

Review

Influence, insecurities and evil: The political and economic context of witchcraft-related crime in the Eastern Cape, South Africa

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Accepted 26 March, 2012

This article explores the political and economic context of witchcraft-related crime in South Africa, with specific reference to the Eastern Cape Province. The article examines how political and economic influence, and the factors that determine who has access to such influence, can impact on perceptions of 'spiritual insecurity' in African communities. Often such perceptions and insecurities are expressed in occult terms. The article argues that witchcraft-related crime is a manifestation of such expressions of political and economic insecurities, as it does not occur in a vacuum but can be located in a political and economic context. The arguments raised in the article are based on the author's critical engagement with relevant literature, including his ethnographic study of witchcraft-related crime in the Eastern Cape.

Key words: Witchcraft-related crime, political and economic context, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between witchcraft-related crimes and the political and economic context of South Africa has been one of several challenges to the post-apartheid government at least since the country's transition to a democratic dispensation. Any attempt to make sense of witchcraft-related crimes and their effects on communities in South Africa has to be approached from a perspective that takes the political and economic elements of contemporary South African society into account. As Petrus (2006) has argued, even a theoretical attempt to understand witchcraft-related crimes cannot by-pass the importance of a political and economic context (Petrus, 2006: 149).

In a country battling to come to terms with the political and economic inequalities engendered by the apartheid system, even after more than fifteen years in power, the African National Congress (ANC) led government is still struggling to assuage the insecurities of local communities. As Ashforth (2005) points out, the political and economic insecurities that local communities face

have culminated in a 'spiritual insecurity', something which many communities have attempted to manage or explain through recourse to supernatural powers. Often, these explanations have involved the invocation of witchcraft discourses that manifest themselves in expressions of political and economic concerns.

This article explores the relationship between witchcraft-related crimes and their political and economic context. Notions of influence, both political and economic, as well as the reality of inequality, are related themes that are discussed. The article focuses on these issues with reference to the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa, one of the regions of the country where particularly the rural communities are hard hit by poverty.

The Eastern Cape is also a region where witchcraft-related crimes occur most frequently, especially in the former Transkei, an area located in the far north-eastern part of the Eastern Cape. For the purposes of this article, the author uses Petrus' (2009a; 2011) definition of witchcraft-related crimes, which includes three aspects,

namely; witchcraft accusations and killings, the murdering of people for their body parts to make magical potions (commonly referred to as *muti* [medicine] murder), and the harming of others through witchcraft.

With reference to relevant literature, the author provides a general discussion of the relationship between witchcraft-related crime, power or influence, and politics, as well as the relationship between witchcraft-related crime and economic insecurity. Following this, the author then proceeds to an exploration of these issues within the context of the Eastern Cape.

WITCHCRAFT-RELATED CRIME, INFLUENCE AND POLITICS IN POSTCOLONIAL AFRICA AND SOUTH AFRICA

In postcolonial African states, it is virtually impossible to engage in discourses related to politics without taking cognisance of discourses related to beliefs in witchcraft. This relationship between witchcraft beliefs and politics exists due to the common denominator that links both politics and witchcraft, namely the notion of influence or power.

Geschiere (1997) has argued that 'Nearly everywhere in Africa, discourses on power continue to be marked by these notions [of the occult, sorcery and witchcraft]' (Geschiere, 1997: 7). Postcolonial authors on Africa have stressed the transformative influence of modernity, or, as some writers have indicated, modernities (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993; Moore and Sanders, 2001). They have also stressed how this transformative influence has impacted on African politics, as well as local communities' understandings of politics through reference to the control of occult forces (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993; Geschiere, 1997; Bond and Ciekawy, 2001; Moore and Sanders, 2001; Ashforth, 2005).

In most African states, the struggle to adapt to the changes of modernity has resulted in the creation of more inequalities, as well as the perception of local communities that they are somehow worse off than before modernity. In addition, many postcolonial African governments have also not delivered on their promises, and their failure to ease the suffering of their communities has added to insecurities within these communities.

As a consequence of these factors, a contestation for influence emerges. Some scholars have argued that such a contestation often finds expression in the control of occult forces, where the influence of witchcraft or sorcery plays a central role in tensions between local communities and the state (Moore and Sanders, 2001: 17).

Some postcolonial writers have argued that witchcraft occupies an ambiguous position in discourses on power in some states, as it possesses both a levelling and

accumulative power (Geschiere, 1997; Niehaus, 2001: 9). Geschiere (1997), for example, found this to be the case among the Maka of Cameroon, where

'...alongside such references to witchcraft as a levelling force, which opposes new inequalities and relations of domination, other interpretations emphasize the role of these forces in the accumulation of wealth and power. And it is especially this version of witchcraft as an accumulative force that prevails in more modern forms of politics' (Geschiere, 1997: 5).

