

INTRODUCTION

Outside All Reason: Magic, Sorcery and Epistemology in Anthropology

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Magic, sorcery and witchcraft are at the epistemological centre of anthropology. They embed matters at the heart of the definition of modern anthropology, and the critical issues that they raise are of enduring significance for the discipline. But the questions these phenomena highlight expand beyond mere disciplinary or scholastic interest. They point to matters of deep existential concern in a general quest for an understanding of the human forces engaged in the human construction of lived realities. Anthropology in the embracing Kantian sense is involved. The phenomena that are deemed to be magic and sorcery (including all that which such scholars as Durkheim (1915) and Mauss (1972) would include under the label 'profane') project towards the far shores of human possibility and potentiality. The human profundities to which they might lead are already there in the imagery and metaphors of thinkers, both abstract and concretely pragmatic, worldwide. Within European traditions the world of the magician and the sorcerer is routinely evoked to explore the continuing crisis that is faced by humankind, more recently, for example, in the works of Dante, Goethe and Nietzsche right through to the most contemporary philosophers and social commentators. The essays in these pages contend with some of the overarching existential issues towards which a concern with the magical must extend.

This introduction begins with a consideration of the somewhat narrower confines that have developed in the discipline of anthropology. But this should not obscure the fact that at the outset, the anthropology of magic and sorcery dealt with weighty issues – the foundations of religion, the underlying features of the human psyche and, indeed, the very nature of science. While these interests have persisted, over time they became narrowed or deflected onto smaller, more empirically manageable concerns. However, of late, via a renewed interest in magic and sorcery, anthropology is once more opening up to the larger

questions. These include the significance of sorcery and magic as revelations of the fabulations and transmutations of capital in globalising circumstances, and the magical character of nationalist discourses of the modern and post-colonial state (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001, 1993; Coronil 1997; Kapferer 1997, 1988; Taussig 1997, 1980). Even so, anthropology largely remains bound to the problem of reason, confined to re-examining well-answered questions rather than exploring new horizons of interest to which the phenomena themselves point.

Territories of the Strange: Magic, Sorcery and the Realms of Unreason

Geertz once poignantly remarked that anthropologists are 'merchants of the strange'; magic and sorcery fill this bill of trade. Contemporary attacks on anthropological exoticism from several quarters of the discipline and elsewhere in intellectual and scholarly circles might have predicted a shrinkage of interest, especially in a subject as self-critical as anthropology. Anthropologists are acutely self-conscious of their colonialist past and the risks of a voyeuristic exoticism that have accompanied what a few commentators (Clifford 1997, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Fabian 1983) have described as their traveller's search for the ethnographic Other. But against the odds (especially given that anthropology as much as other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities is driven by intellectual fashions), sorcery and witchcraft – indeed, the occult as a whole – are reattracting anthropological attention (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). Many insist that this is because empirically such practice is globally on the rise, a not unproblematic observation. However, I stress the vital epistemological status of occultic phenomena in the conceptual and theoretical imaginary of anthropological thought.

Reason and rationality, the central questions and themes at the centre of the philosophy of the Enlightenment and at the root of all dominant post-Enlightenment enquiry in the sciences and humanities, were and still are integral to the formation of modern anthropology. They are vital to defining the object of the discipline and in the construction of theory and methodology. The very history of anthropology may be described as an enduring crisis driven by shifting certainties/uncertainties as to what constitutes reason and rationality and the appropriate perspectives for their revelation. These issues achieve, perhaps, their sharpest focus in the occult – that which is mystical and stands outside, or is opposed to, science and the rule of reason. Anthropology established itself as the science of unreason, initially at least. This constituted its principal object. Indeed, unreason, or apparent unreason, defines the Other, the conventional region of anthropological enquiry. Once territorially confined to cultures and societies dominated by colonial and imperial power (whose rule of reason defined the legitimacy of such control and conquest), the Other, for contemporary anthropologists, is now deterritorialised. Everywhere, the unreason

of the Other is the possibility of human action and vital even in the orders and structures composed by those authorities who would lay claim to a legitimacy ordained by reason's rule. If reason (now a thoroughly relativised reason and implicated in the excesses and devastations of power) is at the apex of systems of authority and domination, it is the unreason of this reason that has attracted much recent anthropological attention. Occultic metaphors – magic, sorcery, witchcraft – highlight these processes (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999).

The general point, then, is that magic, sorcery and witchcraft (among various other related concepts) address a central problematic in anthropology. It is to be expected that they would be among the key tropes at critical moments of debate or redefinition when epistemological questions at the heart of the discipline are likely to surface.

The Significance of Evans-Pritchard's Contribution

Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (1937) defined major directions in modern anthropology. There are other works published about the same time that could be discussed, such as Kluckhohn's *Navaho Witchcraft* (1967) and especially Reo Fortune's *Sorcerers of Dobu* (1932). The former examines magical and sorcery practices from sociological and psychological angles demonstrating, among numerous other aspects, their role in the expression of conflict. Fortune extends more towards the importance of grasping the cosmological worlds of magic and sorcery. Geza Roheim's *The Riddle of the Sphinx* (1934), based on Australian Aboriginal materials, demonstrates early on the significance of a psychoanalytic approach. But I focus on Evans-Pritchard's path-breaking work because it is generally recognised by most anthropologists as the key study of significance and is the major reference for cognate fields. This is more than deservedly so.

Not only does the work itself contain an abundance of ethnographic material integral to a plethora of questions (many still to be seriously explored in anthropology) that might be provoked from a diversity of disciplinary or subject standpoints, but also there is an engaging lack of self-consciousness, a seductive naivety that draws the reader into an intellectually challenging reality. However, by far the greatest significance of Evans-Pritchard's study is that it opens up new horizons of understanding that are embedded in magical practices. He redirects the course and import of the anthropological exploration of ethnography.

Overall, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* is a critical methodological and theoretical work in anthropology. It demonstrates a fundamental anthropological aim to de-exoticise what may otherwise be deemed as exotic and strange, but without destroying the nature of the phenomena in question. Magical practice is not here reduced to terms that are external to it. Furthermore, the work is significant because it implicitly overcomes what has become an issue in anthropology, that of relativism versus universalism. Written before the matter became acutely problematic for anthropology (perhaps

fuelled by discourse in a postmodern anthropology dismissing its past and consumed by a need to be pragmatically relevant), Evans-Pritchard's study transcends the matter, demonstrating that a deep concern with phenomena as they are practised and in their terms is in every way thoroughly consistent with general understanding. Universalism and relativism are not opposed terms as they came to be treated in later anthropological debate. Possibly of greatest importance, Evans-Pritchard gave the anthropological Other a position in exploring issues of wide import. Azande practice was not a mere passive object for the demonstration of alien knowledge and theory, but was itself a source of knowledge and made active in both opening up horizons of understanding and challenging other analytic constructions of the nature of human experience. This direction in Evans-Pritchard's work – what should be regarded as a central project of anthropology – is being carried further in the work of contemporary African scholars (see, for example, Hallen and Sodipo 1997, Appiah 1992, Mudimbe 1988, Sodipo 1983).

Evans-Pritchard's important move in his Azande ethnography was to bracket off the thought and practice of the Azande from Western conceptions. He effectively disconnected or decentred practices glossed as magic and witchcraft – particularly those so conceived in the colonial or imperialised territories of the Other – from their submission to forms of thought and judgment constituted out of a Western history. This lay the groundwork for Evans-Pritchard's claim that Azande witchcraft was not the same as European witchcraft. Here he quite explicitly refused to identify Zande practice with the occult as the latter has become defined in Western contexts.

The word 'occult' is laden with the sense of the mystical and is the obverse of reason and scientific rationality. Indeed, what is broadly described as the occult, and largely a Western (especially Victorian) fascination with magic and witchcraft (*wicca*) together with the understanding of them, is the invention of a post-Enlightenment secularism. In fact, magic and witchcraft conceived as practices of the occult were created as alternative rationalisms to that of science (see Brendbekken, chapter 2, on Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophical movement), and, as if in obedience to the law of dialectics, the occultic vision drew into its practice aspects of the scientific rationalism it opposed. The mystical occultism of that which is glossed as New Age (recognised by some as the religion of post-modern globalisation) is an extension of the very Western-centred (and often highly Christian-influenced) perspectives within which not a few anthropological approaches were shaped. Indeed, this continues in much of anthropology, but Evans-Pritchard indicated a concern to distance Zande practice and conception from such approaches and, therefore, to avoid interpretations from the viewpoint of a history that was not that of the Azande. Furthermore, Evans-Pritchard's decentring strategy carried an implicit critique of anthropological approaches up to (and after) his work to the effect that they were insufficiently reflective on the logic of their own thought and practice whereby they constituted the realities of others. This resulted in the construction of anthropological Others that were merely inversions or obversions of the reality of the analyst

or ethnographer's Self: the territory of the Other was invented as a zone for the free play of prejudices which resulted in neither a challenging of the assumptions of the Other nor, indeed, those of the Self.

