Witchcraft in Statecraft: Five Technologies of Power in Colonial and Postcolonial Coastal Kenya
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Abstract: This work focuses on the production of discourse on witchcraft in relation to colonial and postcolonial statecraft in coastal Kenya. It distinguishes between two sets of terms for magical harm, the Mijikenda term utsai and the term witchcraft, and uses this analytical distinction to draw attention to the different worlds from which utsai and witchcraft emerge, and to frame each discourse on magical harm in terms of the political conditions of its production and use. It presents “witchcraft” as a disciplinary technology with five component practices identified as “witchcraft technologies of power.” These technologies have wide general applicability to other colonial and postcolonial situations in Africa and can be used to illuminate both processes of state formation and the emergence of new forms of magic and the occult.

Résumé: Ce travail examine la production des propos sur la sorcellerie relative aux politiques coloniale et post-coloniale au Kenya côtier. Ces propos distinguent deux séries de termes pour désigner les maux dus à la magie: le terme mijikjenda “utsai” et le terme “witchcraft” (sorcellerie), et utilisent cette distinction d’analyse pour attirer l’attention sur les mondes différents d’où sont issus utsai et witchcraft, et pour construire chaque propos sur les maux dus à la magie dans le cadre des conditions politiques de sa production et de son utilisation. Ils présentent la sorcellerie (“witchcraft”) comme une technologie disciplinaire composée de cinq pratiques identifiées comme technologies de pouvoir sorcières. Ces technologies sont applicables à grande échelle à d'autres situations coloniales et post-coloniales en Afrique et elles peuvent être utilisées pour éclairer à la fois les processus de formation des états et l'émergence de nouvelles formes de magie et d'occultisme.

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On any one day in the rural areas of the Kenya coast, if I met Mijikenda people at their homesteads, along paths and roads, and in the chief’s office, I could engage in a variety of conversations about magical harm. It took me years to acquire even the most basic vocabulary to understand the precise terms and euphemisms for forms of magical harm, and even longer to learn some of the contexts in which people would speak and not speak about them. I observed that speakers of the language of Kimijikenda used the Kimijikenda word utsai among themselves. Mijikenda chiefs and other administrative officials, Mijikenda who knew English well, and many Mijikenda who identified themselves as Christians often used the word witchcraft. Later I began to realize that the choice to use the word utsai or witchcraft for magical harm was not only based on the speaker and listener’s language abilities, but also involved their knowledge of, strategic uses for, and participation in worlds of understanding about magical harm that were embedded in local, regional, and national political processes. Analysis of my research on colonial and postcolonial administration, law, religion, and the politics of a witchfinding movement revealed how the production of discourse about magical harm through time and in different political spaces was integral to these processes, and ultimately to the process of state formation.

This work investigates the production of discourse on witchcraft in relation to colonial and postcolonial statecraft in coastal Kenya. It presents “witchcraft” as a disciplinary technology with five component practices, which I refer to as “witchcraft technologies of power.” They have wide general applicability to other colonial and postcolonial situations in Africa and can be used to illuminate both processes of state formation and the production of new forms of magic and the occult. These technologies of power are: 1) the operation of a state legal apparatus to categorize Mijikenda rituals and prosecute Mijikenda ritual practitioners; 2) the everyday policing of Mijikenda ritual by administrative agents; 3) the creation of a set of ideas and practices about mystical harm derived from colonial administrative, European, and Christian practice that comes to be known as witchcraft and strategically merges with Mijikenda discourses concerning utsai; 4) the construction of collective moral discourses among Mijikenda common people, Mijikenda elites, and state agents about the “problem of witchcraft”; 5) the conceptualization, categorization, and naming of particular members of the Mijikenda community as witches. This final act of witchcrafting depends on all of the previous technologies, and together they produce witch-others.

The body of this work focuses on a description and analysis of the five “witchcraft technologies of power” in Southern Division, Coast Province, Kenya. It addresses the period from the late 1950s to the early 1990s and draws from field research conducted in the 1980s, 1991, and 1993. In Kenya the Location is the smallest administrative unit, and each Location has one chief. Research focused on three Locations within Southern Divi-
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sion: Rabai, Ruruma, and Kambe-Ribe Locations, situated on the coastal ridge ten to twenty-five kilometers northwest of Mombasa. Southern Division is populated primarily by members of the Mijikenda ethnic group, which comprises nine closely related subgroups that share a language and many historical traditions (Spear 1978).

Both the terms utsai and witchcraft refer generally to harmful magic conducted by a human being. I present utsai and witchcraft as discourses of power, and assume that discourse includes both conceptualizations and actions. For the purpose of this analysis the distinction between utsai and witchcraft does not refer to differences in the use of terms by speakers of different languages in coastal Kenya, although difference in language usage would be reflected through the processes I describe. Rather, I use this analytical distinction as a tool to draw attention to different worlds from which utsai and witchcraft emerge, and to frame each discourse on magical harm in terms of the political conditions of its production and use. While this discussion on magical harm in coastal Kenya is focused on how forms of state domination shape Mijikenda life, the larger narrative includes Mijikenda resistance and struggle, as well as traditions of critical practice that concern utsai discourse. The present exercise, organized around “seeing like a state” (Scott 1998), is intended to show the interpenetration of state power and culture, and contributes to an understanding of the development of anthropology in the colonial encounter.