Local communities, in this case referring to generalised communities where beliefs in witchcraft are held, thus interpret the concentration of influence in the hands of the elite as an example of their access to occult forces to acquire this influence.

Conversely, it is also common to find those with political and economic influence accusing local communities of using witchcraft to subvert state efforts at modernisation and development (Geschiere, 1997; Bond and Ciekawy, 2001). In this case, witchcraft may be viewed as a weapon of the weak against the strong. Thus, the battle for influence between the elites and the masses is contested in the realm of the occult, where occult powers, such as witchcraft, can be used by either group. This suggests that in the world of politics, occult forces are characterised by a marked ambivalence, not only in a moral context where they can be manipulated for good or evil, but also within a context of influence, where they can be used both by the weak and the strong, often for opposing purposes.

The relationship between politics, influence and witchcraft also impacts on questions concerning the legitimacy of political influence. Often such influence is legitimated through the demonstrated ability of a leader to protect his/her subjects from visible as well as invisible threats.

Political instability and related economic insecurity have become characteristic features of many African states and have resulted in communities speculating about the legitimacy of their political leaders.

In the African context, access to occult powers seems to be a prerequisite for an individual's ability to legitimate political influence. Thus, some African leaders may resort to efforts to demonstrate control over occult forces. For example, in 2005, there was an increase in "ritual" (*muti*) murders in Liberia in the run-up to the country's first post-war elections (Petrus, 2009a: 173).

Also, in Tanzania, in the October 2005 elections, "witchdoctors" were officially employed to provide magical spells to politicians to help them win votes in the elections (Petrus, 2009a: 174). Even in cases of witch hunting, political legitimacy also features, not only for political leaders on the national level, but also for leaders on the

local level. For example, in the former South African homeland of Lebowa, '...diverse actors found it politically convenient to involve themselves in attempts to identify and punish witches in their quest to attain legitimacy' (Niehaus, 1993: 498, 2001: 15).

These examples illustrate that postcolonial African governments recognise the importance of demonstrating their ability to control supernatural forces in order to safeguard their political legitimacy in the eyes of local populations under their jurisdiction.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF WITCHCRAFT-RELATED CRIMES IN SOUTH AFRICA

As the South African example has illustrated, perceptions of politics, influence and their relation to discourses on witchcraft are as relevant in the South African context as they are elsewhere in postcolonial Africa. According to Faure (2003), South Africa continues to be a country marked by striking paradoxes (Faure, 2003: 143). These paradoxes may refer to the many ambiguities and dichotomies that exist as the country's political and economic landscape undergoes significant change (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999: 307).

On the one hand, the country struggles to attain global recognition, both politically and economically, as the government attempts to increase development and modernisation. On the other hand, South Africa also possesses a richly multicultural society, where both Western and "traditional" cultures co-exist.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa guarantees that 'Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion', as well as that 'Persons belonging to a cultural [or] religious...community may not be denied the right,...to enjoy their culture [or] practise their religion...' (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996: 8, 15).

However, despite these freedoms being enshrined in the constitution, their practical implementation often creates complex problems that the government has to contend with. One example is the issue of ritual animal slaughtering, an important aspect of African rituals honouring the ancestors, which has led to conflicts, not only between white and black neighbours in suburban areas, but also between the Department of Health and traditional leaders (Petrus, 2009a: 175). Another example is the continued belief in witchcraft and the subsequent witchcraft-related crimes that occur mostly in African communities.

Some scholars have indicated what the possible negative consequences are of witchcraft-related crimes for South Africa. Faure (2003) has argued that witchcraft-related crimes are counter-productive to South Africa's

modernity and development project as they perpetuate stereotyped perceptions of Africans as barbaric. They also evoke the failure of civilisation and progress and prove that the government is ineffective (Faure, 2003: 144 to 145).

An African academic from the University of Limpopo in South Africa has supported the views of Faure, by arguing that crimes such as *muti* murders constitute an embarrassment to the South African government, especially in the eyes of the rest of the world (Petrus, 2009a: 176). Consequently, the ANC government has attempted to manage the problem of witchcraft-related crimes, mainly through the use of state influence and structures.

In general, it can be argued that the political context of witchcraft-related crimes is based on a contestation for influence between what could be called the macro- and micro-political levels of the South African state.

The macro-political context may involve the governmental structures and departments, as representatives of state influence that are directly involved in attempts to visibly demonstrate their control over occult forces. The micro-political context involves those structures and authorities who hold and exercise influence on the local level, that is traditional authority figures such as chiefs and headmen (Niehaus, 2002). This implies that local African communities could be regarded as mini-states within the broader state context (Donkers and Murray, 1997; Mavhungu, 2003).

The tension between the macro- and micro-political authorities, especially in relation to witchcraft, is one reason why witchcraft-related crimes have become a serious problem in South Africa. In precolonial times, crimes and accusations involving witchcraft were dealt with by tribal chiefs in customary courts which functioned as the primary conflict resolution institutions in communities.

