Seventeenth-Century Dutch Depictions of Female Handiwork. In Weiner and Schneider.

Taussig, Michael T. 1980. *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Thomas, Keith. 1971. *Religion and the Decline of Magic.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Thompson, E. P. 1968. *The Making of the English Working Class.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

———. 1971. The Moral Economy of the Crowd in the Eighteenth Century. *Past and Present* 50:76–136.

Trevor-Roper, H. R. 1968. *The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and Other Essays.* New York: Harper & Row.

van Binsbergen, Wim M. J. 1981. Religions and the Problem of Evil in Western Zambia. In *Religious Change in Zambia: Exploratory Studies,* by van Binsbergen. London: Kegan Paul.

Weber, Max. 1930. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* Trans. Talcott Parsons. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Weiner, Annette B., and Jane Schneider, eds. 1989. *Cloth and Human Experience.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.

White, Luise. 1990*a*. Bodily Fluids and Usufruct: Controlling Property in Nairobi, 1917–1939. *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 24:418–38.

———. 1990*b*. *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

-249-

5

Atinga Revisited: Yoruba Witchcraft and the Cocoa Economy, 1950–1951

Andrew Apter

CRITICAL APPROACHES TO AFRICANIST ETHNOGRAPHY question its methods, categories, and epistemological claims as inventions of a colonial mentality, or what Mudimbe (1988:69) calls "a philosophy of conquest." The critique is pitched directly against the classic ethnographies that were produced as much for district officers as for growing numbers of anthropologists, but it implicates the very possibility of ethnography itself. To be sure, British functionalism incorporated the practical units of administrative overrule into its theoretical lexicon. Tribes, chiefdoms, lineage heads, and elders represented the "patterns of authority" that were officially sanctioned—even as they were revised—by the British Crown. Moreover, ethnographic fictions occluded the politics of the colonial situation, since societies were conventionally depicted as ethnically "pure," located in a timeless world of the ethnographic present which generally excluded the colonial state.[1] But even as this ethnographic vision expanded to embrace history, change, and imperial intervention, the "colonial gaze" endured. And, as the more radical argument goes, it still endures, implicity, in any ethnography that treats Africans as objects, symbols, or even victims of change rather than as agents of their own histories and sociocultural transformations.

It is against this general interpretive problem that I will reanalyze the Atinga witch-finding movement among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. The case is interesting for several reasons. Historically, it captures a dialectical moment when local communities, regional economies, state structures, and global markets dramatically collided and dynamically realigned; a moment precipitated by a sudden increase in cocoa prices from 1945–50 (see fig. 1). Ethnographically, it represents an unusual event, when an antiwitchcraft cult from the (then) Southern Gold Coast spread east, and crossed the (then) Dahomean border into Western Yorubaland, where it persecuted thousands of women in many Egba and Egbado Yoruba towns (cf. Matory 1991:183–91). And historiographically, the

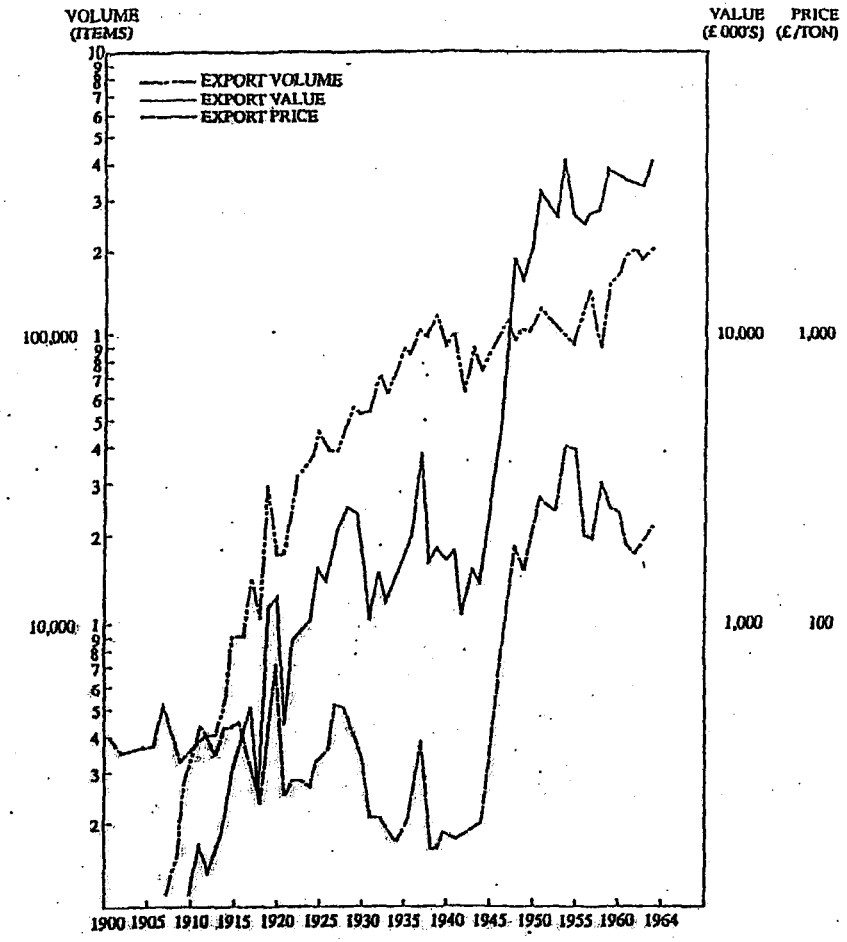

Figure 1. Nigerian cocoa exports. (From Helleiner 1966:80)

text that first documented this movement is a classic of functionalist anthropology, revealing both the acuity of a finely trained fieldworker and the methodological limitations this training imposed. The point of revising the original ethnographic interpretation is not to take potshots at functionalism—an exercise which is as unnecessary as it is uninteresting—but to extract the rational kernal from its ideological shell. Motivating this interpretive strategy is the recognition that a more critical anthropology should not reject its history but should build upon it by taking it into account.

