# Do I Understand What Witchcraft Is?

Beyond assumptions and Federici's thoughts on witches, witchcraft and witch hunts in sub-Saharan Africa after qualitative research in Kigoma, Tanzania

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**Abstract:** Local realities might differ from the macro perspectives of theories. Moreover, applying theory to local contexts may well lead to wrong conclusions and render the researcher blind to experienced lived worlds. This paper sheds light on the limits of thought and assumptions by analysing qualitative interviews conducted in Kigoma, Tanzania on the topic of witches, witchcraft and witch hunts, and comparing the results with Silvia Federici's neomarxist feminist theory, according to which contemporary witch hunts are linked to the expansion of a capitalist, i.e. neoliberal, world order. As this paper will show, promoting phenomenologically oriented, field-based approaches to theory, Federici's perspective and my own assumptions fail to recognise the ambiguities of witchcraft and to understand the witch as having a moral function within society, rather than being the victim of a concerted attack on the female body; essentially, the witch is a human being that in the perception of the other embodies what an individual in society ought neither to do nor to be.

## Introduction: How I Found the Research Topic

"...like the European witch hunts, the new witch hunts in Africa are taking place in societies that are undergoing a process of 'primitive accumulation,' where [...] new property relations and new concepts of value creation are coming into place, and communal solidarity is breaking down under the impact of economic strain." (Federici 2018, 73)

"Witches are modernity's prototypical malcontents." (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993, xxix)

"...the witch too executes the arrogant, who have violated the social law strictly defined. [...] Contrary to the typical picture of an outcast at the periphery of society, the witch should be located at the heart of society, if in its deepest, invisible core. The witch has moral power." (Stroeken 2012, 133)

"I would say that witchcraft is the using of magical power in the wrong way." (a very good friend in Kigoma in 2021)

When I first came across Italian social scientist Silvia Federici's neomarxist feminist theory about witches and witch hunts during my term at the University of Pretoria in South Africa in 2020, I had no idea that my own home town, Würzburg, situated in Northern Bavaria, was the setting of one of the largest witch hunts in 17th century Europe, carried out by Julius Echter of

Mespelbrunn, whose coat of arms decorates many buildings in Würzburg and still today is on one of Würzburg's famous wine labels (Monter 2002, 26f.). I was similarly unaware of the prevailing omnipresence of witchcraft beliefs in Kigoma, Tanzania, despite my almost annual visits since 2013, which sometimes lasted several months. My ignorance as a white European man was no hindrance to forging close friendships; additionally, I don't recall any situations that called for an update or correction of my worldview. The narratives I had been told since I was a child seemed to work very well; Africa is an underdeveloped and poor continent because of global dependencies and a colonial record of exploitation. Poverty leads to illnesses, especially in a tropical setting, and illnesses lead to poverty. Modern education is the way out for the individual and the key to enlightenment or civilisation, ultimately leading to economic growth and progress. Simply put, the well-known story of development and modern reason fuelled my more or less subconscious self-perception of some sort of superiority by chance, for I was lucky enough to be born in 'civilised' Europe at the right time, with the right skin colour, the right sex, and so forth and so forth.

Assuming a singular, unidirectional path of development, of transition from 'traditional' to modern, capitalist societies, Federici's theory, derived from 17th century Europe, superficially fit well into my picture of the world: as African societies entered a new wave of primitive accumulation[2] in the 1980's through the neoliberal restructurings imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank,[3] the violence of witch hunts with the witch as a symbol of evil forces controlling an ever more elusive and violent social reality became to me the inevitable and natural "response to the commodification of life and capitalism's attempt not only to reactivate slave labor but to turn human bodies themselves into means of accumulation." (Federici 2018, 68) Such an explanation did both: it soothed my political convictions and did not threaten my view of a sub-Saharan Africa that yet had to catch up on a few steps. However, social sciences are about challenging our 'common sense truths' and so I went back to see my friends in Kigoma towards the end of my M.A. with little clue but with a question that sounded smart: *how far is the concept of primitive accumulation capable of explaining the lived and embodied experiences of women affected by contemporary witch hunts and witchcraft allegations?* I soon came to realise that my presumptions had to be dismantled.

This paper attempts two things: first, it summarises and analyses the findings of a qualitative study I conducted in Kigoma and its surroundings on the topic of witchcraft, witches and witch hunts during November 2021, elaborating that the witch is a moral figure that plays a crucial role in the functioning of a communally organised society, the latter being disrupted in the neoliberal setting. Second, by doing so and by connecting the findings with auto ethnographic reflections, anthropologists' writings and Federici's theory, it aims to shed light on boundaries of thought and limited horizons, arguing that the social sciences must constantly reassess their common ways of knowledge production. Therefore, I will first describe the assumptions surrounding witchcraft, witches and witch hunts from which I departed, summarising the literature I read accordingly and – with a special emphasis on Federici's thoughts – pointing to the connection between witch hunts and processes of primitive accumulation and subsequent social crises in a neoliberal setting. I will then turn to an outline of my methodology, where I will introduce the phenomenological stance which I tried to pursue in my research and sustain throughout this paper, although – as the following part shows – I also rely heavily on content analyses and literature. The interviews analysed here, i.e. the perceptions and experiences which were shared with me by various people, will draw a picture of witchcraft and witches which I did not expect; namely that 1) their existence is undoubted, 2) they are embedded in shifting cosmologies and ambiguous notions of witchcraft, and 3) the witch is a moral figure. In the conclusion, I will return from that micro perspective to Federici's structural macro lens and restate my arguments.[4]

# Towards Assumptions on Witches, Witchcraft and Witch Hunts in Tanzania: Establishing the Research Project's Horizon, with a Focus on Federici

By January 2022, a simple google research[5] on 'witchcraft in Tanzania' from my current location in Germany primarily produced articles on accusations, persecutions and killings in a predominantly Christian and Muslim country where nonetheless 93% of the population believe in witchcraft. (Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life 2010, 178) Some of those articles write about killings for the sake of "albino body parts bring[ing] great wealth" (Barnett 2012); more shed light on those "thousands of elderly Tanzanian women [...] strangled, knifed to death and burned alive over the last two decades after being denounced as witches." (Reuters 2017) The belief in witchcraft and witches, it is iterated, is capable of explaining the inexplicable, leads to tensions and violence, and can only be overcome through education and development. The actual content of witchcraft belief systems, this "specific form of African tradition [that is engulfed by] a sense of mystery and fear" (Barnett 2012) and links "calamities such as death, sickness, and poor crops [to] magic and superstition" (von Dacre 2019), is barely dealt with despite the terms given to the search engine and – more importantly – its significance for speaking about so-called witchcraft-related violence. Moreover, such articles dwell on a depiction of witchcraft as negative, fictional and uncanny, perpetuating a modern, demonising perception that understands witchcraft as a vague, incoherent and evil concept incompatible with any enlightened notion; a perspective that has its roots in 17th century Europe and was exported to the African continent during missionary and colonial activities. (Pavanello 2017b, 104ff.)

While it may well be that google's algorithms follow a certain common habit here in Germany to picture the East African country as a 'dark' place[6] where "dark arts flourished" (Barnett 2012) and 'traditional', 'backward' belief systems dating back centuries prevail, such a dubious tendency towards simplistic postcolonial, if not racist, perspectives in the Western popular imagination of sub-Saharan Africa should not distract us from the fact that indeed such incidents occur. Although there were already anti-witchcraft movements in precolonial and colonial times, those movements aimed at ending witchcraft rather than killing witches. Witch-hunts in Tanzania took on unprecedented dimensions during the late socialist era in the 1970s and 1980s, and even more during young neoliberalism in the 1990s, with e.g. 5,000 people killed between 1994 and 1998 alone. (Behringer 2004, 206ff.) According to the latest annual report of the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC 2021, 20f.), a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) based in Tanzania monitoring human rights processes in the country, "more than 1,380 incidents of [...] killings committed by community members, motivated by their beliefs in witchcraft" occurred from 2015 to 2019, equalling "an average of 276 killings each year", but with figures declining because of "efforts by the Police Force and other law enforcement officials"; in 2020, 112 such incidents were reported to police stations.[7] They succeeded despite the poorly equipped Tanzanian jurisprudence on that matter for the corresponding law, the so-called *Witchcraft Act*, is in large parts a relict of the country's colonial past, remains vague and presents "conceptual and definitional inadequacies", as Simeon Mesaki (2009, 137) asserts. Most importantly, the law differs from practical and popular understandings of witchcraft to such an extent that people do not turn to the governmental jurisdiction or official law enforcement procedures and rather deal with cases of (alleged) witchcraft themselves, which is – according to Mesaki (ibid.) – both a "category with which people think" and a supposed way out of "poverty and hopelessness."

Likewise referring to witchcraft as being 'a way out' of distress and hardships, Wolfgang Behringer's (2004, 212) argues that "witchcraft fears proliferate amidst insecurity" and that the ecological, political and socio-economic crises of Africa in the late last century – e.g. the droughts of the 1980s, rapid population increase, malnutrition, famine and epidemics – encouraged "the revival of protection cults, witch-finding and persecution," a dynamic intensified through growing frustration and fundamentalist tendencies among a large youth population without prospects. Indeed, according to a study by Edward Miguel (2005, 1170) that evaluated the impact of rainfall variations on income and witch hunts, poverty or essentially "income shocks are a key underlying cause of the murder of elderly women as 'witches' in Tanzania." In a similar vein, Mesaki (1993, 229ff.) links the witch-killings in Sukumaland, where between 1970 and 1984 3,692 people were killed, 69% of them women, to the socialist efforts by independent Tanzania's first leader Julius Nyerere, arguing that his *ujamaa*-politics led to greater dependence, ecological problems, food crops deficiencies and social tensions.[8] With the end of the socialist era and its ideology of "rejection of selfishness [and commitment] to forswear the temptation to exploit one's fellow man" (Ferguson 2006, 75), Tanzanian societies came under new pressure from neoliberal structural adjustment policies (SAP). Land shortages and economic decline followed in many rural areas, a trend ever more accelerated by the reforms imposed on Tanzania by the IMF and the World Bank in the mid 1980s by means of loan conditionalities. (Machangu 2015, 279) To put it briefly: the relicts and the overturn of the socialist system, and the subsequent deregulation of markets, liberalisation and privatisation, in particular the withdrawal of the state from rural areas, has resulted in Tanzania "in the revival, continuation or escalation of conflicts over land and resources and the reordering of property relations" (Pitcher and Askew 2006, 8), leading to increasing inner-migration, economic insecurities, social stratification, and – indirectly – witch-hunts.

