

The Meaning of Rural Political Violence: The meaning of the anti-witchcraft attacks

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There is a terrible weeping in Brooklyn.
The community is crying for the Comrades.
Some say, we, the Comrades, will pass away.
Many things came and they passed away.
Haai! Haai! Haai!
Comrades will never pass away.
Suffering – Haai! Haai! – You will pass away.
Comradeship is our people's weapon against you.
Haai! Haai! Haai!
Parents – Haai! Haai! – Brooklyn is our home.
Tell the police – Haai! Haai!
Tell witches – Haai! Haai!
Tell those who poison – Haai! Haai!
Tell those who commit abortions – Haai! Haai!
This is our hour – Haai! Haai! We will die for our land.
Forward Comrades!

(Song sung by the Brooklyn Youth Organisation)

Introduction

On the 12th May 1986, in Brooklyn Trust Land, Mapulaneng, a mass meeting was held on the local soccer field. The meeting was called by the Brooklyn Youth Organisation (BYO). It was attended by about eight hundred men, most of whom were below the age of twenty five. Women were forbidden to attend. The purpose of the meeting was to identify witches living in Brooklyn and to punish them. The judicial procedure was, according to my informant, "perfectly democratic". Any person attending the meeting was allowed to stand up and put forward an accusation. The accusation included the name of a person and who they were supposed to have witched. If the accusation was received with popular approval, then the name was

noted down on a list. The most enthusiastic accusers were the older, unemployed men. They would refer to previous occasions when witches were identified, but the witch would then bribe the Chief or Induna, and remain within the community. Some forty-three names were placed on this list. The Disciplinary Committee were sent to collect five old women whose names were on the top of the list. These old women were members of a notorious gang called the "Big Five". A trial was held of the five. Those members who were reluctant to confess their evil deeds were sjambokked until they gave a confession. One of the members died during the sjambokking. Two of the members confessed to making zombies of their victims, to causing lightning to strike and to cause children to be born lame. They handed over the knives they had allegedly used to cut out the tongues of the victims. The two were given three days to repair the damage they had done to various people (i.e. make the lame children walk). A third member of the "Big Five" was ordered to leave the community. The fourth member was allowed to remain in the location on condition that she stopped practising witchcraft. This was because the court decided that she had only been an apprentice.

The following day a rumour was generated that members of the "Big Five" had boasted that they would now really "witch" the "comrades" (members of the BYO) as they had been allowed to live. Three days later, three members of the "Big Five" were sjambokked and then burnt to death by terrified and furious youths. The youths went on to attack a further eight people (seven women and one man). These people were either sjambokked or their herbs were burnt.

The above events pose a number of questions to the political analyst: Were the witchcraft attacks merely superstitious remnants of the "dark pre-colonial mind projecting a collective guilt onto certain objects and destroying them" or was there a more material effectivity to the attacks? Were the attacks arbitrary or can one deduce a series of social processes that structured and defined who was to be attacked? This paper will attempt to unpack the meanings surrounding the anti-witchcraft attacks. In doing so it will analyse the political effectivity of the movement. However, before plunging into the historical context that structured the attacks, it is useful briefly to make explicit a guiding methodology.

There is a broad consensus amongst anthropological literature as to the definition of a witch. A witch is a traitor, representing all that is unnatural and anti-social to a particular society. Hence, to be labelled a witch is to be placed in an antagonistic relationship to the rest of society. And, as there is no outward sign through which an ordinary person can identify a witch, anyone can potentially be accused of witchcraft. Similarly, a whole number of different antagonistic relationships can be expressed through the symbolic object "witch".

