

# **Dealing with ‘Remote Control’: Ritual Healing and Modernity in Western Kenya.**

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## Chapter One

### Ritual Healing and Modernity in Western Kenya.

#### 1.1 Introduction and background to the study.

My interest in ritual healing derives from experiences during fieldwork for my Masters thesis on the choice of health care in a rural setting, a thesis submitted to the University of Nairobi in Kenya. My focus at this time was on the range of health care alternatives available to resource deprived rural households, the criteria of choice and the emerging pattern of utilisation among the available alternatives. I was struck by many of the responses that I repeatedly received from respondents while eliciting information on the perceived causes of illnesses and their preferred treatment options. The majority of those I interacted with, formally during interviews and in informal chats talked about a category of illnesses that ‘was sent by one person to another<sup>1</sup>’ and which was treated exclusively by ‘traditional’ means. My initial impression was that this expression referred to infectious diseases especially HIV/AIDS that dominated public debates and attracted enormous attention and interventions from government and other local and international Non governmental organisations due to its rapid spread and high prevalence rates<sup>2</sup> at that time. My informants were however quick to clarify that they meant diseases caused by alleged ritual manipulation. Instead of employing the native term ‘*Obuloji* or *Obulosi*’ which approximated to the English term ‘witchcraft’, my informants preferred to talk about it in a circular manner using phrases like ‘people are not good here’ ‘do not joke with some people here’, ‘they are dangerous’ etc.

The practical implications of these statements would come to me through many other related incidents later in my fieldwork. One such incident was a chat with one of my informants who inquired whether I intended to visit every homestead in the village. I answered in the affirmative. I had by now learnt that informing my respondents that I had a sampling criterion raised suspicions regarding my ‘real intention’ for visiting their particular households and not that of the others. While it worked in many households that I visited, this response stunned my informant. She was shocked that I intended to visit all households and after giving me a rather terrified and concerned look, my informant, a lady in her mid

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase is a euphemism for witchcraft. Although there is a term for witchcraft, (*buloji* or *bulosi*) informants preferred the circular and descriptive form probably to avoid having to explain what they meant by it.

<sup>2</sup> The national aids control programme through its sentinel’s surveillance had placed the HIV/AIDS prevalence rates at 11% and 13% in rural and urban areas respectively.

30s, responded, 'You are going to die'. I asked why she thought so and her response again was euphemistic, 'not everyone in this village is good'. Again in a very circular way, my informant warned me against visiting every homestead if 'I wanted to complete my fieldwork'.

Such incidents were many and varied in my fieldwork and it is neither possible nor desirable to re-present all of them here. At the back of my mind though, several questions lingered. What, for instance, did my respondents mean by statements like 'illnesses that could be sent from one person to the other' 'people are not good in these households' someone can close you or your homestead' etc. Later in the course of the fieldwork for this dissertation, three other expressions became increasingly popular in discussions about witchcraft and its effects especially among the literate clients. These were 'research', 'African chemistry' and 'remote control'. When I sought to understand what clients meant by witchcraft, some of them stated that it was like African chemistry, a mixture of substances imbued with preternatural forces to cause harm to a victim. One respondent, a primary school teacher explained the action of the witch using the following expressions: 'The witch does enough 'research' on you and knows all your plans. He then captures you and controls your life in the same way that a remote control (device) directs the channels of a television set. In this way, you will never get out of their radar and you can only do what they want you to do. The problem is these people are retrogressive and never want anyone to succeed in their lives and so they block your development'. The use of terms such as 'research' African chemistry and 'remote controlling' exhibits an attempt by clients to understand and (re)present their experience with occult forces. They form part of the interest of this dissertation as they not only represent the people's experience but also their desire to appropriate the language of technology to reinterpret their traditions. For sure the respondents know the difference between someone changing the channels of television set and the action of a witch. However they intend to show that in both cases the actor and the action need not be in close proximity for one to affect the other, and herein lay the similarity.

My informants also explained a wide and fascinating range of ways by which people could protect and treat themselves against witchcraft. One such prophylactic was the use of charms. A year after completing my MA studies, I was employed by a Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) as a social science researcher on a reproductive health project. Part of



my task was to conduct observation sessions in selected government and private hospitals to assess whether nurses conducted proper counselling for reproductive health clients. In most government hospitals in Kenya, the Family Planning Department is conjoined with the maternal child and health care department and usually abbreviated as MCH/FP. The nurses would therefore handle the MCH patients before dealing with the FP clients usually in the afternoon. In one of my observation days, I sat with one very friendly nurse as she prepared preliminary bio-data for the children before the doctors could examine them. These involved stripping the babies naked and measuring their weights, temperatures and blood pressure. In my observations, I noticed that all the children brought to the facility on this day, (about 40 of them) had a string tied around their waists with a small ball like substance at one end<sup>3</sup>. The string tied to each child was unique with no specific pattern on colour, weight and the size of the ball-like knot on one end. Of course, I had to keep reminding myself that I came to observe nurses in their practice and not to stare at crying naked babies. After my 'official' task i.e. assessing the accuracy of nurses counselling, I could not help but revisit my observations about the strings on the children's waists with the nurse. She casually informed me that those were charms and that it was common for parents in that locality to tie charms around their children's waists or ankles to protect against witchcraft.

A couple of things struck me concerning this observation. The first and most obvious was the temporal juxtaposition or rather convergence of two medical systems, traditional African medical beliefs and practices exemplified by the charms and biomedicine attested to by the very fact of the children's presence in a biomedical health facility together with their parents or guardians. Instructively, most of the babies had visited the health facilities for routine check up and immunisation. Charms too were believed to be a protective device against many forms of witchcraft, chief among them the 'evil eyes'. Secondly, there appeared to be a comfortable accommodation of the two systems by both the consumers and providers of biomedicine. This was in stark contrast to the official position by the ministry of health in Kenya that embraced biomedicine and castigated most of the practices of traditional medicine<sup>4</sup>. Health care personnel at the local level appeared to embrace a softer position

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<sup>3</sup> The examination at the MCH/FP department involved completely undressing the children to take their weights, which made it possible to notice something on the bare bodies.

<sup>4</sup> Biomedical practitioners in the colonial and post colonial era Kenya have always been against traditional medical practices. Their position was summarized during discussions held in Kenya in 2001 and 2002 on the role of traditional medicine in health care provision. Through the chairman of the Kenya medical association, biomedical practitioners stated that traditional medical practitioners provided health care in a manner that was unacceptable and their practice needed to be monitored. Ritual healing was among the practices that were

regarding social health care practices for as long as they did not seem to interfere with the provision of official health care services like immunisation.

Apart from these observations, all of which I cannot reminisce here, and as much as such occurrences were very common and part and parcel of the peoples health seeking behaviour, my interest in the field was further fuelled by the observation in literature and policy formulations that these practices were neither recognised nor documented by the mainstream official health establishment. The nurse in the example above later explained that there was no use castigating the parents as this would stop them from bringing their children for vaccination. She and others I spoke to regarding charms appeared to have taken an unofficial though pragmatic and personal initiative to ignore the charms and attain a higher coverage for the official health care service. Worth noting too was the body language of most of my informants while talking about such ritual practices. There was noticeable discomfort and ambivalence among some of them, possibly because they were not sure about my reaction to their positions regarding ritual practices<sup>5</sup>. My respondents always appeared half surprised and half amused that I wanted to know more about the 'rituals'. It then becomes necessary to examine the circumstances and processes that have led to the situation where ritual practices persist but are considered unimportant by the official health establishment and evoke ambivalent emotions at times even by its consumers especially when (re)presenting them to 'outsiders'.

Like other former colonies in Africa, Kenya has a plural medical system consisting of traditional ritual healing<sup>6</sup> as well as imported western biomedicine. Since the colonial period however, ritual healing has been subject to criticism and even persecution by the forces of modernity as represented by biomedical practitioners, the state and Christianity often acting in concert. It is however important to note as Good (1987) did that the problem was not just for ritual healing but on many other indigenous institutions that inherited a post colonial legacy of negativism. As a result many Kenyans are ambivalent regarding traditional healing and its place in a developing (modernising) society.

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classified as superstitious and unacceptable and health care personnel were expected to be vigilant against such.

<sup>5</sup> Most respondents thought that I was either a medical doctor or a researcher with strong biomedical leanings and assumed that I would either criticize or laugh at their belief in the occult and ritual healing.

<sup>6</sup> Here I use the terms 'ritual healing' 'Traditional healing' and 'Traditional medicine' interchangeably, since traditional healing techniques normally involved the use of rituals.

Several scholars have argued that biomedicine was introduced in Africa in a thoroughly patronizing and imperialistic manner, with the aim not only of compelling indigenous peoples to abandon their "unscientific" medical ideas and practices (Mburu 1991, Ranger 1981, Geschiere 1997, Good 1987, Janzen 1978), but also to advance colonial economic interests and subordinate the Africans to the interests of capitalism (Ranger 1981, Mburu 1991). According to Okoth-Owiro (1994) the first step towards establishment of colonial medical organisation supported and controlled by the state was through the Medical practitioners and dentists ordinance, which made provision for the registration of medical practitioners as a precondition for practice. This ordinance acknowledged the existence of traditional medical specialists but exempted them from the requirement of formal certification and registration through the policy of 'legal abstention' whose aim was to deny indigenous medicine the legal, administrative, and institutional resources that were needed for its proper development. It is on this policy framework as well as the enactment of other legislations, notable among them the 'Witchcrafts Act of 1925'<sup>7</sup> that medical pluralism assumed its shape and character in Kenya.

Although independence was accompanied by lofty egalitarian pronouncements, and calls for the masses to reclaim their cultural heritage (including indigenous systems of medicine) postcolonial government policy has continued to treat traditional healing as an inferior form of healing, to be incorporated only if it meets the standards set by biomedicine. The postcolonial political elite in Kenya strongly and openly fostered a highly competitive and capitalistic style of modernisation, enthusiastically embracing many western values and institutions (Good 1987). The government rapidly expanded modern health care facilities (Owino 1997, Good 1987) while continuing to treat ritual healing as a cultural resource. The number of health facilities quadrupled between 1963 (at independence) and 1996 (Owino 1997: 3). Today, traditional healers are registered by a department in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services, while biomedical practitioners, considered to be health professionals are registered by the Ministry of Health (Sindiga 1995, GOK 2003).

The 'Witchcrafts Act' enacted in 1925 by the colonial government has been amended twice by the post independent regime, but it has not changed its character fundamentally. Sections 4 and 6 of this Act proscribe both the practice of witchcraft and ritual healing that identifies

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<sup>7</sup> The Witchcrafts Act enacted in 1925 in response to increasing sorcery and witchcraft accusations. It was meant to suppress the activity of witches but ended up confusing ritual healers and witches, proscribing all of their activities.

and punishes perceived perpetrators of witchcraft (witches). As my ethnography will show in the subsequent chapters, identification of witches and a determination of their fate are central to ritual healing practices in Western Kenya and proscribing such actions is the same as proscribing ritual healing. Section 4 and 6 of the witchcrafts act state the following:

*4. Any person who of his pretended knowledge of so called witchcraft with the intent to injure, uses or assists to use or causes to be put into operations such means or processes as may be calculated to cause fear, annoyance or injury in mind, person or property or to any person shall be guilty of an offence and liable to the same punishment as is provided for in section 3.*

*6. Any person who accuses or threatens to accuse any person with being a witch or with practising witchcraft shall be guilty of an offence liable to a fine not exceeding five hundred shillings or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years, (Kenya Law reports).*

While the rest of the chapter deals with other aspects of witchcraft offenses, these two specifically relate to the practice of witchcraft and witchcraft control. Section 4 proscribes witchcraft, while section 6 equally proscribes the identification and control of witchcraft, a task that was often performed by healers. Ritual healing as we shall see in most of the ethnographies in this dissertation often started with declaration of certain members of the community as witches and proceeded to determine ameliorative strategies against them and their actions. The drafting of the law in such an ambiguous manner was however done purposely to enable the colonial authorities to clamp down on cultural aspect that they deemed dangerous to their continued occupation of the colony (Ciekawy 1998, Feierman, Personal comm.<sup>8</sup>). It is surprising then that the post colonial government has made two amendments to it without altering its fundamental character. The retention of this chapter in Kenya's laws reflects the post colonial government's desire to maintain the status quo established by the colonialists as well as to identify itself as rational establishment committed to emerging as a 'modern' nation. In spite the promulgation of this law, its enforcement was rather haphazard both in the colonial and post colonial era and as I argue

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<sup>8</sup> I met Prof. Steven Feierman who has written extensively on Traditional African Medicine at a conference in Kenya in December of 2009. According to him the writing of the law in this manner was not a mistake or confusion between the role of a witch or a healer. Colonialists were suspicious of the ritual practices of Africans and crafted the law in such an ambiguous manner to enable them to clamp down on 'anything' and 'everything'.

later in this chapter, some colonial officers embraced certain aspects of ritual healing within their jurisdiction, for example, the administration of oaths.

In spite of these "modern" attempts by an alliance of biomedical practitioners and the state to erode the influence of traditional ritual healing, studies show that indigenous medical theories and practices continue to be a prominent part of health seeking behaviour in 'modern' day Kenya (Mburu 1991, Kimani 1981, Good 1987, Wandibba 1995, Nyaigoti-Chacha 1995, Whyte 1989, Westerlund 1989). In this dissertation, I ask why ritual healing persists and flourishes in Kenya in spite of these challenges. Asking the question in this manner is however to misframe it fundamentally, as Moore and Sanders (2001) stated. The interest here is rather on the human needs that ritual healing caters for and for which it is consulted.

As early as 1978, the World Health Organisation observed that over 80% of the African population depended on traditional medicine (WHO 1978). And since neither the African governments nor the WHO 'could afford to provide all the biomedicine required by the populations', it exhorted African countries to come up with strategies for the promotion, standardisation and inclusion of traditional healing into the formal medical care system (WHO 1978, 2002). However, a close look at WHO documents reveals that "traditional medicine" is re-defined so as to ignore its ritual dimension (Last 1981, Whyte 1989, Sax 2008). Moreover, in the process of re-defining and re-presenting themselves, ritual healers often "modernize " their techniques, by emulating the practices and appearance of biomedical healers (Whyte 1989). Whyte aptly observes that an important aspect of this process is the consciousness of herbalism as African traditional healing as it fits nicely with the pharmaceutical character of western medicine and avoids a lot of difficulties having to do with supernatural powers and kinship therapy (1989: 294).

Under encouragement and goading from the WHO, the Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Health has made several halfhearted attempts at the formalisation of traditional healing. For instance, after the 1978 Alma-Ata declaration<sup>9</sup> and exhortation from the WHO, the government included plans for the development of traditional medicine in its five-year

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<sup>9</sup> The term Alma-Ata declaration is named after the International conference in Primary health care held in Alma-Ata in the former USSR between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of September 1978 and which set as a target, the attainment of all peoples of the world by year 2000, the attainment of health that will enable them to lead a socially and economically productive life.

national development plan between 1978 and 1983. (GOK 1978) However the subsequent five-year development plan (1983 –1988) is absolutely silent on such plans. The first serious attempts at formalisation and recognition traditional medicine in Kenya resulted in two conferences held in 2001 and 2003 (GOK 2001, 2003) and the drafting of a Traditional Medicine Bill in 2001 (GOK 2003). Acting through the Kenya Medical association (KMA), the biomedical community expressed its reservations regarding the 'ethical basis' of ritual healing, but still welcomed the bill as a way of regulating, controlling and monitoring traditional ritual healers (Nyikal 2001). Although traditional healers did not have an organisation comparable to the KMA through which they could articulate a collective position on the bill, several individual healers rejected the bill for failing to recognize that traditional medicine is not amenable to standardisation (Sci & Dev Net news 2004).

Despite the holding of these two conferences and the drafting of the Traditional Medicine Bill in 2002, it has never been debated in parliament. Discussions between biomedical practitioners and traditional healers have taken place, but the power relationship between the two is inherently unequal. The Department of Standards and Regulations Services which was in charge of the process is less than enthusiastic about endorsing a policy and regulatory framework for traditional ritual healing, as can be seen in the language of the bill. Traditional and ritual healers thus operate in a "zone of frail confidence" (Swiderski 1995), since their work can be deemed to be both therapeutic and criminal at the same time (Sindiga 1995). Ciekawy (1998) and Brantley (1979) have documented the tribulations of a ritual healer known popularly by the name Kajiwe at the Kenyan coast whose ritual healing practice oscillated between years of official recognition and accreditation by the state and proscription in some by the very state leading to his incarceration. Clients however do not suffer this lack of confidence. Their only concern appeared to be whether the specific healer would solve their problems.

