FROM THE BODY TO THE WALLET:
CONCEPTUALIZING AKAN WITCHCRAFT AT
HOME AND ABROAD

JANE PARISH
Keele University

This article focuses on the way that Akan witchcraft invokes imagery of new forms of modernity, especially a feature of the post-colonial monetary economy, the credit card. Credit card spending encodes relations within a technological monetary network, and it affects personal relations at home and abroad. The article is based on fieldwork carried out in 1990-1 at anti-witchcraft shrines in the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana. It looks at young entrepreneurs who work in the large commercial cities, and who visit shrines in the Dormaa-Ahenkro district in order to buy protection from witchcraft. These young businessmen distinguish between two types of witchcraft and explain how a witch at home, as opposed to a witch abroad, does not have the business acumen or technological knowledge to harm their finances.

In recent anthropological theorizing, the association of witchcraft discourses in West Africa with 'traditional' thought and 'irrational' behaviour has been supplanted by the view that witchcraft signs and practices crystallize the experiences of the modern world (Auslander 1993; Comaroff & Comaroff 1993; Parish 1999; Shaw 1997). It is argued that modernity has injected post-colonial witchcraft discourses with a new dynamic, which reflects the ability of witchcraft beliefs to adapt to a modernizing nation-state and to new types of entrepreneurship (Fisiy & Geschiere 1990; 1991; Geschiere 1982; Geschiere & Fisty 1994).

Here, I argue that there is a relationship between witchcraft accusations and the idiom of the market, of capitalist production and the consumption of material goods, which reflects the impact of boom-and-bust global capital on the local economy (Rowlands & Warnier 1988; Taussig 1980; 1993). Global markets have been criticized for failing to respect the moral economy and the social orderings which govern the production and distribution of material goods in the local market. This conflict, I propose, between two moral economies is a defining feature of witchcraft beliefs in Ghana today. At stake is the privileging of sociality, the local reproductive relations subverted and distorted by the alienating effects of global commodification (Apter 1993; Auslander 1993). The incorporation of the domestic economy into the capitalist world economy has, however, given people new types of information about consumer spending and the ways in which conspicuous consumption affects personal and private relationships.

© Royal Anthropological Institute 2000.
J. Roy. anthropol. Inst. (N.S.) 6, 487-500
In these circumstances, witchcraft accusations and fears become a symptom of the ways in which the values attributed to capitalist accumulation and the possession of material goods generate friction in the local moral economy (Parry & Bloch 1989). Witches are those people, often women but sometimes men, who express envy towards kin who are materially better off (Fisiy & Geschiere 1991; Geschiere & Fisy 1994; Meyer 1995).

Some time ago, Nadel (1952) showed how economic tensions among the Nupe in Northern Nigeria generated accusations by men that successful women traders were practising witchcraft. Their husbands, who were often in debt to them, accused them of immorality and of secretly organizing themselves in a witches’ coven. In contemporary West Africa, the growing resentment between rural villagers and their urban relatives is indicative of such economic conflicts (Geschiere 1994; Meyer 1998). To the Nigerian urban dweller, the witch is symbolized by the greedy villager who strips city dwellers of their wealth (Bastian 1993). In the Cameroon, manipulating witchcraft accusations is a key strategy by which rural villagers make the urban elite honour their kinship obligations. And yet the urban elite are also credited with special witchcraft powers, their wealth being taken as proof of this (Rowlands & Warnier 1988).

My particular focus here is on the way that witchcraft invokes an imagery of new forms of modernity, focusing on one of the defining features of the post-colonial monetary economy, cheque and credit card borrowing and consumption. The article examines the witchcraft imagery and discourses of different types of modernity among young entrepreneurs who work in the largest commercial cities of the Brong-Ahafo region, and in Accra. Young entrepreneurs visit anti-witchcraft shrines in one district in the region in order to protect their wealth and prevent witches from siphoning off money from these entrepreneurs’ international bank accounts.