Previous attempts at theorising anti-witchcraft movements have all tended to draw on a structuralist framework and as a result, they rely heavily on a synchronic analysis. A list of relationships between accuser and accused is drawn up by the analyst. The analyst then goes to show that these relationships are structurally contradictory or strained. While a structural contextualisation is a useful starting point in an analysis of witchcraft accusation, it remains static and the emphasis still remains on the event rather than on the historical process that made the event possible. While a periodisation of a social identity is implicit in a structuralist analysis, no attempt is made at explaining who witches are through historical process. A useful place to start such a project would be to draw the following conceptual distinction in our conception

of social identity. We have a level of denotation such as "What is a witch?" and various levels of connotation which would provide the answer to "Who, at a specific place and time, are the witches?" While the level of denotation will have its own history in the institutions, practices and discourses that reproduce beliefs in witches and witchcraft, the levels of connotation are our object of analysis. These levels will be determined by relatively recent historical experiences and struggles. It is these struggles, and how they are perceived and acted upon within a political culture that institutionalises witchcraft beliefs, that we need to unpack.

Comrades, Women & Witches: Struggles in the rural household

Informers, we will destroy you. Haai! Haai!
Witches, we will burn you. Haai! Haai!
Those who commit abortions, you will be destroyed. Haai! Haai!
Mrs Botha is barren – she gives birth to rats. Haai! Haai!
Mrs Mandela is fertile – she gives birth to comrades. Haai!
Haai! Haai! Haai! Haai! (x3)
Trample comrades. Haai! Haai! Haai! (x3)
Trample an informer. Haai! Haai!
Trample people's enemies. Haai! Haai!
Killer comrades. Haai! Haai!
Kill our people's enemies. Haai! Haai!
Let our people know comrades. Haai! Haai!
Our Motto is: An injury to one is an injury to all.

(Song that was sung by youths in Brooklyn as they patrolled the location at night.)

This section will attempt to demonstrate three processes. Firstly, an attempt will be made to show how witchcraft accusations were fundamentally shaped by the history of the rural household and the struggles within it. Secondly, the trial of the "Big Five" took place entirely at the level of supernatural events and rituals (eg. the turning of children into zombies). It will be demonstrated how this level of meaning, independent of any specific accusation, was constructed. Thirdly, the question will be posed as to how a consensus was generated as to who exactly the witches were. During the meeting of the BYO, when it was decided who was going to be punished, many people were accused of witchcraft but these accusations were not popularly accepted. It came as no surprise to either the youth or to women interviewed that the group of people who were attacked, were the chosen ones. Thus, we are posing the question as to how this consensus was generated.

In her paper *Family and Household in a Lebowa Village*, Debra James offers both a description and analysis of different households to be found in rural Lebowa. Household forms are not only determined by the development cycle of an individual household, but access to land, migrant's wages, local employment, ethnic practices, kinship and patronage networks serve as parameters around which a particular family formulates strategies for survival. Access to these resources is, in turn, determined by a household's history in the area and experience of resettlement.

As a result of these material variables, a number of different household forms have emerged. A nuclear household, making up 13% of those studied in James' sample,

contains two generations, and is headed by an adult male, who is usually a migrant with a fairly steady income. Simple three-generational households, making up 9% of the sample, consist of the extension of a nuclear household to include a further generation in the form of one of the son's family. Extended households, the most common category making up 54% of the sample, are an extension of simple three-generational households with the vertical addition of grandchildren, or the horizontal addition of the spouses of other siblings. As males are often absent working in the cities, about half of the extended families are managed by women. The last category James produces, the small female-headed household is comprised of a woman and her children following the death, divorce or desertion of the husband (if the woman was ever married).

James stresses that her typology is not to be thought of as an end in itself. The different forms of households she labels are a result of a complex ongoing historical process. In this context economic necessity, rather than "tradition" will determine the form each household takes. The form of a household will mutate as the broader conditions of existence change through time and the household struggles to survive.

While we cannot use James's work without qualification, it is worthwhile pointing out the striking similarity in the economic history of Morotse (the community studied by James) and Brooklyn. Like Morotse, Brooklyn was made Trust Land in 1936 and later subject to a subdivision of plots. And like Morotse, the inhabitants of Brooklyn have been arriving in an unsteady stream as Pedi labour tenants from the neighbouring area were evicted from their farms. Access to labour markets is also restricted to a labour bureau and some small towns from sixty to a hundred and fifty kilometres away. The employment policies of the few factories in these towns will also determine who in the household has access to employment (e.g. some factories will only employ women). Thus it is not surprising that similar forms of households have been generated in Brooklyn.