My basic thesis is that the Atinga antiwitchcraft movement responded with alarming vitality to contradictions generated by the cocoa economy. This response is not proposed in terms of a simple cause and effect but as

the complex mediation of competing interests and claims, articulated by the logic of Yoruba witchcraft. Moreover, the contradictions themselves were complex, since their levels of "articulation" were ultimately local, regional, national, and even global, given fluctuating cocoa prices on the world market. What I hope to illuminate is the view from "below"; how Atinga made sense at a local periphery, not merely as a critique of capital accumulation but as a strategy of political and economic empowerment by a rising commercial elite. The success or failure of this strategy remains an open question, since some of those who stood to gain from the movement may well have achieved their goals. If they did, however, it was at the expense of many people, especially the women who were involved.

An empirical question this study addresses is why witchcraft as such—and "borrowed" techniques of eradication—provided salient idioms of hidden power and collective action within Egba and Egbado villages and towns. The answer, ventured more as a hypothesis than a final solution, is that the cocoa economy intensified structural contradictions that were already articulated by the logic of witchcraft, creating a witchcraft epidemic of extraordinary proportions which demanded extraordinary redressive measures. As such, the epidemic created new opportunities for various groups and actors to compete for power and resources, or simply assert control over their lives. Clearly, the Atinga cult configured a multiplicity of motives which cannot be reduced to a simple socioeconomic formula. To see the Atinga movement as a "symptom" of social upheaval does not illuminate the forms of its violence or the logic of its practice. To understand why women were sought out in such unprecedented numbers, as imputed—and at times self-professed—agents of death and destruction, we must understand how they came to embody the contradictions of a larger world in the southwestern corner of Yorubaland. From this dialectical perspective, both internally derived and externally informed, we can see the Atinga movement for what it was—a complicitous assault on female power in its social, economic, and ritual domains.[2]

The Atinga Cult

Like many powers of the Yoruba cosmos, the Atinga cult came from the "outside," crossing ethnic, regional, and colonial state boundaries. Although its genesis as a witch-finding movement remains obscure, it swept eastward through the Southern Gold Coast in the mid-1940s, across Dahomey, and by 1950 into Nigeria, entering Southwest Yorubaland when cocoa prices boomed on the world market (Berry 1985:55). The cult was clearly of foreign provenence, renamed "Atinga" from "Tingere," and linguistically "appropriated" as in *Al + atinga*, or "owners of Atinga." The cult itself thus represents a foreign power which its members brought to

different Egba and Egbado Yoruba towns, and even sold to enterprising Yoruba witchfinders. The leaders of the cult claimed that "they did not visit a settlement unless invited by its chiefs, who would send a 'small present' with the invitation" which could be as much as 200 pounds, a considerable sum at that time (Morton-Williams 1956:316). Upon arrival, cult members would prepare antiwitchcraft medicine in a large pot by combining kola nuts, animal blood, and water and uttering incantations. The pieces of kola were then extracted, dried, and sold as antiwitchcraft medicine to individual buyers, who were subsequently marked with a chalk disc on their foreheads to signify witchcraft immunity and association with the cult. It was claimed that Atinga would kill anybody who tried to practice witchcraft after eating the kola.

The cult then organized a public dance in which young men and women, augmented by local youths and adolescents, were possessed by the Atinga spirit and thus empowered to detect witches. One branch of the Atinga cult was known as the "Glass" because its "leading dancers would look at women indirectly, reflecting their faces in a small hand-mirror, before declaring whether or not they were witches" (Morton-Williams 1956:324). Accused witches who maintained their innocence were tested by cutting a chicken's throat and flinging it on the ground. If the chicken died on its back "facing heaven," the woman was innocent; if it died in any other position, she was a witch. Confirmed witches were required to confess; to pay a cleansing fee (thirty shillings); to surrender their witchcraft materials (including divining beads or objects from altars to their *òrìṣà* [deity]); to be washed in water from the sacrificial pot; and to eat the medicinal kola, so that Atinga would kill them if they attempted to practice witchcraft again.

In the Egbado town of Aiyetoro, a "new" town with a population of about 10,000 in 1950, 483 women were recorded by the king's scribe as confessed witches within the first week of Atinga's activity.[3] Many confessed to cannibalism, to killing agnates and children, to joining the witches' *ẹgbẹ́* coven, and to killing enemies and rivals with evil thoughts. One woman told how she sacrificed a goat to cure her sick child on the advice of another woman. The other woman packed the goat's entrails into a calabash, which she placed at the base of an *apá* (African mahogany) tree. The mother was told not to eat any of the goat, but at night her "soul" left her body, went to the tree, and ate from the calabash. Her child then died, because the goat was its alibi, "and in the calabash were really the child's entrails" (Morton-Williams 1956:324). It was then that she knew that she was in the witch society. Notions that witches consume children and cause infertility take many forms. When the Atinga cult was proscribed by the administration, the *Olóbì* of Ilobi, an educated king, complained to the divisional council that the cult was useful, citing as evidence a woman who, after eating the medicinal kola, delivered a child who had been blocked by witchcraft in her womb for three years.