It was initially through friends of both sexes in the Dormaa district that I met the entrepreneurs who are my focus. They formed a loose social circle, which in turn overlapped with other wider social networks. It was through socializing with three members of this loose circle that I was introduced to their mutual friends. Eventually, I was able to build up my own network of friends whom I met on regular occasions. All of the entrepreneurs cited in this article had visited an anti-witchcraft shrine (obosom-brafô) in the Dormaa district and I interviewed each of them after they had consulted a shrine-priest (okomfo). Fieldwork also extended beyond the shrines to their everyday leisure pursuits in the bars, restaurants, and night-clubs of the large commercial cities of the Brong-Ahafo region and in Accra.

The Dormaa district

The district is an agricultural area in the west of Ghana which borders the Ivory Coast and is located in the Brong-Ahafo region. Dormaa-Ahenkro is the capital of the district and a major crossroads for the movement of people both within the district and between Dormaa-Ahenkro and the large cities of Sunyani, Kumase, and Accra. There is also a bus which travels twice a week between Dormaa and Abidjani in the Ivory Coast.
Anti-witchcraft shrines have always circulated in the district (Fink 1990; Parish 1999). Shrines can be divided into two main groups. One is dedicated to the atano abosom, regarded as the most ancient state gods who were pulled from the River Tano. The second are the witch-catching shrines (abosom-abrafo), whose gods are discovered in the forest (wuram) in water (nsuo) and in stones (aboo). These deities may be owned by an individual priest (okomfo-abosom) or, as in the majority of cases, by families (abusua-abosom). In 1981, Fink found twelve abosom-abrafo-wuram/nsuo/aboo. In 1991 there were ten shrines active in the district. Symbolized by a brass pan, the gods of these shrines are carried on the head of the male priest who communicates with them. The abosom-abrafo shrines may also include another group of gods, the abosom-abrafo-mmootatia (dwarfs), symbolized by small clay pots or brass basins, and named after the forest-dwelling dwarfs (see also Fink 1990). The gods of these shrines are not carried. Rather, spirit possession is aided by prayer, rattles, and the stirring of water. There were thirteen active mmootatia shrines in 1991, eleven of which were individually owned (okomfo-abosom).

By far the most popular shrines among young businessmen are the abosom-abrafo-mmootatia type, found in the towns and villages nearest to the border of the Ivory Coast. The shrines specialize in get-rich-quick and financial protection schemes and offer powerful talismans for sale, said to afford security from the evil actions of ‘competitors and the downtrodden’. A client is able to purchase a talisman (suman) made from powerful bush materials, such as a plant or herb, which is then fashioned into an object to be worn about the person. However, there is also a moral dimension to the preaching of the shrine priests. Evil money, it is claimed, falls from the tallest trees and clogs the most spiritually important rivers found in Dormaa town. Evil money consumes the souls of those who carry it in their pockets, people who disown the heritage of the district and who pursue their fortunes at the expense of the rest of the district; who rob the community for their own selfish ends, striking deals with the devil and bartering their souls away (see also Meyer 1995).

Paradoxically, the very businessmen who might be accused by this logic of making pacts with the devil travel from the city in order to visit the shrines in the district to get asuman. They buy these to protect themselves from the witches in their home villages who, they believe, are envious both of their ability to accumulate wealth and also of the consumer choices available to cosmopolitan young men.

There are two types of popular witchcraft feared by the young men visiting shrines. These serve to highlight an interesting perceived relation between commodification and the local and global scaling of types of knowledge. The expansion of circuits of virtual money and of imports and consumer goods permits contested witchcraft discourses to extend beyond national boundaries and to flow between Ghana and Europe. First, witchcraft is believed to be routed through local commodities. A witch (obayifo) was often described by the young, city-dwelling entrepreneur as a greedy woman, usually a local market trader, from the home town of the entrepreneur. She is secretly envious of her victim’s wealth and social status. She passes witchcraft (bayie) to him, often by means of a banknote which has fallen into his possession, or through sexual intercourse (see also Fink 1990). She often ignores the donations made
by an entrepreneur to his kin, and she unreasonably demands that more and
more financial investment be poured back into the local business community,
rather than 'siphoned off' from it. In the eyes of the young businessman, such
witches confuse 'good' wealth with that acquired through illegitimate means.
A witch may cause physical harm to the body of her victim if money is not
forthcoming. In such instances, however, the witch lacks the knowledge of
highly technological financial systems and cannot cause financial damage to
an entrepreneur.

