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Defying the Gaze: *Exodelics* for the Bewitched in Sukumaland and Beyond

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Abstract. Since the late seventies the Sukuma of northwest Tanzania have observed an increase in witchcraft practice as well as an extension of the list of potential witches. They particularly blame the Ujamaa resettlement program of the Tanzanian government, which imposed mono-centric village structures upon the agro-pastoral farmers. Suddenly gone were the distances that used to be crossed systematically as a token of solidarity between homesteads. The national policy caused the bewitching curse called "gaze" to intensify, while it deprived neighbors of their main anti-dote to witchcraft suspicions. That anti-dote generally refers to an exchange of gifts that disarms the reproaching gaze. For lack of a better term I will call its effect *exo-delic*: the bewitched must transcend the surrounding world, which has become too intrusive to manifest itself as an outside; he or she must make that world appropriable again, for example by appreciating its 'exotic' side. Inflatory discourse on the occult manages to do so, in Sukumaland and far beyond. Collective drinking is equally effective in remedying feelings of bewitchment. Those remedies appear to draw their meaning from the one figure that is anti-thetical to the witch: the dancer, who defies the collective gaze. So I could observe on my journey to the invisible village of Gamboshi.

Journey to Gamboshi

Numerous stories were told to me about the village of Gamboshi since I arrived in Sukumaland in 1995 as a beginning researcher. The Sukuma describe Gamboshi as a parallel world of luxury, but also of horror: pleasure and pain, beyond good and evil. "There are tarmac roads in that place, two-storied houses, cars and many lights," they would tell me. "Just like Ulaya (Europe)." Above all, it is an invisible village where legendary dance-leaders, witches and sorcerers reside and feast. Here the witches bring their abducted victims, the *mitunga*, which in other parts of the world are known as zombies. Anyone doing fieldwork in the West of Tanzania will have heard of the place. As far as Dar Es Salaam I was told of its renown which stretches beyond Tanzania's borders. A businessman had even heard people talk about that place during his stay in Egypt. Imagine my surprise when I realized that Gamboshi actually exists.

A school-inspector told me about his brother-in-law who many years ago had been assigned a teaching post in the primary school of Gamboshi but

soon fled the place after his child died from an inexplicable illness. By sheer coincidence I met him a year later during the funeral of an old healer who used to live near my compound. The man refused to elaborate on his experiences in Gamboshi. But he gave us some indications as to where that mysterious place might be. That day my friend and research collaborator, Paulo Makufuli, decided he wanted to travel with me. It was a courageous decision on his part. I had heard of the place only a year before. He, his whole life.

With vague directions we drove off north-east on muddy meandering paths, in my 1977 Landrover, maximum speed 60 kms per hour. After an eight-hour drive, the landscape changed into fairly woody terrain. As we approached the area which the teacher had vaguely described to us, people around were unwilling to direct us once they heard us mention the name of the place. Instead, they tried to discourage us from going any further. Their lack of hospitality did not miss its effect on our confidence because such a welcome of strangers contrasted sharply with Sukuma standards. After having lived peacefully for more than a year in a village community, this area suddenly made me aware again of the conspicuous color of my skin, which in combination with the car gave me an unsubtle look of observation and appraisal. The look could only be met by an equally confronting gaze of the local inhabitants. As we repeatedly ran up against these silent suspicions about the motives of our journey, we increasingly felt unwanted and uncomfortable, even doubting our own initial motives – not far from doubting the motives of ethnography altogether. However, we were unable to return home due to night falling. And there we were in our car, face to face with the last obstacle before Gamboshi: a river twenty meters broad and up to a meter deep. No bridge. Two smirking young men were doing the unthinkable: ignoring our Sukuma greetings and just staring at us. We had to make the crossing by ourselves, and after I vaguely recollected a short prayer, I managed to drive straight across the river in one go. At the other side of the river were what looked like a dozen small, sandy paths crisscrossing one another. At one of the intersections lived an elderly woman alone in a hut. Despite the obvious deduction for a Sukuma that she must be a witch, Paulo stepped out of the car to ask the way. He came back, looking rather pale: "Just drive straight." He seemed to have lost his usual composure.

We finally did get there, late at night. There was indeed a sign saying "Gamboshi primary school". The teachers' houses seemed uninhabited. The complete silence after turning off the engine faced us with the ludicrous inadequacy of our arrival, unannounced and noisy. But then a man appeared from behind the fence of an adjacent house. He turned out to be a teacher, the only one present (The headmaster had left months ago, he would later tell us, because being assigned a teaching post in Gamboshi is considered an ordeal).

That same night, with the help of some local alcohol, we made friends with him and were introduced to the village head.

The next morning I wondered what all the fuss was about Gamboshi. The village turned out to not differ much from any other place in rural Sukumaland: no electricity, no roads, no cars, no two-storied buildings. We were soon to find out that what makes it so special is its history, as told to us by the village head and a healer, whose trust we had gained. Around the turn of the century a famous rainmaker, called Gambosi, inhabited these parts, dense with vegetation. He and his family lived mainly by hunting, whereas their fellow Sukuma were herdsmen and farmers. In the 1930s most of the family died of sleeping sickness. The place became deserted and the savanna took over again. In 1961, after Tanzania's Independence, new settlers came, in spite of an event that had occurred three years before. In 1958 a young man called Lungwecha had crossed the forest of Gamboshi at night after having accompanied his girlfriend back to the village on the other side of the forest. But the young man did not come back. He disappeared for three days, until witnesses saw him suddenly appear out of the forest. He seemed delirious and, as his childhood friend told us, he never regained his senses until his death in 1993. All his life, Lungwecha had been telling people how that day he had been abducted by witches. He had been a zombie in Gamboshi, a fantastic place of many lights, strange objects and people, invisible to the common eye. The sorcerers had taken him to a meeting. But luckily his ancestral spirit was present too and intervened on his behalf. The sorcerers decided to let Lungwecha go and they returned him by some flying object. Once he passed a magical fence in the forest he became visible again.

In 1967, Gamboshi was still a young, newly founded place, but the idea of this village having an invisible 'double' started appealing to the local dance-leader, Ng'wana Mabula. She proclaimed herself to be the greatest witch alive, challenging anyone to compete with her group in dance competitions, which would take the shape of sorcerous battles. Since then the story goes that Gamboshi is a hungry village, in need of evermore zombie slaves. The reason for this need is what Samike did, the famous healer and dance-leader from Shinyanga. He had arrived in Gamboshi with an invitation to perform dances. When the village head told Samike the invitation was a forgery, he realized it was a set-up by the witches of Gamboshi. So, he entered their invisible realm, fought them and allegedly managed to burn all their zombie slaves. Later on there were again reports of inexplicable lights in the forest. And in 1992 two women in the area admitted using magic from Gamboshi and were burned alive for causing the cholera-outbreak that had made hundreds of victims. Since then, rumors have spread rapidly and new stories have not ceased to come about.