After its official prohibition by the colonial authorities, the Atinga cult turned to felling trees (particularly the *ìrokò* tree) inhabited by witches, and destroying *òrìṣà* cult shrines and altars, although the conventionally male antiwitchcraft cults of Gelede, Egungun, Ogun, and Oro were spared (Morton-Williams 1956:326). By March of 1951, the Alatinga had amassed considerable wealth and, dodging police harassment and prosecution, returned to Dassa in Dahomey. Local interest turned away from Atinga and toward the heavy farm labor the season demanded.

How can we account for this unusual antiwitchcraft movement in recent Yoruba history? For Morton-Williams, the "sociological meaning" of the Atinga cult derives from the relative decline of traditional religious institutions and the rise of a commercial elite. In brief, his argument runs like this:

> 1. Yoruba witchcraft is the cultural and psychological expression of contradictions generated by affinity. Witches are "wives and mothers," and hence both "strangers" and "members" of the husband's compound and patrilineage. What is more, they are never fully accepted until they bear children, preferably sons. Thus witchcraft, born of jealousies, emotional strains, and feelings of ambivalence, is practiced between co-wives and close kin, resulting in infertility, early death, and contested accusations.
>
> 2. With the decline of traditional rituals to placate witchcraft, the Atinga cult provided a convenient substitute, particularly since it could [and did] embrace Christians and Muslims as well as "pagans."
>
> 3. The final phase of Atinga—the attacks on *òrìṣà* cults— represented "an assertion by youth that their world was triumphant over that of a backward-looking age"; it also promised increasing independence from the "forces of nature" which the *òrìṣà* controlled. (Morton-Williams 1956:327).

Almost as an afterthought, Morton-Williams (1956:333) mentions that the sponsors of the Alatinga were "wealthy and influential men," many of whom "had achieved status through utilizing wealth obtained in commerce, and whose interest in the Alatinga was largely speculative." What is so clearly missing in his functional explanation, despite this tantalizing glimpse, is how new forms of production and exchange were transforming social and political relations at the time; and how Atinga was implicated in the process. The "general shift" thesis—that this antiwitchcraft cult represents a rite of passage from tradition to modernity—can be recast in more complex forms: as a series of encounters between local and global worlds, encounters that intensified the contradictions of everyday Yoruba

-251-

life. Let us begin to analyze the encounter by looking, albeit schematically, at the material conditions of precolonial witchcraft beliefs and accusations.

Production and Reproduction in Precolonial Polities

In the so-called traditional Yoruba polity, according to canonical accounts, witchcraft beliefs and practices expressed "structural contradictions" between basic principles of social organization. In a more or less agnatic lineage system (Schwab 1955; Lloyd 1955, 1962, 1970; Bender 1970; Bascom 1969:42; Forde 1951:10–15; Fadipe 1970:97–146), virilocal polygyny generated jealousies and rivalries between co-wives—who often accused each other of witchcraft—as well as more general tensions between agnates and affines. Since a new wife was not fully incorporated into her husband's household until she bore her first child, preferably a son, childless wives accused co-wives, particularly senior wives, of using witchcraft against them. When wives did bear children, these tensions acquired a matrifilial dimension. Within a polygynous household, children of one mother (*ọmọiyá*) were taught never to eat food prepared by co-wives, for fear of being poisoned. If a successful child would attract the witchcraft of the household's jealous co-wives, the child's misfortune, sickness, or death confirmed it. Hence the proverb: *Àjẹ́ ké lánàá, ọmọ kú lóòní* (The witch cried yesterday, the child died today) (Bamgbose 1968:75). These suspicions and hostilities were further fueled by inheritance patterns, which devolved property of the deceased male head between different sets of *ọmọiyá*, precipitating competition between "half-siblings" for property (Lloyd 1962:279–307). Corporately held lineage rights—such as access to land and political titles—generally devolved through agnatic kin, but occasionally passed through women, introducing a "cognatic" element to the lineage system. Thus powerful women connected with political and economic resources could even precipitate lineage "optation" by drawing sons away from the father's patrilineage and into the mother's patrilineage.[4] Even in the absence of such lineage optation, tensions between different sets of full siblings (*ọmọiyá*) defined salient points of lineage segmentation and fission. United by paternity but divided by different matrilines, lineage segments would (as they still do) trace back to half-brothers (*ọmọkùnrin bàbákan*) who fought and separated at some time in the past.

This orthodox functionalist perspective accounts for several basic features of Yoruba witchcraft.[5] First, the high proportion of accusations between co-wives expressed relations of competition and vulnerability. The wife's dependence on her children for full incorporation into her husband's household underscored the significance of "infertility" as a sign of witchcraft victimization. And the cannibalistic aspects of witches' appetites—the eating of men, particularly husbands and their children—echoed the

potential ability of mothers to "snatch" sons away from their patrilineages, draining them of their strength, or of precipitating fission to achieve a similar effect. The matrifilial impact of mothers on the male household and lineage was further expressed by ideas of transmission of witchcraft between women, largely between mothers and daughters, and appears in the Yoruba belief that all women, particularly mothers, are potential witches. *Ìyá wa* (our Mothers) is in fact the most common way of referring to witches. But the "principles" of polygyny, inheritance, lineage optation, segmentation, and fission do not exist as isolated structural postulates. They articulate with production, exchange, and the sexual division of labor.

