to narratives. Regardless of categories of healers, the actual healing practices are under researched.

contexts of the research site, attempt to separately examine narratives and actions related to witchcraft beliefs. In the discussion on narratives, we deal with people's narratives concerning witchcraft beliefs and actions. These narratives will illustrate how people, not only influential people, such as traditional doctors, but also ordinary villagers, understand and hold the beliefs. These narratives conflict in places but they show us how people hold the beliefs differently. Instead of recounted interviews this study employs data obtained through observation and tape-recorded dialogues held between a traditional doctor and her patients in healing sessions. The recorded dialogues serve as observed data since it can be viewed as behavioural data which was captured at the very moment the healing practices took place. By examining the dialogues in actual sessions, we look into an application of witchcraft belief in a particular social setting. We then look into rumours and gossips concerning witchcraft beliefs in order to examine how people collectively express their beliefs in witchcraft.

We are now able to illustrate how people act out witchcraft beliefs. This enables us not only to inquire into witchcraft beliefs in detail but also to consider the application of witchcraft beliefs in a broader social context. In other words, narratives of witchcraft illustrate relatively pure ideology. On the other hand an application of witchcraft beliefs

illustrates particular concerns about people's lives. These concerns are sometimes desperate, pressing, and urgent; therefore the more "practical" aspect of witchcraft emerges through an examination of them.

Neither is independent from the other or from the broader social context. As various anthropologists claim (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997; Niehaus 2001a), belief systems such as witchcraft beliefs are located within political, social and economic settings. For example, as we will discuss later, the economic and political circumstances in which people live provide some, if not all, of the obstacles that cause people to suspect the involvement of witchcraft. Therefore, referring to a broader social context and employing people's narratives and practices of witchcraft, this case study aims to explore how and why people in the Bafokeng Nation hold witchcraft beliefs.

Chapter Three: Background of the Bafokeng Nation

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have established that both aspects of witchcraft beliefs—ideological and behavioural—should be considered within their broader social contexts. This chapter, prior to looking at these two aspects of witchcraft beliefs, introduces the historical, economic, and social conditions of the research site, namely the Bafokeng Nation. It also discusses people's narratives concerning the state of the Bafokeng Nation, specifically its wealth, and frustration over the administration of the Nation and its people.

3.2 Historical overview

According to Mbenga and Manson (1999) we can deduce the Bafokeng's descent up to the Late Iron Age. For example archaeological research has revealed that the area now known as Magalies valley west of Pretoria had inhabitants from c.350 to 600AD (ibid: 8). After having experienced several processes of fission and relocation, direct ancestors of the Bafokeng started to inhabit the area now known as Rustenburg at the end of seventeenth century. By the mid-nineteenth century their capital town was

established at Phokeng and Luka. It was estimated that the Bafokeng people were roughly 3,000 in number in the 1880s out of the entire African population in Rustenburg District, estimated to be about 26,300 (Bergh 2005). On the other hand, the population of white settlers in this District was approximately 6,500 in 1886 (Bergh 2005). These numbers suggest that the Bafokeng nation, as a community, was relatively small in scale.

Although they were small in scale, various historical sources suggest that they established a firm political system led by a *kgosi*, or king. For example, in the history of struggle and negotiation with white settlers, we see the presence of strong leadership by the *kgosi*. For instance, Bergh cites several historical records concerning Mokgatle Thethe, *kgosi* of the Bafokeng and farms owned by him. He claims that "land had been allocated to the Bafokeng by white leaders/authorities in the pioneer phases of white settlement" although the land was later dispossessed from the Bafokeng by white settlers leaving the Bafokeng with no land by the 1850s and 1860s (Bergh 2005: 102).

The importance of the *kgosi* became clearer when a German missionary from the Hermannsburg Missionary Society arrived in Phokeng in 1867 and diamonds were discovered in Kimberley around the same time. Mokgatle, together with the

Hermannsburg missionary, Reverend Penzhorn, started to buy the land despite restrictions on African land ownership. The land formerly occupied by Afrikaners, including 33 farms, was purchased by the Bafokeng and registered in the name of the Hermannsburg Missionary Society on the understanding that the missionary would keep the land in trust for the Bafokeng (Manson and Mbenga 2003). Money for such purchases was collected from the wages of migrant labourers who Mokgatle sent to the diamond mines in Kimberley. Bergh refers to the chronicles of a mission station of Hermannsburg Missionary Society and claims that "Mokgatle sent 220 of his men to the diamond fields in 1877 to earn money … After their return each man had to hand over £5 of the money they obtained to Mokgatle" (2005: 107-8). Prices of the farms varied but from Bergh's (2005) article, it emerges that a farm cost between £450 and £600 at that time. In this manner, under the strong leadership of Mokgatle, *kgosi* of the Bafokeng, they purchased the land in the region. A study of oral histories of women in Phokeng also indicates active land transactions in those days (Bozzoli 1991). According to the women interviewed, some of their fathers at the turn of the 20th century owned farms in the area where the Royal Bafokeng Nation was later established (Bozzoli 1991).

Although the Bafokeng could obtain the land in the region, and the land was used for stock-grazing and for agriculture, it was not particularly fertile. Most of the obtained land was used for subsistence farming although there were some exceptions. For example, Bozzoli (1991) shows that in the beginning of the twentieth century the young people in the region, regardless of gender, were forced to migrate in order to assist their families financially. After finishing missionary school, many female pupils migrated to Johannesburg or Pretoria to work as domestic workers while males migrated to mining cities such as Kimberley to work as miners. Their narratives indicate that even if one owned a farm, the profit derived from farming was not enough to provide for a family.

The situation surrounding the Bafokeng started to change in the early twentieth century. In 1921, an ore-bearing reef, called the Merensky reef, was discovered in an area that extends across present-day North West, Limpopo and Mpumalanga Provinces. This discovery showed that there was a platinum ore close to the town of Rustenburg. Moreover, it became clear that most of the ores were on land purchased by the Bafokeng. This discovery subsequently caused chaos among the Bafokeng. A great number of companies and parties tried to profit from the platinum ore. Subsistence farming went out of fashion while many of the farms were turned into mining areas

(Bozzoli 1991). A large number of migrant labourers entered the region. Without the people's knowledge, mining rights were sold off to other corporations (Manson and Mbega 2003:27). Individuals in the Bafokeng Nation also attempted to maximize their profits through private contracts without authorization. To secure the rights over the platinum ore, the Bafokeng resorted to legal actions. As a result, the Bafokeng started to derive royalties from the mining companies. However, the amount was not so remarkable. Due to the complex extraction process and cost-ineffectiveness, the profit derived from platinum mines was not substantial.

Drastic changes occurred in the 1960s when Impala Prospecting Company entered into Notarial Prospecting Contracts with the Bafokeng and when Anglo-American Platinum moved into platinum mining in the Bafokeng Nation. Generally speaking, these two giants in the platinum industry, with their capital reserves and mining skills, brought about increased production and profits. Moreover, the fact that the site of the Bafokeng platinum reserves contains a fairly rare and valuable composition of metal increased the importance of the Bafokeng platinum reserves (Manson and Mbenga 2003: 28). According to Manson and Mbenga there was a struggle between mining corporations and the Bafokeng over ownership of the land since the 1920s. However, in 1999 the

Bafokeng and Impala Platinum reached an agreement to settle the long dispute. Since then the nation has received royalties from the platinum mining.

3.3 Present situation

The Royal Bafokeng Nation forms part of the Rustenburg Local Municipality and the Bojanala Platinum District Municipality. In the context of present-day South Africa, the Royal Bafokeng Nation is one of the so called "traditionally governed communities". The Royal Bafokeng Nation consists of twenty-nine villages and an estimated 300,000 people live in those villages. Most of the villages are undeveloped, impoverished and rural. For example, rates of unemployment and HIV infection are at least 30 percent (Cook 2006). These figures indicate that the Royal Bafokeng Nation faces problems which most contemporary black communities in South Africa face. Although the figures above indicate similarities between the Royal Bafokeng Nation and other African communities in South Africa, there certainly is a difference between them. Firstly, and most significantly, the Nation has accumulated considerable wealth from royalties. Impala Platinum and Anglo-American Platinum paid the Nation approximately USD 65 million in 2004 (Cook 2006). The wealth the Nation accumulates is not only massive but also tangible. For instance, in Phokeng, the capital

of the Bafokeng Nation, a huge civic centre was erected and a stadium, which is hosting not only South African but also international professional football matches through the year, was built with funds drawn from the royalties. Water supply, electrification, waste management, road maintenance and improvement and school construction in the twenty-nine villages has also been financed with platinum royalties. Therefore, most of villagers living in the Nation can experience the Nation's massive wealth. It should be noted that most other African communities in South Africa rely on local government to finance and develop such public services, however, the Royal Bafokeng Nation can draw on its own resources and to provide services and infrastructure. The following sections look into how the Nation manages to plan and achieve such projects, as well as the social impact of these expenditures on the community.

3.3.1 Politics

The Royal Bafokeng Nation has retained the office of the chiefship as many other Tswana societies have (Comaroff 1974, Schapera 1955a). The Nation exercises centralized political control through a system led by a *kgosi*, a king. The first born son of the *kgosi* succeeds to the chieftaincy in principle. The present kgosi is Leruo

Tshekedi Molotlegi, the 35th King of the Bafokeng. The king resides in Phokeng on the royal compound known as "Legato".

The Royal Bafokeng Nation consists of 72 wards and each of them has its *kgosana* (pl. *dikgosana*), a headman also selected through the rules of primogeniture. They are usually elderly or middle-aged men. The *kgosana* supervises everyday life in the ward. Death and birth certificates are issued by the *kgosana*. Meetings between the *kgosana* and the villagers in his ward are held regularly to resolve disputes and discuss villagers' concerns. From the viewpoint of ordinary villagers, the *kgosana* is the most accessible and an important political authority in village life (Cook 2006). For instance, disputes such as troubles with neighbours over land use or marital disputes are brought to the *kgosana,* though a verdict by the *kgosana* can be appealed. Many villagers join mutual aid societies for funeral allowances. Having a funeral or having financial support from the association involves acquiring the death certificate. Interestingly, *dikgosana* have the authority to issue death certificates. Therefore, without the *kgosana*'s acknowledgement, an important event in everyday life cannot happen smoothly.

Bafokeng Councillors are elected by each ward for five-year-terms and exercise political power alongside *dikgosana*. This political institution is relatively new. It was instituted in 1996, over the opposition of African National Congress, the ruling party in South Africa's parliament. The elected councillors and headmen form the Nation's Supreme Council. They meet six times a year to discuss and legislate budgets, projects, programmes, and policies of the Royal Bafokeng Nation. The president of the Supreme Council is the king, and the council is considered the supreme body for the Nation. Although the councillors are active and important actors in the political scene, villagers view them differently from *dikgosana*. According to Cook (2006) villagers see the councillors' role and status as ambiguous. Compared to *dikgosana*, their authority and support base are weak. Cook (2006) claims that villagers often see the councillors, who can act upon the Nation's policies and have access to resources but have no clear assignment, as a breeding ground of nepotism and corruption.

As in other communities in South Africa, Municipal Councillors are elected from wards within the Royal Bafokeng Nation. They represent the community in local government which provides primary and secondary education, health services, grants and pensions. Although these public and social services are essential for the Bafokeng, people do not

consider the Municipality or Municipal Councillors as crucial in the political scene. As we have seen, basic infrastructures such as water supply, electrification and road maintenance are financed and implemented by the Nation. The Municipality is less well represented in the daily life of the Nation. Therefore, the Municipal Councillors are not seen as reliable political actors who can represent villagers' interest.

Twice a year, a public meeting called *Kgotha-kgothe* is held in the Civic Centre in Phokeng. The *kgosi*, the *dikgosana*, the Bafokeng Councillors and ordinary villagers gather in a hall. Villagers, regardless of age, gender or occupation can join the meeting. The Nation arranges transportation to the Civic Centre from each village and encourages villagers to come to the meeting. In the meeting, presentations of financial standing, annual budget, ongoing projects and programmes, outcomes of past projects and policies of the Royal Bafokeng Nation are made. The attendees are entitled to address questions directly to *kgosi*, the councillors and other executive members of the administration. This meeting is considered the highest body of decision making in the Nation. Therefore, without the ratification of this meeting, no major decision can be authorized.