With the end of the socialist era and an emergent globally-dependent economy in neoliberal Tanzania beginning in the late 1980s, witchcraft became a possibility to interpret and understand the new, not state-planned, hence relatively unpredictable and seemingly miraculous, rewards from factors of production such as labour, land, capital and entrepreneurship. (Mgumia 2020, 21f.) Meanwhile, the neoliberal restructurings according to the imposed SAP pushed many Tanzanians, predominantly farmers, out of subsistence into dependence on cash income. Yet, "social networks are still maintained through food exchanges and livestock loans, though they almost always involve cash." (Snyder et.al. 2020, 43) Neighbourhood groups – also a relict of the socialist era – manage "a variety of social needs, such as providing help for medical care [...], weddings and other events through pooling of cash contributions" (ibid.), but are challenged by inequalities and increased individualisation. In this neoliberal, yet postsocialist setting, the Tanzanian legal system of land tenure and land use, namely the Land Act and the Village Land Act of 1999, is built on a community-based system where village councils are assigned land management tasks whereas the "actual right to land is now deemed to be held by each individual, family, group, sub-village or village community as a whole." (Ikdahl 2008, 49) Registration is not mandatory as customary rights themselves are recognised as property rights. In this regard, it is not necessarily a harmonious solution which favours some over others. Customary law might, for instance, deny "widows the right to inherit at the death of their husbands [and thus increase] quarrels over property and inheritance." (Machangu 2015, 280) According to Federici's (2018, 1) analysis, which I shall elaborate further in the following section, as well as the concerted attack on the female body, "the relation between witch-hunting and the contemporary process of land enclosure and privatization" is emphasised as fulfilling one of the major conditions for violent witch hunts. At least, it is "no wonder" – as Jacqueline Mgumia (2020, 22) notes – that the shift in Tanzania from a socialist system to a dependent neoliberal economy, where "rewards from factors of production

[. . . ] are often unpredictable and miraculous", resulted in witchcraft practices that are geared against one's own neighbour or competitor.

For Silvia Federici (2018, 65ff.; 2019, 65), the social crisis that comes with neoliberal restructurings and global capitalism – e.g. the rupture of communal bonds, quarrels over access to and rights over land, the intransparency of global forces' local effects, radical belief systems, and an intergenerational struggle to survive and 'develop' in the emergent neoliberal order – is unmistakably tied to the surge of witch-hunts in sub-Saharan Africa from the late 1980s onwards. Federici (2019, 117) argues that the neoliberal restructurings imposed on the relatively young independent African nations by the IMF and the World Bank were meant to "guarantee a more equitable allocation of communal lands but [have] actually promote[d] commercial interests and reduce[d] the resources that people can claim." Accompanying "the decline in the status of women [and] as a consequence of the life-and-death competition over vanishing resources, [...] a new round of enclosures, and [...] an unprecedented impoverishment of the population" (Federici 2004, 237) led to a scale of persecution and violence which was unprecedented in the colonial or even pre-colonial era. In line with Justus Ogembo's (2006) observations of contemporary witch hunts in southwestern Kenya, Federici (2008, 24f.; 2018, 67) highlights the "increasingly mysterious character of economic transactions," the incomprehensibility of economic distress, and the subsequent despair or hopelessness caused by neoliberal restructurings, igniting an intergenerational struggle for survival as main drivers of witch hunts, and adds the role of evangelising sects which fuel radical views and anxieties about the devil, illnesses and death. Acknowledging the tendency of African societies to refer to spiritual powers for the legitimacy or moral value of any given act or the believed reflection of social arrangements in the invisible world (Ellis 2011, 111; Ellis and Ter Haar 2004, 15), radical religious thoughts and practices that hold the devil culpable for misfortune may indeed foster a 'witch-craze' with troubled African societies turning to witchcraft related belief systems, seeking a "solution [for their social crisis] in the restoration of what they see as a pure tradition." (Ellis 2011, 113) But, while the spread of radical religious beliefs such as Pentecostalism can also be linked to tense socio-economic conditions under neoliberalism, Federici's (2018, 74) argument points to these conditions first; they create a situation where "many older women and men [...] are hunted as witches; [...] seen as dead assets, the embodiment of a world of practices and values that is increasingly considered sterile and nonproductive." Hence, broadly, she interprets the increase in the sheer number and violence of witch hunts in sub-Saharan Africa as the result of a new wave of primitive accumulation which Federici (2019, 14) sees – contrary to Karl Marx – *not* as a "one-time historical event confined to the origins of capitalism, [but] constitutive of capitalist relations at all times."[9] It has to be stressed however, that her global analysis departs from a historical materialist analysis of witch hunts in Europe with women being "the main target of this persecution, because it was they who were most severely impoverished by the capitalization of economic life, and because the regulation of women's sexuality and reproductive capacity was a condition for the construction of more stringent forms of social control." (Federici 2018, 2) The reputed witch, in this sense, is both struggling in an emergent capitalist system and rebelling against the new social order, by virtue of *her* own body as well as the capability to perform magic, the latter fundamentally "incompatible [. . . ] with the capitalist work-discipline" (Federici 2004, 143) since magic attributes special powers to the individual, enables them to be free from the limits of time and space, and ultimately *"to obtain what one wanted without work."* (Ibid., 142; italics i.o.)

Now, to summarise initial assumptions on – or rather my starting point for – the topic: with the exploitation and disruption of former social and communal bonds continuing beyond colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa under an ever more emergent global neoliberal order, the witch becomes

the embodiment of metaphysical, evil forces which control an increasingly competitive and indi-vidualised social reality. Subsequently, for Federici (2018, 73), witch hunts are a "disciplinary tool" to control women's reproductive labour, and take place "in societies that are undergoing a process of primitive accumulation", defining women's societal role "when monetary relations become hegemonic" and inequalities, obscurities, dependencies, and insecurities evolve. Based on these theoretical observations, we should now be able to put forward the hypothesis that witch hunts in Tanzania are caused by social tensions under a constantly emergent neoliberal condi-tion that faces the heritage of socialism and colonialism. In accord with Mesaki's (1993) and Miguel's (2005) observations, women are those primarily targeted due to their relatively poor or 'low' socio-economic and cultural positions (also because of religious influences), as an effort to put them into the reproductive and submissive dependency (although many engage in subsistence farming) that allowed men to take part in paid labour and to produce for the market (cf. Mies 2014). If the witch is to be seen as the (female) one who causes misfortune and harm for *her* own benefit beyond *her* 'rights', at least in the eyes of those who are in distress, the belief in witchcraft can now materialistically be interpreted as a potential 'way out' of insecurity; respectively an ex-planation for one's own misery, although witchcraft itself is barely dealt with in this theoretical perspective.

## On Positionality, Locality and a Phenomenological Research Approach: the Difficulty of Leaving Behind Assumptions and Imagining Questions

Going beyond what has already been stated, Federici's structural argument runs the risk of falling short of "focusing on the subjective aspects of human agency and making sense of the presumed irrational side of human life." (Pavanello 2017a, 6) Indeed, to understand what witchcraft is and what it is not was a crucial endeavour of my research project since I first felt the urge to equip 'my Tanzanian friends' with more agency than to see them as mere cogs in the wheel of a neoliberal global order that is beyond their control but shapes their lives, but second, especially wanted to understand the lived experiences of those affected. Because I wanted to see how far Federici's theory was capable of explaining actual experiences, and since Federici herself is considered a feminist Marxist, and as those 'experiencing' are – I assumed – primarily women, I was inclined to follow a feminist qualitative research approach which does both: "to test theory against praxis, [and] to try to articulate the meaning of women's experiences, including stories that have been marginalized and/or silenced." (McHugh 2014, 153) Accordingly, I was committed to taking a phenomenological stance, i.e. to analysing experiences, even more so as it seemed self-evident to me that the way people perceive and approach their worlds has a decisive influence on how they navigate their lives. Hence, if there are social pressures within neoliberal structures, then for me, the following questions arose: Why do those tensions burst into witchcraft allegations and violent persecutions? What is that specific mindset, that subjective perspective that seeks solutions in metaphysical forces which allegedly harm and control one's own destiny or life? How do people who believe in witchcraft perceive their worlds, and how they are positioned in them, and what construes their particular ways of being? Such questions are – of course – highly problematic for they might easily contribute to harmful *Othering*, given my own privileged white heritage and a subject matter which (at least superficially) seems to me quite distinct from my modern world views. To rephrase the problem along the lines of Peter Geschiere (2015, 609), renowned for his works on the modernity of witchcraft:

> A crucial challenge to both historians and anthropologists [...] is how to face the strong presence of these [witchcraft] imaginaries in the societies concerned, without contributing to 'othering' them – as irrational, prescientific, and nontransparent, or whatever peculiarities can serve to make these societies the 'Other' of the supposedly modern West. Or, to put it more directly, ignoring the generality of popular preoccupations in many parts of, for instance, Africa – as for early modern Europe – is an impossibility. But how then can we address them without 'primitivizing' the continent or the earlier period?