The introduction of Christian religions in Kenya during the colonial era is yet another process that has had a huge impact on ritual healing. It is estimated that over 70% of Kenyans belong to mainstream (Catholic, Anglican, and other Protestant) churches (Mbiti 1969). Numerous syncretic churches and cults (such as the legion of Mary and African Divine church) have also emerged (Mbiti 1969). Kenya is currently estimated to have over 3000 different Christian denominations. With respect to ritual healing, the mainstream denominations differ markedly from the syncretic ones. In their evangelical missions in

Kenya and the entire African continent, mainstream churches found themselves in the uncomfortable situation of, on the one hand, denying the usefulness of African ritual healing practices, and even preaching against them, while on the other hand promoting the efficacy of Christian prayer against the sorcery for which such practices are often considered to be the most effective antidote (Ranger 1981). As a result, as LeBeau observed for Namibia, 'local inhabitants were encouraged to go to school to learn to read the bible, to go to church to save their souls and to go to hospital to save their bodies' (2003: 25). This approach by the missionaries led to the formation, in colonial and post colonial times, of many independent churches popularly referred to as syncretistic (Comaroff 1981). These syncretistic denominations in which a large percentage of ritual healers can be found (but who form a smaller percentage of the Christian following) are more accommodating, not only of African concepts of ritual healing, but also other aspects of African culture by attempting to bridge a number of discontinuities between western and indigenous cultural principles (ibid). LeBeau (2003) and others have observed that paradigmatic similarities between African and Christian religion have made it possible for traditional healers to incorporate Christian aspects into their healing techniques and thus giving rise to what may be termed 'neo-traditional healers' (2003: 26). Several other scholars have pointed to a new phase of Christianity in Africa, referred to variously as Pentecostalism or syncretism (Moore and Sanders 2001, Meyer 1998a, 1998b, Van Dijk 2001, Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). These scholars have observed that Pentecostalism posits a dualistic theology, which emphasizes the struggle between God and the devil. Witchcraft and other occult practices are explicitly recognized as the devil's work. And therefore in this context, modern Christianity has not displaced ideas about witchcraft and the occult, but provided a new context in which they make perfect sense (Moore and Sanders 2001, Van Dijk 2001). Van Dijk thus observes

..the rise of independent churches particularly in the form of prophetic-healing churches implied a syncretization of religious discourse and practice. Many of these churches incorporated important elements of local cosmologies, healing practices and styles of leadership. They often merged elements of missionary Christianity (the bible, hymns, styles of dress and uniforms) with a range of healing and cleansing practices that related directly to traditional forms. Their healing prophets catered for a wide array of problems perceived to be caused by occult powers, evil spirits and the like which the established white missionary churches were prone to dismiss as unreal, heathen, superstitious and the product of ignorance. (2001:101)

This scenario well exemplified in the healing practices of *Mtumishi Barasa* whose healing rituals are extensively described in this dissertation. In his practice, most if not all afflictions are ascribed to the work of the devil and the crux of the healing rituals can be summarized in the one phrase that he and his clients often repeat in the rituals, i.e ‘*Shetani Ashindwe*’, a Kiswahili<sup>10</sup> phrase that translates to ‘The devil be trounced’. The Christian bible and worship practices are central in all aspects of his healing rituals, namely, the divination sessions, production and eradication of cleansing and ritual closure. These processes are explained in detail in the following chapters. .

While one may mention the influence of western science and rationality through biomedicine, state manipulation and the spread of Christianity as having a direct and profound impact on ritual healing, the demands of modern day economic organisation are equally important to the practice of ritual healing. My very interest, presence and preoccupation with ritual healing are very much a product of my anthropological interests as much as they are shaped and conditioned by my own ‘modern upbringing’. I was brought up by my parents in a cosmopolitan city away from their ethnic environment or ancestral cultural background. As such, I grew up in a different town and very much outside my own ethnic social and geographical locus, interacting more with boys and girls from other ethnic backgrounds. As teachers, my parents took me to school demanding that I work hard to make a good career in future. And so while conducting fieldwork for my Masters degree back in my father’s village, my informants were often quick to pick me out as an urban, educated, emigrated, and therefore, ‘modern’ person. At other times they pitied and derided the fact that I spoke my mother tongue differently, and that some of my questions especially regarding rituals exhibited extreme forms of ignorance. I represented what was, in their understanding, the product of modernisation. The respondent I referred to at the beginning of this chapter was for instance quite shocked that I could think of visiting homesteads indiscriminately. My aunt once stopped me from offering some money to a man who claimed to be my uncle. The man asked me to lend him some 20 shillings (approx USD 30 cts) money to buy a glass of the local brew. But as soon as I stretched my hand to offer him the coins, my aunt stopped me and severely reprimanded the old man for being a drunkard. Later in the evening, she equally reprimanded and warned me against giving out money to

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<sup>10</sup> Kiswahili is the national language spoken by majority of the people in Kenya. Kiswahili is a mixture of Arabic and Bantu languages and the term ‘Shetan’ means Satan in Arabic as well.



people I did not know. 'People in this locality use money to spoil others' she said without further elaboration.

The notion that people could use money and other items from their victims for sorcery would turn out to be a very prominent feature in the healing rituals that I describe later in this dissertation. By offering money to strangers, I came across as ignorant and my aunt and several other informants never shied away from juxtaposing my 'modern upbringing' with what they perceived to be extreme ignorance of the nature of life in the village. And this partly explained my fascination with rituals in general and my respondents discomfort with and uncertainties over what to tell me and what not to tell me. I would be fascinated every time my cousin, for instance, advised me to apply pig's fat on my face to ward off the effects of evil eyes<sup>11</sup> or to carry certain herbs in my hair or pockets to protect against witchcraft.

My personal experiences and fieldwork for my masters degree showed that ritual healing practices persist and in Geschiere's words, are even 'intertwined with items of modern provenance' (1997:2). Much other ethnography from Africa evidences the persistence of ritual healing in Africa (Feierman 1985, Maithya 1992, Wandibba 1995, Turner.E 1992, Sindiga 1995, Nyamwaya 1995, 1987, Comaroff 1980, Swiderski 1995, LeBeau 2003, Jansen 1979, Turner V. 1968, Last 1981). In the course of my fieldwork, I was puzzled by the presence of practices that seemed incompatible with 'modernity and since I could not delve much into them at this level, I decided to conduct more research especially on the relationship between ritual and social transformation occasioned by the modernisation process.

Three basic questions arise and form the basis for the research and write up of this dissertation. One, why has ritual healing persisted and continued to be an inextricable part of the people's health strategies even in the face of modernity as marked by the spread biomedical science and technology? My second question is on how ritual healing adapts to the challenges posed by 'modernity' - challenges which include but are not limited to the hegemonic tendencies of biomedicine, emerging needs posed by modernity, the altered economic and social matrix of potential clients, economic necessities etc. The third question

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<sup>11</sup> Applying pig's fat on one's face was believed to act as a prophylaxis against the effects of evil eyes for respondents in my field site. My cousin always asked me to apply pigs fat on my face just in case I came across an 'evil eye'

for this research is on efficacy. In view of ritual adaptation, how can ritual efficacy be adjudged? Assuming that all ritual recourses to a certain worldview or cosmology (Dow 1986, Comaroff 1980) what aspects of the creatively altered rituals are used to evaluate their efficacy? This study progresses on the assumption that the contestations (both theoretically and practically) surrounding modernity or its malcontents do by themselves replicate people's anxieties and create an inclination towards a reliance on ritual healing as opposed to exterminating it.

With respect to the question of ritual's continued presence Geschiere (1997) and others already stated the stereotype that belief in witchcraft was something traditional that would automatically disappear with modernisation does not fit with actual developments in Africa today. But to ask why ritual healing persisted in Africa in spite of the modernisation process is to assume that it should. Yet as Moore and Sanders stated, this can only occur if we 'think in narrow teleological terms of progress, development and modernization. (2001:19) However if we conceptualise multiple modernities as this dissertation does, the idea that 'progress' 'development' and modernity are multiplex, undecidable, and contextually specific, there is no reason to believe that the occult should vanish. (ibid). It is then more useful to rephrase the question to, what human needs does ritual healing serve for clients in a contemporary society? Studies on the persistence of ritual healing have tended to be based on an etiological incompatibility thesis which posits that non-western people's illness beliefs are conceptually inconsistent with biomedical theory (Young and Garro, 1982) and that under certain circumstances non western people will select traditional healing methods. Other studies argue that the persistence of ritual healing depends on the social and historical context of the particular tradition (Cant 1999, Janzen 1978, Leslie and Young 1992, Nichter 1989.) Patients are said to choose healers on the basis of ethnicity, cultural and social aspects (Heggenhougen 1980, Minocha 1980, Young and Garro 1982) and cost (Bhardwaj and Paul 1986, WHO 1978, 2002). The WHO actually uses the cost element in advising poor countries to revert to traditional healing.

These studies however do not capture the reality of ritual healing in Africa as patients are known to readily embrace biomedicine even as they resort to traditional healing methods, at times even within the same illness condition. Some traditional healing methods are known to be even more expensive than biomedicine while healers in Africa are known to practice out of their own cultural background and even derive their popularity from this fact alone.

And so like Evans -Pritchard's (1937) respondents who believed that the poison oracle was strongest if the poison was collected from far off places, ritual healers in Africa are known to advertise themselves and their medicines as originating from far off distances to impress on their abilities. Further ritual healing clients are known to seek out healers from far off places. It is hypothesized here that ritual healing persists primarily due to its comprehensive etiology that easily incorporates new changes including biomedicine. More importantly though is that ritual healing persists because it does what it purports to do, i.e it heals. In its healing however it may incorporate certain procedures under its logic including procedures that are borrowed from biomedicine. Advertisement boards from ritual healers for instance show a wide range of afflictions that they handle, that are not limited to the narrow biomedical understanding of disease. Good (1987) exhibits one such advertisement that I reproduce below, together with another that I saw at the beginning of my fieldwork in western Kenya. While Good's advertisement was in the capital city and collected 30 years before the beginning of my fieldwork, the list of afflictions handled by the two healers were strikingly similar as can be seen for the advertisements below.

Advertisement of a traditional healer in Nairobi and its translation (From Good 1987: 181).



The advert translated.

**Traditional healer.**

**Expert in the treatment of the following ailments:**

1. When a woman wants to give birth
2. The medicine for bringing back someone who is lost
3. Love medicine
4. Medicine for calming conflicts between husband and wife
5. Treating Mental illness and Epilepsy
6. Treating advanced/persistent Syphilis and Gonorrhoea.
7. All stomach illnesses
8. Medicine for business
9. Eliminating demons and djinns
10. Treating chest and soul diseases.
11. Medicines for bringing a husband or a wife back home
12. Medicine to assist one get a job after searching for long
13. Blocking the home from all types of witches
14. Medicine to succeed in a court case



# JAMII TIBA EAST AFRICA

AN ASTROLOGER HERBALIST - HEALER  
DR. MOHAMMED ALI NA MAWAZI



Daktari mashuhuri anayejulikana kote Africa, sasa amerudi kwa miaka minne (4) ya utafiti wa Miti shamba kutoka South Africa na Uarabuni. Yuko Midland Café mjini Kakamega katika Canon Awori Rd. . Yeye hutabiri shida zako kabla hujamwambia. Pesa za uchunguzi ni Kshs.100.

Kutokana na utafiti huu, sasa anaweza kutibu maradhi mengi na shida tofauti, ambazo zimeshinda madaktari wa kizungu. anatibu magonjwa haya:-

1. Wazimu, Kisirani, kutoka mimba /kuhara damu,, Wasiwasi, Kifafa.
2. Kisonono, Syphilis na Tego, Vingoonda vya Tumbo, Malaria Kali na Typhoid, Kifua (T.B), Asthma, Nguvu za kiume kama ni ndogo.
3. Dawa za kupendwa kazini, Mapenzi, Dawa ya kumaliza visirani, Dawa za masomo na promotion.
4. Mke kupata mimba kama hapati, kuita mtu aliyepotea.
5. Magonjwa ya kichwa, Kifafa, Ini, Figo, Dawa za biashara, kazi.
6. Dawa za kuosha mishipa, Damu, Mkonjo, Tumbo, Dawa za moyo, Macho na Masikio.
7. Kusokota, Kukosa hamu ya kula, Kufunga, Kuhara Damu na kutapika, Kuvimba vimba mwili wote, Kinga za Boma.
8. Mwili au shamba, Uharibifu wa pesa Mkononi, Magonjwa yote ya ngozi mgongo (boils) majibu, Kuzuia ndoto mbaya, Majini.
9. Mizimu, Pepo mbaya, Bibi kusumbuliwa na damu, Dawa za kuzuia kupasuliwa kama ako na mimba, Kesi yoyote ya miaka, magonjwa yanayo ambatana na Ukimwi. e.t.c

AKO MJINI: KAKAMEGA  
NYUMBA: MIDLAND CAFÉ  
ROOM No: 8  
BARABARA: CANON AWORI  
P.O. Box: 69071, NAIROBI  
MOBILE No: 0722-520682  
0720-554686

HEAD OFFICE: NAIROBI  
CROSS ROAD NEAR COAST BUS,  
DARAJA GUEST HOUSE,  
BASEMENT ROOM No. 6  
TEL: 020-341306

7  
TABLE TEL.  
0720395362  
B. R. MAWAZI

The translation of the advertisement on page 14 translated

<p><b>JAMII TIBA EAST AFRICA:</b> <b>AN ASTROLOGER HERBALIST – HEALER</b> <b>DR. MOHAMMED ALI NA MAWAZI</b></p>
<p>A Famous healer who is known everywhere in Africa has come back to Kakamega after four years of Research in South Africa and in Arabic Countries. Available at Midlands's cafe in Kakamega town on Canon Awori Road. He predicts your illnesses before you tell him. Consultation fee is Kshs. 100.</p> <p>Following his research he is now able to treat many of the diseases that cannot be treated by European doctors. He treats the following illnesses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Mental illnesses, restlessness, miscarriages, bloody diarrhoea, tension and epilepsy.</li><li>2. Gonorrhoea, syphilis, ulcers, serious malaria, Typhoid, Asthma, impotence.</li><li>3. Medicines to be loved at work, love, medicines to assist in education and to be promoted at work.</li><li>4. Female sterility, recalling lost people.</li><li>5. Head illnesses, Epilepsy, liver, kidneys, business and employment medicines,</li><li>6. Medicines to clean blood vessels, blood, urine, stomach, heart, eyes and ears</li><li>7. Appetite, closure, bloody diarrhoea and vomiting, body swelling, homestead protection.</li><li>8. Body or farm, wastage of money, all skin diseases, boils, back diseases, bad dreams, djinns.</li><li>9. Spirits, ancestral spirits, menstrual problems, medicines against surgical operation in pregnancy, protracted court cases, HIV/AIDS opportunistic infections etc.</li></ol>

This study starts on the understanding that ritual healing persists and meets certain human needs pragmatically. It therefore takes ritual healing seriously and seeks to systematically observe and describe the rituals and to show the way in which ritual handles the very needs that it claims to deal with. Even by a casual observation of advertisements by ritual healers reproduced above, it becomes evident that ritual healing handles a wide range of afflictions. The two advertisements with their translations were quite similar and epitomised the comprehensive etiology that organised ritual healing in Africa where ritual intervened in a set of circumstances and in a social field. In this case, my study will utilize the ethnographic approach that describes the circumstances and conditions under which ritual healing is found to be more useful as opposed to listing ailments and their ritual remedies.

The second question that this study addresses is ‘how does ritual adapt to the challenges occasioned by modernity? For this question, the focus is more on practices rather than systems in view of the idiosyncratic nature of traditional healing in Africa as well as the desire to avoid the anthropological temptation to systematize a set of contingently related practices (Sax 2010, Greene 1998, 635; Kimani 1981, Migliore 1983, Press 1971). The question of ritual adaptation has been ignored in the literature on medical pluralism (except for few scholars like Parker 1988) in part because ritual healing practices have been regarded as static and unchanging and mostly as opposed or resistant to modernity. While looking at ritual adaptation, attempts will be made to compare this with the modifications already documented by Whyte (1989) and Comaroff (1980). Does ritual, for instance, follow the logic of Whyte who argues that professionalizing healers tend to distance themselves from "superstition," or do they merely seek new (perhaps religious) justifications of their ritual practices? Are animal sacrifices for instance replaced with non-sacrificial rituals in view of the religious (Christian) critique? What about the entry of the market and new forms of labour organisations? How do market forces influence the form of payment and morality associated with remuneration for ritual healing? Is there a difference between rituals conducted for city residents and village residents? To the extent that ritual is adopted for afflictions associated with modernity, are new rituals invented for these new set of misfortunes? Press observed that under urban industrial conditions, there was a greater use of medicines, willingness to charge fees, and an increased focus on individuals rather than groups (1971:752 – 53). In the advertisement by the healer in Kakamega above, one can already see the organisational shift for ritual where healers already charge an initial consultation fee for their services. What other influences of modernity can one observe within the practices of ritual healers in a plural medical system?

The final question addressed by this dissertation is on evaluations of efficacy. How do healers and their clients evaluate the efficacy or lack of it in a plural medical system where clients may simultaneously consult healers across medical systems? In view of the power of biomedicine many of the earlier approaches at evaluating efficacy of ritual healing have often adopted biomedical criteria of efficacy. The seminal work by Cannon (1942) on ‘Voodoo’ death clarified the possibility of death or illness occurring after the performance of certain magical practices, including exorcism, sorcery, and uttering spells or curses. Cannon and others after him (Levi Strauss 1963, Av Ruskin 1988, D’Aquili et al 1979, Laughlin and Mcmanus 1992; Turner 1988, Rouget 1985) have adopted and demonstrated neuro-

physiological hypotheses to explain the efficacy of ritual. Moerman (2002) whose work on placebo effect has been useful in isolating the importance of a healer's confidence in his methods as a critical component of efficacy also applied biomedical criteria to ritual healing. Frank's (1973) work on persuasion is quite useful when he argues that healing alters the consciousness of the patient but his focus on an individual's psyche is typical of what Comaroff described as 'the biological individualism upon which western medicine was predicated' (1981: 373). Such an approach is impotent when applied to ritual especially when one recognizes the fact that majority of the issues handled by healers may actually not have a malady that exhibited itself objectively and physically.

This dissertation takes the view as (Sax 2010) and Kirmayer (2004) advise that systems of healing must be assessed according to their own criteria. The most persuasive argument for efficacy of ritual healing in Africa is one that starts with the recognition that the social field is considered the most potent source of affliction. Secondly ritual healing works first by locating the source of the problem in the social field. In many cases, afflictions stemming from the social field did not affect individuals, but a group of individuals, usually related to each other by blood or marriage. Therefore the object of therapy was a 'social field' a household, lineage, neighbourhood or village (CF Sax 2010). In this case, the healing ritual as argued by Comaroff (1980), Sax (2010) and others worked by repairing or restructuring broken relationships. However under conditions of modernity, the social unit that is often the object of therapy has changed. The question here then is what happens to ritual healing when the nature of the social unit which is the object of therapy is radically changed by the conditions of modernity? What happens where the healers' ability to enforce social conformity is eroded under conditions of modernity? How do healers deal with situations where members of the social unit relevant to the occurrence of an affliction do not subscribe to the same set of moral, religious or political ideals? Is the condition of social harmony still maintained as a precondition for efficacy? These and other questions will be addressed under the question of efficacy in this study.