This inquiry into witchcraft emerges from a perspective that examines how conceptualizations and terms deployed in Western forms of knowledge are shaped by processes of power. A study of witchcraft as a term used in Western academic and popular discourse to describe the ideas and practices of peoples in Africa must therefore acknowledge its relationship to the colonial project, as have the works of Said (1978) for orientalism, Taussig (1987) for the concept of the wild man in South America, Dirks (1992) for the term caste in India, and Mudimbe (1994) for the idea of Africa. It presents the possibility of understanding how the concept of witchcraft is part of a larger discourse of othering Africa described by Mudimbe (1988, 1994).

Critical discussion about the very use of the term witchcraft to describe forms of magic and power in Africa reflects several paramount themes. Recent scholarship points to the continuation in research and writing of a focus on negative aspects of African peoples’ cultural conceptualizations and forms of action concerning magic and power (Bockie 1994, Bongmba 1996, and in this volume, Eze 1998). This misrepresentation also limits awareness of the variety and creativity of discourses of magic and power in African culture. Evaluating the emergence of the concept of witchcraft in the discipline of anthropology, scholars also interrogate the uncritical association of witchcraft with crime and the violation of law (Douglas 1970, Moore 1992, Pels in this volume), ignoring the political context of colonial domination that structured the conceptualization of their integration.
Geschiere (1988) and Rowlands and Warnier (1988) have provided some of the most important frameworks for analyzing the relationship between witchcraft/sorcery and forms of political action within African states. Geschiere raises the possibility that “sorcery modes of action” were an integral part of many state processes in Africa, and could, in particular instances, challenge state authority. Making a more broad claim, Rowlands and Warnier (1988:121) state that, “in Cameroon sorcery is not only a mode of popular political action but lies at the centre of the State-building process both in the present and in the past.” Relying on these and other insights, scholars have systematically demonstrated the relationship between political and legal processes in contemporary African nation-states and discourses concerning harmful magic (Ciekawy 1989, 1990, 1992, 1997a; Fisiy 1990, 1992; Fisiy and Geschiere 1990; Fisiy and Rowlands 1992; Geschiere 1994, 1995, 1997; and Niehaus 1992, 1993).4

If we acknowledge that all states rely on images of magical power (Corrigan and Sayer 1985, Kertzer 1988, Coronil 1995 and Taussig 1997) and secrecy (Simmel 1908, Teft 1992), an exploration of the salience of magical harm in state processes in Africa is not novel or unique. I argue that what is distinctive about many political processes in Africa is the construction of the state through “witchcraft technologies of power.” These technologies of power enable centralizing processes and ensure forms of domination for both colonial and postcolonial states. They accomplish these effects not only through the repression and prohibition of resistant and revolutionary discourses concerning magic, but also by successfully incorporating Mijikenda common people into discourses of rule that regulate and transform Mijikenda cultural forms.

Utsai, Uganga and Witchcraft Discourses

Utsai is a Kimijikenda term that refers generally to harmful magic conducted by a person who has learned skills in the preparation of medicines. The closest term in Kiswahili is uchawi or ulazi. The magic can be directed at people, things, or events. Among the Mijikenda people with whom I have spoken about utsai over the past fifteen years, there are many differences in conceptualizations of utsai. Despite its multivalence, Mijikenda share general understandings regardless of their class or religious affiliation (Mijikenda, Muslim, Christian).5 I use utsai to refer to a discourse on harmful magic that is created and operates within social and political settings that are largely under the control of Mijikenda who use them, without primary influence from state agents or the sponsorship of state institutions. Perhaps the distinction between utsai and witchcraft in practice can have the effect of producing a state and civil-society dichotomy. However these distinctions are anchored in Mijikenda practice, the use of such a distinction will draw attention to the presence or non presence of dominant
legal and administrative control over arenas of Mijikenda discourse on harmful magic.

Witchcraft technologies constitute a discourse of power concerning magical harm directed by human beings that is employed by people who have access to particular political and economic resources of the state that enable them to exert a dominant influence on the politics of magical harm. It is a discourse of power that centralizes and hierarchalizes magical ideas and practices (Ciekawy, forthcoming). The historical conditions of its introduction into Mijikenda areas of settlement occurred through the introduction of Christian religious discourse and the imposition of colonial administrative power and colonial legal institutions.

Mijikenda largely speak of utsai as harmful magic, but it also involves a variety of other potentials. As Geschiere (1997) argues, the ambivalence associated with magical harm invites its use to conceptualize the many challenges of modernity. For Mijikenda, the ambivalence of utsai allows them to formulate a critique of particular forms of power rooted in the fulfillment of one person’s desire at another person’s expense, the other person’s “expense” including material loss or emotional, psychological, and physical suffering (Ciekawy 1992 and forthcoming). utsai discourse offers a critique of inequality and the human agents of exploitation where excessive desire for wealth and power, and the fulfillment of one person’s desire at another person’s expense are dominant themes (Ciekawy forthcoming).