A second theme concerning witchcraft involved kin who had migrated to
a European country and were working for transnational institutions. They were
suspected of having the tacit knowledge of monetary systems necessary to
engage in financial damage. This is a system that is out of reach of the
parochial witch at home. It involves an appreciation of an intangible global
network of investments and transactions and the distribution and depositing
of investments. Equally, it is a system whose market mechanisms remain covert;
the hidden hand of the market lends itself to corruption, deception, and sus-
picions of global conspiracy. The witch in these narratives is a man working
for a transnational company who affects the wallet, not the body, of the victim.
A sophisticated consumer of financial knowledge and living in a major Euro-
pean city, paradoxically his financial quick-footedness is also associated with
what is seen as the most provincial of places, the African bush.

Akan witchcraft and wealth

The philosophy of individual accumulation is not new in Ghana (see
the nineteenth-century stress on individual achievement and 'ways of looking
at money ... investment and consumption ... are still important determinants
of behaviour in twentieth century Ghana'. However, economic individualism
posed both a threat to existing relationships and an opportunity to those indi-
viduals who take advantage of a changing economic climate in order to invest
in new business ventures (see McCaskie 1981; 1986).

It was against this background of increasing wealth and social uncertainty
that anti-witchcraft shrines such as Kune and Senyon-Kupa flourished in colo-
nial Asante (Goody 1957; McCaskie 1981; McLeod 1965; Ward 1956). They
offered protection to the impoverished villager and the 'big man'. They
promised protection against evil magic, curses, and witchcraft and also pros-
sperity and financial protection against bankruptcy. Economic individualism
not only added to social tension, but flourished as new shrines offered to
protect and enhance the position of the wealthy individual who sought their
help (McLeod 1975).

McCaskie (1981) records how an anti-witchcraft cult such as Abirewa was
used to make the black man whiter, richer and more powerful. None the less,
today, 'power and influence are looked upon with a particular mixture of
admiration and suspicion, and many stories point to conflicts between indi-
vidual accumulation and egalitarian norms of reciprocity' (Lentz 1998: 51). To
be a truly 'big man' it is necessary for the entrepreneur to build 'moral com-
munities' (Lentz 1998: 61). The contradictory perception of the family as a
source of need during times of economic insecurity and a drain on the wealth of prosperous relatives is identified by Meyer (1995; 1998), who argues that money may be seen as both a blessing and a curse. Pentecostals in Accra dream of ‘big’ money from a safe distance through fantasies about satanic riches and witchcraft. In retribution, popular narratives tell of satanic banknotes put into the pockets of their intended victims to spirit their wealth away. Meyer (1995: 240) repeats the popular story of a businessman who was believed to have visited a fetish priest when his business started to decline. Once there he was required to undergo ‘certain rituals by way of a test, because only he whose spirit was suited would become rich’.

The presence of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ wealth which the shrine visitor reveals highlights the tense relationship between economic aspirations and the legitimation of such wealth, even after death, as in Gilbert’s (1988) analysis of the meanings attached to the burial of a Ghanaian millionaire. In other words, money may be liberating, but it may also be an expression of asocial tendencies in the local community (Parish 1999; Van der Geest 1997).

Globalization and wealth

The market transgresses the bounded autonomy of the African state. The businessman at the centre of Rowlands’s (1995) account of modernity and traditionalism in the Cameroon also has homes in Europe. The modern market also threatens older values and divisions. Rowlands (1995: 33) likens the body of the businessman to a piggy bank, the corporate estate of the lineage. From this body flows the blood and semen, and the financial prosperity, of the lineage. Entrepreneurs employ youth aspiring to be set up in businesses of their own, by providing paternalistic help. Although businessmen fear that those who work for them might attempt to cheat them of money, this is offset by the trust still vested in kinship obligation.

In Sierra Leone, both rural farmers and the urban middle class draw on the same images of affluent modernity, Mercedes, VCRs, computers, to describe the Place of Witches. Popular witchcraft commentaries use the slogan ‘politics of the belly’, a comment on the so-called leaching of citizens’ money by the state and its siphoning-off by affluent business tycoons into overseas bank accounts (Shaw 1997: 857).