As Mavhungu (2003) has indicated, traditional leaders gained their political legitimacy through their contact with supernatural powers, being the representatives of the ancestors and thus the mediators between the people and the spirits. As such, the tribal councils presided over by the chiefs and their advisors were able '...to regulate witchcraft and the supernatural' (Mavhungu, 2003: 179). Consequently, scholars such as Hund (2004) have argued that due to the instrumental role of the chiefs, in precolonial times witch killings were kept to a minimum.

With the arrival of the colonial authorities, and subsequently with the apartheid and post-apartheid governments, it seems as if the authority of traditional leaders has been greatly diminished, especially concerning matters that are regarded as falling under their jurisdiction. The state has attempted to gain more control over customary affairs, including the issue of witchcraft, through, for example, the creation of the

Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft Violence and Ritual Murders in the (former) Northern Province of South Africa in 1995.

Niehaus (1993) has argued that in the former South African homeland of Lebowa, the increase in witchcraft-related violence can be directly attributed to the diminishing role of the traditional leadership, as a result of villagisation and betterment strategies introduced by the apartheid government, as well as legislation such as the Bantu Authorities Act of 1958.

These severely curtailed the powers of traditional leaders (Niehaus, 2001: 8 to 9). In contemporary South Africa, despite the creation of representative bodies such as the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESA), and the post-apartheid state's efforts to be more inclusive of traditional authorities, there is still a struggle for influence between traditional leaders and the state (Kohnert, 2002: 173).

Within the context of witchcraft-related crimes, Niehaus (2001) described several witch hunts in Green Valley in the former homeland of Lebowa, during 1990 and 1994, in which the contest for political legitimacy between various political actors was foregrounded. According to Niehaus (2001), during this period witchcraft was a contentious political issue that created a 'major dilemma to ANC structures, who have become representatives of the state' (Niehaus, 2001: 181).

The main political actors during the witch hunts were the Setlhare chief, the Comrades¹, the ANC structures in the area and the witch-diviners (*dingaka*). While the chief played an increasingly important role in managing witchcraft accusations, the ANC structures came under increasing pressure concerning their stance on the witchcraft issue.

On the one hand, they had to be obedient to the ANC National Executive Committee that forbade local structures from becoming involved in witch hunts; on the other hand, they needed to take a stance in favour of the communities in order to safeguard their political legitimacy.

Also, the Comrades, who had forcefully acquired legitimacy through their active leadership and participation in eliminating witches from the area in the late 1980s witch hunts, found themselves being marginalised politically, and attempted to use the 1990 to 1994 witch hunts as an opportunity to regain their legitimacy (Petrus, 2009a: 180).

The diviners also played a key role in the identification of witches. Their insistence on the use of "traditional" or customary procedures bolstered their influence, along with that of the chief, in communities (Niehaus, 2001).

This political context in Green Valley illustrated how witchcraft discourses facilitated a contest for influence and legitimacy in both the macro- and micro-political arenas. This struggle provides a major dimension to the political context within which witchcraft-related crimes occur.

While tension does exist between the micro- and macro-political levels, competing discourses of power are also to be found within the micro- and macro-political levels themselves. During the 1980s and 1990s there was an upsurge in *muti* killings in the former homeland of Venda. According to scholars such as Mihalik and Cassim (1992), *muti* killings in Venda escalated as a mechanism to destabilise the state authorities in the former homeland. Traditional leaders who had been appointed by the state were viewed as puppets of the apartheid regime and their authority was not regarded as legitimate by the communities under their jurisdiction. This is echoed by Mavhungu (2003) who stated that:

'...chiefs were often accused of having been dishonest to their people and supporting the illegitimate regime. Chiefs were blamed for not defying the law that prohibited them from presiding over witchcraft cases while they knew that their people were still experiencing witchcraft-related problems' (Mavhungu, 2003: 180).

The contestation for influence in this micro-political context was expressed through the perpetration of *muti* killings, whereby members of local communities attempted to demonstrate their access to occult powers through the use of *muti* (African traditional medicine) made from human body parts. These killings are not necessarily examples of human sacrifice which can be defined as '[T]he ritualised offering of a person, a plant, or an animal as propitiation or in homage to the supernatural' (Moro and Myers, 2010: 459).

Human sacrifice implies that victims are killed in a ritualistic manner within a sacred ritual space, but this is not the case with *muti* killings as they are not perpetrated within a ritualised context (Petrus, 2009a: 139). This is why the term 'ritual murder', often used to refer to this specific form of murder (Mihalik and Cassim, 1992; Ralushai et al., 1996), is misleading and problematic.