In addition to their domestic roles as wives and mothers, Yoruba women have historically sold their husbands' produce and engaged in trade in local markets (Sudarkasa 1973). There they organized into trading associations (*ẹgbẹ́*) in which they pooled resources, rotated credit (Bascom 1952), regulated market activities and their wider communal affairs. Represented by a formal female head, the *Ìyálòde*, who aggrandized considerable political clout, market women controlled the exchange of goods, set collective guidelines, fixed minimum prices, accumulated merchant capital of their own, and maximized personal profits. Nor were these relations of production and exchange restricted within kingdoms; they were extended between them through regional market networks. By attending "periodic" markets in other towns—some quite far away—market women mediated between them, taking their goods to other areas and bringing back wealth from beyond the local kingdom.[6] These economic roles and opportunities conflicted with the domestic obligations of cooking (including chopping firewood and grinding pepper and onions), cleaning house, feeding children, and humoring the husband and his agnates (Fadipe 1970:887–90)—indeed, they *subverted* the ideology of household labor and reproduction. Market activity took mothers out of their homes and away from their children, undermining the domestic values of fertility and procreation while empowering these women with public responsibilities. Furthermore, economic success in the market could threaten male authority in the household and lineage. A wealthy wife could precipitate the divisive conflicts of polygyny, inheritance, lineage fission, and optation by gaining strength, power, and considerable independence as a member of the market womens' *ẹgbẹ́* association.

This economic dimension of female power in precolonial Yoruba society fits Nadel's model of Nupe witchcraft in both "base" and "superstructure."[7] According to Nadel (1970:174), "the witch is accused of doing mystically precisely what the women, in virtue of their economic power, are accused of doing in real life." As with the Yoruba, these female activities included indebting husbands to wives; accumulating more liquidity and capital than their menfolk, with which mothers "influenced" their

children; and neglecting domestic and reproductive obligations to pursue profit further afield, where women figured as "prostitutes." For Nadel, it was the contradiction between domestic and economic roles, between domestic "purity" and the worldly "corruption" of female wealth, that challenged male authority and transformed mothers into witches.

The Yoruba situation appeared nearly identical. A basic contradiction between the roles of mother and merchant pitted female power against male authority in both private and public domains. Privately, the witch afflicted the household by striking husbands, co-wives, and children; that is, both the witch's children and those of her rivals. She did this by allegedly drinking the blood of her victims, consuming their vital essences, and in the case of female victims, by consuming their fetuses and blocking their reproductive fluids. From a "phallocentric" perspective, female economic power and its dangerous consequences were embodied in menstrual blood, both in its periodicity and its capacity to undermine male potency and power.[8] For example, it is still maintained that a man's most powerful *jùjú* medicines are immediately neutralized by contact with menstrual blood. In addition, witches could cause male impotence by "borrowing" a man's penis to have sex with his wife or another woman (Prince 1961:798), thereby consuming his sexual powers.

Publically, witchcraft sabotaged political relations between men, even to the extent of weakening kings. It is still averted by sacrifices at the "crossroads" (*orita*) of chiefly jurisdictions, which converge upon the marketplace itself. For it is there, at the bases of baobab and *irokò* trees, that witches form "covens" that are modeled on womens' market associations and are designated by the same term (*ẹgbẹ́*). Note that, in addition to inheriting it from one's mother, witchcraft could be acquired by donating a child or other family member to a coven, which divided and consumed its body as an "entry" fee.[9] Women "tricked" by other witches to consume human flesh and blood could also become unwitting witches and thereby join a coven.

These diverse aspects of Yoruba witchcraft had one thing in common: they sabotaged the reproduction of bodies human and social. The Yoruba cannibal-witch profited at the expense of her family, lineage, and community by taking without returning. She profited in the marketplace by acquiring more than she spent, and by hoarding capital to block the flow of productive resources (Belasco 1980:27, 30, 102). As one proverb states, the wife "threatens the husband in the marketplace with a cutlass" (Drewal and Drewal 1983:54), this being an allusion to Shango's troublesome abduction of the goddess Oya, encoding the "castrating" potentialities of female wealth in a master symbol—the cutlass (*agada*)—of inheritance. Indeed, the accumulation of trading capital and the organization of female power "eats away" at male potency and political hegemony at all levels of

corporate organization. In the precolonial polity, this included the household, lineage, quarter, town, and kingdom at large. Today, the invisible organization of witchcraft associations recapitulates the administrative structure of the Nigerian state. According to Idowu (1970:10):

> Witches are well organized: they choose their local, regional and inter-regional heads. A head of a local guild may be the head of all women in the community (very often such is the one chosen, if she passes the test, in consequence of her exalted, commanding position). Often the head may be the chief priestess of a particular cult.

And mirroring the male-dominated Pan-Yoruba Ogboni Society, which binds its members in total secrecy, fights witchcraft, and formerly ordered human executions, witches administer their consuming powers through hidden chains and languages of command (Idowu 1970:13):

> Witches maintain a chain of contacts through their local, regional and inter-regional systems. They have a subtle means of contacts which consist in part of signs, symbols, telepathy and their own peculiar language . . . Thus, a person who is marked down in Ibadan for punishment or destruction may be dealt with through the local cult of Lagos or Ilorin. The Ibadan or Ilorin cult is only a tool and may be under an obligation not to reveal the source of the operations.[10]

But this expansive vision of covens in modern Nigeria is not merely the conceptual reflex of a growing economy and state bureaucracy. Grounded in material relations of production and exchange, the "immoral economy" of Yoruba witchcraft mediated the very contradictions such developments entailed.