Here, in my view, Evans-Pritchard prefigured recent criticisms of the anthropological method of 'othering' whereby the construction of difference disguises a similarity that is integral to the very procedures through which the ethnographic Other is invented. Difference and similarity are ultimately to be resolved at the empirical ethnographic level in the context of the perceptual and conceptual procedures involved. Their assertion is dependent on the evidence and not upon superficial or unexamined assumptions. The ethnographic bracketing that Evans-Pritchard pursued is directed towards exploring the circumstances in which the magical practices of the Azande establish similarities with and differences from other kinds of practices elsewhere. A common orientation in much anthropology is to make the realities of other peoples 'sensible' by demonstrating equivalences in the everyday reality of the ethnographer. This process of 'translation', often immediately satisfying and capable of drawing astounding associations, not infrequently encourages a refusal to examine the evidence and, therefore, derails the production of that careful understanding necessary for the establishment of new horizons of knowledge. Undoubtedly, Evans-Pritchard, as anyone, is likely to be found wanting, but the Azande ethnography displays a careful rigour that does not leap to unexamined comparisons. There is a constant reflective dialogue in the study between Evans-Pritchard's own encounter with phenomena and that of the Azande.

More immediately, Evans-Pritchard, by the bracketing or decentering of Zande magical practice, loosened the hold of post-Enlightenment European thought that unselfcritically submitted others to the authority of its own ideas and obscured vital dimensions of the phenomena encountered. Therein lay the difficulty with the intellectualist perspectives of Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which celebrated modernist secularism and its scientific rationalism. Here the question was begged concerning the genealogical connection between non-Western magical practice and science, assuming that magical practices constituted a lower and preliminary form of the Western rational intellect. Magical practices were conceived as addressing the same kinds of problems as modern science and, thus, were viewed as pre-modern and inferior. Malinowski's (1954, 1922) approach towards Trobriand magic is an extension of such Frazerian intellectualism, as is Lévi-Strauss's (1966) description of non-Western magical practices as 'the science of the concrete'. However, I hasten to add that Lévi-Strauss, unlike the others, does not imply a hierarchialisation of thought. He stresses that the same intellectual capacities are involved, but that they are directed towards different problems and concerns. Magical thought (or mythic thought) is thoroughly empirical. In this sense it is a precursor to science, but otherwise its forms of abstraction, which deal with the problematics of existence within the limits of particular cultural and social constructions, are entirely different from science. In Lévi-Strauss's approach, magic and science are still different sides of the same coin.

Evans-Pritchard effectively questioned the intellectualist implication that science (and associated logical rationalism) and magical practice necessarily can be aligned along the same axis. Here he shared much with the earlier argument of the French philosopher, Lévy-Bruhl. Evans-Pritchard rejected what he took to be Lévy-Bruhl's racist suggestion that distinctions in mentality underpinned the different logical practice involved in Western rationalism as distinguished from others. This was possibly a misreading of Lévy-Bruhl. However, both refused scientific rationalist claims, such as those by the anthropologist Edward Tylor, that magical practice in non-Western societies was illogical because beliefs and ideas subverted the real relation between cause and effect. As later generations of anthropologists (and philosophers of science, especially) were to demonstrate, if this was so, then this was also the case with rational and scientific understanding. Lévy-Bruhl (1923) located the distinction between magic and science in different structures of reasoning altogether, stressing the notion of 'participation' or the thoroughgoing identity of human existence with its natural and cosmic environment, taking up dimensions that Lévi-Strauss (1968a, 1968b) was later to explore more complexly. Nonetheless, the externalist perspective from the position of science still dictated the understanding of the magical. Here Evans-Pritchard made a further innovation. He showed that Azande magical practice was directed towards specific matters at hand. It was an everyday, practical knowledge, thoroughly different from scientific rationalism as idealised – a practice completely unconcerned with contradiction and system coherence of the scientific sort.

In other words, when all was said and done and the ethnographic evidence was in, there was a unity between practices of the Azande and those of others. Magical practice is akin to what Husserl (1988), Schutz (1970) and other phenomenologists refer to as the 'natural attitude' and is grounded in ordinary experience mediated through cultural categories. Basically, this is what Evans-Pritchard meant when he insisted that witchcraft was simply part of routine Zande expectations. To the Azande, magic, sorcery and especially witchcraft are not concerned with the extraordinary in the sense conveyed by the term 'occult', which is increasingly being used to describe contemporary manifestations in metropolitan and peripheral territories. The comparison between Azande and Western scientific rationalism is a false family resemblance (Wittgenstein 1979, Winch 1958) and, although pursued by some (e.g. Horton 1993), achieves an inaccurate opposition that denies a unity or similarity with diverse practices elsewhere as a formation of common sense founded in different historical and cultural constructions of reality.

This is not to suggest that in his Azande ethnography Evans-Pritchard somehow broke anthropology away from its Enlightenment roots. His work is directed towards the question of reason and towards exploring the varieties and limits of practical reason or rationality. There is no singular or ultimate form of practical reason, and this is because of its thoroughly social character. This social grounding, extending from the ideas of Durkheim and Mauss, is vital in the psychological dimensions of magical, and especially witchcraft, experience.

As Evans-Pritchard describes, the troubled dreams that Zande have are populated with everyday social problematics. The apparent illogicality (to the external observer) of magical and witchcraft practice reveals its logic in the complexities and specificities of social practice. To put it another way, magic and witchcraft derive the logic of their illogicality in social processes. Reason, always a social practice, is limited by this self-same social factuality and can never establish a 'pure' perfect form in social contexts. Magic and witchcraft are particular manifestations of this fact.

Furthermore, the limitation of practical reason is in its totalising character. The magical and witchcraft practices of the Azande are specific instances of widespread forms of totalisation. Paradoxically, such totalisation lies in the hyperrationalism of magic and witchcraft, not in its irrationalism. Thus, the Azande assert the thorough interconnection of existential events as these relate to human experience. This totalisation emerges in the human-centric, person-centred and social nature of witchcraft's practical reason that gives prime force to human agency. That is, human agency is the factor which brings otherwise independently caused events into conjunction. A famous Zande instance that Evans-Pritchard uses concerns the grain bin that collapses, killing those Zande who chose just that moment to seek its shade. In witchcraft reasoning, it is human agency that effects such a conjunction, an agency that is so totalising that it can operate independently of the conscious awareness of the witch. In Evans-Pritchard's account, it is the unconscious dimension of witchcraft that distinguishes it from sorcery, which is motivated by conscious intent.

One of the more important implications of Evans-Pritchard's study is that magic and witchcraft are not part of a clearly bounded and internally consistent 'system' of knowledge. If anything, they are vital in a continually expanding and incorporating system of open horizons. Magic and witchcraft are always contextually relative, situationally adaptive, never abstract. The 'system' of ideas and practices of which they are part is constantly immanent, enduringly emergent, differentiating and shifting in response to new circumstance. Thus, in Evans-Pritchard's study of magical and witchcraft practices are the seeds of a dynamic approach to social life as a whole, even an asystemic perspective, which was to break beyond the more static Durkheimian vision that nonetheless gave the work its initial impetus.

Overall, it is easy to see why the Azande work became so inspirational for a relatively fledgling discipline such as anthropology, and why, also, it should be a major reference for an anthropology that is in the throes of reinventing itself. The Azande study, as well as its subject matter of magic, sorcery and witchcraft, refuses neat categorisation. In many ways it transgressed established conventions in the discipline and, in hindsight, threatened other perspectives that were yet to be made; even now, it presents new avenues of investigation and interpretation. Above all, it moved in the direction of liberating the Other (the Azande as a generic Other) from the chains of a Western intellectual hegemony: from either being that which was to be transcended or being that which was the ill-fated precursor of what was to come. With Evans-Pritchard, phenomena

such as magic and sorcery and those peoples conceived as being at the periphery of metropolitan and scientific knowledge who continued to practise them were given positive place as well as authority and an active role in the advancement of human understanding.