3.3.2 The Royal Bafokeng Nation and corporate governance

As we have seen, the Royal Bafokeng Nation receives royalties from mining companies. The Nation utilizes the royalties to develop the Nation as a sustainable and an independent entity.

The Nation has several corporations which are meant to contribute towards this goal in various ways. The Royal Bafokeng Administration (RBA) operates like a small municipality, providing basic services to the Bafokeng, such as street lights, electricity, and infrastructure, such as paved roads, public school facilities and water supply. It also provides tertiary-level bursaries to the Bafokeng. In 2005, 345 people received bursaries.

Royal Bafokeng Holdings (RBH) is an investment company responsible for growing and diversifying the community's assets. RBH manages the community's relationships with Impala Platinum and Anglo-American Platinum. In September 2006, the royalty agreement with Impala Platinum was converted into a shareholding agreement, such that the Royal Bafokeng Nation is now the single largest shareholder in Implats, rather than receiving a percentage of the company's profits from the mines on Bafokeng land. RBH owns a 50 percent stake in the Bafokeng Rasimone Platinum Mine, a joint

venture with Anglo Platinum. It also owns a significant stake in Merafe Resources, which mines chrome on Bafokeng land.

In addition to maximizing the profits from the platinum and chrome mines, RBH invests in South African companies. At the end of 2006, RBH held shares in twelve different companies in addition to their mining holdings. These assets were reportedly worth approximately R20 billion (approx. USD 3 billion) at the end of 2006.

To promote sustainable economic growth, the Royal Bafokeng Economic Board (RBEB) encourages entrepreneurship, athletics and artistic works. The RBEB promotes economic development in various sectors such as agriculture, tourism, construction and manufacturing. RBEB also sponsors training courses and financial management workshops.

These entities comprise the professional administrative bodies of the Royal Bafokeng Nation which is headed by *Kgosi* Leruo Tshekedi Molotlegi.

3.4 Discussion and consideration

The Royal Bafokeng Nation has emerged as a unique combination of a "traditional" political body and a highly modernized corporation. The Nation's income and ongoing massive strategic investment likely ensures it sustained prosperity. How that prosperity is used and distributed in the community is another important question.

As we have seen, part of the accumulated wealth is visible to the Bafokeng. Moreover, reports and discussions in the semi-annual tribal meeting, *Kgotha-kgothe*, and various media, such as local and national newspapers, continuously expose the Bafokeng to the Nation's wealth and profile on the South African economic scene. However, the wealth does not come down to individual villagers. As Cook (2006) claims, the Bafokeng encounter high rates of unemployment and HIV infection as any other African community in South Africa does. Redistribution of wealth has thus become an issue amongst the Bafokeng people. For instance, at the *Kgotha-kgothe* held on 10th December 2005 the issue of misuse of funds, corruption, and delay or failure of service delivery such as electrification attracted a great deal of attention from the audience. Furthermore, the nation has seen growth in the number of mineworkers residing in the Bafokeng Nation. The majority of them reside in hostels, informal settlements around mining shafts and in shacks in the backyards of the Bafokeng villagers. These "ethnic

strangers" cause tension in the villages (Manson and Mbenga 2003: 47).

The Bafokeng people feel that the wealth accumulated belongs not to the Nation but to them. This perception comes partly from the communal form of land ownership practiced in the Nation. The Bafokeng land, as we have mentioned previously, is part of a Trust and the Bafokeng people are therefore trustees, represented by the Kgosi. The question, then, is how should the Nation redistribute the profit derived from the land amongst the Bafokeng people. As we have seen, the Nation does not distribute the profit directly to the people, but rather invests it to maximize the profit and to achieve the goal of becoming "a sustainable and an independent entity". On the other hand, the platinum mines being operated in their neighbourhoods are packed with foreign miners. There seems to be little space for the Bafokeng. The profits derived from the mines are exclusively managed by the Royal Bafokeng Nation, staffed by well-paid professionals. These corporations have succeeded in maximizing the Nation's wealth but have failed to redistribute the wealth to the Bafokeng people. The *dikgosana* and the Bafokeng Councillors seem to be the only ones who can access the Nation's wealth and act on policies. The Bafokeng people therefore have become very frustrated. In fact, a mood of resignation is widespread among the villagers with regard to the Nation's ability to

improve the living standard of the Bafokeng people. Complaints such as “the Nation has money but does not know how to use it” are frequently heard in villages.

This brief examination of the historical, economic and political situation of the Royal Bafokeng Nation provides a broader social context in which this case study of witchcraft beliefs takes place. In the following chapters we take a closer look at people’s narratives and behaviour concerning their witchcraft beliefs.

Chapter Four: Witchcraft Beliefs and Consultations

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the social context in which the Royal Bafokeng Nation and its people find themselves at the very beginning of the twenty-first century. It described not only community prosperity, but also the poor distribution of that wealth, as well as flourishing xenophobia and frustration among ordinary Bafokeng. This chapter then begins to investigate people's narratives of witchcraft with this social context in mind.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, there is no one person who can authoritatively illustrate the norms which regulate witchcraft beliefs in a particular community. Furthermore, the attempt to pursue such norms tends to lead to fruitless discussion. It seems that we can only construct an abstract cluster of norms which is extracted from examinations of witchcraft stories and people's accounts of their visits to traditional doctors (*dingaka)* with extreme difficulty. However, if we assume that we can formulate such norms through a close examination of stories and accounts, it leads to the risk of backsliding to the very beginning of the discussion which would result in the classification of

witchcraft systems as closed systems. Furthermore, even if we could find a compromise in this endless discussion, there seems to be no foundation which could verify our interpretation because accounts of the same belief are often inconsistent. Therefore, we inevitably have to choose a single interpretation and somehow use it to represent the rest.

My strategy in this chapter is to follow people's narratives and accounts of witchcraft beliefs and closely examine them. I chose to examine these particular narratives because they are typical of the many stories I collected. These expressions about witchcraft might not represent the major components of the belief, but this will not lessen the importance of the examination since I do not intend to construct a model of the system. Rather than draw up a blueprint of the witchcraft belief system, I only aim to illustrate how people represent witchcraft beliefs and to examine these representations by referring to witchcraft stories and accounts of people's own experiences. I then take a close look at the consultation process between a *ngaka* and her patients as one of the behaviours surrounding witchcraft beliefs.

Before doing so I would like to distinguish between two terms used in the Bafokeng Nation, namely *moloi* ("witch") and *ngaka* ("traditional doctor"). Although these two terms refer to similar categories of person and occasionally overlap with each other, relatively clear definitions are found amongst villagers. "*Moloi"* refers to a person who exercises evil and secretive arts to harm people. However, how he or she acquired such arts remains unknown. On the other hand, "*ngaka*" refers to a person who exercises benign, yet secretive arts to solve people's problems. People often have an idea how he or she acquired such arts. It should also be noted that a "*ngaka*" can sometimes be accused of being a "*moloi*". However, a "*moloi*" can rarely be a "*ngaka*".

4.2 The source of power

Several major roads connect the city of Rustenburg to the Bafokeng Nation, especially to the major platinum, chrome, and granite mines found there. These roads also run through and connect several villages in the Bafokeng Nation, such as Phokeng where the royal compound and the Civic Centre are located and the village of Luka where several platinum mine shafts are located. If one travels from the city of Rustenburg to any village in the Bafokeng Nation, one will soon notice a newspaper, the *Daily Sun*, for sale. Roadside vendors and small shops everywhere sell the newspaper. The *Daily*

Sun is a popular tabloid filled with witchcraft stories and gossip and includes various stories from different parts of South Africa. For instance, the 24 April 2006 edition contained two articles concerning witchcraft. In one, a family from the town of Krugersdorp was alleged to have been threatened by a *tokoloshe*. A *tokoloshe* is believed to be a witch familiar that sometimes takes a human form, but it is also capable of transforming into snakes and other animals (Niehaus 2001a). The family reported that a *tokoloshe* had stolen their property such as shoes and had even threatened the family with an axe (*Daily Sun* 24 April 2006: 5).

During the fieldwork period, I often travelled to one roadside tuck shop where I had conversations with my research assistants and ordinary villagers, and frequently observed people reading the *Daily Sun*. The villagers often argued with their friends about the stories appearing in the *Daily Sun*.

When I introduced myself as a student who is interested in witchcraft in the Bafokeng Nation, more than one villager at the tuck shop recommended that I study the stories appearing in the *Daily Sun*. They claimed that almost all the stories appearing in the *Daily Sun* occurred outside the Bafokeng Nation so I should have gone to visit these

areas instead. They repeatedly advised me that there were few accusations or stories about witchcraft in their villages in the Bafokeng Nation. They occasionally claimed that they did not believe in witchcraft and had never consulted a *ngaka*. Initially these claims discouraged me, because I was eager to study local stories. But despite their denials of witchcraft in the Bafokeng Nation, it seemed that they were enjoying the newspaper stories and seemed to believe in their authenticity. When I challenged the credibility of these stories, they sometimes pointed to the involvement of police in these stories as a validating factor. However, they also claimed that "no-one can see witchcraft" and therefore no-one can prove or disprove witchcraft stories.

The villagers not only told me to go to other cities to study witchcraft stories, but also shared their opinions about the Tswanas' magical powers. According to them, Tswana people do not possess strong powers to bewitch people. My research assistant, who is in his mid-twenties, offered his opinion in an interview:

> The strongest tribe in South Africa is [the] Venda. They are the tribe who have been practicing witchcraft from [the] old days. [Arranged] from the strongest [to weakest witchcraft abilities], Venda, Shangaan, Pedi, Sotho and Zulu and Xhosa are the last. Tswana is the first from the last [i.e. second to last]. They are [very]

> much interested in Western culture. The Batswana [Tswana people] are not too much into witchcraft … We don't have strong [*di*]*ngaka* anymore … We mostly turn to other tribes, but not Batswana. [The] Batswana is the weakest and laziest tribe. They like office work, they like [to be in the] driver's seat. The Zulu say Rustenburg has no men, there are only women. They refer [to the] Batswana as women, who cannot fight … Batswana love business, they like to be bosses. They like high society life[4].

The villagers support the view that the Bafokeng Nation is not highly involved in witchcraft, and "prove" their point by arguing that the most violent and harsh witchcraft stories in the *Daily Sun* occur in other provinces. I asked many people about the strength of different tribes in practicing witchcraft and on each occasion, the villagers almost instantly expressed the view that Tswana people do not have strong magical powers. There were not only negative comments on the Tswanas' power in witchcraft, but people also frequently expressed a sense of mistrust towards *dingaka*. These doctors are supposed to exercise their knowledge of traditional medicine (*muti)* and use their mystical powers to solve various problems which people bring to them. The most

[4] From interview transcript with Paul (research assistant) in Kanana, 10 February 2006.

common comments about the *dingaka,* however, were that "they lie" and "they do anything for money".

These views notwithstanding, many traditional doctors are actively operating in the Bafokeng Nation. There are not only Bafokeng *dingaka*, but also Venda, Shangaan and even a Kikuyu doctor from Kenya. Traditional doctors who were born and grew up in the Bafokeng Nation, and are therefore classified as Tswana or Bafokeng, are reluctant to admit a hierarchical classification in magical power, but rather assert that there is no direct correlation between ethnicity and magical powers. However, they do sometimes admit that members of other ethnic groups have a better knowledge of evil arts and of lethal herbs as compared to the Tswana. Some doctors claim that the Tswana, on the contrary, are better at curing than attacking through the use of herbs, or witchcraft. For example, after interviewing a female doctor from Limpopo Province, Maria, my translator on that occasion, and herself a traditional doctor, protested that Tswana people's magical power is not weaker than that of other ethnic groups. However, after the denial she subsequently admitted that the foreign doctor had a more profound knowledge of lethal herbs.

On another occasion, Maria revealed that there are two fundamental prerequisites for being a strong traditional doctor. First, one has to have powerful ancestors. Second, one has to undergo ascetic training under senior doctors. She remarked that the former is more important than the latter. Traditional doctors I encountered in the Bafokeng Nation often claimed that they had powerful ancestors. They often expressed this by telling me that when they had travelled to train with senior doctors, the seniors were surprised to see such strong ancestors behind the students, making them wonder if they were coming to challenge the seniors.