However, some people also suspected that the increase in *muti* murders was the result of political leaders ordering the killing of victims to boost their own influence and to intimidate local communities. Within the macro-political level of the state, witchcraft may also be a weapon that can be used by political opponents against each other. During the presidency of the former president of Venda, '...accusations of witchcraft were rife in his cabinet, in which ministers traded accusations against one another' (Mavhungu, 2003: 175 to 176).

Even in the post-apartheid context, political rivals

¹ This was the popular term used to refer to the African youths who used radical and even violent methods to destabilise authority structures that they regarded as illegitimate, or as being in league with the apartheid government.

continue to use witchcraft in struggles for influence. For example, in 2005, in the town of Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape, a local Pan African Congress (PAC) veteran was accused of using witchcraft to commit murder (Petrus, 2009a: 181).

Also, in 2000 in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, the former ANC Member of the Executive Committee for Education in the province refused to enter her office after suspecting that witchcraft had been used against her by her predecessor who had been removed from office (Mavhungu, 2003: 176).

These examples suggest that even within macro-political structures of the state, such as political parties like the PAC and ANC, witchcraft exists as part of the political context in which contests for influence occur.

WITCHCRAFT-RELATED CRIME AND ECONOMIC INSECURITY

One of the most serious challenges facing the post-apartheid South African government is poverty. Economic insecurities and the resultant high levels of poverty have left many communities 'disillusioned in state power' (Petrus, 2006: 146). Before the advent of the ANC regime, it was reasonably easy for African communities to find a scapegoat for their suffering.

The apartheid regime, with its segregation policies, contributed largely to the poverty experienced by communities, especially through the creation of the homelands or "Bantustans" (Niehaus, 1993). As a consequence of these policies, the apartheid government became an illegitimate government that was the enemy of the people.

However, when the ANC came to power post-1994, the government was no longer seen as the enemy. African communities had millenarian expectations that the ANC government would undo all the economic suffering of the people and inaugurate a utopian South Africa free of racial discrimination and poverty (Niehaus, 2001; 2003).

When the reality set in after the ANC came to power, communities became aware that in many ways their situation had not changed for the better and new scapegoats were sought. Consequently, witchcraft became the scapegoat as witches were sought out in communities and killed as causes of misfortune and poverty (Niehaus, 2003). In this way the old witchcraft beliefs were adapted to the new context in order to make sense of new relations of political and economic influence and new inequalities and anxieties.

Witchcraft-related crimes occur as a direct response, in some cases, to economic factors. In South Africa, witchcraft-related crimes tend to occur most frequently in rural communities which are hardest hit by poverty and economic insecurity (Petrus, 2009a).

Often rural communities face problems related to lack of a sustainable income and fail to experience the intended benefits of government initiated rural development schemes. In postcolonial South Africa, poverty and economic insecurity have seemingly become features of the post-apartheid state.

These problems have been exacerbated by corruption, lack of housing, lack of adequate service delivery, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and high crime levels. Within a context of economic uncertainty and the accompanying spiritual insecurity, local communities tend to seek remedies for their precarious situations through recourse to occult powers (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999; Kohnert, 2002: 169).

In terms of Geschiere's (1997) notion of the levelling versus accumulative aspects of occult influence, in economic terms, local African communities may attempt to gain access to occult forces to improve their economic conditions, while those who are already economically better off attempt to accumulate more wealth through occult means.

In this context, it could be argued that *muti* murders may be a manifestation of efforts made by certain people in African communities to alleviate their economic insecurities. It is often believed that *muti* made from human body parts is especially effective in increasing chances of success in economic endeavours. For this reason, particularly in Africa, an 'occult economy' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999) has emerged whereby a "black market" of human body parts provides the necessary ingredients for medicines strong enough to increase economic prosperity.

In the Mpondoland area of the Eastern Cape province, a study by Petrus (2009a) found that people often cited success in business or economic prosperity as not only a motive for *muti* murder, but also a motive for witchcraft in general. For example, in one of the villages surrounding the coastal town of Port St Johns, an elderly man who owned a successful business in his village, recalled how he had been the target of rumours that he had used witchcraft to facilitate the prospering of his business: 'When I started my shops, people said that I am prospering because I had a snake, but I ignored those accusations' (Petrus, 2009a: 184). The same individual also stated that 'In the villages it does not matter what a person does, the suspicion of witchcraft is always there. If you are seen to be progressing then you are suspected of keeping witchcraft familiars, however, if you are not successful, then people will say that you are bewitched' (Petrus, 2009a: 184). This suggests that in rural communities characterised by poverty, people seem to be trapped between progressing or not, as both options could lead to suspicions of witchcraft.

Within a political and economic context, political influence can often be equated with economic influence,

which implies that whoever controls access to economic resources also controls access to political influence. Thus, the more wealth a person can accumulate the more influence such an individual may hold in his/her community.

In African communities, there are often legitimate and illegitimate forms of influence. Traditional leaders, for example, are legitimated in their positions of authority by virtue of their access to reproductive and economic resources in their communities. This serves to support the existing relations of authority and status in the community.