What to make of this journey, which inevitably has a certain 'heart of darkness' tenor, as much loved as feared by anthropologists today? The second evening at the teacher's compound two drunken men barged in, sneering at us that we had better watch out since everyone in Gamboshi is a witch. In their day-time composure and wisdom the villagers made us understand the tragic side of the fantastic stories. What had seemed appealing about this remote place to many of us in our village back home, had negative reverberations for the inhabitants themselves. Gamboshi was not some story at the open fire, but their daily life. Not only did they feel stigmatized and suspected when traveling outside their village, but it had not taken long before mutual suspicions had crept into the village itself and were magnified in the case of death or illness. No inhabitant of Gamboshi could reassure us that the invisible, occult double of their village did not exist. We overheard the teacher quarrelling with the village head because the latter had brought us to the infamous Ngusa Nyamsale, a man of over ninety years old, the first inhabitant of Gamboshi and renown for his sorcery. The man is simply feared and clearly enjoys his reputation. He lives next to the old rainmaker's hill, where all the events occurred. He was still remarkably sharp and witty, confidently sitting under his tree, with all his grandchildren around him. We spent the whole afternoon there. The sun was very hot that day. At one time I suddenly woke up. I realized I had dozed off, looked around, and saw everybody lying on the ground or on logs. Sleeping. Except for the old man, Ngusa Nyamsale, sitting up straight with those twinkling eyes of his. I could swear he was smiling at me until I fell asleep again.

In the daytime people told us: "I know I am not a witch, but some people are. Who can really know what another person conceals?" Anthropologists have rarely gone deeper in their interpretations of witchcraft than the recognition of this opacity proper to everyday social relations. At night a transformation occurs in Gamboshi. Then the villagers enter a kind of ritual that has spontaneously grown out of their fears: collective, nocturnal drinking-bouts. In drunkenness nobody appears to conceal anything. On those occasions, joking and irony take over, allowing them to release the object of anxiety. Shame and suspicion surface only to be easily dismissed. And the drinking villagers experience a feeling of unity, so that they can look at each other straight in the eye, smile and say those baffling words: "Aren't we all witches?"

From exotic to exodelic

By claiming everybody is a witch, they know they are fooling themselves. So are anthropologists who explain witchcraft through the magical potions that

can be bought on every rural market or street corner in town. The transfiguration of suspicion into accusation, of vague fears into witch-hunt, of crisis into ritual, of illness into oracle and therapy, of inexplicable misfortune into the imaginary of zombification and anonymous monsters, of personalized hatred into social conflict and politico-economic oppression are as many forms of the one magical operation by which the human condition of powerlessness and dependence is denied and replaced by an idiom of power and autonomy. This is not to claim that such transformative process, which has fascinated anthropology ever since rituals were studied, is socially insignificant, but it comes *ex post facto*, after the fact of what really matters: the feeling of bewitchment. From that experiential reality the rest follows – the beliefs about the identity of the witch, the symbolization of somebody's crisis, the inevitable meaning of it all. It takes a Western society to be pitiless enough to believe that there is no reason for our ailments and deaths but chance. Pure and unanimated chance is the principle of the Real (Lacan), Nature (Monod), and Society (Luhmann). With that we have fixed crisis, an intrinsically transient condition, as a constant. Our search for a remedy has become equally unceasing. With modernization came "this evil rooted in all good" summing up the schizophrenic romanticism of Nietzsche, Freud, and Stoker's Dracula. Then could a particular mentality, which Edward Said discovered in the Orientalist tradition, become generalized in an endless stream of sensational stories about witchcraft, war and healing in Africa and in other places meant to transcend 'the real world' where reason ruled.

The Sukuma differentiate between the everyday flow of social exchanges that make the world 'cool' (*mhola*) and the disruptive intervention of that state by 'hot' entities (*nsebu*) such as witches. By making the distinction, they already reach part of the solution. The witch's heat does not affect the world at large. Propitiate an entity that belongs to the hot side, in the form of an ancestral spirit or healer, and things can only get better. All that is good and fertile comes in two's, the Sukuma say. A Sukuma child is born from 'back' and 'bow', mother's clan and father's clan, right hand and left hand. Modernity – definitely 'on the other hand' and postmodernity even more so – is all about opting for the autopoietic flux that drowns any dialectics between cool and hot, crisis and healing, belief and a deeper truth. The one great wave of social process, be it individualization, globalization, entropy or simply evolution, crushes all hopes for surprise. As Jean Baudrillard has pointed out, any millenarianism or hysteria about great new developments, even the dystopia on the year Y2K problem, the cold war, and the threat by alien civilizations, merely express our wishful thinking that something fundamentally anti-thetical might happen after all.[1] We know better. Unfortunately, we know best. Therefore, the retrieval of dialectical pleasure does not come

easy. Africa simply has to be ruled by witchcraft for it to satisfactorily pulsate with the blank rule of contingency in the West. What else could be the motive behind our discourse on worlds where other logics reign and nature might even listen to other laws? Africa heals us, but only if it is willing to reduce its cultural plurality to the unitary, imaginary order of unfathomable forces and self-loss which Westerners believe they have been deprived of. In the following I will demonstrate that witchcraft knows two sides, both of which are utterly social, dealing with the condition of society itself, and thus no less Western or modern. Until now I have only spoken of one side, which surfaces in the thought of witchcraft belonging to an invisible 'double' such as Gamboshi, safely separated from daily life and personal concerns. It has the same salutary effect for the Sukuma as the label 'Africa' has for Europeans and Americans.

To begin with, we have to realize that Sukuma farmers too, and as far back as they will remember, love a story like that of Gamboshi. They are the ones telling it. The difference is that they will not question whether the story is exoticizing the people involved. In New York we go to markets and exhibitions of African art, not without gaping in astonishment at how central a role the exotic plays in these events. In other words, we seek to experience that which lies beyond what already belongs to ourselves – in two words: a real outside. For one person that could be the extra-ordinary invoked by a pierced statue, for an other the marvelous spectacle of art-lovers buying the African chimera. I have known the Sukuma to look for the same thing. I could select only a few examples out of an endless series, ranging from dance competitions and medicinal concoctions, to ancestral sacrifices and initiation rituals. All of these show how much the Sukuma adore bringing home what they consider to be 'unfamiliar' and 'distant'. When the Sukuma dancer paints his face white to look like a dead spirit and at the same time wears shades to mimic a European star, he is not exoticizing the spirit or the star, nor domesticating[2] them, but on the contrary being receptive to an exterior world that moves him. He is letting the outside (*exo*) manifest (*delos*) itself to him. He is engaging in a universal practice that I would not limit to the transcendental or the exotic, but quite literally term 'exodelic'.

Our discipline has come to culturally oppose the romantic, sensation-driven account I opened this article with. And yet I trusted you would read on. In alternation with the pleasure you might have drawn from sensation, you were reassured by a dialectical process by which you attributed an intelligence and awareness to the author, perhaps more than I deserved. In opposition to the colonial exhibition of non-Western people as primitive and uncivilized, has emerged the anti-thesis, which denounces such objectifications of other cultures. Since then the dominant urge of anthropologists

has been to write about other cultures in such a way that they avoid being accused of seeking the exotic. No doubt this postcolonial anti-thesis is driven by a sense of guilt. After all, the prejudices of the explorers' times, of our ancestors, still strike us today. Yet, we can no longer avoid a third phase, the temporary synthesis saying that some degree of objectification is quite frankly inevitable when dealing with other cultures. Fascination with the unfamiliar has continued to inspire anthropologists secretly. As the combined guilt and hatred in relation to colonialism dies out, we dare to bring our fascination out into the open. Somewhat helped by the example of the Sukuma dancer or the Mwanza rapper, I state that our appetite for the exotic is more sincere than our urge to curb it.