Expansions and Retreats

Since Evans-Pritchard, magic and sorcery have continued to be engaged in discourses concerning rationality, especially with regard to questions in the philosophy of science. In some respects the critical implications of Evans-Pritchard's study have been ignored or deflected. Horton (1993), for example, has sustained the science-witchcraft axis of discussion. So too did Gluckman (1972, 1971, 1956), although he broadened magic and witchcraft into general metaphors for faulty reasoning or bad thinking, whether this be in science or in politics. A student of Evans-Pritchard, and following Michael Polanyi (1998), Gluckman applied Azande witchcraft logic to explain why poor scientific theories were upheld despite contradictory evidence. The answer was in the biasing and selection of evidence, the fact that the theory as a whole was never put into question, and so on. There was perhaps an anticipation of Thomas Kuhn's (1962) famous work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in Gluckman's approach. However, he was chiefly interested in moments of systemic transformation through which new forms of thought and practice would come into play. Gluckman had in mind the shameful commitment to unreason of his native South Africa, then bound by the chains of apartheid. He was concerned with the circumstances whereby it would come to its rational senses and escape the prison of its particular logic of the absurd. But the main features of witchcraft and magic upon which he concentrated were their appearance at points of social conflict or in the fissures of social and political contradictions and disjunctions. They were the forms of reason which appeared in those spaces where other modes of reasoning failed. For Gluckman, 'magic' and 'witchcraft' were generalised forms of reasoning that were the privilege of any and every social reality. They were not located in the conventional anthropological territories of the peripheralised Other; rather, they were vital in all systems – functional simultaneously in their reproduction and in their failure. Gluckman in many ways destroyed the aura of exoticism that surrounded the subjects of magic and witchcraft and revealed further their social dynamics, which were sometimes obscured by the concern with their exotic features.

A major orientation pursued by Gluckman, his students and colleagues, and in different ways by many other anthropologists, was the social basis of belief. The factuality of belief (and of culture conceived as an organisation of belief) and the commitment of human beings to beliefs (including those relating to magic, witchcraft and sorcery) are properties of social processes. They are not to be reduced to the character of beliefs in and of themselves. In other words, no belief is necessarily absurd, true or false in itself but achieves such characteristics in

the contexts of the structuring of social relations. Furthermore, for the kind of anthropology that Gluckman and other social anthropologists advocated, this social understanding created a form of comprehension that was missed in other disciplines, such as an individually centred psychology.

The Durkheimianism that underscored such a position (as well as the academic politics of a young discipline, especially in the British context, desirous of demonstrating its specific theoretical expertise) undoubtedly influenced a neglect of psychological factors, especially the importance of the psychoanalytic contribution. Obeyesekere (1981) presented a well-known trenchant critique in favour of the importance of a psychoanalytic perspective, a point well demonstrated by other anthropological work (Spiro 1979; Devereux 1974, 1970). There is, however, always the intensification and exacerbation of a discourse of pathology that continues to dominate most discussions of magical and sorcery practice, as Obeyesekere's (1981, 1975) own research illustrates. An orientation towards pathology, especially with regard to sorcery and witchcraft, of course, is also strong in social perspectives of a Durkheimian kind, as well as others. These, too, are prone to psychologism, especially that which continues the nineteenth-century concern with origins, as Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915) well demonstrates.

In their understanding of witchcraft practice, many anthropologists have pursued as a sociological argument one that is essentially psychologistic. An example is Marwick's (1965) view of Chewa sorcery as a mechanism for the release of social tensions. Such psychologism is probably integral to the enduring functionalism of much anthropology; this is particularly evident in the field of magic and sorcery, given their powerful pragmatic intent. But obviously psychoanalysis should not be confused with psychologism. Psychoanalytic themes, such as the dynamics of desire, the imaginary and fantasy, which are of direct relevance to the social construction and force of magical forms, are to be neglected at considerable cost to an anthropological understanding. Some anthropologists are developing understanding from psychoanalytic perspectives (e.g. Lambek, chapter 8; Taussig 1997), though they remain in the minority.

A Neo-Durkheimian Intervention

Mary Douglas (1973, 1970), also Durkheimian in her emphasis, nonetheless pushed the understanding of magical practices in innovative ways. She reaffirmed the social foundation of sorcery and witchcraft practices, further shifting the anthropological gaze away from the problematics of reason and rationality. She also helped to keep studies of sorcery and witchcraft from being bogged down in a kind of microsociology of group conflict and tension, a major legacy of the Manchester tradition in social anthropology and a still continuing focus of many anthropologists. These redirections may have been impelled by her anti-psychologism, with psychologism perhaps being viewed as a risk in discussions of rationality and reason as well as in a sociology that becomes

focused on individual intentions and motivations (as did much Manchester anthropology). Douglas returned to a primary concern with the social structures and frames within which certain kinds of personal practice and cultural strategies are associated and produced.

Adopting a comparative approach (the strength of both Durkheim and especially Mauss), she aimed to build greater understanding using detailed ethnographic findings but without becoming trapped in the specific case, as happens in so much anthropology. Simultaneously, she was concerned to avoid the traps of comparativism, for example, what Leach (1961) described as Frazerian 'butterfly collecting' in which disparate bits of ethnographic information were brought together willy nilly without attention to differences of form and context to illustrate and compound either trivial understanding or knowledge that was already assumed or accepted. Her interest, too, was to avoid the risks of cultural essentialism and social homogenising whereby societies or practices were lumped together in boxes or categories without attention to internal diversity and complexities of mix. These aims underlie Douglas's (1973) comparative constructs of grid (e.g. degrees of shared social classification) and group (e.g. degrees of boundedness, social distinction, separation), which she presented as two intersecting continua forming a topological space into which could be plotted kinds of practices and their structural associations. The final, general success of Douglas's efforts is due to her imaginative exercise which opened up possibilities for categorising practices such as witchcraft and sorcery in a sociologically meaningful way. She was able to reveal similar social processes underlying ethnographically distinct sorcery and witchcraft practices.

The Grid and Group of Witchcraft and Sorcery Practice

Witchcraft and sorcery are concepts that are frequently used interchangeably, and some anthropologists have challenged the validity of their distinction, seeing them as different aspects of an often obsessive concern with human agency (Kapferer 1997, Turner 1964). However, Douglas's grid-group schema suggests why a sociological distinction between sorcery and witchcraft may be significant and useful, or at least why such a distinction may be 'good to think with', even if it is not easily workable in diverse empirical contexts.

Actions can be attributed to sorcery or witchcraft at different moments in the social process or dependent on one's standpoint, as Victor Turner (1964) suggested. Nevertheless, it is worth considering some of the important dynamics that a conceptual distinction can highlight.

Douglas's concepts of grid and group are especially sensitive to different dynamics of bounding (of body, person and group) and, therefore, of transgression. These achieve further significance in relation to her concerns with such aspects as degrees of personal control and freedom, as these are affected by rules and other restrictions on conduct. As Douglas herself recognised, not only does her orientation point up salient features permitting a useful, sociological

definitional distinction to be drawn between sorcery and witchcraft (one which is not overly absolutist or exclusionary), but also, and perhaps more importantly, Douglas's approach indicates in what spheres of social action witchcraft or sorcery-like forms are likely to be present, as well as the social conditions and processes for their creation or production. The perspective is suggestive as to why certain forms might appear to be prevalent in certain contexts or situations. Influenced by Douglas's approach, it is possible to construct a distinction between witchcraft and sorcery as Weberian ideal-types, which may assist in extending an understanding of their differential cultural, social and historical significance.

Typifications of sorcery, real or imagined, might include more than the fact that it is conscious, intentional action usually performed by specialists in the arts of magical rite. Such specialists are often socially marginal or in some way external to or outside of the populations that they serve. Kings are often described as supreme sorcerers in the ethnographic literature and can be conceived as outside the polities they determine or encompass (see de Heusch 1985, 1982; Kuper 1969; Gluckman 1971, 1954). Skilled sorcerers and magical practitioners often come from low status or outcast communities. A major feature of sorcery is its ambivalence. It is typically protective and destructive, the conjunction of these forces being integral to its potency. This is an aspect of the sorcery of healing practices, for example, that engage poisons to cure. Connected with the potent ambiguity of sorcery is its common figuration as intensely transgressive and violent, a force that is capable of crossing boundaries between persons and groups as well as enforcing them. Sorcerers sometimes achieve this by changing shape and by overcoming the ordinary barriers of time and space.