However, when ordinary people attempt to increase their status at the expense of their neighbours then political and economic influence that such individuals may attain is regarded as illegitimate. It is especially when people attempt to gain this unfair advantage through the use of occult means when the illegitimacy of this influence becomes most apparent.

As Minnaar et al. (1992) have indicated, among the Venda of Limpopo Province in South Africa, every person has a fixed or limited amount of good fortune. When an individual attempts to increase his/her fortune, it can only be done at the expense of another. When this happens, suspicions of witchcraft then arise.

The unfair access to economic resources which results in increasing inequality and illegitimate relations of domination is expressed negatively in the discourse of witchcraft. In the postcolonial South African context, where poverty and inequality are realities for many African communities, a tension exists between those who favour the use of occult means to increase their economic prosperity and those who express their disapproval of this practice through the use of witch persecutions and killings.

Those who commit *muti* murders may regard these killings as justifiable as they are meant to serve a positive outcome, namely to increase wealth and prosperity (Petrus, 2011: 5). In some cases, traditional healers are themselves believed to be involved in these murders, as they too may benefit economically either from clients who may pay them to make *muti* made from human parts, or through the selling of *muti* containing human parts for commercial purposes (Petrus, 2009a: 94 to 95; Petrus, 2011: 5). For these reasons, in contemporary South Africa, it is not impossible for traditional healers to also be executed by community mobs if they are suspected of being involved in *muti* murders.

Petrus (2009a) mentions a 2005 case in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, for example, where a traditional healer was killed by a mob after being suspected of killing two people 'for witchcraft purposes' (Petrus, 2009a: 186). The deaths of the two victims were treated as witchcraft by the community because the intention or motive for these killings was evil, based on a selfish desire to increase

one's wealth at the expense of someone else's life.

In addition to their suspected involvement in *muti* murders, there have also been reported cases of some (perhaps bogus or charlatan) healers who have cheated clients out of money by manipulating their fears and insecurities.

Petrus (2009a) refers to another case from KwaZulu-Natal in 2006, where a widow was swindled out of a considerable amount of money by a "fake" traditional healer, who had claimed that the woman was a victim of witchcraft who needed a protection ritual (Petrus, 2009a: 186).

The political and economic context of witchcraft-related crime in the Eastern Cape: A historical perspective

The previous section of this article has provided a general outline of the relationship between political and economic issues and witchcraft-related crime in South Africa. Many of the political and economic dynamics that have been raised are relevant within the context of the Eastern Cape. In the remaining section of the article, the author discusses how witchcraft-related crime in the Eastern Cape can be viewed as a product of specific political and economic factors in the region.

In many ways, the colonial and apartheid history of the Eastern Cape and the response of local African communities to colonial and apartheid oppression reflect the role of witchcraft beliefs as a mechanism for making sense of and controlling seemingly uncontrollable forces (Crais, 2002; Redding, 1996).

According to Redding (1996), the belief in witchcraft was still common in the former Transkei area of the Eastern Cape, and clearly had repercussions during both the colonial and apartheid periods in the region. The historian Crais (2002) has provided a detailed account of how the complexities of state formation during the colonial and apartheid periods impacted on local perceptions of the Xhosa-speaking peoples of the relationship between influence, witchcraft, suffering and misfortune. This perception of the 'politics of evil', specifically the role of witchcraft, contributed to perceptions among the Xhosa-speaking peoples in the Eastern Cape that the oppressive South African state was somehow in league with evil forces that were responsible for their suffering (Redding, 1996; Petrus, 2009a).

Crais (2002) has argued that the rebellions of the Xhosa-speaking peoples against the colonial and, later, the apartheid state were, in many cases, interpreted by the people as a 'holy war' fuelled by millenarian expectations that the survival of the Xhosa-speaking peoples would depend on the eradication of evil from the

land. Thus, the eradication of political and economic evil, as symbolised by the colonial and apartheid state, coincided with the eradication of supernatural evil, as symbolised by witches.

The social and political tensions that gave rise to jealousies, greed and hatred, as well as the consequent widespread violence and killing of people accused of witchcraft, emerged as a result of the social, political and economic changes that occurred in Xhosa-speaking "traditional" communities due to colonialism and apartheid (Petrus, 2010).

Similar to the experiences of many other African groups in South Africa, the Xhosa-speaking peoples of the Eastern Cape found their political and economic systems changed through contact with European societies. The precolonial or traditional political system of the Xhosa-speaking peoples was based on the institution of the chief (*inkosi*), who fulfilled several roles and functions that were crucial to the existence and cohesion of the community under his jurisdiction. He was assisted by a council of advisors and headmen (Campion, 1976; Pauw, 1994; Petrus, 2009a). After the British annexation of the Transkei area in 1894, in 1903 the council system was imposed which was 'not based on the traditional Xhosa systems' (Campion, 1976: 78). As a result of this system, '...Xhosas were not afforded the opportunity of administering their own affairs. Xhosa law and custom had no place in this system' (Campion, 1976: 78).