Fardon (1995: 9) refers to the insubstantiality of global markets. This is especially evident in the use of credit cards by businessmen in Ghana. I argue that a dynamic relationship is emerging between kinship networks in Ghana and Europe, reflecting circulating types of knowledge that equate persons with things (see also Strathern 1995). One aspect of this relationship is the ways that systematized knowledge, implied by a global economic and social network that relies on a technological culture, cuts into local networks dependent on face-to-face interaction. The tacit knowledge implied by credit card spending is incorporated into post-colonial accusations of witchcraft. More particularly, the power of the witch at ‘home’ to harm those she envies financially is restricted by her knowledge of how technological financial systems work, and by her ability to interpret and reorganize information embodied in the credit cards possessed by young, male Ghanaian entrepreneurs.
Young Ghanaian entrepreneurs

Although Ghana’s economy is weak, there is money to be made by those willing to risk large amounts of cash in European business ventures. This is especially the case for some of the young entrepreneurs found in Accra and in the largest cities of the Brong-Ahafo region: Sunyani, the regional capital, Nkoranza, and Techiman, an important trading centre. In their late twenties and early thirties, these entrepreneurs are able to accumulate large amounts of money by importing consumer goods from Europe, ranging from cars to CDs, which they then sell to wealthy businessmen throughout Ghana.

All the young entrepreneurs I followed had initially been sent to live with a wealthy relative, who paid for them to go to school and then provided them with employment. Many spoke of the debt they owed these relatives, and they distinguished them from their kin left behind in their home village. It was their kin in the city who had taught them the skills necessary to succeed in business; their peers in the village were described as spending more money than they knew how to make. At the same time, they thought that they needed to contribute socially and financially, even if only infrequently, to their home village. To fail to make monetary donations towards worthy individuals and communal projects would, they felt, lead to attacks by witches upon them and on their benefactors.

These entrepreneurs said that they were able to look at the world differently from their predecessors, because of the greater and more sophisticated knowledge which they now possessed. The main focus of their narratives was on the Western consumer goods they bought in Europe, which were not readily available in Ghana. Often, for example, young entrepreneurs preferred to invest in fast European cars, which they then lived in, rather than investing in property that contributed little to the new ‘African swagger’, as one man put it (Parish 1999).

Daniel, aged twenty-four, was from the Dormaa district, but spent much of his time in Accra, where he imported car radios from Belgium. He returned to the Dormaa district to visit family and in order to conduct business in Techiman and in Sunyani. He had come to the abosom-abrafo because he wanted to ask the gods to make him a protective suman. He had recently suffered from recurring migraines, a sudden ailment for which he could find no cause. Additionally, one of his friends had fallen ill with a stomach ulcer, while another had discovered that his wife was infertile. He believed that a young woman in Sunyani, with whom he had recently had sexual intercourse, had inherited witchcraft from her mother, a prominent market trader. The witchcraft lay in the belly of a snake (owo) found in her vagina and was now wrapped tightly around his neck, strangling him slowly and squeezing his body of life. At the same time, Daniel often spoke in a contemptuous way of the earning power and spending habits of ‘villagers’. He spoke of how villagers did not trust what they cannot see with their own eyes, a suspicion that extends to keeping their money where they can see it.

I later interviewed the young woman who, although never openly accused of witchcraft by Daniel, was dismissive of his claims. She believed that Daniel had probably made many enemies in the city, largely because of his own dubious business practices. She spoke of how he owed a lot of people money, but still bought very expensive European clothes, which, he believed, made those less
fortunate than himself envious. He spent, she recalled, a lot of his time supposedly transferring money all over the world. But he failed, in her eyes, to give enough money to his family or to help his young relatives who desperately needed work. Indeed, it was highly probable, thought the young woman, that many men in Sunyani had entered into pacts with the devil (see Meyer 1995).

Isaac, aged twenty-seven, imported hi-fi equipment and lived in Sunyani. He had visited a fetish priest at a shrine both in the Dormaa district and in Sunyani in order to purchase a talisman to overcome evil magic. It preyed on his conscience that his relatives might think that he was in league with the devil, and so he had decided to buy a talisman to protect himself both from them and from those he thought were the ‘true’ followers of Satan, the greedy women traders in his home town who ‘fail to make as much money as men’. Later, he explained why he appeared to give money to his kin rarely:

There is a bank in the nearest town ... my relatives will not use it. My uncle does not understand how to draw out money. And of course I would have to inform him ... when I deposit money in his account. This takes a long time, and he would then have to travel to the post office which is several kilometres away ... My relatives would think that this money is secretly being transferred between my uncle and myself.

