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Cahiers d'études africaines

189-190 | 2008
Territoires sorciers

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Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafricaines/10302
DOI: 10.4000/etudesafricaines.10302
ISSN: 1777-5353

Publisher
Éditions de l'EHESS

Printed version
Date of publication: 7 April 2008
Number of pages: 131-160
ISBN: 978-2-7132-2141-5
ISSN: 0008-0055

Electronic reference
Adeline Masquelier, « Witchcraft, Blood-Sucking Spirits, and the Demonization of Islam in Dogondoutchi, Niger », *Cahiers d'études africaines* [Online], 189-190 | 2008, Online since 15 April 2011, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafricaines/10302 ; DOI : 10.4000/etudesafricaines.10302

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Witchcraft, Blood-Sucking Spirits, and the Demonization of Islam in Dogondoutchi, Niger

"In the village of Balgo, who is the witch? It's Usuman.
He is the witch who caught the soul of Dako's daughter.
You, Usuman, you're the only witch of the village of Balgo.
You are the one who killed all the children.
Dako has not accepted the death of his daughter, you must pay him.
[With] his daughter's soul, every night Usuman leaves to do his witchcraft.
Amadou is the one who said 'it's a lie'.
He said it was a lie. They must go to the masters of water.
His father is not a witch.
He is the one who said it was a lie. They must go to the masters of water
To show him [what his father is] because he said that his father was not a witch.
[Usuman] showed his witchcraft everywhere in Balgo.
He who, some said, wasn't a witch, he ate the life of forty-nine people.
I, Usuman, I am finished. I am Muslim and they are going to give me the water of sacrifice to drink.
Whether he wants it or nor, they are going to give him the water of sacrifice to drink.
He will drink it, he must drink it. We want him to drink it, he has no choice but to drink it.
Amadou, you are finished because you followed Usuman.
The Doguwa, whether you like or not, will also follow you
Until she kills you."
Girls' song about Usuman the witch, 1994.

In Dogondoutchi, a town of some 38,000 Hausa-speaking people[1] in Arewa, southern Niger, cases of spirit-induced witchcraft have been supposedly rising over the past two and a half decades. Victims of such forms of witchcraft typically lose their blood to a blood-sucking spirit and wither away unless something is done to extract them from the clutches of their spiritual

1. Traditionally recognizable by their facial scars, Hausa-speaking Mawri identify themselves with the Hausa, a large sedentary population of subsistence farmers that constitutes about 50 percent of the total population of Niger.

Cahiers d'Études africaines, XLVIII (1-2), 189-190, 2008, pp. 131-160.

attackers[2]. According to some residents, the rise of witchcraft attacks has something to do with the death of Chief Soumana, the former *chef de canton* who had the power to tame bloodthirsty spirits and keep them locked up in his palace. When Soumana died in 1981, he was succeeded by his brother Amadou who was a progressive leader and a fervent Muslim, and did not believe that people could be attacked by spirits. In his eyes, being Muslim implied being disengaged from the world of spirits. When an old woman came to him hoping to be rid of the Doguwa who had caught her, Chief Amadou dismissed the attack as a simple case of epilepsy. No charge were ever brought against the suspected witch, a prosperous Muslim trader from whom the old woman bought spices and other food supplies. Soon after, a wealthy widow accused of having caused the death of several persons in her neighbourhood was pursued by a mob of children, eager to administer the punishment traditionally meted out to witches: death by stoning. Amadou kept the old woman in the chiefly residence until it was safe for her to come out. Though he took pains to listen to the victimized parties and tried not to antagonize religious leaders who demanded retribution, he nonetheless actively discouraged people from bringing witchcraft cases to his court.

With Soumana gone, there was no one to confront the bloodthirsty spirits, known as Doguwa ("the long ones"), when they zeroed in on their victims. As a Dogondoutchi resident explained to me, "it is because Soumana is dead that Doguwa spirits are attacking so many people. [Chief Soumana] would slaughter the Doguwa spirit to get rid of her if she refused to spare her victim". Another resident put it this way:

> "Amadou, the [current] chief of Arewa, is a *malam* [Muslim cleric]. But Soumana had medicine to prevent Doguwa spirits from killing people. When a Doguwa spirit attacked someone, he could stop it. He made a house for the spirits in his palace. When you went to see him, you did not meet them. He was not giving them people [to eat]. [Instead] he slaughtered animals for them. When he died, the Doguwa all left."

Where the spirits went was anyone's guess. But local residents weren't taking any chances. When the news of Soumana's death hit the town, everyone promptly went home and within moments of the radio announcement, the bustling streets of Dogondoutchi had emptied out. No one, not even Muslims, dared stay out for it might mean possibly cross paths with one of the evil spirits roaming the streets of the small, provincial town in

2. Anthropologists routinely made a distinction between "witches" (perceived as supernatural beings) and "sorcerers" (understood as ordinary humans who have acquired malevolent skills) (EVANS-PRITCHARD 1937). Hausa-speakers use the term *"maye"* (masc.) or *maya* (fem.) to refer to both the superhuman entities and the ordinary humans engaged in witchcraft *(maita)*. Educated Nigeriens speak of *la sorcellerie* when referring to *maita*.

search of prey now that their master was no longer there to keep them well-fed—and locked up. Eventually, people returned to the streets and life resumed its normalcy. The Doguwa spirits did not disappear, however. Nor did they return to their original homes in the bush as everyone had hoped.

Though the spread of Islam and the concurrent abandonment of spirit-centred practices are routinely invoked to account for the rise of spirit attacks, paradoxically, Muslims themselves are suspected of keeping spirits in their homes for nefarious purposes. Such a practice, it is widely believed by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, also accounts for the surge in spiritual assaults over the past few decades. Unlike adepts of *bori* spirit possession, whose devotional practices typically benefit the entire community, the relationships that Muslims allegedly entertain with spirits, all Doguwa, are eminently destructive because they are driven by personal greed (or a desire for power). In their lust for wealth, these individuals strike Faustian deals with Doguwa who can be made to do the bidding of their human masters if in exchange, they are supplied with blood, typically human blood. The spirits produce wealth for their guardians as long as their craving for blood is satisfied. Though the spirits suck the blood of their victims, thereby ultimately causing their death, it is their human masters who are held responsible for the wrong committed and who are accused, and occasionally convicted, of *maita* (witchcraft).

In this essay, I explore these images of wrongful consumption and consider the renewed relevance of witchcraft in what is now a largely Muslim town. As a traditional (pre-Islamic) idiom of desire, narratives of bloodthirsty spirits and greedy masters have gained wide currency for addressing the visibility of Islam and the sense of crisis that has emerged in its wake. By focusing on the case of Muslims who are accused of keeping spirits for personal gains, I analyze how the Islamisation of what used to be an "animist" stronghold has profoundly transformed the local imaginary, at times helping fuel local perceptions of witchcraft as a thoroughly Muslim tradition. More than a mode of accumulation, Doguwa-centred *maita* (witchcraft) is also a weapon of the weak that can be used to level social inequalities (Geschiere 1997). For those who remain unconvinced of the superiority of Islam over indigenous ways, witchcraft offers both a convenient means of demonizing Muslim values and a powerful commentary on the ways that Islam has supposedly transformed local modes of sociality and kinship as well as patterns of wealth production. As we shall see, the stories people tell about Doguwa spirits, their keepers, and their victims, build on the notion that wealth is not something that can be acquired through hard work: to become rich, one must access the occult, the outcome of which is often far from certain. One must also be a Muslim. How Islamic Muslim, in its complex associations with wealth, power, and moral superiority, comes to re-signify witchcraft in its most perverse and troubling expressions is at the centre of my discussion. For those for whom the attainment of wealth

hinges on spiritual support, the prosperous lifestyle of Muslim residents is incongruous with their rejection of indigenous tradition. This apparent incongruity between economic success and religious orientation is precisely what fuels suspicion that those who claim to have rejected "tradition"—and all its trappings—may secretly be its strongest adherents.