Atinga and the Colonial Economy

The impact of Islam, Christianity, the colonial state, and the cash economy on precolonial productive activities and ideologies was complex and profound. Here I can only highlight the most basic transformations. Although Islam and Christianity have never displaced local *òrìṣà* worship (as their more dogmatic followers claim), but in fact were reconfigured within local cosmological horizons (Apter 1992:174–77), they did introduce "foreign" sources of spiritual and economic capital. Both religions of the book, first Islam powered by northern *jihad*, then Christianity motivated by coastal trade and further encouraged by British overrule, established regional and transethnic networks and associations which widened the Yoruba universe of discourse and commerce. By 1914, Lord Lugard's amalgamation of the Nigerian Protectorate transformed the content of political offices and roles by incorporating them within the colonial administration. Yoruba kings

-253-

lost certain powers of prosecution (e.g., they could no longer authorize the death penalty) and decision making, but gained the Crown's protection against traditional mechanisms of disaffection and deposition. What subordinate chiefs gained in status as government civil servants, they lost in real power, being subject to administrative demands and directives—such as tax collection—from above. If the new government provided schools, roads, piped water, and health clinics, it also taxed male household heads, appropriated political power, and recruited a new generation of literate youth into local and regional administrative structures and positions.

This political transformation was largely funded by foreign markets and local wage labor. The introduction of cash cropping, mainly cocoa for export in the Western (i.e., Yoruba) Region, provided profits which farmers often invested in their children's education to prepare them for elite professions (Berry 1985). The many consequences of this dramatic shift in production on local economies, social structures, and political strategies have been explored in detail (Berry 1975, 1985). The most salient include (1) a general breakup and "nucleation" of the patrilocal compound (*agbo ilé*) with rising cocoa profits; (2) a proliferation of independent women traders as the prosperity of the agricultural sector rose; (3) an increase in polygynous households among farmers who traded in cocoa, with their wives as managers; (4) an increase in the provision of petty trading capital by mothers for daughters, contravening the "customary" pattern of husbands providing it for their wives; (5) the migration of farmers and their immediate kin away from natal towns to cocoa villages, where "family" labor combined with migrant (nonkin) wage labor; (6) a rise of profits in the distributive sector; (7) the development of cooperative marketing schemes among farmers to compete with the state-formed Marketing Board which exploited producers in the name of price protection; as well as (8) the formation of a new educated elite that sought greater participation in local affairs.

It is in this historical context that the Atinga witch-finding movement should be reanalyzed; not as a "symptom" of structural change but as a drama which sought to comprehend and control it. First, I would argue that the development of a cocoa economy *intensified* the existing etiology of witchcraft. Competition between co-wives and their children, inheritance disputes, lineage optation, segmentation and fission, and, most important, the tug of war between women's economic autonomy in the marketplace and subordination at home were fueled by prevailing trends—notably, the proliferation of independent petty traders, the nucleation of patrilocal compounds, increased migration, the rise of polygyny among cocoa farmers and traders, and a general increase of profits in the distributive sector. Indeed, trading capital, like the power of witchcraft itself, was now transmitted from mother to daughter. Under these conditions, the

symptoms of mystical affliction might have been expected to reach "epidemic" proportions, justifying unprecedented and unorthodox placations and persecutions.

Second, it appears that the Atinga cult had strategic value for the rising commercial elite. By financing the Atinga cult from profits in trade, these "new men" could (*a*) bypass the traditional authority of elders to force an alliance with "traditional" chiefs, who became indebted to them for antiwitchcraft protection; and (*b*) persecute women traders, either directly as witches, or indirectly through general intimidation, into whose traditional sphere of commercial activity the "new men" were intruding. In this respect, the fate of the traditional cults represents a direct assault on female power. The decline and rejection of Yoruba religion asserted (if overstated) by Morton-Williams (1956) does not explain why the predominantly female *òrìṣà* cults were attacked while the male Oro styled antiwitchcraft cults were left alone.[11] Clearly, a gendered opposition was taking shape, asserting the ascendancy of male over female power in ritual, social, and economic spheres.

Finally, in order to explain, as Morton-Williams cannot, why a "foreign" antiwitchcraft cult enjoyed higher prestige than its local counterparts, we must consider the Atinga cult in relation to the rise of the commodity economy. Both were of foreign provenance, the former establishing a medium in which the contradictions wrought by the latter might be addressed.

This final point highlights the emergent relationship between witchcraft and the state. For if the colonial administration encouraged cocoa production, it also sought to regulate it. In the early days, cocoa became the object of struggle between farmers, traders, and British companies, each seeking to maximize their share of the earnings. In 1939, the government established Marketing Boards (reorganized in 1947) with a monopsony on the purchase of cocoa for export, and increased control over the domestic terms of trade. The state thus became a powerful broker between Yoruba producers and regional distributors, intervening in the prices commanded by export markets. Poised between local and global arenas, the Marketing Boards set up a chain of buyers and sellers which, if cost-effective for the state, siphoned profits away from the farmers and appropriated the surplus value of their labor. Before fetching its world market price, cocoa passed through many intermediaries—from "pan buyers" who purchased it directly and resold it to "scalers," who then retailed it to Licensed Buying Agents (LBAs), who in turn resold to the Marketing Board at a fixed commission (Berry 1985:90).

In theory, the Board guaranteed farmers a fixed return on their cocoa, promising to "cushion" the impact of world price fluctuations. In practice, it acquired enormous reserves: during the boom years of 1947–54 these

totaled over 46 million pounds sterling (Helleiner 1966:161), which were invested in British securities and used to finance general development projects. Helleiner (1966:162) estimates that this amount was 39% of "potential producer income"; that is, income that *could* have been distributed to farmers. But if the state extracted profits from afar, local purchasers incurred additional costs in more visible and concrete forms. Just as the government eventually bought the cocoa, it also extended credit, again through its chain of contracted (and contracting) agents: LBAs and their subsidiaries paid advances to farmers in return for cocoa purchased below the guaranteed board price. To complicate matters, many of the unlicensed middlemen and women at the lower end of the distributive chain were members of cocoa farmers' households (Berry 1985:87)—brothers, sons, affines, and collateral kin. Under these conditions, as kinsmen and affines turned debtors and creditors on an unprecedented scale, it is hardly surprising that the "traditionally" gendered tensions attendant upon agricultural production and exchange would be invested with new conflicts of economic interest.