Witchcraft, unlike sorcery, often involves little in the way of overt magical or ritual practice (some European traditions aside, which I would typify rather as sorcery). It is unambiguously malevolent and death-dealing and highly immoral rather than amoral, amorality being an aspect of sorcery's ambiguity. Moreover, witchcraft is a potential quality of everyone and is deeply integral to the person. The Zande provide the model with their notion that witchcraft is a physically recognisable substance (*mangu*), located somewhere near the lower intestine, which is activated in the course of social action. Witchcraft as a dimension of the person is also deeply part of ordinary, ongoing social relations and courses along them (see Rio, chapter 5). It is intrinsic to the 'magicality' of social forces (the emotional and psychological energies that flow with them) that draw human beings into social relations (Kapferer 1997: 231–2, Sartre 1966) and hence necessitates little in the way of overt magical manipulation, as in the magical practice of sorcery. While, like sorcery, witchcraft is thoroughly transgressive, it is generated from the ambiguities and contradictions of sociality (rather than being ambiguous in itself) and is thoroughly integral to the social patterns of exchange and reciprocity (which witchcraft reveals as being themselves potentially transgressive). Whereas sorcery may be engaged to force reciprocity and exchange (the Trobriand *kula* provides illustration; see Munn 1986, Malinowski 1922) and comes from outside, witchcraft, more typically, is already integral to

social relations and arises from them. Witchcraft is frequently conceived as emerging from within the community, fragmenting it from the inside.

I should emphasise that sorcery and witchcraft so typified are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, in ethnographic contexts their character as typified here is often intimately related. What is seen to be sorcery is often being presented as the openly violent and legitimate response to a more covert or hidden aggression against the person or community. Witchcraft can become sorcery in the process of its exclusion and the redefining of community bounds. Sorcery is a public reaction, and the dangerous, volatile, potentially rebounding quality of its revengeful force (sorcery, in effect, embodies the dangers of reciprocity and the transgressive potentiality of sociality) is one impetus behind both its ritual control and the social marginalisation of its practitioners who must bear sorcery's risks. Ordinary people who practise sorcery in Sri Lanka, for example, typically go outside their everyday contexts to practise it. This going outside is also part of sorcery's potency (see Kapferer 1997, 1988).

As the foregoing indicates, the forms of sorcery and witchcraft are likely to occur in different social dynamics and social space within the one broad social context. Sorcery action is hedged about with protective practices and involves, in some way or another, going outside, that is, becoming removed from the ordinary, routine lived-in world. Witchcraft or witchcraft-like effects, such as the 'evil eye', emerge in the intense spaces of everyday sociality and often involve close kin. Harrison's (1993) excellent study of a Sepik people in Papua New Guinea demonstrates a similar pattern, with powerful sorcery and magic occurring in the highly ritualised occasions of male cults organised for war and the assertion of communal boundaries. Contrastingly, what I refer to as witchcraft flows along the lines of marriage and kinship, cross-cutting communities and catching victims unawares in the vulnerability of their openness to others (in the magicality of sociality).

Following Douglas's lead, it is possible that the proportional mix of sorcery to witchcraft beliefs and practices within societies, and in comparison between them, is related to the kinds of social forces that determine their structural dynamics and processes. Douglas suggests that socio-cultural and historical realities that are highly differentiated internally, that manifest strong internal divisions and boundaries, and that express widely shared schemes and codes of social and personal control (often restrictively so) are likely to have sorcery as a major mode of practice rather than witchcraft. In societies that are relatively flexible and are not highly socially differentiated, in which the boundaries and divisions between persons and communities are not strongly marked, and in which personal and social codes of conduct are diverse and relatively non-restrictive, witchcraft is likely to be common.

There is much ethnography that might appear to give some support to the kind of thesis that can be developed from Douglas's approach. Thus, in various societies in Central and Southern Africa, witchcraft rather than sorcery appears to be the dominant form, and this appears to be associated with social forces, for example, that encourage movement and the regular break-up and formation

of new settlements; fairly weak social boundaries crossed by kinship ties that articulate diverse localities; and little in the way of powerfully socially differentiated hierarchies. Witchcraft, as many ethnographies have indicated, is both a function and a cause of the socially labile character of many Central African contexts, being integral to a constant process of redefining and restructuring social and political relations (see Douglas 1973, 1970; Marwick 1965; Van Velsen 1964; Mitchell 1956). There are aspects of the Central African contexts that bear some resemblance to Melanesian materials as others have noted (especially Kelly 1993), despite the fact that it is often described as sorcery.

I note the emphasis that several ethnographers of witchcraft/sorcery in Melanesia place on the notion of the person (Strathern 1990) and what may be called the 'permeable Self' whereby persons are continually open to being intruded upon, usually by kin within their communities but also from outside. Dreaming is often an indication of this permeation of the Self by others (Lattas 1998). Intense fear of sickness and suspicions of death motivated by persons with whom one is socially involved are routine expressions. Witchcraft is the potentiality of 'good company' (Knauff 1985). Such ideas support frequent stigmatising accusations of witchcraft which, as elsewhere, provoke revenge and demands for compensation. Most people are potentially open to accusation, but widely feared sorcerers are somewhat different. They are loners, highly individuated and to some extent set apart from others. Among the Mekeo (Stephen 1996), these are persons who have hardened, bounded selves, who are not easily permeated and who intentionally and by magical means invade and destroy others (see also Knauff 1985).

Some groups among Australian Aborigines may be more oriented to magical action that can be typified as sorcery. Such groups manifest complex hierarchies of finely discriminated kinship relations, widely shared codes controlling kin activity and relations with strangers, and forms of authority powerfully backed by rituals of social and territorial regulation. All of this seems to be associated with the kind of sorcery that is practised: frequently highly ritualised, involving shape-changing and the capacity of the sorcerer to act simultaneously in more than one place at once, entering the bodies of his victims unbeknownst to them. Remarkable in this sorcery is its extreme transgressive character, with sorcerers describing the terrible physical-sexual destruction they visit on the victims they kill (see, for example, Burbank 2000, Berndt and Berndt 1989, Warner 1937).

Elaborate forms of magic and highly visible forms of sorcery are apparent throughout a number of contexts in South and South-East Asia. Here, social, political and religious hierarchies strongly differentiate communities, influencing the formation of sharp social and physical boundaries between them (of caste, class and ethnicity) that are often mutually reinforcing. In addition, there are widely shared codes and rules regulating social intercourse which also produce considerable social distance. Hindu India and Buddhist Sri Lanka provide numerous examples. Frequently, the beings of sorcery in these contexts are transcendent god-like or demonic figures who are extraordinarily violent,

amoral beings. Janus-faced creatures of the boundary and of the margins, they are oriented simultaneously as destroyers, protectors and creators (see Obeyesekere 1984; in these pages, Kapferer, chapter 4; Bastin, chapter 6).

Other histories and other places are fertile in the construction of the images and imaginaries of the sorcerer and of demonic forms and practices. These appear to be associated with the destruction and formation of social and political hierarchies; the production of huge social cleavages founded in slavery or built upon transmutations of, for instance, feudalism; and the generation of modes of class domination together with the erection of all kinds of social and political barriers. Well-known examples relate to the fears and imaginaries of sorcery and the demonic in Europe during the 'witch craze' (Ginzburg 1983, Cohn 1975, Harris 1974). *Vodou* (also *candomblé*, *santaria*) in South and Central America and the Caribbean, formed from the practices of West African slaves, constituted its potencies in the social forces of despair, degradation and annihilating revolution (see Brendbekken, chapter 2). Contemporary practices of demon exorcism that take place in some Pentecostalist churches in North America and Europe or the exculpation of sorcerers in the Zionist African churches of southern Africa refract forces of social differentiation, exclusion and marginalisation (Csordas 1994, Pauw 1975).

A major contribution of Douglas's perspective is that it opens up the exploration of magic, sorcery and witchcraft to an anthropological understanding of social processes as formations of force and power. Their imaginal structure reflects this, and it is where psychoanalytic interpretations, for example, should be important (see Devisch, chapter 7; Lambek, chapter 8). However, Douglas points not just to the social grounding of sorcery and witchcraft constructions of the imaginary, but also to the distinctive force and even appeal that such imaginary may have. Here I concentrate on the magical practice of sorcery.