The purport of my essay is to demonstrate the therapeutic effect of the exotic, or better: to illustrate its exodelic dimension. To state that the exotic is okay could not have the same meaning as one hundred years ago. My statement is experientially rooted in the historical framework I described above, and in my journey to Gamboshi in particular. The awareness of such dialectical processes leads me to emphasize the importance of experiential frames in understanding the meaning of statements. I apply this principle to my study of witchcraft, first of all, by focusing rather on the underlying experience of bewitchment than on the perceptible practices of witchcraft. Secondly, I will define bewitchment as the structural impossibility to release critique (and the Law in general) and demonstrate how it amounts to a reductionist stance in life. Postmodern critique is fundamentally insincere by rejecting the author's fascination with the 'outside'. Such critique disempowers, bewitches and silences both author and reader. An antidote is to defend the exodelic side of the exotic. Only in the eyes of the bewitched could my defense of the exotic be equated with colonial exhibitions and thus obscure what it intends to be: a critical release of the critique.

The whole debate on contemporary witchcraft becomes meaningless if we do not distinguish between the experiential frames involved, which define the actual meaning of related beliefs and practices. As this article will show, the worldview originating from a state of bewitchment ('heat') is anti-thetical to the basic frame of reciprocity whereby the Sukuma experience their socio-cosmic environment as 'cool'. The latter frame of experience can be recognized in the ideal representations by many myths or initiation rituals, where death is not a fundamental breach but partakes in the grand cycle of life. An individual's experience of bewitchment radically breaks with that view. Therefore, his or her belief in healing through medicine or therapeutic ritual can never be a simple return to the primary 'cool' condition, but needs to be a transformation – a synthesis or third level – that confronts and transcends the anti-thetical frame of experience. These three experiential levels

are present in the witchcraft beliefs we record. The legend of Gamboshi can be (first level) myth or (third level) therapeutic discourse, but it has little to do with the (second level) reality of suspicions about relatives having ensorcelled one's child out of envy. Those beliefs are of a different order.

The above dialectics certainly apply to discussions of modernity and science as well. The postmodern aversion to universalistic theories is exemplified in the increasing contraction of anthropology's study-object. Some speak of the 'crisis of representation'.[3] It resembles bewitchment in the full sense, namely in the phase prior to the cure which turns the invisible witch into a concrete person ready to be identified. The remedy for the crisis is to end the gradual 'self-contraction' of postmodern critique and to release it into a more realistic and liberating conception of anthropology, as a science on the human being, driven by human interests such as the search for knowledge (rather than a non-science, only allowed to voice the diversity of cultures and opposing human drives such as curiosity and fascination with the unfamiliar). Those who call this release a neo-modernist turn, should know that the course taken is never a simple return. Even if such a new anthropology would at first sight bear resemblances with old structuralist generalizations, chances are that in depth – experientially – it will contain the postmodern critique as well.

The polycentric complex

The most common spatial pattern of habitation in Sukumaland is that of extended families living in dispersed, fenced compounds, which, I would argue, amounts to a worldview that differs from that of households living centralized around a public core in the village. Each patrilineal, extended family in Sukumaland is fairly self-sufficient in its agro-pastoral activities. The compound has its public space for politics, its educational arenas at the fireplace and the hearth, its own cattle-pen, and its ancestral huts in case misfortune hits the household. The village community does not act as a whole, nor does it accord itself to a central power figure or shrine. The Sukuma's everyday sense of the world is *polycentric*, with community decisions following from general consensus among the various 'centers' or homesteads (*kaya*) making up the village. They maintain an ambiguous relationship to community norms, on the one hand heavily fining any violation of agreements and on the other hand willing to negotiate the rules during meetings in a ternary practice bordering on plain detachment and irony. That is how I understand the polycentric sense of being-in-the-world. Paying fines preserves the integrity of the household head (*namugi*), as opposed to reprimand and moralization which do not tally with Sukuma culture. It is

important to note that this detachment with regard to village solidarity is one of the first things that disappear when the bewitched discusses the cause of his or her illness. Then an experiential frame of moralization and reductionism creeps in: "Perhaps I had this affliction coming to me?"

The Sukuma number over five million farmers living in the northwest of Tanzania and engaging in what Per Brandström has coined a "culture of expansion", since time immemorial reflecting itself in practices of bush-clearing and in the search of new pasture and arable land at the fringes of society.[4] The Sukuma people however never sought to have their status as largest cultural group in Tanzania translated in political power or other privileges. In their society the 'cool' way of acquiring personal success and recognition is through accumulating forms of alliance and membership. The spatial tendency for isolation and self-determination engenders a passion for joining and bridging separated spatial entities. It sheds a brighter light on the Sukuma's receptive stance to the outside world, to adopt foreign trades and products without sacrificing their own, the importance they attach to hospitality and commensality with visitors, their continuing quest for initiation into the unknown, for new medicinal knowledge from ever further areas, their journeys of visiting and 'wandering' (*buyeeji*), their historical migrations to cultivate pristine territory, and not the least the existing variety of social associations beyond the patri-clan, like village and neighborhood groups, cultivation and dance associations, or the initiatory societies transcending these territorial forms of solidarity. Virtually no corner of Sukumaland is out of reach for the individual accumulating memberships. The Sukuma passion to share and link up in a polycentric universe is their key to a dynamic type of social peace in fairly agitated times.

The Sukuma receptiveness to the undomesticated outside would become more real to me, and to five other novices, after our initiation into the traditional society of elders (*bunamhala*). Unlike the southern parts of Sukumaland this initiation (*ihane*) is still practiced in the chiefdoms of Bulima and Busimabu (north-central Sukumaland) where I lived and worked from 1995 until 1997. As we ventured up to the hillocks beyond the compounds and the fields, "into the forest" (*mu bu*), we were taught to appropriate the constituents of the forest – some forty medicinal plants – and thus mature into our new identity as mediators of this resource of undomesticated fertility. In our invigorated, yet 'hot' condition of being absolute outsiders we returned to take the village by surprise, attempting to plant our spears at the entrance of the house – a female space defended by our wives brandishing a wooden ladle, the home's tool of receptivity and fusion. This ostensive invasion of the home's pristine serenity was followed by both male and female parties merging in song and dance. Only after that classic separation before fusion[5] could each of

us become holders of the initiatory bundle of plants called "forest within the home", defying the contrast attributed to this pair of terms. As "feathers of the Sukuma wing" and thus members of a community beyond kinship, we could now drink beer from the double gourd symbolizing life-giving and have our bodies incised with the initiatory concoction, which is also used to fertilize cultivated fields. In the succession of teaching, symbolic mastery over the outside and initiatory incision of the body, the means to social recognition and well-being could dawn upon us: to not seclude oneself within the safety of one's inner space, but to sustain the effort of matching home and forest, I and other, kin and non-kin, to relate and thus expand oneself in the world. This is the unspoken, founding law of Sukuma society, if not of every social system as such.[6] In contrast with the antagonism between individual (desire) and society (law) presumed by old definitions of socialization,[7] this 'law' is not oppressive in itself. On the contrary, it appeals to the individual's desire to become a fully fledged participant of the social order; to not receive love out of the blue but to actually earn it.