Many Mijikenda rely on healers (aganga, si. muganga) for their diagnostic, protective, and curative skills that involve medicines. Any act of healing can be called uganga, but uganga usually refers more specifically to Mijikenda or syncretic healing practices that involve Mijikenda traditions. Aganga acquire these skills through training, and together with the assistance of spirits, assist Mijikenda to overcome misfortune and illness. Some of the uganga professions are restricted by gender. In addition to regular aganga, there is another group of specialists who heal: senior men selected for membership in a secret society. These senior men are known as azhere a kaya, or kaya elders. Both kaya elders and regular aganga can assist Mijikenda to cure or contain utsai, but their medicines and skills are different. The full range of practices Mijikenda employ to fight and contain harmful magic include diviner consultations, utsai rumor, utsai accusation, oaths of ordeal, individual and homestead cleansing and protection rituals (generally referred to as ngoma), large-scale community protection rituals, government court trials and the ritual of utsai detection known as uganga wa kuivoyera (Ciekawy 1992). While utsai and witchcraft discourse and its containment cannot be fully separated from state power, it is important to note that Mijikenda conduct most of these forms of containment outside of state legal and administrative institutions. In contrast, some forms can only be practiced by people with access to economic resources and state legal and political power; these forms are ngoma, government court trials, and rituals of utsai detection using licensed aganga.
Mijikenda frequently describe *uganga* as a way of bringing order to confused or messy circumstances, consistent with Parkin’s (1979) analysis of divinatory speech among Giriama. Parkin presents divination as a way of “straightening” a path that is confused or lost. In addition to these conceptualizations, I have argued that Mijikenda view the healing of problems caused by *utsai* as a way of working toward the removal of undesirable states of blockage, or what I have referred to as arrested potential or arrested development (Giekawy 1989, 1992, 1996). Mijikenda speak literally and metaphorically of being in states of blockage or incapacity when they are affected by *utsai*, and stress the necessity of changing this state to one of positive movement.9 This conceptualization uses an imagery of blockage and movement that in many ways resembles Taylor’s (1995) formulation of the flow/blockage dialectic in Rwandan symbolic thought. Both *utsai* and *uganga* discourses employ complex philosophies of human transformation. They provide Mijikenda with the ability to change circumstances, or what can be characterized as transformational capacity (Arens and Karp, 1989). For these reasons I present *uganga* and *utsai* as discourses of power.

Mijikenda use the term *mutsai* (pl. *atsai*) to refer to the ritual specialist who undertakes *utsai* magic, as well as his or her clients. Mijikenda observe that *atsai* are often known primarily as *aganga* and acquire knowledge about *utsai* later in life, and that *atsai* are usually middle-aged and older men (Giekawy 1992).10 Analysis of accuser-accused relationships over the past twenty years in the central Locations of my research area reflect these understandings. Tensions between men and women, and between younger and older people that emerge because of changing expectations about collective resource sharing are reflected in the age and gender dynamics involved in *utsai* accusation (Giekawy 1992, 1999).11 Any accusation has the potential to be influenced by wider political circumstances that involve members of local elite groups, regional and national politicians, and administrative agents.

**The Five Witchcraft Technologies**

The first and second technologies of power work to construct colonial law, which gradually prohibits some religious discourse and controls other religious discourse. It creates conditions for the practice of colonial law that foster forms of cooperation among Mijikenda common people, Mijikenda elites, and state agents. The third, forth, and fifth technologies of power work to incorporate Mijikenda discourse into colonial legal discourse, demarcate Mijikenda religious discourse into legal and illegal realms, negotiate a common moral discourse directed toward the containment of harmful magic, and produce particular ways of identifying witches. These last three technologies concern some of the more complicated and apparently paradoxical aspects of statecraft, where witchcraft and statecraft...
emerge dialectically. Through the collective creation of moral discourses that conceptualize harmful magic and formulate the threat it presents to society, strategies for its containment can be formulated. Through discourse on the containment of harmful magic, Mijikenda common people, Mijikenda elites, and state agents create a common goal. Uniting in order to address the “problem of witchcraft,” they participate in a politics of action that categorizes, names, blames, and prosecutes people defined as witches. Witchfinding becomes a central conceptual tool in the “morality plays” (Wagner-Pacifici 1986) of colonial and postcolonial state agents in the politics of rule. These moral discourses are more than ways to legitimize state institutions and state agents; they build new forms of community fractionalism centered on “us” and witch-others.

An appreciation for how state actors manipulate discourse on magical harm using the state legal apparatus requires mention of some of the earliest interventions in Mijikenda legal and religious practice by colonial authorities. Before the 1880s, when the British colonial government had not yet set up administrative stations and placed administrative agents in the rural areas of the coast, Mijikenda legal, political and religious authority was directed by a council of senior men called the kambi (Spear 1978:7). The kambi was composed of the senior age set of each Mijikenda subgroup. The strength of the elders’ council decreased considerably after that time, as Mijikenda moved out of their forest settlements and local clan, lineage, and neighborhood elders began to create informal councils to settle disputes. By the early 1900s the British colonial administration had appointed individual Mijikenda as chiefs and provided them with one or more administrative policemen. They also established a Native Tribunal Court (later called the African Tribunal Court) composed of four or five Mijikenda elders, which functioned alongside the informal elders’ council.12 Both groups considered problems that concerned harmful magic directed by human beings. While the chief’s influence over problems concerning harmful magic remained small until the 1960s, the role of chiefs in mediating conflict in the Location steadily grew as they increasingly referred cases to the Native Tribunal Courts, influenced Tribunal Court elders’ decisions, and settled disputes in their own offices (Ciekawy 1992, 1997).

After independence, the government of Kenya maintained the structure of administrative control based on chiefs, subchiefs, and administrative police. It abolished the African Tribunal Courts, and created in its place a Division and District Court System with decisions made by nonlocal magistrates. In some areas of Mijikenda settlement, informal elders’ councils increased in importance over government courts, but these too could come under the influence of chiefs (Ciekawy 1992). Chiefs continued to be
recruited from the areas they administered and increasingly acted as intermediaries between Mijikenda and the court system.

By the 1970s members of a new elite had consolidated their power around access to legal and administrative resources, new economic enterprises, and control of the Kenya African National Union (KANU), the single political party (Ciekawy 1992, 1997). With the advent of multipartyism and severe public criticism of KANU in the early 1990s, some of KANU’s influence lessened, but KANU officials and party members continue to dominate rural politics and control the majority of economic resources from the state. In the rural areas of the Kenya coast, opposition parties are not well represented and rural Mijikenda still overwhelmingly support KANU, even though they are critical of the central government, particularly because they view up-country politicians as concerned primarily with appropriating coastal resources rather than in the development of the region by those with deep historical claims.