Sorcery as the Imaginal Face of Power

As indicated here, sorcery is that imaginal formation of force and power that is to be expected in social circumstances that are disjunctive or in some sense discontinuous. Its concept in many different ethnographic contexts revolves around its magical capacity to work with the very potencies of difference, differentiation, division, opposition, contradiction and transgression. It gathers the force of such potencies, harnessing them to the purpose of destruction or to conjunction. Sorcery makes the disjunctive conjunctive, the discontinuous continuous, the weak powerful. As Mary Douglas's work suggests, sorcery builds its force in the gaps, exclusions and marginalisations of social processes. These have potency; they are the positive of the negative. In this sense, sorcery is a thoroughgoing force of the social and the political. It is there in what is excluded, in remainders, in what is cast out, in dirt, in what social and cultural energies generate as disgust, as the terrible infraction of moral code and personal conduct (see Telle, chapter 3; Kapferer, chapter 4; Devisch, chapter 7).

Pursuing such observations further, extreme forms of sorcery and the demonic are likely to be highly apparent in contexts of state power. They are forces acutely generated in the social and political conditions of the state – the state as a centralised, differentiating and bounded entity – and represent its dreadful force. This is very apparent in cosmic states. In mediaeval Sri Lanka, only the king was able to exercise the magical potencies of sorcery (Peiris 1956). Among the Zulu, the supreme sorcerer is the king (Gluckman 1954). That this is so indicates the nature of the power of the king, who creates or re-creates the social order (as in the annual rites of kingship in Asia, Polynesia and Africa) and does so through fearful acts of exclusion and inclusion. The power of the king as sorcerer, I suggest, is in what he can force together in spite of the socially differentiating and divisive potencies that may fragment the king's order. Such potency is not merely in the king's capacity to order, but in the way he orders. Ordering is a hierarchialising and territorialising phenomenon, specifically when involved in state formation (see Deleuze and Guattari 1988). Its totalising dynamic involves a process of systemic inclusion and also systemic exclusion, a divisive and separating process. In some societies this is a sacrificial dynamic which is not only central to the kingship but also a dimension of the sorcerer. In these situations the power of the sorcerer is in what is excluded and in what is remaindered. King and sorcerer are alternative images of each other (the mythologies of Europe and of Asia often resonate with such themes). I stress that the force of king and state is in the sacrificial and sorcerous dynamic of destruction, division (differentiation) and exclusion, out of which order (sometimes conceptualised as the order of society) is created (see Kapferer, chapter 4, also 1997). Acts of violent destruction are integral to the (re)formation of king and state. By destroying, dividing and cutting, the power of the king as the sorcerer is generated. Thus, the sorcery of the power of king and state is oriented towards violence. Contemporary states are very different from cosmic states, which are the main contexts for the observations I make here (see de Heusch 1985, 1982; Valeri 1985), but perhaps they too have a sorcerous power in which their constitutive ordering force must be bound with the energies of destruction and exclusion (see Gulbrandsen, chapter 9; Feldman, chapter 10). Such destruction must be a recurring phenomenon as the sorcerous potential is generated in what is excluded. That which is excluded is re-created as a force that reactively threatens to rejoin that from which it has been separated, and therefore to destroy that whose very order or coherence depends upon the exclusion.

The Magic of Modernity: Fragmentations of Power

Most recent studies of magic and cultic practice, of sorcery and witchcraft, powerfully insist that these practices are thoroughly modern. The point has particular poignancy in a discipline often accused of traditionalism and exoticism. Magic, sorcery and ritual are virtually synonymous with the exotic and

the 'traditional' past. Therefore, those scholars who assert that current practices of sorcery and magic are not merely addressing current crises but are often the inventions of these selfsame crises are not only making a valid empirical observation, they are making a point in the politics of a discipline frequently criticised as indulging in exoticism. Such a view is particularly relevant in a postmodern and post-colonial discourse – especially given the subject matter – in which anthropologists are anxious to rid themselves of their colonialist past. However, there is also a concern to change the focus of theoretical orientations in anthropology, to address magic, sorcery and witchcraft in postmodern and deconstructionist terms. The reorientation is away from the modernist visions of coherent systems, bounded cultures and societies that apparently demonstrated little internal diversity and an opposition to us/them contrasts that divided humanity from itself and, too often, appeared to serve the dominant interests of metropolitan power. But above all, in anthropology the drive has been towards understanding contemporary processes that an older, antiquarian and modernist anthropology – one concerned with witchcraft, sorcery and other exotic practices – might appear to threaten.

The apparent anti- or asystemic aspects of witchcraft and sorcery, including their anti-rationalism, have been picked up by deconstructionists and post-structuralists as anti-modernist and, in particular, antagonistic to the modernist state (Nietzsche 1961, 1954; Bataille 1993). Anthropologists have followed suit, and usefully so. However, certain risks are entailed. Paradoxically, the vision of magic and sorcery that Bataille (1988) and others drew upon is in itself a modernist one, and the approaches to magic and sorcery that scholars such as Frazer and Lévy-Bruhl put forward at the turn of the last century are being replayed. In other words, there is a danger of reintroducing modernist thought of an extraordinarily rationalist kind under the guise of being up to the minute and currently relevant. This is perhaps less problematic if it can be demonstrated that the postmodern modernism of current ideas and practices engaging such kinds of analysis or understanding are thoroughly integral to present-day contexts. While the world is modern everywhere, even in those regions that may still count as remote, there are multiple ways of being modern, and different conceptions of magic and sorcery may nonetheless hold sway despite a historical intertwining (see Brendbekken, chapter 2; Kapferer, chapter 4; Gulbrandsen, chapter 9). But even so, the reintroduction of a rationalist modernism in a new form threatens a degree of superficiality, an anti-anthropology, which pays insufficient attention to the diverse structures and processes in which differential modernities are constructed and which form various kinds of magical, sorcery and witchcraft practices.

The foregoing observations in no way reduce the importance of empirical recognitions that much sorcery and witchcraft now current in Africa (notwithstanding problematic assertions that it is on the increase) were fomented in the discourses of colonialism and post-colonialism. Legal proscriptions, part of the modernising project of colonialism, were a factor in reinventing sorcery as a potent force of modernity, a force resistant to colonial authority and alive in the

ambiguities of post-coloniality. Brought within the legal system, sorcery and witchcraft have now become legitimate references before the law (see Geschiere 1997). This move was opposed by anthropologists at the time, although from the standpoint of a modernist modernising position rather than a post-colonial or postmodern one. Elsewhere, as in Indonesia, sorcery was not proscribed yet is no less modern; that sorcery was not proscribed may account for some of the differences from those practices described for Africa (Ellen 1993). An analysis of witch cleansing cults in Africa, both towards the end of colonial rule and now in an era of globalisation, reveals them as refracting major moments of redefinition of state political orders. In certain instances today, they are part of a dynamic of what is called 'villagisation' or the creation of communities outside the order of the state, which in many African contexts is in crisis and collapsing violently into itself (see Devisch 1996). Some of these and other African religious movements (Zionist churches in South Africa, the Lenshina movement in Zambia) can be seen as engaged in a 'de-sorcelling' of the state. They address the state effects of abjection, recognising in sorcery and witchcraft the destructive force of power.

In southern Africa, and especially in post-apartheid South Africa, the combination of intensified hope (an excess of desire) and the end of racial barriers is contradicted by the creation of stronger class hierarchies and boundaries within the African population. This is a process complicated by growing economic distress in the global context of transformations in capital and the creation of new aspects of foreign imperial control. Sorcery encapsulates the violence of new politically and economically conditioned fears and struggles. Its monstrous symbolism and matching practices at once assume the phantom shape of the destructive, implacable and apparently irresolute forces of everyday life, and attempt to strike directly at them (see Ashforth 2000; Niehaus et al. 2001; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 1993).

The terrible shape of the Sinhala god of sorcery, Suniyam, a being largely created in the circumstance of British rule and burgeoning in popularity in the reformations of post-coloniality, is another illustration of the modernity of witchcraft. Supplicants visit him to appeal to his violent 'justice' to punish enemies and to force remote government bureaucrats to act in their behalf (see Kapferer, chapter 4, also 1997, 1988; Bastin, chapter 6). Taussig's (1980) classic study of commodity fetishism and the Faustian dangers of devil pacts in Colombia (see also Nash 1979) presents these practices as a refraction of the intensities of social and economic contradictions at the margins of the expansion and transformation of metropolitan-based power. Taussig's work prefigures the more recent studies of African sorcery that stress the explosion of what Lacanian psychoanalysis would recognise as a politics of desire, a 'politics of the belly', and an overdetermination of consumption (see Bayart 1999, 1993; Friedman 1994). These studies also describe sorcery as having been refigured as the magical means for the protection of elite and vested class interests, as in Mobutu's Zaire or Papa Doc's Haiti.