The institutionalisation of migrancy has resulted in a transfer of household management from male to female. The person who used to be the household head took up the social position of migrant, with its accompanying role and responsibilities. The mother became both mother and manager of rural resources. A series of kinship courts ensured that both parties had a power to appeal to, in the event of the other not meeting up to their responsibility. However, the change in the balance of power within the household from male to female has not been without conflict and ambiguity. The economic recession has been accompanied by mass migrant unemployment (see next section). But what role do these male "household heads" play in the homelands when they are unemployed? On what basis can these men wield influence in the household, when they are not meeting their marital responsibilities?

How has this change in the status quo vis-a-vis the power of the husband been perceived by the youth? When a youth leader was complaining about how women ran the households while their "men" (usually unemployed migrants) passively took orders from them, he was asked how this state of affairs came to be. He responded as follows: "It is a well known fact that powerful Xhosa herbalists from the Transkei have produced a herb, which when used by a woman, makes men passive and obedient to their wives. It is a major problem. These women are very mischievous with their herbs."

However, the transformation of the household has not been without internal struggles between household managers for control of resources. Ziervogel marks as one of the important distinguishing features of the Pulana "The important part played by the mother of the kraal-head (so clearly manifested by the position of the Queen Mother in Swazi life)" (Ziervogel, 1954, p.5). According to Kuper, "in all activities they (the king and his mother) should assist and advise each other, for he is Inkosi and she is Inkosi" (Kuper, 1961, P.55). This dual control by mother and son is explained by Kuper's informant as follows:

"A mother always loves her child and he loves her. They respect each other greatly and so work together peacefully. With wives it is different; today they love you and tomorrow they hate you." (ibid, p.56). This structure of dual control was used within each household.

The first migrants from Mapulaneng were sons of household heads. They would migrate and send their earnings to their father in exchange for lobola to get married and a field for their wife to plough. There was no ambiguity as to whom would receive the money. Initially, when migrancy was extended to incorporate household heads, the migrant's remittance to the countryside was sent to his mother who would then distribute it throughout the household. However, the institutionalisation of migrancy to incorporate the household head was accompanied by two processes: Sons began to marry who they wanted to, as opposed to into the family that their mothers wanted them to marry into. Previously, the son depended on his father to pay lobola which ensured that the son would marry into the family of his parent's choice. However, access to an independent source of income through migrancy, combined with the bureaucratisation of the chieftainship (which allowed youths access to land independently of their father's intervention) meant that young men could start marrying the woman of their choice. When the migrant married outside of his mother's wishes, then a conflict arose between mother and daughter-in-law. The mother would accuse the daughter-in-law of adultery and the migrant's wife would complain to her husband that his mother was not giving her a sufficient portion of his wages. This conflict was accompanied by a fragmentation of the household into smaller units because of the shortage of land. The fragmentation of the household was exacerbated by each household's desire not to share the migrant's money with the broader family. The result was that migrants began to send their money to their wives, not their mothers.

Hence, it is not surprising that while the male "kraal-head" is absent in the cities: "The main friction is between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. The son is fond of his mother. When he returns he brings presents for his mother and often even sends his migrant's wage to his mother. This creates problems with his wife who complains that her mother-in-law not only wants her own pension but still takes money from her husband which she should receive. "What is the mother-in-law doing with so much money?" the wife will complain. When the wife goes down to collect water or to work at the fields she will be advised by her friends: "Your mother-in-law is giving your husband herbs so that he will love her and give her his money. Your mother-in-law is a witch." This is how trouble starts." (quote from a woman resource manager living in Brooklyn whose husband is a migrant).

In the absence of a sufficient migrant's wage, pensions have become a crucial element in the reproduction of rural society. What is not clear is the duty of the old woman to contribute to the broader household budget. While this obligation is vague

in the case of a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law (especially if the daughter-in-law has a form of local employment), it becomes opaque if her children have left the area, and she is staying with relatives. Similarly, when a married son or daughter living in a different household from his/her mother is in desperate need of resources, the mother's loyalties will be torn between the household she lives in, and her duties to her children. Either way she will not win. An antagonism (accompanied by a witchcraft accusation) will emerge from whoever is excluded from the grandmother's pension. An important point to be drawn from the above discussion is that a static structural analysis would be missing the point. What we are dealing with was a generalised fear amongst the elderly that they would be attacked as witches. At night, literally hundreds of elderly people would flee into the mountains. The course of history has produced a form of household and conflicts previously unknown in Mapulaneng. To only go into the complexities of each "structural" relationship would be losing out on not only the historical process that made the relationships necessary, but the specific meaning of the conflict involved in the relationship.