However, that the raised questions indeed assume a distinct or even alien *Other* is crucial to a phenomenological approach. Philosophically, phenomenology dwells on the notion of any *Other* as a subject being placed in and perceiving the world in a certain way. One can relate to these subjects through "empathy" (Husserl 2013, 51) or understand them through hermeneutic interpretations of their being-in-the-world (Heidegger 2001, 61ff.). The focus of a phenomenological analysis is thus an analysis of the Other's being-in-the-world, meaning "human beings' existence in their world as an individual and within their social context" (Horrigan-Kelly et.al. 2016, 7), rather than on subjects per-se. To see social phenomena instead of subjects as original ontological entities and content of research allows the research to move beyond an inscriptive story-telling about 'the (inferior) characteristics of native Africans' towards 1) rejecting objective reality for the sake of phenomena, i.e. "our experiences and our perceptions of these experiences" (Spencer et.al. 2014, 88), 2) paying attention to lived experiences and their attributed meanings, and 3) realising that phenomena are universal. Therefore, in line with one of Geschiere's (2015, 609) suggested solutions to the challenge of avoiding *Othering*, namely to show "through a broader comparative perspective [...] that the issues addressed by a notion like witchcraft emerge in maybe different but still corresponding forms in societies all over the world", I can already assert that broadly, witchcraft, witches and witch hunts are not bound to a certain time and place. They "are – like magic and religion – a *universal phenomenon*." (Behringer 2004, 3; italics i.o.)

But to what extent am I really able to relate to – and thus interpret or understand – a mode of being-in-the-world that builds on belief systems incorporating an immaterial, metaphysical world supposedly alien to me, against the background that "there has never been a universally accepted definition of witchcraft" (ibid., 4) and opinions as well as interpretations of witchcraft diverge? Simply put: am I really able to find the right words, or to understand witchcraft in sub-Saharan Africa at all? Of course, it is undeniable that my cultural and socioeconomic context (male, white, German, rich family, Christian upbringing) is different to those I would like to research (mostly female, Black, Tanzanian, relatively 'poor', belief in Christianity/Islam *and*/or witchcraft). The problem is both ethical and methodological. It is ethical because I am writing with the intention to speak without certainty that what I claim to be valid qualitative research results are actual reflections of the lived experiences of the research subjects.[10] It is methodological because I can hardly know what questions are the most relevant or which ones I should ask or avoid in order to make my conclusive argument valid for those subjects I am trying to speak about or to.[11] Additionally, how should I assess or even know the influence of my own positionality? As one approach to these issues, one of my professors argued in an email: "Positionality remains a vague background item, and even if you are aware of it and let that change your behaviour, you will never know in what way that changed behaviour based on that awareness of positionality influenced your interactions. [...] Awareness of positionality means that you need to be open to how interlocutors perceive you and how interlocutors invite you to reflect upon them in relation to yourself and your questions, in as far as they communicate this at their wish and initiative, not yours." To adhere in my analysis to what people are willing to communicate to me, already contains an acknowledgement of agency.[12] Moreover, such an approach is in line with requirements for phenomenological research, i.e. with "keeping [my own] biases in mind [while] approaching a research

question with the assumption that experience forms the basis of behavior and understanding [. . . ], utilizing methods [such as ethnography and narrative analysis] that emphasize gathering data on lived experience from the participant's perspective." (Spencer et.al. 2014, 89) Yet, morally, my focus lies on the effect of my text and of my limited white, privileged, Western-centred views, following Linda Alcoff's (1991, 28f.) assertion that "the importance of the source of a view, and the importance of doing a genealogy, should be subsumed within an overall analysis of effects [...]; source is relevant only to the extent that it has an impact on effect." Accordingly, based primarily on what I was told in the field and secondly on what others were told before me, my findings are a modest story shaped by its context and time that seeks to move beyond presumptions, and to neither despise belief in witchcraft nor regard witchcraft or witch hunts as inherent to certain research subjects, but as a social phenomenon, i.e. a mode of being-in-the-world.

With this in mind, one of the main tasks of my research was to first leave behind Federici and any of my Europe-made presumptions on African witchcraft. When I introduced myself in the field and explained the topic of my research, I usually highlighted that I was an unknowing or at least poorly informed European, and started by asking simply what witchcraft was. In the following rather non-structured interviews, I tried to listen as much as I could, while speaking as little as possible, so as to diminish any influence of my own thoughts on the subject's speech. Nonetheless, social phenomena are embedded in their specific time and location, and – having read Federici in preparation for my research project – I could not help but especially notice any hints to linkages between witch hunts and social distress through neoliberalism. Already, I came to Kigoma supposing that e.g. so-called land grabs[13], themselves the result of the "specific logic of capitalist development by commoditizing land and labor" (Demissie 2014, 2), would be one factor contributing to witch hunts, for they deprive local farmers of their lands, their means of subsistence, creating a dependent workforce, and those who suffer are primarily women who are majorly the ones who cultivate the fertile lands of sub-Saharan Africa and often "do not hold secure rights to the land from which they derive their own and their family's livelihood." (Englert and Daley 2008, 1) Similarly, I considered the current global climate crisis – challenging local farmers on various levels, and contributing to land and food scarcity as well as to the global demand for fertile lands – as potentially aggravating the phenomenon of violent witch hunts since it has consequences for all, but most devastatingly for vulnerable groups and individuals, e.g. those living on subsistence farming, hence, especially women.[14] Also, I knew that there are many refugees in the area of Kigoma and that refugee hosting populations face a variety of challenges[15] that might contribute – I imagined – to witch hunts. I thought of the role of evangelising sects and fundamentalism as well as of Kigoma being – as Geert Castryck (2013, 77) coined it – "in the permanent transitional stage of entering globalization through the backdoor, cloaked in the relative invisibility that is characteristic of liminality." He highlights that Kigoma is a prominent historical trade hub at the shore of Lake Tanganyika with close ties across the Congolese and Burundian borders, both an important gate into and out of Tanzania; a vivid and vibrant, international and multicultural town, but also a town with a lack of identity and belonging, where many residents are perceived as foreigners or outcasts because of their non-Tanzanian descent. It is this "paradox of simultaneous marginality and centrality [that] gives rise to several crises and conflicts of belonging, [that] provides a breeding ground for collective witchcraft accusations" (ibid., 73) and fuels radical belief systems.

Now, the attentive reader might have noticed my presumptions' focus on witchcraft *allegations* and witch *hunts* rather than on witches and witchcraft themselves – the former being after all the main subjects of my study design and the latter the underlying belief system. Inspired by Federici and because of my Christian upbringing,[16] I intuitively related witchcraft to that unreal

but mysterious trick game called magic, magic to evil and the attack on witches to 'necessities' in the transformation into a modern, rationalist and patriarchal society within a neoliberal world order, i.e. being 'just another' side effect of capitalism's expansion.

## Voices and Literature on Witchcraft, Witches and Witch Hunts in Kigoma: an Analysis with Phenomenological Stance

So, how do people in Kigoma today experience witchcraft, what is it and why or how are accusations, persecutions and violence related to it? Before I dive into the analysis of what I was told, I want to acknowledge that a definition of witchcraft is difficult because it has become – along with religion and through the ideological juxtaposition of tradition and modernity – a vast, almost infinite category for all that is (too) 'irrational'[17] and "a mirror for anthropological metanarratives that are seen incorporating different local narratives and reflecting how our way of seeing the world constantly changes." (Pavanello 2017a, 6) George Clement Bond and Diane M. Ciekawy (2001, 317) claim, however, that despite the fact that there appears to be "no universal configuration of beliefs and practices that can be described as witchcraft", features of it are "the attempt to explain the course of human fortunes" and "the attribution of occult powers to the individual." The voices I heard gave me answers on similar grounds; my best friend in Kigoma, who was born in Kigoma more than 30 years ago, holds a Bachelor degree, and accompanied me to most of my interviews in order to show me around and help when I was lost in translation, summarised, for instance: "Witchcraft is the using of magical power in the wrong way." Due to his statement I may already determine that witchcraft in Kigoma, at least in popular discourses, is not about making use of occult forces per se, but about making use of them in a 'wrong', i.e. in a morally bad way. I will analyse this notion in the paragraphs below, but want to flag here that Ronald – as I will call him so as to not disclose his identity (in fact, all following names are fictional) – spoke this phrase in English, where the word 'witchcraft' reflects an interpretation derived from the European notion of witchcraft where anything magical is generally condemned without allowing for ambiguities. The term's best translation *uchawi* (literally: 'sorcery'), a practice which is the focus of this paper, is to be seen as only one word in the Swahili vocabulary corresponding to witchcraft as a practice, or better: to *occult forces* as a notion, i.e. to "unseen powers, positive or negative." (Sanders 2001, 162) The English terminology was proposed by Geschiere in order to avoid one-sided negative connotations and to grasp the underlying cosmology where the metaphysical world exercises power over the physical one and vice versa, hence: to recognise the wide range of attributions of what we Europeans are used to subsuming under magic or witchcraft.[18]