## **1.2 Ritual healing and Modernity.**

This study investigates both why and how ritual healing persists in the face of 'modernity' or the so called modernisation process. But what is modernisation or why should the presence of ritual in the face of modernity attract attention? In his book 'Expectations of modernity' Fergusson asserts that the term modernism is 'notoriously vague, analytically



slippery and susceptible to multiple and sometimes contradictory sorts of invocation' (1999:17). He however maintained the use of the term for two main reasons: first to underlie the point that dismantling linear teleologies of emergence and development remains an unfinished task in African studies and elsewhere; and second, to suggest that current debates about modernism and post modernism need not only to take account of Africa but to be fundamentally qualified in the light of the contemporary African experience. While agreeing with Fergusson's characterisation, Eyoh states that modernisation is not the only concept to prove a 'slippery thing susceptible of subtle massage and rough manipulation alike' (1999:4). Geschiere et al (2008) on the other hand proclaim that the term modernity is indispensable even though in the context of Africa it confuses the analytical and empirical levels - whether we like it or not. (2008:2) In spite of the scepticism associated with the term, even its critics maintain rather than dispense with its use all together as is evident in titles adopted by its critics. For instance, Gaonkar (2001) speaks of Alternative modernities, Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) and Moore and Sanders (2001) emphasize the aspect of 'Multiple Modernities' while Schmidt (2006) talks of 'Varieties of modernity'.

While the term modernity may be used to refer generally to the contemporary, the present or the now or more broadly to innovation, a more substantive conception of the term seem to be more prevalent. This conception according to Geschiere et al. requires that we consider the relative value of different dimensions of the 'modern': processes such as commodification and monetization, of instituting constitutional government, representative democracy, taxation and/or the civil services, of mass mediatisation, of reconfiguring personal relationships towards the bourgeois nuclear family and/or the individual, of the demise of religion and the rise of secularization etc (2008: 2). People in Africa often evoke and talk about these aspects as emblematic of their being modern, as a shift from their traditional ways of life and to refer to the basic sense of them living in a new time. While such qualities or processes might indicate aspects of modernity, Geschiere et al. (2008) and other critics of modernity observe that as some of these attributes might be useful in characterizing modernity, but their promise of defining modernity remained illusory. Since this dissertation deal with ritual and modernity, I will briefly examine the origin and development of the notion of modernity especially with respect to Africa to see the ways in which it has turned out to be both evasive and ambivalent both analytically and empirically.

The intellectual roots of modernisation theory lie in Western nations thinking about social change and more immediately in the European enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which gave birth to the modern social sciences (Eisenstadt 2007). The enlightenment embodied a critique of the 'old order' when European societies were at the threshold of industrialization and exposed to social dislocations that would only intensify. Convinced of the inevitable demise of the old feudal order and of absolutism, Enlightenment intellectuals propounded the 'idea of progress' a dogma about the imminence and desirability of change. In opposition to the defenders of the old order, of social progress governed by and political authority legitimated by religion and tradition, they argued that rational knowledge of society based on scientific investigation and freed from religious dogma and superstition was possible and represented a superior form of knowledge (ibid). Once validated and worked upon, such knowledge would advance the material and cultural emancipation of society. The modernisation paradigm derived from scholars who were themselves products of the enlightenment. Prominent among them was Max Weber whose ideas were reformulated in the 1960s by several English speaking scholars. Enlightenment scholars (Marx and Durkheim included) enamoured of the idea of progress as a universal historical process leading to a single modernity. Gaonkar (2001) describes eighteenth century philosophers of the enlightenment as having limitless faith in the emancipatory potential of human reason. They believed that when reason was properly deployed, as exemplified in scientific inquiry, it would lead to steady progress in both the material and moral condition of the mankind. The former will be enriched through an explosive increase in productive powers that will accrue with the technological mastery of nature and with an efficient and planned administration of collective existence. As for the latter, the enlightenment philosophers believed that the rationalization of cultural and social life resulting from the spread of scientific knowledge and attitude would lead among other things to the progressive eradication of traditional superstitions, prejudices and errors and to the gradual establishment of a republican form of government.

Modernisation theory takes as its principal economic transformation, the shift from a network of predominantly rural communities preoccupied by the needs of agrarian self subsistence, to an increasingly urbanized market oriented society dominated by mechanized industry (Eyoh 1999, Eisenstadt 2007, Smith 2006). Adopting the nation state as its main unit of analysis, the theory defined development as an endogenously driven process and maintained that modernisation was a goal attainable by all societies. Modernisation theory

conceived of underdeveloped societies as comprising traditional and modern sectors. The traditional sector was rural and agrarian, its socio-political organisation defined by religion, superstition, primordial loyalties and similar forces. In contrast, the modern sector was urban, its economy dominated by industry, social standing was determined by economic position (social class) and hence the result of personal achievement, and secularism defined the organisation of social relations and public life. In effect this equated development with the increasing westernization of underdeveloped societies through elaboration of market based economies, and liberal, pluralistic political systems. Whereas traditional communities were depicted as stable hierarchies dominated by kinship networks, modern social mobility creates a more impersonal society, in which national loyalties outweigh social ones. This way nationalism generates nations and not the other way round (Eyoh, 1999). Within these amorphous national mass, individuals have more choice than before, empowered not only by increased affluence but also by the spread of literacy. This allowed the written word to replace face to face contact as the principal form of communication. By popularising scientific discoveries, education helps to demystify the world helping modern man to spend more time contemplating his history than agonising about his future (Ibid). Wider access to education makes traditionally restricted high culture publicly accessible and opens up careers based on talent rather than on lineage, leading ultimately to an increase in popular politicisation and political equality (Eyoh 1999, Eisenstadt 2007, Smith 2006).

This focus of social sciences on modernity took a particularly sharp and systematized form after World War II (Smith 2006), even though as Geschiere et al. (2008) observe, the classical social thinkers cherished a more ambivalent understanding and vision of modernity. The second half of the twentieth Century saw the development of social science theories that posited modernity and modernization as largely universal, uniform, predictable, and inevitable dynamics inexorably transforming the world. In sociology, Talcott Parsons theorized universal “pattern variables” and processes of evolutionary development of differentiation organizing the process of modernization. In economics, W.W. Rostow theorized the “Five Stages of Economic Growth” through which all societies would pass in order to develop and modernize. An entire “Economic and Social Development” industry worked for decades under such theoretical notions. Thus, until as late as the 1970s, a very particular theoretical model for understanding modernity and modernization dominated much of the social sciences. And this model continues to exert powerful effects in the social sciences through its residual background assumptions and models of thought. Especially

relevant for my discussions is the fact that this model assumed that modernity and modernization are not only inevitable and inexorable, but also that modernity produces predictable patterns of uniformity and standardization—which, it turns out, resembles the particular experience of Western Europe (Smith 2006). Again, a key element of the uniformity that modernity is believed to engender is the necessary and inevitable abandonment of religion, spirituality, objective universals, and non-naturalistic metaphysics (ibid).

The two key conditions for successful modernization were economic growth through industrialization and modernizing elites with the ‘Psychocultural attributes’ to guide their societies through the process (Eyoh 1999, Gaonkar 2001). Modernization of underdeveloped societies could be realized in a shorter period than had been the case of western societies. In bequeathing the ex-colonies with modern economic enclaves and westernized elites, colonial rule laid the foundations for accelerating the process. Interestingly the narrative of progress that undergirded the approach resonated with the nationalist aspirations of third world elites that Gaonkar has referred to as latecomers to modernity (2001:22). Julius G Kiano, a leading Kenyan economist at the dawn of Kenya’s independence for example commented at a conference in Stuttgart<sup>12</sup> that his country would channel all its resources on forced industrialization. Commenting about the case of Kenya, Speich (2009) observed that socioeconomic change in the East African country was promoted by the pro western independent government. This led to Kenya of the 1960s to be referred to as a ‘Laboratory of development’ in which key assumptions of modernization theory were tested and refined (Speich, 2009:450). One of the key documents in this setting was sessional paper number 10 of 1965 in which Kenya’s Ministry of Planning and Development presented a strategic vision under the label of an African socialism, and whose basic idea was to design a route for planned economic and social change in which assumedly, traditional African forms of solidarity were to coexist with open market structures and forced industrialization. The ministry was at this time headed by Tom Mboya who is credited for charting Kenya’s path to economic development in the years immediately after independence. To overcome the dramatic problems of new states, Kenyan leaders (like their other African counterparts) sort massive transfer of technical knowhow and capital from the North. Technical assistance, the transfer of specialized knowledge and

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<sup>12</sup> This conference was organized by the German evangelic church and was held in Stuttgart in 1961, two years before Kenya gained independence.

financial aid were seen as the appropriate means to efface global inequality. To craft the sessional paper no 10 of 1965, for instance, Mboya enlisted the services of economists such as Mwai Kibaki<sup>13</sup>, G Kiano and Philip Ndegwa who had received formal training during colonial times. In addition several expert missions from West Germany, Switzerland and the United States visited the country between 1961 and 1963. and offered policy advice. Finally Mboya built up working relationships with United States centers for economic planning such as the Syracuse University (Speich 2009). Formal training was a crucial matter for the first generation of Kenya's politicians and technocrats. In 1960, Mboya sent 222 East African students for further training to various universities in the US universities in what became famous as the first airlift. A fair proportion of them returned to Africa and formed the basis for a growing network of personal relations and ties between Kenya and the United States. Independent Kenya was thus guided in its growth out of the theoretical background of American modernization.

Modernization theory was subjected as the 1960s unfolded to blistering criticisms brought on by the experiences of third world societies which mocked its excessive optimism. Numerous developments in recent decades have opened up an important theoretical space for the reconsideration of modernity in more empirically realistic and metaphysically open terms (Smith 2006). These developments as enumerated by Smith (2006) include: the emergence of Japan in the 1980s as a global economic powerhouse without necessarily conforming culturally or socially to the Western European model; a growing disenchantment in many sectors with modernity in the latter twentieth century that, though not all aspects of which were particularly smart or salutary (e.g., postmodernist anti-humanism and relativism), did focus useful reconsiderations of the particular historical and cultural situated-ness of the modern project; the larger economic and cultural fact of globalization and its consequences, which has raised basic questions about the relationship between modernization and westernization, suggesting possible alternative forms of something like an "Asian Modernity," as well as casting into some doubt the future of the nation state which was so central to the modern project; the reality of numerous modern Islamic and quasi-Islamic states and societies (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Iran, Oman, etc.) which appear to be appropriating modernity more selectively and applying it in more customized fashion than traditional modernization theory would have expected; current developments in China, a country which is clearly economically modernizing in many ways at an

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<sup>13</sup> Kibaki is the current Kenyan president at the time of the writing of this dissertation.

unbelievable rate yet, again, does not seem to be simply evolving inexorably toward conformity to a Western European model; the diverse paths that post-communist states and societies appear to be forging with regard to their own religious futures, particularly around the role of religion in public life; the growing force of terrorism, which routinely uses all sorts of modern technology to promote often “anti-modern” agendas; the complication of what was once taken to be a straightforward secularization theory by the empirical fact of the widespread continuation of “traditional” religion both in the U.S. and in much of the Global South; and finally the experience of many traditional Muslims actually living in urban centers of Western Europe who, by all accounts, are very selectively adopting “Western” ways, even if they seek to be and understand themselves to be entirely “modern”.

Modernization theory and process were also faulted by the fact that the record of economic growth in developing societies was at best mixed and whatever growth that occurred appeared to be accompanied by mass poverty and economic inequality. Fergusson (1999) uses the example of the Zambian copper belt to show that modernization was much more than an academic myth. For the Zambia of the 1960s, urbanization seemed to be a teleological process, a movement toward a known end point that would be nothing less than a western style industrial modernity. ‘The expanding mining economy that was driving the urbanization process was a stereotypically industrial one, whose smelting plants and sooty miners seemed to reiterate a well known chapter in the usual narratives of the West’s own rise to modernity, evoking particularly iconic images of the early period of British industrialization’ (Fergusson, 1999:5-6). This vision appeared to many to be a convincing and straight forward description of what was happening to Zambia. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, Zambia’s GDP of £ 431 was the highest in Africa and it did not seem unreasonable to suppose that Zambia would reach the rank of at least the poorer European nations such as Portugal whose GDP in 1969 was £ 568 or Spain with GDP of £ 867. (Fergusson 1999: 6, cf. United Nations 1973:627-629). Kenya’s story was similar to Zambia’s in many respects. Since gaining independence from Great Britain in 1963, the Kenyan economy performed well in the period 1964–80 with the GDP growth rate averaging around 5.5 per cent per annum during this period. The manufacturing sector grew at a rapid pace, at 10 per cent per annum, fuelled by growth in domestic rural incomes and the expansion of exports to Tanzania and Uganda under the common market created by the East African Community (Manda and Sen, 2004).

Somewhere along the way though, the African industrial revolution slipped off the track. Zambia for instance, experienced periods of steep economic decline in the decades between 1974 and 1994 where per capita income fell by over 50%, leaving it near the bottom of the World Bank's hierarchy of developing nations (Fergusson 1999, World Bank 1995:162). The story for Kenya was quite similar. While the first two decades of independence were characterized by a record of impressive economic growth, the period 1980 – 1990 saw Kenya's economic growth falter due to among other reasons, a rise in the petroleum prices, a sharp decline in the price and demand for its key exports (Tea and coffee), and the break of the East African community which ended up denying Kenyan exporters preferential access to Ugandan and Tanzanian markets. These shocks were aggravated by low levels of technology, drought and famine, high population growth, high rates of urbanization, increasing debt, land fragmentation, widespread poverty, disease and ignorance. These factors caused the widening of the current account deficit from 3% of GDP in 1975–77 to 10–11% in 1978–82 (Manda and Sen 2004: 30, Rono 2002, Fahnbulleh 2006). The continued economic downfall in Kenya led to the introduction of structural adjustment programs in the 1980s at the behest of the World Bank and the international monetary fund and by the turn of the century Kenya was among the countries experiencing less than 1% growth rate, (Fahnbulleh 2006).

Clearly the 'laboratory of development' in which key aspects of modernization theory were to be tested and refined turned out to produce fodder for its criticisms. But as Fergusson (1999) pointed out, modernization was never only an academic myth. The idea that Kenya, Zambia and other African countries were destined to move ahead to join the ranks of modern nations and that development would lead them to ever greater urbanization, modernity and prosperity had come by the 1960s to be accepted both by academics and national and international policy makers and by a wide range of African as well. This helped to shape the way that African came to experience events since then. Tom Mboya, Kenya's independence economic planning minister for instance, believed that economic growth could be induced through the application of technical knowledge and that such a process would inevitably solve the problem of unequal distribution of wealth (Speich, 2007). Like many other wealthy Kenyans, Mboya drove a white Mercedes Benz and argued that this form of conspicuous consumption was not a provocation to his poor citizens but a device to raise their ambitions (Ibid). The breakdown of certain teleological narratives of modernity has occurred not only in the world of theory but in the lived understandings of those who

received such myths as a kind of promise. For many Africans, cynical skepticism, a feeling of being cheated and betrayed by this turn of events has replaced an earnest faith when it comes to the idea of modernization (Fergusson 1999). The breakdown of the myth of modernization was no mere academic development but a world shattering life experience. The story of Banda, whom I met as a client to a ritual healer exemplifies what Good explained as ‘the ways in which oppressive global and societal forces are present in small details of living and dying (1994:59).

I met Mr. Banda, a 37 years old man at Got Agulu Rural health facility<sup>14</sup> in Nyanza Province where he was being treated for Bronchopneumonia. Mr. Banda was at the same time, a long time ritual healing client of one of the ritual healers in my field site who treated him against Jinn attacks from his estranged second wife. After a brief encounter with him in the health facility I visited him later at his home to talk about his ritual healing experience.

Mr. Banda lived with his wife at Osieko beach in a fishing a community on the shores of lake Victoria. He was a fisherman and lived with his wife and one child. This was his 3<sup>rd</sup> marriage. His first wife died and left him with one son, he was divorced from his second wife who was barren and he had opted to marry his current wife. Mr. Banda informed me that he was a fisherman by profession and for a long time, his fishing business was doing quite well and he managed to buy two boats. However a few years ago, (he could not tell me exactly when) the local authorities outlawed trawler fishing in the lake. They also regulated the size of the nets that the fishermen could use, thereby not only restricting the type of fish, but also the amount of fish that could be harvested. The volume of fish in the lake had also dwindled and this had reduced his fish earnings to almost nil in certain months. But what produced this scenario for Banda the rest of the local fishermen?

Several reports have been written on the political, economic and environmental aspects of the transformation of the fishing industry that detail the ways in which global processes and interests have descended on the local fishing community around L. Victoria irreversibly altering their fortunes. Ogutu-Ohwayo (1990) and Sibylle (1994), attribute the changes in the way fishing is conducted around L. Victoria, from fishing targeted towards the local market to fishing for the purpose of export to increased liberalisation of trade throughout the

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<sup>14</sup> A rural health facility is the lowest tier in the organisation of health biomedical facilities by the Ministry of health in Kenya.



world. To meet the international market demands, the L. Victoria fisheries services (LVHS) introduced the Nile perch fish, a fast growing predatory fish that preyed on two indigenous species of Tilapias, (*oreochromis esculentus*) (Ngege) and *O variabilis* ('Mbiru'). These two fish species that were the mainstay of the fishery had virtually disappeared as a result of being predated on. Many of the other over 300 endemic species of haplochromines which existed in the lake and nowhere else also declined drastically due to the combined effect of predation from Nile perch, the increase in water levels in 1961-1964 which destroyed the breeding grounds, and fishing pressure. The fishermen who formally subsisted on haplochromines and Tilapias were therefore driven out of business as the fishery was concentrated in the hands of wealthier people who could afford boats as well as the larger stronger and more expensive nets that are required for the Perch.