Bearing this broader context in mind, we are now ready to examine the history of the household conflicts of two members of the "Big Five".

Mrs D's husband started out as a teacher at a local school. However, he became an alcoholic and soon lost both his job and his memory. He then got a job at the nearby army base in Hoedspruit. It was well known that Mrs D ran the household. "Mrs D made a living zombie of her husband while she runs the family. The man is a woman in the household. He works but is not managing the money." (quote taken from a youth leader.) Mrs D's eldest son was a migrant. However, he did not marry into the family that his mother had planned for him. Mrs D and her daughter-in-law did not get on well. Mrs D would complain about her son's wife. "The girl is eating my son's money. He is giving her a lot of money and she does not contribute to the rest of the household." (quote taken from woman resource manager commenting on the conflict). The son's wife had a nervous breakdown. Her parents took her to a sangoma who told them that Mrs D had been witching her (the daughter-in-law) as she wants her son to get divorced and marry another woman. After recuperating, the son's wife returned to the household. "It was the daughter-in-law and her parents who used to argue very strongly that Mrs D was a witch", commented a community leader.

Mrs M, another member of the "Big Five" had two daughters-in-law living within her household. The senior daughter-in-law (Mrs M's oldest son's wife) was kind-hearted and often used to give her mother-in-law money when she required it. However, the junior daughter-in-law was "miserly" and would not give her any money. In return Mrs M totally disowned her junior daughter-in-law. If her junior daughter-in-law's husband did not send her any money one month, or sent the money late, Mrs M would not assist her from her pension money. Mrs M would not fulfil any social or ritual functions with her junior daughter-in-law and would ignore her grandchildren. It was the junior daughter-in-law who would blame everything that happened on her mother-in-law.

Adultery, according to one of my informants, used to be punishable by death. In fact, in Casteel, in 1984, two adulterers, caught in the act, were stoned to death by a mob. When a migrant goes to the city, there is great insecurity that his wife will not be faithful while he is away. One strategy used by migrants to prevent adultery was the surprise return one night from the city. However, this proved extremely dangerous as such confrontations often resulted in the death of the husband or lover in the ensuing fight. Another strategy, that was more commonly used, was for a migrant to leave his

parents to watch over his wife. When he returned to the countryside, he would visit his parents first and then his wife. He would receive any reports of trouble or "unfaithfulness" from his parents. However, adultery is perceived as more than just the act of personal infidelity:

You kill your husband with adultery. Adultery and witchcraft are one thing; they go hand in hand. This is because the husband is a stumbling block. So the wife will give him some herbs to ensure that he remains ignorant. When given such herbs, even if the husband's mother tells him about the affair, he will remain passive and continue to love his wife. (quote taken from a [male] community leader).

With this logic in mind we are ready to confront the case of another member of the "Big Five", Mrs L.

Mrs L was married to a migrant. While he was away she would have many affairs. Yet still her husband sent her money every month and returned every year end despite the strong rumours about her infidelity. It was rumoured that she used herbs to keep him ignorant. When he died in 1980 it was said that she had given him an overdose of herbs. She lived with her divorced daughter who worked in Acornhoek and two grandchildren. Her daughter's husband (a migrant) accused her of witchcraft when he divorced her. It was rumoured that the mother gave her daughter herbs which the daughter gave to her husband.