The Sukuma principle of healing adopted in recipes and therapies recalls the experience of initiation. An external, blind element or energy is extracted from its natural habitat, for example a plant from the woods. It is merged with *shingila* (from *ku-ingila*, to enter): a 'penetrator' from the human world that makes blind healing power meaningful and effective, for example saliva or another particle metonymically representing patient or affliction.[8] External and unfamiliar elements carry a quality of danger or 'heat' (*nsebu*), which through pacifying practices (*ku-poja*, to cool or heal) such as ritual performance, can be transformed into life-bearing and curative means. The successful encounter with that previously unknown realm during the initiation ritual left us invigorated and self-confident, combining a sense of belonging with the fulfillment of personal desire – an experience which served as an eye-opener to several fellow novices who were now talking about entering yet another society. It was one of those occasions when everything – the surrounding world and myself in it – seemed to fit: the day after our initiation the rains came pouring down, after lasting drought had postponed the cultivation period already for three months. A similar initiation which took place one week later in another village and where I was present as an initiated elder this time, gave the same fertile result of calling up the first rains. Nobody would speak of a miracle and I kept my lips tightly sealed. Things just seemed to fit.

Tanzania's villagization: From enchanting strangers to bewitching insiders

Given the above polycentric complex, we would barely dare to ask what would happen if the slash be lifted from the duality inside/ outside that allows for the reciprocal move animating social life. Literally this tearing down of the fences and bridging of all distances took place however with *operesheni kijijini*, the villagization program that befitted Tanzania's project of *Ujamaa* in the mid seventies. Ray Abrahams,[9] Per Brandström,[10] and Goran Hyden[11] have extensively dealt with Nyerere's ambitious, modernizing endeavor fostered by a planned economy's good intentions. They have assessed the program's failure to anticipate the ill effects of such a relocation and centralization of homesteads on agro-pastoral people like the Sukuma and Nyamwezi. Determined to provide education and health care for all citizens, the government enforced farmers to emigrate to artificially mapped villages, centered around school and dispensary. Stragglers were spurred on, as their traditional, round houses of grass and clay, these mockeries to the nation's sweeping belief in *maendeleo* (progress), were set on fire. The whole operation turned out to be counterproductive for stock-breeding as well as for the cultivation of staple crops, partly due to the homesteads being separated from the fields and cattle, which hindered the farmers from giving these all the attention they needed. Furthermore, the density of the villagers' cattle grazing resulted in land erosion and diminishing pasture. When the failure became obvious, only a few years after the inception of the program, most Sukuma started returning to their former lands, the so-called *mahame*.

However, when talking on an intimate basis with Sukuma elders about the villagization program, none of the above observations came to the forefront. Maybe because these had become too obvious. Or is it because considerations sprang to mind that were considered to be more important? The elders claimed that the villagization program most of all had boosted the practice of sorcery in the community – or at least had increased suspicions and accusations of that kind.[12] It is generally felt that nowadays sorcery occurs more than ever before.[13] Furthermore, I was told that formerly people would primarily fear their kin in witchcraft cases. Since villagization, and still after remigration, the conviction started spreading that virtually everybody, starting from the neighbors, could be one's witch.

What could be the reason for this double observation, of more witchcraft and an unbounded extension of the list of potential witches? Macrosociological explanations, of the kind Roscoe E. Tanner has offered for the Sukuma witch-hunts prior to the seventies, would refer to higher social density producing an increased chance for conflicts arising between

neighbors.[14] Simeon Mesaki points out that Sukumaland qualifies for Mary Douglas' assertion linking witchcraft beliefs to small-scale, densely populated, sedentary groupings with a high dynamic density of interaction and internal competition.[15] But do such densely populated communities in Africa always experience more sorcery than others? And can such an explanation, which overlooks cultural particulars, account for the situation we encounter in Sukumaland? This debate would bring us back to the impressive enterprise of structuro-functionalist research undertaken by Max Gluckman's Manchester school of the 1950s, where sorcery has been explained in terms of social conflicts that would inhere in the contradictions of the social and normative order of certain village communities. In the case of the Sukuma and Nyamwezi, Abrahams has added the political dimension to the debate: in analogy with the rise of Sungusungu vigilante groups, witch-killings can be understood in the context of disappearing chieftainship and the limited local relevance of the national government, which have impelled villagers to rely on their own resources of action.[16] Far from contesting these assertions, I would argue that while socio-structural processes, historical changes, and government policies are enacted, the core of the matter remains that when people fall seriously ill – and they will continue to do so – they usually attribute the cause to someone bewitching them. Instead of denouncing functionalist or macro-sociological theories on the basis of their alleged unfashionable status, I would look for the experiential basis in which these theories may (or may not) be grounded. A theory of witchcraft that is rooted in the human condition can escape its archaic features and find fruitful applications in the Western context. My analysis of sorcery in Sukumaland revolves around the intransparency between the self and the other, and the ease by which (certain) 'others' can come to represent the 'social' in its narrowest sense. For a more in-depth explanation I prefer to follow the intuitive track of reasoning proposed by the Sukuma themselves. What happened during villagization when each house neighbored another? One elder tried to explain this to me as follows:

> Now your neighbors could see every day how your wife was preparing a fish for a nice meal, but you couldn't invite them. This situation, you may expect that it makes your neighbors jealous. They may think to themselves: "*Wadosile sana*, you feel you're too good for me. Well, you will see . . ."

Fish and the Swahili word *sana* in the expression *Wadosile* ('You are full of yourself') often pop up in these accounts, invoking the imagery of alleged promiscuity, arrogance and unearned fortune that are associated with the

lakeshore fishermen and the Swahili-speaking towns. Others tell of feelings of reproach for not greeting the neighbors properly. 'You will see' leaves little room for speculation as to the outcome hinted at. The stress is on seeing, which predicts retaliation: derived from the verb 'to see' (*ku-bona*), the *ibona* spell is reputed to be the most common form of affliction caused by sorcery in central Sukumaland.

The surge of suspicion corresponded to the centralization of households, because the latter implied a radical shift in the spatial sphere and thus of social relations. To replace the polycentric landscape by a monocentric or village type of spatial order put heavy pressures on Sukuma society: the boundaries and ensuing interactions between interior and exterior were undercut as the fence – the slash of the duality – was brought down and the mediation-prone distance that separated households shriveled away. Households were suddenly confronted with each other without being able to comply with the unspoken law of society that prescribes social exchange between independent homes. In the case of the Sukuma this social law has been translated in the norm of hospitality. Co-presence or sharing space for the Sukuma necessarily entails sharing food and speech, thus spanning an interstice of the life world. In this new situation of spatial density neighbors were prevented from consistently following their urge and call to reciprocate when eyes and senses were meeting. The alternative would have been to invite each other daily and thus to absorb one another in a sort of aimless potlatch. In short, the spatial shift made them act like *ba-doshi*: they were involuntarily attesting to a negligent and self-conceited attitude. And they could not conjure a neighbor's possible feelings of deprivation, for lack of the Sukuma's well-tried method of dissolving envy, namely sharing.