Islam, Modernity, and the Occult

Prior to the French conquest of what was to become Niger, Arewa was economically isolated and impervious to the influence of Islam at a time when neighbouring Hausa states were under the control of the Sokoto Caliphate. In this area of subsistence agriculture and barter exchange, religious authority was in the hands of indigenous priest elders while political management was entrusted to the descendants of the Bornuan warriors who had conquered the region in the seventeenth century (De Latour 1982, 1984; Piault 1970, 1975). Though the spread of Islam in Arewa and elsewhere in Niger owes much to French colonial policies (Fuglestad 1983) that stimulated religious conversion—especially after Muslims came to be perceived as useful servants of the colonial administration instead of potential agitators—it is not until independence in 1960 that adherence to Islam intensified. Muslim identity soon became the common denominator among the various ethno-linguistic groups of Niger. In recent years, however, certain Muslim practices—including the performance of *zikiri,* the ritual recitation of the names of God—have been virulently criticized by members of the Wahhabi-inspired reformist association popularly known as Izala, who promote a scripturalist, universalist Islam.

When the educated elite, intent on carving out a distinct identity, turned to Islam at independence, Islam became increasingly associated with *arziki* (wealth, good-fortune, and well-being), status, and power (Nicolas 1975). In Dogondoutchi—and elsewhere in Niger—trade is in the hands of Muslims, who have largely succeeded in silencing spirit devotees and in making them relinquish the ties they ritually held over the marketplace (Masquelier 1993). Administrative positions are also monopolized by Muslims whose prosperity and modernity are proof that the social veneer provided by Islam is an indispensable dimension of success when building a career in commerce or politics. Because making the pilgrimage to Mecca remains a substantial financial undertaking for the average Nigerien, it is seen as a measure of the pilgrim's commercial abilities, and indirectly, of God's blessings. Ultimately, wealth and piety presuppose one another to the extent that wealthy *commerçants* are addressed as Alhaji, whether or not they have gone on the hajj. Conversely, the prestige that the hajj confers on returning pilgrims helps build ties to the merchant community, and can occasionally translate into material benefits for it is seen as an expression of *arziki*. The prosperity of respected *alhazai* (pilgrims) can be a powerful incentive

to turn to prayer for those who associate a Muslim identity with economic success.

Today in Dogondoutchi, many have embraced the values of the Qur'an. The sites where itinerant Muslim preachers prostrated themselves during prayer are no longer burned by spirit devotees anxious to purify the land from the supposedly polluting effects of Islam. In their stead, mosques have mushroomed, testifying to the vast spread of a faith which counted few adherents until the mid-twentieth century[3]. Now that Islam is associated with progress and prosperity, spirit-centred practices have been relegated to "backward" tradition. *Bori* adepts are marginalized. In the eyes of many of their Muslim neighbours, they are poor, provincial, and unrefined. In a word: primitive. Paradoxically, their rootedness in the past is seen by some as a source of power.

Of late, a burgeoning anthropological literature has explored the complex intersection and continuing tension between magic and modernity on the African continent. Modernity, we are told, has produced its own forms of "magic" which an impoverished majority struggles to understand in the face of the ever more mysterious and rapid means through which fortunes are amassed and power gained (Blunt 2004; Comaroff & Comaroff 1993, 1999; Masquelier 1999, 2000; Meyer 1995; Schmoll 1993; Smith 2001; Soares 2004). Put differently, modernity's contradictions are increasingly apprehended through the medium of "the occult". Consequently, trying to disentangle modernity from magic rarely works (Meyer & Pels 2002). It is only by interrogating the magicalities of modern forms of power that one can successfully uncover the ways in which magic is "not only contiguous, but also constitutive" (Moore & Sanders 2001: 12) of African modernity.

If witchcraft and the occult can no longer be unreflectively relegated to "tradition", that slippery concept whose heuristic utility hinges on its opposition to the equally shadowy notion of "modernity", this hardly means that witchcraft is exclusively a discourse of modernity. In his insightful discussion of witchcraft in Ihanzu, Tanzania, Sanders (2003: 347) argues that while local discourse about rain witchcraft is "patently part of modernity", it is not *"about modernity"*. Instead, the process of identifying rain witches enables people to "circumscribe, contemplate, and ultimately reassert" (Sanders 2003: 338) the veracity of that which they call "tradition". It is not

3. Dispite doctrinal and ritual disagreements, *bori* and Islam have thoroughly impacted each other (MASQUELIER 2001). The complex ways that *bori* has simultaneously competed with and borrowed from Islam means that some see no incompatibility between their commitment to *bori* and their identities as Muslims. To them, possession is part of a wider religious enterprise. Others disagree with this picture, and see *bori* as incompatible with Muslim practices. Such divisions often follow gender lines. Thus while for women, *bori* falls squarely within the purview of Islam, for their male counterparts, possession is sinful and contrary to the teaching of the Qur'an.

that witchcraft in Ihanzu has nothing to do with "modernity", for by definition, one concept presupposes the other. What this means, Sanders suggests (2003: 339; Englund 1996; Green 1997; Rutherford 1999), is that witchcraft "demarcates modernity's conceptual boundaries but does not fill them". Building on these diverse insights, I explore the modalities of Doguwa-centred witchcraft to trace how *maita* redefines the modernity of Islam while Muslim identities, in turn, validate witchcraft as an "authentic" source of power that, many believe, has become co-opted by increasingly rapacious Muslim elites. If witchcraft has not lost its relevance, I suggest, it is precisely because in addition to reminding people that greed is an age-old phenomenon, local witches help demystify Islam, its charms, and the perverse contradictions it generates as Muslims attempts to demarcate it from the supposed backwardness of spirit-centred practices.

Extracting Power, Making Wealth

In Arewa, witches *(mayu)* may have distinct origins, take diverse appearances, and employ a variety of techniques to manipulate the occult, but they share the same aspiration: to satisfy their immoderate hunger for wealth. Whether they attack travelers during nocturnal flights to snatch their belongings, steal wanderings souls to eat them, bury evil charms to attract misfortune, or keep a Doguwa spirit hidden in their homes, *mayu* engage in nefarious, extractive activities for the sole purpose of accumulating riches. They are experts in the "art of getting rich" (Geschiere 1997: 137). Because their lust for wealth knows no bounds, they stop at nothing to acquire riches, even if it means sacrificing the lives of fellow humans in the process.

While all forms of witchcraft are corrupt and reprehensible, acquiring a Doguwa to enrich oneself is especially perverse for aside from pointing to the contradiction between profit-making and morality, it also subverts the existing terms of exchange between humans and spirits[4]. In the context of spirit worship, the spilling of blood is the quintessential act that concretizes the bond originally established between humans and the first occupiers of the land, spirits. This is why spirit devotees are occasionally referred to as *masu yanka* (those who sacrifice). In exchange for the sacrificial blood on which they feed, these spiritual creatures grant protection, health, and prosperity to their human devotees. Because it attracts spirits for whom blood constitutes sustenance, the shedding of blood obeys strict rules. Outside of the context of sacrifice, cupping, and butchering, spilling blood threatens the integrity of bodies and contradicts notions of well-being (Échard, Journet & Lallemand 1981).

4. GREENBERG (1946: 47), in his work on Hausa communities in northern Nigeria, notes the practice of cultivating a relationship with a single spirit for anti-social purposes, a practice known as "keeping a *dodo* (evil spirit) in the house".

Spirit-induced witchcraft, in which a Doguwa feeds on human blood until her victim is sucked dry, is a particularly sinister manifestation of evil. Here, sacrifice takes the form of a parasitic drainage that fuels the nefarious production of riches. Rather being the object of a spirit's protection, a person is depleted of her vital substance to sustain a spiritual force. Through the invisible extraction of human blood, the meaning and merits of sacrifice are subverted: instead of the lives of animals substituting for the lives of people (in pre-colonial times, slaves captured in battles were sacrificed in exchange for the spirits' protection), it is people who become surrogate sacrifices offered to a spirit. And far from being satiated, the fierce creature's craving for human blood only increases with time.