When I persisted in asking about the reasons for the differences in magical powers or knowledge of herbs between Tswana and other ethnic groups, Maria offered her view on the matter. According to her, Tswanas, unlike other ethnic groups, live in urban areas and love urban life. Their inhabited areas are developed to the extent that there is no rich natural environment left. She claimed that the ancestors live in rivers and bushes which Tswanas are not familiar with anymore. Unlike Tswanas, other ethnic groups still live in rural areas where a rich natural environment is believed to be preserved. She claimed that the environment enables the other ethnic groups to have closer contact with their ancestors and this enables them to develop a deep knowledge of herbs. This

logic was also employed to account for the perception that non-South African traditional doctors have a profound knowledge of evil witchcraft and lethal herbs. This reflects their assumption that all non-South African traditional doctors came from rural areas and have therefore had the opportunity to accumulate evil knowledge of herbs and bewitching techniques.

A 'foreign herbalist', as he calls himself, came from East Africa and opened his office in the central business district of the city of Rustenburg. He claimed that "South African traditional doctors are weak in general. Doctors from Mozambique and Swaziland are the strongest ones in Southern Africa, though East African doctors, especially Maasai are the best." According to him, people who live in rural areas and have intimate contact with animals and plants, such as Maasai, develop a deep understanding of herbs and so become powerful herbalists or traditional doctors.[5]

4.3 Training to be a *ngaka*

According to my informants (including *dingaka* and one trainee), during training, the senior *ngaka* teaches various arts, including how to read the bones to diagnose patients'

[5] From interview transcript with Michael (Kenyan herbalist) at his office in Rustenburg, 17 March, 2006.

problems and how to prescribe herbs and mixtures of various substances called *muti*, according to the diagnosis.

Most of the Tswana *dingaka* I interviewed claimed that they received their training outside their native villages. The most popular place for studying amongst those I interviewed was Swaziland. Some of them travelled to several different places to receive training and qualify as *dingaka*. Many stated that they chose to study in a foreign country because of prophecies sent to them by their ancestors that indicated the place of training. However, a female *ngaka* offered me a different account. She claimed that applicants seek training outside their home villages in order to avoid conflict between them and their teachers. If one trains under a *ngaka* in one's own village, one would inevitably compete with the teacher to obtain customers after one qualifies as a *ngaka*. According to her, this causes serious trouble. The teacher and the former student will be jealous of each other and the jealousy will cause them to use witchcraft against each other. She claimed that in order to avoid this situation, one travels to be trained and leaves the teacher's village after graduation.

Regardless of their ethnic origin, doctors attribute the effectiveness of herbs and medicine (generally called *muti*) to the length of time they have been used. For example, on the subject of medicine for HIV/AIDS, Maria claimed that her ancestors must have known the disease very well and had effective countermeasures because in the past people lived promiscuously, but no one suffered from HIV/AIDS.

Some of the medicines seem to be based on a relationship of iconicity. For example, according to some of the doctors, the dead body of a dog hit by a car is used to cause an adversary to have a car accident. The dry powder of a plant which lives with other trees and grows up like a tumour is used to treat cancer and tumours in the human body. For an affliction that makes one's facial skin look like the hide of a crocodile, dried crocodile powder is prescribed. To develop a man-made zombie (*tokoloshe*) one uses porridge. The porridge must be mixed with special herbs and be kept in a matchbox. The porridge will begin to rot and develop hair-like black moulds. These moulds, together with the special herbs, start to become a human shaped zombie. After two to three weeks the matchbox starts to make a ticking sound. This means that the *tokoloshe* is complete.

Throwing bones is considered an important part of a consultation held between a *ngaka* and his/her patients. For instance, a female patient who has been suffering from having "birds in her head" claims that she had trained as a *ngaka* in several places and was taught how to read bones. She claims however, that when she came back to her home village after the training, she suddenly realized that she could not read the bones anymore. Since then, she gave up her occupation and never practiced reading bones again. Therefore without her ability of throwing bones, she is unable to act as a *ngaka*. Considering the training course to become a *ngaka*, these narratives clearly show how important bone reading is in the curing session.

Although interpreting the bones is taught during training under the senior *ngaka*, there are no written accounts, so the arts are only taught orally. There is no broadly shared method of interpretation either. Concerning the use of *muti*, a *ngaka* revealed that even if doctors used *muti* made from the same ingredients, its aim was often different. One doctor may use a specific herb to cure epilepsy while another uses it to treat septic wounds. They are both valid uses of the herb. She admitted that she had tried other doctors' methods when her methods had failed. In this manner the number of methods a traditional doctor knows is multiplied.

4.4 When one encounters problems

According to people's narratives, people consult *dingaka* to learn why they suffer from particular problems. Moreover, people seem to believe that accidents, such as car crashes are aimed at a particular person and motivated by malice. For example, a female patient revealed in an interview that her daughter was involved in a car accident[6]. According to her, a taxi suddenly went into reverse and ran into her daughter's car. The patient then suspected that witchcraft was involved. She claimed that "witchcraft was checking [i.e. obscuring] the mirrors [on the taxi]" so that the taxi driver did not see her daughter's car coming. Otherwise the taxi could have avoided the car.

Although most of the villagers I encountered claimed that they were sceptical about *moloi* and *ngaka*, some provided me with the typical procedure people follow when they encounter problems that they suspect are connected to witchcraft. According to them, one would choose to consult either a *ngaka* or a priest from the Zion Christian Church or Apostolic Church[7].

[6] From interview transcript with Franca (a female patient) at Maria's home in Kanana, 17 April 2006.

[7] These classifications are not exclusive. There are the doctors who claim that they are Apostolic traditional doctors. According to them, they first became priests in the Apostolic Church and then became traditional doctors so they claim to be Apostolic traditional doctors. In his study on

When one chooses to consult a *ngaka*, one is supposed to travel to a different village to have a consultation. A female villager in her twenties explained to me why people are supposed to travel for a consultation with a traditional doctor. According to her, there are two reasons[8]. First, people do not want their neighbours to know about their problems. If one has a consultation with a nearby traditional doctor, one would be anxious about information spreading amongst neighbours. Second, people believe that a truly powerful traditional doctor should know or be able to see a stranger's problems by casting bones, rather than through being familiar with the patient's circumstances.

For instance, a nurse who had a conflict with his wife claimed that he had consulted a *ngaka* he was unacquainted with at his sister's recommendation. The fact that his sister was also a *ngaka*, but did not want to grant a consultation regarding the problem is significant because this shows people's preference for *dingaka* they don't know rather than familiar ones. The nurse told me the following in an interview:

> Regarding the traditional healers, I want a person who does not know me at all. Who tells me the situation I am actually suffering from and the things which will happen to me soon. If these things would truly happen, you will be convinced. But

witchcraft in Soweto, Ashforth (2005) reveals that residents of Soweto also consult with traditional doctors or priests when they encounter problems.

[8] From conversation with Nancy (a female villager) in Luka, 9 March 2006

> I do not want a person who knows everything, such as my sister. If I consult with her, who knows [about] my problem with my wife, she's got to tell me what she knows because I talked to her about the problem before. It should not be like this. What is important is the fact that the doctor and I do not know each other[9].

A nearby traditional doctor could have heard of one's problems via neighbourhood gossip. By not consulting with these doctors, people try to exclude possible charlatanism and ensure that they receive dependable counselling. The female villager cited earlier also pointed out that the distance people choose to travel depends on how serious the problem is.

People who revealed that they had had consultations with traditional doctors claimed that they had been given accurate accounts of their problems in the consultations. The nurse claimed that he had been told by a traditional doctor that a female relative of his was bewitching him:

> The traditional doctor told me that somebody in my family dislikes my marriage and [that] that person was trying to destroy the marriage. The doctor then offered

[9] From interview transcript with Alberto (a nurse) at his house in Meriting, 6 April 2006.

> me a lady's name but I could not think of someone with that name in my family. The doctor was more interested in … issues at [my] workplace. The doctor pointed out that I was stressed out so that I did not sleep well. That was true.[10]

A female patient from Johannesburg had a septic wound on her ankle. She came to one of the villages in the Bafokeng Nation to seek treatment and to consult a *ngaka*. During the interview, she told me that snakes were causing the infection:

> You cannot see these snakes. You cannot feel them. It's just because it is witchcraft. This traditional doctor believes that the snakes came into me through the wound and did something harmful to me. It did. I never used to believe [in] such a thing, but now I do because I have been suffering and I know it is painful … According to this doctor's ritual, my distant relative from [my] father's side is bewitching me … I have never met her, but she knows me. She is my father's sister's child. She is my cousin … I wish I knew why she has bewitched me. This doctor may know why, but I have never done anything wrong to her. I have never quarrelled with her or exchanged words with her.[11]

[10] From interview transcript with Alberto (a nurse) at his house in Meriting, 16 March 2006.
[11] From interview transcript with Franca (a female patient) at Maria's home in Kanana, 17 April 2006.

If one chooses to consult with the priest of an African church rather than a *ngaka*, one does not necessarily travel to other villages or cities. My research assistant claimed that people tend to consult with nearby priests. He reasoned that because priests want to recruit new church members, they treat people who suffer from witchcraft problems respectfully. According to him, if the problems were not resolved after consultations with local priests, people travel to a bigger branch of the church for help. He had had a consultation with a local priest. He shared his experience with me in an interview:

> I saw a zombie last night. It was in human shape, but in size [that] of a one year old baby or so. He was wearing [a] headpiece something like that of the Roman priest and it was … dome shaped on top. I was not sleeping. I remember I was listening to Jacaranda Radio. I was lying on a bed. Then suddenly this thing came up. It climbed on to my bed. I then started to become [physically] weak, like [a] powerless person and my mind became a bit weak. I struggled and tried to turn over and face it. It was sort of black, but greyish creature. I tried to touch it with my hands, so by the time I felt it, it went back … not on the top of the bed, but on the other side of the bed. I then started praying and I could still brace myself when I prayed. When I prayed it moved out of the room. And after the pray[er], I remember I was screaming, but not so … loud because I had no voice and [had

become] powerless. Once it closed my bedroom door I became normal. I flipped the curtain to see if I could see something outside, but there was nothing.

After the incident I SMS[ed] my mother and she told me to go to a priest for a consultation, because if I went to a witchdoctor they might tell me lots of stories. But at least ZCC has some mission to tell me what's wrong. This church is good. We mostly turn to it for help. They are very helpful especially for the people who are not their members. Maybe they are doing it to recruit new members. I remember one day I went there. It was a normal church. I went to see the prophets. They told me the things that are really happening in my life. This time I will tell them my story then, after that, they will give me the treatments, like rules. I have to follow them until I am cured. I then have to return for other ones.[12]

According to villagers and the research assistant, it is quite rare to openly admit to neighbours, friends or even one's family members that one has consulted traditional doctors or priests. Revealing that one has had a consultation, (automatically indicating that one has a serious problem), exposes oneself to the danger of more harmful attacks

[12] From interview transcript with Paul (research assistant) in Kanana, 10 February 2006.

from one's enemies. According to informants, when attackers know one is suffering from their witchcraft they will continue the assault. An enemy can also exploit one's weaknesses such as physical disorders or troubles with partners or employers and attack one's weak points intensively by consulting traditional doctors to send more trouble.

4.5 Consultation overview

Almost all previous studies on witchcraft, sorcery and magical beliefs in Africa primarily postulate that people have faith in these beliefs. In other words, what is told is almost always assumed to be practiced without serious inspection. A question then arises: how do the believers believe in these beliefs? In the following sections, we attempt to illustrate how witchcraft beliefs are operationalized in practice. Firstly, I look at sessions held between a female *ngaka* and her patients. These sessions show people's actual behaviour when it comes to witchcraft. I then take a close look at dialogues held in these sessions. It should be noted that the dialogues are considered a source of practice in which witchcraft beliefs emerge as an observable form.