In the face of practical constraints and in order to allay suspicion, this entrepreneur prefers to engage in face-to-face financial transactions, something he would rather avoid. Isaac felt that specific people were not to be trusted because, in spite of surface appearances, they were envious of his wealth. In particular, he felt that these people had been maligning him regarding the source of his wealth. He believed that he had suffered from such slurs because of his own boasting. Isaac attended a border shrine in the Dormaa district. At the shrine he told me how he had heard about its innovative techniques in protecting a man’s savings from the threat of witchcraft.

The envy of consumer goods is especially tangible, he said, when the entrepreneur travels to his home town and meets relatives face-to-face. Many entrepreneurs concurred with this statement. Paradoxically, perhaps, entrepreneurs’ most conspicuous consumption is reserved for their home town. They want to show off their wealth, their prosperity, and their success. But of course they are also victims of their own success, for the envy this may invoke can have severe repercussions. Robert, aged thirty, was a close friend of Isaac, and he sold music cassettes in Sunyani. I accompanied Robert to a shrine recommended to him in the Dormaa district. He also complained that women traders in his home town in the Asante region did not know how to enjoy their money because of the demands made on them in the village. In turn, they vented their frustration on ‘innocent’ businessmen:

Everyone wants my time ... The women ... in the market talk to my sisters and tell them that I waste my money on myself. They are jealous because my money buys me clothes that they do not have ... They have no shops to buy nice clothes from ... They have no knowledge of what goods to buy. Their money brings more obligations not less ... and cannot give them my sort of lifestyle ... They want my lifestyle for themselves, but some things money cannot buy.

Witches are women who are simultaneously near and far. They are socially near, from the home town of the entrepreneur, but they are also socially distant because they have very little in common with the young men. One group has
left the other behind. For aspiring young men, the witch is a woman who is found in a place to which these young entrepreneurs only occasionally return.

These entrepreneurs believed that they were protected from the worst ravages of village witchcraft because those witches did not have the knowledge or capacity to understand their financial affairs and the complex, hidden ways in which the credit economy worked. As one entrepreneur explained, 'She can touch my body, but not my wallet'. The misfortune a woman trader can cause is limited to the body of her victim: she is unable to damage her victim's financial affairs. This is because the witch lacks understanding of global financial markets and processes, or of modern business transactions.

For these entrepreneurs, then, witchcraft emerges from the inequality between often long-established women traders and a new cohort of male traders in international consumer goods. This threatens the circulation of cash in an immediate locality, which means that the fear of witchcraft may be seen as a critique of cash earned beyond the rural economy and of the failure to redistribute it adequately. Instead, the money these entrepreneurs made is directed away from the local economy, to business networks and contacts in the city. These contacts are people whom the entrepreneur sees socially and who have been involved in some way in the entrepreneur's business, especially in its early phases. Kwame, aged thirty-four, owned a small company and was a regular attender at shrines in the Dormaa district. After one of his visits to a shrine, he said:

I know about thirty other people who know a lot about how I make my money. Two are my uncles. They were there at the start when I first came to Sunyani. I worked for them, helping to sell cars. We would import these from Belgium. I used to wash and valet BMWs and drive them all over Ghana to the purchaser. I was then promoted and bought many cars over from Belgium myself. I saved hard and invested in car radios and other hi-fi equipment. Of course, I was treading on other people's territory, but I reached a deal with them.

Credit cards

One way to gain prestige among one's fellow entrepreneurs is by having a credit card, often enough obtained through dubious means while working in Europe. Joseph, a friend of Kwame's, sold Walkmans in Sunyani and Kumase. He explained this:

I'm not saying that I should not have the cards I have ... Banks in Europe, all credit card companies, want you to buy things so that they can make profit ... Some companies are not as careful as they should be about checking who has a card, your real name, your finances, your address ... as long as you are using it and the bill eventually gets paid who cares? I deserve a card. The black man works hard in Europe. I don't worry about this aspect ... of the card at all as long as it works. I worry about people stealing my money, not me stealing from them.

