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Review

Possibilities for Cultivating African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSs): Lessons from Selected Cases of Witchcraft in Zimbabwe

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The speculation about the practice of witchcraft has been commonplace in many societies the world over since time immemorial. The complexity of establishing the existence of witchcraft is predicated by hegemonic Western scientism's preoccupation with empiricism and evidence (through laboratory experiments) that render indigenous African beliefs and value systems inexplicable through the standards of expert science. This is further compounded by colonially-derived African legal systems in Africa that for centuries outlawed witchcraft and relegated as speculation the existence of the practice. However, in recent years in Zimbabwe, anecdotal evidence (for example, witchcraft confessions and witches apprehended bewitching others) pointing to existence of the practice seemed to have put to rest the controversy over the existence of witchcraft. I draw on this evidence, with a view to recast witchcraft debate not necessarily in terms of deliberating its existence, but rather exploring possibilities for reexamining and reengaging witchcraft as a form of an indigenous knowledge system for public good. It is this area that this work quests to contribute- particularly exposing in this twilight zone the different angles from which the practice could be harnessed to foster "ethno-science" and advance knowledge in general.

Key words: Possibilities, witchcraft, indigenous knowledge systems, lessons, Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

The debate on witchcraft has taken central stage in academic circles, and academics and researchers have tussled with various aspects of this subject. Some academics have attempted to resolve the conflict about the very existence of witchcraft and its motivations (Brantley 1979, Chavunduka 1980, Geschiere 1998, Ikuoebe 2000, Niehaus 2003). Related works have examined existence of witchcraft and investigated how cases of witchcraft have been handled in some African countries by traditional courts and formal courts (Chavunduka 1980, Druker-Brown 1993, Diwan 2004). Other sociological studies have regarded accusations of witchcraft as outcomes of contradictions between forces of modernity and local traditional values, the difficulties of managing people's occupation of multiple hierarchies of power, or as perversions of power (Westerfelhaus and Ciekawy 1998, Niehaus 2002). Despite the voluminous work on the subject, witchcraft remains shrouded in mystery partly due to Western science's preoccupation with empiricism and emphasis on logical proof that render the practice as speculation and the debate on it inconclusive. My work does not seek to engage with the debate on the existence of witchcraft as this has been extensively done with little success. Rather, I first seek to argue that Western science and laws against witchcraft have shattered the hope of accruing any possible benefit from the practice and its 'practitioners'. Second, I seek to argue that to the extent that witchcraft has been exploited to serve the egoistic, selfish agendas of the witches and wizards, this practice constitutes an 'abused' and 'lost' African ethno-science /technology (body of ethno-scientific knowledge). I define an ethno-science as embodiment of indigenously developed practices, values and methods whose existence and functioning have not

been adequately explicated through the practices and values of Western/expert science (experimentation, verification and predictability). Using selected cases of witchcraft drawn from Zimbabwe's print media and academic literature, I examine how this 'lost' and oftenly abused ethno-scientific knowledge can be drawn upon as an indigenous knowledge system, (and be considered as a distinct, separate form of knowledge), to shift the human development trajectory of Africa and beyond.

That said, my work can not necessarily be conceived as citizen science, but rather seeks to contribute to the witchcraft debate by arguing that witchcraft constitutes an indigenous knowledge system that could contribute easing the tapestry of African's human development. That is to say, witchcraft embodies a hidden genre of epistemology or different form of knowledge that could contribute in multiple ways to resolving Africa's development dilemmas, if it is cast in the open for debate, and 'tamed' for public good. I argue that the exploration of witchcraft is a potentially productive indigenous knowledge system that for long has been conceived as diabolic by Western civilisation and whose developmental essence remains shrouded in mystery.

Witchcraft as a metaphysical belief

The heated debate on what constitutes witchcraft has been futile because it has been riddled by confusion activated by dearth of precision in definition of terminology and the context driven nature of witchcraft. This complexity of developing a precise definition is implied in Bowie who philosophizes witchcraft through the lenses of taxonomy than a concise definition: She provides the following classification of witchcraft:

> *Malefice:* medieval European practice of cursing or healing, and the manipulation of people or objects.
> *Adversaries of Christianity and agents of Satan"*
> *African witchcraft:* associated with the ethnographic works of the Anthropologist Evans-Pritchard (1937) on witchcraft and magic among the Azande.
> *The rise of modern era metaphysical beliefs in western culture which has seen the rise in neo-pagan witchcraft including Wicca (Bowie 2006: 201).*

While this classification is illuminating in terms of identifying the contextual origin and the different forms that witchcraft often takes, it is less informative with regards what witchcraft is. Further, although the classification provides some insights into medicinal or pernicious properties of witchcraft, its connections to the metaphysical realm particularly God and Satan (celestial beings that operate in cosmology that are immune to scientific verification about their very existence) and its consummate associations with the dark world or underworld, it leaves us perturbed by what the practice of witchcraft is, and what are the finite aspects of its anatomy.