Now, before I introduce three features concerning *uchawi* and witchcraft belief systems that appeared to me in Kigoma, let's first set the scene well. To begin with, my main host, the more than 50 years old mother and grandmother Maria, who was my starting point and main gatekeeper 'in the field,' although many interviewees were selected through snowball sampling and random occasions on the street, originally from Southern and not from Western Tanzania, she does not – like many people in Kigoma – stem from the Ha which form the main ethnic group in the region. That Maria had nonetheless already experienced occult forces in her home town is no coincidence; according to the LHRC (2021, 20), "Tanzania [in general] is one of the countries in Africa in which belief in witchcraft is very high." However, Kigoma stands out because of its unique history. As Castryck (2013, 62) puts it, "Kigoma's authenticity is characterized by a high degree of not fitting any dominant scheme of national, ethnic, or regional belonging, but at the same time being pivotal to all." Lying at the shore of lake Tanganyika as well as on former Arab slave trade routes dating back to the 17th century, and being the end station of the

railways that the colonised were forced to build under German rule, Kigoma-Ujiji – Ujiji with a predominantly Muslim population being the oldest part of the town, gradually growing together with the newer port-city of Kigoma with its predominantly Christian population – used to link the Indian Ocean (Dar-es-Salaam) with central Africa, namely the lands of what is now eastern DRC, southern Burundi and northern Zambia. While being an international hub with the railways still functioning, "multicultural Kigoma" (Bleyenberg and Stroeken 2018, 208) is also a border town – with relatively little importance to the later British colonists and far from Tanzania's prominent Swahili coast – and its region is one of Tanzania's least developed. Also because of the influx of refugees from conflicts in neighbouring countries, already during the times of Arab slave trades, Kigoma-Ujiji hosts many people like Maria that are deracinated but seek their fortune in a place that is simultaneously marginal and central, separating and connecting, visible (in popular culture and in external imagination) and invisible (e.g. in current political discourses). It is regarded as "the end of the world" and particularly Ujiji's "reputation and reality of magical practices cause fear and fascination on nationwide as well as local levels." (Castryck 2013, 76) To further follow Castryck's (ibid., 77) analysis:

> The reputation and the image of the place are defined by the role it has to play in a world view basically beyond its control or influence. The town is neglected in its very prominence. At the same time, some local realities are indeed acknowledged or addressed in these external imaginations. [...] If not the witchcraft itself, then at least the belief in it and the practices of magic are real.

It is in this context that the people – e.g. farmers, fishermen, entrepreneurs, doctors, *waganga*[19] and pupils – whom I met live and experience their lived-worlds in relation to *uchawi*. The interviews were conducted in English, French, but priorly in Swahili.

## "*Uchawi upo*": the Uncontested Reality of Witchcraft

When I arrived in Kigoma in November 2021 for the seventh time and began to converse with my closest friends there about the topic of my research, I had no idea about the extent to which occult forces played a role in their lives. Maria, for example, had had a *mganga*[20] staying at her place for a couple of days in a row to perform magic (not *uchawi*) to protect her, the family and the house from misfortune. The omnipresence of occult forces and *uchawi* in Kigoma, a place I have visited on an almost annual basis since 2013, took me by surprise, although – in my defence – *uchawi* contains many secrets and often people are reluctant if not afraid to disclose their knowledge around it, both because they are afraid of becoming bewitched if they get too close to certain topics or places and because they do not want to be linked to it. To provide two examples from people that I know quite well:

> When Maria and I went to Ujiji because she wanted to introduce me to her *mganga*, we met two neighbours and a relative on our way and in the following chatter she lied to all of them about the place we were about to go to.

> Roland neither wanted to accompany me to all places I went nor to be part of every interview because – paraphrasing his words – 'once you get too close to these things, they might already interfere with your mind.'[21]

Although I was told I required a strong, self confident and healthy mind, my own fears that researching the topic might be dangerous for me were misplaced according to them; I was a

foreigner and – as anthropologist Koen Stroeken (2012, 193) was similarly soothed during an extensive study he did on witchcraft among the Sukuma in Northwestern Tanzania – "it was exactly that I did not belong, my exteriority, that reassured the community."

Now, contrary to what I had naively and ignorantly imagined, namely the existence of 'witchcraft' as a remote phenomenon in the 'poorly developed' peripheries of the town, I came to understand that not even well educated people question the existence of occult forces. A chief physician and manager of a hospital told me for instance, after denying any belief in *uchawi* at first because she was "a scientist", that she believes that "there are evil spirits and daemons but that she has never seen them" and – perhaps more importantly – that "God has more power than they do." Similarly, in many talks at the market, at coffee places, in the streets or with friends, people repeatedly insisted, often with the conjunction 'but': "*Lakini uchawi upo*" ('But *uchawi* exists'). Turning the whole phrase into a counter-sentence to any statement that might contest or question the existence and reality of witchcraft, this conjunction is interpretable as the attempt to reassure me – as the white European foreigner interviewing – of it. In other words: to re-emphasise the reality of *uchawi* in the face of someone[22] who has said that he had no idea about it, particularly to clarify that *uchawi* is no mere fantasy or imagination that *only* works through belief in relation to cognitive processes; it works because of occult forces. At a sitting area in the centre of Kigoma where ordinary men, Christian and Muslim, meet, chat, drink freshly brewed coffee from tiny cups, smoke cigarettes, or buy some herbal remedy from a *mganga wa mitishamba* (a healer specialised in herbal medicine), I was told, for example, that there are people ('mostly in the villages') who believe in *uchawi*, including the works of spirits and one's own protective forces against *kurogwa*[23] ('to be or being bewitched'), while there are others who believe in God or Allah. Yet, the existence of *uchawi* is not a matter of belief because: "*Uchawi upo*." Rather, the type of belief determines whether or not, and to what extent *uchawi* actually has an impact on life and on one's own lived-worlds, even more so since Allah, respectively God, is by many thought to be more powerful than *uchawi*.[24]

The space that occult forces seemed to occupy in the awareness of people wherever I went points to the simultaneity of an allegedly irrational belief system and modern reason in Kigoma. Indeed, far from being a mere 'traditional' or 'primitive' relict from a precolonial past,[25] witchcraft "came out into the open, in many parts of postcolonial Africa [and] rumors and references to the occult forces proliferated especially in more modern contexts; in relation to novel forms of entrepreneurship, national politics, sport, and the new institutions for health care and education." (Geschiere 2015, 606) Apparently going along with modernisation, witchcraft is not a mere hindrance to development, understood as a unidirectional and singular process without alternative, or an obstacle to be overcome through reason and material welfare, as some have argued. (Cf. Brain 1982) Todd Sanders (2001, 162) points out, for example, that occult forces allow Tanzanians "to contemplate the moralities and immoralities of a changing world", i.e. to reflect upon winners and losers in a modern and neoliberal world order, upon international flows of commodities or upon the limits of a 'free market'. Witchcraft or, how John and Jean Comaroff (1993, xxx) have coined it, "ritual, as an experimental technology intended to affect the flow of power in the universe", can be seen as an effort "to penetrate the impenetrable, to unscrew the inscrutable, to recapture the forces suspected of redirecting the flow of power in the [modern] world." According to them (ibid.), witchcraft has to be linked to the "malcontent" that gathers facing the "fissure between assertive rationalities and perceived magicalities", i.e. the rift between the elusive forces of global modernity and their local perceptions in varying modes of being-in-the-world. Moreover, the emphasis on the power of belief in the interviews reiterates a narrative of modern cognitive reasoning not unlike the one used by many Protestants to relativise and ultimately prove God's

existence. However, *uchawi* is not the product of mere imagination; as Stroeken (2012, 42ff.) explains, magic in general does not only work because of cognitive processes, but because of a trans-modal meshing of physical, mental and social conditions which are assessed and rearranged by the ones performing magic; holistic systemic processes "cross-cutting mind, body and society" (43).[26] Accordingly, *uchawi* – afflictions, bewitchment or witching itself – works beyond the limits of the mind and equally transcends the boundaries of subsystems such as the body or society. It is no coincidence that many interviewees told me exemplarily about diseases which would not be named by physicians, explaining that patients then turn to *waganga wa kienyeji* (traditional healers in very broad terms) who would understand their conditions holistically and treat their afflictions systemically rather than seeing illnesses as a mere bodily thing.

## Lost Ambiguities of *uchawi* Embedded in Local and Contemporary Cosmology

As if aware of language-related interpretative difficulties or of Geschiere's (1997, 12) warning of a "highly moralizing view of the occult forces", some stories people shared with me questioned whether *uchawi* ought to be understood as unilaterally negative in the way the English word 'witchcraft' would suggest, the latter carrying its own distinct historical connotations.[27] Like the magic of European 'Dark Ages', *uchawi*, or 'occult forces,' are capable of shaping the course of human lives. But, carrying the burden of the reformist developments in 15th and 16th century Europe, the term witchcraft is often hastily subsumed under a categorical and unequivocal opposition of good (piety) and evil (witchcraft) that oversees if not dismisses the inherent ambiguous meanings of corresponding contemporary local terms.[28] According to Geschiere (1997, 13), witchcraft or occult forces can have "highly disturbing effects, but they can also be used constructively: to protect oneself or reinforce authority and, more generally, to succeed in life, [an] ambiguity [that] is crucial to modern transformations of the discourse."[29] As examples for the diverse usages of *uchawi*, I would like to share four popular stories I was told in Kigoma, starting with one narrated by Roland where *uchawi* was not as obviously used for a bad cause, going on with another similarly ambiguous one narrated by a woman living in a bewitched house, and ending with two stories which intuitively reflect the bad workings of *uchawi*; one from Kiganza, a farmers' village near Kigoma, narrated by a man who showed Roland and me around, and one from Kitonga, a fishing village near Kigoma, narrated by two elderly fishermen.

> "There was this old man who was staying in Kasulu. You know, in order to take a train, if you are staying in Kasulu, that means, you have to come to Kigoma town and then take the train to Dar es Salaam. So, whenever he was late, I don't know what he did, but he was doing something that caused the train to not move until he was there and then the train was good. [...] No one was getting harm."

> "This house belonged to someone who was doing big business in Congo. [...] He was taking salt from Uvinza to change it in Congo and at another place. Now, there was actually someone else who trusted him the salt to sell. Yet, this guy took the salt and sold it. [...] But he did not return the money, but used it to buy this house. [...] When he bought it, the other one became angry: 'I gave you the loads [of salt] and you did not bring anything yet and dealt with it like it was yours.' So, he bewitched the house. Every time you would go inside and sleep, you would find yourself outside in the street, or you would be beaten by someone you could not see. [...] Since I am here, I haven't seen anything of this." Later I was told by others that the new owner of that house, a political representative for Kigoma, has had a *mganga mchawi* at the

house to lift the curse before people were able to move in.