Finding a Doguwa to produce *arziki* for oneself is—initially, at least—relatively painless, people will tell you. All a person has to do is bring a calabash of milk at the foot of a tree known to shelter such a spirit[5]. Because, as Mauss (1923-1924) would have it, any gift bears the expectation of a counter-gift, upon accepting the offering of milk, the Doguwa will generally ask the gift-giver what she wishes for in return[6]. This is when that person tells the Doguwa what she wants[7]. In this process, patience is key. By making repeated offerings of milk (and, in rare cases, honey and eggs, followed by an offering of roasted groundnuts or berries), the wealth seeker tames the wild creature and strengthens her bond with her. Eventually, the Doguwa will agree to follow her self-appointed "master" home and produce wealth (in the form of cash or millet) for him.

Once the spirit has entered her master's home, there is no turning back. From then on, the wealth seeker must nourish the spirit with the blood she craves in exchange for which she will make him rich. He will sacrifice chickens to keep her satiated. Soon however, the Doguwa will tire of chicken blood and demand human blood[8]—a requirement her keeper has

5. According to some *bori* practitioners, every tree in the bush is the home of a Doguwa. Therefore one need not look far to initiate contact with one of these spirits.
6. For simplicity's sake, I will refer to the Doguwa's master alternatively as a her or as a she. In my experience, women and men were accused of "keeping a Doguwa" for illicit wealth-making in roughly equal numbers.
7. According to FAULKINGHAM (1970: 110), a person wishing to secure a good harvest initiates contact with a spirit "by secretly taking a clabash of ow's milk to the bush and leaving it there for a few days". If when he returns, the calabash is empty, he can assume that the spirit has agreed to grant his wish for an abundant harvest "in return for a sacrifice of something with two legs".
8. I was often told that this was because chickens are, like humans, two-legged creatures. When she has grown used to "eating" two-legged creatures but is no longer satiated by chickens, the spirit will ask for a larger two-legged victims. In the very act of offering a chicken (rather than say, a goat) to the Doguwa, that witch thus sets in motions the fateful process that will eventually result in the death of numerous people.

no choice but to satisfy as best he can[9]. Initially, she will prey on the individuals her master designates among strangers. Persons who are sucked dry of their blood die quickly, and the keeper must continually look for new victims. Once the supply of individuals unrelated to him is exhausted, he has no choice but to select people from among his distant kin. Eventually, the increasingly ravenous spirit will require the blood of his own progeny, thereby obliterating the very future he was trying to secure through his search for financial security. In some rare instances, the *maye* (witch) himself becomes the ultimate victim of the Doguwa.

Though by all accounts, once she has "tasted" a person, the Doguwa becomes a fearful creature, ready to pounce on anyone she meets to satisfy her lust for human blood, people widely acknowledge that spirits who exhibit such "vampiric" characteristics do not originate as evil forces. They only turn malevolent at the prompting of individuals who use them to serve their own selfish ends. Spirits, people say, are like children; like them, they will do what they are asked to do. Like children who are taught wrongly, Doguwa spirits learn from their unscrupulous masters how to perform immoral tasks. In short, they are the unwitting instruments of human selfishness. As a *bori* devotee explained: "When you take a Doguwa, she takes on the personality of her master. If he is mean, she becomes mean." Once their powers are corrupted by their masters' greed, Doguwa spirits can no longer be satisfied with the blood of domestic animals. Nor can they return to the wild. Exposure to humans has "socialized" them to the extent that they now consider their master's house their home—and issue to which I will return.

If sufficient evidence can be brought against a suspected witch (*maye* for a male; *maya* for a female), she is forced to undergo a water ordeal to determine whether or not she is guilty. During the ordeal administered by *'yan ruwa* (masters of the water, members of a priestly lineage) in the village of Gumbin Kano, a few hundred kilometres east of Dogondoutchi, the harmful forces unleashed by greed are overcome and the Doguwa is freed from her association with the *maye*. After she has undressed completely, the accused is given swamp water to drink and asked to vomit it. By vomiting the water, she establishes her innocence. If, on the other hand, she cannot spit the water out, she must be a witch. The water test is considered an infallible means of identifying witches[10].

9. According to a friend and contrary to what I have just asserted, the spirit starts feeding on people right away. "You must initially give your oldest son, or your brother. Or your father, followed by your mother. Il you cannot provide a member of your family for [the spirit], she won't come." Inconsistencies such as these do not point to a lack of consensus over the blood-thirsty spirits' *modus operandi* so much as they suggest how malleable local images of witchcraft are. Whether or not people agree on who Doguwa spirits first feed on, the point is that they are directly implicated in the destruction of the lineage: they feed on their master's progeny.
10. This as how FAULKINGHAM (1970: 111) describes the water ordeal, based on his 1960s research in a Nigerian community: "The accused was taken to the *sarki*

Witches, it is one of their trademarks, cannot ever regurgitate the water they take in; they only drink to extinguish the predatory desires (symptomatised as an unquenchable thirst) that consume them. Ordinary water does little good to assuage their thirst for greed is like a fire that burns in their insides, quickly exhausting any moisture their bodies might absorb. Instead of spitting the "test" water, the suspect brought to Gumbin Kano usually asks for more, proving that he is indeed a witch. Because of its special properties, the water of Gumbin Kano not only establishes the guilt of the accused but also divests him of the Doguwa and tansforms him, thereafter repressing his urge to profit from others. As a *bori* healer put it: "The *maye* who is taken to Gumbin Kano, that's it, as soon he drinks the water, he won't be able to feed himself. He won't be able to kill anyone, not even a hen. He cannot [. . .] harm anything that contains blood." Once the accused is found guilty, she is brought home where she is made to undress and a piece of millet stalk covered with hot pepper is pushed in her rectum. Thereafter, and in the presence of the entire community, she must jump three times over the motionless body of her victim in a procedure known as *ketare* (jumping)[11]. When successful, the procedure frees the victim from her spiritual attacker.

The Proliferation of *Maita* in the Age of Islam

In Arewa, local spirits, who occupied the land long before people, provided valuable assistance when human settlements were established. Known generically as Doguwa, these spirits played a central role in the survival of local communities in pre-colonial times, protecting the inhabitants from enemy attacks, droughts, and epidemics. Eventually, many of them evolved into more personal protectors. In the contexts of possession performances that came to be known as *bori,* they were regularly invited to possess "fleshy" hosts, thereby momentarily gaining texture and voice: in such "embodied" states, they advised people, rewarded them, or conversely admonished them. As noted already, Islam has gained ground over spirit worship on the visible terrain of religious practices and the overwhelming majority of residents in Dogondoutchi and the surrounding villages are now Muslim. Known as "those who pray" in contrast to "those who sacrifice", Muslims no longer make offerings to the spirits and loudly castigate the few who

[chief] in Madaoua who either dismissed the case if the accused paid him a fine of 4,000 CFA or sent the accused to the village of Gumbin Kano, nearly 80 kilometres west of Madaoua. There the accused was given swamp water to drink. If he vomited it, he demonstrated his innocence, had the water been swallowed, he showed his guit and had to pay the *sarki* 8,000 CFA."

11. See also Greenberg (1946), for a similar description of the procedure used to liberate the soul of a victim after it has been "eaten" by a witch.

remain committed to serving the spirits[12]. For having relinquished the values that traditionally shaped their moral world, they are themselves criticized by spirit devotees: in the eyes of *bori* adepts, it is precisely people's lack of commitment to *al'ada* (tradition) that has left communities vulnerable to disasters (Masquelier 2001). As I noted at the outset, it is this lack of commitment that has supposedly unleashed the wrath of the spirits.

