

## The Power of a Severed Arm: Life, Witchcraft, and Christianity in Kilimanjaro

*Knut Christian Myhre*

*Not-being made its appearance in the world as an alternative embodied in being itself; and thereby being itself first assumes an emphatic sense: intrinsically qualified by the threat of its negative it must affirm itself, and existence affirmed its existence as concern. So constitutive for life is the possibility of not-being that its very being is essentially a hovering over this abyss, a skirting of its brink: thus being itself has become a constant possibility rather than a given state, ever anew to be laid hold of in opposition to its ever-present contrary, not-being, which will inevitably engulf it in the end.*

Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (1966: 4).

### INTRODUCTION

One morning in October 2008, I was sitting in the living room of a school teacher in Rombo District on the eastern slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro in northern Tanzania. A TV in the room showed a Sky News broadcast, where a story concerning Tanzania suddenly appeared. The segment consisted of images from an unidentified village that accompanied a voice reporting on the murder of a person suffering from albinism. I noted the story, even though it was in some respects old and familiar news. Tales of such murders had appeared in the national media during

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K.C. Myhre (✉)  
University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

earlier fieldworks, and had occasionally been a topic of conversation among the rural Chagga-speaking people with whom I lived. Previously, they had described such murders as a practice pertaining to distant areas of central Tanzania, but by 2008 they had become a more pressing concern. Now, stories swirled of albinos attacked or kidnapped in areas closer to Moshi town, which sparked fears that the perpetrators would come to Rombo, and impelled calls for people to protect the region's albinos. These fears reached their peak one Sunday morning, when the Catholic priest announced in church that a girl had gone missing from a nearby village. Amidst gasps from the congregation, he said the girl was last seen entering a car containing several persons, who had approached children on the main road that circles the mountain. Suddenly, we were all alert to strange cars with strange people making strange propositions.

The newscast I saw in the teacher's living room was not an isolated incident that year. In early April 2008, BBC News reported that the President of Tanzania, Jakaya Kikwete had "...ordered a crackdown on witch-doctors who use body parts from albinos in magic potions to bring people good luck or fortune".<sup>1</sup> The order came after 19 such murders had occurred the previous year. Appearing on TV, Kikwete said: "I am told that people kill albinos and chop their body parts, including fingers, believing they can get rich when mining or fishing". His order had little effect, however, as BBC reported in July that 25 albinos had been murdered only since March that year. It reiterated that, "Albinos are targeted for body parts that are used in witchcraft, and killings continue despite government efforts to stamp out the grisly practice".<sup>2</sup> A week later, an additional victim was reported, whose right foot and genitalia had been removed, in an attack that also left the victim's albino wife injured.<sup>3</sup> It said that an investigation by a BBC correspondent had "...revealed that witchdoctors are behind the killings. They use albino organs such as hair, arms, legs and blood to make potions which they claim make people wealthy." On the brighter side, it said that 173 witch-doctors had been arrested since the president "...ordered a crack-down of all those involved in these ritualistic killings for riches."

Some of these claims and numbers resurfaced in a resolution passed by the European Parliament in September 2008 to condemn the murders of albinos and "the speculative trade in their body parts." The resolution referred to unspecified NGO and media reports of such murders, which the Tanzanian government had confirmed. It stated that the events were especially prevalent in Mwanza, Shinyanga, and Mara

Regions of the Lake Victoria zone, which “...are not only notorious for the killing of albinos but also for the killing of people believed to be witches or wizards.”<sup>4</sup> The European Parliament welcomed and supported the steps made by the Tanzanian president, his cabinet, and the parliament, but called for further efforts from the national government, local authorities, and civil society. However, the resolution had no more impact than Kikwete’s order. Thus around the time, I saw the newscast in the teacher’s living room, the British newspaper *The Guardian* reported that the number of killings had reached 30.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it said that the last three murders had happened shortly after the Tanzania Albino Society organized a demonstration against the murders in Dar es Salaam. One victim was the 10-year-old girl Esther Charles, whose murder and mutilation by a gang who “...wanted to sell her body parts to witch doctors” was reported from Shilela, Shinyanga in western Tanzania by Sky News.<sup>6</sup> The story added that Tanzanian police had reported multiple incidents the previous year of people exhuming the bodies of children to remove organs, like genitals and eyes, to produce remedies used in rituals. It furthermore claimed that such murders were not only prevalent in Tanzania but also reported from Kenya and Burundi, where the authorities provided increased protection for albinos. It even relayed that, “Some reports say albino skin is prized in the Democratic Republic of Congo, another troubled African nation where superstition is high”.

### FROM OCCULT ECONOMIES TO MODES OF BEING

A salient feature of these reports and resolutions is the way they seamlessly shift from the murder of albinos to claims regarding witchcraft, magic, and rituals that are performed by witch-doctors and wizards. Their conceptual range resembles and recalls the conflation that Terence Ranger (2007) detects in media accounts, law-and-order responses, and academic representations that lump a plethora of practices under the rubric of ‘the occult’ and create a chimera of a singular sinister culture enveloping Africa. Accordingly, one BBC report asserted that “Sorcery and the occult maintain a strong foothold in this part of the world, especially in the remote rural areas around the fishing and mining regions of Mwanza, on the shores of Lake Victoria.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the report on Esther Charles’ murder leapt from one incident in a Tanzanian village to a general claim regarding practices and perceptions that effortlessly extended to encompass neighboring countries.