> "The people knew that he was a *mchawi*. [...] There were some guys, farmers. [...] And they had an argument [with the man who allegedly is a *mchawi*] about the boarders of their land; something like I use mine, you use yours. After that dispute those guys died within two weeks. [...] and he [the alleged *mchawi*] tried to get everything there." It was later clarified to me that those who died were four brothers which all died for no apparent reason.

> "Others prepare everything so that you can see a human in the water who does this work of bringing *daga* [famous small fish]. [...] That is also witchcraft because they confine the shadow of the person who they kill, to be a watch. [...] These shadows will do the fishing work."

These stories depict a pattern that varies from *uchawi* being used without causing any harm at all, to causing physical harm in order to harm someone indirectly so as to restore order (!), and causing harm to the body of a person because of anger or for prosperity. Yet, all four stories show a common trait: in all four cases, *uchawi* was used *to serve one's own selfish interests, i.e. for one's own benefits*. To underline this observation, I want to point to some rumours I became aware of; assuming that climate change might intensify the violent dynamics of witch hunts (cf. 3.), I asked around whether the delay of seasonal rainfalls, already by more than one month, could also be linked to *uchawi*. While most interviewees refuted this, pointing to the hands and powers of God, sometimes also following the pleas in the regional radio to pray and feast, a few in Kigoma shared another story blaming 'the Chinese' for paying people in Tabora to delay the rain since they were constructing an asphalt road between Tabora and Kigoma and wanted to prevent the weather conditions from interfering with their business. Whereas one could assume that most just thought that the powers of *uchawi* are limited, I was told in Kiganza that an old man who had lived there some decades before had actually been able to influence the start of seasonal rains; not for his own benefit though, but for that of his community. Thus, while most did not see any link between the use of *uchawi* and the delay of seasonal rainfalls, this was not because changing weather patterns is beyond the powers of *uchawi*, but rather because most did not see that there was any true benefit for anyone in it.

Let's return to the second story, for it seems to introduce an antagonist; someone who is able to lift afflictions, curses or spells by the use of *uchawi* itself: the *mganga*. "The *mchawi* harms, and the *mganga* treats," a *mganga* in Ujiji told me. This notion was reiterated to me at the regionally famous *soko la uchawi* (*uchawi*-market) in Mwandiga, a village close to northern Kigoma, where one could buy items and remedies necessary to perform or to protect oneself from *uchawi*. That herbs or other items – often sold by so-called *waganga wa kienyeji* themselves (traditional healers; herbalists) – are able to function as remedies for material or visible conditions with immaterial or invisible causes, can be best understood when acknowledging that Bantu (under which the Ha speaking people and many other groups in the area can be accounted) cosmology interprets the physical and the metaphysical world, e.g. ancestral spirits, as interlinked; occult forces shape the world, but can and indeed have to be influenced by those who are knowledgeable. Moreover, as Eva Bleyenberg (2013, 45) notes in her thesis[30], "most prominent ethical notions within Bantu society are solidarity and the coherence between body, group and cosmos," because these values serve to keep "the community or micro-cosmos as a humeral system [...] in balance" and the "well-being of a person is considered as a sign of good social functioning within the community." On these grounds, the treatment of the body, i.e. 'making it fit' for the environmental conditions,

is one of three possible ways to treat afflictions in general and illnesses or misfortunes in particular, the other two being 1) societal processes, e.g. group gatherings, rituals and common sacrifices (*tambiko*), and 2) dealing with the 'cosmos', with ancestral spirits (*mizimu*), the soul (*roho*) and — generally — *uchawi*. Correspondingly, but from the other side, some *waganga wa kienyeji* presented me with whole lists of things that are curable or treatable only by the possession of certain items or the application of certain herbal remedies, ranging from fever and knee pain to drug addiction, or troubles in love or business. With regards to 1) and 2), the *mganga* might also be able to heal or protect from *uchawi*-related calamities or afflictions by other means, sometimes even by *uchawi* itself. There are even *waganga wachawi*, meaning *wachawi* who chose to become *waganga* as well; as a son of a *mganga mchawi* told me in Ujiji, *uganga* (healing) and *uchawi* are two different ways of shaping occult forces which can complement each other as a means of mere business or of cosmological treatment. Yet, as I have pointed out already, *uchawi* as one way to gain some control over occult forces is nowadays often regarded as bad, for people mostly link *uchawi* to selfishness and maleficence, far removed from Christian, Muslim or Bantu values. As one of my interviewees in Kigoma, let's call the young, well-informed and -connected business man Peter, explained to me:

> Back in the days, people used witchcraft to make protection for their clans, for their village and families; [...] for something like they want this year to have big rains. So, they find a big tree, [...] they go and make a sacrifice there. [...] I think the difference [...] between those days and these days is: nowadays people use witchcraft for their own benefits like protection [for] work and business and [...] to kill the one who [one] is fighting with. [...] So, we believe in those things, yeah?" (He laid a certain stress in that last phrase before he went on, and I got the short impression that he wanted to defend this belief.) "As human beings, we want everything [...] like I want me to have everything, yeah? I want to have a big farm, big land, and I think, witchcraft is used by people in order to get things so.

Accordingly, a *mganga*'s popular reputation is often better if he or she – people assured me of a gender balance but I have not been able to speak to a female *mganga* – is one of those *waganga* who use the Quran or pray to God and thereby call upon angels in order to work against *uchawi*. This is where I have to introduce an important rift, for *uchawi* represents ideas of maleficence, uncanniness and wickedness, and is feared by the public; it symbolises danger, therefore, even for a *mganga*. So, although a *mganga* might know of the secrets of *uchawi* and deal with conditions related to it, they might refuse to use the powers of *uchawi*, partly also because it is illegal, but especially if they are religious. Rather than believing that "praying does not help", to reiterate the opinion of one *mganga* at the *soko la uchawi* in Mwandiga, they see Allah or God and his angels as above *uchawi* and regard the ways of *uchawi* as an indecent shortcut at best, and as evil and sinful at worst. Accordingly, they would prefer to use either scripture (Quran, bible), advise a faithful way of living, or contact one of the angels.[31] What seem to be overlaps with *uchawi*, e.g. the use of candles and incense among some Christian *waganga*, should primarily be understood as a mystic rather than magical attempt to transcend the boundaries 'between this and the other world' (although they are inseparably united in Bantu cosmology). However, some *waganga* incorporate magic to a certain extent, which – and this is the rift – is in fact not called *uchawi* but (if anything) *ajabu* (wonder, magic) or simply: *uganga*, i.e. healing practices. While Maria and I were with one *mganga* in Ujiji, for instance, he became possessed by the spirit of a French journalist through a rhythmic sequence of sonorous sounds, repetitive hand gestures and the deep inhalation of 10 cigarettes in a row, and claimed that his ability to get in touch with ancestral spirits *and* angels (*malaika*) would be key in his work, but that he knew *uchawi* only in so far, as he had to understand the doings of *wachawi*.[32] In contrast, Ronald and I recalled an

interview (a record was not approved) we had with a Muslim *mganga* in Maria's neighbourhood in Kigoma:

> "If you want to get something, let's say, you want to get rich, the *mganga* is going to give you [...] the follow-ups plan; like, in order to get this, you have to do this. [...] He mentioned a few examples, like, maybe you have to kill someone or you can [...] wear clothes until they really, really get old, or shoes, or having some [blisters/injuries] coming out of your body. [...] Everything of this is *uchawi*, of course. It is not normal. [...] But it is there, there is a connection. [...] You don't have to go and kill directly. [...] You maybe have to buy something or go at your home, do some stuff, do this and do that. Then, at the end of the day, with that, it's the death of your child, or your mother, or your father. [...] To follow bad things is up to you. Every one has two angels. [...] The angel who writes the bad stuff, is on the left hand, the angel who is writing the good stuff, is on the right hand. So, if you'd be doing good things such as to give, to help, to build, to feed, then the right hand angel would write that stuff. If you'd be doing bad, bad, or evil things, the [...] left angel will write the sin. But the right angel will ask him to wait because [. . . ] everyone has a second chance. [...] In the Quran, there is only one way: to pray and to work, [...] and if you can really well use the Quran according to people who know well the Quran [like that *mganga*], you can cure even some diseases which are not seenable by the doctors, [...] just by reading and by praying, because God is [...] above all supernatural power."

Therefore, although harm or even death was often mentioned to me 'in one breath' with *uchawi*, *uchawi* is not necessarily the intentional harming of someone else for one's own advantage , but rather the acceptance of harm to another person in the pursuit of one's own interests and fortune. The short cut to richness, for example, can be understood as an attempt to magically influence occult forces for one's own selfish benefit which is neither according to Bantu values nor to Christian or Muslim faith. Now, as some told me that the secret ways of *uchawi* are transmittable by simple touch, e.g. of a grandparent to a grandchild, I want to assert that *uchawi* is enabled and conducted by external, metaphysical forces. Yet, among Christians and Muslims, this path is both chosen and linked to evil and sin.[33] Thus, in contemporary Kigoma, *uchawi* is mostly not perceived in the way of Geschiere's occult forces in general, but as a wilful human attempt to make a pact with them in a certain way; the way of the *mchawi*.