Approximately fifty years later, in 1951, the South African government passed the Bantu Authorities Act which gave greater responsibility and autonomy to the Xhosa-speaking peoples. The council system was replaced by the Transkeian Territorial Authority in 1956 (Pauw, 1994: 8), and in 1963, under the leadership of Chief Kaizer Matanzima, self-government was granted to the Transkei (Campion, 1976; Liebenberg and Spies, 1993; Pauw, 1994). Since the Xhosa-speaking peoples were organised around tribal lines (Labuschagne, 1976: 17; Pauw, 1994: 5 to 7) throughout the Transkei, each tribe had its own chief with limited powers.

With the implementation of the Witchcraft Suppression Act (No. 3 of 1957), the powers of chiefs to intervene in witchcraft cases were severely curtailed and, as such, witchcraft became an offence that could not be tried in tribal courts by chiefs (Pauw, 1994: 155).

With the emergence of the anti-apartheid resistance movements throughout South Africa, the Transkei chiefs became opponents not only of the South African government but, in some cases, also of each other, which resulted in competition for legitimacy both between and within the micro- and macro-political levels.

According to Carter et al. (1967), violence and hostilities in the rural areas of the Transkei, which in many cases were instigated by the tribal authorities, '...led to hut burning and murder [and] varied from area to

area, depending on circumstances of local rivalries and grievances as well as opposition to official policies' (Carter et al., 1967: 20 to 21; Crais, 2002).

Problems that emerged as a consequence of bribery and corruption among traditional leaders (Hammond-Tooke, 1975: 211; Campion, 1976: 87 to 88) was a major reason for some traditional leaders losing their legitimacy. A further problem was the role conflict caused by the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, whereby traditional leaders who were appointed by the government (Carter et al., 1967: 39, 89; Southall, 1982: 104; De Wet and Whisson, 1997: 324) were caught between loyalty towards their people and loyalty towards the state:

'[T]he chief under the Bantu Authorities system is involved in a role-conflict situation which imposes upon him problems and tensions. On the one hand, as a government employee, he is charged with the implementation of government policy...often strenuously opposed by the conservative peasantry. On the other hand his people expect him to be the upholder of conservative tribal values...It is as if two opposed ideological systems meet in one man – the universalistic, impersonal norms of modern bureaucracy, and the particularistic, highly personalized norms of close-knit kinship, based on the traditional structure' (Hammond-Tooke, 1975: 212, 218; Labuschagne, 1976: 19; Groenewald, 1980: 95).

The same problem was faced by headmen who were restricted to the administration of laws that were unpopular with the people under their jurisdiction. Consequently, '...they tended to come into constant conflict with the villagers...[T]he headman ceased to carry his traditional prestige...' (Carter et al., 1967: 90). Traditional leaders tended to respond differently to these challenges. Some chiefs and headmen gave preference to their people, thereby becoming enemies of the state, while others who upheld state policies were viewed as corrupt sell-outs to the oppressive government. Subsequently, in the Transkei, 'Opposition to unpopular chiefs and headmen, and to unpopular...official policies, resulted in sporadic and violent protests...These protests took the form of...rioting, the burning of huts, and the murder of fellow-Africans considered to be government collaborators' (Carter et al., 1967: 25).

The legitimacy of chiefs and headmen was severely curtailed due to the interference of state authorities since they could no longer be trusted to maintain law and order in their communities:

'The regulations prescribing the duties of chiefs and headmen mean[t] that the main areas of conflict between these officers and their people could be expected...in the enforcement of rules concerning law and good order in

their areas' (Hammond-Tooke, 1975: 217; Labuschagne, 1976: 19). The destabilisation of traditional authority could well have contributed to increased fears that witchcraft was running rampant in communities. For this reason Segar (1989) states that *'...the fact that people have less and less faith in the local political system...has created a context wherein certain "traditional" practices such as ritual [muti] murder have tended to increase'* (Segar, 1989: 113).

Even into the 1980s and up to the present, the rural areas of the Eastern Cape have been plagued by political and economic instability that has contributed to inequality and insecurity. In the former homeland of Ciskei, for example, the Sebe government's repressive style of leadership contributed to the poverty of rural communities, largely as a result of *'...maladministration as well as prestige projects [which] have all had their effects, mostly negative, on development'* (Streek, 1988: 62). In addition, control over access to land has also been a major contributing factor to rural poverty and the lack of rural development.