This conceptual reach and geographical embrace are afforded by the recurring emphasis on trade in body parts, along with the claim that these are used to ensure wealth and success. Such assertions invoke the economy as the salient context for the murders, which is accentuated by the suggestion that there is a demand for the body parts that those involved supply and satisfy. The reports thus conjure and lock into the ‘occult economies’, which Jean and John Comaroff (1999) expose at the root of a range of phenomena that include witchcraft, trade in body-parts, and zombie production, as well as pyramid schemes and other scams. According to them, “‘Occult economy’ may be taken, at its most general, to connote the deployment of magical means for material ends or, more expansively, the conjuring of wealth by resort to inherently mysterious techniques, techniques whose principles of operation are neither transparent nor explicable in conventional terms” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 297). Their definition accords with Kikwete’s claim that the albino murders involve a belief that the deployment of body parts will affect people’s economic pursuits, and conforms to the assertion by Shilela Councillor Joseph Manyara that, “It is utterly stupid for some people to believe that albinos have magic powers and their parts can make them rich.”<sup>8</sup>

The compound character of the Comaroffs’ concept suggests a relationship of equivalence between two terms, but its effect is, in fact, a contrast that assigns priority to the material over the magical. The Comaroffs thus argue that “What counts as magic varies across time and place and context, although it is always set apart from habitual, normative forms of production” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 297). Magic is a historically and geographically variant phenomenon, but it has an invariant yet unspecified relationship to production. Analysis consists in the specification of this relationship, which dictates that the economic provides the ground and context for the occult. Accordingly, the Comaroffs claim “...to trace the causal determinations of the occult economy in postapartheid South Africa across generations and genders, villages and provinces and regions, and a nation-state in transition - not to mention the labile vectors of a post-Fordist, millennial economy” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 294). It is the relationship of causal determination that lends the occult the character of a mysterious mode of production or a perverted form of trade, whose interpretation involves the exposition of how one gives form to the other. The Comaroffs therefore argue that, “Our primary concern here is to examine how-as well as

by whom, why, and with what implications—occult practices have come to be *imagined* in rural South Africa” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 297, original emphasis). The conception develops the longstanding idea that witchcraft and related phenomena are metaphoric forms that provide a language for speaking about one thing in terms of something else (West 2007: 24), and extends the notion that they are responses or reactions to social and economic change (Myhre 2009: 119), which combine in the claim that they are critical commentaries on new forms of wealth and commodification (Niehaus 2005). It moreover advances an abiding approach to money and commodity forms as operators of historical change, whose capacity to mediate and represent creates “...isomorphic patterns of economies, symbols and metaphors” (Gilbert 2005: 365).

However, the secretary general of the Tanzania Albino Society suggested a different dynamic, as he told *The Guardian* that, “Our biggest fear right now is the fear of living. If you leave work at night as an albino, you are unsure of reaching home safely. When you sleep, you are unsure of waking up in one piece.” Skirting economic processes and imaginative forms, Zihada Msembo claimed that the albino murders involved a fear of life and what may occur in it. Invoking various activities, he articulated a concern that merely going about life may entail death. His claim resonates with the epigraph above, as it suggests that the murders and what they evoke pertain to life and the intrinsic possibility of its negation. It shifts the gaze from questions of economics and representation toward issues pertaining to modes of being and not-being, and the ways in which life becomes and is affirmed in the face of its denial. In this light, the events and experiences pertaining to the albino murders *regard* life and *concern* existence, as the former hold up the capacities the latter entail and embody. The perspective locks into Jeanne Favret-Saada’s (2015 [2009]: 102) conception of witchcraft as a matter of ‘being affected’ that reorders lives and transforms subjects, whose existence is staked in the process. It moreover summons Bruce Kapferer’s (2002: 22ff) notion that magic and sorcery open a field of forces or potentialities that reorient people’s existence and relationship to the world. It evokes Malcolm Ruel’s (1965: 3) idea that witchcraft concerns the potential abilities of persons in relations with others, and recalls Marilyn Strathern’s (1988: 273ff) account of the partible person, who detaches and transacts parts of him- or herself to render and transform relationships that constitute his or her being. The circulation of body parts is obviously acute in the albino murders, which raises the question

of whether they primarily concern the form and being of persons, rather than matters of economics and forms of representation.

In this article, I pursue this question through an exploration of two events and accounts concerning witchcraft practices that occurred or were invoked during my fieldworks in Rombo District.<sup>9</sup> The purpose of holding these incidents and stories together is not to lump them under one rubric, but to explore the intensities they contain and entail. In particular, I investigate how the events and accounts pertain to the Chagga notion of 'life-force' or 'bodily power' (*horu*) that is transformed and transferred through 'dwelling' (*ikaa*), where its movements and refractions constitute 'life' (*moo*). The events and accounts hence involve and regard practices that concern and affirm life. Importantly, life here assumes the form of a transformational process, which entails the ever-present potential that subjects can convert into objects, and objects may mutate into persons. It is this potential that the events and accounts concern. Furthermore, it means that the events and accounts surpass the attention for life and its negation to rather regard life and its transformations. It follows from this that these phenomena not only pertain to being and not-being, but instead concern different modes of being. The effect of their transformational character is that witchcraft and life fold out of and into each other. These processes moreover envelope forms of Christianity, which has been a firm fixture of this area for over a century (Fiedler 1996). More specifically, the events and accounts show how Catholicism and Pentecostalism fold into each other to fold out of witchcraft, and alternately fold out of each other as inversions or reversals of one another. The result is a set of folding movements and moments where life, witchcraft, and forms of Christianity alternately and situationally emerge from and sink back into each other.