For those who bemoan the loss of tradition, the alleged proliferation of evil spirits is directly linked with the recent spread of Islam. As non-human and (mostly) non-Muslim, spirits are the ultimate other, the expression of a wild, yet powerful alterity that can seldom be contained within the ordered parameters of social life. It is to secure their protection as much as to placate them that *bori* devotees communicate with spirits. Muslims, on the other hand, abstain from any contact with *aljannu* (spirits). Though they acknowledge their existence as creations of God, most of them insist that they want nothing to do with these "satanic" creatures. Ignored or altogether forgotten, spirits now haunt the very places they once called home—this is, at least, what some residents claim when pressed to explain the incidence of spirit attacks (Masquelier 2002, 2008). In the late 1980s, Arewa was reputed to harbor a considerable number of evil spirits. Civil servants originating from other regions who were assigned to Dogondoutchi reportedly took up their posts with great reluctance; they had heard what happened to those who crossed the path of an evil Doguwa.

Despite the destruction of spirit shrines and the progressive abandonment of spirit-centred practices, some Doguwa spirits remain, hidden away in a back room of the family compound. While they allegedly continue to insure the prosperity of the household, this prosperity comes at a cost—the cost of human lives that must be sacrificed to keep the spirit satiated. Many such spirits are said to reside in Muslim households. As Kasuwa, a *bori* devotee, explained:

"Those of today, they have forgotten the Doguwa. Everybody prays and becomes a *malam* [Muslim cleric]. The *malams* avoid the Doguwa. Even if it was their fathers who brought them in the house, they avoid them. They do not like Doguwa [spirits]. That's when the Doguwa is going to come out. She will ask the *mai gida* [head of the household] to give her one of his daughters. If he can't, he will go to town to show her the child of somebody else that she can have. And the Doguwa will kill the child. If the *malam* refuses, she will kill him. It is the Doguwa spirits who kill all these people in town since they have been abandoned because of prayer. Now they take their revenge. When they are given a child, they will suck his blood. When there is no more blood, he will die."

Prosperous Muslims routinely invite suspicion that they are keeping a Doguwa in their home even as they claim not to have dealings of any kind

12. Through the sickness and social ills that they allegedly provoke, spirits continue to assert their presence and to make their power palpable. By enabling communion with the spirits who have the power to cure, to protect, and the empower, *bori* devotee affirm their usefulness in the community (Masquelier 2001).

with spirits. Indeed, the flexibility of *maita* conceptualizations is such that, as Kasuwa noted, it is sometimes precisely *because* Muslims ignore (or even reject) inherited Doguwa that these spirits occasionally lash out at their former masters who are then forced to sacrifice their own domestic or community interests in order to satisfy the creatures' voracious needs.

Although Muslims vigorously deny making sacrifices to spirits, I was often told that they, like everyone else, know that economic success can only be had by securing the allegiance of a spirit. "They claim to have left the 'things of *bori*', a friend explained, 'but everyone knows that in the privacy of their homes, Muslims regularly sacrifice to the spirits'". *Babban salla,* the commemoration of the sacrifice of Abraham that is celebrated in Muslim households, is often invoked by non-Muslim residents as a glaring example of how "those who pray" shed blood for the spirits under the cover of Muslim tradition. As a *bori* healer put it, "they say the blood of the rams they slaughter is not for the spirits, but we know that's a lie. They shed blood for the spirits like everyone else". Because Muslims categorically deny that the blood shed during *babban salla* (or other Muslim celebrations) is for the spirits, they are suspected not only of sacrificing to the spirits to secure *arziki* (wealth, good-fortune, and well-being) but also of sacrificing to a Doguwa who, hidden away in a back chamber of the family compound, assiduously converts the blood of her victims into wealth[13].

So prevalent is the association between wealth and witchcraft that *maita* is routinely referred to as the *real* explanation for the economic success of prosperous Dogondoutchi residents, all of whom are Muslim. *Nouveaux riches* who build two-story houses, transport entrepreneurs who display fleets of cars, and wealthy landowners who reap so much millet that their granaries are full when everyone else's are empty are widely suspected of having retained the services of not one, but two or even three Doguwa spirits whose presence they try to keep secret from neighbours and household members alike[14]. In the eyes of many residents, the glaring good fortune of these individuals, which exacerbates the failure of their less fortunate neighbours, can only have originated in a corrupt deal with a Doguwa. In 2006, I was told that Niamey residents (financiers and politicians, mostly) now hire the services of Doguwa masters from Arewa to embezzle public

13. *Bori* practitioners usually boast of the material benefits they enjoy as a result of their partnership with a spirit. I met spirit mediums who credited the fact that they never wanted for anything in their spirit(s). There was nothing suspect or immoral in this partnership. Muslims, on the other hand, credit their wealth to hard work and the blessings they receive from God, which is what raised the suspicion of neighbours.
14. James Smith (2004), writing of witch-finding in southeastern Kenya, similarly reports that a member of the local elite was once found to keep "hundreds of bloodthirsty majini spirits from Mombasa" in his home for the purpose of enriching himself.

funds. That the Doguwa's powers to make wealth are allegedly tapped to enhance yet other forms of profit-making is a reminder of the extent to which, for local residents, economic survival hinges on immoral activities —not honest labour. The laws that govern the process of wealth production are as inscrutable as they are corrupt which is why a positive outcome can only be secured by accessing the equally mysterious and perverted powers of a blood-sucking Doguwa.

Far from waning with the spread of Islam, the covert dealings that witches traditionally had with spirits have allegedly intensified as growing numbers of people turn to *salla* (Muslim prayer). Membership in the *umma* (Muslim community) has opened doors for those who—not having the French-based education required to enter the civil service—must engage in trade to supplement the income they derive from farming, but it is not in itself a guarantee of success. Given the widespread assumption that spirits intervene in people's lives to increase or decrease their *arziki* (wealth, good-fortune, well-being), invoking Doguwa "ownership" to account for the prosperity of Muslim elites makes sense to many. Whether or not these individuals publicly recognize the power of Doguwa spirits, the outcome is the same: people around them fall suddenly sick and often die while they, on the other hand, allegedly get plumper and more prosperous[15]. A prominent Dogondoutchi resident who, in 1989, was accused of being a *maye* always stood in the first row behind the imam when he attended the Friday prayer at the *grande mosquée*. This was noticed by some residents who, after he was taken to Gumbin Kano, pointed it out to me as a blatant example of Muslim hypocrisy. In their eyes, rather than ruling out illicit processes of wealth production, Muslim piety had become a front for such activities.

Secrecy, here, is key to both the ways that witchcraft is imagined to work and the process through which proof of its existence is affirmed. Like Malagasy miners and traders who, in their efforts to understand what sapphires are used for once they leave Madagascar, "are able to do little more than speculate about what lies behind the apparent" (Walsh 2004: 236), Arewa farmers for whom hard work never seem to translate into prosperity and progress see the production of the wealth others enjoy as inherently suspect because it does not seem to obey the laws that govern the production of their own meagre income. This could only mean that such a production is part of an "immoral economy" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999), the mysterious workings of which turn out to have frighteningly real consequences for the victims. Aside from helping make sense of the hidden logic of wealth production, the rhetoric of witchcraft also sheds lights on what Muslims supposedly hide behind their monotheism. Greenberg (1946: 47) wrote that keeping an evil spirit in one's house meant that one sacrificed

15. In this region of the world where famines are a prevalent scourge, fatness is both a sign of wealth and a symptom of good health, though it can also mean that one can takes in too much, like witches who selfished hoard resources.

to bush spirits "inside the compound instead of at the appropriate place in the bush". Those who "[were] not bent on evil" (*ibid.:* 47), but who wished to sacrifice to the bush spirits carefully did so outside their compounds to avoid raising suspicion:

> "If one asks a man why, for instance, he sacrifices to Gajimari at a tamarind tree, and not in his compound, the usual reply is 'so people will not say that I keep a dodo [evil spirit] in the house'."

By slaughtering rams in their own home to celebrate the commemoration of the sacrifice of Abraham or their children's successful completion of the first stage in Qur'anic studies, Muslims (wealthy ones, in particular) provide fodder for speculations about what *really* goes on in their homes.