Post-colonial Rationalities

Such processes, despite their localised symbolic forms and specificities of practice, are stressed in much postmodern and post-colonial anthropology as being particular manifestations of more general political processes. They are as much present at the centre as at the periphery, where the general forces driving them (contradiction in capital, the failure of the modernist state) may be more extremely manifest (Taussig 1980). The local often appears 'exotic' because it is seen from the perspective of another local context. The critical point is that the apparent 'otherness' constructed in a previous and modernist anthropology obscures the underlying political and economic processes of a general kind that, in particular historical and social contexts, drive the differences (see Kapferer 2001, 1997, 1988; Geschiere 1997). However, in the contemporary redemptive mood of anthropology there is a further push to demonstrate that surface differences are also part of the underlying similarities. More than being a metaphor of practices in the metropolitan centres of modernity (a method of self-exoticisation via the Other), the magical is thoroughly integral in the modern or modernity everywhere: the magical structures of the surface are working at depth.

Thus, the power of the modern state springs from the magical force of a hegemony forged through state constructions of nationalism, whereby populations achieve an immediate unity with its objects – what Sir James Frazer described as 'sympathetic magic' (see Coronil 1997, Taussig 1997). Here is located the unreason of the modern, its own absurdity. More expansively, Jean and John Comaroff (2001, 1999, 1993) suggest that the forms of sorcery and other magical practices they find in South Africa are replicated elsewhere in New Age mysticism, in the Satanic cult scares involving child abuse in England, even in the fantasies surrounding the markets in stocks and shares. All this and much more is part of what they describe as 'millennial capitalism' and 'occult economies', making implicit references to highly problematic anthropological arguments concerning the 'proto-rationalist modernism' of millenarian cults in Papua New Guinea and other places (see Worsley 1970). There is a strong tension in their analyses to reproduce earlier functionalisms, given their stand that such practices – modern sorcery and occultism especially – are conditioned in contemporary circumstances of vulnerability and uncertainty. This skirts close to earlier positions that treated sorcery and witchcraft as pathological indicators of social breakdown (see Redfield 1941) rather than being generated in specific kinds of structural dynamics which, as part of their ordering or structuring process, generate forces that are embodied in the forms that magical beliefs and practices take (see Bastin, chapter 6). The reduction to arguments based on notions of 'vulnerability' and 'uncertainty' reintroduces the psychologism of functionalism and reinsists a foundationalism that deflects analysis away from considering mediating structural dynamics. Moreover, there is a turning away from the particularities of the phenomena, a tendency to lump them together under the sign of the irrational which must await the true understanding of the anthropologist, the author of the rational. For all the insight, it may be wondered if

anthropology has not remained the same despite heralded changes. In the study of magic, sorcery and witchcraft, the nineteenth-century issue of the problem of reason has returned to centre stage. Whereas much current work (e.g. Taussig 1999) reconfigures such a problematic into a critique of reason and its tyrannies and aims to escape its rule, the Comaroffs reinstate the value of previous perspectives, though to necessarily weaker effect.

The old divide between the anthropological Self and the anthropological Other may have disappeared, the potential differences having been largely flattened out in a homogenising, globalising sweep. This contradicts the significance of the postmodern notion of multiple modernities, namely that there are many different ways of being modern, involving distinct histories and cultural and social orientations to reality, as well as the effects of intermingling and hybridising. The contradiction is even more problematic when diversity is subjected once more to the hegemony of dominant assumptions about the nature of reason and rationality in social practices. This is an important criticism that Bourdieu (2000) casts at both modernist and postmodernist anthropologists who leave unexamined the assumptions and logics implicated in their own analytical categories. Such was the major problem in Frazer's functionalism in which he applied his assumptions concerning others unreflexively and uncritically. To reverse and generalise the rational equation (humanity is united in a common irrationality), as is currently being done, sustains the hegemony of metropolitan assumptions rather than decentring them.

The crucial argument regarding modern magical practices concerns their disjunction from pasts (histories and cosmologies prior to modern periods, basically before the imperial expansions of the West) and the radical reconfiguration of the ideas and practices of the past in terms of the circumstances of the present. This position represents a major corrective to those orientations that see magical practices as survivals of tradition and refuse to attend to the import of their current reformulations in the political and social contexts of their use. It was an argument, excellently pursued by Gluckman and the Manchester school, which effectively indicated that the very appearance of traditional continuities was primarily a function of the political and social structural processes of the present. That they were reproduced in the present demanded a focus on their social situatedness rather than an approach that in effect dislocated them into contexts that were no longer in existence (primordialism) or reduced them to mentalistic predispositions (essentialism, psychologism). The force of this argument is one to which I personally and largely adhere.

However, this approach can threaten an oversociologisation of the phenomena in question or an excessive rationalisation of practices to the terms of an external view, a position that can effectively deny the very differences vital to the distinct modernity of practices and the particular articulation they form with broader structural processes. There is a seeming refusal to address the practices themselves, which even today are too often left exposed as anthropological exotica (of the very kind that has been disparaged) without much in the way of an attempt to enter within the terms of the symbolic structures that are

manifested. A fuller consideration of what they are is avoided, while they are boxed away into familiar sociological and rational categories: witchcraft as resistance, witchcraft as the folk explanation of misfortune, or witchcraft and sorcery as types of ‘social diagnosis’ (Moore and Sanders 2001). The practices are domesticated to the analysts’ own sensibilities. There is a tendency towards a too easy glossing of the phenomena in question, a brushing aside of dynamics that are not immediately and externally self-evident. Furthermore, such oversociologising and rationalising can disregard dimensions of practices – part of a ‘sociology’ already inherent in them – that are critical in the production of their distinct modernity (see Rio, chapter 5).

At the very great hazard of being misinterpreted, I suggest that there may be critical features of old practices that make them modern (beyond such generalities of the kind that they embed ambiguities, or make the abstract personal) and, indeed, impel them towards the present. Much sorcery practice in Sri Lanka, and ritual practice elsewhere (e.g. as reported for Papua New Guinea), derives its force from the fact that it fuses old practices onto the new, hybridises, and is ‘foreign’ and borrowed. Sorcery that is well tried loses its strength; its potency inheres in the new and in its fusion force (the most widely reported dynamic of sorcery). However, I cannot stress enough that the concept of ‘traditional’ – a thoroughly modernist notion – subverts the recognition that some practices which do have historical depth, and maybe because of it, possess internal dynamics that make them always already modern. Understanding how and why this may be so requires an analysis of their cosmologies and structural dynamics, the mythopoeia of their process (see Kapferer, chapter 4; Devisch, chapter 7). An externalist sociologising can encourage a turning away from such matters, thus overlooking the features of their dynamics that may, nonetheless, disclose ‘sociological’ aspects of the contexts within which they form an original articulation (Crick 1976).

Negative Cosmologies

The cosmologies that are implicated in much that is recognised as magical practice, sorcery and witchcraft are part of their contemporary force. They are often practices of cosmological fusion, in which all that is brought together has intensified or enlarged their innate potency in the potencies of that to which they are joined. In such fusion, cosmologies are frequently reconfigured and achieve their force in such restructuring. By cosmology I refer to a process whereby events, objects and practices are brought into a compositional unity, are conceived and patterned as existing together, and are in mutual relation. In this sense, magical practices and the conceptions and practices of sorcery and witchcraft constitute metacosmologies, that is, methods of patterning or bringing together acts, events or practices that may normally be expected to exist in different or separate cosmological frames. Their metacosmology is one that bridges or crosses different registers of meaning and practice (their hybridising

energy) and frequently is a dynamic of negation. Much sorcery, for example, gathers its force by systematically negating dominant cosmological forms (the terror of its destructive agency) or else by breaking apart elements of other cosmological schemes in order to effect unions or crossovers that might otherwise be impossible. Magical practice and sorcery are major sites of invention, and their method of invention (a cosmology of invention) is to attack the very ways in which human beings routinely are seen or conceived to construct their realities. They work simultaneously on the basis of surface appearances and at depth, often constraining that which they address to the cosmological form which is emergent mythopoetically in the method of their constructive practice, frequently a dynamic of negation and appropriation.

Magical practices are rites in themselves (rites of the imagination and of abstract conception, as well as actual practices) and seldom come out of thin air. They work intuitively, which contributes to the explosion of the imaginary that is so often their feature. But they also do so by extending and adapting already available cosmologies, modes of constructing and patterning, to the pragmatics at issue, to the particularities of the case. Magic and sorcery may routinely be seen to operate at the boundaries of understanding, imaginatively and inventively so, but oriented, nonetheless, through structuring dynamics (even if radically negating them) that work with already conventional cosmologically patterned procedures.