The period of Atinga in Southwest Yorubaland coincided with an indisputable period of cocoa production and economic growth. But this growth exacted its costs and generated its own local paradoxes. For cocoa farmers, increased values meant greater appropriation of their profits as their wealth was sucked away by the state and its intermediaries. If cocoa production stimulated greater commerce and trade, it pitted men against women, literate youth against elders, in a market held hostage to world price fluctuations and an evermore powerful political center. The "witchcraft" of the cocoa economy meant different things to different people. For farmers, it meant the extraction of surplus value ("potential producer income") by the invisible appetites of an encroaching state, and the inflation of exchange values by unlicensed and licensed buying agents. Within lineages, it meant increased competition for wealth and merchant capital, intensifying segmentation, fission, and nucleation of households, while bolstering the power and autonomy of market women. If the logic of witchcraft illuminated these developments, it also prescribed remedial measures. The Atinga movement objectified the contradictions of cocoa production in the nefarious forces of female power, and offered new techniques of eradication that would be equal to the task. In so doing, it provided opportunities for a rising literate and commercial elite to bypass their elders and secure access to merchant capital and state resources. More generally, it enabled local communities of an emerging periphery to assert control over the forces that were transforming daily life.

A complex dramaturgy of resistance and opportunism, of competing agendas and emerging interests, Atinga attacked the female body as icon

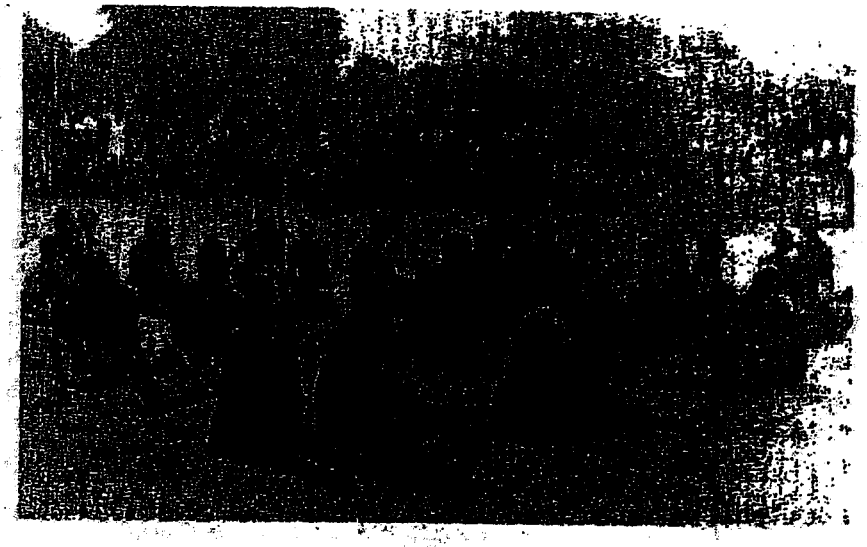

Plate 1. Women identified as witches during an Atinga dance. (From Morton-William 1956:318)

and agent of commodity value; of false representation, of unbridled circulation, and of hidden accumulation. As soul eater, the witch profited at the expense of her kin and affines, consuming their productive and reproductive powers while appearing to cater to their needs. In her coven, she occupied two "places" at once; the private sphere of her domicile and the public arena of the marketplace itself, where as a disembodied witch bird she aggregated with her soul-eating sisters to conduct nocturnal business. As Atinga attacked the sites and signs of women's corporate power—their *òrìṣà* cults, ritual paraphernalia, their market and mystical *ẹgbẹ́* associations—it *immobilized* their bodies in public tribunals, where they sat "fastened" to the ground beneath the burning sun (plate 1) until they received the oracle's verdict (see Matory 1991:189–91). Women thus accused were not killed but cleansed, spending heavily to divest their bodies of accumulated witchcraft and to invest in the economy of collective purification. Whether we see its efforts as maliciously misguided or symbolically displaced, the Atinga movement's popularity need not be taken as a measure of its success in solving the problems of the growing cocoa economy but of the growing recognition that something had to be done.

INASMUCH AS THE ATINGA MOVEMENT represents a particular interpenetration of Yoruba, Nigerian, and global worlds, a turning inward against

-255-

hidden enemies to confront the dislocations of socioeconomic change, it entered more generally into popular discourse. Omoyajowo (1965:23–24) recalls a song praising Atinga which he heard on a Yoruba gramophone record:

Ajeji mefa kan wo'lu Eko,
Mo bere oruko won, won l'Atinga ni.
Iru ise wo l'e nse, won l' aje l' awon nmu.
Iya b'o l'o l' eiye, ofo l'omi efo nse,
Wa ba sigidi n'ile, wa ba Baba wa l'oke.
E ba wa ko won lo o.
Agbere aje poju, Atinga ko aje lo.

Six strange people entered Lagos town,
Asking their identity, I was told they were Atinga.
I asked of their mission, they said they were witch hunters
You madam, dare you deny possessing a bird-familiar?
You will be got rid of like dirty water.
You will encounter spirits on earth and face our Father above.
Wipe witches away.
Their wickedness is immeasurable, Atinga, wipe witches away.

It is a song which Omoyajowo "loved to sing in those days," for it celebrated the spirit of a crusade against evil, a march toward progress and purification which captured the popular imagination. "Great was the disappointment of many Yoruba people," he writes, "when the group was banned by the government in 1951, for they had expected them to help wipe out once for all the institution of witchcraft" (1965:23).