This is not the image which Muslims wish to project as they struggle to extricate themselves from a cumbersome, un-Islamic cultural heritage. In contrast to educated elites who see *bori* possession performances as an expression of the local folklore (and a part of their cultural heritage, *gado*), the majority of Muslims, all recent converts, associate *bori* values with transgression, immorality, and backwardness. Yet despite their best efforts, the practice of sacrificing *(yanka)* to the spirits is not easily disentangled from local models of wealth production; on the contrary, it provides ever more relevant images for dealing with the ambiguous and often contradictory workings of power, with reports of false representation and hidden accumulation. The fact that pious Muslims who slaughter rams on *babban salla* (or an ox during *walima,* the celebration held when a child has memorized the Qur'an in its entirety) are suspected of surreptitiously making offering to the Doguwa spirits responsible for their prosperity underscores the strong circularity of witchcraft representations[16]. It is also indicative of how resilient local configurations of *maita* are in the face of Muslim determination to stamp out both spirit-centred practices and the "epistemic anxiety" (Ashforth 1998: 62) that these respond to. Witchcraft discourse adjusts circuitously to the changing cultural landscape: even when it generates diametrically opposed explanations of social realities, it remains seemingly consistent. In Arewa, emerging Muslim values (as well as the models of personhood, the modes of sociality, and the practices of consumption they are predicated on) have not stamped out the discourse on *maita*. On the contrary, they are "trapped in its vicious circles" (Geschiere 1997: 145).

16. When an ox is slaughtered during *walima, rahanai* (angels) are said to be dispatched to inform God of the person's accomplishment and ask Him for protection. If no sacrifice is made, illness or poverty will strike the family and the Qur'anic student will become mad. A Qur'anic teacher recounted for me the fightening dreams he had after committing the Qur'an to memory. He went to see his teacher who told him that he would have such dreams until his family held a *walima*.

Doguwa Spirits on the Hajj: Secrecy, Hypocrisy, and Hidden Accumulation

Most pilgrims on their way to Mecca are said to leave their spirits home for fear of being found out while sojourning in the Holy city. Though it is thanks to the spirits' production of wealth that their masters are able to finance the trip in the first place—and to claim the social and spiritual rewards associated with the status of *alhaji* (pilgrim)—they must "come clean" during the hajj itself. *Mayu,* on the other hand, allegedly accomplish the trip in the company of their bloodthirsty Doguwa: they have grown so dependent on the fearful creatures as to need their constant protection (against the threat of being trampled to death by crowds of faithful, for instance—a distinct possibility in Mecca when pilgrims converge *en masse* to the same spot).

In the eyes of non-Muslim residents, some pilgrims on the hajj rely heavily on the secret protection afforded by their spirits, despite the risks that such partnership necessarily entails[17]. Even Muslims who have no direct dealings with *bori* are known to secure spiritual protection before leaving for the pilgrimage. In 1994, a woman I knew asked a *bori* practitioner to guarantee her safe return before leaving for Mecca. She promised to bring a goat if the spirit of the *bori* medium protected her during the pilgrimage. "Those who are not protected by spirits, bad things happen to them in Mecca. They are trampled by a crowd or bewitched. I took my precautions", she explained to me after handing out five thousand CFA francs to the *bori* medium. She had returned from the Hijaz safe and sound, and was making good on her promise to reward the spirit.

In the mid-1980s, Tani, a woman in her forties, was sent by her husband on the pilgrimage to Mecca. She was a practitioner of *bori* and he hoped that the hajj would affect her enough that she would "forget the spirits" and submit exclusively to Allah. Tani (or Hajiya, as everyone called her), showed little trust in Muslims, however. Nor did she value the social recognition that came with the title of Hajiya (pilgrim) she had earned upon her return from the Hijaz. As she explained:

"Before [my husband] left for Mecca, he took care of his family's spirits. He let me attend possession ceremonies. But since he went to Mecca, he does not let me. If I leave for a possession ceremony, he beats me [. . .]. He went to Mecca, this is why he does not like *bori* anymore [. . .]. He said to everyone: 'I sent Tani to Mecca because otherwise, she was going to kill all my other wives [with her *bori* spirits]'. So I told him, 'If you think that by sending me to Mecca you are going to make me abandon my spirits, you are dead wrong [. . .]. There are plenty of Muslims who keep their spirits. And if you had told me this before, I would not have gone to Mecca.' And my husband said: '*Malamai* [Muslim clerics] are

17. For an illuminating analysis of what happens when bori do attend the hajj in the company of their devotees, see O'BRIEN (1999).

going to insult you.' So I answered: 'These *malamai* can eat their father's penises!' I don't want people to call me Hajiya. I want people to call me *'yar bori'* [member of *bori*]."

Hajiya Tani's impassioned critique of Islam hinged on the notion that Islam was a deceptive body of practices that people adopted only to further selfish ends—a social veneer that brought respect and recognition, but did not do away with spirits and the support they provided. Piety in its various expressions, Tani implied, was but a facade for hiding one's continued reliance on occult forces whose hold over humans Muslims paradoxically denied and denounced. Stated otherwise, Muslims allegedly rely on spirit for protection and to guarantee the income needed to afford the hajj but they do so secretly: admitting that they worship spirits (which Islam condemns as *shirk,* associating a lesser being with God) would sully the reputation they have earned as *alhazai* (pilgrims). It is precisely because Muslim practices seem opaque to those who are in no position to know better that they invite speculation about what *really* goes on.

Being true to her convictions, Hajiya Tani refused to participate in this "charade" simply to earn the social capital associated with a pilgrim identity. By resolutely rejecting the title of Hajiya and loudly claiming to be a *bori* practitioner, she avoided any suspicion that, like other less scrupulous pilgrims (including her husband), she had gone to Mecca under false pretence. In other words, by openly acknowledging her own dealings with spirits in the context of her engagement with *bori* practices, she could claim the high moral ground whereas *alhazai* (pilgrims) who, by virtue of their commitment to Islam, denied altogether having any relations to the spirits, paradoxically raised suspicions about some potentially secret—and therefore, necessarily pervert—dealings with spirits.

Wealth, Witchcraft, and Anti-Sociality

What emerges from Tani's testimony is a vision of Islam that is inextricably linked to witchcraft and vice versa. For financially burdensome practices like the hajj to be sustained at a time when households throughout Niger are feeling the impact of an economic crisis that shows no signs of resolution, Muslims must rely heavily on the very body of traditions they are supposedly combating. Of course, not all Muslims are thought to keep a Doguwa spirit to finance their pious endeavours. Nor are suspicions of Doguwa-produced wealth directed solely at Muslims. Nonetheless, and despite the scorn which Muslims pour on *bori* practitioners and the combative stance they take towards indigenous religion, in Dogondoutchi, the aetiology of witchcraft has been strengthened, indeed reaffirmed, by the rise of a commercial Muslim elite. Instead of being confined to irrelevance by an emerging Muslim order of values, witchcraft provides a convenient,

malleable rhetoric through which the problems associated with this order might be addressed.

Individuals who rely on the powers of the occult do so covertly: no one ever admits to keeping a Doguwa that feeds on human blood. If Doguwa-centred practices are shrouded in secrecy, that secrecy must paradoxically be unveiled for the reality of witchcraft to be demonstrated at all. It is out of this tension between concealment and revelation (Taussig 1993; Meyer & Pels 2002) that the power of witchcraft—its capacity to signify as well as the violence it unleashes (Ashforth 2000; Ferguson 1999: 118-121)—emerges. Consider the following case. In 1994, Usuman, a wealthy Muslim living in the village of Balgo (now part of the *commune* of Dogondoutchi), was accused of being a witch by a *bori* devotee in the throes of possession. Upon hearing the accusation against him, Usuman had vehemently denied that any of the spirit's allegations were true. He was nonetheless summoned to the chief's court by village authorities.

When the spirit, mounted on her devotee, identified him once again as a *maye,* Usuman insisted he was innocent of the charges brought against him; to no avail. He was asked to swear twice on the axes of Kirey (the *bori* spirit of thunder and lightning) that he was not a witch[18]. Holding one of Kirey's axes, he swore once that he was innocent of any wrongdoing. Before he was able to utter another word, however, thunder clapped. Usuman was thrown to the ground. Whether or not they witnessed the proceedings, many residents took this dramatic denouement as proof that Usuman had lied; he *was* a witch after all. Angered by the lies, Kirey had sent lightning to inform everyone of Usuman's perfidy.