In order to understand how every member of the community was terrified of the "Big Five", it is necessary to tell the story of the "leader" of the "Big Five", Mrs B. However, to understand the story of Mrs B, we need to introduce a link between the concept of the "family" and that of the "community". The residents of Brooklyn were forcibly removed in the mid-Sixties from three surrounding areas: Cheetah Inn, Bedford and Maripieskop. Ziervogel remarks that another striking characteristic of Pulana tradition is that there is "preferential marriage into the clan of one's mother, or the clan of one's mother's mother, or the clan of one's father's mother." (Ziervogel, 1954, p.5). The effect of the above, according to Hammond-Tooke, is to "reinforce neighbourhood and agnatic ties with affinal ones, so that members of a village or ward are bound together in multiplex relationships" (Hammond-Tooke, 1981, p.125). Within ten years, marriage between families within the community produced a common ancestor. In effect, everyone living in Brooklyn is considered a relative to everyone else. People of the same generation refer to each other as brother or sister. The elder generation is referred to as father or mother.

Mrs B had four sons (one of whom was dumb) who lived with her household. When her eldest son got married, two babies died at a young age. A sangoma was consulted and the blame was put on the mother-in-law, Mrs B. The eldest son (a migrant) moved his wife to another house. The second son got married and a baby died. Again a sangoma was consulted, and again the blame was put on Mrs B. Mrs B's daughter-in-law divorced Mrs B's son. Eventually, the son left the household and lived with another woman. Mrs B was left living with the dumb son, a female grandchild and a great-grandchild. In 1981 the second son died and a rumour was

generated that as there were no more grandchildren for Mrs B's medium to eat, it is now eating her son. The following year, Mrs B's senior son died. From then on other members of the family were afraid that Mrs B was going to turn her medium on them until the entire family was finished. Almost every death that occurred was shown to be a relative of Mrs B, and she was blamed. By 1986, the entire community was terrified that they would be her next victim.

The "Big Five" were not the only people in Brooklyn to be attacked by the "comrades". The herbs of a sangoma were burnt as she allegedly gave abortions. According to one informant, there are a number of different perceived effects of abortion:

- If a man has sexual intercourse with a woman within six months of an abortion, he will become extremely ill and often die.
- Usually the operation involved in giving an abortion will make a woman permanently infertile.

Clearly, the struggle against abortions is part of a struggle to control female fertility and sexuality. However, we still have not confronted the question of the relationship between abortions and witchcraft. Or, more particularly, in what way were abortions perceived as a threat to the very existence of the *community* as a whole?

Hammond-Tooke, writing on the Kgaga, refers to the concept *fisa* to describe the ill-effects of a miscarriage. *Fisa* connotes a state of pollution, of heat, as a result of contact with death or a woman who is in a non-normal sexual condition. Pulana tradition supports both the word *fisa* and the tradition surrounding it. For example, it appears that there are similar beliefs and rituals surrounding miscarriages in both Pulana and Kgaga culture. Sexual intercourse with a woman who has had a miscarriage results, according to both Pulana and Kgaga culture, in illness and even death. There are also similar rituals after a miscarriage. For example, in Pulana tradition: "When a woman has a miscarriage they put the child in a pot; they take it to the river where it is wet" (Ziervogel, 1954, p.187). To the Kgaga: "If the foetus is from one to three months old it is buried in a small clay pot, in an upright position, in a damp spot at the river side" (Hammond-Tooke, 1981, p.115). However, if this procedure is not followed the results can be disastrous for the whole community.

When a woman has had a miscarriage, having spilled her blood and concealed the infant, this makes the hot wind blow and dry out the country with heat. Rain does not fall, for the country is not in order. The rain when it approaches the place where the blood is hidden, does not dare to arrive. It fears; it remains at a distance. This woman has committed a great wrong. She has spoiled the country of the chief, for she has hidden blood which will never again come together to make a person. This blood is taboo The chief calls together his men and says to them: "Are you in order in your villages?" Someone will reply: "So-and-so was pregnant, but no-one has seen the infant that she has put

into the world. Then someone goes and arrests the woman. (Junod quoted in Hammond-Tooke, 1981, p.115).

The community then goes through a number of cleansing rituals that "lift the misfortune that the women have brought to the paths; the rain will come. The country is purified." (ibid.)

But how does this discussion relate to witchcraft. According to Hammond-Tooke, there is little if any association between *fisa* and morality.