Not only did the Sukuma notice the boost of mistrust, but: "Since the seventies virtually anyone can be your witch, starting from your neighbors . . .". In ethnographic accounts prior to the villagization program,[17] we can read that already accusations and witch-killings were not limited to the extended family or kingroup, but involved the larger community. However, we may assume that the elders' remark that formerly only your kin would be suspected, does not hint at a Sukuma maxim, but is meant to stress the sharp contrast with the situation prior to the mid seventies and thus hints at the observed preponderance of neighbors involved nowadays. In exploring Sukuma practice, it is most revealing why they stress this historical shift. Their interpretation confronts us with a crucial link in the analysis, summed up in the Sukuma belief that, as the saying goes, "The witch lives in your home" (*Nogi ali mu kaya*). Indeed, the stranger may inspire, frighten, repulse or arouse hopes for personal gain, but does not present any subdued strain or

hidden conflict from where bewitchment is assumed to originate. Now, with the spatial division becoming blurred, the former outsider occupies a position comparable to that of an insider, privy to the daily life in the neighboring homestead. The Sukuma say that for someone to be able to bewitch you, this person has to know you, your activities and the names of your ancestors for starters. Hence, as neighbor is added to neighbor the list of potential bearers of a grudge – with the ability to put spite into practice – radically extends.

In Sukumaland, compounds are fenced by euphorbia bushes. The euphorbia twig (*inala*) symbolizes the diviner's patient, because it invokes the border between inside and outside where intrusion takes place causing affliction. These intrusions are prevented by protective medicine (*lukago*) incised on the skin of the household-members and in the ground along the compound-fence. With the modernist centralization of space the domestic body became unfenced, 'skinned': the gaze of the other, assumingly rating you on your compliance with the unspoken Law, could now relentlessly intrude upon what was no more a separate interior, your home.[18]

An important key to understanding the Sukuma perspective on this spatial shift is the common synonym for witch: *ngwiboneeji*, the gazer or appraising onlooker. This piercing gaze, what could it be referring to? Based on the linguistic formulas of derivation in the Sukuma language studied by Ian Richardson and later Herman Batibo,[19] the semantic structure of this noun would be: *ngw*(1)- *i*(2)- *bon*(3)- *eel*(4)- *y*(5)- *i*(1). The literal translation strikes us as remarkably significant in terms of our argument: (1) the one who (5) causes (3) to see (2) him/herself (4) persistently. That would be the witch. Implied are the ideas of comparison and jealousy, the latter being the motive generally attributed to the witch. The concept of jealousy refers to the intimate bond which is supposed to exist between witch and victim. In the words of Merleau-Ponty all jealousy represents a "non-differentiation between oneself and the other."[20] People who compare themselves with others who are supposed to share the same rules and desires, can become envious. One basic tendency for non-differentiation lies in the community's condition of existence, namely the societal norm that urges all members to share and exchange. In the field of witchcraft we deal with an individual attributing his or her affliction to the envy of others. The envy is said to remain hidden, so it may very well be an imaginary construct. Our task is then to find out what the conditions are for such a perspective on society. Which cultural processes are at work that lead the 'victims' to impute such a strong emotion and motive for murder to their relatives and neighbors? The concept of *ngwiboneeji* may well give the answer, if combined as the Sukuma do with two other semantic associations: first, the alleged arrogance or self-

indulgence (*bu-doshi*) of the victim, and second, the belief that the ancestor (*isamva*, 'great provoked one') sanctions the descendent who ignores him. The gaze can only be significant and threatening if the opposition it invokes between individual and Other is not merely one of difference and separation. There must be an absolutely binding element added to it which would explain the intrusive quality suggested in 'an unknown person persistently and reflexively seeing (me)'. As a member belonging to the same social and normative system, the witch is entitled to compare. In other words, I speak of the (sorcerous) gaze when the radical opponent aiming to kill is simultaneously regarded as an insider. This defines the feeling of intrusion that is proper to bewitchment. An outsider who has little in common, will not be expected to feel any jealousy, or have a motive. Strangers do not bewitch, they at most enchant. The tragedy of the abrupt villagization policy was that neighbors who were formerly enchanting outsiders and living away at an enticing distance, now became almost as socially relevant as family-members. Consequently, neighbors were increasingly considered to be emotionally involved and belonging to the group of insiders.

Before leaving for my fieldwork in Tanzania, I still adhered to a popular discourse assuming that the witch is in essence a marginal figure, an outsider opposed to an accusing community. So, I was somewhat apprehensive about my future position in Sukuma village life and on how people's misfortune could be imputed to my presence. After a while I came to realize that it was exactly my not belonging, my exteriority, which initially endowed me with the community's reassurance that I could not be suspected of sorcery. The reason is the unspoken belief that the witch partakes in the system, the scheme set up by the founding fathers of society. Consider this episode in a young teacher's life, which many years later he narrated to me, one afternoon, in the company of mutual friends. He had been assigned to a teaching post in a primary school, some fifty miles away from his native village. More and more did he feel uncomfortable in the relative isolation proper to a schoolteacher's life in the village. One day a healer passed by to caution him on the prevailing dangers and he gave him *wija* medicine to perceive the invisible, as well as magic to alarm him in case witches were near, and another tool to chase them away. So intense had his anxiety become in the meanwhile – villagers' conversations had in his eyes taken the shape of relentless gossip concerning him – that, triggered by self-inflicted intoxication and the healer's warning, it caused him one night to see his neighbors gathering within and around his homestead, like witches performing their 'sabbath' in his home, with a niece of his even entering his sleeping room. The next day he took his bags and left to request a transfer.

Underlying his mind-boggling discourse portraying the transgressive behavior of others, we find that the witches are not outsiders or marginal figures, but on the contrary everyday people representing the group itself. The teacher's witchcraft fantasy is common in Sukumaland and far beyond. In it we recognize the individual imagining sanction from the group. Crucial in my analysis, however, is the realization at this stage that this fantasy does not follow from seething leveling pressures in the community persecuting individuals that stand out. If the fantasy springs from the fear of social exclusion, this fear is not proper to, but rather a perversion of the polycentric complex calling for social exchange. Suspecting others of envying you to the point of killing you does not suit the polycentric complex, where personal freedom and varying levels of success are permitted and even expected from everyone. The successful breeder of cattle is a role-model. Those who seriously label someone as 'too successful' will fall into disrepute. However, in the victim's shifted perspective on the world the unspoken code of the gift (or law of exchange) is no longer experienced as accompanying people's passion to link up with others, nor is it considered a means anymore of acquiring social recognition. For a moment the communal code of solidarity becomes a Law, a goal in itself. In the eyes of the afflicted, losing their trust in the world and wondering about the lethal outcome of their illness and about its cause, the law of social exchange has become rigidified and unnegotiable. The victim finds him- or herself guilty, with no room for fines to lift the crisis. Reproaching both themselves and the others, the victims say: "I have become too successful", "I have not given enough." The volatile permutations of the code, permitting the postponing of gifts and solidarity, has been replaced by the dichotomy of right and wrong. The victim's imaginary constructs the witch as a figure perverting the social order by equating social life with its underlying law. Therein lies the anxiety expressed by the afflicted who fears to have given cause for envy and to be retaliated against. Divination will contribute to removing that anxiety by establishing the identity of the evil agent. In the best case the affliction will turn out to be the work of an ancestral spirit. Then the outcome will not be lethal and the victim can resort to placating rituals that restore the reciprocity with the ancestor. However, for the Sukuma the difference between an angry ancestral spirit and the witch is that the latter embodies the structural impossibility of reciprocity.