A female *ngaka*, Maria, throws bones in consultations with her customers. Maria describes the objects she throws as "bones", but the objects actually consist of various bits and pieces such as a coin, a domino, pieces of pottery, buttons, pieces of wood and also some real bones. These objects number between twenty and thirty. She often allows her student to throw the bones in the presence of her customers. The bones are put into a small bag and placed on a straw mat measuring about one meter square on the floor in her traditional hut next to her house. Before throwing the bones, Maria recites a short charm asking not only her bones, but also her and her customer's ancestors to give her insight into her customer's situation. After reciting the charm she takes the bones from the bag and holds them up with both hands about 0.8 meters above the floor and opens her hands. The bones fall and scatter on the mat. Some of the bones pile up and others roll off the mat. If the latter is the case, Maria fetches the bones and places them on the mat arbitrarily indicating that all bones are supposed to be on the mat. She also allows her student to throw the bones again if the bones thrown by the student pile up too high or run off the mat too drastically. Even when Maria or the student collects the bones that have fallen off the mat or throws them more than once, customers never complain.

When the bones are evenly scattered on the mat to her satisfaction, Maria and the student fix their eyes on the bones and concentrate. After several seconds, pointing at specific bones with a wooden stick, the student starts to interpret the bones (afterwards Maria stated that letting the student interpret the bones first was a part of the practical training for her student). According to Maria, each bone signifies a specific object such as a home, woman, money, backyard or car. Some of the bones have different meanings if they appear upside down on the mat. For instance, a “bone” - that was actually a silver coin - which signifies money indicates affluence if it appears right side up but indicates poverty if it appears upside down. Generally speaking, the spatial relationships between bones are crucial. For example, if three different bones, signifying a car, woman and water, are placed very close to each other or piled together as the result of a throw, one could see that they relate to each other and have a special significance. One interprets this spatial relationship of three “bones” and develops a story in which the three signified elements are involved. The interpretation of the bones mainly takes place as storytelling in which various actors appear.

After interpreting the bones, Maria gives her customer some form of treatment. It usually consists of traditional medicine, *muti*. She has hundreds of different kinds of

muti consisting of the powders of various plants, roots of trees, wild animals and chemical substances. According to her interpretation of the situation behind the diseases, misfortune and so on, Maria chooses specific *muti* and either smears them on the customer's skin, lets the customer drink them, or tells the customer to spread the *muti* in his or her yard. When Maria describes her *muti* she tends to insist that it is traditional although some of them are obviously exotic. She admitted that she had bought some powder from an "Indian alchemist". Some of the *muti* are supposed to be taken with human and other animals' urine such as baboon's urine[13].

I observed a number of consultations held between several *dingaka* and patients. Most of the consultations proceeded as in the example above. The basic structure of the consultation can therefore be loosely summarized as follows:

Ngaka throws the bones. The *ngaka* then "sees" the problems his or her customer has as well as the cause behind the problems. The *ngaka* "interprets" or "reads" the bones and "verbalizes" the cause of the problems in order to convey it to the customer. The verbalized accounts of the problems enable the *ngaka* to treat the problems with his or

[13] Maria admitted that traditional medicine for HIV/AIDS must be taken with a virgin girl's urine. A doctor in Rustenburg Provincial Hospital claimed that she had a patient who confessed that he had taken baboon's urine according to a traditional doctor's advice.

her *muti*. He or she can now choose effective *muti* according to his or her own knowledge of the treatment. *Muti* consists of various substances including powder of plants, animals and exotic materials.

4.6 The way people utilize the consultation

According to my observations, customers generally accept Maria and her student's account without hesitation. It seems impossible to determine whether the customers really accept the account. It is possible to imagine a patient consulting a *ngaka*, undergoing treatment, and then later refuting the account provided by a *ngaka*. But even in such a case, the person took the treatment which means that, at least initially, the patient had some faith in the *ngaka*'s diagnosis and found his/her treatment relevant. Furthermore, if one refutes the account offered by a randomly chosen *ngaka*, one often seeks a more relevant and appropriate account by visiting another *ngaka*.

For instance, a female villager, Christina, in her thirties who had been suffering from pain in her uterus told me that she had already consulted three different *dingaka* regarding the pain. She claimed that the first two had attributed the pain to one of her ancestors but had had no suggestions about how to treat her. She questioned the validity

of these accounts in our interview. The third *ngaka*, who was trying to treat the pain, was a traditional herbalist rather than a traditional doctor because he specialized in therapeutic herbs, not the art of throwing bones. However, he claimed that he knew which treatment to use for the pain in her uterus[14]. She also remarked that if the third treatment did not work she would travel to another city to seek more powerful *dingaka*. She said that she did not plan to see a medical doctor even if the third *ngaka* fails to remove the pain.

Her expression for not wanting to see a medical doctor is that she had seen medical doctors before she had consulted the first *ngaka,* but the pain did not disappear. Due to the previous failure, she doubted the effectiveness of medical treatment for the pain. She also claimed that she was unemployed, unmarried, and had no money to consult a medical doctor.

This last point, however, does not reflect the availability of medical care in the region where she lives. A medical doctor, who works for Rustenburg Provincial Hospital, a

[14] Relatively clear boundaries between herbalists and traditional doctors seem to exist. The former specialize in therapeutic herbs, but are not able to throw the bones. Therefore they cannot "see" the bones. The latter use both the herbs and bones. Generally speaking, herbalists do not undergo special ascetic training but traditional doctors must to do so.

level two governmental hospital in the city of Rustenburg, about 30 kilometres from Christina's home, told me that if someone is unemployed, she does not have to pay for most of the medical care costs in the hospital. The government of South Africa pays these expenses instead. Therefore, although the quality of the care offered can be questioned, Christina could have access to medical care without spending a considerable amount of money. Furthermore, she stated that she had paid R550 for the consultation with the first *ngaka* and R250 for the second. The consultations with a *ngaka* are thus not inexpensive.

This example suggests that even if a person doubts or refutes a *ngaka*'s account, he or she might not reject the system itself. The attempt to ascribe the patients' preference for traditional doctors over medical doctors for economical reasons also seems questionable.

4.7 Dialogues held in sessions

The example above illustrates actual behaviour regarding suspicions of witchcraft. By throwing the bones *dingaka* communicate with the patient's ancestors and deliver an account of what problems the patient is experiencing. The example of the female

patient Christina implies that the belief guides people's behavioural patterns.

In light of the fact that people consult with *dingaka* repeatedly, it seems relevant to postulate that their diagnoses of the diseases, misfortune and problems, are acceptable or at least convincing to the patients. Therefore, more questions arise. What kinds of explanations are given to the patient? How is the explanation delivered? As I have briefly mentioned, an interpretation of the bones mainly takes the form of storytelling. In the following sections we examine the dialogues that take place in consultations between a female *ngaka* and her patients.

These dialogues were collected between June 2006 and July 2006. I asked Maria, a *ngaka*, practicing in Kanana, one of the villages in the Bafokeng Nation, to tape-record sessions with her patients. I was not present at these sessions. I requested the *ngaka* to obtain permission from the patients for tape recording and the use of these recordings for my study in advance of the sessions[15]. As a result dialogues held between the *ngaka* and four male and seven female patients were obtained. The patients are mainly young

[15] Prior to the recording, the *ngaka* explained to patients that she was asked by a university student to record sessions for a research project. Only when the patients agreed, she tape-recorded the dialogues. In the session, the *ngaka* and the patients mainly spoke in Setswana. Due to my poor command of Setswana, the recorded sessions were translated into English and transcribed by a Setswana speaking research assistant.

adults or adults staying in Kanana or neighbouring villages.

4.7.1 An example of dialogues

Although the dialogues vary in content, it is helpful to cite an example to illustrate what the dialogues are like. The dialogue below is one of the recorded sessions. A male patient appears in the session. I did minimal editing to the translated transcript in order to convey the mood and information revealed in the session.

Ngaka is talking to her bones and throws them.

Ngaka: You know the bones speak what they see and I will speak what I know.

Sometimes your lumbar has some cold and it really troubles you. And at the same time your head becomes painful. Your eyes become painful and you become dizzy. The pain goes through veins around the ears. You become tired and when you wake up you feel tired too. Sometimes during the day, your shoulders become painful and they trouble you. You also complained about your genitals. The pain goes through your thighs and legs and becomes very painful. When you wake up sometimes your

heels becomes painful too.

Patient: It's true.

Ngaka: Your wife got amazing problems. There is a spear in your wife's life that is busy messing her life. There is a huge secret talking with your wife. On the third month of her pregnancy, she experienced some illness and pains as if she would have miscarriage.

There was a woman who gets to your house with some *muti*. Your wife stepped on them. That's why she's got sore feet. She's been bewitched to die with her baby in her womb. She will only give birth with the ancestors' help. In your family there is an ancestor who was a *ngaka*. He is the one protecting her. There is a pain in the stomach which troubles her and after that pain the pregnancy becomes painful. The pregnancy was bewitched so that during her delivery it is either the baby will die or will be born with some weakness. The problem is a woman somewhere. This woman is complaining about your wife. She is also seeing a man, *ngaka*. The problem is between her and you. The woman is fighting against you. Is there any woman that

you were seeing before? It seems like there is a fight between two women over you. That's why you get problems. They tried to fight with you with *muti* but your ancestors are very strong. That's why they now go to your wife. There is a fight and three of you are involved. The lady is trying to send her a stroke so that she can kill her. I don't know if you know what I'm talking about.

Patient: I had a wife before and she passed away. So I had started a relationship with her cousin and we are now parted.

Ngaka: Were there ever some complaints because I see a fight around you? You may say she is not complaining but it only results to find that she gets some. I see these women are alive. There is also an animal here.

[The *ngaka* talks to her bones.]

Ngaka: The one in your family who was a *ngaka* is using bones. Where are the bones? I will have a big problem with the wife of yours. They want her to be a *ngaka*. She needs to be an Apostolic *ngaka*. You see, these bones, as they stand like this,

show that you should stand and your shoes should be tied up. This big headache is caused by the feeling of being a *ngaka*. She should be a *ngaka*. She should go to school. Secondly, at her home there is some troubles but I won't go that much deep into it. There are some fights in her family and they affect her life. This family is easy. It should be worked against bad luck. There are some talks and fights that affect the family. And you also need to be worked. After you married the woman, did you drink *muti*?

Patient: Yes, I did.

Ngaka: When you met this one, did you both drink some *muti* together?

Patient: No, we didn't.

Ngaka: You should have drunk the *muti* that wash your bad luck away and the one who made you to meet her. The bad luck you have affects these wives. This woman is being tied up. There is also a woman who fights. She got some troubles that are combined.

Patient: So can you help me?

Ngaka: Where will your wife give birth?

Patient: At her home.

Ngaka: At your home, who is the *ngaka* who tied up (fortified) your home? Don't you know anything about the woman at your home that causes you some troubles?

Patient: No I don't know.

Ngaka: I can help her with the bad luck stroke. The problem is that she is going to give birth at her home and I don't know what they will do to her.

Patient: That one will be discussed by her parents. Maybe we will take her to other village.

Ngaka: I will help her but I'm afraid she will go and give birth at her home. It's a home of *ngaka*. If there is somewhere they might take her to give birth, then there is no problem. I could give her something to help herself. So you stay in a (name of place) in a location?

Patient: No, next to it. I stay in B.

Ngaka: I know where B is. She will call me when I'm here at 13:00 pm. I will wash her and give her some *muti* to drink, something to smear on herself but she won't come again after that. The drinkable one is for pains. When she comes to get some *muti* you must accompany her for some instructions.

Patient: How much is it?

Ngaka: R600 and after the birth she will come back here.

Patient: I will give you R200 now and month end I will give you the rest.

Ngaka: We only need trust. I can't work on her before you pay.

Patient: I know. I pay now.

4.7.2 General structure of the dialogues

As we have seen, the *ngaka* first throws bones and then starts to interpret them. Interpretation of the bones plays a very important part in a consultation. For example, one consultation started as follows:

> Maria: You have a headache problem that stretches the veins … and you become dizzy and it goes through your waist to the back of your spine. Your pillow becomes hot. Your heart beats fast and you become crazy. You feel like crying to ease the pain. When you sleep, you wake up tired and your lower back becomes painful and your urine burns. Your feet become painful. You talk alone during your sleep and dream some bad dreams and you forget some.
>
> Patient: It's true, but what I don't understand is that of my pillow. The back and lower back became painful. It's true.[16]

[16] From transcription of a consultation held between Maria (a traditional doctor) and Terry (a male patient) at Maria's tuck shop in Kanana, June 2006.