The colonial and postcolonial Kenyan states have maintained great interest in the control of religious discourse, focusing attention on the circumscription and shaping of ritual and ritual practitioners. Aganga conduct the majority of rituals that diagnose or resolve problems caused by a variety of supernatural agents and utsai in order to help maintain the health of individuals, homestead and lineage members, and communities. These rituals include the branch of healing termed uganga wa kuvoyera which finds or discovers information about lost property, theft, and the identity of a mutsai. Because these rituals can also be powerful social and political resources, politicians, administrators, religious authorities, and common people are involved in a continual struggle to maintain control over them and the ideas that govern them (Ciekawy 1989b, 1992, 1997). Since the 1920s administrative agents have relied on a series of legal acts to help them control and shape uganga and utsai discourses. The Kenya coast colonial and postcolonial administrations have had particular reasons for attempting to control uganga and utsai discourse, for one of the strongest oppositions to colonial rule at the coast, the Giriama War of 1914, was led by a Mijikenda medicine woman from the Giriama subgroup named Mektalili (Brantley 1979).

The Witchcraft Act (Cap. 67) of Kenya, created in 1925, was one of the earliest laws aimed at containing and controlling African people’s religious discourse. It was revised in 1962 with few changes and accepted by the Independent Government of Kenya (Mutungi 1977: xvi), remaining today in virtually the same form. The current Witchcraft Act (Cap. 67) contains ten sections which prohibit chiefs from allowing the practice of witchcraft and prohibit individuals from pretending to exercise witchcraft; supplying advice or articles for witchcraft with intent to injure; using witchcraft medicine with intent to injure; possessing charms; accusing persons of witchcraft; and attempting to discern crime with witchcraft). The Witchcraft
Act also permits the district commissioner to order persons practicing witchcraft to reside in a specific place and to deport or restrict a person previously convicted under the Witchcraft Act.

Administrators in each Location and Division developed their own use of the Witchcraft Act and created their own administrative practices and understandings of its application to the religious practices of the area. By the 1950s the administrators in the Locations and Divisions of Kilifi District were involved in the practice of a policy that they referred to as “the restriction of ngoma” (Ciekawy 1989a, 1992) which was based on provisions of the Witchcraft Act, the Public Order Act (Cap. 56), and the Native Authority Ordinance (after 1966 known as the Chief’s Authority Act [Cap. 128]).

Ngoma can be translated literally as “drum” in Kiswahili, but for Mijikenda ngoma also referred to diagnostic or curative rituals that involved music and dance, commonly sponsored by the members of a homestead or lineage to cure members of group. Ngoma drew large crowds of people, and these gatherings were viewed by administrative agents as potential sites for political activity and the development of patron-client ties to powerful healers who could challenge administrative authority. The three acts enabled administrators to prohibit some ngoma rituals entirely (such as those of uganga wa kwovoyer) and limit the number of ngoma that Mijikenda were able to perform through the institutionalization of a required permit (Ciekawy 1992, 1997a). When used by agents of state, these acts enabled and continue to enable colonial and postcolonial administrators to interpret the threat to order that any assembly of people might present, giving them great power to control Mijikenda religious practice. This power has been challenged by private citizens, politicians, and the Kenya Human Rights Commission in 1997, resulting in some concessions offered by the central government in the form of changes in the Kenyan constitution. There is not yet an indication that in Southern Division policing practices have changed in accordance with these constitutional amendments.

Since independence in 1963, Southern Division administrative authorities have adopted similar policies toward Mijikenda rituals and religious practitioners, but the policing of these events has changed in character and increased in frequency. Chiefs still require permits for ngoma, but one major departure in local administrative practice has been that permits have been given to a small number of aganga wa kwovoyer, such as in the case of the famous muganga named Kajiwe. Another change occurred in state law in 1966 when the independent state of Kenya reformed the colonial legal system and placed the Witchcraft Act under the Criminal Code. After 1966 cases concerning magical harm were in theory not to be addressed by elders councils and they were largely kept out of civil court proceedings. Witchcraft officially became a crime against the state, and there are continuous efforts by chiefs and police to channel problems concerning magical harm into the courts (Ciekawy 1992).
A second technology of power involves the policing of discourse on magical harm using the state administrative apparatus. State agents (police, chiefs, subchiefs, and district officers) use the administrative apparatus to constrain and influence Mijikenda religious practice concerning magical harm. Within the boundaries of the existing legal system, they have created a space for themselves in the policing of aganga and those whom they suspect have used harmful magic, and in the local politics of accusations against people thought to practice harmful magic.

State agents have the power to prevent, survey, or intervene in Mijikenda religious practice. These three major fields of policing include ensuring that Mijikenda obtain a permit or license to conduct rituals called ngoma, enforcing the provisions of the Witchcraft Act, and surveying everyday religious practice and informal gossip (Ciekawy 1994, 1997). In the 1980s and early 1990s in Southern Division, policing clearly worked to centralize administrative power. It reduced the number of powerful aganga in any one area, encouraged aganga to comply with chief’s directives in order to be permitted to conduct an aganga practice, fostered the development of aganga-chief patronage ties, and facilitated the chief’s and police’s surveillance of aganga (Ciekawy 1992, 1997). Policing also resulted in new forms of violence used by police on Mijikenda citizens that were unknown before the advent of colonial rule.