In Africa, and in particular Zimbabwe, the conceptions of witchcraft have been unyielding and disturbing. Zimbabwe's Witchcraft Suppression Act (WSA) (Chapter 73) defines witchcraft as the "throwing of bones, the use of charms and other means or devices adopted in the practice of sorcery." This broad definition leaves a lot to be desired as it conflates witchcraft with sorcery, and throwing of bones is not necessarily done to identify or drive out witches, as many judiciary officials and lawyers now realise. Rather, the throwing of bones is "a means of divination, that is to say, a means by which a diviner or medical practitioner determines, or attempts to determine who or what caused an illness, death or other misfortune complained of by an individual or a group" (Tredgold 1943: 194). Thus Zimbabwean definition for witchcraft is too conflated and therefore philosophically implausible.

A common notion underlying witchcraft is the belief that witchcraft is essentially a secretive pursuit, seen in a very negative light by most community members since supernatural forces may be used as a means to achieve personal goals which include harm, profit and fertility. In other words, "witchcraft beliefs embrace a wide range of ideas, practices, and motivations, but in their various forms they usually share the idea that the power to inflict injury and benefit could be exercised through unobservable, supernatural means"(Mutungi 1977: xviii). As such, beliefs in witchcraft are often used to explain fortunes and misfortunes, good and evil, and life and death. This understanding of witchcraft also explains why its practitioners are highly unlikely to co-operate [if the witchcraft debate is not cast in the open for debate and national governments don't intervene to 'tame' the practice] with the 'witch taming' goal that this paper advocates.

I shall define witchcraft as a practice that involves the secretive use of potentially harmful medicines, charms, magic and any other supernatural means or devices to cause some positive effects (such as wealth accumulation, social power) or negative consequences (such as psychological or physical harm, illness, misfortune or death of other people, animals or property. I ascribe to the view that the difference between positive witchcraft (witchdoctors, or traditional healers) and negative witchcraft (witchcraft, sorcery) is semantic and academic. I argue that negative and positive witchcraft are different in the most unimportant respects. Both apply supernatural powers, involve the use of charm or magic, are connected to the cosmological world and most importantly can be employed to do both good and harm depending on the motivation of the individual involved (healers or witch).

This definition suggests that witchcraft has potentially

good and bad 'sides' depending on what it is used for. Witches (those involved in the practice of witchcraft) are thought to possess extraordinary powers that enable them to perform ritual practices and acts beyond the capabilities of ordinary human beings. They are deemed capable of traveling great distances at night using winnowing baskets or of having the ability to turn themselves into hyenas, or of going out in spirit and killing a victim while their bodies remain at home in bed (Middleton and Winter 1963). My view is that these negative connotations about the practice instill fear into humanity and foreclose possibilities for unpacking the productive potential of the practice. As such, one is left wondering what epistemological, medicinal and social benefits witchcraft practice could accrue to society.

Perplexity about the causes of witchcraft

In Zimbabwe and by extension Africa, every evil and misfortune that is rationally inexplicable is attributed to witchcraft. Seidman (cited in Parrinder 1958) observes that in Africa as in Europe witchcraft superstition seemingly flourishes in times of social instability. This explains why many sociological accounts attribute witchcraft to contestations over scarce resources, including configurations of power. Mutungi (1977) observes that in the so-called civilized communities, inexplicable eventualities and misfortunes are attributed to fate, bad luck, or the will of God. However, this is not to say Western societies are insulated from witchcraft and witchcraft accusations as this study will demonstrate using the statistics below. The native African seeks his explanation for misfortunes and mishaps in witchcraft. Widner (2000) however noted that, in both Western and African communities the struggle is the same- a search for causal explanation for misfortunes, deaths and sicknesses. Historical records show that "in the period from about 1450 to 1750, around 40,000 to 60,000 individuals were tried as witches and condemned to death in central Europe" (Gale Encyclopedia 2003: 1). According to the same source, estimates of the number of witches put to death in England are about 400. In 1998, mobs in Indonesia attacked and killed 153 people who were accused of practicing sorcery. And in an eight-year-period, from 1990 to 1998, more than 2000 cases of witchcraft-related violence including 577 murders were recorded in the northern corner of South Africa (ibid). Besides, in America the Salem Witchcraft trials from June through September of 1692 had nineteen men and women, all having been convicted of witchcraft and carted to Gallows Hill, a barren slope near Salem village, for hanging (Linder 2009).