Although the dialogues vary in content, the procedure of the consultations I collected can be loosely outlined as follows:

> Maria points out the patient's physical disorders or social problems after throwing the bones. She then ascribes it to various actors. The patient agrees that the disorders or problems are truly troubling him or her but they do not always note if the ascription of the disorders or problems is acceptable. Maria, the *ngaka*, then asks the patient if he or she knows the actors appearing in her account. The patient, referring to the situation he or she has experienced, tries to ascertain who the actors are, but usually can only identify some of them. Maria keeps asking questions regarding the identified actors and develops an explanation for the cause of the problems. She then offers the means of solving the problem and states the price of the consultation, sometimes including treatment.

The price of the consultation and the treatment varies from a few hundred rand to several thousand rand. The highest price charged that I heard about was R3000 to a female patient to fortify her house against evil spirits. The patients can pay immediately in full, but it is also possible to make a deposit first and pay the balance later. Usually the manner of payment is announced by the *ngaka* at the end of consultation.

Interpretation of bones therefore accounting for the patients' misfortune is crucial in the sessions. Then a question arises: how are the misfortunes explained? In order to illustrate how a *ngaka* and her patients account for the misfortunes, I introduce common themes in consultations.

4.7.3 Partners or ex-boy/girlfriends as witches

> Maria: There is a woman who fights with you. This woman needs your money so badly. This woman had a certain relationship with you. There is a separation between you and this woman.[17]

> Maria: There is a talking between you and your husband. There is a separation going on between the two of you. When I look [at the bones] again there is a woman who swears at you and she is using *muti* from a man, a *ngaka*. She needs you [to have] an accident at any time.[18]

> Maria: There is a big gossip about you and your husband. There is a *muti* between

[17] From transcription of a consultation held between Maria (a traditional doctor) and Terry (a male patient) at Maria's tuck shop in Kanana, June 2006.
[18] From transcription of a consultation held between Maria (a traditional doctor) and Kelly (a female patient) at Maria's tuck shop in Kanana, June-July 2006.

you and your husband.[19]

In the dialogues there are various actors and stories which allegedly disturb the patients' lives. Among them, complaints and accusations about patients' partners or ex-partners are most frequently heard. In ten out of eleven recorded sessions they appear as the ones who caused the problems or who tried to bewitch the patients. In the *ngaka*'s diagnosis they often work with another *ngaka* who provides them with *muti* to bewitch the patients.

4.7.4 Money issues

Frustration over one's financial condition was heard in eight out of eleven sessions. The patients often complain that they work hard, but at the end of month they have no money left.

Maria: You are a working man, but as the days go by you have no money left. These women have bewitched you sometimes.

[19] From transcription of a consultation held between Maria (a traditional doctor) and Dollie (a female patient) at Maria's tuck shop in Kanana, June 2006.

> Patient: I am surprised. He (another patient) works, but at the end of the month we see nothing.[20]

The patients often ask the *ngaka* to "see" or "check" their work place. The *ngaka* then reveals that someone in their work place is trying to have them dismissed.

> Maria: I see some money troubles. You work, all right? You should take care of that money because it will cause you some troubles. It will [land] you in prison. There is a woman at your job. She is involved with a male *ngaka* and they are determined to trap you. They mess up your job. You are protected by your ancestors. I also see a man but he is a young man. You will soon be in a fight or quarrel. It will give you bad luck. They want you fired or imprisoned.[21]

Though many of the patients complain or agree that they suffer from a lack of money, almost all patients are assured that they are born with "money luck" which is supposed to bring them success. According to the *ngaka*, various actors disrupt the patients' promised success.

[20] From transcription of a consultation held between Maria (a traditional doctor) and Silas (a male patient) and his parents at Maria's tuck shop in Kanana, June-July 2006.
[21] From transcription of a consultation held between Maria (a traditional doctor) and Terry (a male patient) at Maria's tuck shop in Kanana, June 2006.

Maria: You have money luck. There is a female ancestor. She wants to give you some money. When I check your boyfriend, they have a spear. They want to kill you. I can see here you are getting tired. They want your pregnancy to be destroyed. They are using secret bad luck. It will always make you sick … There is a woman here. She wants to give you some money. Please help us to see who she is. You see, they are giving you luck, but the man ties things up. He is using *muti*. There is a man who tied up the money so that it is not to be given to you. He wants to take the money. He already got some of the cash. So if you can do a ceremony, you can get the money.[22]

Maria: You get money but you don't know what you do with it. Sometimes you don't even have money. This woman swears a lot. She needs your life. She tries to give you a stroke but your ancestors are strong. They protect you. I am surprised by the bad luck of you being hit by a car. They bewitch your husband so that when he sees you he gets angry at you and does not give you money.[23]

[22] From transcription of a consultation held between Maria (a traditional doctor) and Rita (a female patient) from Kanana at Maria's home in Kanana, 14 June 2006.
[23] From transcription of a consultation held between Maria (a traditional doctor) and Kelly (a female patient) at Maria's tuck shop in Kanana, June-July 2006.

4.7.5 The inherited gift of being a *ngaka*

The gift of being a *ngaka* is passed on from one's ancestors. This is often used as an explanation of misfortune. In four out of eleven sessions, the *ngaka* claims that the patients or their wives have to become *ngaka* because their ancestors want them to do so. The ancestors long for the patients to become *dingaka*, but the patients are unaware of their desires. The ancestors then try to inform patients of their gift by causing various problems in their lives.

> Maria: In your life you should have been working with people, but you don't do that. Your ancestors have given it to you. You should have become an Apostolic *ngaka*. Even your fathers are now offering you [the chance] to be a *ngaka*.[24]

> Maria: There is an ancestor in your family who needs to give someone the "*ngaka* gift". That *ngaka* should be a man …You were born with luck. You should be self-employed, not working for someone … Your ancestors are from a *ngaka*'s family so they are giving you a chance to become one. Now if you could do that you will know and see what you are working for. And I mean having your own

[24] From transcription of a consultation held between Maria (a traditional doctor) and Terry (a male patient) at Maria's tuck shop in Kanana, June 2006.

> family and buying nice things for yourself. When I say you play with the luck the old lady gave to you, I mean she takes away the luck you have.[25]

The *ngaka* often claims that the patients are too strong in their power of the gift so that other *ngaka* cannot treat their problems.

> … you should have been a *ngaka* already. Even if you go to other *ngaka*, they won't help you. They will turn you away. You are strong to be a *ngaka* and a very strong one. Some *dingaka* when you turn to them, they will tell you that they themselves are not the ones who should check up on you, but that you are the one who should check up on them because you have strong ancestors.[26]

4.7.6 Unexplained causes of misfortune in actual consultations

A *ngaka* usually points out key figures in the session, but does not always explain why the patient has been targeted by these people. The interpretation of the bones thus explains how the misfortune was allegedly caused, but does not offer insight to the

[25] From transcription of a consultation held between Maria (a traditional doctor) and Johan (a male patient) at Maria's tuck shop in Kanana, June 2006.
[26] From transcription of a consultation held between Maria (a traditional doctor) and Mila (a female patient) at Maria's tuck shop, June-July 2006.

motivation behind one's misfortune.

> Maria: There is a big problem. They are not bewitching your husband to divorce you. They are bewitching you to die. Anytime, if you don't stand on your own feet and fight back, they will send you a spear and it is sent with a man to shoot you or stop you with a knife. These things are getting serious. This lady does not want your husband to divorce you because with a divorce there are some problems. She wants you to be killed by someone especially by your boyfriend. He loves you, but is confused by all these *muti*. He does not know that things will be this rough. He was just cheating only to find that things will be tough. At his home they are also not doing good things to him. It's trouble. Your family needs to be worried, because the enemies bewitched your place.[27]

The explanation of the patients' problem as "read" in the bones is never straightforward. It often shows seeming inconsistencies. A single simple account of the problem is never heard. It is rather presented as chaotic fragments in which various actors influence the patients' lives. For example, the following explanations can be delivered in a session about the same situation: the patient's ex-boyfriend is bewitching her; her ancestors are

[27] From transcription of a consultation held between Maria (a traditional doctor) and Dollie (a female patient) at Maria's tuck shop in Kanana, June 2006.

passing her the gift to be a *ngaka*, but she ignores it; the ancestors then send some problems to signify that they have passed "the gift" to her; in the workplace some co-workers dislike her and are trying to chase her away. Such seemingly unrelated causes have appeared in each of the recorded sessions. The explanation is never clear, at least to me, instead is rather confusing and multi-faceted.

4.8 Discussion

This chapter has dealt not only with how the Bafokeng talk about witchcraft, *dingaka* and *baloi,* but also how the Bafokeng practice such beliefs. People's narratives illustrate how the Bafokeng people perceive, comprehend and express witchcraft beliefs. It is worth reiterating at this point that we can neither read people's behaviour out of their stories, nor construct a model of witchcraft beliefs from these few examples. However, quite a few things can be extracted from their narratives.

At the beginning of the chapter I mentioned two different categories, *baloi* and *dingaka* who have similar abilities but are seen differently by the Bafokeng. Through the examination it became clearer that people have certain faith in *dingaka* and their practices. This, however, does not necessarily mean people believe in individual

dingaka but rather in the training system and the authority derived from the length of time *dingaka* and *muti* have been in their lives. For instance, we have found that to become a traditional doctor, one has to have strong ancestors and undergo training under senior doctors.

I never interviewed any *baloi* because people never confess they are *baloi*. But this does not deny the existence of them. I simply could not find any of them. Although I could never interview *baloi*, grounds for their secretive and evil power and arts are almost always attributed to their secretiveness by the Bafokeng. As we discussed in the previous chapter, the presence of non-Bafokeng people in the Nation is tangible and attracts people's attention. The general attitude towards these people is not only negative but also generates conflict between the non-Bafokeng and the Bafokeng people. As we have seen, a rash of complaints about migrant labourers in the Nation and discourses of patriotism amongst the Bafokeng in the *Kgotha-kgothe* on 10th December 2005 shows how the situation has become acute. The presence of these non Bafokeng people in the narrative related to witchcraft seems significant too. Having low levels of confidence in their magical power, indicates that the Bafokeng think they are victimized because they are more modern. They are not good at bewitching

someone due to the loss of their traditional knowledge and magical power. They are thus vulnerable to being attacked by those who are more familiar with secretive arts and *muti* than the Bafokeng. Thus, when the Bafokeng have a festivity or chance of getting a job, they think they are vulnerable and become aware of possible danger. Traditional doctors originally from outside of the Bafokeng Nation are allegedly accused of using evil arts to bewitch the Bafokeng.

However, as I pointed out, the boundary between the two categories or rather their characteristics are not clear-cut. For example, according to villagers, people in the Bafokeng Nation often choose to travel far to receive training to become a *ngaka*. They prefer non-Bafokeng to Bafokeng as teachers. This norm clearly indicates that to be a *ngaka* one is supposed to go through secretive training under non-Bafokeng who are knowledgeable about traditional herbs and evil arts. Furthermore, people claim to prefer consulting an unknown traditional doctor to a familiar traditional doctor when they suspect the involvement of witchcraft in their lives. They claim that consulting an unknown traditional doctor assures that they receive reliable consultations and treatments. It seems that people try to ensure that they receive "reliable" training and consultation by resorting to slightly mysterious or exotic *dingaka*.

The sessions held between one *ngaka* and her patients examined above are obviously only one kind of "practice" relating to witchcraft. However, they capture crucial moments including the expression of people's trust in *dingaka* and consulting sessions in which accounts of misfortune, diseases, and other obstacles in one's life are offered. Among these explanations, it is worthwhile to note that money related issues and the employment of having the gift of becoming a *ngaka* play a major role. Most of the patients are assured that they can be wealthy. However, various actors such as co-workers, ancestors and ex-boy/girlfriends interrupt their success. Patients' claim such as "I worked hard but I see no money left at the end of month" clearly depicts not only their frustration but also confusion about the economic situation around them. A seemingly booming economy and the wealth of the Royal Bafokeng Nation, which does not have a clear channel to distribute the accumulated wealth to the people, put into stark relief the poverty of ordinary people who struggle just to find a job.