Chiefs send police to the home of suspects in order to obtain physical evidence of witchcraft that is likely to be persuasive in the Division Court in support of the most common charge, “possession of charms.” This evidence generally consists of any of the articles aganga use in their work. Because the medicines and instruments for curing are almost identical to those of bewitching, aganga find it nearly impossible to prove in court that their medicines are used exclusively for healing. It is extremely rare for the defendant to win a case, and the defendant is usually convicted of one or more violations of the Witchcraft Act, which could include a heavy fine or imprisonment from three to six months. Regardless of whether or not the accused has been found guilty, the fact that the accused has been questioned by the chief or subjected to a house search is highly stigmatizing and typically causes the accused to suffer from social ostracism in the community. Data from Division Court registers and case studies show that from 1982 to the present, most suspects are aganga and are middle-aged or older men, but they are drawn from the lowest socioeconomic strata of society. These people are clearly unable to defend themselves against the state’s legal and administrative apparatus (Ciekawy 1992, 1997).

This analysis of how state agents use law and the administrative apparatus shows that the postcolonial state has succeeded in repressing some forms of Mijikenda practice and incorporating others into its own procedures for controlling mystical harm. Licensing and policing practices have
changed the character of Mijikenda rituals and local politics surrounding magical harm. By usurping from Mijikenda institutions and religious authorities some of the power to detect the practice of harmful magic and identify its practitioners, administrative agents have gained control over the indigenous discourse on utsai containment. These forms of control strengthen the power of state agents and state institutions in the rural areas. The postcolonial state also introduced some new forms of containment, such as court proceedings, practices of policing, and the practice of licensing aganga which allow them to become agents for the containment of magical harm. The use of legal and administrative apparatuses of the state, conferring tactical and organizational power (Wolf 1990), have not been the only technologies that facilitate statecraft. As will be illustrated through discussion of the next three technologies of power, statecraft in the rural areas of coastal Kenya also rests on technologies that work to unite common people and state agents in a complex discourse blending utsai and witchcraft, and organize different groups to participate in common to contain witchcraft. The final act is the production of witch-others.

The third technology of power concerns the creation of a set of ideas and practices about mystical harm that merges a Mijikenda discourse of utsai with a discourse of witchcraft. It comes about through discussions between state agents and state subjects in matters concerning harmful magic, as Mijikenda attempt to ensure that there is some continuity in their response to magical harm, albeit through accommodation to state processes and institutions. This technology illustrates that state intervention was not only about repression and policing, but also about creating “dialogues of rule” among Mijikenda common people, Mijikenda elites, and state agents (Ciekawy 1990, 1992). As state leaders and other power brokers come to craft the state in ways that facilitate their own domination, they have entered into modes of familiarity (Mbembe 1992) with common people and worked to establish points in common. The forms of familiarity that emerge are captured in Mbembe’s notion of the postcolonial situation, where state agents and state subjects establish arenas of “conviviality” using logics that “inscribe the dominant and the dominated within the same episteme” (Mbembe 1992:6).

In addition to the control of permits for ngoma and uganga wa kuvoyera, a chief’s power to police religious practice extends to his ability to influence cultural processes that construct utsai suspicion or accusation. Chiefs have created central roles for themselves in the politics of mediating accusations of magical harm, selecting from gossip and complaints about magical harm in his Location the ones that he will pursue. Chiefs commonly act
to investigate and support accusations initiated by their friends, clients, or people who have given them bribes, or when they have existing conflicts with the suspect. When a chief decides to collect against a suspect, he can dispatch an administrative policeman to bring in the suspect and search his/her home, or send a message to the suspect to report to his office for interrogation. These kinds of investigations can lead to an arrest and charge, a court case, and a conviction. People who hope to prosecute someone considered to be a mutsai will discuss the case with a chief over a period of time, work with chiefs and police to provide evidence and testimony, and develop knowledge of legal understandings of witchcraft and court procedures in order to frame their case.

The forth technology concerns the negotiation and creation of a common moral discourse between state agents and Kenyan subjects that facilitates their cooperation in order to control mystical harm. This includes the detection of people responsible for mystical harm.

The dialogues between state actors and state subjects is well illustrated by events in the 1950s and 1960s when chiefs and district officers entertained the proposals of different aganga to obtain permits for cleansing and protection rituals. In the 1950s different Mijikenda groups demanded from administrators the opportunity to conduct some legal rituals that involved utsai cleansing and protection. In response to Mijikenda demands, administrators developed a policy of giving permits to those who were termed “acceptable” utsai cleansers whose practice consisted of traversing designated areas in order to place cleansing and protective medicines at major crossroads and water holes (Ciekawy 1989, 1992).

While the colonial administration appeared to have given in to Mijikenda demands for utsai control, the solutions administrators developed also required Mijikenda to participate in bureaucratic routines and engage in negotiations with administrators. These opportunities for administrators to engage in action and discussion with rural people concerning religious affairs provided a useful entree into the routines of Mijikenda daily life and encouraged Mijikenda to develop patron-client relations with chiefs.

Utsai control in negotiations between Mijikenda and administrators were administrative strategies for legitimation. As Geschiere (1988: 55) shows for Cameroon, both the colonial and postcolonial administrations were “pressured to side with rural people against witches by permitting forms of witch detection.” The need to acknowledge a moral imperative for utsai control was all the more important for the new administration of the independent government of Kenya.

The public debate about utsai control took on unprecedented dimensions in the late 1950s. One aspect of this debate featured arguments about
Mijikenda rights to practice their own culture and traditions, and the right to defend themselves against what colonial documents characterize as the great threat of witchcraft. This argument was also woven into another about the right of Africans to practice their own culture (Ciekawy 1992), which emerged to form a complex politics of, in Becker’s (1985) terms, “moral entrepreneurship.”