Zimbabwe and selected cases of witchcraft

Traditional courts of Zimbabwe accept the view that witches exist. Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (ZINATHA), "religion scholars and anthropologists estimate that 75 percent of sub-Saharan people believe in the power of witchcraft to some degree, although they acknowledge precise numbers are unavailable" (Freep.com news 2002). In Zimbabwe like elsewhere in Africa, a qualitative difference between witchcraft and sorcery is normally drawn. While witchcraft is seen as something intrinsic to the person, to his soul or his personality, sorcery is extrinsic to these entities, being merely a technique or a tool employed by an individual under certain circumstances. Drawing on this understanding, Chavunduka (1980: 134) notes that "recourse to sorcery is always on a deliberate, conscious, voluntary basis"**.** This means a sorcerer may will-nilly cause illness or kill his fellows by 'blowing' medicine towards them; by putting poison in his/her victim's food, drink or tobacco or by concealing the poison or the poisonous objects on a path where the victim will pass. A researcher on witchcraft in Zimbabwe, Aquina (1968) gives a good example of sorcery when he observed "in Zimbabwe, the use of *chitsinga* is prevalent". For Aquina (1968), *chitsinga* is concealed poisonous objects that are put on the path (by sorcerers) and these have important social consequences for the targeted victim. Although many traditional courts as well as family gatherings still try certain cases of witchcraft, according to the law of Zimbabwe, such cases must be referred to the formal courts. Cases of witchcraft now come under the WSA (Chapter. 73), originally passed in 1899, and amended in 2006. The amendment is still in favor of witches as the practice of witchcraft remains a fuzzy subject. The 2006 amendment was effected after a series of incidences of witches caught in the practice of witchcraft and confessed that they were witches. Cases in point are:

1). The witchcraft case of a 21 year old Murehwa woman who claimed "she flew naked in a winnowing basket" from Murehwa, some 120km east of Harare on a mission to kill her brother-in-law in Highfield (where she was found loitering the following morning) through witchcraft and ended in the Harare Magistrate court. According to AFRIK-News report,

The accused was seen naked by passers-by outside the house wearing a red headgear and some black strings around her waist. She claimed she had "flown" in a winnowing basket from Murehwa, some 120km east of Harare, with her father-in-law and an aunt. Their winnowing basket aircraft taxied off from a graveyard in Zihute village under Chief Mangwende- their mission to kill her brother-in-law.Once at the house in Highfield, she

claims she balked when asked to kill her brother-in-law. Her father-in-law ….and the aunt … then took off and abandoned her (AFRIK-News Report 29/05/2009).

2). In 2009 Studio 7 News (7/14/2009) reported that a couple of women in nude were found loitering around Mbare and Highfield areas claiming to have been left behind by their companions back to their nearby village. Recounting the same story, Mallard (2010) reports that:

A couple of women were discovered in nude in the early hours of the morning near Highfiled suburbs. When confronted by locals, the women claimed they had "flown" from a rural location during a night escapade. Unfortunately, [on the part of the women] something went wrong and the [winnowing basket] spell wore off before they could return to their original location.

3). In another incident, a man was caught at Mbare bus terminal, Harare with a live cobra [snake] in his luggage. When interrogated, the man confessed he was a wizard. He further told police that the reptile was one of his witching tools (see Mallard 2010).

4). The other recent case is that of a Bulawayo man allegedly developed a female genital organ on the right side of his face stretching up to the chest in what is suspected to be a case of witchcraft (NewZimbabwe.com 2010).

In the face of all these incidences, the WSA is therefore regarded by the traditional courts as illogical piece of legislation divorced from reality. Its aim is deemed to be exoneration of witches and punishing those individuals who name others as witches.

Barriers to unraveling witchcraft

The fallacy of science

The fallacy of science is its inability to provide scientific explanations to issues of a metaphysical nature and to present alternative convincing explanations outside the canonical frameworks of scientific inquiry (Mawere 2010). While science seeks to offer powerful, convincing explanations about diverse issues of nature notwithstanding its limitations, some civil unrest in Western world contexts have been instigated by the same scientific studies that have proven to be faulty, or inconclusive, and the public has instigated independent inquiries to invalidate scientific findings of experts. Durant (2008) cites Beck (1992) who suggests that the "scientisation" of protest against science means that even to dispute the scientific position of an opponent one usually relies upon science to make a persuasive challenge. This has been the dilemma of science when confronted with issues of metaphysical nature like witchcraft where recourse to scientific laws and methods has proven to offer limited results.