The market forces as well as environmental control through the lake basin development authority now control the activities of fishermen. Fishermen like Mr. Banda, however considered the local authorities responsible for their misery. The local authorities were part of the Local government and when the local authorities outlawed certain types of fishing, this was interpreted as the government interference in their livelihoods, even as they continued paying taxes and bribes to their local authorities. As such the global fish markets, environmental concerns, and new forms of political organisation and processes (democratic institutions) that Kilson (1963) observed were instituted in Africa as a form of 'modernity', all converge in one small village and shape the experience of the local population. The local population for instance blamed the government, especially the failure by their local member of parliament to protect their interest in the face of economic marginalization by the rich fishermen. Fergusson (1999) has argued that at times people often experience modernity as a lack, as something from which they are deprived or not in control of. Through global flows of information, people and goods, for instance, the world's fish resources have experienced exceptionally high levels of globalisation. As a result, the losers in the global competition for fish resources are often the poor fishermen and fisherwomen of the south, in whose waters new species of fish are introduced to meet the consumption patterns of fish in the North where powerful consumer groups have become aware of health benefits of eating fish (Le Sann, 1998). The new fish ends up depleting the local fish preferred by the local populations (as happened in the case of Banda) and as Sibylle (1994), Ogutu-Ohwayo (1990), and Jansen and Boye (2001) have observed, the consumption of fish in many local communities has declined since the big fish are usually processed for export. Besides, as

Mr. Banda informed me, the big fish was too oily and most of the local people do not like its taste.

With respect to the health field and specifically to ritual healing, modernity is strongly associated with the spread of biomedical science, since as enlightenment philosophers envisioned, the rationalization of cultural and social life resulting from the spread of scientific knowledge and attitude would lead to the progressive eradication of superstitions, prejudices and errors. In Africa, biomedicine has spread at the expense of traditional healing methods, while its universalizing knowledge claims have redefined ritual as unscientific and ineffective. (Sax, 2010). At the same time as Good observed, many health care professionals and authorities wish traditional medicine to be as ‘dead as a dodo’ a even greater number of them believe it to be (1987:10).

At the time of our encounter, Banda was at a biomedical health facility in Osieko, referred to as a rural health facility<sup>15</sup>. He was admitted and treated for Bronchopneumonia. As routine treatment, since he resided in a Malaria endemic zone he was given a dose of anti - Malaria medication. But as he lay in his hospital bed, his wife telephoned a ritual healer to come and heal him as well. This was because, he and his wife believed that his illnesses were caused by attacks by Djinn sent to him by his second wife as he experienced pains in his chest and laboured breathing. His wife further complained that the hospital did not understand Banda’s illness since they treated him for Malaria even though his tests were negative for Malaria<sup>16</sup>. This made them invite the Mr. Francis Shisia, a ritual healer who had previously treated both of them against Djinn attacks by Banda’s estranged second wife. I and the ritual healer made a secret entry into the health facility where Mr. Shisia observed Banda using his talismanic ring and concluded that he was a victim of Djinn attack and offered him herbal concoctions to treat his chest. He also explained to Banda and his wife that he had captured the Djinn that were afflicting him as soon as he received the call from Banda’s wife. At the same time he advised them to continue using the hospital medication as ‘they were also good’

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<sup>15</sup> A rural health facility is at the lowest tier in Kenya’s Ministry of Health organization’s structure of health care facilities.

<sup>16</sup> I had discussions with health care providers in the facility regarding Banda’s case and they admitted that the facility had no equipment for conducting tests for malaria antibodies. Banda’s wife was however adamant that tests conducted on Banda were negative for Malaria.

I have sketched the case of Banda here briefly to illustrate the experiences of modernity in Africa and show the way in which, as Geschiere et al (2008) state, modernisation and modernity have, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century lost much of the optimism that characterized them in the 1960s and 1970s. The introduction of the big fish in the Lake Victoria was meant to improve fish production, increase income and therefore improve the livelihoods of the fishermen. In turn the fishermen would improve their fishing equipment, buy proper nets and stop trawler fishing which was outlawed. The formation of the Lake Victoria Fisheries services introduced modern forms of regulations with the concomitant taxation and bureaucratization. Monetization and the entry of the local and international markets forces dictated the type of fishermen and fishing methods that could be employed for bulk fish production and harvesting. All these processes as Banda's case revealed had not resulted in the progress and development promised by modernisation. Instead the big fish ended up depleting the small fish, and the smaller fishermen like Banda who could not afford big nets and boats to capture the big fish were driven out of business. The entire fishing industry was taken over by rich fishermen who bribed the local authorities and locked out the smaller fishermen like Banda. The expectation of prosperity through modernisation process had failed to deliver and some people like Banda felt trapped in downward spirals of deprivation and despair. It is little wonder then that they develop apathy and distrust towards other 'modern' institutions like the hospital whose ability to effect treatment they contest and augment by ritual healing. The introduction of the big fish had failed to improve the lot of the local inhabitants and their scepticism over the ability of other modern institutions like the hospital to improve their health increased. This was further aggravated by the inability of the national and local governments to provide the proper quality and quantity of biomedical health care at all levels of the country. Notions of modernity in such a population had thus lost their credibility.

Contrary to the postulation of modernization theorists, the spread of science has not resulted in the effacing of ritual healing. In fact as Moore and Sanders (2001) observed, the general feeling in Africa is that witchcraft is increasing. This is what concerns me in this dissertation. How ritual healing survives even with the criticism and/or spread of biomedicine. Many scholars critical of the modernization theory/process have actually used the persistence of ritual healing and the occult to fault the theory. In these regard many of the most recent studies on rituals and rituals healing in Africa have been written within the framework of 'multiple modernities' or alternative modernity. Some of the prominent works

written within the Multiple or alternative modernities framework include Geschiere's, *The Modernity of Witchcraft* (1997), Comaroff and Comaroff's *Modernity and its Malcontents* (1993), Moore and Sanders 'Magical interpretations, Material realities, (2001) and Gaonkar's *Alternative Modernities*, (2001)

Scholars adopting the 'Multiple Modernities framework reject the earlier assumption held by modernisation theorists who were of the idea that modernity and modernization are not only inevitable and inexorable, but that modernity produces or would inevitably produce predictable patterns of uniformity, and standardisation. Multiple modernities scholars argue against this position and observe that even in its conceptualisation in Europe, the cultures of industrial capitalism have never existed in the singular either in Europe or in their myriad transformations across the face of the earth (Gaonkar 2001, Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993). Moore states that 'modernity comes with no single built in telos, no single rationalising *raison detre*' (2001: 12) and modernity, if it was ever a single entity has gone in innumerable and often unanticipated directions. The key notion in the study of ritual in the recent years has been the refutation that the spread of science, or scientific medicine automatically eradicates ritual healing. As Geschiere has eloquently argued, witchcraft powers are ambivalent and can reinvent themselves in novel situations. It is precisely through this ambivalence that discourses on the occult incorporate modern changes so easily (1997: 13, cf. Moore 2001). Sax (2010) has argued that superstition and modernity are not immutable constructs but relational entities, mutually defined and strategically evoked. But in stressing that ritual healing too is modern, many of the scholars agree too, that modernities are multiple. In this case, as Kendall (2001) and Gaonkar (2001) state, the modernity should be seen as a viral ideology that has infected most of the globe and mutated or waxed and sometimes waned in local settings.

It is based on such processes that I agree with Moore and Sanders (2001) when they argue that we should not suppose or expect the occult to wither when we admit to multiple modernities, to the idea that 'progress' 'development' and 'modernity are multiplex, undecidable, and contextually specific (Moore and Sanders 2001:19) Ritual healing does not disappear with the spread of modernity but appears to flourish not only in the third world but also in the richest and most industrialized countries. (Sax 2010, Geschiere et al. 2008 Moore and Sander 2001, Connor 2001, Geschiere 1997, Kendall 2001, Laderman and

Rossman 1996, WHO 2002). Comaroff and Comaroff summarize the situation for rituals and modernity and I quote them here extensively,

Ritual, as an experimental technology intended to affect the flow of power in the universe, is an especially likely response to contradictions created and (literally) engendered by processes of social, material and cultural transformation, processes re-presented, rationalized and authorized in the name of modernity and its various alibis ('civilisation,' 'social progress,' 'economic development,' 'conversion' and the like). For modernity, a Eurocentric vision of universal teleology carries its own historical irony, its own cosmic oxymoron: the more rationalistic and disenchanting the terms in which it is presented to 'others', the more magical, impenetrable, inscrutable, uncontrollable, darkly dangerous seem its signs, commodities, and practices. It is in this fissure between assertive rationalities, and perceived magicalities that malcontent gathers, giving rise to ritual efforts to penetrate the impenetrable, to unscrew the inscrutable, to recapture the forces suspected of redirecting the flow of power in the world. In these circumstances, ritual practice typically appears to its practitioners as an entirely pragmatic, secular means to bridge those chasms, to plumb the magicalities of modernity. (1993: xxx).

### **1.3 Ritual Healing and Traditional African Medicine.**

In this section I describe the logic that informs traditional healing practices<sup>17</sup> with the aim of showing why and how rituals form an inextricable part of traditional African medicine. All ritual healing takes place within a cosmological setting, which Comaroff (1980) refers to as the manifest perceptions of the world as they inhere in the context of action and experience. In traditional African medical practices, perceptions about cause and effect and the nature of the world are always couched in a set of cultural expressions that determine the nature of affliction and the manner of its management (amelioration). It is important right from the outset to show the central importance of rituals in traditional healing, because as I will be arguing later, it is this connection to healing and to other spheres of life that has made ritual healing continue to flourish. Traditional African medicine has been defined and described in different ways in various ethnographies on health and illness in Africa. Banermann et. al have defined it as 'the total body of knowledge, techniques for the preparation and use of substances, measures and practices in use, whether explicable or not, that are based on personal experience and observations handed down from generation to generation, either verbally or in writing and which are used for the diagnosis, prevention and elimination of imbalances in physical, mental or social well-being (1983:25). Good (1987) clarified that

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<sup>17</sup> In this dissertation I use traditional African healing in the singular sense even though one could argue that the singular form is misleading since each region or ethnic group in Africa had its own traditional healing system. As I use it here, I refer to the general principles that govern traditional healing in Africa which as Good (1987) argued, and I agree with him, have wide distribution throughout Sub Saharan Africa. The concept of underlying course which I address in the next paragraphs, for instance, is found in all regions in Africa in similar form.

African traditional medicine is an all-embracing system of healing that is deeply embedded in religious and socio-cultural institutions and reflecting values and practices, both local and foreign which have been incorporated and adapted over the centuries.

A discussion on the centrality of rituals in illness control and prevention in Traditional African medicine boils down to what Foster referred to as the ‘**underlying cause**’ (1976: 178), or its etiology. Foster observed that in all accounts of ethnomedical literature, beliefs about aetiology determined the kinds of curers, the mode of diagnosis, curing techniques, preventive acts, and the relationship of all these variables to the wider society of which they are part. Most ethnographies of illness and misfortune in Africa have always sort as their starting point, two of the most famous ethnographies on Africa, the one by, Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937), and the other by W.H.R. Rivers, *Medicine Magic and Religion* (1924). Since the publication of these two famous ethnographies, scholars have argued over whether the two writers (Evans-Pritchard and W.H.R Rivers) and their followers placed too much emphasis on supernatural causation at the expense of natural causation and practical medical behaviour (Pool 1994). The debate on Evans-Pritchard’s famous ethnography among the Azande has over the years become more complex and moved beyond the discussion of whether he was right or wrong, to a level of discussing whether those who criticise him misunderstood his main argument. Based on these debates, a number of ethnographies appeared between the mid 1970s and mid 1980s, which sought to show that Africans traditionally recognised a separate medical domain in which they interpreted illnesses primarily in empirical and practical rather than in social and moral terms.<sup>18</sup>

It is not my intention to enter the debate on Evans-Pritchard and his critics although much ethnography on Africa has been written against this background. Part of what is at stake here is the notion of causality in illness or even more importantly the notion of affliction and misfortune. Based on this underlying assumption on the importance of etiology, scholars have attempted to categorize medical systems using various schemes. I provide two examples of such categorization.

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<sup>18</sup> Such ethnographies as cited by Pool include, Fortes 1976, Loudon 1976, Gillies 1976, Prins 1981; Warren 1982, Yoder, 1981.

The first is that of G.M Foster who came up with the two categories, i.e 'personalistic' and 'naturalistic'. Foster defines a personalistic medical system as

one in which disease is explained as due to the active, purposive intervention of an agent, who may be human (a witch or a sorcerer), non human (a ghost, an ancestor, an evil spirit), or supernatural (a deity or powerful being) The sick person is merely a victim, the object of aggression or punishment directed specifically to him and for reasons that concern him alone. Personalistic causality allows no room for accident or chance. In contrast to personalistic systems, naturalistic systems, explain illnesses in impersonal systemic terms. Disease is thought to stem, not from machinations of an angry being, but rather from such natural forces or conditions as cold, heat winds, dampness but above all, by an upset in the balance of basic body elements (1976:775).

The second scheme though similar to the first one, is that between 'externalising' and 'internalising' medical belief systems associated with Allen Young. Young explains that internalising systems

encapsulate sickness within the sick person's body and concentrate effort on decoding the symptomatic expressions of intrasomatic events. In externalising systems on the other hand, episodes of serious sickness implicate categories or groups of people and sickness is itself a symptom of disrupted relations not between organs but between people and between people and anthropomorphized spirits who mirror or invert the moral order of society. Externalising systems have a low degree of conceptual autonomy in the sense of constituting a phenomenological domain which people can distinguish from coordinate jurral and cosmological systems. (1976:148).

Both Foster and Young agree that the two systems of classification, whether labelled externalising/internalising or Personalistic/naturalistic are not mutually exclusive and that most medical belief systems employ both kinds of explanations. The principle determining variable is the notion of causality, which yields either personalistic or naturalistic explanations to an illness. A useful clarification is provided by Young (1976) who explained that even as the two systems are polarized, there are certain systems that fall in between the two – systems where therapeutic strategies emphasize naturalistic or personalistic explanations or a combination of the two. In these case Young observes that 'even when physiological explanations are used they are often weakened by the emphasis given to the motives and purposiveness (i.e personalisation) of causal agencies' (1976:148) while Foster agrees that in such mixed systems, 'illness is just but a special case in the explanation of all misfortune (1976:776). Medical beliefs persist as parts of larger cultural systems and the strategy of medical action, which they organize and rationalize, imply coordinate action in economic, kinship and even politico-jural domains (Young 1976).

Although the distinctions made by both Foster and Young are useful as organising rubrics within which several ethnographies can and have been written on traditional African medicine, it is difficult to state how such distinctions between systems can remain applicable in rapidly modernising societies where medical systems borrow ideas and techniques from each other and remain neither autonomous nor puritan. The notion of underlying cause which both categorizations reckon, is very necessary to an understanding of the organisation of healing is important not just to these categorizations, but to an understanding of why ritual healing has persisted in the community under study. It is important to state here initially a part of my conclusion: that ritual healing has continued to flourish principally because medical beliefs are linked to other parts of the larger cultural system and to cosmology.

While recognising the importance of the underlying cause, researchers and writers on health in Africa also agree that is more useful to use the term 'affliction' than 'disease' and/or 'illnesses'. The title of Turner's famous book, *The Drums of Affliction* is one of the most eloquent in the use of the term. The preference for the affliction as opposed to illnesses or disease is due to the recognition that frames of reference for health and disease are wide since African medical systems espouse a comprehensive etiology (Foster, 1976). The use of the term affliction enables the discussions on health in Africa to go beyond the limiting biomedical framework that perceives illnesses as isolated or simply probabilistic occurrences and allows the location of symptoms and manifestation of dis-ease beyond the ill persons physical being, to reflect discord in his or her social body or a rupture in life's harmony (Mbiti 1969). Perceptions of affliction are linked to a people's cosmology. Comaroff (1980) described cosmology as the manifest perceptions of the world as they inhere in the context of action and experience. Affliction and its amelioration were thus best understood within a people's cosmology. In discussions on affliction, Comaroff's (1980) article based on her research amongst the Barolong boo Ratshidi of South Africa is quite relevant here since Tsidi cosmology is similar or shared by many other African communities. Comaroff states that the Tshidi spontaneously expressed a set of perceptions about cause and effect and the nature of the world which comprised a relatively inclusive cosmology. This cosmology was however an etiology, a set of causal notions which was articulated most clearly in the identification and management of affliction. The set of notions though shared for the most part were only relevant in the specific contexts of



practical experience where they served to impose meaning upon everyday events. The frame of reference for discussions of affliction revolved around the self and its social, spiritual and material existence (Comaroff 1980, Mbiti 1969). Selfhood (health in its encompassing sense) in this principle connotes a positive existence, an assertion over the natural and social environment, which otherwise threatens to swamp identity. Selfhood is conceived then as being in a region of positive valence. Affliction on the other hand is the lack of self-determination; it is a state of vulnerability, of being overshadowed by external sources or being eaten away by a hostile environment (Comaroff 1980). Misfortune or illness implies a disruption of the delicate balance between the subjective and objective points of being, characteristically perceived as an intrusion into the self. It is the movement of a person from a region of positive valence to that of a negative valence – to vulnerability. It is important however to note that the self is not perceived as confined within the visible limits of the body; it extends to encompass the more general sphere of personal influence upon the environment, inhering in words, footprints, and personal possessions, such as land with its crops and cattle. The self is also lodged in all those persons who (literally) share its substance- those who give it life, those to whom it has given life, and those with whom it has regular contact, including but not limited to sexual contact.