Usuman's last alleged victim had been a young woman named Mariama who was expecting her first child. Upon seeing her one morning at the pump where she was filling her water buckets, Usuman reportedly told her: "Every time I see you, you run away and escape me. But today, you are in my hands." Mariama tried to flee, but she fell to the ground. Unable to walk, she was carried home[19]. The *bori* healer summoned by her father Dako determined at first glance that she was in mortal danger. He diagnosed a Doguwa attack. The spirit would most likely kill her, he warned, if nothing was done to stop her. When the healer tried to perform an exorcism (*diba Doguwa,* literally "taking out the Doguwa"), by convincing the spirit of abandoning her victim[20]. The Doguwa spoke in the voice of Mariama.

18. Swearing on the axes of the spirits of rain, thunder, and hightning is procedure commonly used to extract the truth from suspected wrong-doers or to settle a dispute between two individuals. Whereas pious Muslims refuse to swear on anything but the Qur'an and dismiss the *bori* oath as "backward" and sinful, others remain convinced of the potential threat they could incur at the hands of the spirits, should they lie under oath.
19. Other testimonies I collected tell a slightly different story, though they all agree that Mariama feel violently ill soon after her encounter with Usuman.
20. In contrast to other spirits whose lifelong relationship to their human hosts is negotiated in the context of *bori* possession performances, blood-sucking

In the presence of several witnesses, the spirit she identified Usuman as her master, who had sent her out to kill Mariama. She then proceeded to name her previous victims, all ninety nine of them[21].

Though he denied being responsible for anyone's death, let alone having made a pact with a Doguwa, Usuman was sent under heavy escort to the village of Gumbin Kano and made to drink the water that would neutralize his power. Upon learning that his father was to submit to the water ordeal, Amadou, one of Usuman's sons, had fled to Nigeria. As the oldest of Usuman's children, he stood to inherit the evil spirit once the ingestion of water dissolved the bond between the master and the Doguwa. "One cannot get rid of a Doguwa. She stays forever in the family", I was told. In the words of a *bori* healer, "If the witch dies [or ceases to be the spirit's keeper], the Doguwa follows her children and grandchildren"[22]. In Gumbin Kano, Usuman underwent the water ordeal, but failed to prove his innocence. When he returned home, he was but a pale image of his former self. He could neither work in his fields, nor resume his trading in the market. All he could do, people told me, was pick rags off the ground and mumble incoherently to himself[23].

Individuals who are denounced as witches are subjected to intense public humiliation. Aside from being accused of terrible crimes, they are stripped naked (and occasionally beaten) in front of hundreds of onlookers who sneer or shout insults at them—a mortifying experience, by all accounts, and one which typically causes the accused to become insane. The "madness" that affects those who have been subjected to such an ordeal is also rooted in the process of purification itself. The Gumbin Kano water puts out the fire burning inside the *maye,* but it does not restore the balance so vital to people's ability to negotiate their place within existing webs of social and material transactions. Like breast milk which, upon falling on an infant's

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Doguwa are typically expelled from their hosts through a combination of prayers *(roko)* and fumigations *(turare)*. The procedure is not without risks: the healer performing the exorcism may well end up being the next victim of the Doguwa spirit if his own spirits do not offer enough protection. Therefore, only experiences *bori* healer advertise their services as exorcists.

21. The identified victims were all individuals who had died in the previous 20 years. Some were young, others much older. While a few lived in the same village as the witch, many were residents of Dogoundoutchi, where Usuman came to the market—the largest in the region—every Friday to sell his goods. Note, here, the discrepancy with the information (49 victims) provided in the little girl's song featured above as an epitaph.
22. The kin who accompanies a to Gumbin Kano (to insure his protection as well as the fairness of the procedure) is most at risk of becoming the new spirit's master—or her victim, depending on how things turn out. In one case I heard of, the accused was escorted to Gumbin Kano by his paternal uncle and found guilty of witchcraft. A few months later, the old man was dead, having reportedly suffered an attack at the hand of his nephew's Doguwa.
23. According to FAULKINGHAM (1970), this is a sign that the individual is talking to the spirit, and thus another confirmation of his guilt as a.

genitals, is said to "kill" them (that is, cause sterility), the water cools the *maye*'s insides so drastically that he can no longer engage in productive exchanges, let alone insure his economic survival.

Mayu, it is their predominant trait, are controlled by greed; they don't know how to modulate their desire for things. This is why they accumulate possessively. Once their possessiveness is "killed"—neutralized by the test water—they reach another kind of imbalance, symptomatised by an obsessive desire to accumulate refuse. Discarded items of no use to anyone else become their focus in life—a focus that typifies social exclusion. While most people take great care to protect the integrity of their social persona in the layers and folds of their garments, convicted witches, like mad persons who roam the bush in tattered clothes or undress publicly, have rejected society or been rejected by it. The unwavering attention these lonely figures devote to collecting shredded cloth speaks to their own decaying social identities and to their surrender to permanent liminality.

After Usuman returned to Balgo, no one dared talk to him. Little girls made up songs about him, describing how he had been found out and what had happened to his victims, like the song that is featured at the beginning of this essay. His neighbours avoided him. "They are afraid of him", I was told by those who knew him. Though people expressed relief that Mariama had escaped the Doguwa's clutches—she had given birth to a healthy girl hours before Usuman's return home—there was also concern about all the *maye*'s previous victims. Eventually, everyone who was unrelated to Usuman moved out of Balgo to resettle a few hundred yards away. Usuman remained in his home with his wife, and his sons and their dependents, but all the other compounds of the hamlet were deserted. People spoke of travellers who had lost their ways and mistakenly ended up in front of Usuman's house, an experience they described as frightening[24]. While convicted witches are no longer expelled from their communities as was once the case, they still suffer a social "death" when others ostracize them or stop acknowledging their existence altogether. By moving away, Usuman's neighbours relocated the threat outside the periphery of their community. They could not expel the witch from their midst, yet they found a means of recreating the boundaries that ideally separate human space from the bush, boundaries which Usuman violated when he invited a wild spirit into his home.

24. A friend of mine, on her way to a *bori* ceremony, found herself in a deserted hamlet. She had felt out of sorts, weak, oppressed. This was the *wrong* place, she felt. It was not until she reached her intended destination and told people about her experience that she realized that the strange-looking hamlet she had stumbled into had been Usuman's home.

Witchcraft, Muslim Elites, and the Weight of the Past

Usuman had not been liked in the hamlet where he and his extended family lived[25]. He was a taciturn, unfriendly, and hot-tempered man who quarrelled easily with neighbours. He was also a reputed miser—and therefore, the perfect target for witchcraft accusations. As a prosperous member of the local Muslim elite, he represented all that was wrong with the "new" values—individualism, free enterprise and so on—promoted by Islam, values that presupposed the rejection of one's heritage and one's obligation to the spirits. As a witch, Usuman had profited at the expense of his neighbours, allegedly consuming their productive and reproductive powers. After being divested of the Doguwa, he became poor, feeble-minded, and powerless to improve his situation.

Witchcraft accusations both feed on and articulate people's resentment of their better-off neighbours, providing both a script for the wrongful accumulation of wealth and a *modus operandi* for dealing with those who are suspected of profiting from such accumulation. At the same time that they eliminate witches, thereby working towards the potential eradication of witchcraft, the practices employed to identify and neutralize *mayyu* reassert the viability of indigenous religion and its indispensability in the face of hidden threats against which Islam is ineffective. At a time of intensified debates over the centrality of Islam in local definitions of identity and community, the fact that those who have retained their ties to the spirits are the only ones able to counter the powers of *maita*—itself increasingly rooted in Muslim values—is evidence that the growing control of Muslims over the terms of trade, religion, and politics remains contested.