In this case, traditional leaders have been blamed for not being willing to give up their monopoly over land, which is already a scarce resource:

'...[I]t is questionable whether traditional authorities and the chiefs will be willing to give up one of their foremost and effective powers over rural peoples, the allocation and control of land. The influence of the chiefs over people in the rural areas in terms of the allocation of land, jobs, pensions and other resources is extensive' (Streek, 1988: 65).

This, among other factors, contributed to the Ciskei being described as *'...a land of extreme poverty'* (Black, 1980: 20; Charton, 1980: 228). In the same area, some scholars such as Manona (1980) argued that inter-tribal tensions between the Xhosa and Mfengu of the Ciskei region have in large part been due to historical power struggles, as well as competition for resources:

'...the ethnic struggle in the Ciskei is not merely a struggle for political power...but relates...to competition for scarce resources, especially land' (Manona, 1980: 119).

The political and economic context of the rural Eastern Cape region caused local village inhabitants to become more sensitive to the occurrence of witchcraft-related crimes. Segar (1989), for example, recalled the sentiments expressed by one of her informants who perceived a link between the increase in muti murder and independence in the former Transkei in the 1960s:

'Since 1963...the Whites started not to have power and it

became difficult to report [crimes to the police]. The ones who do get arrested are those who are trying to help themselves to pay taxes by selling jwala [home-made beer]. For the ones who make bebebe [muti murder] they get arrested and are only kept for a month and then released. It is because people who make bebebe are rich and can bribe...people who make jwala are poor.' (Segar, 1989: 114).

In this statement, it is apparent that villagers were aware of both the political and economic motives behind witchcraft-related crimes. Those who regarded themselves as powerless, politically and economically, perceived the politically and economically powerful as perpetrators of witchcraft-related crimes. The corruption of the police was also exposed as a contributing factor to the fears of villagers of becoming victims of witchcraft-related crime:

'Fear is definitely exacerbated by the belief that the police, instead of protecting the public from murderers and punishing them...do not care about the safety of the public and are often in league with the murderers...' (Segar, 1989: 114 to 115).

Also, many villagers insisted that there was an increase in muti murders. From an observer's point of view, Segar (1989) argued that it could well be understood why the villagers could have perceived an increase in muti murder. She provided at least two reasons for this perception:

'...it makes sense to consider that ritual [muti] murders which are supposed to give the perpetrators greater wealth and power, could be on the increase in a community in which there is both a high degree of poverty, and of inefficiency in the police force...[a]s problems like impoverishment and ethnic and political tensions grow, so the scene is set for incidences...of ritual murder' (Segar, 1989: 115).

This political and economic context also encouraged incidences of witchcraft accusations. According to Segar (1989), these accusations were often *'...made in the "traditional" idiom that witchcraft and sorcery are used by local politicians as a means of jockeying for influence. This they do by besmirching the name and reputation of certain of their opponents'* (Segar, 1989: 115). This illustrates the use of witchcraft on the micro-political level where political opponents within a community contest for influence and legitimacy.

The political and economic context of witchcraft-related crime in the Eastern Cape: A contemporary perspective

In the post-apartheid Eastern Cape region, many

communities still suffer from the uncertainties and insecurities created by the apartheid government. Under the apartheid regime, African communities battled to come to terms with political and economic insecurities resulting from increasing interference of the state in their daily lives (De Wet and Whisson, 1997: 322). Post-1994, these insecurities still remain.

According to De Wet and Whisson (1997), '...the position of more than a handful of traditional leaders has still to be clarified at the national level. Until that is done, uncertainties and problems at the local level are likely to remain' (De Wet and Whisson, 1997: 324; Peires, 2000: 113).

The problem of the status of traditional leaders in the Eastern Cape was echoed by a 2006 report in a local Eastern Cape newspaper, the *Daily Dispatch*, where thirty traditional leaders, including twelve amaXhosa princes, were at loggerheads with the former Department of Traditional Affairs for refusing to confirm their appointments (Daily Dispatch, 27 November 2006). The problem was also compounded by a report of two traditional leaders in the region who were embroiled in a power struggle. Both of these leaders were members of traditional leaders' organisations, namely the Eastern Cape House of Traditional Leaders and the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Daily Dispatch, 24 November 2006).

One of the most significant challenges facing the post-apartheid government in the Eastern Cape concerns the tensions between modernity and traditionalism. Much of the rural Eastern Cape is still characterised by conventional "traditional" cultural practices and beliefs, where communities continue to maintain long existing cultural institutions such as those of the traditional healers and tribal authorities. Both of these institutions continue to play a significant role in the everyday lived culture of the inhabitants.

However, these very institutions also find themselves caught in the dynamics and tensions of a modernising South Africa. In few areas is this tension more noticeable than in the relationship between the institutions of traditional healing, tribal authorities and communities on the one hand, and law enforcement on the other, especially within the context of witchcraft-related crime.