The most popular description of the bewitched's identity and fate is the living dead, a person de-personalized by the fact of not being able to communicate. The victim of witchcraft has allegedly become a mute slave in a cohesive, parallel world, which is inhabited by some of the same people who make up daily life. The Sukuma term is *litunga*, signifying 'bondage' (from *ku-tunga*, to tie), perhaps indeed in a magnified way referring to the feeling of

being tied to something more powerful and encompassing such as the opaque cause of it all or the Other commonly called 'witch' (*nogi*). As I have illustrated above, the figure of the witch symbolizes the persistent, unsoothable gaze of relevant others. My research has mainly dealt with Sukuma strategies to disarm the gaze. These strategies consist in lifting the imaginary impingement of the world upon the individual that has come to intrude upon the perspective of the afflicted. I have regarded these practices as therapeutic, or more precisely as 'exodelic' in the sense that they make the world manifest itself again as a habitat for the individual's realization of personal desire. The social environment no longer appears as intrusive but as a domain separate enough to be appropriable. I shall concisely discuss two of these collective replies to the gaze: communal drinking and dancing, two variations on the same theme called exodelica.

The collective reply to the gaze

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* of 1897, a classic of Gothic literature, was written in modernity's slipstream of the Romantic counter-movement, 19th century spiritism and post-witchcraft phantasms on vampirism. Dracula's victims were torn between hatred towards their intruder and a newly found passion, illicit and destructive. In their crisis they discovered "this evil rooted in all good," evocative of Freud's theory of the Id inhabiting our most intimate self. The expression captures well the feeling of devastation by an evil power permeating the world at large, a world without any supernatural counterpart where evil could stay and be kept at bay. Modernity rejects such a supernatural realm and locates 'evil' within everyday contingency. Such is also the temporary condition of the Sukuma patient who fears to be reproached by the community at large and to subsequently suffer death. The patient has to break out of his incestuous and too endogenous sense of the environment, so that he can be a person of his own again, talking to those neighbors, inviting them for food, giving and receiving gifts as literal 'anti-dota'[21] to the poison of reproach, and at the same time projecting the cause of illness upon one marginal villager. I have already pointed out that stories on the distant village of Gamboshi can also serve that process of expelling and symbolizing the evil. The witchcraft beliefs that ethnographers record are interlarded with discourse that heals. Equally therapeutic, and mostly used by healers in the final phases of therapy, is the power framework that depicts witchcraft as a reciprocal game of magic and counter-magic, instead of a critically 'hot' event with compromising, personal feelings at stake. In that experiential frame of empowerment and competition "we are all witches and witchcraft is everywhere," so the villagers of Gamboshi told us. Gone is the

ng'wiboneeji, the real witch who kills somebody's child out of envy and with whom nobody wants to be identified. The same trivializing statement I heard when staying over at a village whose male population according to the staff of a local housing project was rarely encountered in a sober state. The place showed similarities with Gamboshi in that a cave had been disclosed a few years before, allegedly containing aggressive additives for sorcerous objectives. The suspicions that weigh on a village in such circumstances appear to be met by collective drinking-bouts and indiscriminate identifications with the source of anxiety.

In what way do these responses to crisis disarm the gaze? By claiming that everybody is a witch the speaker undermines the grounds for suspicion, since everyone is accused, oneself included. The participants of the drinking party join the collective mood of becoming fully transparent and attuned to each other. The community can no longer come across as a gaze or Law opposing the individual. With the participants becoming immune to any normative reproach, the community has perhaps even suspended itself. The term 'witch' in the above statement undergoes an experiential shift in meaning: not that of unknown community-members embodying the sanctioning gaze, but that of emulative competitors boasting about their individual powers. Sharing the beer, drinking it from the same receptacle and openly competing for success, the participants simply use the law of social exchange as a means instead of being impinged by it. They have regained a form of belonging that permits self-assertion.

Sharing the drink from a common vessel: to fully savor the cultural significance of such a seemingly trivial practice, the reader should perhaps be submitted to the compressed gasp of clustered, culture-specific metaphors that possibly frame the participants' experience on the spot. Sukuma culture differentiates between more than thirty types of baskets, pots, vessels and other containers in all possible materials. Traditional cosmology describes the world as a cooking pot (*nungu*), with the sky forming its lid. In divination a healthy body is called a full 'gourd' (*kisabo*). The round, encompassing stool symbolizes the ancestor containing and protecting the descendant's life. When an elder dies, the stool is split in two and thrown in the grave. The potsherd (*lujo*) symbolizing death is the main item used in both aggressive medicine and funerary rites. In analogy with these practices, Sukuma myths recount how the accident of a water jar breaking asunder brought death into being. A general theme in Sukuma culture is to depict life and fertility as containment. The 'plenitude' requested from the ancestors refers to the unhindered expansion of offspring and cattle, which determine the patriarch's social status or 'collection' (*lukumo*), also called 'stomach' and 'home' by the diviner. The founding father of the clan is 'the great collector' (*makuma*). The

agro-pastoral challenge of a Sukuma family could be summed up along these lines: to 'fill up' their three main containers, the huge food basket (*ifuma*), the cattle-pen (*lubigili*), which will allow sons to marry, and the compound-fence (*lugutu*) comprising offspring and allied inhabitants. Containment invokes life and well-being, yet therefore it is also a source of envy. The chicken diviner indeed finds the sorcerous gaze under the chicken's flesh in a hidden pocket called the food basket (*ifuma*), which can show lingering reproach by poorer clan- and community-members. Hierarchy of social status among the elders depends on the sharing of home-made beer. For my initiation into the society of elders I was expected to brew well over six hundred liters of the two major types, *mapuya* (millet-based) and *kindi* (maize-based). The different, well-defined stages of sharing the beer dictate the pace of the initiation rituals. The nick-names which members obtain in the society of elders only have to do with idiosyncrasies of drinking. Even the so-called aspersing rites (*kufuha lwanga*) to treat affliction by propitiating a neglected ancestor, basically suggest the sharing of beer and mood with something as unfathomable as the ancestral spirit. This intricate cluster of semantic associations could explain the healing power which the Sukuma draw from the practice of sharing the same receptacle of beer. In such a culture there is more to beer drinking than the mere biological effect of intoxication, the social mechanism of escapism, or the psychical release of inner tension.[22]

One important clue in understanding how this practice addresses 'the piercing gaze' (*ngwiboneeji*), is that the anxiety of bewitchment is kept at bay as long as rules are allowed to be subjected to inversion, irony or joking. Blame dissolves. Words and deeds are taken at face value. Calculated, sneaky acts do not fit the inebriated. People's whims become a source of joy rather than threats. The individual is not focused on as accountable. Given such a frame of experience, the inhabitants of Gamboshi have managed to temporarily arrest the gaze that is fixed upon each other with the escalating rumors of intense witchcraft activity. As deaths from Aids and other illnesses cause suspicions to increase, Sukuma society devises collective replies that cover the land with innocence. These extract the 'zeal' out of what would allegedly be the main motive for murder, namely '(z)jealousy'. If necessary, they drench any lethal grudge or claim of the opaque Other in alcohol. Thus we may better qualify the often heard observation in Sukumaland that an increase in alleged sorcery parallels the spreading of 'alcoholism'.