During the independence era in the late 1950s, a particular configuration of patron-client relationships emerged with regard to utsai control. Local politicians attempted to generate clientele by helping them obtain permits for rituals. Some councilors and other politicians began to champion the right of Mijikenda to practice their own traditions, including uganga wa kuvoyera (Ciekawy 1992). After independence in 1966, district and provincial administrators also entered into these discussions. While refusing to “legalize” the practice of uganga wa kuvoyera for all Mijikenda, they bargained with some of the Mijikenda politicians who supported it and who hoped to advance one particular muganga named Kajiwe as the supreme witchfinder.

The political activities surrounding the promotion of Kajiwe as a witchfinder required the cooperation of Mijikenda common people, Mijikenda elites, and state agents. Kajiwe was known in his neighborhood as a muganga whose practice in uganga wa kuvoyera had just begun, but support from his Location chief, local KANU leaders, and the national politician Ronald Ngala enabled him to achieve legal status. Ronald Ngala was the chairperson of KANU for Coast Province, MP for Southern Division, and a cabinet minister. Because Ngala was Mijikenda, he was familiar with Mijikenda practices of utsai control and understood how he could benefit politically by supporting Kajiwe’s movement.

In 1966 the DO and PC for Coast Province had agreed to support Kajiwe’s uganga activities, but had termed them a “campaign.” They ordered chiefs to help administer the campaign in their own Locations. In colonial and contemporary coast administrative language the term campaign had been used to describe administrative activities targeted at particular problems such as tax evasion and the elimination of disease. The obvious other association of the term campaign is with political party activities in preparation for elections. These usages of the word campaign identified Kajiwe’s work with the legacy of coastal administrative policy and the new political party system, as did the set of rules for the execution of Kajiwe’s campaign that the PC sent to all administrative officials.18

The practice that came to be known to administrators as Kajiwe’s “campaign,” and to local residents as Kajiwe’s “work,” was therefore a complex set of activities brokered and shaped by administrators, politicians, and the leaders of Ngala’s KANU faction. Through this negotiation, the regional and central administrations supported the formation and institutionalization of Kajiwe’s invented tradition of uganga wa kuvoyera. By the 1970s, Kajiwe’s uganga wa kuvoyera practice became an established practice in South-
ern Division, working alongside administrative policing practices and supporting the prosecution of witches in the Division Court. Kajiwe was the only muganga in Southern Division to receive an official permit, which he irregularly maintained for twenty-seven years and throughout most of the period of my research in the 1980s and 1990s.

Kajiwe’s reliance on a permit from the administration compromised many aspects of what would otherwise be considered to be a Mijikenda uganga wa kuvoyera practice. In order to obtain and retain the permit, Kajiwe accepted restrictions on the place and time of his rituals, allowed the participation of the chiefs, and agreed to take people he proclaimed to be atsai to the chief’s camp where they were jailed and tried in the Division Court under the Witchcraft Act. Kajiwe’s agreement to comply with at least some of these requirements therefore resulted in new forms of state-society cooperation in witch detection and created a new form of uganga wa kuvoyera.

Through the administration of uganga wa kuvoyera, state agents in Southern Division have emerged as moral authorities. State agents now provide new apparatuses for the detection of mystical harm and its agents that can appear to be more “expedient” than other methods (some of which have been repressed by state agents) and have a greater role in containment. State agents are also able to boast of preventing the actions of practitioners who they claim fear being caught through administrative investigative methods, and often receive a high degree of support from local people who have lived with the fear of a mutsai practicing in their area. As one chief remarked to a group of men in his office in 1993, “We all know that there are atsai, and it is for you to report these matters to my office. Here I have full-time policemen, and you have seen the results.” The chief was referring to a witchcraft case that was prosecuted with his assistance. The defendant was found guilty and sentenced to six months in jail, and had been in jail over four months when this discussion took place. One of the men replied, “Yes, we are living in tranquility these days, and we have few worries. Everyone here thanks you; such people will fear to do those things [use witchcraft magic] when you are in office.”

A fifth technology of power is the production of “witch others.” The convivial practice of finding information about witchcraft and prosecuting its practitioners allows state actors to penetrate and influence locally based discourses on atsai and reidentify practitioners as witches. State agents and state processes insert themselves into a politics of representation that influences the categorization of persons who are suspected of practicing harmful magic, shaping Mijikenda imaginings concerning magical harm. Together state agents and common people are producing “witch others.” The legal and administrative apparatus, having helped to shape the con-
struction of the categories themselves, ensures that witches are then processed through particular forms of state action. This practice creates new identities (Fisiy and Geschiere 1996, Werbner 1996) according to which those who make members of their own community into witches also reposition themselves. It offers to those who appropriate the moral authority of protecting society from the utsai threat the opportunity to engage in their own social transformation (Ciekawy 1990, 1992). The ability to contain problems allegedly caused by utsai and “clean up” society (a phrase that can be used ironically to refer to practices in both the United States and Kenya) also confers legitimacy on anyone who would like to build political influence or run for office (Ciekawy 1992).

Both David Parkin and I have observed that, since the 1960s, Mijikenda increasingly claim that utsai is on the rise. My own work shows that it is increasingly provided by diviners as a diagnosis for illness, among some four to six other possible sources, and I now wonder if “witchcraft technologies of power” have helped to promote utsai as the primary diagnosis of illness.