The dominance of science and perceptions about its opaqueness to the public have "led to a focus on 'back-end' consequences such as risk, in effect protecting the broader trajectory of scientific and technological development from accountability" (Davies et al 2009: 340). This raises critical questions about whether different forms of knowledge can not be developed outside the terms and parameters defined by science. What is lost in the process of moving from conventional scientific inquiry towards the unorthodox processes of searching for other forms of knowing like examining witchcraft? These questions can not be adequately addressed without challenging the monopoly of science as the predominant way of accessing, communicating and transmitting knowledge. The rise in 'citizen science'-participatory processes of public understanding and even challenging of science research is the direct consequence of public frustration with the limitations of science, hence the justification for the present research.

Colonially-derived African legal systems

Debate on witchcraft has been highly contentious because of its complex political, legal, cultural and social ramifications. From a political-historical perspective, the Rhodesian regime perplexed by failure to establish and provide proof about witchcraft existence in legal battles outlawed it for legal and administrative convenience. Unsurprisingly, the post Independent Zimbabwe government haunted by the same dilemma retained the colonial Witchcraft Suppression Act (Ch. 73) and formal courts of law were under obligation not to recognize witchcraft unless the plaintiff provided substantial evidence linking the defendant to the practice.

More so, some [Africans] social scientists have perpetuated the skepticism [about witchcraft] and colonially-derived African legislation by arguing for the non-existence of witchcraft. They assert that witchcraft beliefs are based on a mistaken view of the world; that witches do not exist except in the minds of certain people. Winter (1963: 280), who is an authority on witchcraft in Africa comments "there is no reason to think that anyone does in fact practice witchcraft or even that anyone could practice it". Similarly, Lewis (1976: 68) declares, "I certainly do not believe in witchcraft". Ncube, a Zimbabwean Constitutional Law scholar commenting on witchcraft avers: "I have never seen a *tokoloshi* or have a *tokoloshi* attack me, but I have heard all the stories like everyone. I don't believe or disbelieve. It's difficult for outsiders to understand, but African daily life relies heavily on the spirit world for good or evil" (freep.com news 2002). In contrast, traditional courts of law believed in the existence of witchcraft as evidenced by the conduct of *bembera*, (*Bembera* is a Zimbabwean traditional court settlement where the traditional leader (chief, headman, or kraal head) mediates a witch naming process through the intervention of a svikiro (spirit medium) or a n'anga (traditional healer). The traditional

leader and his subjects (including the accused and the accuser) consult the spirit medium or traditional leader who then invokes a spirit that advises him on who the witch is in a bid to settle the case.) when one is accused of being a witch or wizard. Significantly, increasing incidences of witches caught in the practice of witchcraft in Zimbabwe have challenged the views of government and witchcraft denialists alike.

Although the 2006 amendment of the Witchcraft Suppression Act (WSA) of 1899 now concedes that a witch can be convicted if there is substantial evidence by the complaint or if the defendant is charged for defamation, it is apparent that the government still holds ambivalent views/ or is skeptical about the existence of witchcraft. This is because those who caught nude loitering in grave yards and confessed to be witches have been tried but discharged for lack of sufficient evidence. In many cases the confessors have been considered to be mentally unstable or insane. The point is, to evade judgment and condemnation, people who testify to being withes (under the influence of the spirit), may always deny the allegations in court for fear of punishment or jail sentence. In light of the above, formal courts of Zimbabwe thus still conceive their job as eradicating the belief in witchcraft which some people hold. For them, "the witch does not exist, and any person who purports to locate him and render him harmless is the real public enemy" (Chavunduka 1980: 130).

In other African countries like Cameroon and Tanzania, anyone convicted of witchcraft is liable for punishment. According to Tanzania's Witchcraft Ordinance, anyone who is caught practicing witchcraft, or who possesses witchcraft materials, can be charged with an offence (Amended Witchcraft Ordinance-Tanzania 1956). Under Section 251 of the Cameroon Penal Code, whoever commits any act of witchcraft, magic or divination liable to disturb public order or tranquility, or to harm another in his person, property or substance, whether by taking a reward or otherwise, shall be punished with imprisonment for from two to ten years, and with a fine of five thousand to one hundred thousand francs (Fisiy 1990). Sentence on witches in different countries takes various forms ranging from ostracism, to beating and even killings. For example, in Cameroon "judges in southeastern Cameroon have meted out harsh sentences on accused witches who confess to practicing witchcraft" (Ibid). In Tanzania approximately four hundred alleged witches were killed between 1997 and 2000 in the western part of the country, mainly among the Sukuma ethnic group (Amnesty International-Tanzania 2000). The heft sentences imposed on witches send messages of institutional intolerance for the practice that severely undercuts the possibilities for interrogating any virtue derived from it. More so, the issue of extra-legal killing [in Tanzania and other countries like Zimbabwe and South Africa] of people (usually old women or old men) suspected of being witches might also lead one to argue that the real enemies of witchcraft are not only from the western scientists or the national governments, but also their fellow villagers.