During these spontaneous drinking parties the stronger, distilled alcohol (*gongo*) usually follows or replaces the home-made beer, which is more typical of ceremonial occasions. The parties essentially differ from the beer drinking during initiatory ceremonies or from the beer party which Ivan Karp has for example evocatively studied among the Iteso in Kenya. The strongly

formalized setting of the latter, concerning etiquette and seating of alternate and adjacent generations, forms the basis for a commensality and sense of sociability which Karp compares to Turner's concept of 'communitas' in ritual.[23] The community seems strongly present here, with rules of conduct aimed at preventing sorcery. Hence, in the beer party the Iteso "recapitulate their experience of the social order".[24] In contrast, the average Sukuma party could be portrayed as a celebration of the present. It has virtually no past: the common divisions of age, gender and kinship disappear. Little or no social status is accumulated (or lost) outside of the event. If participants fiercely compete or ostentatiously assert themselves, it is not to establish a hierarchy among them, but to enjoy the act itself of self-assertion and thus defy the gaze which tends to govern the community they otherwise form. During the event, any sorcery imagined is the kind that adult men fearlessly use in combat. They have become 'dancers' in the sense which will soon be illustrated.

Social order and a sense of belonging do not depend on reinforcing the social within the self, but on empowering the self within the social group. Group members have to retrieve the composure and self-confidence to negotiate the norms for their own benefit. Collective drinking practices amplify the negotiable and malleable side of the social order. They also deactivate the stress of social expectations and the feelings of relative deprivation that may have been caused by an increasingly monetarized economy holding the promise of unbounded possibilities of self-enrichment. In the blessed ambiance that leaves nobody accountable, there are no winners or losers, only sorcerers.

The dancer and the witch

Sharing beer is however only one way amongst several for the individual to retrieve his or her sense of belonging to the world. We should turn to another example of exodelic practice, which may have been more of a model for the *gongo* party than the traditional drinking ceremonies. I am thinking of the famous Sukuma dance-competitions (*mbina*), which take place after the harvest, when all the food has been stored (some farmers of course having had more success than others). These celebrations magnify the struggle for distinction in social life while casting away its confining normative factors. In dance-competitions the social environment is overtly presented as an outside to conquer. The participants in the drinking party identify with the dancer, who contrasts strongly with the witch they despise.

Since the first half of the 20th century, people have been fascinated by two secret societies, *Ba-galu* and *Ba-gika*, founded by two illustrious healers whose followers soon managed to diffuse their antagonism over the whole

of Sukumaland. Dance societies affiliate themselves with either Bagalu or Bagika. Today, few people have been initiated into either one, yet even fewer are those who do not identify themselves, for instance through their patri-clan, with one of these two sections of popular social structure. In the dance and singing competitions the two contesting groups should be of opposite affiliation. What is at stake in their battle? The attention of the public, who swarm and jostle in between the two sides. The winner is the group that attracts the largest crowd. In contrast to what is pursued in daily life, the objective of *mbina* is only to catch the public's eye. The participants try to excite and shock the audience, challenge and deter the opponent while pretending to dispose of the stronger aggressive medicine for defeating the opposite group. They particularly use recipes of 'attraction' (*samba*) that enchant the viewers. Personal attraction is indeed the key-word to understand what is at stake. All the dancers and drummers distinguish themselves as wild, powerful, and dangerous in their own way, incarnating *budoshi*, 'selfishness', which is precisely what the victims of witchcraft imagine they are reproached for.

The dance and singing competitions take place in open terrain or in a secluded, fenced area, in any case on the fringes of village space. The scenes and interactions happen in a twilight zone, unhindered by the distinctions and related prohibitions of the social order. The spectacle is dominated by an attitude and behavior normally not tolerated by the community: obscenity, open sexual advances, trying to monopolize attention. In that sense the *mbina* reverses the social order of daily life. A parallel can be drawn between *mbina* and Swahili-speaking towns, where outward show, individual ostentation and plain self-assertion through lifestyle and wealth are not mediated but stimulated, especially in bars, church services and modern weddings. A similar anonymous space at odds with common village life is the market place, with its rapid greetings and shallow conversations, where physical proximity and contact are undisciplined and devoid of significance, and where exchange occurs without leaving any trace of strings attached. Being distant enough from the familiar to be replenishing, towns and markets attract adolescents for the same exodelic effect as dance-competitions. In sharing the mood of drinking, dancing or selling the participants 'touch' each other, without it affecting social ties. The witch however intrudes. In that opposite frame of experience the rules of social distance are still very much valid, even unduly accentuated, yet purposefully broken. Invisibly inhaled, swallowed or treaded upon, evil substances find their way inside the victim's body.

Galu and Gika groups, who informally divide Sukuma society into two social sections, compete publicly, out in the open. Such popular antagonism obviously allows both the participants and the no less active spectators to

ventilate the social tensions proper to any society. Each side stereotypes the other: “The Gika are slow and lazy” or “The Galu eat like savages.” The overt confrontation between Galu and Gika is that of rivals who in spite of their antagonism know that both derive their identity from the existence of the other. They are ‘relatively’ opposed to each other. Their competition liberates: despite conflicting interests, both groups belong to the same game. The witch plays a fundamentally different game than the victim, and in that sense no game at all. When interviewing the patients of the Sukuma healers where I lived, and following their progress on a regular basis, it struck me how the idea of fighting the witch through the healer’s strong magic (including the idea of a distant battle-field for magic, called Gamboshi) was a discourse to acquire after reassuring divinations and group therapy. That discourse on magic and counter-magic, often the only one recorded by ethnographers, is the synthesis, a ‘third’ phase following the actual crisis that underlies witchcraft beliefs. It takes depth-interviews, life-stories, day-to-day monitoring of patients and the analysis of their divination-sessions before one traces this essential breach so anti-thetical to the ‘cool’ state of everyday reciprocity and competition. In that ‘heat’ victims perceive their witch in a framework that opposes the individual to the opaque community of others. Patients feel intruded upon and marginalized by the curse they call *ibona*, ‘the gaze’. Collective drinking and dancing practices can disarm that gaze by turning the social environment again into a play-ground for self-assertion.