Despite vigorously denying having killed anyone, Usuman returned from Gumbin Kano a broken man. To understand why he was so affected by the water ordeal and by his condemnation as a Doguwa-owning witch, we must ultimately assess witchcraft accusations in the context of Islam's relatively short history in Arewa. In a region where, as people put it, before Islam, everyone sacrificed to the spirits, followers of the Prophet are especially eager to affirm their Muslim identity through distinctive practices —that establish their rupture with a prior order of values. It is difficult to escape the "weight of the past" (Lambek 2002), however, especially when it takes the form of an angry spirit demanding her dues. Rumour had it, for instance, that Usuman's Doguwa had been in his family for three generations. According to Samana, a *bori* healer and Balgo resident:

25. Witnesses to the event spoke of him as a "strange" man. One person recalled the fuss he had made when the chief's guards had tried to put him in a care headed for Gumbin Kano. Usuman, who had never ridden in an automobile before, refused to enter the chief's car. His sons, worried about his safety, had tried to intervene. In the end, they had all been stuffed into the car after being hand-cuffed to revent any further disruptions to the proceedings.

"The Doguwa has been around since the time of [Usuman's] grandparents. [Back then] she was already mean. But they neglected her and she became meaner. In the past, his father sacrificed a black cow to the spirit every year. One year, there was hunger, and the father sold the cow. [. . .] Soon after, he fell from the top of a granary and died. It was the Doguwa, seeking revenge. From then on, she followed Usuman."

While evidence that Usuman's actions were driven by greed was overwhelming, especially for those who actually knew the man, Samana's comments complicate the picture by implying that while the accused may have been a covetous individual, he was also saddled with an unwanted heritage which no amount of Islamic posturing could erase.

In the end, his words imply, no matter how hard Muslims try to deny their heritage, ties to ancestral spirits cannot be dissolved. Acting as if these ties have been severed (by engaging in Muslim practices such as prayer, alms-giving, and so on) only heightens the spirits' frustration, intensifying their thirst for blood and their retaliatory impulses. If no victims are designated to insure their subsistence, the Doguwa "help themselves" and feed on whomever they find in the household. The only way to hold them at bay is to keep on providing them with victims, which is what Usuman did until one of his victims identified him as a the source of her ill health. Through witchcraft accusations, poorly understood economic processes and social disparities become objectified in the ample and richly clad bodies of those who, like Usuman, appear to live off the vital substance of fellow villagers. More than simply providing a stock of images for making sense of emerging inequities, witchcraft enables people to localize and ultimately *act upon* the visible sources of predation and power—this case, economically successful Muslims who remain vulnerable to accusations of *maita* thanks to their cultural roots.

Milk, Blood, and the Betrayal of Kinship

Witchcraft forges an invisible economy based on wrongful exchange and accumulation. It does not obey the ordinary laws of flows and exchange. Once it is initiated, such an economy can only be dismantled—and its flows "frozen"—when the *maya* is forced to ingest swamp water. To understand what the economy of *maita* entails, how it undermines conventional forms of sociality and kinship, and how it ultimately threatens social reproduction, we must focus for a moment on the specific terms of a *maya*'s original pact with a Doguwa and examine the wide-ranging implications that the exchange of milk and blood has for local models of family, community, and reproduction. First, that human blood should serve to fuel the production of wealth in this predatory scheme is no accident. Blood figures as a remarkably generative fluid in local conceptions of physiology and

sociality[26]. It imparts strength and life to all limbs and organs, and must be continuously replenished though the regular ingestion of food. Blood in a person is thought to be like the kerosene in a lamp: just as the light goes out when the kerosene goes low, so a person "flickers" and then dies when her blood dissipates (Darrah 1980; Wall 1988). Blood, the quality, volume, and consistency of which changes daily, is thus a sort of fuel that gives energy to the body. Through its qualitative and quantitative variations, blood symptomatises the moral and material transactions people engage in.

Ideally bright red, blood may turn black or conversely fade if it becomes spoiled, too thick, or watery. The colour of blood is also symptomatic of one's moral state: popularity literally translates in Hausa as "white blood" *("farin jini")* while "black blood" *("bakin jini")* means bad reputation. It follows that individuals who engage in witchcraft have *bakin jini,* and by extension, *bakin fata* (black skin) because the gossip which denounces them as witches have stained them. While the victim of a *maye* withers from lack of blood and turns white[27], the *maye* himself sees his reputation, that is, his "blood", darken as a result of his evil deeds. More than a metaphorical measure of people's physical and moral well-being, blood thus objectifies through its varied states and appearances the shifting terms of engagement between self and society (Wall 1988). This capacity to index various modes of production and exchange is precisely what enables blood to convey so powerfully the evils of Doguwa-centred *maita:* as the progressive and complete extraction of an individual's blood, blood sucking "speaks to an ominous challenge that undermines the kind of secured containment integral to viable social practice" (Weiss 1998: 181).

As the substance that imparts life to bodies, blood becomes an essential source of sustenance for the Doguwa, without which she cannot make wealth for her master, much less concretize her existence as a member of the household. She is, after all, a disembodied spirit, a creature of the wild. With no blood or flesh of her own, she can only sustain her "kinship" with the *maye* (initiated with the offering of milk, of which I say more below), through regular the ingestion of human blood. Aside from bringing energy to bodies, blood is also the substance of kinship: in the past, agnates were referred to as "blood relatives" (Nicolas 1975: 67). While today members of a patrilineage are known *'yan maza* (sons of men), blood still symbolizes the bonds of the patriline. By depleting a person of her blood, the Doguwa takes away more than life. She destroys the very ideas of family and reproduction, of how life is renewed, by perverting the terms (blood, nurturance, productivity) through which kinship is affirmed and sustained.

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26. WEISS (1998) has described how blood similarly concretizes a host of social, moral, and physiological states and processes fot the Haya people in Tanzania.
27. People usually whiten when they are close to dying because say, they lack blood, just like infants who are born with white skin which later darkens.

All the more so when the *maye* is forced to designate victims from among his agnates, that is, people of his own "blood".

Turning to milk, recall that to invite a Doguwa into her home, a person initially offers her a calabash of milk. As a prime symbol of maternity, milk is a marker of kinship. Baba, an old woman from Karo, Nigeria, remarked to anthropologist Mary Smith (1954: 147) in the 1950s that maternal milk was called the "child's judge" because it always silenced a hungry baby. Milk establishes an inalienable bond between a mother and her child. Nicolas (1975: 68) notes that while a father is tied to his children through blood *(jini),* attachment is also reckoned matrilineally through milk, the vital substance that sustains children during their infancy. Significantly, it is through milk that a witch is said to pass her malevolent powers to her children which is why a father who suspects his wife of being a *maya* must pay her for her *nono* (breast milk)[28]. By buying the milk of his children with a coin, he "cuts" the witchcraft, thereby insuring that the mother's malevolent traits will not be passed along to the suckling infant[29].

Milk has cooling properties, and is used in a variety of contexts to neutralize potentially hot, dangerous substances. It can protect against the threat of lightning. In the days of Baba, milk rubbed on the sole of a baby's feet would help mediate the effect of burning sand on hot days (Smith 1954). Though milk's coolness has protective properties, it can also have unfortunate consequences that one must guard against: maternal milk was traditionally thought to cause sterility if it fell on a suckling infant's genitals. Far then from being a neutral substance, its use and ingestion must be carefully monitored precisely because it is so centrally implicated in the materialization (or obliteration) of kinship and closeness. By offering a calabash of milk to a "foreign" creature living in the bush, the *maye* makes her one of his own. Through the ingestion of milk—that is not only expressive but also constitutive of the bond uniting mother and child—the "wild" Doguwa becomes integrated as a dependent in her master's household. Except for the secrecy that surrounds her presence, she behaves as any member of the household would, living, sleeping, and feeding in the family compound. Indeed, like other members of the household, she contributes to the common wealth and expects to receive sustenance. As the

28. Greenberg (1946: 48) similarly notes that in Hausa communities in northern Nigeria, if a man marries [. . .] a witch, her husband's family gives her a shilling on the day she bears a child saying, "We have bought your milk". The child is then given to a co-wife or hired nurse to suckle so that there will be no chance of its becoming one of these cratures.