The entrepreneurs I knew kept cards in a very large wallet, bought in Europe of course, and displayed whenever the occasion demanded. Indeed, these young entrepreneurs commonly compared the number of credit cards each possessed, and boasted about the number of items that they bought with them in Accra and Europe. These cards, then, did not attest only to young men's consumer power and their access to different bank accounts, but also
attested to their sophisticated knowledge of the workings of the global markets, beyond the reach and expertise of the village.

For these entrepreneurs, success does not depend on relations between persons, but on knowledge of complex systems: the capitalist market and financial institutions. This is knowledge that bypasses the embodied knowledge of the witch, and can only be obtained by those who are a part of the system. Consider Kwaku, aged twenty-five, who lived in Techiman. At the time of my research he suffered from impotency (kotewurie), a condition he blamed on greedy relatives who were envious of his ability to make money easily. He described how, although he had never purchased a talisman in order to get rich quickly, he knew plenty of people who had. It was these very people who, suffering from a guilty conscience, now also bought asuman to protect themselves from witchcraft. He stressed that he was different from these people. He had worked hard to build up business contacts, to learn about management skills and to become aware of the financial system. Villagers did not understand such skills and found it easier to blame his wealth on a demonic pact. However, it was his business acumen which also protected him, he thought, from the worst ravages of witchcraft practised against him in his village.

Businessmen distinguished between cash earned directly through business, which is spent on consumer goods or distributed through the kin network, and financial transactions involving plastic money and credit transactions. They stressed how cash makes them vulnerable: they get the feeling that persons are watching their wealth. Credit card spending, on the other hand, is covert to a degree, a form of secret transaction. Joseph, aged thirty, used the slogan from a recent Mastercard advertisement to make an analogy between the different routes open to a witch in different types of city in Ghana and Europe:

The witch may travel to the city by taxi or tro-tro. She travels along the roads that we all drive along in our cars. But once in the city she becomes lost, even in a small city like Sunyani. However, eventually, she will find her victim … There is no hiding place. One day you will wake up with a pain, a headache perhaps, or a person might be knocked down crossing the road. A woman may become infertile or there may be a health crisis in the family. It will be the witch who is envious of your wealth and has tracked you down.

The witch attacks those she sees and knows, those with whom she has visible relations. These do not mirror credit flows. The witch cannot keep up with these complex circulations. She is able to track the physical movement of cash but not the intangible exchanges through the use of plastic money, which is part of systems that the witch does not understand.

The individual wealth of the entrepreneur is beyond relations between persons, but is part of the obscure connections of electronic credit media. Here distance is no object. Benjamin, who had travelled widely in Germany, makes this clear:

Whenever I am in … the village or in the city my kin are all around me. I can imagine people I know well travelling between Kumase and Abesim by tro-tro or by taxi. It is quite conceivable that they can do this. My mother can do this and my aunts. My father can even do this. And a witch can do this. But a credit card is nothing to do with them … It allows me to make connections which are business transactions, between organizations … people I cannot see. It involves many relations between machines and aeroplanes and ships and fax
Financial transactions cannot be systematized in a person-to-person network, for they are part of a network that does not consist of journeys made back and forth to a home town or within the local economy. Instead, this technological network is made up of invisible conventions and instruments that create an imagined global reality. As Benjamin told me, 'I cannot see the routes and journeys my transactions take ... the transaction grows and grows.' The sheer scale of relations between things in the monetary system makes for a global system of interconnectedness that stretches beyond the locality and, indeed, beyond national borders to cover the European market. However, and this is the paradox of the global, it is also made up of the local; and it is when entrepreneurs visualize the global financial system as a series of local market-places that a second type of witchcraft is rooted in the anxiety about the working of this market. This witchcraft centres on dispersed kinship networks and the mapping of credit card transactions.

Witchcraft and credit card transactions

Suspicious about witchcraft perpetrated by kin living abroad reflect the 'urban paranoia' noted by Marshall-Fratani (1998) and the vulnerability of young men to the invisible workings of the market. Anxieties about witchcraft reflect their often unfounded fears of a global financial conspiracy, but also their own guilty conscience that their wealth was often obtained by illegal methods. Indeed, many of the businessmen I interviewed admitted to handling stolen goods and breaching import–export and international currency regulations. Their presence at the shrine reflects their unease that, as one man described it, they 'play too close to the fire of Satan', a semi-confession that they would not want to make public for fear of denunciation in their home town.