The dancer and the witch, the player and the killjoy. The young man showing off, noisily, arousing the viewer’s desire, contrasts with an elderly lady, imagined to scold in silence while holding no fertile promises. Witchcraft beliefs draw from such tangible, self-empowering contrasts in order to therapeutically obscure something more basic: the victim’s loss of trust in ‘the world as such’ when facing death or ongoing misfortune. That loss of unproblematic trust has certainly not diminished among the growing number of educated, informed and ‘connected’ people worldwide who are building up evermore social expectations and pressures. Perhaps it is unfortunate for the individuals involved, but their culture does not accept witchcraft beliefs to voice and expel this heat. Many of them resort to the exodelic they know: besides cross-cultural lifestyles and travels verging on the exotic, intoxicating techno-dances keep on conquering the planet. The Sukuma response to bewitchment does not differ much when feelings of intrusion reach such intensity as in the village of Gamboshi. Sometimes there may be no other exodelic left but to join in parties of collective release with tensions freely arising but not sticking.

Perhaps the Sukuma are right after all when they compare Gamboshi to *Bulaya*, the West in general. For outsiders it seems like a dreamland,

prosperous and full of sophisticated magic. For the inhabitants themselves it resembles a vortex propelled by the drive to progress or perish. Distance and a minimum of ignorance are necessary for enchantment to work. In other words, I have come to realize that Gamboshi is a place meant to be fantasized about but not visited.

Since drink and dance stimulate exactly those attitudes of subversion that witches are believed to punish, these practices may do more than disarm. They may actually be defying the community's gaze, which manifests itself in the very presence of the audience. We probably capture Sukuma culture too when understanding its appreciation for anybody who likes to be a bit more of a dancer in life: to not care about what others think or say, to respond to one's deeper longing to assert oneself in every possible way. To be eye-catching instead of subject to the gaze.

Notes

1. Jean Baudrillard, *A l'Ombre du Millenaire ou le Suspens de l'An 2000* (Paris: Sens & Tonka, 1998), 97.
2. Here I refer to Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
3. Lorraine Nencel and Peter Pels, eds., *Constructing Knowledge: Authority and Critique in Social Science* (London: Sage, 1991).
4. Per Brandström, "Seeds and Soil: The Quest for Life and the Domestication of Fertility in Sukuma Thought and Reality," in Anita Jacobson-Widding and Walter van Beek, eds., *The creative Communion: African Folk Models of Fertility and the Regeneration of Life* (Uppsala: Alqvist & Wiksell, 1990).
5. Maurice Bloch, *Prey into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 6.
6. Similar reconsiderations of Mauss' theory on the gift and Lévi-Strauss on alliance, can be found in Maurice Godelier and Jacques Hassoun, eds., *Meurtre du Père / Sacrifice de la Sexualité: Approches Anthropologiques et Psychanalytiques* (Strasbourg: Arcanes, 1996).
7. Such an old conception of socialization does not limit itself to adepts of Foucault, Heidegger and Nietzsche, which was claimed by Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xiii. It is still present in postmodern thought or in holistic efforts when these tend to shy away from cultural distinctions such as inside/outside, home/forest, male/female. In their reaction the same assumption may be recognized, namely unwittingly treating distinctions as dichotomies (each of the two terms is assumed to be an absolute entity with fixed content) instead of relative, codic operators of cultural practice.
8. For a list of medical recepies combining *shingila* and curative plants, see Hans Cory, "The Ingredients of Magic Medicines," in *Africa*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1949), 13–32.
9. Ray Abrahams, *The Nyamwezi Today: a Tanzanian People in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 54–57. Ray Abrahams, "Sungusungu: Village Vigilante Groups in Tanzania," in *African Affairs*, vol. 86, no. 343, 194–195.
10. Read chapter 3 in Per Brandström, *Boundless Universe: the Culture of Expansion among the Sukuma-Nyamwezi People* (Uppsala University: doctoral dissertation, 1991).

11. Goran Hyden, *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an Uncaptured Peasantry* (London: Heinemann, 1980).
12. Ray Abrahams notes that already in the mid seventies at the moment of migrating into compact settlements the fear of increased witchcraft was expressed among the Nyamwezi; Ray Abrahams, ed., *Witchcraft in Contemporary Tanzania* (Cambridge: African Studies Centre, 1994), 13. For an account of contemporary witch-hunts in Sukumaland I refer to this monograph.
13. The distinction between witchcraft and sorcery as introduced by Evans-Pritchard's study of the Azande does not apply to Sukuma culture; E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracle and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 226–227. The Sukuma believe in the conscious and hidden usage of aggressive medicine causing affliction and death. Adopting Evans-Pritchard's distinction I should only employ the term 'sorcery'. Yet, english-speaking Sukuma translate their word *nogi* by 'witch'. To speak of a witch-hunt sounds indeed better than to impose consistency on our vocabulary and create the word 'sorcerer-hunt'. In my study on Sukuma culture both terms refer to the same figure and they will be applied interchangeably, yet the one more emphasizing the use of lethal magic (sorcerer), the other emphasizing the intimate relationship between victim and secret aggressor (witch). The term 'witch' connotes the impact which the alleged aggressor has on the victim's imagination, emotions and sense of self.
14. Roscoe E. Tanner, "The Sorcerer in northern Sukumaland, Tanganyika," in *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 12 (1954), 437–443; also Roscoe E. Tanner, *The Witch Murders in Sukumaland – A Sociological Commentary* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1970).
15. Simeon Mesaki, "Witch-Killing in Sukumaland," in Ray Abrahams, ed., *Witchcraft in Contemporary Tanzania* (Cambridge: African Studies Centre, 1994), 55–56.
16. Abrahams, ibid., 1994, 15–17.
17. Tanner, ibid., 1970.
18. I roughly apply the term 'gaze' in reference to Foucault's panopticism and to Lacan's antinomic relation between the (intransparent) gaze of the Other and the eye of the subject; see Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre XI: les Quatre Concepts Fondamentaux de la Psychanalyse, 1964* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), 101ff. However, I conceive of the 'gaze' as only being experienced on specific occasions related to existential fear, crisis or affliction.
19. Here I apply the general formulas proposed by Ian Richardson, *The Role of Tone in the Structure of Sukuma* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1959), 9; and by Herman Batibo, *Le Kesukuma: Phonologie, Morphologie* (Paris: Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1985), 166, 171.
20. Elisabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: a Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990), 42.
21. Jacques Godbout, *L'Esprit du Don* (Paris: La découverte, 1992), 188, 15.
22. Here I refer to Horton's tension-reduction thesis according to which 'the primary function of alcoholic beverages in all societies is the reduction of anxiety', which anthropologists, as Heath points out, often tacitly take to be axiomatic in their studies of anomie and social conflict; see Mary Douglas, ed., *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 39. From the data of my paper one could indeed argue that, first of all, the communal aspect of sharing the drink plays a major role in attracting the Sukuma (Otherwise, individual withdrawal into alcoholism or drug-abuse would have been equally valid alternatives). Secondly, Horton's thesis taken at face value disregards the element of competition, which is so central in the drinking parties which I refer to. Bateson, for instance, has shown how a kind of competitive 'symmetry' dominates in alcoholism and how the AA treatment aims

at converting this state of mind into a complementary view on one's relationship to others and the universe; Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1990 [1972]), 326.

23. Ivan Karp, "Beer Drinking and Social Experience in an African Society," in I. Karp and C. Bird, eds., *Explorations in African Systems of Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 108.
24. Ibid., 113.