Explaining the misfortunes, problems and difficulties in one's life plays an important part in the consultation sessions. However, the explanations seem to be elaborate rather than clear and comprehensible to the patients. The reason that a particular person is

bewitched by another remains elusive. The *ngaka* reveals which individuals are to be blamed for evil schemes and their intentions, but they never explain why a particular individual is targeted at a particular time. It seems that patients do not necessarily pursue such reasons in detail. The patients only need to have reliable consultations which assure them a resolution of their problems. In other words, the patients are not always interested in the details of evil schemes affecting their lives but are instead eager to be "fixed" and assured of their success.

The examination of the dialogues between the *ngaka* and her patients illustrates one way in which people act on witchcraft beliefs. The transcripts show, as I discussed in the previous chapter, that there certainly is a link between social contexts and witchcraft beliefs. However, it should be noted that I have deliberately dealt with detailed sessions that relate to villagers' lives, experiences and practices of witchcraft beliefs. There was another form of expression of the beliefs, namely rumours or gossip. In the following chapter, I will look at such expressions of the beliefs. As Pels (1992: 170) claims, "[r]umour is rumour because it is passed on and because, in being passed on, it both retains and changes its shape". Because of this, the examination of witchcraft stories heard in such forms, will let us analyse collective expression of the

beliefs.

Chapter Five: Witchcraft Stories: Collective Beliefs

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I showed how the Bafokeng deal with witchcraft beliefs and respond to them in their lives. Examinations of actual consultations between patients and *dingaka* vividly depicted how the Bafokeng operationalize such beliefs in particular social settings. In the consultations, *dingaka* and patients attributed individual difficulties such as financial problems and breakups of romantic relationships to jealous parties. According to the dialogues, the jealous parties bewitch the patients to disturb the patients' prosperous lives.

Though such findings themselves are evocative, in order to have a better understanding and analytical discussion of witchcraft beliefs, I will now introduce some additional witchcraft stories collected in a village of the Royal Bafokeng Nation. These stories were told by villagers, *dingaka* and their patients. It should be noted that although it is almost impossible to identify what really happened and what did not in such stories, as Pels (1992) and White (2000) claim, rumours and gossip about witchcraft can be seen as a collective expression of witchcraft beliefs.

White, for example, discusses how the introduction of new European technologies/systems such as fire engines and blood banks in East Africa provoked witchcraft rumours amongst indigenous people during the colonial era. According to her, the fire engines that had no windows and operated day and night made local people suspicious of their secret activities. They gossiped that bloodsucking was their secret mission because firemen always wear red clothing and use red equipment. White concludes that witchcraft stories do not always originate with traditional beliefs but can sometimes be associated with new technologies and new social settings. Such arguments also show that an examination of witchcraft stories heard via rumours and gossip is as illuminating as individual experiences and stories.

In contrast with the dialogues between patients and *dingaka* where many of the difficulties individual patients face are attributed to jealous people, witchcraft stories heard via rumours and gossip in the Bafokeng Nation suggest the possibility of a more collectives sense of jealousy or resentment towards prosperous people and enterprises. One might even venture a connection between witchcraft narratives and the general state of socioeconomic insecurity. What follows is a sampling of some of these stories/rumours.

5.2 Jealousy seen in stories

Adam Ashforth claims that in Soweto, Johannesburg, people go through everyday life feeling afraid of the vicious jealousy that might motivate people to resort to deploying witchcraft against them (2005). Peter Geschiere (1997) discusses how rich city-dwellers in Cameroon are accused of using witchcraft to accumulate wealth by impoverishing villagers who are jealous of them. Hence jealousy—the feeling of wanting what others have, and resenting them for it—is a commonly identified feature of contemporary witchcraft narratives in Africa. In the Bafokeng Nation, jealousy also features prominently amongst the "reasons" for witchcraft. In one example, my research assistant, Paul, recently attended a relatively large family reunion in the village of Kanana. His relatives travelled long distances to reach the gathering and the family had homemade beer and a meal together. Paul's mother warned him afterwards that he should not have eaten the food served by relatives he did not know well because these dishes could have been poisoned out of jealousy. Paul claimed that his mother often alerts him to jealous relatives. But she does not tell him what they might be jealous about.

The following excerpt is from another conversation with Paul where he told me that he had seen a "zombie" when he was in bed and was petrified with horror:

KY: You saw a zombie and you think you are the target. What is its mission?

Paul: Like I said it's not easy for them to give up. They keep on coming until they get what they want. But I think if you are strong enough, they don't have to get to your yard. That's when you are really strong.

KY: Do you have any idea who sent that creature?

Paul: No, I'm going to that priest. He will tell.

KY: Is someone jealous of you?

Paul: I don't know. I'm going to get a job. Maybe they are jealous of me because I'm going to be successful. Maybe they are trying to stop me. But I don't know. It's just a guess. I'm not sure. … The worst part is that you don't know who the person [the jealous person] is.

KY: So, you are sure that it is witchcraft?

Paul: It definitely is.[28]

Paul's assumption, therefore, is that if he were to get a job and start earning an income, this would almost inevitably lead to witchcraft attacks on him, motivated by jealousy. A much more elaborate story with no specific source or "author" goes as follows:

A woman was bewitching children between five and seven years of age. She used *muti* to kill them, but the children did not remain dead. The children became zombies. After she had killed the children, she resurrected them from their graves as zombies at night. She then used these children to bewitch other children. At night, her zombies snuck into houses and pinched children's thighs. The children who were pinched got up and came to the woman with the zombies. One day people in the village reported her as the witch who had bewitched their children. The woman had a daughter-in-law who had told villagers that she had been cooking for many children, but that she did not know where they came from. She related that her mother-in-law brought them into her house. When the villagers

[28] From interview transcription interview with Paul (research assistant) in Kanana, 10 February 2006.

arrived at her house, her mother-in-law would not allow people to come inside the house. The villagers finally reported her to the police. When the alleged witch knew that the villagers had reported her to the police, she closed the door and kept indoors. Policemen arrived from the station and searched through the house. They found nothing in the house except bottles of Coca-Cola. The policemen were puzzled, but could do nothing and returned to the station.

The villagers believed that the woman and the child zombies flew to another village using brooms. One of the children had an abnormally large head and was recognized by a female villager in a different village. The child zombie was pinching the thigh of a child in order to take him away. The villager then went to a female *ngaka* and asked for help. The *ngaka* spread *muti* to capture the child zombie. After capturing the zombie villagers took him to the chief's court. He then admitted that the witch sent him there, that there were many of them at home, that they had stolen money from houses and bewitched other people. He also revealed that the witch transformed them into bottles of Coca-Cola. The chief reported the case to the police. Policemen arrested the alleged witch and took her to the headman's court. However, she denied the charge against her. The child zombie

> then claimed that he was working for the alleged witch, that she transformed the child zombies into bottles of Coca-Cola and that the police would find many bottles in her house. As he had claimed, the policemen found bottles inside the alleged witch's house. The policeman took the bottles to the headman's court and consulted the headman about how to deal with them. The headman told the policemen to take the bottles out of the village and burn them because the children were already dead and had been buried once. How the headman dealt with the alleged witch was uncertain, but the witch became ill and later died. She was the owner of a bottle store near the mine and sold beer to miners. She was believed to have become rich through her business.[29]

This story deals with a woman who was perceived to be rich and who owned her own business. It does not seem coincidental that she owned a "bottle store" and was accused of hiding her zombies in the form of Coke bottles. The villagers were able to give information on her background, including details of her business, suggesting that her commercial success is not unrelated in people's minds to her nefarious activities with kidnapped children. The general resentment towards this woman could point to several

[29] This was told by Maria (a traditional doctor) and her daughter at Maria's home in Kanana, 18 April 2006.

social issues: her ability to make money from miners—mostly migrant labourers of non-Bafokeng ethnicity; her status as a successful businesswoman, or other aspects of her socio-economic identity. A review of several witchcraft rumours suggest that women's relative prosperity often leaves them vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft.

Several villagers shared other stories involving the owners of small businesses. They said that to become rich, one has to kill one person a year. This claim seems to correspond to other accounts of the flourishing witchcraft violence in Africa (Ralushai eds. 1996, Geschiere 1997 and Niehaus 2001a). The accused parties are relatively more prosperous than their neighbours. It is actually this incremental difference in wealth and resources that seems to lead to witchcraft allegations, rather than extreme disparities in wealth. I could not, for example, find any stories linking the Bafokeng Royal family or the Nation's executives to witchcraft. In addition, the alleged witches are always neighbours of, or are related to, the accusers.

Another story illustrates this point.

> There was a big grocery store in Kanana… The owner of the shop was a nurse in the provincial hospital. Her husband was a policeman. One day a boy went missing.

> The police and villagers searched for the boy throughout the village. The owner of the grocery store was driving a car when policemen stopped her at a checkpoint on the road from the city of Rustenburg to Kanana. When the policemen searched the trunk of the car, they found the body of a small boy. When they found the body the owner of the shop started screaming "*Khumo*" which means "riches" in Setswana and also a common given name. The policemen asked her why the body was in the trunk of her car. She did not answer, but just kept screaming "*Khumo, Khumo*". The mother of the boy was Pedi and originally from Pietermaritzburg. She collected the body from the police station and buried it. The mother later told the owner of the grocery store that she had better not open her shop again. The body of the boy was later "fixed" with traditional medicine, but the hair of the owner fell out and her husband died in a car accident. The grocery store has been closed since then[30].

According to my informants, the owner of the grocery store was trying to use the body to attract customers to her business. Using a human body for this purpose is understood to be a common form of witchcraft. The owner was therefore alleged to be a witch.

[30] This was told by Maria (a traditional doctor) and her daughter at Maria's home in Kanana, 20 April 2006.

However, the mother of the boy was also suspected of bewitching the owner and the owner's husband out of a desire for revenge. According to the informants, her warning toward them is seen as proof of her involvement.

To the extent that prosperous individuals and owners of small enterprises are suspected of involvement in witchcraft in order to achieve their success, it seems safe to say that there is an economic dimension to witchcraft allegations in the Bafokeng Nation. In other words, people do not see such success as a result of hard work, determination, or even good luck, but rather as the result of un/super-natural forces that have been brought to bear on the quest for money. Is this the dark side of the principle of egalitarianism? Are people asking themselves: "I'm the same as you, so why do you have more than me?" Are people with greater resources seen as having abandoned a basic social contract, and having enriched themselves through immoral and antisocial behaviours? It is difficult to answer these questions definitively based on a limited number of witchcraft narratives. It can only be asserted that in a number of documented rumours of witchcraft, the accused are often women who have enjoyed a certain amount of success in business.

As I discussed earlier, there are two categories of people who perform secretive arts, namely *baloi* and *dingaka*. People are aware that to be a *ngaka* one goes through training under the supervision of senior doctors. But how to obtain and exercise the evil arts, in other words, to be a *moloi,* remains untold and secret. A *ngaka* can be an authentic and constructive member of society, but *a moloi* can never be. Are there, by analogy, acceptable ways of accumulating (and distributing) wealth, and unacceptable ways? What is important here is that wealth itself is not sufficient to provoke suspicions of witchcraft. We now understand why the Bafokeng Royal Family does not appear in witchcraft stories. As everyone knows, their wealth is derived from platinum royalties, and will never be exhausted. It is like magic. However, it is not witchcraft for the Bafokeng. The distinction between understandable ways of accumulating wealth and unknown or suspicious ways is important. In other words, the Bafokeng never get jealous of the Royal family because their prosperity is not a mystery. The following story helps illustrate this point even better.

5.3 The Story of *Kgwenyape*

Throughout the fieldwork, I collected about 20 stories. They were mainly told by *dingaka* or by groups of villagers. They are sometimes vividly detailed but many of the

stories go back at least a few years and consequently lack specific details. However, when I was about to finish the research project I encountered a fascinating and very contemporary story that might enable us to present an integrated analysis of the relationships between witchcraft beliefs and the socio-economic situation of the Bafokeng Nation.