## The Witch as a Moral Figure Within a Neoliberal World Order

The people who use *uchawi* are either most likely to become, or already are, *wachawi* (witches) for they are born with or chose to have a "*roho mbaya*": a bad soul. They are perceived as the embodiment of jealousy, hatred, intrigue, ruthless- and selfishness, i.e. of evil forces, sometimes thought to be reflected in the red eyes of a person. Accordingly, "elders are usually the major victims of [witch-] killings" (LHRC 2018, 22); primarily women, since they are the ones who have spent the most time close to the kitchen's conjunctivitis-causing cooking fires. However, the witch neither has to be female nor elderly, nor do they have to be killed. I have been told stories in which children were perceived to be, or perceived themselves as, *wachawi*, including in the LHRC's (2021, 21) current report which points neither to gender nor age imbalances anymore: on January, 6th 2020, for instance, "a witchdoctor, along with his pregnant wife and children, were killed [in Kigoma region] by an angry mob, who accused them [!] of practicing witchcraft." Of course, from a rationalist standpoint, we can doubt the credibility of a child stating that he or she is a *mchawi*, but such claims are not discredited among respective communities and those children are (more often than killed) treated with special care, meaning both with caution and thoroughness.

Moreover, I was assured that men and women of any age can be or become *wachawi*, since *uchawi* is a matter of character and behaviour, a matter of soul, and not of gender or sex. Besides, the Swahili word *mchawi* is — like all Swahili nouns — not gendered, and in a dictionary commonly used in Tanzania's, namely Kigoma's schools, the English word 'witch' was deliberately translated as "*mwanamke mchawi*" (Newton 2018, 124), which literally means 'female witch' or, to use the dictionary's term for *mchawi*, 'female sorcerer'. Apparently, the gender imbalance I imagined, inspired by Federici, but mostly because of my European background, had to be corrected, albeit an elderly woman in the village Kiganza clarified after I asked her whether women are more likely to be *wachawi*:

> I cannot tell. I cannot say that women are more likely to be *wachawi* than men nor that men are more likely because these are secret things. [...] I can also have it while we are talking now, but I don't know whether I have it. [...] These are secret things which we are not able to see. [...] Though, the *wachawi* know each other.

Similarly emphasising the notion of carrying this thing which makes one a *mchawi* inside, i.e. of *uchawi*, the *mganga* at the *soko la uchawi* in the village Mwandiga explained to me that

> everyone can become a mchawi, even myself; you see me as this or that, but in truth I can be a mchawi. Everyone has their own uchawi. But I treated myself so that uchawi does not enter. [. . . ] Many times it is about a bad soul. Every mchawi kills people; that's a bad soul.[34]

In contrast to this view, and reiterating the cosmological rift I have already alluded to (cf. 4.2), *waganga* and people with stronger ties to Christianity or Islam indicated that people choose the ways of *uchawi* freely rather than failing to protect themselves sufficiently from the influence of bad occult forces which all carry. In line with what Ronald and I drew from the interview with the *mganga wa kiarabu* in Maria's neighbourhood, the emphasis is on the individual human subject and its decisions over the course of its life rather than on bad metaphysical forces or malcontent spirits trying to shape its lived worlds. One young, rather poor Christian woman in a community in southwestern Kigoma told me, for instance:

> A *mchawi* is an ordinary human. [...] You cannot see that he/she[35] is a *mchawi*. [...] But he/she witches.

The most faithful Christian couple I visited- well-educated and fairly well-off people who we can call Felicitas and John- gave me the example of a man taking another man's wife, levelling *uchawi* with other major sins in Christianity:

> I [Felicitas] see it this way: [...] [instead of talking to your wife], you look for *uchawi* to bewitch the man who took your wife. But the man who took the wife with him sinned with the wife. The wife also sinned, right? So, they all sinned.

In the Bible (as well as in the Quran) there are several passages where the ways of or *wachawi* themselves are condemned in similar ways, just to mention two biblical ones:

> "A man or a woman who is a medium or a wizard shall be put to death; they shall be stoned to death, their blood is upon them." Lev 20:27 (New Revised Standard Version)

> "Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, a drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Gal 5:19-21

Clearly, these exemplary quotes depict magic or sorcery as sinful, qualifying it as non-religious and ranking it among other sinful traits such as jealousy, envy and impurity, either warning of punishment in the afterworld in the New Testament or calling for direct action against them in the Old Testament. I have also heard calls for direct action against alleged *wachawi* during my interviews. One fisherman told me, for instance, that once they "get a *mchawi*, [they] destroy them":

> We don't like *wachawi*. [...] We destroy him/her and burn his/her house so that he/she goes away. [...] Or so that he/she dies.

What nourishes such aggression is a certain feeling of helplessness and fear, for the metaphysical forces of *uchawi* are thought to shape one's own lives for the bad, but are neither visible nor controllable. Moreover, *wachawi* are perceived as dangerous – "women more than men," as John tells me, but he is the only one I speak to with this Genesis influenced opinion, and Felicitas was directly opposed to this. To return to the underlying feeling of helplessness and fear, the two *wachawi* with whom I was actually able to speak – which was not easy because no one wants to be called a *mchawi* and I had to avoid the term in both cases – were not able to live in their old neighbourhoods anymore because of what they were said to have done; in one case killing four neighbouring farmers and in the other causing the sickness of a house girl.[36] While I can understand (though not condone) that the first case, which happened in Kiganza, was serving the *mchawi*'s selfish interests, I could not find any motive for the second one, which happened in Kigoma. Maybe it is linked to the notion of 'the *mchawi* as mere client', a distinction Bleyenberg (2013, 67) makes according to her data:

> Many witches are somehow related to the victim as a friend, a colleague, a neighbor or as family. However, witches can also act in the name of a client. In that case, the witch is not related to the victim. He or she handles out of pure economic self-interest. He/she performs an act against an unknown person in trade for the money from a client who wishes to harm that person. The witch is simply the executor of the wish of the client.

Whatever the individual motive in the respective case, both persons claimed that the accusations were false. However, in their cases, we can see that – contrary to Stroeken's (2012, 200) description of the Sukuma witch as an informed insider with moral power who attacks on a justifiable basis, rendering witch killings as "a crime of passion" similar to "homicide" – the persecution of these *wachawi* in Kigoma region seems to be on moral grounds, whereas both their alleged actions and motives are (probably) not. Rather, they display the 'bad' values which were described previously, and pursue their ruthless, selfish interests through deliberate – or at least accepted – harm to others. Linking the notion of *uchawi* and the figure of the *mchawi*, I want to depict the *mchawi* as a moral negative, a human being that in the other's perceptions embodies what an individual in society ought neither to do nor to be. Since everyone can become a *mchawi*, everyone is also required to behave and live in ways that do not resemble the ways of the *mchawi*. As an example, I would like to share my memory of the second *mchawi*:

> The rather poor woman (the other one was a man), with smiling eyes and an almost blind husband, told me a story of irritation and incomprehension in which she is accused of having given a helper in the house, a young girl, some *daga*, after which the girl fell ill. She cannot live in that area anymore. After the interview, I gave her and her husband 20,000 TZS, equivalent to less than 10 EUR, as a means of 'thank you' and as support because Maria advised me to do so. Then, just a few days before I left

Kigoma, she brought a gift for me to Maria's house where I was staying; some fabric, on the market worth more than the money I gave her. I interpret the dimension of this kind gesture with regards to the allegations primarily as an attempt to regain acceptance in the broader community, for giving is generally perceived as good, which is also the way she wants to be perceived because of her reputation. The fact that I – as a "white man with blue eyes" most capable of recognising the devil, as the elderly fishermen told me – accepted the gift, a gift from a woman who is known for being – or at least, once being called, – a *mchawi*, favours her endeavour.

From Bantu cosmology as well as from the written word in Christianity or in Islam, we may derive values that stand arbitrary to how people experience *uchawi* and *wachawi*; in contrast to values such as solidarity, sociality, consideration, honesty, purity, faithfulness, etc., the one who chooses the ways of *uchawi* (or fails to protect oneself from it), is said to be jealous, selfish, hateful, ruthless, and so on and so forth. To put it simply: the *mchawi* has a 'bad soul,' and once they act, they act because of it, with their actions often being bad in themselves. To find and haunt them, i.e. to reinforce the picture of a moral negative, often lies in the hands of the community, since neither Tanzanian police nor Tanzanian law recognises witchcraft. Without physical or material evidence, it was explained to me, allegations against *wachawi* would not be persecuted, and the police would only start investigating if a 'true' crime, like the murder of alleged *wachawi*, were to happen. Along with the shifting contemporary cosmology and its focus on the self-determined human subject rather than on the intrusion of *uchawi*-spirits, this is why a lot of assaults on *wachawi* happen either by unrestrained angry mobs or within organised attacks during the night, e.g. setting a house on fire. In contrast to the still violent and humiliating, but public and not deadly de-witching processes which freed the human subject from its occult forces and reintegrated it into the community and endured until the 1960's despite repressive colonial rule (cf. Greenshields 2016), the death of the alleged *mchawi* is not directly intended but seen as an acceptable side-effect.

Within the contemporary neoliberal context, the *mchawi* serves as a figure who – because of her anti-social morality – offers an explanation for the pressure on and struggle of the individual in an elusive, intransparent world order which is on the one hand depicted as a rational concept, but on the other perceived as uncontrollable. It is a context which emphasises materialistic values and commodifies every aspect of life, including occult forces themselves. It is in this setting that, paradoxically, the negative values of the ways of *uchawi* proliferate. Of course, selfishness and ruthlessness are not proclaimed to be good values, but nonetheless promoted within a neoliberal setting. As the Comaroffs (1993, xxviii f.) postulated:

> In its late twentieth-century guise, however, witchcraft is a finely calibrated gauge of the impact of global cultural and economic forces on local relations, on perceptions of money and markets, on the abstraction and alienation of 'indigenous' values and meanings. Witches are modernity's prototypical malcontents. They provide – like the grotesques of a previous age – disconcertingly full-bodied images of a world in which humans seem in constant danger of turning into commodities, of losing their life blood to the market and to the destructive desires it evokes. [...] They embody all the contradictions of modernity itself, of its inescapable enticements, its self-consuming passions, its discriminatory tactics, its devastating social costs.