Affliction in such a context is the dislocation of person from the positive valence sphere, and is identified in terms of disruptions within the categorical relationships between man and man, man and spirit and man and nature (Comaroff 1980). Healing is the objectification and restructuring of such dislocation. Mbiti (1969) corroborates this position when he comments that in popular culture, the root causes of many illnesses and misfortunes are directly attributed to conflicts and tensions in interpersonal relationships which feature both horizontal (kinfolk, neighbours, co-workers) and vertical dimensions (relations with the 'living dead' ancestral spirits). In this context Foster (1976) avers that individuals adopt a personal idiom as the basis for the attempt to understand the world, to account for everything that happens in the world, only incidentally including illness. In these societies, the same deities, ghosts, sorcerers and witches that send illnesses may blight crops, cause financial reverse, sour husband-wife relationships, and produce all manner of misfortune. Quimby (1971) showed that in Bobo-Dioulasso (Cameroon) the principle source of conflict within the social structure was the socially induced conflict between loyalty and aggressive competition for scarce resources including wives. Jealousy by itself did not cause illnesses. However, in societies where belief in magic, witchcraft and other forms of ritual

manipulation was universal, fears of jealousy fostered a belief that the jealous ones would and could easily exact revenge (ibid, see also Handloff, 1982). Writing about the notions of health and disease among Abaluyia of western Kenya, Wandibba (1995) points to the fact that they attributed illnesses to multiple causes, which included human factors, transgression against taboos, spiritual factors and environmental pollution.

Other writers who have written about illness notions in Kenya, including those of communities whose members constituted the ritual clientele referred to in this study, include Sindiga (1995) Nyamwaya (1995, 1987), and Good (1987). I mention these scholars in relation to the healing rituals conducted by my two main healers, and especially by *Mtumishi Barasa*, and deliberately avoid giving a thorough description of his nosological categories because, as far as I have observed, his clientele represent a cross-section of all ethnic groups in Kenya and occasionally from neighbouring countries. In response to this growing clientele and supported, as we shall see later by notions and '(mis)-conceptions about modernity', *Mtumishi Barasa* appropriates general principles of nosology from throughout African traditional healing, rather than exclusively using notions and expressions from his own ethnic group. It is however important to note that when dealing with clientele from his own ethnic group (the Luyia), he uses the specific cosmological notions, rationale, and language of affliction and reconstruction that he shares with them.

Many scholars agree that in the consciously elaborated world of everyday experience, cosmological logic is implicit and not always self-consciously articulated. It cannot be elucidated systematically by ritual specialists or by non-specialists. The concepts embodied in it are not the subjects of self-conscious elaboration but are axiomatic dimensions of reality (Comaroff, (1980). And so the diagnostic categories in African illnesses are observable primarily within the practical management of affliction. These categories are always composites of both cause and symptom (ibid., cf. Mbiti 1969). And as Good (1987) and Mbiti (1969) observe, these categories of affliction do not differentiate between 'how', 'what', and 'why'. Symptoms and causes are not logically separated; the former are merely tangible expressions of the latter deriving their meaning from the dominant metaphor of causality (Comaroff 1980). A broken leg, or any other physical injury is both a fracture and sorcery and both components are part of an adequate description. Furthermore the meaning of both is encoded in terms of the disrupted relation of the sufferer to his overall context. Several of the cases that I illustrate in this dissertation clarify this notion. In chapter 5 for

instance, I provide the case of Karama case whose swollen stomach was interpreted by *Mtumishi* Barasa, one of the healers described in this study, as sorcery as well as an instance of stomach distension and thereby required recourse both to a ritual healer and a biomedical facility. Both explanations are seen as complementary and not exclusive.

In the all encompassing understanding of affliction, there is no categorical distinction made between physical sensations and such disturbing occurrences as terrifying dreams, perceptions of personal failure, illnesses of one's livestock, failure to be promoted at work place or in business, family discord or run away spouses and children. Indeed an observation of what transpires at a healer's practice, as we shall see in the subsequent chapters, confirms that affliction or the types of problems handled by the healer had more to do with afflictions or misfortunes than with illness or disease.

The perception and classification of afflictions derives from notions of causality, and since similar afflictions could be attributed to different causes at varying times, the task of the healer was crucial in translating specific symptoms and contextual indicators into the patient's idiomatic language of causality. This was often done through divination. Comaroff argued, that 'the crux of the healing process and the defining rite of the healers' role is the act of divination, which brings the cosmological repertoire to bear upon specific instances of affliction and in so doing, it involves the reduction of apparent chaos to order by legitimately allocating responsibility in terms of available causal metaphors'(1980: 646). Writers on African medical systems have observed that there is no known community in which divination or diviners did not play a crucial role in the management of affliction. Throughout Africa, whether in the city or in the country side, no matter the religion, sex or status of the individuals - questions, problems emerge for which every day knowledge is insufficient and yet action must be taken: the information necessary to respond effectively is available, but often through a diviner' (Peek 1991: 2). Many of the ritual healers in Western Kenya employed divination as a vital source of knowledge that enabled them diagnose the clients' problems and suggest ameliorative strategies. Their techniques will be described in great detail in this dissertation especially the way they responded to changed circumstances of the clients and their needs.

#### **1.4 Methodology.**

This study was conducted among ritual healers in western Kenya although their clients hailed from all over the Kenya and at times from neighbouring countries like Uganda and Tanzania. On the next page I provide a map of Kenya showing the Western province as well as two other maps of two districts to show the location of the two healers with whom I conducted extensive observations. My respondents were mainly the healers and their clients who I encountered in the course of their consultations with the ritual healers. This kind of study populations is what Pelto and Pelto have referred to as a 'Clinical Population', which they define as 'any group of patients, clients or cases selected from the persons found at a particular health centre, hospital or individual healer's location (1990:276).

My starting point in the location of healers and their clients was a chat with one of my professors at the University of Nairobi, Prof Wandibba (whose work on traditional healing in Western Kenya is cited in the introduction) who gave me some names and locations of healers from western Kenya. He informed me that it would be easy to locate them by simply asking at the local market place, which turned out to be true for some of the healers. I made my first fieldwork trip to, Bungoma district and to a division known as Kamukuywa where I was able to locate *Mtumishi* Barasa by simply enquiring at the market place. *Mtumishi* Barasa (MB) was quite famous and almost every bicycle transporter (popularly known as 'boda boda') knew him as they had transported many clients to his place. Although I visited the other healers later, I decided to spend more time with MB for a couple of reasons. *Mtumishi Barasa's* healing rituals were quite complex and he, unlike other healers in the division allowed me 'unlimited' access to observe and interview him and his clients. Many other healers that I contacted were quite evasive and uncooperative. One of them gave me appointments that he never honoured yet others preferred to perform the ritual before they could allow me to conduct exit interviews with selected clients. In some instances they selected the clients they wished me to speak to a situation I found unsuitable for my fieldwork. For this matter I did not conduct much fieldwork with them. MB turned out to be most ideal for my study as he allowed me to observe the ritual as well as interview him and any of the clients that I wished to. Much of the ethnography provided in this dissertation therefore relates to his healing rituals.

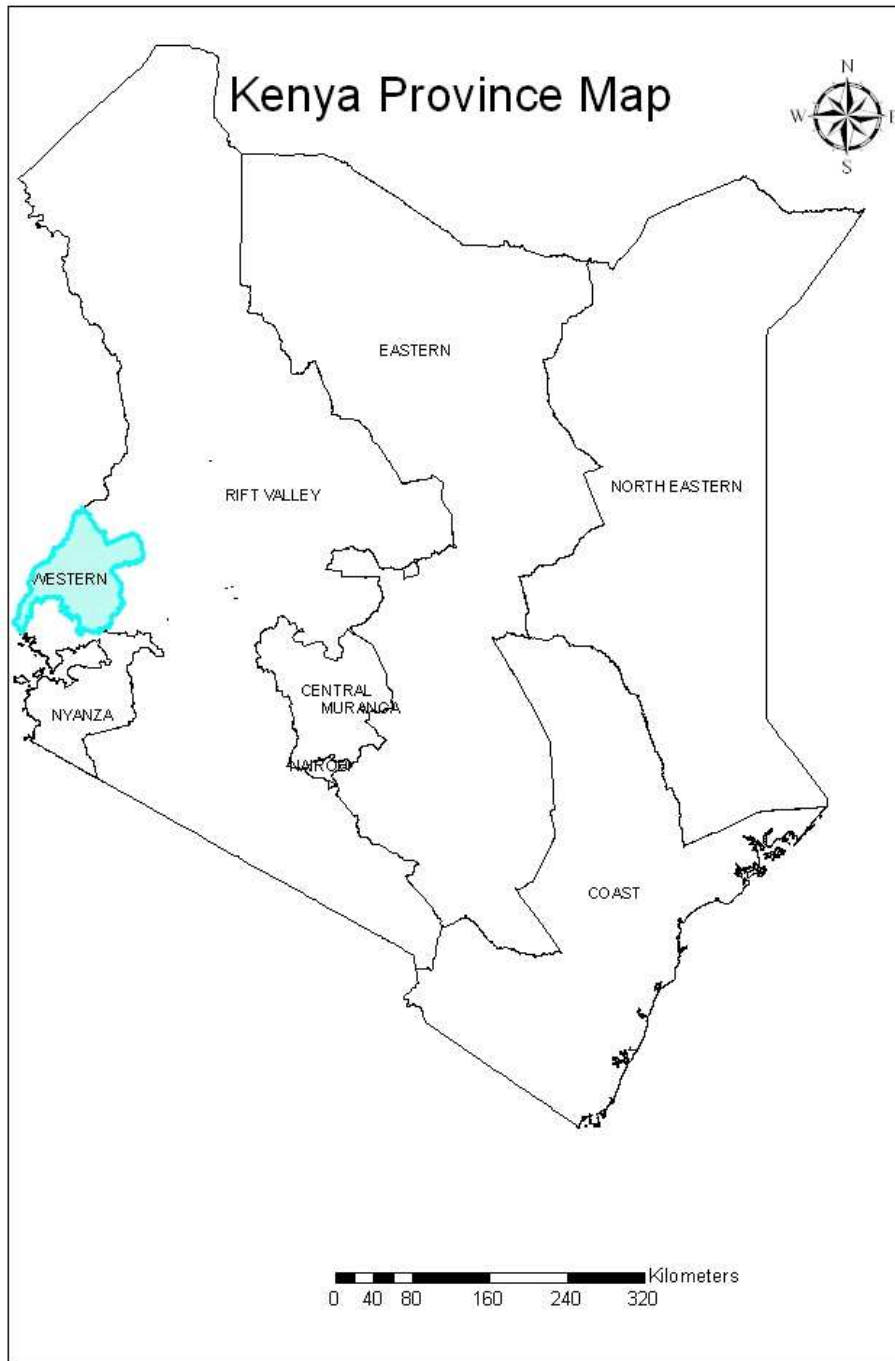


Fig. 1. Map of Kenya showing the different provinces. Western province is on the western side of the country and is shaded on the map.

I conducted the first day of my fieldwork at MB's healing practice as a 'client' by default. I arrived at the healers homestead accompanied by a *Boda boda* transporter and was met at the gate by MB's security man. The *boda boda* man explained to the security guard that I was MB's visitor. The security man thought I was a new client and he took me straight to the healer's secretary. This appeared to be the general procedure for every new client. The healer's secretary, without much inquiry, also assumed that I was a client and registered me on a small blue registration card, like she does with every other client, even as I protested that I was not a 'real' client.

After registering me and asking me to pay Kenya shillings 20 (approx USD 30) registration fee, the secretary asked me to proceed to the church. I attended the church service which lasted about 2 hours between 11.00 am and 1.00 pm, then stayed for the lunch break and part of the initial group divination (I later learnt that it is called the X-ray) before the healer called me to his house for consultations at about 4.00 pm. (I explain these processes in detail in chapter 2). The healer too embarked on the discussion with me as though I was a client. He welcomed me to his house, said a short prayer, read the bible before inviting me to state why I wanted to see him. When I informed him that I was a student of anthropology interested in observing his rituals, he stunned me by his revelation that through his powers he had seen that 'I was not the typical (normal) type of client'. I then had a very lengthy discussion with him where I explained my fieldwork interests and got his permission to observe his rituals. MB was extraordinarily friendly and cut out the image of a very confident healer as he informed me that I could observe whatever I wanted and consult him on any problem I had. He even informed me that I could use his video machine if mine would not work well and this marked the beginning of my fieldwork at his rituals. .

I conducted fieldwork over a period of 15 months between the months of August 2006 and April 2007 and also between the months of October 2007 and March 2008. My second phase of research was interrupted at the end of December 2007 after the irruption of interethnic violence in Kenya in the aftermath of the general elections held at the end of 2007<sup>19</sup>. It was not possible for me to conduct fieldwork between the months of January and mid March for security reasons. On the few occasions I was able to visit MB, he informed

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<sup>19</sup> Kenya holds presidential and parliamentary elections every five years. In the elections that were conducted in 2007, the opposition party ODM claimed to have been robbed of victory and called for mass protests and civil disobedience in a bid to force the president to hand over power to them. What followed was a period of three months of interethnic violence between the supporters of the opposition party and those of the ruling party PNU.

me that he had suspended ritual healing until the country returned to normalcy except for very serious cases. During this period while waiting for *Mtumishi Barasa* to resume his healing, I contacted another healer and serendipitously stumbled on the rituals he was conducting for politicians, allegedly to help them win the elections. This was in addition to conducting numerous other healing rituals for clients. In view of the sensitive nature of the rituals in politics, and my inability to sufficiently disguise the characters involved without losing the contextual meaning, I cannot present these rituals here. I however include healing rituals by the second healer, in the strictest sense of the term healing, as a comparison between him and *Mtumishi Barasa* in the chapters that follow.

I used a raft of anthropological methods to collect my data, key among them, direct observation, in-depth interviews (instant and follow up), conversations, videotaping, and audiotaping. I spent the first months of my fieldwork observing the sequence of events at MB's homestead, the different variations within the same set of the rituals, the different type of clients, and the different procedures involved for different clients. I conducted a semblance of a semi-participant observation. On a typical fieldwork day, I would arrive at the healers homestead at 8.00 am before the arrival of clients. I would then observe and chat with clients as they arrive and get registered by the secretary, attend the church service which was always conducted sometime between 10.00 a and 1.00 pm, eat lunch with the clients, go for the divination sessions, ritual 'pulling' and collection of charms and observation of ritual cleansing and burning of the charms. To be able to make sense of the different rituals and variations to the same processes according to each client, I conducted several in-depth interviews with the healer and his secretary. Apart from in-depth interviews, I held many unstructured conversations and chats with the healer to clarify some of my observations. Apparently, although the healer followed a fairly consistent pattern in his rituals, there were times when he altered the rituals for specific clients. At such moments, I would request either him or his secretary to explain to me the reason for the alteration.

To assist my observations and note taking, I audio taped and video recorded the proceedings at MB's rituals. Audiotape recording was not a big problem as I was able to fit my tape-recorder with a microphone and place it on the floor of the room where the rituals were taking place. Video recording was occasionally problematic especially when clients did not wish to be taped. I discussed with MB the question of my identity and presence among the

clients especially when I needed to take photographs. MB did not consider this to be an important aspect of the procedures and on his advice I sat through the rituals as if I was a client. When I took notes and photographs some clients thought I was a journalist, while others assumed I was a client. Some who noticed my note taking asked me to explain who I was. Majority however thought I was a client and my presence, note taking and video recording did not bother them. One middle aged woman who had seen me severally at the healers place, and thought I was a client even ventured to ask, *'Young man, I have seen you here so many times, but I have never heard your people come to confess for you. Does it mean that the healer has not been able to solve your problems?'* I answered in the negative, and she consoled me: *'Don't worry just leave it to him, some of the evil forces are often strong, but Mtumishi Barasa often struggles and eventually overcomes them'*

Transcribed notes from audio and videotapes of the daily proceedings at *Mtumishi Barasa's* healing rituals formed a key data source for follow up interviews as well as a large part of the data analysed and presented in this dissertation. After a typical day of observation, I would select clients for follow up interviews and visited them in their homesteads from where I obtained lengthy discussion regarding their afflictions and consultations with MB. A typical in-depth follow-up interview would be conducted between a day or two and at times over a week after a client presented himself to the healer. Before conducting such an interview, I would either transcribe their audio-taped divination sessions or listen to the tape and formulate key areas of discussion with the specific client. I also carried the audiotape with me as some of the clients wished to listen to the proceedings at the healer. The in-depth interview would generally cover the events before the visit to the healer, the reason for the visit to the healer, the client's impressions of the healer and the follow up process. Such discussions were also tape-recorded and later transcribed and analysed. The process of data collection was therefore cyclical, oscillating between observations at the healers practice, interviews with the healer and his clients and countless chats and conversations with clients both at the healers homestead and in their homes. To maximise objectivity and reduce bias, all in-depth interviews with the clients were conducted at locations away from the healers' residence.

### **1.5 The Healers.**

In this section I introduce the two healers whose rituals form the core of this dissertation: *Mtumishi* Patrick Kokonya Barasa and Mr. Francis Shisia.



### 1.5.1 *Mtumishi* Patrick Barasa.

*Mtumishi* Patrick Barasa (MB) is a well-known ritual healer who conducts his practice in Kamukuywa *location* (an administrative term) in Western Kenya (see map on page 25). His ritual theory, practice and paraphernalia exemplify a complex hybridisation of traditional healing practices and cosmologies, incorporating Christian teachings as well as ritual use of the bible for healing purposes. His title, *Mtumishi*, is normally reserved for Christian preachers and translates as ‘Servant.’ Although *Mtumishi* Barasa depends mostly on a traditional African cosmological repertoire to explain illnesses and misfortunes faced by his clientele, his reconstruction of disrupted human relationships, incorporates Christian practices of prayer and exorcism. The Christian Bible is a central feature of his divining and healing practice, and ideas of disrupted relationships among humans, and between humans and the Supreme Being (including the Christian God) are central to his practice. He uses the bible to divine and cleanse, and applies the concept of fire to signify the destruction of evil, and of cleansing oil to signify new beginnings after the powers of evil have been exorcised.