I argue that the institution of such legal enforcement is a living testimony not only to the belief in witchcraft, but to its possible existence. I identify with Ikuenobe (2000) who suggests that internalist basis of Africans' belief in witchcraft is given credence by the commonplace view that there are social, contextual, and pragmatic components of epistemic rationality and justification. What counts as knowledge is given coherence and logicality by contextual influences such as tradition that shape the value systems and access to what can be conceived as knowledge in particular societies. As such, what is prized as indigenous knowledge is often handed down in form of beliefs, value systems and forms of knowing and interpretation of events, and witchcraft is one such embodiment of these beliefs. Witchcraft is one form of neglected wisdom that could be useful unpacking and inferring from as the operation of the indigenous knowledge systems embodied within other humans (witches). The proposition of this paper is not to examine witchcraft scientifically, but rather to argue that witchcraft is a metaphysical issue that should be understood and interpreted from a metaphysical viewpoint as indigenous knowledge system with development potential.

Conflation of witchcraft with n'anga (traditional healer)

It is difficult to develop a fine line of demarcation between a witch and a traditional healer and hence the conflation of these two practices. The complexity of this distinction is premised on the striking similarity between the rituals and practices of these two. The apparent similarities, between these two practices are:

Both practices depend on charm with medicinal properties.

Both perform rituals that invoke the spirits of the dead. For *un'anga* (the practice of a traditional healer), the traditional healer is connected to the universe through the spirit of the dead (either an ancestor or a foreign spirit) that speaks through him or her. For *uroyi* (the practice of witchcraft), the witch is normally possessed by a spirit that is either inherited from a dead ancestor or elderly living relative or enemy.

The practices can be conceived as hereditary. Just as a traditional leader can be possessed by their ancestral spirit, so does a witch- who can inherit the charm and spirit of witchcraft from a relative.

Both can be marshaled to cause grievous harm, misfortune and even death to a victim.

Both practices are dreaded by people (weak and strong, educated and uneducated) and are attributed to fairly older, wicked people.

The consequences of witchcraft are conceived to be catastrophic-severe sickness, bad luck, miscarriages, hemorrhage, and death. The fear of these practices makes them the least talked by communities, paradoxically making them possible green fields for intellectual inquiry. Igwe (2004) cites Mbuy (1992) who suggests that because witchcraft is dreaded in Bamenda, Cameroon, possession of it is a prerequisite for traditional office bearers. In Igwe's (2004:72) words: "witchcraft is believed to invest rulers with mystical powers, deeper insights and extraordinary wisdom". If this belief is true, there are strong epistemological grounds to unveil this practice to illuminate understanding of this possible form of untapped knowledge. That said, I contend that *uroyi* and *un'nanga* are different in the most unimportant respects. For example, it is generally believed that a traditional healer appropriates herbs and charm with medicinal properties to heal and not to harm, while the aesthetic and spiritual works of a witch are usually devious, manipulative (cause misfortune and ostracism) and meant to harm or kill. Yet, there is an increasing outcry that even traditional healers become traditional 'killers' who are hired by aggrieved parties to instigate commotion and despondency in the .perpetrator's life to avenge the crimes committed by the perpetrator. As such, the complexity of this distinction rests on the fact that both can be marshaled as conflict resolution mechanisms. I have already heeded to the use of *bembera* in Zimbabwe where the witch doctor's role in conflict resolution is monumental. Similarly, witchcraft accusation can be adopted as social resources for defeating rivalries in conflict. Westerfelhaus and Ciekawy's (1998) study documents how young Mijikenda men surrendered to the corridors of witchcraft as cultural and material resources for resolving the hierarchical conflicts that emerged between modern, capitalist Kenyan society they operated and that of their elders (the local, pre-colonial Mijikenda culture). As such, they managed to dilute the social power of their elders. I transcend Westerfelhaus and Ciekawy's views by arguing that instead of manipulating witchcraft for sweepstakes; the practice could shape meaningful dialogue and critical engagement between humans of all ages in ways that render universal good- public knowledge, preservation of traditional knowledge and its medicinal qualities. To substantiate this position, the next section discusses possible benefits that can be accrued from witchcraft if the practice is reexamined, 'tamed' and recognized as a form of knowledge.