The ills and misfortunes explained by the concepts [of fisa] ... are all associated with ritual pollution which can contaminate one through no fault of one's own, and, frequently, the danger is believed to be greater for others than for the polluted person himself. (ibid.p.113)

What should be clear at this stage is that abortions and miscarriages are considered analogous and perceived to have similar effects. However, the difference between the two acts is that an abortion is performed with an intention. There is an allocation of moral responsibility: a "child" has been intentionally killed. But an abortion (usually performed in secret) which is not followed by the required rituals, not only causes the death of a single child, it is a threat to the very existence of the community. According to one informant, "If many women have abortions, it causes a rainless year." It is worth noting that Mapulaneng had been wracked by a severe drought since 1983.

In order to contextualise correctly the conditions that the youth organisation inherited, it is necessary to include the inter-household conflicts.

There was a piece of land that was the family's to use. However, we did not need it and my neighbour began to use it. When my husband lost his job we began to need the land again. We gave our neighbour time to realise she did not have rights to it. Eventually, we took the matter to the chiefly court, who decided in our favour. There was great tension between us. (quote taken from a female household manager).

Neighbourly harmony turns to neighbourly conflict as competition over scarce resources increases. In a situation where migrants are losing their jobs or simply not returning to the countryside, access to rural resources becomes a life and death issue. It is important to note that with the decline of chiefly power, there is no definitive structure to mediate in neighbourly disputes. The result, in an atmosphere of even scarcer rural resources, is an increase in neighbourly and factional conflict that is never resolved. Hence, it is not surprising that the BYO planned to burn the house of a family accused by one of the comrades of killing a pig (whose ownership was in dispute) but was only stopped by the timely intervention of a member of the SCC.

My biggest problem is hunger, I don't have money to buy food, my children are suffering because we have no food. I have no money for school fees, my son had to leave school because I could not afford to pay. Look at my house, it's next to nothing. It would not be long before it falls down and there is no-one to help. (taken from Mrs G, mother of five children whose husband has neither been home nor sent money since 1978).

For the first time in Mapulaneng both young boys and young girls are suffering from pellagra. The household manager is facing an impossible task. The result is severe stress, chronic illness and even insanity. In the case of Mrs G:

... for a long time she [Mrs G] fell ill, because, I think, of all the frustration, she went a little confused she became all mixed up and was in hospital for a long while. (quote taken from a women's organiser)

Meanwhile, at the daily meeting points, in the fields, water taps, scenes of tragedies and funerals, a propaganda machine is at work.

A combination of the sharpest observation of the daily recounting of the day's events and encounters, and of life-long mutual familiarities is what constitutes so-called village gossip Each story allows everyone to define himself. The function of these stories, which are, in fact, close, oral, daily history, is to allow the whole village to define itself. The life of a village, as distinct from its physical and geographical attributes, is the sum of all the social and personal relationships existing within it, plus the social and economic relations – usually oppressive – which link the village to the rest of the world. But one could say something similar about life in some large town. Even in some cities. What distinguishes the life of a village is that it is also a living portrait of itself: a communal portrait, in that everybody is portrayed and everybody portrays; and this is only possible if everybody knows everybody. (Burger, 1985, p.16)

We can now return to the construction of the "Big Five". The members of the "Big Five" were all neighbours, living in close proximity to one another. While they

maintained a central role within household conflicts, their position in broader village life was marginal. It is the daughter-in-law's task to fetch water, wash clothes, plough the fields (if the family has fields), collect wood, prepare mud for plastering and painting houses and numerous day-to-day activities that lead to contact with the broader community. To this must be added a solidarity forged amongst the younger generation of women as a result of common childhood and initiation experiences.

Within this context it is not surprising to discover that it was said that the members of the "Big Five" were

close friends, close neighbours and they shared the same rumour; the rumour being that they were witches. It [the rumour] was a treasure to them, a treasure they could not live without, especially Mrs L. If she was insulted she would respond as follows: "If you are not cultured, I will teach you some discipline. Maybe you have not heard of me. I am Mrs L. Go around and ask. They will tell you who I am. Then you will keep your mouth shut." That lady was proud." (quote taken from community leader)

The members of the "Big Five" used their status as witches to achieve some respect from the rest of the community. Threats of witchcraft were used to maintain some power both within and outside of the household. Hence, a meaning independent of any individual conflict is constructed. The close association between members of the group ensured that an accusation against any individual member was shared by all.