On the 11th of March, 2007, I received a phone call from Maria. In our conversation, she urged me to come to her house in Kanana because the entire Bafokeng Nation was shaken by a story told by a woman on a radio programme. She indicated that this was related to witchcraft. When I came to her house on 17 March, she told me the following story:

> On the 10th of March 2007, a non-Bafokeng woman originally from Zeerust, a city in North West province, and who is a prophet, spoke on a programme on *Radio Mafisa*, a local station whose broadcast radius covers the entire Royal Bafokeng Nation[31]. According to the woman, when she was sleeping, her tin-roofed shack was shaken and she saw a *Kgwenyape* in a dream.[32] The *Kgwenyape* said to her

[31] The station's coverage is available on http://www.themediaconnection.co.za/Mafisa.htm (accessed on 27 March 2007).
[32] *Kgwenyape* is a mythical creature. According to villagers and *dingaka* its shape is similar to that of a snake or a dragon.

that every person in the Royal Bafokeng Nation had to give her two rand[33]. She would bring the collected money to a river and give it to the *Kgwenyape*. The *Kgwenyape* claimed that it had previously been receiving money from the platinum mines in the nation but that they had stopped paying it. Therefore, the people had to pay instead. If they did not, heavy thunder storms would destroy the whole nation on the 18th of March. After the station broadcast the programme, the whole nation became worried about what she had said. According to Maria, many of the villagers where the woman stayed gave her money as she requested. Furthermore, according to villagers I spoke to, the *Kgosi,* or King of the Bafokeng Nation offered her two head of cattle to prevent such a disaster.

On the 15th of March, the radio station called on *dingaka* and prophets from different villages in the Nation to throw their bones or perform divination rituals to determine if the woman was telling the truth about the dream and the *Kgwenyape*. On that day they concluded that the woman had lied. Radio Mafisa called her back to the studio but she did not appear. People who had given her money and somehow heard the result of the *dingaka*'s divination rushed into the woman's

[33] One copy of *Daily Sun*, a widely read tabloid costs R1.50 and one cigarette costs R1.20 to R1.50 in the Bafokeng Nation.

house in Ramochana, an area next to Kanana which does not form part of the Royal Bafokeng Nation, and urged her to give them their money back. The woman, however, refused to refund the money. A crowd then brutally beat her up and burnt her shack and car. She was then taken to Rustenburg Provincial Hospital. Afterward the South African Police Service interviewed her and she admitted that she had lied but never revealed where the money was kept. People suspected that her son who lived with her took the money because he went missing amidst the turmoil.

This story differs from the stories discussed above in several ways. First, although it concerns the occult and depicts people's beliefs related to witchcraft, the woman who spoke on the radio is not a witch, according to Maria and other informants. In other words, this is not a witchcraft story in the same sense as the previous ones. This story rather reveals another dimension of the worldview connected to witchcraft beliefs, that of mythical creatures with supernatural powers. Second, though the woman was attacked by the crowd for collecting money under false pretences, it does not mean that people do not believe in the existence of a vengeful *Kgwenyape*.

In the Bafokeng Nation, a *Kgwenyape* is usually believed to live in rivers or dams. It is a mythical creature that nobody can control, unlike a witch familiar such as the zombies who featured in previous stories. Though snake-like familiars are widely seen in Southern Africa (Niehaus 2001a, Green 1999), there is a significant difference between *Kgwenyape* and them. For example, Niehaus (2001a) points out that a snake-like familiar called *mamlambo* can be purchased from foreign traditional doctors and brings wealth to its owners. *Mamlambo* works for witches but witches cannot keep them under control for long. *Mamlambo* is too greedy and often "dominates, enslaves and destroys its keepers" (Niehaus 2001a: 56). On the contrary, in the Bafokeng Nation, and generally in Tswana societies, a *Kgwenyape* is perceived as being more autonomous from human society. In other words, people rarely control it. They can only ask it for mercy. More importantly, keeping a *Kgwenyape* does not always provoke witchcraft accusations. For example, Maria told me that she keeps her own *Kgwenyape* in a nearby river as other *dingaka* do. However, she does not consider herself a witch nor do other people. It can be said that *Kgwenyape* is a symbolic and mythical creature that is ambiguously associated with beliefs in nature, the environment, and supernatural beings.

Kgwenyape is believed to have tremendous magical power and to exercise it in unpredictable ways. According to popular understanding, a *Kgwenyape* wreaked destruction on the city of Klerksdorp, approximately 150 kilometres south of the Royal Bafokeng Nation, on March 4th 2007, less than a week before the woman spoke on Radio Mafisa about the *Kgwenyape*'s threat against the Bafokeng Nation. The Klerksdorp incident involved a freak storm that severely damaged parts of the city. Pictures on the South African Weather Service website had captions such as "Corrugated iron wrapped around a street lamp" to indicate how severe the storm was. According to the information on the website, the storm caused "at least one death and over 200 injuries"[34]. People in Rustenburg and the Bafokeng Nation would have been well aware of what took place in Klerksdorp a week earlier when the woman prophesied that a *Kgwenyape* was threatening to destroy local communities. It is therefore not surprising that people would have gladly paid R2.00 as an insurance policy against imminent and catastrophic destruction.

I am quite sure that this story spread far and wide throughout the Bafokeng nation and

[34] http://www.weathersa.co.za/Pressroom/2007/2007Mar07Tornado.jsp (accessed on 27 March 2007).

many people believed it at first[35]. It bears repeating that although people eventually exposed the falsity of the woman's claim, it does not necessarily mean they do not believe in *Kgwenyape*. The idea that a mythical snake had a financial relationship to the platinum mines, and that, when that relationship went sour, the people needed to step in to appease the angry snake, was plausible enough on the face of it that people readily paid their R2. People's beliefs in mysterious forces at work in the mines are thus established. When I inquired about the relationship between the mines and *Kgwenyape* in particular, Maria told me the following:

> In mines sometimes a mine worker goes missing. His colleagues search for him in the mine shaft. After the search people would finally find him on the verge of death with stab wounds to his chest. The wounds can be read—in other words they spell out numbers—and represent an amount of money. If this happens, the mine has to pay him the amount of money indicated on his chest. He would be paid and his ID would be stamped not to allow him work for any mines in the future. He has to stay at his home for a long time to come. The money he took would never run out. It would keep replenishing itself.

[35] For example, an entry which deals with this story is found on a weblog. The author is a non-South African who lives in one of the villages in the Bafokeng Nation. http://vapaakana.livejournal.com/13355.html (accessed on 27 March 2007).

Maria told me that the missing mine worker has kept his *Kgwenyape* at home for the sake of his success but the *Kgwenyape* wanted more money than the mines were supplying. Then the *Kgwenyape* used the mine worker's body to threaten the mine companies and steal the money. Paul agreed that this kind of story is widely spread in the Bafokeng Nation and people gossip about similar stories from time to time.

The *Kgwenyape* figure is thus employed to help explain the mysterious relationship between international mining companies, the territory underneath the Bafokeng villages and the people who move in and out of those spaces, sometimes getting paid seemingly large amounts of money, sometimes getting injured, and sometimes disappearing for good. The uncertain and inexplicable aspects of these activities and relations are then perhaps attributed to familiar supernatural figures, such as the *Kgwenyape*. Given that the *Kgwenyape* in the story was allegedly being paid off by mines, the link between this particular story and other stories becomes clearer. People or businesses that derive wealth and turn a profit amidst the general poverty of the Bafokeng villages must be using supernatural means or forces to do so. Witchcraft and mythical creatures become as good an explanation as any.

5.4 Discussion

In the conversations between Maria, the *ngaka* and her patients, she often concluded that some jealous party is bewitching her patients, skimming the patients' money and preventing the patients from achieving their rightful success. The patients have particular and pressing problems such as financial difficulties and partners' unfaithfulness. Their problems are unlike gossiped stories that lack such reality. As we have established, success in small business often provokes suspicion of involvement of witchcraft amongst neighbours. In other words, suspicion and the ambiguous relationship between success and witchcraft are claimed in the stories. Moreover, it is reasonable to think that many villagers have been exposed to such stories via various media such as tabloid newspapers and gossip. Ambiguity and allegory found in gossiped witchcraft stories which villagers are familiar with may make *dingaka*'s accounts somehow trustworthy or credible to their patients.

Throughout our examination of witchcraft stories, it becomes clear that the accumulation of wealth under circumstances that are considered unclear or unjust provokes witchcraft accusations in many cases. People who get jealous of relatively better-off neighbours such as owners of small shops suspect the involvement of

witchcraft in the process of profit-making. This same explanatory framework may even apply to the recent story of *Kgwenyape.* Although the story does not deal with witchcraft in a narrow sense, it reveals how a worldview, witchcraft beliefs, and perceptions of wealth interact.

What is important in the *Kgwenyape* story is that we can read people's suspicions and uneasiness about mines that are operating in the Nation. As we have discussed, the mysterious process of turning dirt into fabulous sums of money could be one of the major reasons why people are suspicious of what is occurring underground. In addition to this, the actual working style required of miners, such as night shifts and activities in underground caves is mysterious at best, and sinister at worst, in the eyes of those who have never been exposed to mining methods. This reminds us of Luise White's (2000) discussion of vampire stories in Africa. As she claims, new technologies that challenge people's imaginations provoke witchcraft suspicions or the involvement of occult forces. Night shifts, unfamiliar working styles and new technologies can be experienced as very threatening to people and foster stories such as that of the *Kgwenyape*. The important thing to remember is that witchcraft beliefs are adapted to the present context, and can even help explain changes that are going on. As we have

seen, the objects of people's jealousy as expressed in some of these widespread witchcraft stories are individuals. However, in the story of *Kgwenyape* it becomes a collective entity, namely the mining industry. Economic and social shifts, the introduction of new technologies and industries, and potentially the influx of new identity groups, are all changes that might be understood through explanatory frameworks that involve the occult, and specifically witchcraft.

I have examined witchcraft stories as expressions of collective beliefs or rather anxieties. This not only illustrates how such stories express people's frustration and suspicion about other's success but also vividly depicts that there is a transition in its objectives. In other words, people's suspicion and jealousy are now directed not only to better-off individuals but also to enterprises. In the following Chapter, I will present an analysis of the witchcraft beliefs the Bafokeng hold. The meaningful relationship between wealth and witchcraft beliefs in the Bafokeng Nation emerges as a highly significant aspect of contemporary life in this South African community.

Chapter Six: An Analysis and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

I have firstly examined social settings in which people in the Royal Bafokeng Nation find themselves. After giving background information on the Nation, I secondly looked into narratives of witchcraft beliefs and actual practices that operationalize those beliefs. Therefore, we have firstly established how individuals hold the beliefs and act on them in practice. These examinations of people's narratives and practice of witchcraft beliefs have dealt with different levels of the beliefs. I also examined witchcraft stories as collective expressions of these beliefs. Gossip and rumours about witchcraft vividly depict how people use these explanatory frameworks to express their suspicions about those around them who achieve success.

In this Chapter I try to integrate the discussions in previous chapters and present an overall analysis of the witchcraft beliefs that the Bafokeng people hold. By doing so, I will try to answer the question: how and why do people in the Bafokeng Nation hold witchcraft beliefs.

6.2 Summary of the discussion

As we have seen, the Royal Bafokeng Nation faces certain obstacles in achieving its goal of establishing a sustainable and an independent community. Among the obstacles, people claim that the presence of migrant labourers and the Nation's poor capacity to distribute accumulated wealth to ordinary people are major problems. The Nation's tangible wealth is a source of frustration to most Bafokeng people. There is no doubt about the Nation's development and wealth. Compared to any other black community in South Africa, its success is obvious. As we have seen, tangible projects such as road construction, the erection of a massive stadium and annual accounting reports released by the Nation make the Bafokeng people aware of "their" success. The presence of expanding platinum mines attracts a great number of non-Bafokeng people. As seen in the *Kgotha-kgothe* held on 10 December 2005 people publicly accuse such non-Bafokeng people of stealing jobs and resources.

In people's own narratives, the Bafokeng are urbanized and have therefore lost their traditional knowledge, such as how to produce and use strong and lethal traditional herbs. Moreover, some Bafokeng perceive themselves as victims. They are not good at witchcraft due to the loss of their traditional knowledge and magical power and are

therefore vulnerable to being attacked by those who are jealous of the Bafokeng. Such representations of themselves clearly reflect a specific political and economic context in the Bafokeng Nation. At the same time xenophobia amongst the Bafokeng emerges in people's narratives concerning witchcraft. Non-Bafokeng people in the Nation are represented as evil, eager to use witchcraft and moreover knowledgeable and strong in magical power.