Tapping from the 'lost' and 'abused' indigenous knowledge systems

I have pointed out in the preceding paragraphs that many Zimbabweans and Africans at large acknowledge the existence of witchcraft "ethno-science". In fact, by acknowledging that there is the physical world and the spiritual world one is acknowledging the possibilities of beings in the metaphysical world whose metaphysical powers might harm or bring fortunes. Unfortunately, none of the believers in witchcraft have conquered their fears enough to negotiate with the witches to adopt their ethno-science for public good. In Zimbabwe and by extension Africa, witchcraft ethno-science remains a hidden secret and none has strived to tap from its productive potential. As such, it remains an 'abused' and 'lost' science whose essence regrettably, has been 'unexploited' for common good.

In light of the evidence given on witchcraft, I argue that government should recognise the practice and find possible mechanisms of engaging with the witches in order to understand their indigenously developed "scientific knowledge" or "ethno-science." I have stressed the semantic difference between witches and traditional healers, yet traditional healers' work is legalised and witchcraft is illegal. Given that witchcraft can be appropriated for both good (wealth acquisition, generate bumper harvests) and bad, I contend that the negative application of witchcraft (abuse) is a culmination of constrains in conceptualization on the appropriate, effective use of magical powers embodied in indigenous knowledge. As such, if witchcraft is recognised by the state and its positive benefits underscored while its catastrophic effects are abolished, its positive permutations can be affirmed.

I argue that Western scientific knowledge is a holy grail across the world because it has been acquired, distilled and documented in ways that are readily usable (readable, allowing for sustainable use by the posterity), transmittable and patented. On the contrary, the reason why witchcraft as an 'ethno-science' has not been a productive indigenous knowledge is because it has been shrouded in mystery, not transparently transferable and has been given strong pejorative connotations. I argue that if indigenous knowledge systems are to be developed, then local beliefs and value systems about the functioning of the cosmology like witchcraft should be given credence in this quest.

Commenting on the South African government's adoption of an Indigenous Knowledge Systems Policy in South Africa, Green (2008) emphasises that the motivation for such an extensive commitment to the idea of indigenous knowledge from government is underpinned by the desire to restore dignity to African knowledge; to de-racialise the ways in which African knowledge has been collected, archived, and used, and in relation to international debates around indigenous knowledge and its legal protection. I infer that the need to restore dignity in African knowledge and de-racialise indigenous African indigenous knowledge production is premised on the realisation that much of the knowledge production processes about Africa, and for Africa have be externally executed, with many possibilities for

misrepresentation, misinformation about Africa by foreign writers. All this constitutes underutilisation and misappropriation of African knowledge systems and witchcraft is one such practice from which rich indigenous knowledge can be documented by Africans for Africans. Witchcraft constitutes vast, untapped knowledge or ethno-science whose productive potential remains unsubstantiated and underestimated owing to its opaque form and mystery. If witchcraft is captured and appropriated (I call this 'witch taming'), this 'abused', and 'lost' indigenous knowledge could be used in manifold ways to support Zimbabwe's human development agenda. These ways include, among others, the following:

Witchcraft an ethno-science to support health information database

As Adam (2010) cogently observes, vital information on health, child rearing, natural resource management is often encoded in unique forms such as proverbs, myths, rituals, and ceremonies but often shunned for modern scientific techniques and thoughts. Witchcraft is one such indigenous knowledge base that health professionals, traditional healers and policy planners can draw on, integrate it with other scientifically generated information to enrich or to indigenously manufacture curative medicine, herbs and healing practices. Herbs from witchcraft practices can be purified and patented as medicines and integrated in mainstream health education programmes that benefit the nation. Alternatively, Witchcraft as an indigenous knowledge system can become an alternative form of knowledge system that complements the mainstream scientific knowledge systems. Given the contested nature of scientific discoveries, the term 'citizen science' (Irwin and Wynne 1996) has been coined to describe independent investigations that the public conduct to understand contentious issues on science or issues science has failed to provide convincing explanations to the public. The examination of the medicinal properties of witchcraft could be a launch pad for effecting 'citizen science' aimed at liberating Africans from over-dependence on modern science for production of expensive drugs. A useful health information database can be developed from witchcraft confessions that target extraction of health information, transmission and preservation. Given the perspectives and claims raised by indigenous people's groups whose emphasis is usually on the autonomy of local tradition of knowledge and ways of life from modernizing states and development paths (Leach and Fairhead 2002: 301), substantial gains can be acquired from developing witchcraft as a form of alternative indigenous knowledge system given that witchcraft is recognized as an indigenous practice.

Witchcraft for indigenous 'biotechnology' inventions?