Petrus (2009a; 2009b) has explored the challenges facing post-apartheid law enforcement structures, such as the South African Police Service (SAPS), in dealing with witchcraft-related crimes. He notes that since the 2000s there have been various reported cases of witchcraft-related crimes in the province, some of which have even received national media attention, such as the *muti* murder case in Mbizana in 2008 (Petrus, 2009a: 105 to 111, 2009b: 21).

One of the important challenges for law enforcement involves developing better co-operation between

themselves and traditional institutions. The police, using modern investigation techniques and definitions of evidence, are often ill-equipped to deal with witchcraft cases that push the boundaries of their Western rationalist methods and techniques.

Consequently, the police experience a lack of co-operation from communities and even traditional authorities due to the perception that they disrespect the cultural beliefs of rural communities. This is exacerbated by the tendency for the police to treat witchcraft-related crimes as any other type of crime (Petrus, 2009b: 25). An added problem that results from this, is that the police in rural areas such as those of the Eastern Cape, are not reliable, if any, statistical information regarding the frequency of witchcraft-related cases (Petrus, 2009a: 222 to 223, 2009b: 25).

The tensions between the police and communities are further exacerbated by the perception of the police as agents of the state who have little regard for what Petrus (2009a: 209) refers to as 'alternative forms of policing', 'community policing' or 'local justice enforcers'. As state law enforcement officials, the police are obliged to act in accordance with state legislation regarding designated crimes and how to deal with them. In terms of witchcraft legislation, such as the Witchcraft Suppression Act (No. 3 of 1957), the police can only act against those who accuse others of witchcraft, or who violently act against those accused of witchcraft. This often puts the police in a confrontational position with local communities who have their own ways of dispensing justice to those whom they perceive as perpetrators.

Petrus (2009a: 209 to 211) alludes to this in his description and analysis of a mob violence incident in Nelson Mandela Bay in the Eastern Cape in 2008. In this case, a man who was believed to have raped and disembowelled his female 14-year-old cousin, was stoned and then set alight by a group of vigilante community residents. The suspect had apparently confessed to his aunt that he killed the girl for her body parts on instruction from his traditional healer. The parts were to be used in the making of a get-rich-quick magical potion (Petrus, 2009a: 210).

Community members supported and justified the killing of the suspect by criticising the manner in which the police dealt with such cases. For example, one statement suggested that '[Vigilantism] goes a long way to teaching criminals that people have other means to deal with them if police are lazy to arrest them...If the government does not agree with us, then we need visible changes in the justice system...' (Petrus, 2009a: 210).

These 'visible changes' would then include accommodating cultural beliefs, such as those pertaining to witchcraft, in legislation and the justice system. This example shows the tensions that may occur between communities and the police, and the resulting distrust that

communities have for the police, and, by implication, the justice system and the state.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to illustrate that witchcraft-related crimes do not occur in a vacuum but could be located within a political and economic context. A general outline of the political and economic context of witchcraft-related crimes was sketched, illustrating how political and economic factors related to influence and inequality have shaped the context of witchcraft-related crimes not only in South Africa, but also in other African states.

Based upon the general interpretations of the role of influence and inequality, the article provided an exploration of the political and economic context of witchcraft-related crimes in the Eastern Cape region. It was shown how the inequalities of influence and wealth engendered by the apartheid system may have contributed to the same inequalities in contemporary post-apartheid African communities in the Eastern Cape.

Despite the transition to a black majority government, many of the apartheid era inequalities have not disappeared. These inequalities, combined with high unemployment and crime rates, have exacerbated anxieties, insecurities and general perceptions of powerlessness in communities. This context provides a fertile breeding ground for witchcraft-related crimes as people turn to the occult in an effort to control these seemingly uncontrollable forces.

In other words, the current political and economic context in South Africa in general, and in the Eastern Cape in particular, implicates both the micro- and macro-political structures of influence, and it is this context that is encouraging witchcraft-related crimes to continue.

Since the belief in witchcraft is a cultural issue, and since the South African Constitution protects the cultural rights of groups, the phenomenon of witchcraft-related crime remains a complex issue which may require complex solutions. One way of attempting to deal with the issue may be, as Petrus suggests, to encourage anthropologists, policy makers, law enforcement and community stakeholders to engage and co-operate in developing holistic strategies to address the issue (Petrus, 2009b, 2010).

It is necessary to point out that attempts to eradicate witchcraft beliefs will fail, as has been shown in the fruitless efforts of the colonial authorities and apartheid government to ethnocentrically eliminate witchcraft beliefs through Western centric strategies and legislation.

Witchcraft beliefs have endured colonial and apartheid regimes, and are a part of African traditional cultures and should be acknowledged as such. Thus, any viable strategy to combat witchcraft-related violence would need

to take African cultural beliefs into account.

In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the problem of poverty and inequality needs to be urgently addressed since, as this article has shown, there is a link between witchcraft violence and the socio-economic context of the communities in which such violence occurs.

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