Although *Mtumishi Barasa’s* practice is altered from the strictly traditional healing practice his healing techniques identify him with the diviners of the traditional system. He claims to come from a family with a divining tradition, as his grandfather was a diviner. However, his grand father used a buffalo’s switch to divine while MB uses the bible. He consistently explained that the main reason why he used the bible was because he is the ‘servant of God – *Mtumishi*’ and quite different from his grandfather. Ethnically, MB is a member of the Luyia ethnic group who mainly inhabit the Western province of Kenya. Luyia traditional healing practices have been documented by Wandibba (1995), Maithya (1992), Nyamwaya (1987) and Wagner (1970). Amongst the Luyia, there is clear distinction between an *omuliuli* (plural *abaliuli*) and other traditional healers, known as *omusirishi* (plural *abasirishi*). *Omuliuli* means "diviner" while *Omusirishi* means something like "traditional healer". The presence of a separate term for "diviner" along with the more general category of "traditional healer" is consistent with African cosmologies as already explained which ascribe affliction to multiple causes. Many of these are supernatural causes, and they require the services of a diviner (Comaroff 1980, Wandibba 1995, Maithya 1992, Sindiga 1995, Nyamwaya 1987, Wagner 1970). Although such diviners or ritual healers are still referred to as *abaliuli*, the more common term in use today is *omusali* (one who prays) or the Swahili term *mtumishi* or ‘servant’. The introduction of these terms attests to the influence of Christianity on ritual healing.

Many of *Mtumishi* Barasa's practices also show a response to the critique of ritual healing by biomedicine. *Mtumishi* Barasa has modelled his healing practices on the biomedical system by incorporating apparently "modern" medical procedures and hospital-like spaces. These include a reception room, fully equipped and staffed by a secretary, appointment cards, and payment of registration fees before consultations, record books and an intercom telephone line between the secretary and the healer. There are different rooms for consultations, exorcisms, divinations and church rituals, as well as boarding facilities for clients who require nocturnal rituals or those who cannot travel back to their homes after a consultation. The most important room of his practice is referred to by him and his clients as the 'X-ray room' or simply the 'court room'. It is in this room that he conducts his divination sessions. Since the different stages of the rituals are conducted on different days, the secretary schedules appointments, which she writes on the registration card that the clients carry with them. Record keeping is done meticulously, with the secretary taking notes regarding the healing rituals as they unfold.

#### ***Mtumishi* Barasa's brief Life History.**

MB's history is a prototypical diviner story where as Behrend states, most 'healers and prophets suffer severe illnesses, die, and go to heaven but are sent back to earth' before becoming healers (2003:137). Good (1987) rightly observed that ritual healers are often 'called' to practice divining and healing magic by an act of God. Writing about the healing practices of the Akamba in Kenya, Good observed that, 'typically, the sign of the professional calling materializes in later childhood, or adult life and is manifested in a lengthy illness syndrome whose symptoms may include dreams, hallucinations, socially aberrant behaviour, vision problems, and inability to concentrate or a series of misfortunes that affect the individuals entire family' (1987:138-139).

Signs of MB's calling into the healing profession started early in his childhood. MB had a very eventful early childhood in which he discovered that he had unique capabilities. He was always able to have visions of confiscated things any time anyone hid them. 'My mother would hide foodstuff like a bunch of bananas for them to ripen, and I would definitely get to know about it and inform her when the bananas ripened' he explained. In his early years of primary school education, MB was expelled from many schools because he had special capabilities to perform tricks and simple magical acts that attracted many

students to him. His teachers considered this behaviour disruptive of normal learning and he was expelled from at least three different schools.

The year 1972 was quite important in MB's transition into the healing practice. During one afternoon, MB fell asleep while tending his parents' cattle. While deep asleep, he dreamt about a tall man attacking him. He suddenly woke up, and actually saw a very tall naked man standing next to him, ready to strike him. He stood up and sprinted away from this man. The man followed him and he continued running till he collapsed. In his collapsed state, he had a vision where he walked on a winding footpath inside a thick forest. At the end of the footpath, he found a neatly fenced homestead, inside of which were men drinking a local brew from a huge pot using straws. As he peeped through the fence, a man appeared to him dressed in a white robe and ordered him to go back to the village immediately using the very same path. MB took the same winding path back to the village and regained his consciousness at the end of the path. It was late in the evening when he regained his consciousness and his parents decided to take him to hospital, as he exhibited symptoms of malaria fever. His parents brought him to Misikhu Mission hospital,<sup>20</sup> where he collapsed while undergoing treatment. He had yet another vision. In this one, he found himself staring at a large water mass, which had a thin rail (metal bar) connecting the landmass to the other side. The same old man with white robes who advised him to go back to the village in the first vision appeared a second time. This time round, he advised him to cross the water mass, using the thin rail ensuring that he did not slip and fall into the water. This he did and he regained his consciousness as soon as he was on the other side. He had been unconscious for close to six hours and in his own estimation, he literally walked on the bridge for an equivalent duration of time.

When MB regained his consciousness, he heard some noise, which he later came to realise, was from a generator that was used to supply power to the hospital. He had never heard this type of noise before and it really terrified him. Next, he saw was a very bright light from an electric bulb over his head. This too terrified him, as he had never encountered electricity light in his life. In this terrified state, he sprang to his feet and ran out of the hospital. The nurses and other hospital attendants however noticed him trying to escape and restrained him by holding him tightly on his bed. He explained that in the course of this struggle, he

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<sup>20</sup> Mission hospitals exist in many parts of rural Kenya to supplement the care provided by government hospitals. In some areas, they are the only source of care as government hospital may not be available.

lost his consciousness a third time, and ‘was transported to the next world’. After he collapsed the third time, the health care workers assumed that he was dead and took his body to the morgue for preservation<sup>21</sup>.

*Mtumishi* Barasa claims that he learnt quite a lot from the ‘other world’ and it often took him a minimum of seven hours to preach about this to his congregation. He, for instance, advised people never to commit suicide. This was because people who committed suicide by hanging themselves or by taking poison never completely died, but remained hanging on their ropes and in pain till the day of their final judgement as per the Christian religion. Those who took poison had stomach pains every day until their judgment day. Victims of murder remain in pain too and that was why some of them haunted the people who killed them. MB claims that he also discovered that dead bodies do communicate to each other while in the morgue. He explains that he was able to follow the discussions from two other bodies that had been preserved in the mortuary at the time he was brought into the mortuary, and learnt the cause of their deaths. One had died during childbirth while the other had been ill for over seven years before he succumbed to death.

MB claims to have been in the mortuary for three days before he regained his consciousness on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day like Christ who rose on the third day. This event caused a huge stir in the entire hospital as mourners and mortuary attendants who had come to collect one of the bodies scampered in panic when they noticed him sitting inside the mortuary. It was only the hospital administrators, two Europeans, who summoned sufficient courage to approach the mortuary and get him out. He was taken back to the hospital ward, and caused even more pandemonium as other patients scampered away. Due to the confusion brought about by his ‘resurrection’ the hospital storeroom was converted into a ward where he was admitted. Three days later he was transferred to yet another Mission hospital, known as Mukumu Hospital<sup>22</sup> from where he was discharged a week later.

These dramatic incidents passed and MB went back to school. He was however enrolled to a different school. The teachers in this new primary school were not opposed to the tricks and

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<sup>21</sup> Many clients that I spoke to stated that they knew MB had died and resurrected and that was how he obtained his healing powers.

<sup>22</sup> Mukumu hospital is one of the earliest mission hospital in western province and it still ranks as one of the best in the provision of efficient health care Western province.

the seemingly magical acts that he performed. He completed his primary and secondary schooling uneventfully and joined a local polytechnic where he trained as a mason.

The defining moment of MB's transition to the healing profession came in his adult life as he worked as a mason. He explained that he would visualize things that nobody else saw and exhibited strange behaviour as a result. He would, for instance, see numerous snakes, tortoises or people stacking dogs on top of him. This made him scream and run away to hide in the bushes. He also saw many caterpillars or chameleons in his food and threw away the chunks of food that contained them. It was at this point that his parents decided to take him to traditional healers. He explains that his parents did not bother taking him to a biomedical health facility as they recognised this to be an affliction treatable best by traditional healing methods. Such diseases are often referred to by the local name, *Misambwa*, which literally translates to something like 'spirits' or 'spirit possession'. MB's parents took him to a total of 26 traditional healers (*abaliuli*) and another 12 'healers who prayed for people' (*abasali*). MB observes that the *abaliuli* were not able to treat him and it took the last of the 12 *abasali* to have him healed. This last healer informed him that he was destined to be a healer and that was why he was afflicted. After the healer prayed for him, he opened up his (*Mtumishi Barasa*) healing potential. Once he acquired the healing powers, it was now MB's turn to pray for this healer who also got more healing powers. From this very moment, MB realised that he had obtained 'powers' that enabled him to pray for people and 'if the people believed they would be healed, then they got healed in the name of Jesus'.

I attempted to bring MB to discuss the 'nature' of his healing powers but he often took this as an opportunity to engage in discourse on the Christian teaching on faith and healing. He preferred to discuss and provide bible citations of instances where the power of the Christian God through Jesus Christ and other prophets was able to heal people. He himself claimed to be incapable of understanding 'these powers'. In some cases, he actually claimed not to have any powers at all: 'Jesus Christ hires my body and uses it to heal people' - I am just like a pipe that delivers water, but if you ask me to tell you how that water is, where it comes from or how it does its wonders, I cannot tell you'. Everything according to him emanated from the Christian understanding of healing powers even where certain of his procedures appear to be from his creativity.

MB hailed from a family with a ritual healing tradition. He inherited his healing capabilities from his maternal grandfather who was a diviner. The afflictions he suffered before becoming a healer were understood to be his dead grandfather's spirits (*Misambwa*) that wished to be inherited. He however distances himself from his grandfather who he claims was a traditional healer who used traditional powers while he (*Mtumishi*) used the power from the Christian God. MB explained the concept of healing powers especially the way they transited from his predominantly traditional African grandfather to him in this manner:

*God has since time immemorial provided human kind with special abilities to heal. The powers that I have to heal are the very same powers that my grandfather had. The only difference here is that while I acknowledge that these powers come from God, my grandfather attributed the powers to his ancestors. And that is why instead of using the bible, he used a buffalo's switch to divine. The powers are however the very same. I have however cleaned my fathers healing tradition from its Misambwa origins, from its traditional outlook and given it a Christian outlook, which is guided by the Holy Spirit.*

This philosophy would however appear to contradict his initial position that he actually had no powers. *Mtumishi* Barasa explains that although his grandfather did not acknowledge the Christian God, he struck him at times as possibly having powers that exceeded his own. His grandfather had for instance powers to produce people's images in a basin of water and make them speak. MB stated that he could not do this but then clarified that this was not a necessary condition for his healing work.

*Mtumishi* Barasa dates the onset of his healing work to 1983. Although he was initially an adherent of the Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship Africa (PEFA) churches, he later started his own church known as the 'King Jesus all Ministries'. This church has since grown in membership and is currently headed by another pastor. The church had branches all over the country and even in neighbouring Uganda and Tanzania. In chapter two, I give a detailed account of his healing techniques, which illustrate his Christian orientation.

### **1.5.2. Francis Shisia.**

Francis Shisia is the second healer with whom I conducted extensive fieldwork. His background has its own share of complexities and mystery. As compared to *Mtumishi* Barasa, Shisias' work has maintained most of the African cosmological, praxeological

orientation and outlook. He does not have any special identifying title added to his name and although he converted to Islam, he was known more by his Christian name 'Francis'. His Muslim name is Ibrahim, although in the course of my fieldwork I never heard any of his clients refer to him by this name, except for his close friends. His clients simply described him in expressions such as 'He is a very powerful healer' a healer who does not pretend to heal or take money from clients whose cases he could not treat' and ' if Francis cannot treat you, then no one else will, you will just have to die'.

Shisia's practice is located about a kilometre from Mayoni shopping centre in Mumias district of western province. His residence is a stone throw away from the main Mumias - Busia road that leads to neighbouring Uganda. Apart from the ease of accessibility for his clients, the proximity to the highway did not seem to have much influence to his practice. Unlike MB, Shisia's conducts his healing rituals in a separate building located over 20 kilometres away from his residence which is off the Kakamega-Mumias road. The healing rituals are conducted in a small hut using paraphernalia and powers that he inherited from his grandfather. The powers from his grandfather are held by Djinnns that fly freely in the air and come to his aide when he summons them in divination sessions. Once summoned, the djinnns inhabit his paraphernalia – a pair of cows horns, a bead made of cowry shells and a pot stuffed with medicines – from where they aide him to divine the source of affliction, advice him on the treatment and remedial action, as well as mete out revenge on afflicting forces and individuals. The Djinnns also decide on the amount of payment to be made by the clients. Shisia practiced herbalism as well and performed physical examinations on his clients using what he called a 'talismanic ring' that he obtained during his apprenticeship in Nigeria.



1.1 Mr. Francis Shisia, the healer in his healing hut during one of the discussions with the ethnographer.

According to Shisia, the defining moment for his ritual practice was in 1974 after he completed his secondary school education. He had previously experienced a myriad of health problems during his schooling, such as persistent headaches and inability to concentrate on his studies. After his secondary school education he was possessed by *Misambwa* spirits (apparently the same type of spirits that possessed MB) that made him walk naked in the streets for several weeks. At this point, his uncle who lived in Mombasa at the Kenyan Coast brought him to be treated by one of the most popular healers who resided at the Kenyan coast, known as Kajiwe. Kajiwe's witch hunting and his tribulations with law enforcement agents are described by Brantley (1979). Mr. Kajiwe treated Shisia and further informed him that the spirits of his displeased dead grandfather who wanted him to inherit his profession brought about his illnesses. As part of his treatment, Shisia would have to take up the healing profession from his grandfather; otherwise his illnesses would not disappear.



Mr. Shisia spent the subsequent six months at Mr. Kajiwe's homestead, where besides being treated, he trained as a herbalist. He was a good apprentice and when he excelled amongst a group of 120 other apprentices, Mr. Kajiwe sent him to several African countries to learn about the occult and how to deal with different afflictions. Between 1976 and 1978, Mr. Shisia visited several countries including Nigeria, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Cote d'voire, Congo Tanzania, and Uganda. Mr. Shisia explains that his mentor (Kajiwe) had acquaintances and colleagues in all these countries that welcomed him and taught him all kinds of medicines and healing techniques<sup>23</sup>. He only carried an introduction letter from Mr. Kajiwe and the healers welcomed him and acquainted him with the skills of their trade. Mr. Shisia is quite vague on the details of how he was able to afford the costs of these journeys and how he was able to locate the healers in these countries.

From his apprenticeships, Mr. Shisia learnt more about herbalism and occult forces. He explains that after his apprenticeship, and the trips to these different countries, he acquired the knowledge of and actually possessed over eight thousand five hundred (8,500) different medicines and could treat an equal number of afflictions. This was a surprisingly huge number of afflictions, and in spite of my polite but incessant expressions of doubt over such a huge number, Mr. Shisia often maintained that he could treat this number. He often affirmed in his answers that he was a 'very tough healer' and often concluded by saying 'don't joke around with African medicines'.

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<sup>23</sup> Cynthia Brantley's (1979) article mentions that Kajiwe had lived in Kenya, Tanzania Somali and the middle East before he started his healing practice. She does not however state whether Kajiwe visited these countries to learn healing. One could therefore speculate that the contacts referred to by Shisia were made by Kajiwe during this time.



1.2 The cupboard in which Mr. Francis Shisia stores his medicines. According to him, his medicines can treat over 8,500 diseases.

In 1978, Mr Kajiwe declared that shisia was qualified to heal and therefore gave him the powers and paraphernalia that he would use in his healing practice. These were, cowry shell beads strewn together in a circular hoop, two horns of a cow that appear to have been filled up with an assortment of substances<sup>24</sup> and a calabash. This assortment of paraphernalia is shown below. Shisia explained that Kajiwe captured the djinns that belonged to his (Shisia's) father and implanted them inside the two horns. But the Djinns do not always reside inside the horns. They only came into them during the divination ceremony when Mr. Shisia called them. Armed with the knowledge about herbs, and the occult powers from his dead grand father, Mr Shisia worked in different towns in Kenya such as Nakuru, Nairobi and Mombasa before finally settling in his current residence at Mayoni.

Like MB, Mr. Shisia also claims not to possess any healing powers by himself. The powers of the Djinns do not even reside in him. The Djinns imbed themselves inside his

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<sup>24</sup> Mr Shisia was not able to explain what was filled up in the cow horns but only insisted that they were prepared in that fashion for him by Mr. Kajiwe.

paraphernalia, during the divination session, divine the problem and advice on the therapy and remedial action to be performed. Once the divination sessions are over, the Djinns retreat or just disappear into thin air. Mr Shisia is not able to tell exactly what the Djinns are and where they disappear to. They simply divine for each client and disappear and must be invoked every time a new client walks into Mr. Shisia's divination room. Although Mr. Shisia openly states that he uses the Djinns to heal, he and his clients rarely talk of Djinns. They referred to them as 'Wazee' (translates to 'old men') who assisted Shisia in healing.



1.3 Mr. Francis Shisia's divination paraphernalia into which Djinns fly to divine and advise him on healing options.

Most of the healing sessions by Mr. Shisia would be conducted with each client in private. This often involved an initial consultation with him, payment of a small fee about ½ a dollar - just like the registration fee at *Mtumishi* Barasa, invitation of the Djinns, who would diagnose and prescribe remedial action and payment of the fees, which was also determined by the Djinns.



1.4 Mr. Shisia uses his 'talismanic ring' imported from Nigeria to examine Mr. Banda's chest after Djinns had attacked him.