### THE STORY OF A SEVERED ARM

In 2001, a story began circulating in the area I was doing fieldwork that the arm of a human being had been found outside the Catholic Church in the neighboring parish. When I arrived at the church a few days later, the priest received me in his office where he proudly confirmed the story. He said the arm had been found in the morning in front of the door of the church, where they were certain it had been discarded in the night by a witch (*mchawi*).<sup>10</sup> Enthusiastically, he said its appearance was due to an initiative by the church for parishioners to give up witchcraft (*uchawi*)

and stop visiting healers and diviners (*waganga*).<sup>11</sup> For this, they had called on people to bring and dispose of their witchcraft and healing paraphernalia at the church, where they read a special Mass before burning the gathered objects. The arm had arrived after this event, but they had burned it too so it was not possible to see it. However, he illustrated its appearance by holding up his forearm and curling his fingers into a claw, while pointing out that the one they found was thinner, darker, and smaller in size. It could possibly have stemmed from a monkey, he said, but added they were certain it was the arm of a human being. To justify this, he reiterated what many villagers already had told me and described how a witch digs up the grave of the person that he or she has killed and steals a part of the body. The witch brings the body part to his or her homestead and places it in a cooking-pot (*chungu*) in the cooking-hut attic (*dari*), where the heat and smoke of the hearth (*jiko*) dry it out and preserve it. The limb then withers and blackens to gain the appearance of the arm they found on the doorstep. Occasionally, the witch takes the body part down from the attic and uses it to stir the food that is cooking on the hearth. Doing so averts the blood (*damu*) of the victim from returning to wreak vengeance on the witch for intentionally (*makusudi*) killing another person. The witch is thus able to continue his or her life without suffering the consequences of having taken the life of someone else.

The story of how the witch exhumes a dead body and steals a limb resembles and recalls the reports regarding the albino murders, and is underscored as the priest acknowledged that the witch may retrieve and deploy other parts of the victim's body. Nevertheless, it is no coincidence that an arm featured in this incident. The arm—*koko*—namely plays central roles in crucial activities and their surrounding discourses.<sup>12</sup> Persons with a 'good arm'—*koko keshu*—are for instance favoured for carrying out certain tasks, such as the annual pruning of the banana garden, where excess off-shoots (*ndaka*) are uprooted and the stumps (*matonga*) of harvested banana trees are removed. Its purpose is to enable a smaller number of trees to grow to full stature and produce the largest possible bunches of fruits without being depleted by a surfeit of *ndaka*. The pruning also serves to tweak and tune the composition of the banana garden, as the excess off-shoots are replanted to ensure an even distribution of trees or increase the amount of certain kinds of banana. Superfluous *ndaka* are also gifted to friends, relatives, and neighbours, who request off-shoots to replenish their banana gardens. In either case,

replanting is delegated to a person with a good arm, which ensures that the off-shoot will ‘seize’ or ‘stick’ (*iira*) in its new location to grow and yield further off-shoots and fruits.

The good arm hence ensures the growth of the banana garden, where a significant part of daily activities consists in harvesting the leaves and stems of the banana trees. These are used as fodder for the livestock, which are exclusively stall-fed due to a shortage of grazing land. The arm features here too, as the homestead’s inhabitants slice (*itena*) the leaves and stems for the animals to eat. The role of the arm is accentuated in conversation, where this activity is often neither named nor mentioned, but illustrated by a cutting motion with the arm, where the extended hand manifests the blade of a machete. The arm is moreover used to sweep and gather the manure of the livestock, which is placed at the foot of the trees in the garden to ensure continued growth of fodder and plentiful bananas for the staple food. In fact, people stress that the main purpose of keeping cattle is the provision of manure, which is crucial for the intensive form of horticulture presently practised. However, cows are also treasured for their milk, which is used fresh in morning tea and curdled for inclusion in various foods. Milk is also churned into butter-fat (*msika*) that is used for cooking and applied to make the skin ‘shiny’ or ‘clear’ (*uaa*), and hence ‘beautiful’ (*usha*). The arm is also implied by the term *msika*, which derives from the verb *isika* that is used for the act of shaking a gourd to churn milk into butter. In fact, the supply of milk also relies on a person with a good arm, who is usually asked to lead a cow to another homestead to be impregnated by a bull. Like for the *ndaka*, the semen is more like to ‘seize’ or ‘stick’ (*iira*) and result in a calf, when the tether of the cow is held by a *koko keshu*.

The good arm hence ensures growth in both the banana garden and the livestock-pen, which moreover enfold through the provision of fodder and manure by means of the arms of the homestead’s inhabitants. Their imbrications mean that *koko* is a pivot that turns vegetative matter into fodder, which animal digestion converts to manure that is spread to fertilise the banana garden. Indeed, the notion of *iira* articulates pivots of different kinds, which turn excess off-shoots into trees that provide fodder and foodstuffs, and transform a heifer or a dry animal into a lactating cow that yields animal offspring and milk for human consumption and application. In both cases, *iira* concerns a critical point that acts as a fulcrum on which further engagements of the arm hinge and turn. The arm thus enables and entails forms of transformations that afford further conversions where the arm is required and plays a role.