The contrast between the Bafokeng and non-Bafokeng illustrates that the Bafokeng perceive themselves as law-abiding and non-Bafokeng as evil and unjust. A similar but ambiguous and complicated contrast was found between the Bafokeng's representation of *ngaka* (traditional healer) and *moloi (*witch*).*

The fact that people resort to non-Bafokeng traditional doctors to solve serious problems reflects their anxiety about witchcraft. To have a reliable consultation one has to search out a strong *ngaka*. They presume that such a *ngaka* should know the reason for one's visit and problems even though they have not met each other. From such a claim we can read people's perception that urbanized, therefore, powerless *dingaka* from around the Bafokeng Nation are of no use. This perception is not only shared by

ordinary villagers but also by *dingaka* in the Nation who exercise magical power and knowledge of traditional herbs in order to treat people. *Dingaka* reluctantly admit that non-Bafokeng have a deeper knowledge of traditional medicines, or *muti*. Moreover, the Bafokeng who want to be *dingaka* have to seek a strong *ngaka* to have him or her as their teacher according to the prophecy passed down by their ancestors. They are neither supposed to visit a neighbouring *ngaka* nor ask him or her to be a teacher.

In people's perceptions of *dingaka* and *baloi*, the two categories overlap but are differentiated from each other. Though they differentiate between Bafokeng and non-Bafokeng *dingaka*, people have a firm idea of how to become a *ngaka*. On the contrary, to be a *moloi*, nobody could tell me how to obtain evil arts and knowledge. There is a certain gap in understanding of how they gain magical and secretive power and knowledge. What is important here is that both of them exercise such knowledge. As people presume that unfamiliar non-Bafokeng keep evil knowledge, they project a vicious and evil image of *baloi* by keeping the process of obtaining arts and knowledge unclear. In other words, to obtain legitimacy in exercising not only magical arts and knowledge, the process of learning must be open to anybody.

As people differentiate rightful knowledge in magical arts from unjust knowledge, they seem to distinguish rightful wealth and unjust wealth too. For instance, the Bafokeng claim that non-Bafokeng steal their rightful share from the platinum mining industry. However, they never challenge the royal family's wealth, which is derived from these royalties. They acknowledge the royal family's authority. Therefore, although villagers rarely receive direct dividends from the mines, they never see the royal family's wealth as unjust.

In examining consultations held between a *ngaka* and her patients, we found that many of the patients feel they should be succeeding, but that others are trying to block them. Neighbours, relatives, and ex-lovers are often accused of being greedy and of utilizing evil arts to steal the patients' rightful wealth. In other words, many villagers are anxious about such sabotage and are looking for countermeasures. What seems important here is that many of the patients do not delve into the reason why they are targeted or how others work on such evil scheme but rather desire to fix their problems eagerly. We may read how the villagers are desperate for success and a better life.

By studying the patient/doctor dialogues we saw how individuals perceive and act upon witchcraft beliefs in detail. In contrast an examination of rumours and gossip about witchcraft illustrated how people, as a collective, perceive and act on their witchcraft beliefs. A villager's claim that "to become rich, one has to kill people" indicates that success is somehow unusual because most of the villagers fail to achieve it. People suspect that successful entrepreneurs resort to witchcraft to attract customers. However, as people do not consider the royal family's access to wealth mysterious or unjust, they don't suspect the royal family of resorting to witchcraft to secure their wealth. It became clear that if people perceive someone's success as unjust or undeserved, they often become suspicious that those people have resorted to witchcraft. Wealth by itself rarely provokes such suspicion.

Jealousy is another explanatory framework employed to explain why people resort to witchcraft to prevent other's success. As we have established, rumours and gossip about witchcraft depict how people as a collective get jealous of others' success. They almost always accuse neighbours who seem to differ little from them, except with regard to the success of their businesses. It is not difficult to picture how villagers firstly get confused by the neighbours' success, and secondly get jealous of the success due to a

lack of distinction between the success and themselves.

The story of *Kgwenyape* vividly depicted how deeply the Bafokeng believe in witchcraft and supernatural powers. Moreover, it revealed people's suspicions and uneasiness about the mines that are operating in the Nation. As we have discussed, the mysterious process of turning dirt into huge profits could be one of the major reasons why people are suspicious of what is occurring underground. It should be noted that unlike other stories I heard, in the *Kgwenyape* story, people's jealousy is directed at an enterprise. Furthermore, it shows the extent to which witchcraft beliefs are adapted to the present context, and can even help explain ongoing changes.

6.3 An analysis

The involvement of witchcraft in the accumulation of wealth has been found in places such as Cameroon (Geschiere 1997) as well as in other African countries and Latin American countries (Taussig 1977). In Cameroon, Geschiere (1997) claims that people explain that the poor employ "occult forces" to stop others from becoming successful, whereas the wealthy use it in order to protect themselves from others' envy and malicious intervention. During the transition from a subsistence economy to a capitalist

economy, wage labour was introduced, and a proletariat was formed. During the transition period peasants in Latin American countries claimed that it was necessary to work with the devil to accumulate money from wage labour in mines and plantations. Moreover, the accumulated wealth resulting from making a contract with the devil is impermanent. Taussig (1977) points out that contrary to the notion of wage labour and money, established economic activities such as subsistence farming and its benefits are considered natural and fertile. He then argues that the capitalist economy, especially the component of mechanization, is considered unnatural, magical and evil by the peasants. According to him, the use of resources to acquire more capital, which forms the basis of capitalist economy, conflicts with local norms concerning the use of resources. According to these norms money should not be pursued as a goal.

As we have discussed previously, Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) interpret the flourishing of witchcraft in the late twentieth century as a manifestation of frustration against a globalized capitalist economy. According to them, uncertain and unclear mechanisms of globalized capitalism, especially in the way wealth is accumulated and distributed, make people imagine the involvement of magical power in its mechanisms. Similar to Taussig's (1977) discussion, they imply that the way the capitalist economy

allows people to accumulate wealth is immoral according to previously established norms.

Concerning the witchcraft stories collected, it has emerged that people who are thought to be better off, such as owners of small businesses, are allegedly accused of resorting to witchcraft which involves violence for accumulating wealth. Therefore, wealth is seen as evil, unnatural, and the result of magical intervention. This contrasts with the actual consultations I examined, in which nearly all the patients, regardless of their profession and financial situation, were assured of their potential to become wealthy, but were told that others were encroaching upon this potential by using witchcraft and magical power. It should be noted that in the consultations, the likelihood of accumulating wealth is seen as a gift passed from their ancestors, rather than the outcome of intelligence or hard work. Therefore, the blame falls upon those who interrupt and steal one's success, but not on the one who achieves success. The *ngaka* and patients claim that the problem is not that the patients suffer from a lack of money but that their potential to become wealthy has been interrupted.

It can be argued that quite a few people in the Bafokeng Nation perceive the process of what Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) call "global capitalism" as exploitive rather than accumulative. Although people suspect the involvement of witchcraft in the accumulation of wealth, when it comes to their own life they suspect the involvement of witchcraft in exploitation. The frequently heard complaint that "I work hard, but [at the] end of month I see nothing" shows that for villagers in the Nation, the "magic" involved in "global capitalism" is not that wealth is accumulated, but rather that the workers are exploited. Contrary to Taussig's (1977) argument, capitalism's secretive arts of impoverishing people under the mask of success seem to breed suspicion of the involvement of witchcraft in "global capitalism".

Even though royalties derived from platinum mines enables the Royal Bafokeng Nation to accumulate massive amounts of money, ordinary villagers feel hopeless when thinking about the improvement of their lives. They do not think the Nation is able to take actions to improve their lives. Furthermore, they are anxious about non-Bafokeng who tries to steal Bafokeng's wealth and jobs in the mines. In their vicinity, entrepreneurs somehow earn profits from their businesses. The gap between the haves and the have-nots widens. What annoys the Bafokeng is that they do not see any

difference between their successful neighbours and themselves who still suffer from poverty. Many of them ask "Why do I deserve this? Why do others deserve success?" and suspect that there is a secret to achieving success. In other words, they suspect that people resort to witchcraft to achieve success. They might have asked *dingaka* to sell them evil materials called *muti* or knowledge to domesticate zombies or other familiars. By doing this, ordinary villagers who differ little from others could be successful. Put another way, the desire for success amongst the Bafokeng and the seemingly unclear way of achieving it is one of the reasons why people believe in witchcraft. By attributing others' success to socially unacceptable means, their own poverty becomes less of a liability, and can even be seen as a virtue.

6.4 Conclusion

Contrary to the glowing and glittering images of the Royal Bafokeng Nation's wealth found in the mass media, the life of ordinary Bafokeng villagers is nothing but humble. Most of them are excluded from any share of the profits the Nation obtains from platinum mines and other strategic investments. There is no room for ordinary, unemployed and undereducated villagers in organized and highly capitalized corporations which manage the investment for the Nation. The *kgosana* (headman), the

most accessible authority to the villagers, and the one who can act on the Nation's policy, succeeds to his position through birthright. Bafokeng Councillors who can also act on the Nation's policy are elected in a democratic manner. To the villagers, any chance of accessing the wealth of the Nation is desperately slim.

The only realistic way to have a tiny share of the platinum mines is to get employed by a mine, or mining related company. However, there seems to be little space for Bafokeng people in the mines. These are full of migrant labourers that live in shacks around the mine shafts and in the backyards of Bafokeng. Needless to say there is little opportunity for females to get employed by the mining companies. The Bafokeng are being squeezed by non Bafokeng migrants, or at least that's how people perceive the situation. These foreigners monopolize the available employment opportunities and use evil knowledge of traditional herbs and arts to secure their jobs and earnings.

The wealth surely belongs to the Bafokeng people because they are the collective owners of the land. Technically, the villagers entrust their communal land rights to the *Kgosi,* but they are the rightful beneficiaries, although they have hardly received their fair share.

The situation of the Bafokeng people are thus very frustrating, and in such social settings people must find ways to make sense of their misfortune or confusion. People thus not only hold witchcraft beliefs but also operationalize these beliefs. By consulting *dingaka* and paying considerable amounts of money they not only have a means of resisting the obstacles they face but they can also increase their chances of realizing their promised future. It can be said that consulting *dingaka* is one of many strategies used to reassure oneself that he or she can be successful.

This case study has only dealt with limited aspects of witchcraft beliefs and therefore lacks insight into crucial aspects of the beliefs such as the use of *muti* and people's behaviours when they have malicious desires. From the available empirical evidence, such desires are only rumours, they are rarely visible to the researcher's own eyes. Consequently the scope of this study is limited. However, it has shown that the Bafokeng people utilize witchcraft beliefs to explain difficulties around them and to ensure one's success. Although the diagnoses offered by *dingaka* do not explain why someone is particularly targeted, they somehow persuade people to accept their explanations. The way people utilize the belief is therefore similar to Evans-Prichard's claim summarized by Turner that "[a] major feature of witch[craft] beliefs is … they

are attempts to explain the inexplicable and control the uncontrollable by societies with only limited technological capacity to cope with a hostile environment" (Turner 1964: 315). The difference between Evans-Prichard's claim and the way the Bafokeng people utilize witchcraft beliefs is that the Bafokeng resort to witchcraft beliefs not only to explain the inexplicable but also to ensure their own success. The highly capitalized and globalized Bafokeng context is a ripe environment for such strategies.

Contrary to the broadly shared expectation that witchcraft beliefs would decline with modernization (Moore and Sanders 2001:2), these beliefs seem rather to be continuously adapted to the present context. Platinum mining is highly industrialized and capital-intensive. Therefore, at first glance there is no apparent link between mines and witchcraft. However, as clearly shown in the story of *Kgwenyape* and related rumours that claim the existence of a secret relationship between *Kgwenyape* and the mines, people suspect the involvement of supernatural powers in mining. It is clear that modern things, as well as traditional things, can be explained through people's beliefs in witchcraft and supernatural powers. That is to say, people suspect such involvement due to unclear processes of creating profit in a context where ordinary people are often left behind. I therefore conclude that one of the reasons why the Bafokeng people hold

witchcraft beliefs is to help cope with hard-to-understand and hard-to-accept reality.

This essay has presented an example of how a society and its members form and shape witchcraft beliefs through detailed examinations of people's narratives, practices, and gossip. As I have stated previously, this study only covers certain aspects of witchcraft beliefs. However, I hope this case study can help us to understand how and why people believe in witchcraft in a contemporary African society.

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