Atinga might have been suppressed by government intervention, as its supporters complained, yet witchcraft remains alive and well in Nigeria today. To be sure, it is still largely a family affair, with kinsmen and affines afflicted and accused. But family life has been strained and further reshaped by the growing power of the Nigerian state. The witchcraft generated by the cocoa economy was a mere whisper compared to the calamitous consequences of the 1970s oil boom, which built a new Nigeria on rhetorical foundations. The sudden government infusion of new wealth, the rise of contractors, luxury hotels, hospitals, and schools swelled the salaried class of professionals empowered by their access to state structures and resources. As intensified class divisions crosscut lineage and family sodalities, the witch's work became more devastating than ever.[12]

Today witchcraft thrives among the Yoruba elites as well as the masses, a relational calculus of resentment, fear, and envy measuring the costs of "alienated production" in the consumption of human powers and souls.[13] Witchcraft persists as a practical discourse of hidden agency because economic "development" in the larger sense has failed. Rising fortunes, costs, and expectations have run up against bitter economic

realities. Seen historically and dialectically, from the periphery and the center, witchcraft and "development" have converged. As Taussig (1987) might say, Yoruba witchcraft in Nigeria has become the *terror* of development—the subversion of order (from "above," the "outside") apprehended and refashioned by implicit social knowledge (from "below," the "inside"). If Atinga signaled the beginning of this totalizing experience, there are no indications that it is coming to an end.

Notes

1. These ideological limitations were transcended by the 1950s in studies of urbanization, monetization, and sociopolitical change inspired largely by Max Gluckman and associated with his "Manchester school." See also Smith (1960) for a diachronic framework of political change which incorporated British overrule into its analysis of Hausa government.

2. The methodological lead for this approach is established in J. L. Comaroff (1982) and elaborated in J. Comaroff (1985).

3. We know from Forde (1951:45) that Aiyetoro became wealthy by marketing and exporting cocoa to Abeokuta.

4. The concept of "optation" comes from Barnes (1962:7) who, invoking Firth, uses the term to designate descent systems that permit (in his case a male) ego to "opt" into his mother's patrilineage. Among the Yoruba, a man can opt into his mother's patrilineage to inherit chieftaincy titles and other property which is vested in her descent group, although by doing so he forfeits full membership in his father's patrilineage. The multiple affiliations optation permits has caused considerable debate over the precise principles of Yoruba descent. See Lloyd (1955, 1962, 1970), Bender (1970), and Eades (1980:49–55).

5. It is of course reminiscent of many classical Africanist accounts of witchcraft; e.g., Wilson (1951), Marwick (1965), Middleton and Winter (1963), Mair (1973).

6. In 1976 I encountered three Yoruba market women trading in the Rome market, in Italy, selling "African" goods and buying cloth and foreign "imports" for resale at home. This particular case may be exceptional, but it represents the expansive scope of Yoruba trading networks.

7. The Nupe are located just northeast of Yorubaland and raided Yoruba towns for slaves throughout the nineteenth century. They are called Tapa in Yoruba colloquial discourse.

8. It is possible that the "periodicity" of menstruation—at once a general condition of female fertility and a specific sign of nonconception during its flow—is associated with the periodicity of market women's monthly meetings (as well as with the meetings of *orisa* cult priestesses, which in Ayede-Ekiti were calibrated in alternating two-week periods). This association might connect the power of menstrual blood to the collective power of market women and priestesses. Postmenopausal witches, whose bodies consume without reproducing, would seem to

represent the "other side" of female potency (see Apter 1991). For comparable observations, see Gottlieb and Buckley (1988).

9. The division of sacrificial meat between members of a corporate group—e.g., a lineage, an association of diviners (*babaláwo*), an age-set organization, or a hunters' guild—is a standard ritual of corporate solidarity. Similarly, the fission of such a group is often attributed to "fighting" over the meat. The division and consumption of a human victim by a witch's coven evokes the antisocial character of organized female power in opposition to the jural authority of Yoruba men.

10. These descriptions of Yoruba witchcraft organizations are provided as statements of fact, not belief, by a Yoruba Methodist minister and university professor well known for his work on Yoruba religion (Idowu:1962). As such, they support the conclusion of this paper.

11. It must be emphasized that witchcraft is not a purely negative power but can be channeled toward more positive ends, such as empowering the king and community against rivals, enemies, and imminent disasters (including the deadly appetites of witches themselves). The birds perched atop Oshun and Osanyin staffs, as well as on royal beaded crowns, represent the protective powers of witchcraft. Similarly, *òrìṣà* cult priestesses are feared and respected as witches since they can see into the future and preempt malefactors. Since witchcraft is immanent in women, it can never be fully eradicated. One of the ostensible goals of *òrìṣà* cult ritual is to placate witches' appetites and channel their destructive powers into communal gain (Drewal and Drewal 1983). In the Atinga movement, the identification of witchcraft with *òrìṣà* vessels was cosmologically coherent but revalued these "positive" dimensions of witchcraft in negative terms.

12. See Barber (1982) for a rich exegesis of popular Yoruba reactions to petronaira, including themes of nefarious money making which permute the general logic of witchcraft—i.e., gaining illegitimate wealth from the bodies and blood of others—into the figure of "the child-stealer who uses his victims to conjure up boundless riches" (438).

13. I use the term "alienated production" to emphasize the peculiar character of the Nigerian political economy, based less on the exploitation of wage labor and more on the exploitation of state power, wealth, and resources. As Berry (1985:13–14) emphasizes, the Nigerian ruling class is in reality a "state class" which has internalized the dynamics of class formation at its own expense. In a sense the state has become the ultimate witch, appearing to grow rich at the expense of its "children."