This second type of witchcraft draws upon one of the most definitive characteristics of late capitalism, the idea that the credit card allows for the circulation of funds that is difficult to trace in any one locality. For example, a wealthy person travelling from Ghana may use an international credit card to pay for a Japanese computer game purchased in Belgium and pay his credit card bill from funds held in a bank in Germany. Transactions generate invisible money flows between institutions so that the movement of objects generates flows of debit and credit between global locations. However, if these transactions are broken down into their separate parts, the invisible may become visible again. This is because the global financial system also consists of people working in offices and banks, whose job it is to process accounts and send out bills, check invoices and investigate credit rating. It is the oscillation between invisible dislocation and visible emplacement that explains how the credit card may be a source of fraudulent anonymity as well as a tag of personal identity.

The credit card is therefore a device which simultaneously displaces and makes present, swindles and apprehends 'victim' and 'perpetrator'. Identity circulates. It exists within a system of relations where nobody knows you, but it is also a card which identifies. It embraces identity and anonymity accord-
ing to the person who has access to it. Thus, in their involvement in paper transactions, entrepreneurs believe, they may be able to negate embodied representations of their selves. Like their investments, these entrepreneurs are never in one place, but bear several different identities at once. Tony, an importer of luxury watches, expresses this well.

When I use different cards I can be whatever I want. People know the name I give them and credit rating perhaps, but no personal details ... not really ... because I can be many different people. A witch needs these to attack, to envy ... You cannot envy a name. It makes secrecy. I write a cheque. I am in that place. I use my credit card. I am in another. I pay for my meal with another card. I am in another place. It is not possible to trace my whereabouts ... the time the witch sees these receipts ... I am somewhere else and I am someone else.

The entrepreneur becomes a person who is not the sum of his movements, but is the product of the implicit mechanisms that allow this movement. Tony continued:

When I signed a receipt for the meal we are eating ... think about the conditions which make it possible. The paper I sign, where it goes, the credit card which comes from America or Britain, the symbol of Barclaycard. On this card are many numbers. They are part of a ... wider system which the witch at home cannot enter. I am too quick for her and them ... I make too many connections. I am in several different locations all at once. If I write a cheque, I can post it or I can backdate it. It contains hidden information, a code number that a witch cannot understand.

Paradoxically, however, a crucial feature of the credit card, and especially the cheque guarantee card, is that it also can be used to guarantee who you want to be. The credit card carries a holder's name and access to a whole field of information regarding income and expenditure. And the dread of entrepreneurs is that kin, inevitably living in a European city, will find you out and, with access to this information, unravel your chain of deceit, and try to cause financial fraud and irregularities, so that the harm perpetrated by kin in this instance is to the wallet, not the person.

There are very few entrepreneurs who do not know of at least one relative, often a man who lives abroad, whom they believe to be capable of witchcraft. In this case, however, the witch will have access to the information needed to commit credit card fraud that harms the entrepreneur and exposes him. He will often have access to a fax machine and computer, and through them create chains of businesses, linking one firm to another and another. In response to this fear, entrepreneurs will often spend a lot of time tracing subsidiary companies to the parent company. Daniel describes the difficulty of this task. He undertook it because he had suffered numerous financial difficulties since the money he had transferred by means of his Barclaycard to his bank in Accra had disappeared. Despite the best efforts of banking staff, this money had yet to be traced. Daniel believed that a hidden person was at work, who was able to tie all these connections together out of sight of the human eye.

It is very difficult to know the links between companies since they all have different names and yet may trade under a brand which remains hidden. For instance, the company I bought my TV from also make kettles and hi-fi. I paid for my TV using a credit card. One of my relatives I suspect of living near the Philips Company. He will be able to see that I brought a TV. Using his power, he will get the receipts and ... somehow change the amount and
pocket the difference. Or else he will deposit some parts of an account to another bank so that I cannot trace it in any one country. A witch can do this.

An entrepreneur might use his credit card quite innocuously, for example to pay for food in a restaurant or to purchase an airline ticket. But the receipts that the company retains contain information that might fall into the wrong hands, if a cleaner or office-worker in Europe passes this information on to the witch. Or an entrepreneur might innocently give credit card details to a telephone operator who, unbeknownst to him, is a distant relative who uses this information to go on a spending spree.