In addition to fodder and fertiliser, the arm and its activities yield milk, meat, and bananas, which combine in cooking with eleusine, maize, beans, and other crops that are grown in the plains below the mountain. These different foodstuffs comprise *horu* or ‘life-force’ to a greater or smaller degree, which is compounded when the substances conjoin in cooking and consumption. The arm features here too, as cooking is conducted over an open hearth (*riko*), where ingredients combine in an aluminum vessel (*sufuria*) or clay cooking-pot (*nungu*), which is stirred with a long-handled wooden spoon (*kilikyo*) that is also used for serving food on plates or in bowls.<sup>13</sup> Using different utensils, the arm hence combines and converts various ingredients and conveys the resultant foods to those who consume them. The significance of the arm for these processes is accentuated in the making of banana beer, where the malted eleusine millet is usually added to the wort by someone with *koko keshu*. The justification is that the good arm ensures that the malt and wort—which both are high in *horu*—‘turn’ (*iunduka*) to become beer that is fit for consumption.

Along with beer, different foods increase the person’s *horu* and raise the heat (*mriku*) of the body, as they boost the amount of blood (*samu*) and its circulation. Prominent here are diverse kinds of ‘soft food’ (*kelya kibolo*) that variously combine milk, meat, eleusine, fat, blood, and particular kinds of bananas to contribute to the person’s capacities, health, and well-being. These foods enable the person to use his or her arms in banana-farming and livestock-keeping, which expend *horu* and deplete blood, yet provide life-force in the form of powerful foodstuffs. As it both provides and requires *horu*, the arm is simultaneously a means for, and an effect of, the conversions and conveyances of life-force that occur through production and consumption. The mutable and movable character of *horu* entails that the ends and means of these activities are mutual transformations that assume different forms but are of the same fundamental character (Myhre 1998: 127).

Meat, milk, beer, and bananas are not only consumed within the confines of the homestead, but also provided as bridewealth prestations that afford and justify reproduction, and enable a man’s claim to the children he fathers. The prestations are hence effects of the arms of the groom and his contributing agnates, which his intermediaries (*wakara*) carry to the bride’s parents’ homestead (Myhre 2014: 511ff). The prestations afford the bride’s relocation to the marital homestead, which comes into existence as a place of production and consumption on her arrival.

It is then said of the groom that ‘he has a hearth’ (*neri riko*), where the produce of the banana garden and the plot in the plain is converted into foods of different kinds. Consequently, the bridewealth prestations enable the couple to deploy their arms in banana-farming and livestock-keeping at the marital homestead, as well as in cooking and consuming the foodstuffs they yield. These foods not only afford further productive engagements, but also facilitate sex and reproduction, where the bride employs her back (*moongo*) in conceiving, birthing, and caring for their children (Myhre 2014: 515ff). Through these activities, the groom transfers *horu* in the form of semen, which contributes to the blood of the bride and their child that she in turn conveys through childbirth. The emphasis is on the bride’s back, but the arm features here too, as the groom provides his parturient wife with soft foods that replenish the *horu*, heat, and blood she lost in childbirth, and contribute to her lactation. The husband’s arms hence conjoin and contribute to the wife’s breasts (*mawele*) with the result that parents make extended and extensive reproductive contributions, which involve and occur through multiple body-parts.

These considerations entail that different bodyparts transform and transfer *horu* in different forms, and hence constitute the body as a circuitry of life-force. Thus, the arms yield foodstuffs that are taken in by the mouth (*dumbu*) to afford activities like sex and reproduction, where *horu* converts and conveys as bodily substances by means of backs, breasts, and genital organs. The reticulated character of these flows and transformations is articulated by the use of *mawele* to mean both women’s breasts and men’s testicles through which *horu* flows in different forms. Its use moreover concerns how one part of one person’s body engages and involves a different part of another person’s body to affect his or her being. This occurs in all activities, but is perhaps most striking with the bride’s back, which she acquires through the bridewealth prestations and that therefore emerges as an effect of the arms of others (Myhre 2014: 516ff). Moreover, the use of *moongo* to also mean the doorway of the house and the backbone of animals reveals how the circuitry of *horu* extends beyond the human body to enfold other beings that include inanimate objects. Accordingly, there are sexual prohibitions that surround the practices performed by *koko kesha*, which channel and direct the flows of *horu* to ensure that off-shoots and semen stick, and the beer turns around (cf. Myhre 2007: 322ff). In fact, the multiple uses of *koko* entail and concern that vegetative, animal, and

human being conjoin through the conversions and conveyances of *horu* that occur through production, reproduction, and consumption. These practices constitute the notion and activity of *ikaa*, which I translate as ‘dwelling’ and from which the homestead (*kaa*) derives its name (Myhre 2007: 321). They moreover engage and involve substances and entities whose terms derive from the notion of *moo* that translates as ‘life’. These include the chyme (*mooshe*) that forms the transformational or intermediary form between fodder and manure, as well as the doorways and backbones (*moongo*) that feature in bridewealth and reproduction. As substances and conduits that convert and convey *horu*, chyme, backbones, and doorways afford life, which in Rombo assumes the form of transfers and transformation of life-force.

In light of the concept of ‘occult economies,’ it is important to realize that these concepts and practices are neither exempt from nor opposed to monetary and commoditized forms of exchange. Thus, the pruning of the coffee trees is also delegated to a person with a good arm, who moreover is subject to sexual prohibitions to ensure that the trees grow and bear fruits, which are exclusively sold through the regional cooperative or to agents that operate at the behest of multinational concerns. Capitalist exchange hence does not have a detrimental or destructive effect on these phenomena. Instead, the movements of *horu* encompass and include this cash-crop to entail that money itself is an effect of its transfers and transformations. Money is therefore ‘life-force’ in one particular form, whose transactional and fungible character extends the modes and means of *horu*.