As I have tried to show, they do so not as active subjects, but as figures of moral negativeness, imagined within popular discourses embedded in a shifting and evolving cosmology where ways to fortune and prosperity are often unintelligible and – with respects to Bantu cosmology, Islam and

Christianity – immoral; good values do not necessarily guarantee a good life. With society trying to stay together under neoliberal conditions, everything that might lead to it falling apart, e.g. to ruthlessly only think of one's own fortune or to be jealous about another's fortune, is attributed to a figure that both secretly haunts society and is openly haunted by society. According to what was shared with me, *the figure of the mchawi has moral power because people reject its morals*.

# Conclusion: on the Compatibility of my Assumptions and Federici's Theory on Witch Hunts with Witchcraft Belief Systems in Kigoma

One of the two main arguments of this paper was that the *mchawi* or the witch (female and male) in Kigoma helps to maintain a moral compass in an increasingly changing and obscure, or even violent, world. Based on the interviews and experiences I was able to have during a research trip to Kigoma in November 2021, I came to realise that witchcraft, meaning occult forces in general, and *uchawi*, meaning sorcery or the doings of the witch, are to most an uncontested reality, a part of experienced lived worlds. Many pointed to belief systems which exercise cognitive power on the respective subject, but nonetheless claimed that "*uchawi upo.*" While doing so, people often mixed ambiguous notions of occult forces under one label, although in Bantu cosmology occult forces are shapeable and shape the world, the physical and the social one, in more ways than by *uchawi*, e.g. through substances and herbal remedies or non-harmful magic. Yet, *uchawi* is by many perceived as sinful and evil, or at least as an illegitimate and immoral short-cut towards fortune and prosperity, materially or e.g. in love, motivated by values that are told to be bad or reflect a bad soul such as selfishness, ruthlessness and hate. The figure of the witch in this sense serves a certain axiologic purpose, namely the reinforcement and restoration of moral values in the community through exercising their negatives: what one ought not to be and to do. As cosmologies in multicultural Kigoma with its tense transitional stage, caught between global forces and local realities, shift due to external cultural influences of Islam, Christianity and modern rationality, towards an emphasis on the individual's so-called freedom of choice, i.e. an alleged capability of each subject to choose their own fate and make right decisions based on e.g. in the bible clearly defined moral values, the human behind the witch is rendered culpable of becoming a witch. However, the acts that a witch performs (e.g. in order to become rich, to gain control over land or to disadvantage the businesses of competitors) and that can be harmful or even lead ultimately to the death of another subject somehow related to the witch, are not recognised by Tanzanian law or law enforcement institutions, for they work on a metaphysical level. Accordingly, the persecution of witches lies in the hands of communities and allegations often evolve out of quarrels over commodities and material values, especially within a society that is troubled by emergent neoliberal conditions and the subsequent threat of ruptured communal bonds.

In line with Federici and the Comaroffs, I point to the social crisis that the neoliberal condition of Tanzania has caused, as an important trait in contemporary witchcraft perceptions; the struggle in everyone's everyday lives to resist commodification and to preserve the bonds in society. I could also witness the dangerous shift in cosmology due to modern and e.g. Christian radical belief systems, that transfers responsibility (and culpability thereof) to the individual. Where I have to differ from my own presumptions inspired not only by Federici but also by Eurocentric modern perspectives, is predominantly the following:

1. Witchcraft is not generally condemned but plays a part in people's modern lived experiences, quite capable of adapting to the changing and violent conditions in an ever more emergent

neoliberal world order. Moreover, witchcraft is able to serve as an explanation for the elusive forces governing individual realities. Hence, in contrast to what happened in European history, magic is incorporated in belief systems.

2. The ways of *uchawi*, or sorcery, as being the closest to what I (and probably Federici) had in mind when imaging witchcraft in sub-Saharan Africa, are condemned, but serve an axiologic purpose and help to preserve an even rebellious or – to use the Comaroffs' word – malcontent moral compass within neoliberal conditions; values that are attributed to the witch or motives that are linked to uchawi coincide with what is required in a neoliberal setting.

3. While there are many places in the world and other regions in Tanzania, such as the Sukuma area, where elderly women are primarily the target of witch hunts e.g. because they become perceived as an useless burden, having now a "bottomless debt" with their bird price reinterpreted according to "pure modern reason" (Stroeken 2012, 134ff.), witchcraft is neither necessarily linked to the elderly nor to women in Kigoma. Therefore, witchcraft allegations and witch hunts are not to be primarily seen as a concerted or even deliberate attack on women vis a vis their bodies.

Of course, these qualitative observations I made, which caused me to rethink my presumptions about the phenomenon of witches and witchcraft, are built on shaky grounds since I am a man and a white foreigner who was – as I try to show with this paper – quite ignorant and naive before he spent a couple of weeks in Kigoma for this research project. I cannot tell whether everything which was told to me is true (I indicated where I had my doubts), but I tried to speak to my interviewees about the experiences and perspectives they shared with me. Departing from my own Eurocentric perspective and inspired by a theory that is foremost grounded on events in Europe, I came to acknowledge through their stories that witchcraft is not so much a 'traditional' relict of a precolonial past which is rolled over through processes of development and modernisation, but dwells quite well within a modern context. However, the ongoing violent processes of primitive accumulation which Federici pointed to as a necessary condition of capitalism at all times, thus also within Kigoma's contemporary neoliberal setting, increase social tensions in Kigoma, Tanzania and elsewhere in the world. When we speak about witch hunts as a potential catalyst, we should acknowledge her theory but only depart from it rather than unconditionally apply it, and recognise that the processes of primitive accumulation today are embedded in modern cultural contexts which do not resemble one another so strongly. Moreover, in a neoliberal world order, her points about witch hunts as e.g the justification of expropriation, a means of enclosure, the mysterious character of the forces governing everyones' lives, or the intergenerational struggle for survival (Federici 2018, 65ff.), endanger not only women but many parts of society in a context where everyone can potentially be called a witch, and where witchcraft can have very material realities, e.g. the achievement of wealth, well-being, fortune, love, or secure living conditions. Especially in the context of multicultural, 'liminal' Kigoma, my call is to reinterpret Federici's thoughts according to the respective place and time based only on what people say; we should phenomenologically focus on lived experiences rather than on structural conditions and recognise that modernity has multiple faces around the globe – that is, of course, if we are capable of understanding anything beyond the scope of our own experiences, at all.

## Swahili Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| ajabu | wonder, magic |
| daga | small fish (to eat) |
| kuroga | to bewitch |
| kurogwa | to be bewitched |
| lakini | but |
| malaika | angel |
| mbaya | bad |
| mchawi (pl. wachawi) | witch, sorcerer |
| mganga (pl. waganga) | healer |
| - mchawi | healer who is also a witch (or vice versa) |
| - wa kiarabu | arabic healer |
| - wa kienyeji | traditional healer |
| - wa mitishamba | herbalist; healer specialised in herbs and herbal medicine |
| mizimu | ancestral spirits |
| mwanamke | woman |
| mwangaji | owner of nocturnal slaves |
| roho | soul |
| soko | market |
| - la uchawi | market for witchcraft |
| tambiko | sacrifice, ritual |
| uchawi | lit. sorcery or witchcraft; the doings of the witch |
| uganga | healing |
| ujamaa | sense of family, unity (socialist ideology of Tanzania's first president Julius Nyerere) |
| upo | exists, is there |
| yeye | he/she |

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# Notes

[1]Daniel Stich is a student enrolled in the social sciences' graduate Global Studies Programme at the Humboldt University of Berlin who is currently working on his thesis in which he critically reviews humanitarian reason in light of the Anthropocene.
A sincere thank you to Maria Smith for her language editing of this paper.

[2]Contrary to Karl Marx, primitive accumulation is for Federici (2019, 15) "not a one-time historical event confined to the origins of capitalism," but "constitutive of capitalist relations at all times." As capitalist structures expand, they necessarily reiterate that process over and over again.

[3]The measures were imposed in order to tackle the global debt crisis' impact on the continent.

[4]The entire paper will not deal with the topic of witchcraft and people with albinism (PWA), a notorious and horrifically violent part of witchcraft beliefs in Tanzania.

[5]In the search machine, I took 'English' as preferred language, enabled 'show popular searches' and set my current location (Berlin, Germany) as region.

[6]Tanzania is a neighbouring country to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and thus geographically not too far from that 'heart of darkness', Joseph Conrad wrote his notorious novel upon. Actually, the position of Kigoma and of its oldest part (respectively the neighbouring town) Ujiji "can be signified as the middle of the end of the world." (Castryck 2013, 60)

[7]No killings of PWA have been reported to LHRC since 2015 although the thread remains real and violence still occurs. (LHRC 2021, 23) As mentioned, the persecution and violence against PWA is not the focus of this paper.

[8]This socialist phase saw the redistribution of population, countrywide villagisation and increased use of land for agriculture and livestock purposes.

[9]According to Federici's (2004) work majorly on witch hunts in 17th century Europe, witch hunts are a phenomenon that occurs globally at the transition to capitalist societies.

[10]Every research subject holds agency. Ultimately, they are the ones who share their stories, if they are willing to share them. Accordingly, every interviewee was asked for informed consent.

[11]In her famous essay, Gayatri Spivak (1988) suggested "speaking to" instead of an allegedly empowering 'speaking for' those subaltern people who are rarely heard and often entirely unable to speak. By that, her argument goes, one would neither neglect one's own positionality nor fail to acknowledge subaltern agency and voice. 'Speaking to' would allow a counter-sentence and encourage a more even discourse – if such a thing even exists at all.