Thus, a male witch has access to business transactions which a female witch at home does not. Unlike the witch in the home town, he does not cause tangible misfortune, but financial irregularities, and siphons the money away. He has the power to cause confusion not only because he works abroad and evades the censorship and stigma of witchcraft at home but also because he is able to evade domestic regulators and regulations and to cover his tracks. The witch's strength lies precisely in this ability to infiltrate accounts and transfer funds to an unknown number of locations.

Cosmopolitan city life and the African bush

While this witchcraft is global, it is also associated with that most parochial of places, the African bush. This signifies the victim's confusion about the way the witch in a European city is able to camouflage his actions and move with speed. The desires associated with the witch were symbolized by his red eyes, signifying spiritual danger. Anthony, an importer and exporter of sports clothes, gave me a vivid description of the literal and metaphorical density of the bush that blinded the victim, unable to see the witch for the thickness of the urban jungle around him. The witch 'hides in the city in amongst the skyscrapers and tower blocks. He creeps along the street.' This global witch was likened to 'bush animals'. It is believed that witches usually become the most dangerous animals, who possess sasa, a dangerous spirit. And like the knowledge implied in financial transactions, it is hard to guard against attack by a bush animal without an intimate and wide-ranging knowledge of their habits and movements.

Conclusion

I have argued that witchcraft fears among young entrepreneurs in modern Ghana reflect a radical reworking of the nexus between social and technological networks, between social relations and the distribution of capital resources. If it was once the case that a witch and her victim embodied tension between economic consumption and the distribution of resources among kin, by the late twentieth century these witches have become overwhelmed by the sheer scale of cultural information and uncodified knowledge associated with technological global networks.

Information is experienced as far greater than can be systematized and personalized in one identity, and post-colonial witchcraft discourses reflect upon
fake identities and imagine a witch to be a male relative who has access to foreign financial or business institutions, probably located in Europe. Tension is projected beyond the immediate locality by the supposed victim in a way that embodies an awareness and suspicion of all aspects of financial deceit and a wariness of potential fraud committed by kin living in Europe. In this way, financial exchange helps to create technological systems that bypass the immediate society, only to reproduce a subversive, evil macrocosm dispersed in the most flexible of microcosms, the kin network.

NOTES

This paper is the result of many invaluable discussions with Phina Werbner who also commented on previous drafts of this article and gave me unstinting encouragement. I would also like to thank the anonymous referees for the Journal for their comments and criticisms.

In Ghana, fieldwork was carried out between 1990 and 1991 in Dormaa-Ahenkro. During that time, I stayed with the Queenmother of Dormaa. With the permission of the Dormaahe, Agemang Badu I, I visited all the shrines in the district.

I hired two interpreters from Dormaa, since my command of Twi was limited. One, whose uncle was a respected shrine priest in the district, was especially helpful. His relationship to his uncle enabled me to take advantage of avenues which would have remained closed to an outsider.

REFERENCES


Du corps au portefeuille: conceptions de la sorcellerie par les Akans chez eux et à l'étranger

Résumé

Cet article traite de la façon dont la sorcellerie des Akans invoque des images de nouvelles formes de la modernité et en particulier la carte de crédit comme trait de l'économie monétaire postcoloniale. Les paiements par carte de crédit encodent des rapports sociaux dans un réseau monétaire technologique et ils affectent les rapports entre personnes à l'intérieur du pays et à l'étranger. Cet article a pour base une étude sur le terrain réalisée en 1990-1991 à des sanctuaires contre la sorcellerie dans la région du Brong-Ahafo au Ghana. Il porte l'attention sur les jeunes entrepreneurs qui travaillent dans les grandes villes commerciales et qui visitent les sanctuaires dans le district de Dormaa-Ahenkro pour acheter une protection contre la sorcellerie. Ces jeunes hommes d'affaires distinguent deux types de sorcellerie et expliquent comment un sorcier local, en contraste avec un sorcier à l'étranger, n'a pas le sens des affaires ou les connaissances technologiques suffisants pour nuire à leurs opérations financières.

School of Social Relations, Keele University, Keele ST5 5BG, Staffordshire. J.A.E.Parish@soc.keele.ac.uk