### ORGANS WITHOUT BODY

These considerations entail that when the witch removes a part of the victim’s body, he or she appropriates a means for and effect of the conversions and conveyances of *horu*. The witch thus intervenes in the circuitry of life-force through the victim’s body, and interferes in the transfers and transformation that constitute human, animal, and vegetative being. The dynamic is underscored, as the witch places the body part in a cooking-pot and treats it as a foodstuff, or uses it to stir the food on the hearth and handles it as a utensil for converting and preparing comestibles. Similarly, hiding it in the cooking-hut attic treats the body part like the firewood, which is stored to dry out over the hearth, whose fire it eventually feeds. It also handles the body-part like the beer

bananas, which are ripened by the heat (*mrike*) and smoke (*musu*) of the hearth to enhance their *horu*. Such bananas darken like the arm described by the priest, but differ from it as they plump up and soften to sometimes nearly liquefy, while the arm shrivelled and shrank as it dried out.

The witch's detachment of body parts moreover recalls the butchering of animals, where shares of meat manifest how people expend *horu* to afford the being of others (Myhre 2013: 119ff). Butchering was in fact invoked by Zihada Msembo, who told *The Guardian* that "They [the albino murderers] are cutting us up like chickens." But where the shares of animal meat compensate the recipients' expenditure of *horu* to afford their continued engagement in dwelling, the witch removes a means for transforming and transferring life-force, and thus inhibits its flows or renders them unproductive. In fact, the use of a body part as a form of foodstuff, firewood, and cooking implement collapses the distinction between means and ends that these transformations and transfers involve and entail, and thereby implodes the world-relations that constitute dwelling and life. This is perhaps most striking in the case of an arm, which no longer yields, pivots, and provides *horu* that is transformed and transferred through other body parts, but instead is acted upon by another arm and treated as a form of *horu*. The witch dismantles the victim and turns one of his or her body parts from a means for converting and conveying *horu* into an entity that is subject to the same processes. He or she thus turns the victim from a subject that transforms and transfers *horu*, into an object that is dissolved back into the currents of life-force. Creating and deploying an organ without body diverts the victim's blood from harming the witch, only at the expense of his or her children who villagers stress will suffer from eating the food that was stirred by means of the body part. Its divertive character was manifest in the dry and thin appearance of the immobile arm that the witch discarded on the doorstep of the church, which contrasts with the mobile and flexible character of a strong and good arm. It moreover differs from the round form and soft consistency of the beer bananas ripened in the attic, whose shape and character people comment on when they are peeled. Such bananas body forth a capacity for transformation and flow, which diverges from the emaciated and inert quality of the arm the witch discarded.

As the witch turns subjects into objects that are deployed to affect the capacity and being of others, its activities concern existence, in the manner suggested by the epigraph above. It is underscored by the fact that

these activities engage the means and ends of *horu*, and thus arise as an alternative within the processes of dwelling and life that afford being. Indeed, the activities of the witch owe their form and existence to dwelling and life, as they too involve and consist of transformations. Where life assumes the form of flow and transformation, there is an ever-present possibility that these may be transmuted and diverted. Or, in a world where everything is a conversion of something else, life itself is vulnerable to conveyance. As the person consists of multiple means and ends for transformation and transaction, he or she too is also liable to transformation and exchange. Crucially, this means that witchcraft is not a reaction to an external imposition or phenomenon, but an internal generation of the form of life in this particular place. Witchcraft hence folds out of dwelling and life, at the same time as its activities enfold the relationships that these processes involve. It is an issue pertaining to intimacy and closeness (Geschiere 2013; Myhre 2009: 133) precisely because it unfolds from and redirects the material and practical relationships of dwelling and life that are constitutive of modes of being. In fact, witchcraft constitutes the limit of dwelling and life that is generated by these activities themselves. It is an action upon actions, or a transformation of transformations, that centers on the victim's body but assumes dwelling and life as its horizon.

### THE PRIEST AND THE WITCHCRAFT SNAKE

The argument above is expanded and deepened by another story from Rombo, which more directly concerns the relationship between witchcraft and Christianity in Rombo. The story pertains to Father Dominic, a Catholic priest from the area who is well known and greatly admired for the development (*maendeleo*) he brought to the parish where the witch discarded the arm in 2001. During his tenure at that parish, Father Dominic not only enabled an extension of the church, but also refurbished the primary school and created a vocational training college. These are located right next to the church, where they create a compound that people point to as a manifestation of Father Dominic's abilities. His achievements were allegedly due to financial assistance he attracted from Catholic parishes in Europe, but this resulted in Father Dominic's transferral to the diocese in Moshi, where people suspect the bishop and clergy wished to retain and enjoy the funds he raised.

People argue that Father Dominic's transformative powers are due to the fact that his mother was a witch, whose powers he destroyed when he was a child. According to a story that is frequently rehearsed, his mother performed her witchcraft by means of a snake that she kept in a cooking-pot in the attic, which bore a human face and responded to her calls and communications. She called the snake by rattling the milk gourds by the hearth, which made it slither down an attic-pole. To perform her witchcraft, she fried the snake on a pot-shard over the hearth and scraped off its burned scales, which she either added to food she served her victim or applied to his or her skin. People describe and mimic how the snake cried like an infant when it was fried, but add that she breastfed the animal and applied *msika* to its skin to comfort it and make it soft and supple.

One day, the mother went to the plains to farm and left her first-born son—Dominic—in charge of the house. She instructed him to cook eleusine porridge as a midday-meal for his siblings, but emphasized that he was not to add milk or *msika* to it. At lunch-time, however, his younger siblings nagged Dominic to do just that to make the porridge tastier. At first he refused, but when he relented and picked up a gourd, it rattled against the others to call the snake down from the attic. Seeing the snake, Dominic grabbed a machete and hacked it to pieces, which he proudly showed their mother on her return. She reacted by running away, while wailing: "They have killed my first-born child" Realizing then that she was a witch, Dominic cut off contact with his mother and devoted himself to become a priest and serve others.