References

Apter, A. 1991. The Embodiment of Paradox: Yoruba Kingship and Female Power. *Cultural Anthropology* 6, no. 2:212–29.

———. 1992. *Black Critics and Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bamgbose, A. 1968. The Form of Yoruba Proverbs. *Odu* 4, no. 2:74–86.

Barber, Karin. 1982. Popular Reactions to the Petro-naira. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 20, no. 3:431–50.

Barnes, J. A. 1962. African Models in the New Guinea Highlands. *Man* 62:5–9.

Bascom, William. 1969. *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria.* Holt, Rhinehart & Winston.

———. 1952. The *esusu:* A Credit Institution of the Yoruba. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 82, no. 1:63–9.

Belasco, B. 1980. *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero: Preadaptations in Nigerian Economic Development.* New York: Praeger.

Bender, Donald. 1970. Agnatic or Cognatic? A Re-evaluation of Ondo Descent. *Man,* n.s. 5, no. 1:71–87.

Berry, Sara S. 1985. *Fathers Work for Their Sons: Accumulation, Mobility and Class Formation in an Extended Yoruba Community.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 1975. *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-Economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Comaroff, J. 1985. *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Comaroff, J. L. 1982. Dialectical Systems, History and Anthropology: Units of Study and Questions of Theory. *Journal of Southern African Studies.* 8, no. 2:143–72.

Drewal, H., and Drewal, M. 1983. *Gẹlẹdẹ: Art and Female Power among the Yoruba.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Eades, J. S. 1980. *The Yoruba Today.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fadipe, N. A. 1970. *The Sociology of the Yoruba.* Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press.

Forde, D. 1951. *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria.* London: International African Institute.

Gottlieb and Buckley, eds. 1988. *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Helleiner, G. 1966. *Peasant Agriculture, Government, and Economic Growth in Nigeria.* Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin.

Idowu, B. 1962. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief.* London: Longmans, Green and Co.

———. 1970. The Challenge of Witchcraft. *Orita* 4, no. 1:3–16.

Lloyd, P. C. 1970. Ondo descent. *Man,* 5, no. 2:310–12.

———. 1962. *Yoruba Land Law.* London: Oxford University Press.

———. 1955. The Yoruba Lineage. *Africa* 25, no. 3:235–51.

Mair, L. 1973. *Witchcraft.* London: World University Library.

Marwick, M. G., ed. 1965. *Sorcery in Its Social Setting.* Manchester: University of Manchester Press.

Matory, James L. 1991. Sex and the Empire That Is No More: A Ritual History of

-257-

Women's Power among the Oyo-Yoruba. 2 vols. Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago.

Middleton, J., and Winter, E., eds. 1963. *Witchcraft and Sorcery in East Africa*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Morton-Williams, Peter. 1956. The Atinga Cult among the South-Western Yoruba: A Sociological Analysis of a Witch-Finding Movement. *Bulletin de l'IFAN* 18, nos. 3–4:315–34.

Mudimbe, V. Y. 1988. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Nadel, S. 1970 [1954]. *Nupe Religion: Traditional Beliefs and the Influence of Islam in a West African Chiefdom*. New York: Schocken Books.

Omoyajowo, A. 1965. *Witches? A Study of the Belief in Witchcraft and Its Future in Modern African Society*. Ibadan: Daystar Press.

Prince, R. 1961. The Yoruba Image of the Witch. *Journal of Mental Science* 107:795–805.

Schwab, W. 1955. Kinship and Lineage among the Yoruba. *Africa* 25, no. 4:352–74.

Smith, M. G. 1960. *Government in Zazzau, 1800–1950*. London: Oxford University Press, for the International African Institute.

Sudarkasa, N. 1973. *Where Women Work: A Study of Yoruba Women in the Marketplace and in the Home*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.

Taussig, Michael. 1987. *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, Monica. 1951. Witchbeliefs and Social Structure. *American Journal of Sociology* 56:307–13.

6

"Bloodhounds Who Have No Friends": Witchcraft and Locality in the Nigerian Popular Press[1]

Misty L. Bastian

Witches are predators, bloodhounds who have no friends. As predators, greed is their hallmark; an abiding zest for destroying the successful, the healthy, and the "lucky" in the community.

The witch is propelled by an uncanny obsession with self; every other person is an object to be victimized. Familiarity with the witch is essentially superficial, and once entranced by the inner urge to hurt, the frontiers of its operation can only be circumscribed by the satisfaction of its thirst.

Darkness, that aweful [sic] period of intense gloom is the witch's finest hour. Stealthily and unobtrusively, it makes its way into its victim's abode and strikes decidedly at its target. If caught in the act, the witch instantly feigns remorse, only to revert to the same old habit once it is let off the hooks. Which doesn't surprise anybody either. Or don't they say that "old habits die hard"?

Grafted unto Nigeria's political scene, the "eaglet" politicians on who much hope has been placed for the establishment of a new political culture and political order, have also demonstrated a striking resemblance with witches.

The modest hope that the political greenhorns, who were perceived to have been uncontaminated by the filthy habits of their banned predecessors, would abide by the canons of civilized conduct and fair competition is again collapsing like a bad dream. And like witches, most of the "political upstarts" imbibed the political chicanery and gerrymandering of the old foxes.

However the greater danger is not that they represent a chip of the old block but that they might in fact out-wit them in new stratagems of political brigandage. Take for instance how, suddenly, the word residence *has been invested with a new definition which has turned it into the undoing of many candidates.*

Until recently, the typical Nigerian, unless he is a civil servant, resides in at least two places at the same time. In other words, a businessman from say Afikpo could have another home in Calabar and shuttle between the two points evenly during the week.