[12]Actually, also what people are not willing to communicate and thus spare has a particular meaning. Now, while words are limited in their potential to grasp the so-called 'full story', any added interpretation adds another layer shaped by time and place, leading towards "pure history." (White 2000, 21)

[13]With capitalist globalisation, global population growth and an increasing demand for food security in the face of climate change, agricultural businesses, international corporations and even foreign states are taking advantage of confusing and often contradictory legal frameworks, bypassing customary laws by making personal deals with key government officials and corrupt political elites who often treat the land as (their) private property.

[14]In Tanzania, women like men "depend in various ways upon kin" with kinship tending "to operate [...] to support male control of women." (Creighton and Omari 2000, 14) Also, "the low socio-economic status of women still outweighs the positive achievement of women [with] more poor women than men [being] vulnerable to food insecurity" (Kapunda 2000, 231) and therefore to climate change. Various risks, "ranging from floods and desiccation, rising temperatures and desertification to threats to the security of water, food and fuel wood supplies" (Simon 2010, 243) jeopardise economic production and imperil strategic infrastructure, but also – quite substantially – endanger *poor* populations. People classified by both types of poverty, the "cultural conception of subsistence living as poverty [as well as] the material experience of poverty that is the result of dispossession and deprivation" (Shiva 2016, 9), are put at risk by its impact. Yet, climate change has relatively more devastating consequences to the former, as subsistence "does not necessarily imply a low physical quality of life" (ibid., 10) but implies living on the basis of what grows on one's lands. As a result, I assumed that social tensions in poor areas probably would rise to the disadvantage of those in rather powerless positions.

[15]According to a study by Jean-François Maystadt and Philip Verwimp (2014), the influx of people from Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC since the last late century resulted in an increase of prices of some goods due to the demand by aid workers and the refugees themselves, a drop in wages of low-income population groups because of the use of refugees as cheap labour, new opportunities but also more competition in businesses, and some destabilising effects like firewood shortages, environmental degradation, spread of diseases and security problems. Moreover, benefits were "likely to be unevenly redistributed" (ibid., 778) potentially increasing inner-societal tensions.

[16]The Church in Europe put some effort into the general diabolisation of magic, especially in the 16th and 17th century. (Behringer 2004, 29ff.)

[17]What is 'irrational' and what is not is a matter of perspective for our culturally learnt structures of mind prefigure categories of thought such as the famous but now refutable dichotomy of body and mind.

[18]While I will separately deal with the limits of the European colonisers' language English in translating the occult force's and uchawi's notions in Kigoma's cultural context, I will as often as a comprehensible reading will

allow, use words in the main spoken language Swahili, indicate their meanings and sometimes point to language-related interpretative difficulties in order to be as close as possible to the shared experiences of the ones I was speaking with. Geschiere (2015, 609) has suggested that "promising directions for facing this challenge [not to contribute to Othering] can be found in the recent tendency to confront terminology, not in order to arrive at purer definitions, but rather in a historical and ethnographic sense by following the particular trajectories of these problematic terms in everyday life." As much as the limited scope of this paper allows, I try to acknowledge his hint, but also hope that the deliberate use of Swahili terms will serve others as to further follow his suggested path.

[19]In Swahili, the prefix *wa-* indicates the plural of those words that stand mainly for humans and animals.

[20]The Swahili word *mganga* literally translates into 'healer' but is often interpreted as 'witchdoctor'.

[21] I am very grateful that Maria, Roland and I have grown close enough to have a fairly open and honest relationship.

[22]This 'someone' was sometimes openly regarded as a 'modern' or 'developed' subject whom to emulate. Naturally, this unevenness stems not from me being exceptional in any form, but from a persistence of the hegemony of the Western economic and cultural model.

[23]Pointing to a more ambiguous meaning of *uchawi* than the English word 'witchcraft', I want to flag that contrary to English, the Swahili words for 'to bewitch' (*kuroga*) respectively for 'to be bewitched' (*kurogwa*) have a stem that can neither be linked to the Swahili word for 'witch' (*mchawi*) nor to the one for 'witchcraft' (*uchawi*).

[24]The notion that if one believes in God strongly enough, then *uchawi* could not harm oneself, i.e. one could not *kurogwa*, was equally affirmed by women I spoke to.

[25]Actually, there are quite similar traits around witchcraft belief around the globe which cause some anthropologists to believe that witchcraft belief systems have common roots dating back tens of thousands of years ago. While the latter can hardly be proven, the belief in witchcraft and occult forces apparently serves similar functions in societies throughout history and around the globe and might even point to some sort of magical spot in the structure of the human psyche. (Behringer 2004, 13)

[26]The fairly reasonable systemic explanation that Stroeken offers as to understand the reality of witchcraft or 'why magic works', does not deal with another possible cause, one that lies indeed beyond what anthropology or social sciences are usually able to grasp: actual effects of supernatural powers respectively divine agency. As Harish Naraindas (2017, 290), one of my professors in my Masters elaborates, for instance, criticising a certain inconsistency in an anthropological study on ritual healing in northern India: "Anthropological explanations are thus sacramental, in so far as theurgy is played in a minor key, while human agency is played in a major key and, often, when it matters, it is the only key. And once human agency is introduced to account for divine action it soon takes centre stage and becomes the cynosure of explanatory interest."

[27]In 15th and 16th century Europe, hence during early modernity, both healing and harming through magic became treated as equivalent in the popular mind, and entirely perceived as opposing reformist standards of human piety by the ones shaping and guarding ordinary people's culture at the time, i.e. as "displays of the lack of real religion and faith in God." (Clark 2002, 116) To the clergy, popular attitudes to magical healing and maleficent harming were an urgent topic as witchcraft offered shortcuts to human (mis)fortune and thus "raised issues that went to the heart of contemporary spirituality." (Ibid.)

[28]For Behringer (2004, 12f.), for instance, witchcraft around the globe contains a "basic set of beliefs" according to which "there are evil forces around, and they try to cause harm. Some people, [allegedly witches,] who are essentially anti-social, either incorporate such forces involuntarily, or form alliances intentionally in order to inflict harm by mystical means, mostly on their relatives or neighbours."

[29]Accordingly, historians and – albeit more recently – anthropologists read witchcraft in sub-Saharan Africa today in very general terms as a flexible answer to the evolving and challenging conditions of a dynamic modern life. Now, in line with Hartmut Rosa (2017, 439), I understand modernity primarily as a societal order shaped by positivist reason, patriarchal capitalism and materialist values where societies operate "in a mode of dynamic stabilization, i.e. [...] systematically requir[ing] growth, innovation and acceleration for [their] structural reproduction and in order to maintain [their] socio-economic and institutional status quo." However, inspired by Arjun Appadurai's 'alternative modernities' and the Comaroffs' (1993, xi) observations on witchcraft as an integral part in a modern world, such "modernizing social forces and material forms [do not have a homogenising] universal effect of eroding local cultural differences" and take on different forms in different settings.

[30]The thesis served as the basis for a paper she later published together with her promoter, Prof. Koen Stroeken. (Bleyenberg and Stroeken 2018)

[31]Apparently, Muslim *waganga* – by some called *waganga wa kiarabu* (arabic healers) – tend to use more scripture, whereas Christian ones are also inclined towards spiritual methods such as the use of candles (e.g. white for purification) and incense, along with prayers and reading and living according to the bible.

[32]I struggled to believe him, because 1) he did not give me too much detail, 2) he was a foreign Christian *mganga* originally from DRC living in a majorly Muslim area with many experienced *waganga* where he and his family were unknown and his claims to be a descendent of a *waganga*-family could therefore not be checked, and 3) he made me pay for the interview and the display of his "pouvoir" afterwards, something no other has done. Moreover, to follow Sanders' (2001,162) argument, while witchcraft "has long been a logical prerequisite for gaining and maintaining status and wealth [...], the occult itself has [...] been commodified in ways previously

neither possible nor imaginable", and grew profusely thanks to 'the free market' imposed on Tanzania through SAP by the Worldbank and the IMF. But with my limited expertise and since I grew up in a culture where magic is said to be non-existent, I cannot claim to know whether his performance was just a scam.

[33]Despite the often violent, missionary endeavours of colonial times, a cosmology which incorporates a metaphysical world of e.g. *mizimu* influencing the physical world persisted. As Terje Oestigaard (2015, 196) analyses this circumstance, "Christianity, missionaries and evangelisation have been highly successful in eradicating ancestral tradition as religious practice, but have largely failed to replace the role of the ancestors with the Christian God: these are basically different entities or realms working at different scales within and among humans. God belongs to the other world, and so do the ancestors, but whereas the ancestors, properly propitiated, help the living in their daily lives, God does not intervene in this world among his children. Christianity has therefore created one cosmology, but also left a whole cosmology ripe for reinvention. It has replaced the role of the ancestors in the world beyond with God, but not fully displaced the role of ancestors in this world and their abilities to solve problems for the living. Christianity has diminished that role in this world, but not the logic of how the ancestors work. And that logic of causation has proved more durable than the power of the ancestors themselves: this is point of departure for witchcraft. It provides the means to manipulate or approach the forces of the otherworld for the betterment of this world."

[34]Although I will not deal with this topic any more, I want to mention for the sake of completeness that he also introduced to me the figure of the *mwangaji*, translatable as the 'owner of nocturnal slaves'. According to him, the *mwangaji* is the one *wachawi* obey and devote themselves to.

[35]The term *yeye* which she used, is the personal pronoun in Swahili, equally non-gendered; he/she.

[36]Similar to Stroeken's (2012, 119ff.) observations, I was told that *wachawi* can curse through 1) proclaiming a curse openly ('I shall curse you'), 2) laying out a trap, 3) pointing at the one to bewitch, 4) touch them (also with an item) or 5) blow something at them from the hand.