Like the incident involving the witchcraft arm, the case of Father Dominic and his mother concerns conversions and conveyances of life-force by means of different body parts and implements. *Hornu* here occurs in the form of eleusine, milk, and *msika*, which are handled by means of cooking-pots, spoons, and gourds, and channeled through the mother's breasts and hands that feed and anoint the snake. In contrast to the case above, these acts do not collapse the means and ends of *hornu*, but recombine them in ways that destabilize dwelling and life. Instead of domestic animals being fed by means of arms to obtain food-stuffs that contribute to a woman's lactation, a wild animal is breastfed and smeared with butter-fat, which otherwise nurse children and beautify people. The acts do not involve appropriations of body parts, but their redeployment that concern and affect bodily transformations, where the snake acquires human features and attributes, while the witch obtains the

ability to harm others. It creates and involves an animal that undercuts the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman, whose modes of being entail and depend on conversions and conveyances of *horu* in distinct forms. By contrast, it creates a common mode of being, where life-force is relayed in the same forms between humans and animals.

Accordingly, this uncanny animal replaces or substitutes for the first-born child, who occupies a particular position in Rombo. Termed the ‘child in front’ (*mwana wa mbele*), the first-born son not only bears the name of the father’s father, but until recently assumed his position, as he received on his marriage the homestead that his older namesake once occupied (Myhre 2015: 107). The naming and inheritance practices entail that the first-born son literally replaced his father’s father, whose relational and geographical position he assumed. In fact, these practices mean that the first-born son reproduces his parents, who in turn provide his replacement. Replacing or substituting the *mwana wa mbele* with a not-quite-human, not-quite-snake thus enfolds or collapses the past and the future to enable the witch’s destructive abilities in the present. Like in the case of the severed arm, it means that the witch sacrifices his or her own offspring for the benefit of saving his or her skin. It contrasts with the activities of those who bear children to reproduce their parents and butcher animals to compensate the *horu* of others. Such people act with others in mind, while the witch acts with herself in mind, as she either nurses an animal to simultaneously replace a child and a parent, or decomposes other persons to transpose the effects of taking their lives onto her children. In either case, it collapses the unfolding relationships of the past and the future to create a present moment, where the singular figure of the witch reigns supreme.

The Catholic majority of the area is proud of Father Dominic and tell his story as an epitome of his powers. In killing his mother’s snake, he saved her potential or future victims from harm, which included himself and his siblings, who would eventually have suffered the consequences of what she did. He thus acted with an unknown multitude of others in mind, which anticipated his work of bringing development (*maendeleo*) to the congregation and the community at large. Dominic is therefore an anti-witch, who brings development where the witch destroys it (Myhre 2009: 118–119). His power to do so is considered partly the result of eradicating his mother’s capabilities of harm, which he turned around for the benefit of others. However, his power is also considered an effect of Christianity, which people say bestow the

ability to vanquish witchcraft. People hence tell his story to articulate how Christians can usurp evil and redirect destructive forces for good and constructive purposes. It is this dynamic that lends significance and urgency to the events at the church, when people discard witchcraft objects and remedies obtained from healers and diviners. Such an event is not only an occasion for ridding the community of destructive forces and influences, but a moment where these can be appropriated and turned around for common benefit. Powers that mark the limits of production, reproduction, and consumption are on these occasions folded in and reoriented as forces that enable the extension of dwelling and life in time and space. Thus, where witchcraft unfolds from dwelling and life, Christianity enfolds witchcraft to afford dwelling and life. It is this dynamic and process that draw large crowds to these events, where people come to participate in Mass and take part in efforts to turn the destructive into something constructive. The events nevertheless undergird the concept of witchcraft and people's conviction of its presence and reality in life. Witchcraft is accordingly a recurring topic of the Catholic priests' sermons, where it is castigated as a harmful and sinful practice that people must give up. It is not discredited as an occult illusion, but excoriated as a means and mode for people to relate to each other and the world they inhabit. Like evil, witchcraft is not something that can be overcome or transcended, but an ever-present potential that constitutes the limit of life.

To the area's Pentecostal minority, however, these events and Father Dominic's story show how Catholics dabble in what they call 'matters of the devil' (*mambo ya shetani*). Each case confirms how Catholics engage in witchcraft or visit healers, whom the Pentecostals consider witches in their own right. To them, these stories and events therefore do not concern the immanent power of religion, but rather how Catholicism is not a true form of Christianity. It is corroborated or reinforced by the way in which Catholics butcher animals for the deceased whom they present with shares of meat, beer, and milk on different occasions. In the eyes of the Pentecostals and other evangelicals, these acts constitute worship of other deities, in which they refuse to participate. In doing so, they set themselves apart and withdraw from the transfers and transformations of *horu* that these activities involve, which render them suspect as potential witches in the eyes of Catholics. On top of this, Catholics whisper that the Pentecostals' all-night vigils involve orgies, where they have sex in the dark without being able to identify their partners.



They hence risk consorting sexually with close relatives and thus to engage in incestuous forms of sexuality, which underscores the suspicions that surround their faith and practices.