The beliefs in witchcraft are often strongly tied to the struggle over resources, relations of production and configurations of power. Rich people (particularly successful farmers) who dwell among impoverished communities are often accused of bewitching others and of having a form of witchcraft called '*divisi*.' (*Divisi* is a charm that helps witches and wizards to acquire wealth particularly bumper harvest and big herds of cattle yearly.) As such, Geschiere (1998) cites Comaroff and Comaroff (1993: xxix) who suggest there is a close nexus between forces of modernity and witchcraft: "Witches…embody all the contradictions of the experience of modernity itself, of its inescapable enticements, its self-consuming passions, its discriminatory tactics, its devastating social costs".

While this observation evokes the view of the dilemmas that arise from structural tensions between forces of globalisation that reinforce a consumerist culture on the one hand, and traditional societies with limited access to goods of ostentation on the other, I seek to extend this structural analysis. Given the fact that some successful farmers, upon interrogation concede to the use of *divisi,* there are grounds to argue that instead of denialism about its existence, *divisi* could be explored further to inform indigenous biomedical technology research that could benefit Zimbabwe's agricultural potential. While the potential of indigenous knowledge systems to support human development has been acknowledged in Zimbabwe, limited concerted strategies have been put in place to draw on it. For example, its common knowledge that at the height of Zimbabwe's fuel crisis, half-hearted attempts were made by government to manufacture diesel from cactus plant, despite indigenous knowledge's proof that biodiesel was extractible from this plant. By the same token, the agricultural potential of *divisi* should not be underestimated.

Promotion of reproductive health

Wizards and witches have been accused of causing miscarriages and barrenness among Zimbabwean women, and wizards are accused of committing sexual misconducts with victims' unsuspecting wives without their consent- a practice called '*mubobobo.*' According to freep.com.news (14/11/2002), six female schoolteachers in Guruve, Zimbabwe resigned (that month) after accusing a male colleague of using a *tokoloshi* to cast spells on them in their sleep. They say the spell allowed the man to have sex with them while they slept next to their snoring husbands. Notwithstanding its strong ethical flaws (lack of consensual sex), the capacity for *mubobobo* to promote reproductive health can not be

underestimated. Demystifying this witchcraft practice through promoting public education about the practice, unraveling its secretive foundations and regulating consensual sexual conduct constitute bold steps towards eradicating the high incidences of unprotected sex, highly infectious diseases transmission (for example, HIV/AIDS) and promotion of balanced reproductive health. If need be, ways of integrating this indigenous knowledge into mainstream 'expert' reproductive health could be forged. This is premised on the understanding that both indigenous knowledge systems and global systems of knowledge production are informed by some cultural bases, values and attitudes. As Leach and Fairhead (2002) aptly suggest, fundamentally, both local knowledge and science should be seen as emerging and developing through historically located practices, in particular institutional and social contexts, subverting any fundamental theoretical divide between them. *Mubobobo* should not be imposed on unsuspecting women with debilitating effects like miscarriages. Rather possibilities for its integration with established expert knowledge on artificial insemination on willing infertile women could be envisaged.

I contend that the African practice of turning a blind eye on witchcraft constitutes denialism that works to exacerbate problem of victims falling prey to the negative application of the practice. I can draw some parallels between this kind of denialism to that of former South African President, Thabo Mbeki who denied that HIV virus causes Aids, and this had debilitating effects on the population. Recent research shows the regime of Mbeki's failure to roll out HIV drugs between 2000 and 2005 resulted in 330,000 unnecessary deaths and the infection of 3,500 infants with HIV (Nattrass 2009). In the same vein, cynicism about witches and sorcerers, or to eradicate "witchcraft science" without unraveling it may shortchange Africa in terms of tapping from this 'ethno-science'. Zimbabweans could succumb to many diseases if positive witchcraft knowledge was explored, would be curable. Considering the billons of dollars that Zimbabwe spent on treating patients who are bewitched, I am left with these lingering questions: What could be more efficient to engage witches in developing curative practices integrated with scientific research or footing the lofty health bill spent on curing bewitched patients? How much indigenous knowledge could be derived from unraveling witchcraft practices?

Promotion of space exploration

Although witches are believed to glide for thousands of kilometers in winnowing baskets at night, no one has ever conceptualized the possibilities of applying this traditional science for conventional long distance flights to less navigable areas or support 'space exploration' missions. For example, in one incident a Dzivarasekwa, Harare man allegedly flew nearly 100 miles in a *rusero*-winnowing basket- after failing to bewitch an Apostolic Faith Ministries prophet, Anna Banda [and family] (freep.com news 2002). While conventional wisdom could approach this supposition with cynicism, it should be remembered that it was not until some brilliant inventor invented a cell phone that people came to understand that wireless communication through handhelds (mobile devices) was possible. As such, instead of surrendering to the corridors of skepticism, I challenge fellow academics and researchers to develop unorthodox means of exploring this new field of enterprise (space exploration using the winnowing basket).