The rites that are performed to counteract sorcery and witchcraft reveal the cosmologies (as negations) that are integral both to their conception and to their practice (see Telle, chapter 3; Kapferer, chapter 4; or Feldman's account of police torture in chapter 10). To put the case more strongly, the very cosmologies apparent in the diverse modernities of any ethnographic region, which already engage notions of witchcraft and sorcery as their negative discourse, may in certain situations of their reassertion or reinvention further enliven sorcery and witchcraft practices, though of course in original directions. This is Gulbrandsen's point (chapter 9) with reference to Botswana. Here, state ideological assertions stress a continuity with cosmologies of the past that are still contemporaneous in village practice. Contradictions are thus exposed which bring forth not only a relevant critical discourse of sorcery inherent in such cosmology, but also a regeneration of the fear of sorcery and of the violence that is associated with it.

An understanding of the cosmologies involved in sorcery, leaving aside the issue of their modernity, may also further an understanding of the violence associated with sorcery. As mentioned earlier in relation to the institutions of kingship and state, some practical cosmologies of sorcery indicate a sacrificial dynamic. Or, alternatively, the destructive actions of the sorcerer develop what is explicit in cosmologies that are founded in sacrifice. The sorcerer is a figure of both destruction and regeneration. His actions are centred in the differentiating crux of origination, from which life and death are produced. It is in the sorcerer's acts of destruction that life is also created or again made possible. The violent dismembering that often marks his practices is a mirroring in reverse of the differentiating, life-growth process.

Outside Reason: Virtuality and Magical Phantasmagoria

The importance of attending to the cosmologies of magical practice is that forms of reason or rationality that are not integral to the taken-for-granted understandings of the analyst may be revealed that better account for the practices being reviewed (Englund and Leach 2000). This perspective, one which is most developed in a relativist anthropology, is still committed to the problem of reason, if not a metropolitan or scientific reason. Distinct rationalities are discovered that may not be mutually reducible, but they are nonetheless systems of reason and in many anthropological perspectives are treated as being roughly equivalent, though approached in a different way. Reason – usually in a form with which the anthropologist is comfortable – is maintained.

However, it is possible that different cosmologies, particularly those connected with magic and sorcery, are not reducible in such ways. They may stand radically apart from reason, even outside reason. This is their maddening challenge to a discipline founded in the problem of reason. The labelling of these cosmologies as irrational, or what I have termed ‘unreason’, is paradoxically a way of forcing them within the bounds of reason, which may deny to magical practices and especially to much sorcery key qualities of their potency.

Much sorcery and magic are hybrid forms par excellence. They work at the boundaries and margins, in what Turner (1969) described as liminal spaces. Either they force together things that are normally held apart or they break apart that which is normally whole. This is refracted in the monstrous dimensions of sorcery objects, which are frequently an amalgam of different forms, or something in the process of changing shape – a being or object frozen in a transmuting instant, in the process of becoming-other, becoming-animal (see Deleuze and Guattari 1988). This process is one that is not yet subordinate to any system of reason or rule. Rather, it is a process at the moment of fusing or crossing different registers of meaning and reasoning. Such observations are problematic to a rationalising approach of anthropology that routinely conceives of sorcery and the magical as representations of social and political realities. The connection may at times be less direct; as I have suggested, magic and sorcery may be symbolisations of processes or dynamics that, in effect, reach beyond the limits of reason.

The very force of magic, sorcery and witchcraft (as could be said of a considerable amount of religious activity) is connected to their emergence in spaces apart from everyday life. Not only is their practice or occurrence motivated in spaces of disjunction, dislocation and discontinuity – in the breaks, blockages and resistances in the flow of everyday life – but also they elaborate their power and potentialities in such disjunctions, discontinuities and breaks. Magic and sorcery and the fear of witchcraft are imaginative irruptions formed in such processes. While oriented to overcome such breaks, they may yet elaborate further what can be called their own phantasmagoric space, an imaginal field whose force derives not so much by what it is representative of external to itself, but in the potentialities, generative forces, linkages and redirections that it opens up within itself (see Devisch, chapter 7).

My suggestion develops from Deleuze and Guattari's concept of virtuality. This is not to be seen as modular or representational of external realities but rather as a reality all its own, a dynamic space entirely to itself and subject to its own emergent logics. The cosmology in which its inner praxis is articulated has no necessary connection to realities external to it and no necessary internal consistency. Indeed, the imagery of what I call the phantasmagoric (virtual) space of magic and sorcery (and, also, much ritual) is likely to build out of numerous sources, both personal and historical (including that of other rites from the past and present). What I stress is that the potency of much magical practice is in this virtuality, which stands outside of all reason – even, perhaps, its own. As such it contains its own 'truth', which is not subject to any kind of falsification that exists independently of it. Furthermore, the potency of such phantasmagoric space, and of its practices, lies in its very irreducibility to externalities, which is achieved and effected through its imaginal formation.

Durkheim and Mauss consigned what they viewed as magic and sorcery to the realm of the profane. But as is implicit in their sacred-profane dichotomy, the force of the sacred, as well as the profane, is in the tension of their connection or in the forces generated by the dynamics of attraction and rejection, of formation and deformation created at the point of their intersection. Thus, these spaces often engage acts or substances that embody or produce such energies – faecal matter, intoxicating or hallucinogenic materials, objects of disgust and repulsion, acts of mutilation (see Telle, chapter 3; Gulbrandsen, chapter 9; Taussig 1987). What I describe as the virtual, phantasmagoric space of magic and of the sorcerer is a volatile site of structuration, neither essentially sacred nor profane. The terms 'sacred' and 'profane', of course, are largely rooted in a Judaeo-Christian discourse of good and evil, a discourse that has tended to dominate recent discussions of sorcery and witchcraft (see Moore and Sanders 2001). I wish to avoid such concerns here and to suggest further that the phantasmagoric or virtual spaces in which magical and sorcery practice work are largely amoral, the morality that may come to be applied to them being highly relative and contingent on a diversity of contextual considerations.

But to return to the key point, symbolic and interpretive anthropology is occasionally overdetermined in its commitment to match symbolic forms to empirical reality, to treat symbols as representations of the real. This overlooks the possibility that it is the lack of fit that is significant and the source of some potency. A consequence of the bizarre character of magical practice or the concern to sustain practices that appear to have no outward relevance to modernity is to force a distance between the symbolic and the lived-in world and, perhaps, to expand their pragmatic efficiency through a great diversity of contingencies – that is, to create a virtual or phantasmagoric space (Lambek, chapter 8; Obeyesekere 1981). In the context of such phantasmagoric space (clear examples are Buddhist and Hindu temples, which are the loci of much magical practice often relating to sorcery), people are able to establish their own original relation to existential reality and to reorient themselves into surrounding realities. Such phantasmagoric spaces enable individuals to form their own anxieties and concerns

to the dynamic potencies of the spaces they enter. Here they can join and charge these potencies with their own intentional force, directing them towards objectives in the ordinary, daily world. The vital feature of such spaces, and of magical and sorcery practice as well, is that it is always already modern.

Perhaps we have reached a stage when the cycle of debate about the nature of reason with which much anthropology is still obsessed might be suspended, if not broken. This is not to ignore the insights that such interest has produced, as this discussion has indicated. But there is a limit to the understanding of reason, as Kant recognised long ago. A continuous commitment to the problems of reason and rationality can lead to an endless repetition of the same insights; occasionally, the observations are less penetrating than the first time around (compare statements made in the 1950s with those being made now).

Certainly, the phenomena of magic and sorcery have much bearing on reason and rationality, but their potential is much greater when released from the prison of reason. Evans-Pritchard's path-breaking work suggests as much. In his pages, magic and sorcery reveal qualities of the human imaginary in dream and in daily waking practice. These in their specifics broach serious questions as to the role of the imaginary or imaginal in the construction of realities and in the intuitive orientation of human beings to the processes of their ongoing existence. I refer here not to the imaginary or to intuition founded in a discourse of truth and falsity (to which a preliminary assertion that sorcery is fundamentally concerned with a universe of unreason and the illogical must return), but rather to their force as ever-present and necessary dimensions of human activity whereby reality, as always a human construction, takes shape. Magical and sorcery practices, which are thoroughly integral to the dynamic of human invention, acutely throw up the question of the imaginary: they are a major domain for the objectivated formation of the imaginary. This undoubtedly is constituted in socio-historical processes which in diverse ways embed memories – another field that the exploration of magical, cultic and sorcery practice opens up (see Feldman, chapter 10). But as forces of the imaginary, they press to the limits of human experience and beyond, breaking through the barriers of language and concept. They are among those human practices at the very centre of human creativity (positive or negative) and should be grasped more firmly in this regard than hitherto. As Lévi-Strauss recognised, sorcery and magic are the domains of the bricoleur in which novel constructions of reality are fashioned, where, indeed, 'cosmologies are in the making' (Barth 1987).