It is instructive that the Catholics conceive of Pentecostal practices as a warped or inverted form of sex where *horu* flows in destructive ways, while the evangelicals conceive of Catholic practices as an anathema that must be castigated and rejected, even if it entails restricting or avoiding interaction and engagement. Both conceptions trace limits of social life, but in different ways that structure their engagements. To the Catholics, their counterpart is something to be appropriated, encompassed, and turned around, while for the Pentecostals it is something to be refused, renounced, and denied. Accordingly, Catholics often attempt to accommodate evangelicals, for instance by not stating invocations over animals before they are butchered or cutting their throats instead of suffocating them. They may also refrain from placing shares of meat or pouring milk and beer on the ground for deceased relatives, especially during large ceremonial occasions that require broad participation. Pentecostals, meanwhile, refuse to eat meat or drink milk if they suspect that these acts were performed, and instead largely engage with the Catholic majority through proselytization and attempts at conversions. One particular Pentecostal pastor can therefore be seen most days, as he is diverted on his way to other activities and held up in animated attempts to convince someone of the wrongs and evils of Catholicism. His steadfast attempts at conversion even include his three brothers, whom he still tries to convert, undeterred by more for than a decade of failure.

Thus, where witchcraft unfolds from dwelling and life, Catholics seek to enfold and turn it around, while the Pentecostals attempt to banish and expel it. However, the efforts of each appear suspect in the eyes of the other, where it resembles rather than differs from that which they oppose. These connections appear less strange when one remembers that all these phenomena concern life and regard modes of being. In the case of witchcraft, they involve the conversions and conveyances of *horu* that afford human, animal, and vegetative being, while for the Catholics and evangelicals they regard the existence of a sinful being and its potential for eternal life. Where the latter differ is with regards to the means and requirements for the salvation of this being. Joel Robbins (2004: 127) points out that Pentecostal Christianity is structured around the notion of transformation, which commonly involves a rupture or break

akin to the refusal to engage in certain activities in Rombo. In fact, one may argue that all of Christianity turns on a concept of transformation, where a transcendent deity assumes a human form, whose death affords eternal life for those who follow him. Moreover, the funeral liturgy of both denominations proclaims that the earthly life of those followers arises from and reverts to ashes and dust, or soil (*udongo*) as it is rendered in Swahili. Transformation is particularly acute in connection with the Eucharist, where the Catholics hold that the priest transubstantiates bread and wine into flesh and blood in front of people's eyes. The Catholics of Rombo are obsessed with the Eucharist, which they consider a necessary component of every act of worship. They therefore lament when a funeral is conducted by lay-clergy, who is not allowed to give the Eucharist, and decry that those who fall foul of the church are punished through the denial of Communion.<sup>14</sup> People are equally concerned with the ability of the priests to create Holy Water (*maji baraka*), which they on occasion bless by the bucketful for people to take home in bottles, where they sprinkle it onto persons, animal, and houses to prevent precisely the harm of witchcraft.

On this basis, one may argue that the two denominations fold out of each other, as they turn on different attempts at dealing with witchcraft. While witchcraft unfolds from dwelling and life, Catholicism and Pentecostalism unfold from each other as two antithetical attempts at reacting and relating to witchcraft. These folding movements and moments corroborate Joel Robbins's (2004: 118) point that Pentecostalism engages local culture in its own terms, which here not only includes conceptions regarding witchcraft, but also encompasses Catholic Christianity, which has been present and active in the area for over a century. They moreover accord with Sasha Newell's (2007) claim that Pentecostalism is encompassed by the witchcraft discourse, even though a large part of its rationale and attraction derives from its endeavor to oppose and reject it. Pentecostalism thus unfolds from witchcraft, yet collapses back into it in its encounter with Catholicism. The result is a set of situational folding movements or transformational moments that draw different limits of a life that itself assumes a transformational form. Indeed, it is the unfolding character of these transformations that allow vernacular conceptions, such as witchcraft, to encompass and include new forms of wealth and Christian denomination, in the manner that has long posed a conundrum for analysts (cf. Geschiere 2013).

## CONCLUSION

The concept of ‘occult economies’ allows for the exploration of how money, materials, and imaginative constructs circulate and facilitate the extension of social relations through space in such a manner that the local is enfolded in the global (Gilbert 2005: 360). Thus, the Comaroffs claim to center on the plight of young men in the rural north of South Africa, but in fact range widely and effortlessly to encompass a multitude of phenomena. Like the media reports of the albino murders that recycle photos of unidentified persons and places to illustrate different incidents, the Comaroffs endeavor to describe a general experience and therefore hardly name or involve specific persons (Moore 1999: 305). By not locating the phenomena in particular events and relationships they are able to distil the economic from social relations, but only at the risk of partaking in neoclassical economics’ own teleology (cf. Gilbert 2005: 359). Indeed, as their analytic has come to circulate along with the phenomena it concerns, the concept itself comes to resemble a commodity that flows beyond its origins of production (cf. Strathern 1985a: 204). It is therefore not only ‘occult imaginaries’ that circulate, but the concept of ‘occult economies’ itself. As it is ever-more widely cited and applied, the concept assumes by its own criteria an occult character.

By contrast, the incident of the severed arm and the tale of the witchcraft snake concern how different parts of a person’s body convert and convey *horu* in different forms that become constitutive of the capacity and well-being of others. They dwell on how anatomical features and bodily substances are *horu* in different forms that may be detached and deployed for the purpose of particular effects. The events and accounts entail that the witch decomposes the victim into its constitutive relations, which he or she engages to divert and avert the victim’s blood and its effect. The witch thus dissolves the victim into the flows of life-force that constitute his or her being, which he or she directs by means of the victim’s body parts. Unlike the occult economies, this concept of witchcraft does not float free but unfolds from particular relationships that constitute a mode of life that assumes a specific form.