My discussions with Mijikenda about utsai and witches over the past fifteen years suggest that the proclamation of “witch” appears to be an irreversible “sentence.” Interviews with older Mijikenda indicate that those determined to have practiced utsai forty to fifty years ago were able to “lose” their identification with utsai and be absorbed back into their communities more easily than those determined to have practiced witchcraft over the past twenty years. Furthermore, the practice of mutual accusation and the mutual taking of oaths of ordeal to determine the validity of each participant’s claim was a dominant feature of utsai accusation prior to the 1960s. Afterwards, it appears that accusation has been increasingly conducted in a one-way direction, and that dialogical accusation now is extremely rare. Mijikenda also claim that violence against practitioners of harmful magic was not previously as common or as severe as it has been over the past twenty to thirty years, although this claim might be an attempt to invent a more golden past. In view of all the variety of Mijikenda opinion about changes in the treatment of people thought to engage in practices concerning magical harm, it is possible to ask if the identity of “witch” now takes precedence over any other identity that might characterize a person, and if there are now new forms of social death for those with witch identities.

Conclusions

Five “witchcraft technologies” of power have helped to craft the state in coastal Kenya. Analysis of these technologies also reveals how Mijikenda people have been invited to participate in statecraft and illustrates some of the ways that Mijikenda discourse on magical harm has been shaped
through colonial and postcolonial encounters. Witchcraft and statecraft are in dialectical relation.

Colonial and postcolonial state actors have been and continue to be busy crafting a space for themselves in both utsai and witchcraft discourse. At particular times in history state agents and politicians have both helped to create and taken advantage of the “moral panics” (Cohen 1972) surrounding the fear of the threat of utsai and witchcraft. State agents develop their roles in surveillance, abuse people alleged to be mutsai, and engage in other acts of ethical transgression that categorize people as “others” deserving of mistreatment. Practices uniting state actors and state subjects against witches have created new forms of everyday violence in Mijikenda life.

That state agents would be involved in a moral crusade to save society from the witch-others it has itself helped to create should come as no surprise to those who study the creativity of statecraft in postcolonial Africa. Regardless of the ingenuity and complexity of new forms of governance, inequality and violence dominate, inspiring Mamdani to characterize these forms as “late colonialism” and “centralized despotism” (1996: 291). Given the existence of what Werbner calls “the catastrophe of quasi-nationalism” (1991: 159), where one part of the nation acts against another in the name of uniting the nation, “witchcraft technologies” can blend with other moral crusades that produce varieties of witch-others. The technologies of power described in this essay on Kenya are only some of the ones states have crafted, and their effects are augmented by other technologies of power that are more overt: political assassination, arrest and incarceration of reformist political leaders, verbal attacks on the news media, denial of provisions of the Kenyan constitution, criminalization of opposition political activity through charges of sedition, physical attacks on peaceful demonstrators, and state-organized ethnic violence such as occurred in the 1990s in the Rift Valley and the Kenya coast. The persecution of people identified as witches is but one among many violations against humanity. If the past is any prediction of the future, it is difficult to be optimistic about the products of the witchcraft-statecraft dialectic and its potential to legitimize the inhumanity of the state’s project.

Eze (1997: 13) argues that by dialectically negating Africa, constructing it as irrational, primitive, and dark, Europe was able to invent itself as the ideal for humanity. The discourse of witchcraft in Africa is part of that project. Eze further suggests that the negation of Africa and Africans was central to the possibility of European modernity. The workings of a witchcraft-statecraft dialectic in the fabric of political processes described here in coastal Kenya also could well describe dynamics in other regions and states in Africa. There are, furthermore, other reference points outside Africa that are critical to our discussion of the modernity and postmodernity of witchcraft. These include but go beyond awareness of how African people, in response to state domination and global forces of capitalism, use dis-
courses of magical harm to understand, explain, and direct action toward forms of inequality, violence, and disorder. The modernity and post-modernity of witchcraft in Africa refer more comprehensively to a condition in which human and political possibilities are circumscribed by a constellation of global forces and agreements, crafted even in the spaces of the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, and the academy.

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Notes

1. My use of disciplinary technologies is clearly based on the work of Foucault in Discipline and Punish. I find parallels between the use of witchcraft technologies and the exercise of colonial power in Kenya, and technologies supporting the development of the modern state in Europe involving discourses on health, disease, and punishment represented by Foucault. When viewed comprehensively, the exercise of colonial law in coastal Kenya can be understood as a political strategy that constitutes, the the Foucauldian sense, forms of punishment. Punishment consists of “techniques possessing their own specificity in the more general field of other ways of exercising power” (1979: 23).
2. Article length limitations would not permit ethnographic illustrations for all technologies; most of this material appears in Giekawy 1992 and 1997.
3. In this work I have not incorporated the Kiswahili term uchawi into my analysis, which would be required as a logical extension of my argument. The use of the terms utsai, uchawi, and witchcraft depend on context and strategy, the primary language and identity of the conversationalists, and the particular conceptualization that a person develops in the course of his or her life. Regardless of socioeconomic background, most Mijikenda speaking to Mijikenda outside of a
legal or administrative context will use the term *utsai*. There is some exception among Mijikenda whose primary religious identification is Christian, and among second-generation Mijikenda urban dwellers. Mijikenda speaking to non-Mijikenda Kiswahili speakers will use the Kiswahili term *uchawi*. In discussion with me, Mijikenda who are comfortable with English will often use the term *witchcraft* but switch to *utsai* when I demonstrate my knowledge of the word or other Mijikenda concepts. When engaged in particular legal or political strategies, however, another logic can direct the choice of terms. In interactions with administrative officials, or in discussions concerned with constructing an administrative investigation concerning magical harm, Mijikenda tend to use the terms *uchawi* and *witchcraft* regardless of the factors described.