Magical practices are not merely the plane for the demonstration of a sociological or psychological theory – a folk instance of what we already know – but, for want of a better description, they display a 'machinery' of their own, a naive (unselfconscious) critique and investigation of the way human beings put themselves together socially and psychologically. In this way, they may extend towards a reconsideration of fundamental categories of understanding in the anthropological armoury: of reciprocity, the gift, sociality, and so forth. Furthermore, magical practices open out to a consideration of the formations of power, the dynamics of their cruelty and destructiveness. They may provide

their own commentary on such matters, and it is to this possibility that anthropologists should be open (see Rio, chapter 5); in other words, they should accept the challenge of what they encounter and learn from it.

Nothing that I have said involves abandoning already established trajectories of anthropological analysis. Magical practice, sorcery, witchcraft, the cultic and ritual are fertile regions for the elaboration of perspectives developed in a variety of disciplines. These disciplines provide insight into the nature of these phenomena and, I think, dissolve them as forms of action, as somehow part of all human experience everywhere. But how this is so must not be done as some kind of article of faith or as merely an illustrative dimension of orientations – when all is said and done – that are radically antagonistic to the phenomena in question (see Feyerabend 1987). To do this is to shut away the potentialities encased in such practices that may be critical to the expansion and, indeed, the development of sociological theory and understanding.

I have been concerned to set the study of magical practice within an epistemological history of the social sciences and particularly anthropology. It is an area of vital interest because it embeds the thoroughgoing concern – that of the problematics of human reason and rationality – that has been, and remains, at the heart of anthropology's contribution. Magic and sorcery expose issues that are at the centre of the definition and redefinition of anthropology's project. They occupy critical turning points in the direction of the subject no less today than at the very beginning of the discipline. My aim here has been to outline an approach towards magic and sorcery that encourages a redrawing of their significance – not for an anthropology that mindlessly and resolutely holds on to a traditionalist exoticism, but rather for an anthropology that is committed to radically questioning conventional understandings of what it is to be a human being and to extend towards new horizons of knowledge. This was the adventure that began modern anthropology – and why I spent some time considering Evans-Pritchard's work – and it is crucially important that it should continue.

The Essays

These essays address and in numerous ways extend beyond the arguments in this introduction. The idea that underpins all of the essays is the concern to explore the potentially distinct insights that magical practices, sorcery and rite, and other rituals that appear to take their form, throw upon the social and political processes that give rise to them. The aim is to penetrate into the practices themselves in a way that reveals possibilities which a different anthropological approach might easily avoid, especially one that is still bound by the problems of rationality and is anxious to affirm the authority of metropolitan opinion. The essays here refuse to be limited by an anthropology of the surface.

Marit Brendbekken's (chapter 2) and Allen Feldman's (chapter 10) essays start and close this work. Both explore the effects of imperial history and the forces that joined the imperialists with those they dominated, as well as the

creative, often terrible, forces that were unleashed. This is apparent in the *vodou* of the Dominican-Haitian borderlands that Brendbekken explores and in the inversionary forces and transmutations of historical memory that power magical practice. One of the exciting themes that Brendbekken pursues relates to the intertwining and mirroring of Self and Other that emerge in the hybridising spaces of the borderlands. This is a process that shows clearly how, for example, European conceptions of others are already bound up with themselves, that they are already generatively conjoined in the very differences they assert. Brendbekken concentrates on the mutual recognition and subversive relation of European anthroposophists and the *vodou*-practising peasants among whom the former conduct NGO work. The points she develops reflect back upon a critical understanding of anthropological approaches to the magical. Allen Feldman's essay draws us into the not dissimilar situation of South Africa and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which must deal with the memories and pain of the state oppression of the apartheid years. He explores the sorcerous aspects, the impossible cruelties, that are associated with the tortures of the violent state. A feature of sorcery is that its fear and its violence also build and engage the banalities of ordinary existence; the commonplaceness of sorcery and sorcery-like practices is integral to their brutality.

Kari Telle (chapter 3) and Bruce Kapferer (chapter 4) explore rites that deal with transgression and its overcoming. Telle addresses directly the hidden and thoroughly transgressive dimensions of the sorcerous. Concentrating on theft (and notions that draw thieves within conceptions of witches) within a Muslim community in Lombok, she takes up the theme of smell (see also Feldman, chapter 10) and the dynamics of disgust as ambiguous potencies, disclosing the destructive agencies within communities, forcing their boundaries and also engaging in their ritual reconstitution. Telle expands on the ideas of Douglas, Kristeva, Taussig and others to reveal the threat and violence of subtle forces that permeate and dissolve boundaries rather than break them down. Kapferer focuses his discussion on the cosmology of sorcery among Sinhala Buddhists in Sri Lanka as this is revealed in a major anti-sorcery rite and in the urban sorcery shrines. The cosmologies connected with sorcery show how sorcery must always be more than mere sorcery and is centred in the heart of social and political processes and in the aporias of their constitution. He examines the sacrificial dynamic of sorcery, the critical aspects of its 'instituting imaginary' and the implicit critique of the state and its social orders to which sorcery practice directs attention.

Knut Rio (chapter 5) opens up, through Vanuatu materials, what I see as a new way of conceiving the lurking presence of sorcery and the terror that it conjures. Developing from Sartre, he demonstrates how sorcery operates like the absent third person who nonetheless conditions the circumstances and relations of the other parties. In this sense, sorcery is far more integral to the formation and structuring of social and political relations than many representational or symbolic perspectives in anthropology that concentrate on sorcery as expressing social problematics would indicate. Sorcery is attached to the

very generative dynamics of the social and, as Rio shows, is a historical force as much as a product of history. This essay has strong resonances with others in this publication (especially those by Brendbekken and Feldman) that consider the issue of memory.

Rohan Bastin (chapter 6) returns the reader to Sri Lanka where he explores the technology of sorcery practice among Hindus and Buddhists. Bastin shows the differentiated character of sorcery and its distribution across a plethora of different sites, as well as its constantly cross-fertilising process, its hybridising and its rhizomic capacity to change domains and generate original meanings. Taking issue with approaches that continue to pathologise sorcery and related magical practices, he addresses directly their historically grounded 'creative dynamism'.

René Devisch (chapter 7) and Michael Lambek (chapter 8), both developing distinctive twists on overly neglected psychoanalytic themes, address the imaginary of sorcery. Devisch marvellously penetrates into the reality of the fetish among the Yaka in Kinshasa and Southwestern Congo. He reveals its potency to reside in its totalising force whereby it effects a complex link between the sensuous imaginary and other subliminal processes. Carefully articulating how the fetish is formed within its world and is able to enter into the whole existential realm of its victim, Devisch discloses how, through its 'economy of affect', the fetish kills. Lambek, too, draws us into the reality of the imaginary and the potency of its force. He takes anthropology to task (as did Obeyesekere before him) for too easily and simplistically dismissing Freud. One reason is the anthropological stress on the social and its lack of interest in arguments about fundamental drives, perhaps all the more problematic in a discipline currently critically alert to essentialism. But Lambek, through his Mayotte ethnography, demonstrates the imaginal formation of the social relational and how this relates to witchcraft and possession. He develops Obeyesekere's important work on the nature of public fantasies or what I have called phantasmagoric spaces.

With Ørnulf Gulbrandsen's essay (chapter 9) we turn explicitly to sorcery discourse and the structural and ideological dynamics of the state, themes that run through a number of the other essays. The essay directly addresses highly influential questions raised by the Comaroffs and others on the basis of African ethnography concerning the modernity of witchcraft and sorcery. Dealing with ritual murders in Botswana, Gulbrandsen demonstrates their thorough connection with globalising forces that throw up contradictions in a modernising discourse of the state. He shows the fear of ritual murders to be part of a cosmology of crisis, in which sorcery is a key discourse, connected with the modernist state's 'invention of tradition'.

The essays as a whole attempt to push the anthropological discussions of magical practices in new directions. They address epistemological issues at the heart of anthropological understanding and indicate how the worlds in which anthropologists work must force anthropology not only constantly to re-examine the value of past work, but also to extend towards new horizons of understanding.

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