This association was formalised in a song the youth sang as they patrolled the location at night:

Where will we run to
because of these witches who are killing us.
Mrs L and her gang.
Mrs L, we are going to burn her.

Conflicts and frustrations suffered by the rural resource managers are shared and thoroughly discussed. A private conflict, when shared, becomes a common experience and threat to the survival of society. If, in time, there is no-one to contradict it, a rumour becomes a reality as it is repeated and garnished. As public tragedies occur, people look for past villains in order to allocate responsibility. A selfish pensioner or unco-operative neighbour becomes a witch.

"Suffering – Comradeship is our People's Weapon Against You"- The Brooklyn Youth Organisation

In the households the rumours are spread to new ears: the ears of the youth:

A group of ten women will visit a sick person or the family of a newly-deceased person. During the visit, they will discuss who caused the tragedy. They will blame it on a particular person who was using witchcraft. They will then go home and repeat the story to their children. The children from the different families will then meet the following day. They will compare stories and discover that they have all heard the same thing. In this way they will take the story to be the truth. (taken from a female household manager)

However, before turning towards the social position and conflicts of the youth, let us record one of the militant songs the youth sang while patrolling the location at night.

Our lives are in great danger.
We are bewitched.
We are poisoned.
Abortions are the order of the day.
Comrades, wake up, remake the world.
Our parent's hour has passed away.
This hour belongs to the youth.
We, the Comrades.
Forward Comrades.
We are a generation of war.

This section will attempt to give substance to the "hour of the youth", that is it will attempt to demonstrate how "the youth" became a coherent social force. This coherence was constituted as a result of a common material position and experience. This material position was itself structured by the economic recession, the decline of migrancy and the conflicts within the household. It is from the perspective of this material base that both the meaning of the anti-witchcraft attacks and the accompanying discipline imposed on society can be understood.

Following the economic recession of 1982, unemployment in South Africa, and especially in the homelands, has shot up. The following statistics of registered black migrant workers originating from Lebowa provide a picture of the effects of the recession.

1978 – 387 103
1979 – 392 309
1980 – 432 904
1981 – 445 816
1982 – 437 797
1983 – 272 940
1984 – 248 959
1985 – 258 572

(South African Labour Statistics (1986): Registered Black Migrant Workers originating from Lebowa)

This has had the effect of creating a huge population of desperate unemployed youths in the countryside. Rural culture has yet to create or define a productive place for these people. To illustrate this point let us record the following biographies of three youth leaders:

Joseph K was born in 1965. His parents were not married. His mother first worked at a nearby white farm but in 1970 she was a domestic at Phalaborwa and he was brought up by his mother's mother. But as his grandmother was working at a white farm, he was cared for by his uncles (who also lived with his grandmother). Joe went to school in 1975. He tried to make some money by herding his "rich" neighbour's cattle but he only received an occasional "gift" in the form of some old clothes or food. He was forced to drop out of school in 1984 when he reached Standard 4. He worked for a white farmer for R45 a month. He left after eight months and went to Kempton Park with an uncle who had found work at a construction firm for him and two of his friends. He lived at a hostel and received R58 a week. Spare time was spent at the hostel's shebeen as he was afraid of leaving the hostel because he had been warned about city girls who would rob him. After fourteen months the firm closed down and he was forced to return to the countryside. At Mapulaneng, he would spend his time going up and down to the labour office. He would try and earn some money by washing taxis. His spare time was spent under the trees playing different board games with a group of other unemployed men or watching his friends practice or play soccer. Scholars would only join them after school. He has built a small mud hut on his own plot. He would like to get married but does not have money to pay lobola or to support a wife.