I have included the descriptions of both *Mtumishi* Barasa and Francis Shisia in the introduction even though this dissertation will concentrate more on *Mtumishi* Barasa and his healing methods. Francis is included in the description mainly because he was the healer who handled the case of Mr Banda who I used to illustrate the empirical and theoretical contradictions of modernity in this chapter. I have included Francis description here as well to briefly show what other types of healers exists in Western Kenya as well as to indicate that ritual healers maintain unique healing techniques and their adaptation to changes to modernity are equally idiosyncratic. A detail of his healing methods is however not included in the dissertation

In chapters 2 - 4, I will give a detailed expose of the divination ritual conducted by *Mtumishi Barasa* and popularly referred to as the X-ray or courtroom. I elected to provide a thorough description and analysis of the divination methods since it formed the most critical aspect of MB's healing as well as the area in which he exhibited innovation and creativity per excellence. Chapter five moves to three other reconstructive rituals performed by MB as

a result of the divination. These are cleansing, Retrieval of charms and Ritual prophylaxis. These rituals are described and analysed and a link is made between them and the divination sessions by means of appropriate cases. In Chapter six, the question of ritual healing and modernity is revisited with a focus on how ritual engaged with modernity and how it adapted to changes occasioned by Modernity. The question of efficacy is addressed in chapter seven while chapter eight concludes the dissertation.

## Chapter 2

### ‘You Are Accused!’

#### 2.1. Introduction.

The title of this chapter, ‘*You are accused*’ is derived from the divination session in the healing rituals conducted by *Mtumishi* Barasa. This statement is without exception uttered by the secretary during the divination session in either of two main ways: as a proposal that is confirmed by the congregation or as a statement of fact to be responded to by ‘accused persons’. The statement ‘You are accused’ is always uttered in the Kiswahili Language<sup>25</sup> as ‘*Umeshtakiwa*’. When uttered as a proposal, the word used is ‘*ashtakiwe*’ which translates to ‘Let us accuse her/him’. When uttered in this latter form, the proposal is directed to members of the congregation asking them whether accusations should be levelled against the perceived aggressor. The congregation always responded by repeating the same words to confirm their agreement that the perceived aggressor should be accused. To confirm that the entire congregation was in agreement, the secretary occasionally asked a supplementary question: ‘*Kuna mtu wa kumtetea*’ which translates to ‘Is there anyone who wants to defend him/her?’ The congregation always answered in the negative; ‘*Hakuna*’ ‘There is none!’ When uttered as a declaration, the statement was usually directed to the ‘accused persons’ and thereby inviting them to defend themselves. The divination session within which this statement is made was central to the healing rituals both as a reconstructive strategy as well as the basis on which all other successive rituals are determined. In a way it occupied a meta-ritual position as all other subsequent rituals depended on the proceedings from this session. The greater part of this and the following two chapters will be based on the proceedings of this session.

*Mtumishi* Barasa has designed elaborate rituals for handling the myriad of problems brought to him by his clients. In this chapter, I describe his healing rituals and illustrate them with relevant ethnographies from my observations. MB’s rituals however form the larger part of what is presented in this dissertation. I have chosen to narrate the steps the clients are taken through as soon as they present at the healers’ homestead. At each stage, I give illustrations from the cases observed as the clients went through the initial consultation, divination

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<sup>25</sup> Clients visiting MB were multiethnic and this fact necessitated the use of the common Kiswahili Language that was understood by most if not all clients

sessions followed by the designation of remedial measures agreed upon by the healers and the clients.

## **2.2. *Mtumishi* Barasa and his X-ray Divination Method.**

*Mtumishi* Barasa and his clients referred to his divination process either as an X-ray session or simply as ‘Court’. He used the English term for X-ray and the Kiswahili word, ‘Kotini’ for Court. This process revolved around a set of individuals, specially designated ritual spaces and specific standard procedures. The individuals involved were the healer himself, his secretary and the guard. In situations where nocturnal rituals were conducted, or when the secretary was indisposed, one of the healer’s wives stepped in and acted as the secretary. The ritual spaces include, the healer’s living room, situated in his main house that served for initial divination, the reception and secretary’s office, the church (which also serves as the locus for the ‘retrieval of charms’) the court room or X-ray room, the kitchen and two separate rooms for male and female clients who spent the night at the healer’s homestead. The different specialized functions of these rooms will be clear as I describe the ritual procedures by *Mtumishi* Barasa. The guard was a man in his late 40s who would be found always sitting at MB’s gate and referred to as GSU. The secretary, a lady in her early 40s was referred to by her name, Emma, or simply as ‘*karani*’ which was Kiswahili for secretary.

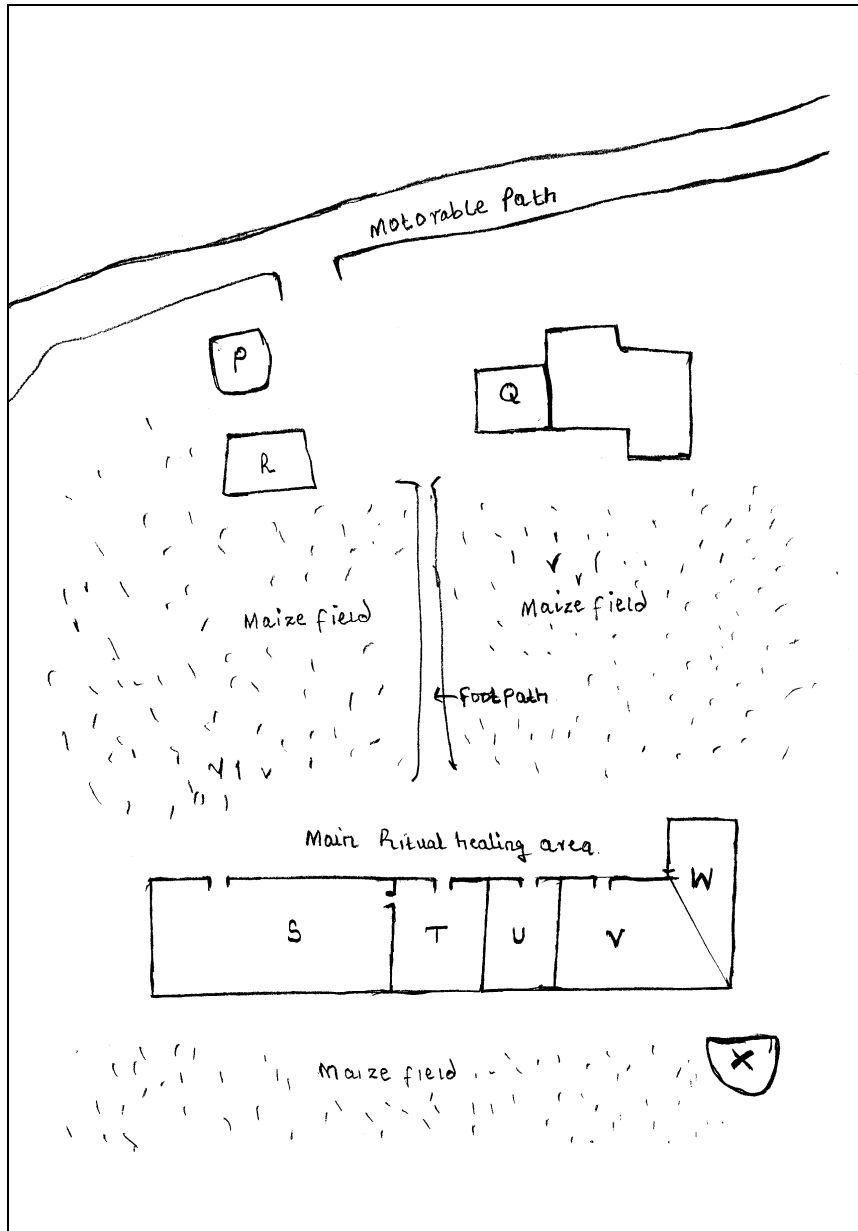
### **2.2.1. Entry into the Ritual Space and Arena.**

The first point of encounter or contact with *Mtumishi* Barasa’s healing rituals starts immediately at the gate of his compound, which is manned by a guard. This is a special feature of the healer’s compound. Very few homesteads (almost none of the homesteads in his vicinity) have a gate and a guard. On most occasions, the guard was dressed in combat fatigue like a soldier though he was unarmed. The healer referred to his guard by the initials ‘GSU’, which stands for ‘General Service Unit’ (this is also the name of the most dreaded police unit in Kenya, often deployed to quell riots and pursue cattle rustlers and bandits in very severe and harsh conditions where ordinary police units have failed).

The guard always greeted clients and, without much conversation, led them directly to the secretary’s office, located some 20 meters from the gate. The guard brought every new client to the secretary as soon as they presented at the healer’s compound and requested to

see the healer. On page 63, I have provided an artist's impression of the healer's residence and the different ritual spaces.

Sketch of MB's compound and Ritual Healing arena.



**Key:**

- P Guard's sitting area
- Q MB's consultation room inside his residence
- R MB's kitchen
- S Church
- T Secretary's office
- U Men's boarding room
- V X-ray or courtroom
- W Kitchen and women's boarding room
- X: Charms dumping and burning site.



The secretary serves as the principal assistant to the healer. As soon as the guard escorts the clients to the secretary, she registers the client on a small green card reminiscent of the ones used in biomedical facilities in Kenya. She records a client's name and address, place of residence and, where available, their telephone contacts. She always assumed that any one appearing in her office was a client and proceeded to register them. Such was my experience with her the first time I went to the healer and in spite of my protests, she proceeded to register and issue me with a card.

During the initial contact with the secretary, clients paid a fee of Kenya shillings 20 (Approx USD 35 cents) for registration, after which they were asked to enter the church, which was in the adjacent room. Although there existed an adjoining door between the secretary's office and the church, the secretary always asked clients to use the outer door and so one practically went out of the office, into the yard and back into the church. A closer look at the secretary's office indicates a modern office space and technological configuration. Inside the secretary's office, one finds her chair, a table and client's bench. On top of the table is a huge pile of exercise books that serve as record books. The secretary has several pens on the table and a land line telephone that the healer uses to communicate to her as well as to some clients.

The church was a rectangular room adjacent to the secretary's room. It measured roughly thirty by twenty feet. Congregants sit on benches arranged in two rows. As a rule, men sit on one side, (the right side) and women on the other. In front of the church is a table where the preachers (usually the secretary but on certain occasions MB or a number of other invited preachers) placed their bibles. The offertory basket was also placed on the same table. There was a signboard with rules and regulations pertaining to the conduct of people within the compound hanging on the front wall of the church. The rules were written in Kiswahili and conspicuously placed on the front wall for all clients to read.

The next phase of the ritual was the church service usually conducted by the secretary, but sometimes by visiting preachers. On Sundays, MB personally conducted the church services. This service took place every day between 10.00 am and 1.00 pm. The church service always started with Christian hymns, followed by an introductory prayer by the secretary, bible reading and preaching, which would last as long as two hours when the healer himself preached. The preaching was concluded by another prayer, and finally a song

as members of the congregation trouped to the front of the church to give their offerings. The service was then concluded by a prayer and announcements by the secretary. Three rules were constantly emphasized: a) The church service was mandatory for all clients visiting the healer every day; b) Women who spend the night at the healer's place should assist in the cleanup of the church premises; and c) Clients who wished to have an appointment with the healer **MUST** seek clearance from the secretary first. MB often repeated this rule during his sermons and chastised clients who tried to contact him without the secretary's clearance. After the service, the secretary asked the congregation to wait outside for the next course of action. She rarely explained what the next course of action would be and the clients especially the new ones were always left to depend on gossip from continuing clients. As the clients waited in the shade outside the church, lunch was served to them. It was also during the lunch break (which lasted anywhere between 1.00 pm and 3.00 pm ) that the secretary scheduled appointments for first time clients as well as continuing clients alike to consult with the healer. Occasionally clients would also consult the healer as the church service continued.

### **2.2.2. Initial Consultations and Divination with MB.**

The processes that clients underwent before their initial consultations with MB constitute an important part of the healing process. I consider it imperative to give a commentary to these processes here before getting into what most clients or even casual observers would consider to be the healing process proper. As every client presented to MBs homestead, they were led directly to the secretary's office without much conversation by the guard. The secretary welcomed them and registered them on a small card, and collected a registration fee of Kshs 20 (approx 35 cents USD) from them. Again without much conversation apart from the client's expression of the need to consult the healer, the clients were ushered into the church where prayers and worship session lasted an average of two hours. After the church sessions, clients were served lunch. The lunch was however not free. One of MB's female relatives<sup>26</sup>, cooked and served delicious comestibles to the clients at a low price. It was after these series of activities that clients finally met MB for the initial consultation. All these preparatory steps appear to be carefully arranged to raise the expectation of the clients, to give the impression of an ordered and professional form of healing and to nourish clients both spiritual and physically in readiness to meet MB. There is an obvious creation of a

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<sup>26</sup> It was not possible for me to establish the actual relationship between the two as MB always referred to her as a 'sister'

hierarchical system most probably from MB's observation of what took place in hospitals where lower cadre health professionals often prepared patients for their eventual encounter with doctors in ordinary consultation or even during surgical operations. Nurses in biomedical health care often registered patients; took their body weights, temperatures and pressure and performed other preparatory procedures before a patient could meet the doctor or surgeon. In the same way, MB let the secretary, the guard, and the 'food lady' to prepare the clients for the eventual meeting with him.

MB's practice also exhibited a careful utilisation and manipulation of time, space and information to maximise the client's expectations. The guard was always at the gate and only moved to the secretary or MB's house when directed to do so. The secretary was always in her office and around the church in the course of the day, unless when called by MB to his house. For his part, MB kept to his house for most of the morning session, and only came to the church and court room in the afternoon. Almost as if choreographed, the guard, the secretary and MB navigated clients between them and their ritual spaces without pre-empting or divulging information regarding the functions of each of their different departments. And finally time was considered of essence. MB mostly consulted with the clients in the afternoon after they had gone through the preparatory stages with the secretary. Clients often waited for a minimum of three (3) hours before they could consult MB.

### **2.2.3. Encountering MB: Consultation and Divination.**

Peek (1991) makes a valid point when he observed that divination often utilized a non-normal mode of cognition which was then synthesized by the diviner and the client(s) with every day knowledge in order to allow for plans of action. And as Douglas (1970) showed, divination systems not only exhibited a desire to distinguish between appearances and reality but offered a way of reaching behind appearances to another source of knowledge. MB's ritual healing can be understood as a practice where he employed a system of iterative consultation with the clients as well as his supra-human abilities to access hidden information. It will be recalled that the general perception of ritual healers in Africa was that of individuals who could access hidden forms of knowledge by means of their supra-human abilities. This notion is linked too to the perception that the problem at hand, for which the diviner (or ritual healer) had been consulted might be caused by supra-human beings or powers, but more importantly to the notion that the supra-human realm is the repository of

true knowledge about a people's shared reality (Good 1987, Mendonsa 1978, Peek 1991). MB's consultation typified this characterization where he employed several techniques that included the psychic (where he used his supra-human powers to read images from the bible and produced voices from the bible to divine) as well as the psychological where he interviewed the clients to obtain background information. Both sources of information were synthesized to arrive at a decision on the reconstructive process in the event of a client's problem. Many clients I spoke to at MB's rituals insisted that they consulted his abilities to access hidden forms of knowledge even though a large part of the information was obtained from the clients before MB performed his tentative divination session.

MB's set of consultation could be divided into two categories; one was for the first time clients and the other was for the continuing clients. MB often informed the secretary when he was ready to consult with the clients and the secretary sifted them one after the other to meet the healer. For clients visiting MB for the first time, MB invited them to his living room (room Q on pg 53), a spacious room with three sets of comfortable lounge couches and two coffee tables. He welcomed all his clients with a very generous handshake and often repeated the statement '*Nimekukaribisha*' which translates to 'I have welcomed you'. He would then say a short prayer in a very loud voice before asking the client to sit across the table and start the consultations.

At first, MB sort information from clients over a wide range of issues: their names, family background, lineage, location, and eventually asking them to state why they came to consult him. There were no standard formulae for the interrogation; rather it appeared to be eclectic and idiosyncratic. For some clients, the healer would first make his own prediction of the problems facing the clients, for yet others, he would let the clients explain the reasons for their consultations. In all cases, however, the healer and the client arrived at a range of issues to be investigated in addition to the client's initial complaints. The healer often explained that what appeared to the clients to be normal occurrences in their lives called for a deeper inquiry through his ritual process, and clients often concurred. A case in point was that of a sixty-five-year-old farmer and retired civil servant who initially only complained of problems with his neighbour over land. In the initial consultations, the healer and the client included for investigations, social and economic problems afflicting his sons as well as marital discord in his daughter's marriage (See the case of Mbago in chapter 4).

After obtaining the background information, the healer assured the clients that he would assist them and repeatedly informed them that they were welcome. After assuring the clients that he would assist them, MB, often without warning, catapulted himself from the psychological mode of information gathering to the psychic form where he would try to read the clients problems from the open bible. To move to this mode, MB would take the bible that he always had on the table next to him and randomly open a page. Occasionally MB invited the client to select a bible verse for him by opening a page of the bible at once, randomly and without flipping the pages. He then warned the client(s) that he was set to ask them over a hundred questions, which they ought to answer honestly. I refer to this as the '100 question technique' although in most cases the questions never numbered 100. He would first read the verse of the bible on the opened pages and give a short commentary on them. And with the bible open, his eyes fixed on it and occasionally glancing at the client, he would ask the client several questions in quick succession, sometimes not even waiting for the client's response. Most of the questions revolved around the client's background, relationships, and recent events in their lives that had a bearing to their current situation. Clients observed that most of the issues discussed with the healer were true and wondered how the healer came to know about them. MB explained that by simply opening the bible and praying, he could see what the clients' problems were even without asking them, and that his questions only served to confirm with the clients and agree on the way forward. MB explained this process in this manner:

'The moment I open the bible, after praying, rather than see the writings of the scriptures, I usually see the picture of the clients and what afflicted them. And that is why I only asked the questions to the clients to clarify the pictures I was seeing'. If you close the bible and ask me to divine by my own human abilities, I assure you there is nothing I can do.