Power generation

More so, witches are also believed to trigger '*mheni*' (*Mheni* is a believed to be a traditionally developed form of lightning that witches can trigger on victims even on cloud free days. The *Mheni* carries high voltage and travels at exceptionally high velocity but causes death of people, irreparable damage to property or animals.) that can set ablaze victims, their houses, property, and herds of cattle. In one incident, a bolt of lightning hit the village of Tale. Neighbors used garden hoes to beat an elderly woman, Nyamavholisa Maduwa, to death for allegedly causing the storm (freep.com news 2002). I am convinced that if some ways of capturing *mheni* for electricity generation and transmission could be developed, the power outages and the incessant blackouts that have robbed Zimbabwe of its industrial production potential could be put to rest. I believe that as knowledge production becomes transdisciplinary, sociologists and anthropologists should look beyond their disciplines for solutions to the daily problems that haunt society. As such, "no professionals of any discipline should be content with the mere logical consistency of a theory at a given moment in time" (Chavhunduka 1980: 144). I argue that the discourse on the indigenous knowledge and scientific research potential on witchcraft should transcend disciplines and invoke the commitment of scientists, traditional healers, social anthropologists, and the witches themselves as collaborative working groups. Limited ground breaking research on witchcraft, particularly in the area of its positive human development potential has been achieved as researchers are bent on drawing lines between scientific research and social science research. Yet, it has to be remembered that "drawing a boundary at a particular point on a continuum can create paradoxes; it can lead to polarization of knowledge, mirror identifications, and endless repetitions of mistaken views" (Holland 1977: 272). In light of this, I argue for collaborative research across disciplines on witchcraft in ways that allow for integration of knowledge and development of new insights on the subject.

Guarding of property

Lastly, witches are believed to have powers to "fence" their property using *rukwa*-charm. *Rukwa* is "a safety lock' or charm used to safeguard and protect one's property from theft" (Mawere 2010: 217). This relates with Professor Mararike-a sociologist and chairperson of Zimbabwe Traditional Medical Practitioners Council's argument that witchcraft has some positive benefits in the modern society. Mararike (cited in Vickers 2007) recounts a story of a man who stole some bewitched cement that became stuck to the thief's shoulders so he could not remove the bag. Such kind of charm is oftenly used to safeguard cattle, among other personal properties, from thieves. Mararike added that the medicine is "like electrifying the fence round your house" (ibid). Thus it is the contention of this paper that some 'positive' knowledge could be accrued from witchcraft if research in this grey area is publicised and the practice is used for the benefit of the entire society.

Conclusion

In this study, I have challenged the view that witchcraft is a metaphysical practice that can only be deployed to cause harm and despondency in society. I argued that there are several epistemological lenses through which witchcraft could be conceived as contributing to the human development trajectory of Africa, particularly in the area of indigenous knowledge systems. I contend that the 'diabolic' stance adopted in literature on witchcraft and derogatory connotations about the practice stem from an acoustic understanding of the practice. This is compounded by the limitations of hegemonic expert science to explicate the cosmology of the dark world, and the conflation of witchcraft with traditional healing. My study has demonstrated that the mounting incidences of witches and wizards found off guard in cemeteries and bewitching victims challenge the established discourses that are framed along sociological accounts, that prize struggle over resources and hierarchies of power as explanatory frameworks for witchcraft over spiritual motivations for engaging in the practice. These incidences have proven beyond reasonable doubt that witchcraft is an undeniable reality and I identify with Zimbabwean traditional courts who have for long challenged civil courts' practices that are bordered by western principles of science that value proof and predictability.

Most importantly, I argued that the medicinal properties of witchcraft and its contribution to the cultivation of indigenous knowledge systems should not be underestimated. I underscored that Western science has gained credence and authority in explaining causality not necessarily because it is hinged on the cannons of empirical proof but rather because of its transparent and logical process of data construction, documentation and reporting. I argue that the reason why witchcraft has not gained similar status in terms of contributing to indigenous knowledge systems is because it has been shrouded in mystery, given the limitations of exploring it scientifically for documentation. This work has advanced the argument that governments, researchers and scientists need to unravel witchcraft through engaging witches in ways that illuminate understanding of their practices. This could be a bold step towards tapping from the positive aspects of witchcraft to cultivate the development and preservation of indigenous knowledge systems extracted from this 'abused' ethno-science.

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