4. These scholars have made the relationships among politics, law, and witchcraft their major focus of ethnographic field research and writing; these citations are their major contributions and are not intended to be a comprehensive list. Other works that demonstrate these relationships are Ashforth (1966), Auslander (1996), Bond (1986, 1987), van Dijk (1994), Fields (1982, 1985), Lan (1985), Parkin (1968, 1969); Werbner (1991), West (1997), and Willis (1968). These works also exemplify concerns related to those focusing on modernity and global capitalism such as Apter (1993), Austen (1993), Bastian (1993), van Binsbergen (1981), Comaroff and Comaroff (1993), Creehan (1900, 1998), Englund (1996), Meyer (1992, 1995), Ogembo (1996), Shaw (1997), and Yamba (1997).

5. The multivalence of *utsai* appears in many ways. Different conceptualizations reflect people’s positions in society based on age, gender, socioeconomic background, exposure to different traditions within Mijikenda subgroups, and exposure to non-Mijikenda life styles and religions. Another aspect of multivalence concerns its use for positive or harmful purposes (Ciekawy 1998, forthcoming), or what Geschiere (1988, 1996), refers to as the “ambivalence” of witchcraft.

6. Mijikenda acknowledge *utsai’s* helpful and harmful potentials, including its “legitimate” use to deliver basic resources to people who do not have access to them (Ciekawy 1998, forthcoming).

7. Divination is one category of *uganga*, which is commonly called *uganga wa nburuga*. *Aganga a nburuga* have the skill to discover the cause of a client’s problem, choosing from among several major sources of agency: ancestor spirits, spirit possession, the divine creator, mischievous spirits, the transgression of accepted sexual relations, and *utsai*. Both my own research and Parkin’s among Giriama (1972, 1991) find that among all the explanatory agents of illness and misfortune over the past thirty years, *utsai* diagnoses seem to be the most common, and Mijikenda observe that it is on the increase. Both men and women can be diviners but there are more men who practice the lucrative forms of *uganga* that extend beyond divination.

8. The term can be translated as “healer who prays for,” which refers to the role of this healer in communicating with supernatural agents for another person.

9. *Aganga* act to “open” the way to progress (*kudzendereza*) and to “close” a person’s body to penetration by *utsai* magic.

10. Based on a sample of 126 cases of accusations concerning harmful magic directed by human beings made between 1978 and 1993, 89 percent of all accusations were made against men, and over 90 percent of these were middle-aged and older people (Ciekawy 1999).
11. The economic history of the region helps to explain the problems of resource management that Mijikenda have faced. In the last three decades Mijikenda have received low prices for agricultural crops and have had an increased need for cash. Most young and middle-aged men have been forced to engage in part-time or full-time wage employment, placing a greater work burden on women without a corresponding increase in women’s access to household resources or influence in decision-making. Households now depend more on wage income than the sale of agricultural produce, placing great pressure on young and middle-aged men to earn enough money to pay for food to supplement subsistence produce and to provide medicine, clothing, and school fees for children (Ciekawy 1988, 1992).

12. Together with chiefs, Tribunal Court elders, and members of an emerging educated elite, colonial administrators constructed what they called customary law. For one of the most comprehensive illustrations of the construction of customary law, refer to Moore (1986).

13. The section most commonly appealed to under the Witchcraft Act is Section 5, entitled “Possession of Charms an Offense.” See Ciekawy (1992) for illustrations of the application of this Act to Mijikenda practice, and to Mutungi (1977) for other areas of East Africa.

14. Both the Chief’s Authority Act and the Public Order Act have been heavily criticized by Kenyan lawyers because they contradict the freedom of assembly and the freedom of association guaranteed in the Kenyan constitution (Kibwana 1990: Mutua 1994: 55), in addition to perpetuating a colonial attitude of suspicion and disdain for African cultural practices.

15. In the trials of those charged with possession of charms in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the prosecution often brought the famous muganga wa kuvoyera Kajiwe to court as an expert who could identify “witchcraft charms.”

16. Wealth, political power, and an active KANU membership are the most important resources that enable a person or a group to successfully wage a public accusation that ends in a Division or District Court trial. Accusations that continue on to the division court require a great deal of administrative mediation and bribery, so it is beyond the reach of most common people to use courts to settle utsai accusations. The same resources are required for a successful defense or to fend off an administrative investigation.

17. The two major political parties, KANU (Kenya African National Union) and KADU (Kenya African Democratic Union) battled against each other from 1960 to 1963. KANU was supported by the larger ethnic groups (Kikuyu, Luo, and Kamba), and its candidate for president was Jomo Kenyatta. KADU proposed a centralized government structure and drew its main support from the smaller ethnic groups, including the Mijikenda (Gertzel 1974). Its presidential candidate was Ronald G. Ngala, who was from the Giriama subgroup of the Mijikenda. KADU’s political platform was known as Regionalism (Majimboism), for its central feature was a division of powers between the central government and the newly established regional authorities. This feature was important to Mijikenda, coastal squatters, and members of other minority ethnic groups who feared the political domination of the central government by larger ethnic groups. Ngala also voiced Mijikenda concern about the need to protect coast land from up-country speculators, generated in part from Mijikenda suspicions about the aims of national land tenure reform.
18. The regulations Kajiwe received specified that he was to be aided by several administrative authorities in each Location, report several times per week to the chief of each Location he entered, and take elders of the kaya to help him administer medicines for utsai cleansing and prevention. Administrative police were to accompany Kajiwe during official campaign activities to ensure that there was no violence and to help arrest suspected utsai. Finally, utsai suspects were to be brought to the subdistrict court at Kaloleni (approximately eight miles away from the initial campaign site) to be processed through the government court system.