Bill G was born in 1965. His father worked at Sabie and would return on the weekends. His mother worked at a local shop. He was brought up by his grandmother. He went to school in 1973 but by the time he reached Standard 5 he was having continual conflicts with his teachers about his bad school attendance. When he needed money his mother would contribute R2 and his grandmother would contribute R2 from her pension. In 1984 he had a mental breakdown and left school. In 1985 he learned how to become a soccer referee. Following that he would act as referee in all local soccer matches and some played away. He now gets money from his half-brother and has an occasional job managing a shop. He has fights with his father who wants him to work in Sabie. He would spend his spare time playing games under the tree, refereeing soccer or, when he had money, at a shebeen.

Phil H was born in 1965. His father worked in Pretoria. His mother worked at Hoedspruit (some sixty kilometres away). As his grandparents were deceased, he was brought up by his two elder sisters. He started school in 1973. He did not like school as teachers would thrash him (especially at high school) for no reason. He left school in 1985. He plays soccer for the Brooklyn Fast Movers which practices four days a week and plays a match twice a week. He also plays games under the trees. He got a job helping at the local butchery. Presently, he faces problems as his two sisters got divorced and returned to the house with their children and suddenly there is no room for him. He organised a room at the butchery where he works.

Hence, we can see the effects of both the new family forms and the depression on the life opportunities of young unemployed men. Grandmothers, aunts, uncles, mothers and sisters all become sites of intense conflict as the young men struggle to stay alive. Yet again, grandmothers are put into an unprecedented conflictual situation. Whereas it was both accepted and necessary for parents to discipline their children

with corporal punishment, the grandmother was supposed to discipline their grandchildren with words. However, when both parents become migrants, the grandmother is forced to play the role of both disciplinarian and spoiler. However, when the child grows up, clearly there will be no effective way for a grandmother to impose a discipline on the youth.

Meanwhile, under the trees and on the soccer fields have become a melting pot of all these frustrations and conflicts. Private experiences are shared and made public. A new solidarity is forged amongst the youth. In a society that cannot find a place for them, nor support them, the youth have generated a culture that is both within and outside society. It is, in effect, the breeding ground for a gang structure and culture. We can observe the birth of an antagonistic youth culture. Thus, we can begin to understand when Joseph K described the youth organisation as follows:

When the youth got together, there was just this wonderful co-operation, and no-one had to lecture us on this co-operation.

By now we have traced a historical process that has produced a series of antagonistic relationships and experiences. These experiences within a world-view that sanctions pure harmony have the status of anomalies. And it is these anomalies that are explained with reference to the notion of witchcraft or herbs. Thus, to recap, changes in the balance of power within the household are explained with reference to herbs and witchcraft. The loss of health suffered by a mother is, in the context of a neighbourly conflict, explained by a neighbour who is witching or poisoning her. Unco-operative grandparents are tight-fisted as they are intrinsically evil and anti-social.

Meanwhile, in the fields, at the watering taps, funerals, in the households, on the soccer-fields and under the trees a metaphor is created and a consensus is reached. A metaphor that links witches, herbs, neighbourly conflicts, domineering wives, unco-operative parents, selfish grandparents and unemployed migrants. And a consensus that binds the metaphor to a relatively small group of marginal people. (Usually people with little access to the "propaganda machine"). It was this metaphor and consensus that the BYO inherited when it was formed. And, it is towards this metaphor that we need to turn if we wish to understand the political meaning of the witch attacks.

An attack on a witch is a punishment for all the crimes the witch is supposed to have committed. Like all public punishment, it places a label on the accused and stands as an example for the rest of society to see and from which to learn. The witch attacks are a warning of a potential punishment for all those people involved in relationships that the youth define as anti-social. The youth had taken power and their way of showing it was by displaying, in the strongest and most public terms, that domineering wives, unco-operative neighbours, tight-fisted pensioners and a multitude of other relationships would no longer be tolerated. Adultery and abortion, while not punishable under everyday law, become capital offences under the logic of witchcraft. The almost impossible task of controlling migrant's wives sexually was achieved in a single act. It was, in effect, the most powerful political intervention the youth could make within rural society. Its effect was not cathartic. It was an implicit threat and it produced fear and anxiety. It was the imposition of a new discipline in each and every household, a demand for co-operation, in the context of a society competing for scarce resources and riddled with potential points of conflict.

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