29. In a parallel manner, many young members of Izala, a reformist Muslim organization that challenges the legitimacy of Sufi-based Islam, initially brought calabashes of milk to their mothers in a symbolic gesture of compensation. Elders did not approve of their new religious orientation. By praying back their mothers for the nurturance they had provided, Muslim reformists symbolically broke their ties with those whom they considered *kafirai,* pagans, because they did not embrace the reforms instituted by Izala.

following testimony illustrates, it is precisely because she is now "kin" that she refuses to go away when ordered to by the *maye:*

"You take the Doguwa to kill or hurt people. But then when you tell her to go, she always returns. She says, You came to my home, now I am staying in yours'. And she kills the people of your household [. . .] even when she is tired of killing people, she stays with you. She never goes back to the bush."

As a dependent, she follows her master everywhere, like a child who clings to the mother on whom she relies for nurturance. While the *maye* is said to own the spirit, in a very real sense, she also owns him. Over time, the *maye* will be forced to sacrifice his family to satiate her gluttonous appetite for blood. Because the kinship created between the *maye* and the spirit through the exchange of milk is motivated by selfishness rather than solidarity, it becomes antithetical to true kinship itself. To be sustained, it feeds on the very substance of kinship, blood. By turning on his own kin, especially his children, to satisfy the increasingly ravenous spirit, the *maye* strikes at the heart of reproduction, sacrificing "the very possibility of a future" (Smith 2004: 268).

The link between witchcraft and family, greed and kinship in Africa has been noted by a number of studies (Ashforth 1998; Ciekawy 2001; Geschiere 1997; Smith 2004)[30]. There, witchcraft "conjures up the idea of an opening, a leakage through which people or resources are withdrawn" (Ciekawy & Geschiere 1998: 5) from the community or the household. By constantly redefining, contradicting, and undermining the boundaries of kinship, it ultimately betrays them. Though he is at first reluctant to sacrifice his own kin to insure the Doguwa's continued support, the *maye* eventually exhibits the same wanton disregard for the limits of kinship as other witches elsewhere. Like the sorcerers LiPuma (1998: 70) describes in his account of personhood in Melanesia, he ultimately becomes "the sole and only cause of his behaviour". By threatening kinship, the *maye*'s excessive individualism "threatens the nature of the social itself" (LiPuma 1998: 71) and this is why his powers must be neutralized without fail, no matter the cost.

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30. The link between witchcraft and kinship has a long history in anthropology (Beidelman 1963; Hunter 1936; Marwick 1965; Middleton 1963). According to Ciekawy and Geschiere (1998: 5) witchcraft epitomizes "the frightening realization that there is jealousy and aggression within the intimate circle of the family where only solidarity and trust should reign". The case at hand differs however in that the only designates his kin to the spirit because he has exhausted every other supply of available victims. In some cases, the Doguwa is said to prey on the *maye's* children despite his best attempt to shield them.

In his account of *majini* (genies) who produce wealth for their owners in exchange for human blood in southeastern Kenya, Smith (2004) writes that though they have long been associated with the experience of economic displacement, the *majini* now speak to newly emerging anxieties centred around the disarticulation of education and wage employment. The recent wave of spirit possession that afflicted Taita schoolgirls in coastal Kenya, he suggests, is a dramatic response to the challenges introduced by the liberalization of the local economy. In Niger, I found no such connection between economic liberalization and the proliferation of spirit forces through which people's experience of changing realities is given substance. True, older notions of *maita*—linked to material wealth, its production and its distortion—have been redeployed to account for new processes and new outcomes—such as when politicians turn to *mayu* for assistance to embezzle large sums of money from the state coffers. Nonetheless, I have suggested here, *maita* increasingly appears to speak to a specific experience of social transformation, having to do with the recent Islamisation of the region. Far from disappearing with the resolute progress of Islam, notions of witchcraft have become central to the ways that ordinary Dogondoutchi residents understand the success and visibility of local elites. As a "relational calculus of resentment, fear, and envy" (Apter 1993: 124) measuring the human cost of immorally acquired wealth, witchcraft works to demystify Islam by shedding light on its covert workings and its "mysterious currencies, its political pieties, its threat to the viability of known social worlds" (Comaroff 1997: 10). Aside from demonstrating that Muslims are, despite adamant claims to the contrary, deeply engaged with the occult, the identification of Muslim witches is an effective strategy for reasserting the centrality of spirit-centred practices aimed at protecting people and places from marauding spirits.

Of course, not all those who are convicted of keeping a Doguwa to amass wealth are Muslims and therefore, "modern". Nor is greed, or for that matter, Doguwa-centred witchcraft understood locally as a response to postcolonial realities: in some cases, it is millet—a symbol of "authentic" value—rather than money that the witch accumulates. While witchcraft certainly exists *within* modernity, people in Arewa do not see witchcraft practices as constituents of the modern, quite the contrary. Indeed, it is precisely because Doguwa-related witchcraft (as well as the neutralization of alleged witches) is part of indigenous tradition that local Muslim officials, in their eagerness to cleanse the town of "animist" survivals, condemn witchcraft accusations as backward and irrational. When individuals accused of witchcraft are declared innocent by the *chef de canton,* people are quick to suggest that bribery was involved. Paradoxically, it is also why Muslims —who claim to be disengaged with pre-Islamic traditions—are thought to engage in such nefarious processes of wealth production. The fact that Doguwa-centred witchcraft is thoroughly enmeshed in "'tradition' and its trappings" (Sanders 2003: 345) supposedly enhances its mystique for those

who claim to have rejected their cultural heritage to embrace modernity and its artefacts. Thus, while Doguwa-related witchcraft speaks to and helps define the particular modernity that Muslims embody and the far-reaching changes that Islamisation has brought in its wake, it remains the hallmark of the unmodern—and this is what makes it so powerfully effective. As such, it belongs to the register of what Ivy (1995: 142), in her account of Japanese modernity, calls "the vanishing": those practices that "linger on the verge of vanishing" and become valorised as site of authentic tradition. It is the tension between witchcraft as "vanishing tradition" and witchcraft as a practice that is firmly rooted in nexuses of cultural production that I have examined in this essay through a focus on the concerns, old and new, that Doguwa-centred images of wrongful consumption invite, reveal, and recover.

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I discuss how the spread of Islam in the town of Dogondoutchi, Niger has profoundly transformed the local imaginary, helping fuel perceptions of witchcraft as a thoroughly Muslim practice. I suggest that it is because witchcraft is seen as a hallmark of tradition that Muslims, despite their claim to have embraced modernity, are accused of being witches. For a small minority unconvinced of the superiority of Islam over local religious traditions, witchcraft offers a convenient means of demonizing Muslims and a powerful commentary on the ways that the globalizing impact of Islam has supposedly transformed local modes of sociality and kinship as well as forms of wealth production and consumption.

RÉSUMÉ

Sorcellerie, esprits suceurs de sang et diabolisation de l'islam à Dogondoutchi (Niger). — Cet article examine comment le développement de l'islam dans la ville de Dogondoutchi au Niger a profondément transformé l'imaginaire local, contribuant à la perception que la sorcellerie est une pratique musulmane. Je suggère que c'est précisément parce que la sorcellerie est perçue comme essentiellement liée à la tradition, que les musulmans sont accusés de sorcellerie malgré leur modernité. Pour ceux qui ne sont pas persuadés de la supériorité de l'islam sur les pratiques religieuses locales, la sorcellerie offre à la fois un moyen de diaboliser l'islam et un commentaire sur la façon dont l'islam a supposément transformé les modes locaux de socialité et de parenté ainsi que les formes de production et de consommation.

Keywords/*Mots-clés:* Niger, Dogondoutchi, muslim identity, spirits, tradition/*Niger, Dogondoutchi, identité musulmane, esprits, tradition.*