

Beatrice Nicolini (ed), *Studies in Witchcraft, Magic, War and Peace in Africa: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*

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This edited volume aims to investigate a theme that has received little analytical attention in the emerging body of literature on witchcraft in Africa, namely whether contemplations about witchcraft can contribute towards understanding processes of warfare and peace-building. Nicolini claims that witchcraft and magic has played an important historical role in political and military conflicts. She observes that anti-colonial resistance movements have invoked the supernatural in political mobilisation, rituals of healing have been deployed in post-colonial situations, and that witchcraft and magic have been invoked in numerous power struggles in the continent through time.

Whilst this aim is an important one and certainly deserves greater analytical attention, this volume does not really succeed in generating deeper general understanding. This is in part because the volume does not contain either any comprehensive introduction that frames the issues dealt with in the subsequent chapters in any systematic theoretical manner, or any conclusion that attempts to formulate generalisations about the implications of the very detailed chapters on witchcraft and magic in various parts of Africa. Generalisations do not simply emerge from historical texts: they need to be formulated explicitly. The editor's contribution seems to be limited to the provision of well-known definitions for the phenomena under consideration. I was also disappointed by the lack of selectivity and intellectual coherence: the volume includes as many as eighteen different chapters, which address very divergent issues. The volume nonetheless contains some extremely

interesting chapters, which greatly advance our understanding of the particularities of witchcraft and magic in different social and historical contexts.

The volume is divided into two parts, the first examining the influence of witchcraft beliefs during warfare in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The editor claims that colonised people often attempted to find a reliable protection against the disruptions and dependencies brought about by colonialism. Azenabor attempts a philosophical, Horton-like comparison between the idea of witchcraft and modern science, and Accoroni shows how Sufi mystics amongst the Senegalese community in Paris reinterpreted the pre-Islamic concept of *baraqa* as a mystical force.

The other chapters deal with more explicit historical themes. Claudio focuses on the exploits of the warlord, Kanyemba, whose warriors were the ancestors of the Shona-speaking Chikundu in contemporary Zimbabwe. Giles and Nicolini examine the status of invasive spirits and the activities of ritual specialists (*waganga*) on the Swahili coast. Kirkaldy carefully examines the accounts of German missionaries to cast light on witchcraft beliefs in nineteenth century Venda and also on the recent phenomenon of witch-killings in this part of South Africa. Roque provides a fascinating account of the experiences of Artur Mafuma, a diviner who was accused by the Mozambican colonial authorities of murder and witchcraft, and of being an impostor in 1955. Perhaps more in line with the overall focus of the volume, are the chapters by Owino on how warfare effected concepts of death and burial practices amongst African soldiers in colonial Kenya; and also by Owusu and Uzoigwe on medicine, magic and warfare in colonial and post-colonial West Africa. The latter chapter shows in great detail how Juju priests used medicines for productive, protective and destructive purposes.

The second part of the volume focuses on the post-colonial era. Ranger and Arnold examine the significance of witchcraft beliefs and of anti-witchcraft campaigns in Zimbabwe and Tanzania respectively. Ranger highlights the themes of introversion, social tensions and moral debates, and Arnold shows in greater detail how these campaigns pitted the youth against elders. Beal and Lubkemann describe the utter devastation of the seventeen-year-long Mozambican civil war between the ruling party (Frelimo) and the opposition (Renamo). Beal examines the author Mia Couto's fictional work *Terra Sonâmbula* in which fantastical and dreamlike elements intermingle. Lubkemann draws on

ethnographic fieldwork, focusing on the displacement of persons, their desperate search for asylum in South Africa and in Zimbabwe, and also on the problems of starting a new life. Three of the nine chapters focus explicitly on mystical healing: Ajibade examines healing in the context of polytheistic belief systems amongst the Yoruba; Butler the significance of Nigerian talismans and amulets; and Granjo the quest for therapy for suffering and guilt in the aftermath of the devastating Mozambican civil war. There are also informative essays on post-colonial dilemmas. Benjamin shows how the development of a huge sisal plantation in coastal Kenya forced people to move to an area called Shariani, which became a centre for popular healing, magical practices and witchcraft. Kasule focuses on how theatrical performances in Uganda evoke memories of Idi Amin. These performances depict religious practices and witchcraft as synonymous to political corruption and bribery.

The volume lacks general theoretical treatment and editorial coherence, but succeeds in bringing to print an array of interesting chapters written by African and Africanist scholars. These chapters should perhaps be read on their own.

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