The media reports moreover reveal that the albino murders involved body parts that form part of these processes and dynamics. Arms and genitalia featured, for instance, which in Rombo convey and convert the life-force that assumes the forms of blood and semen, or the bride wealth that circulates as foodstuffs and people between homesteads

(Myhre 2014). Instead of commodity-like entities that are bought and sold by those who wish to get ahead in economic pursuits, the albino murders concern and involve attempts to appropriate and administer the life-force of others for the sake of one's own personal being. Its urgency in 2008 was possibly linked to the expansion of secondary schooling, where people were required to provide money and materials, as well as contribute labour to build the schools for which they would later have to pay their children's school fees. As these dictates arrived from national and regional authorities and trickled through the local government, the increasing demands and needs for money were experienced as extractions of life-force that pulled people apart. Wary of assigning causal dynamics, I wish to point out that this idea does not weaken the connection between the albino murders, witchcraft, and the economy, but undermines the concept of occult economies where people use 'magical' means or 'mysterious' techniques for material ends. The concept of *horu* entails that these events and practices are neither magical nor mysterious, but material and practical interventions in dwelling and life that affect the modes of being of those involved. They belong to a world where all that exists is *horu* in some form, and hence is a transformation of something else. In such a world, life itself is vulnerable and prone to transformation, which assumes a form where body-parts are used as forms of life-force, deployed as tools for its conversion, or used to nourish an animal counterpart that can be used to harm others. Like in the epigraph above, these engagements emerge as alternatives embodied in life itself, which affirms its existence as a concern for the transfers and transformations of *horu*. Life and dwelling are thus constant possibilities to be seized in opposition to witchcraft, which gives new sense to people's concern and circumspection when sharing and consuming powerful foodstuffs in situations where they may be bewitched (Myhre 2009: 131).

Witchcraft then not only constitutes the end of dwelling and life, but outlines the limit of an anthropology preoccupied with representation. On this account, the concern of witchcraft is with modes of being and not-being, whose intensities these events and experiences evince and convey (cf. Favret-Saada 2015: 104). Accordingly, its character as an action upon action differs from the idea of representation, where one form of action comments on another (Strathern 1985b: 112). Representation is obviously a concern for a discipline that describes and reproduces social life in other forms, but it does not follow that it holds the same interest and urgency for those with whom we work. Indeed,

shedding our capacity for extending this idea to the notions and practices we encounter may expand our ability to conceptualize and represent life. Losing this limb, as it were, can effectuate its own mode of transformation, as it allows vernacular actions to act on our practices and redirect our representational powers. Such a move would facilitate a conceptual encounter of the kind promised by ‘occult economies’, where an equivalence of terms is provided an opportunity for them to modify each other. It requires, however, that we leave behind the presumption that one is a representation of the other, and instead allow ourselves to be bewitched and our hand severed, so that our perspective can be expanded.

## NOTES

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9. Fieldwork was conducted between April 2000 and September 2001, October 2006 and February 2007, and August and November 2008,

with shorter visits in October–November 1998, April 2002, April 2003, November–December 2011, and October–November 2012. Support from the University of Oxford, Norwegian Research Council, German Academic Exchange Service, Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, Nordic Africa Institute, University of Oslo, and University of Bergen is gratefully acknowledged, as are research permits from the Tanzanian Commission for Science and Technology. I am grateful to Kathleen Jennings and Morten Nielsen for reading earlier versions of this text, as well as input from the volume’s editors.

10. Our conversation took place in Swahili, which the Catholic Church uses for both administrative and liturgical purposes. The terms in parentheses in this and the next paragraph are therefore Swahili terms used by the priest, which are cognates of Chagga terms that they are used interchangeably with in the everyday discourse of villagers.
11. Such initiatives are irregular events that occur on the order of the bishop and the diocese, but are organised by the parish. It commonly involves a special Mass that is announced in church several weeks in advance, along with encouragements for people to bring their witchcraft and healing paraphernalia, which they may leave in boxes at the entrance of the church. After Mass, these items are burnt outside the church, while the participants gather in a circle to say prayers and praise god. One such event that I attended in 2006 attracted several hundred at a parish church, where the participants filled several big cardboard boxes with objects that were burned, while lay-preachers led those present in prayers around the bonfire.
12. Like its Swahili cognate *mkono*, the Chagga word *koko* is used to mean both the hand and the arm, depending on the situation and context. I have consistently translated *koko* as ‘arm’ here, even though the hand also features in most of the activities described.
13. Elsewhere, I describe the use of this spoon for divinatory and ceremonial purposes (Myhre 2006, 2015).
14. More correctly, lay-clergy may assist the ordained priests in handing out Communion wafers during Mass, but are not empowered to effectuate transubstantiation, which underscores the centrality of transformation for Catholic Christianity.

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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

**Knut Christian Myhre** is a researcher in the Museum of Cultural History at the University of Oslo. Myhre has long-term research experience from both rural and urban areas of Tanzania, where he has published on a range of topics that include kinship, witchcraft, ritual, exchange, forms of knowledge, and cross-cultural comparison. Myhre has edited *Cutting and Connecting: 'Afrinesian' Perspectives on Networks, Exchange and Relationality* (Berghahn 2016) and published articles in *Africa*, *American Ethnologist*, *Anthropological Theory*, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, and *Social Analysis*. Myhre has previously worked at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) and the Nordic Africa Institute and been affiliated with the research project *Egalitarianism: Forms, Processes, Comparisons* at the University of Bergen.



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