*Mtumishi* Barasa concluded the consultations with yet another prayer and asked the clients to go back to the secretary's office and wait for more directions on the next phase. MB insisted that his Christian orientation distinguished him from other traditional healers as a modern Christian healer, a real *Mtumishi* (servant). Christian practices of prayers, bible reading and interpretation were very prominent in his practice. But importantly though is the fact that he employs the bible to transit from one form of information gathering to another, the normal and the non normal. MB initially interrogated clients, then suddenly opened the bible, read a verse and interpreted the verses to the client. He would then adjust his sitting

position, raise his voice and change his tone, stare at the bible and the client as if piercing him with his eyes, and engage the clients in the '100 question technique'. These actions and his declaration that he would be asking the client over 100 questions served to indicate that the divination session was entering into a different phase, the supernatural phase, where the powers from the bible would replace his human abilities. This shift was however less dramatic in comparison to other systems of divination that utilize mediumistic or oracular divination methods. The key to this shift is the Christian bible, (always open on the table near him) both as a text and a medium through which images of his clients appear for him to read and interpret with the collaboration of the client.

An important aspect of this initial consultation cum initial divination was MB's insistence that it was tentative and might even be misleading. By opening the bible and interrogating the client(s) MB attempted to divine the client's problems. He however warned the clients that his divination was never conclusive and the only way that he and the clients would be sure of the true state of affairs was for the client or the problem to be subjected to the X-ray process. The X-ray process according to MB was necessary for three important reasons: a) MB always stated that his divination session was tentative, incomplete and at times misleading; b) MB complained that some of the clients who visited him withheld information or even lied to him<sup>27</sup> and c) there was a need to establish the true and complete state of the client's predicament through an objective process. As we shall see in the following pages, the X-ray process is designed to give the sense of objectivity as the healer is often absent, clients listen and converse with their adversaries through the bible and a wide range of phenomena is brought to the fore for examination and resolution. This 'thirst for objective knowledge' as Levi-Straus (1963: 3) and Peek (1991) observed was a common denominator in many African cultures where there was a need to distinguish between appearances and reality. Most diviners and their clients including MB exhibit an intense need to know the true reasons for events and believe that answers can be found to all questions but only if one used the proper mode of communication in addressing the correct source of knowledge. MB's 'X-ray' process appeared to be well designed for this as will become evident from the ethnographies.

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<sup>27</sup> Several scholars in African divination systems have observed that it was common for clients to be skeptical of diviners, to loathe answering personal questions, to be secretive and even at times to intentionally deceive the diviner. Compare, Horton, (1964), and Turner 1975)

To illustrate the nature of the initial consultation, I reproduce parts of one such consultation between a young man (I will refer to as John) and MB that I attended. Initial consultations were in most cases private affairs between the healer and the clients and I was rarely invited to the sessions. In any case, most of them took place at the same time with the X-ray process which made it impossible to observe both.

**The transcript.**

**MB:** Do you have a girlfriend?

**John:** Yes,

**MB:** Do you have any problems with her?

**John:** (*Hesitates to answer*)

**MB:** Do you experience extreme tiredness nowadays?

**John:** Mmhhh...

**MB:** Do you often suffer from backache?

**John:** Yeah at times,

**MB:** And does it occur to you nowadays that you are unable to have sex with your girlfriend?

**John:** (smiles and answers hesitantly) Yeah at times...

**MB:** (Healer appears more confident now) I can see that very clearly here: Long time ago you used to be very active, but nowadays, you cannot even manage to 'have it'<sup>28</sup> once with your girl. You used to 'go' up to 4-5 times in one night but nowadays, even once is a big problem. You are always set to 'do it'<sup>29</sup> with your girlfriend but at the crucial moment, you just go limp and all attempts to get strong makes you go even more limp, yeah?

**John:** (*Only nods in agreement*).

**MB:** Yeah, but when you stop the whole thing, you feel that you can get strong again, Yeah?

**John:** (Only nods in agreement)

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<sup>28</sup> The expression 'have it' is used by the healer to mean the act of obtaining an erection and sustaining the act of sexual intercourse. In the subsequent transcript the healer uses euphemisms perhaps for respect as well as the fact that the Language of communication (Kiswahili) does not have direct translations for such words as erectile abilities or dysfunction.

<sup>29</sup> Like in the previous footnote the expression 'do it' here refers to sexual intercourse.

**MB:** You know that is a real problem. That is witchcraft but do not worry, I will help you solve all these problems. You know it can be very embarrassing at times. You get a very beautiful girl and when you agree to do it, you lose all your energies.

**MB:** Okay, and what is this I am seeing here about Dubai?

**John:** I don't know.

**MB:** I can see Dubai here many times and I can see it also in your mind. Do you know what it is all about?

**John:** That one I am not sure.

**MB:** Have you ever been to Dubai?

**John:** No

**MB:** Do you plan to go to Dubai?

**John:** Not at the moment.

**MB:** Don't worry; I will help you find out everything about it and also about your energy problem. You know it can be very embarrassing at times. The picture I can see here is that of a former lover who is annoyed after you left her. Unfortunately I am not able to tell who it is, but it is a former lover who has used your sperms to bring you trouble. But I am not really sure about this. You will have to go to the court so that we can find out what the real problem is and what your former lover wants. Do you have any other questions?

**John:** No.

**MB:** I have welcomed you. Now you will go back to the secretary who will tell you what we shall do next:

The healer then said a short prayer for the client, after which he went back to the secretary's office.

In the consultation above, after obtaining background information about the client, (i.e. name, locality, family details, marital status and reason for consultations) the healer asked John questions on topics ranging from back pain, to sexual abilities and the city of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. All these questions were asked in very quick succession and where John did not answer, the healer still proceeded with the next set of questions almost as if the answers were unnecessary. Clients explained that they were bewildered and unsure of the importance or necessity of some of the questions from the healer. Some of the questions MB asked appeared to be superficial if not extraneous to the client initial complaint. John had previously explained to MB that he and his parents had experienced a series of misfortunes which included, theft of their livestock, his mother's persistent illnesses, his brother losing his job, and constant disturbances at night by people who they



suspected to be either night runners or robbers. After obtaining this background information, MB opens the bible and ritualizes the divination (Peek 1991) which separated it from normal discourse and dispute settlement in order to ensure the necessary shift in the mode of cognition. As the manager of the process, it is the diviner's duty to translate between the worlds as well as between the modes of thought but even more importantly to demonstrate the connection between an apparently random system and the train of misfortunes that the client reveals. In this way, the consultations between John and MB assume a higher level of authority and authenticity.

Although MB always undertook to solve the client's problems at the end of every divination session, he rarely used the word 'heal', preferring to inform the clients that he would help them 'solve all their problems'. He used either of two concluding sentences: 'I will help you solve all your problems' and/or 'I will call them for you'. After the initial consultations, the healer also rarely informed the clients what the next step would be, which further mystified his procedures especially to first time clients. He only asked the clients to go back to the secretary's office who would direct them on the next course of action. Even though the secretary was expected to explain the next set of procedures to the clients, she too rarely gave details regarding the next step. She only informed clients that they would be going to the 'Court'. In most cases, first time clients consulted the continuing clients, who explained the courtroom process often exaggerating and mesmerizing the new clients about the capabilities of the healer. Old time clients often advised the new ones, '*Do not worry, just trust him, he will finish all your problems for you*'

After the initial consultations, clients moved back to the secretary's office. The secretary informed them about the costs of the procedures before the healer commenced the divination sessions. Most clients visiting the healer were aware that they would be expected to pay for the healing and so they always brought along money with them. A calibrated system of payments exists depending on the case presented to the healer. In view of the sensitivity of the matter regarding payments, the secretary and the healer appeared uncomfortable to discuss the details with me. When I enquired about the payments, MB gave me a very long look, as if trying to read the motive behind my question then said, '*Money is not important here; we just help people even those who have no money. In fact at*

*times, I even pay for my clients bus fares after a healing session*<sup>30</sup>. This was in spite of the fact that some clients complained to me that they had paid lots of money to the healer. In one occasion, I overheard the secretary implore a client to *'try and raise the required fee and have her case sorted out once and for all'*.

Clients however appeared to agree that the least one paid for the first session of divination was Kshs 2000 (approx USD30 dollars) while one client informed me that he had paid up to Kshs 15,000 (approx USD 200) for the rituals. A medical doctor who frequented MBs practice for some time informed me that he stopped visiting the healer after he realized that MB deliberately protracted the healing process so that he could collect more money from him at every new stage of the ritual process. The presence of the security man at the gate attests to the possibility that the healer received lots of money on any single day and thus required some form of control of the human traffic in his homestead. It is also important to note that the healer mostly commenced the divination after payment and that the payments were staggered across the different stages of healing with each stage having its own designated cost. This had implications on the speed at which the different rituals were conducted with rich clients having their rituals commence and conclude within the shortest time possible due to the fact that they could raise the required fees almost at once. A client's economic endowment also determined whether their rituals would be conducted publicly or privately. Clients who desired privacy paid an extra fee and had their rituals arranged privately in the healer's house late in the night or early morning.

#### **2.2.4 Beyond MB's tentative divination: The X-ray or Courtroom.**

The label 'X-ray' was coined by *Mtumishi* Barasa for the session that took place after the initial consultations with the healer. He also used the label 'Court session' to refer to the session. MB used the term 'X-ray' because it is in this session that he and the clients would be able to establish the true cause of the afflictions suffered by the clients. Although MB made an initial divination during the consultations, he explained that these were always tentative and thus requiring the 'X-ray' session to complete them. He therefore invited clients to the 'X-ray' session where they could 'hear' and 'see' for themselves the source of their affliction.

The use of this term in his divination procedures resonates more with the ritual divination in the African medical system that, as Douglas (1970) observed, offered a way of reaching

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<sup>30</sup> I once witnessed MB offer money to a client who were not able to travel back to their homes. I could not establish if it was a loan to be refunded or a gift.

beyond appearances to another source of knowledge. It implied seeing beneath the surface, to the hidden or invisible causes of things which enables the translation of visible symptoms and contextual indicators into the idiomatic language of causality (Comaroff 1980). This enabled the healer and the clients alike to gain entry into the hidden source of affliction and thereby decide its management. The healer thus adopted the use of the term X-ray that equally peered into human bodies in search of underlying causes of diseases. MB appeared to use the biomedical term, X-ray due to the fact that biomedical practitioners used X-rays to access inner (therefore hidden) parts of the bodies of their patients. His X-rays was however a method of accessing the inner and hidden body of knowledge regarding the afflictions confronting his clients. This knowledge was thought of as hidden within the social and spiritual realms of the clients' environment. *Mtumishi* Barasa's 'X-ray' then, as we shall shortly see, is an 'X-ray' into the social field of the clients and incidentally to their physical bodies where social maladies reflect in physical malfunctioning.

The healer used the term 'Courtroom' and 'X-ray' for this procedure interchangeably. While talking to his clients, he always directed them to go to the courtroom so that he and the client could know the real source of the problem'. In the court process, the secretary took the position of an independent judge and sort to place the client within his social, spiritual and material context and by some kind of judicial and moral ordering, apportioned responsibility for the presence of affliction. In my discussions with the healer, he informed me that the idea behind the court process was mooted to find out who was to blame for the affliction and whether in some cases the clients themselves were not the initial aggressors. He therefore introduced the question of justice, responsibility and guilt in the management of affliction. MB informed me that he encountered several clients who came to him for assistance yet they were either the initial aggressors or were not entirely innocent. As we shall see in some of the confessions, some of the clients appeared to have been the initial aggressors in accusations of sorcery. As I show in chapter 4, a voice emerging from the bible confessed to have bewitched one of MB's clients because the client had assaulted her. *Mtumishi* Barasa explained that he instituted a semblance of judicial procedure that enabled his clients to 'argue out their cases' with those blamed for their afflictions before he and the client together agreed and designed an appropriate remedial, ameliorative or reconstructive action. A case in point was that of a medical doctor who came to the healer for assistance

but when his case was taken through the X-ray session, a voice emerged from the bible<sup>31</sup> and accused him of fathering twins with her yet he was not providing financial support for their up keep. Although this was not entirely related to his major complaint, the secretary thoroughly scolded the medical doctor: *'Doctor, you should be the one to be accused here. Why do you father children with other women and then refuse to send support for them? Who will you blame if this woman decides to spoil you completely'* Then turning to me she said, *'You see, these are the people who really make life difficult for us here. He comes to be assisted yet he is also offending other people'*.

### **2.2.5. Constituting the 'Court' or X-ray Sessions.**

The court process takes place in one of the rooms (See room V, pg 53) designated in the larger ritual area space constructed by the healer. This room is referred to as the 'courtroom' and the court sitting is with few exceptions always conducted in the afternoon. The only exception is for private clients whose sessions were conducted either at night or very early in the morning before the rest of the clients come to the healer. The courtroom or X-ray ritual is organised into four different sessions usually conducted on different days. Just like the term courtroom, the four different sittings are referred to by judicial terms i.e 'Mention', 'Hearing', 'Judgement' and 'Outcome'. Importantly, these sessions are referred to by their English terminologies.

The 'X-ray' session starts when the healer emerges from his main house and invites the congregation into the 'courtroom'. The congregation sits on benches facing one direction and unlike in the church where women sat on one side and men on the other, clients sat wherever there was space. The healer stood on one corner of the room near the window. This window was directly opposite the door. The healer explained to me that it was important that the window and the door remain open and on the same line during the X-ray session as this was the 'trajectory path of the spirits'<sup>32</sup>. The secretary took her position and sat on a stool next to the healer. She always brought with her, the New Testament bible, a notebook, several pens, and a match box in sessions where witches and murders would be burnt. On such occasions, the secretary would also bring a bottle or more of kerosene that he used to set the bible on fire and thereby exterminating the witches. (I explain these procedures in detail in the subsequent pages). As the clients took their positions on the

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<sup>31</sup> In the next pages, I describe the divination process and the 'voices from the bible' (VFB) phenomenon

<sup>32</sup> In the divination session the spirits of the people accused of afflicting the clients come through the window and after making their confession, exit through the door.

benches, the healer engaged them in light banter about almost anything. In the middle of this seemingly unimportant banter, the healer picks the New Testament bible from the secretary, rips off the top covers and casually throws them out through the window. He then forms the bible into a cylindrical shape by separating the pages of the bible in a process that he refers to as 'searching the network'. As he performed this procedure, he continuously engaged the congregation in light banter almost as if his actions were irrelevant to the proceedings. On several occasions, he caused laughter by stating that he knew of clients who had tried to replicate this procedure in their homes. He mimicked the clients, *'I know some of you go home and say, we normally see Mtumishi do like this, let us also try to do the same'*. Eventually he places the bible vertically on the floor. The point on the floor over which he placed the bible was configured in a variety of ways for the different sessions. On some occasions, there would be an iron slab measuring about 45x45 cms on which he placed the bible. On other occasions, a white piece of cloth was placed either on the floor or on top of this iron slab. On yet other occasions, only a white piece of cloth was placed on the ground without the metallic slab. Another variation and this was usually when the bible was eventually set on fire, the bible is placed on top of pieces of firewood. The different configurations as I explain later relate to the different stages in the divination and reconstruction process.



2.1 *Mtumishi Barasa's X-ray.* The New Testament bible placed on the floor on a white cloth in a typical 'Mention' session from which VFBs emerge.

After placing the bible on the ground the healer asks the congregation to repeat the following prayer after him. The prayer is always said in the Kiswahili Language:

*Eeh bwana, tunakuomba utubariki. Watenda mabaya wawasili hapa, mbio mbio. Bwana na utubariki. Eeh bwana, watenda mazuri wawasili hapa, mbio mbio. Bwana na Utubariki. Tunaomba hayo katika jina la yesu, Amen.*

(Oh God our Father, we pray to you to bless us. Bring to us all the wrongdoers immediately. God bless us. Bring to us all those who have done well to us at high speed. Oh God bless us all. We pray all this in Jesus name, Amen.)

MB and the congregation say every sentence in this prayer twice. In other sessions, he altered the words of the prayer especially in the session referred to as the 'judgement'. At this stage, the healer announced in the prayer that he would be slaying witches. The prayer was said in the version below.

Oh God, we pray to you, this is the session where we shall hang (kill or slay) the witches, God bless us all. Bring to us all the wrongdoers immediately. Bring to us all those who have done well to us. God bless us, Amen.

After the prayers, the healer always walked out of the X-ray room as casually as he entered and the secretary took over the proceedings. The secretary, who is at this time sitting near the bible, starts a chorus and the congregation joined in. It is what I could call the 'ritual chorus' as it is sung in all sessions, including the church service session. The chorus is a common one sung by a majority of church denominations. Its tone is repetitive and uncomplicated, even clients who have never heard of it can easily learn and sing along as the secretary leads. The secretary does not follow any text or any order but partly memorized and partly invented the different lines as the congregation sang along. I reproduce some of the transliterated lines used by the secretary in the song below.

**The Divination chorus:**

Sec: Blood of Jesus,

Congregation: (Blood of Jesus) x 2, Washes us clean

Sec: Jesus is the way of life

Congregation: (Jesus is the way of life) x 2, Praise be to the saviour.

Sec: Forever we shall sing Hallelujah

Congregation: (Forever we shall sing Hallelujah) x 2, Praise be to the saviour.

Sec: Diseases of the devil have been defeated by Jesus

Congregation: (Diseases of the devil have been defeated by Jesus) x 2 Praise be to the saviour.

Sec: And Jesus is the way to salvation.

Congregation: (And Jesus is the way to salvation) x 2 Praise be to the saviour

Sec: The angels of God come down to pray,

Congregation: (The angels of God come down to pray) x 2. Praise be to the saviour.

Sec: Witchcraft from the devil has been defeated by Jesus,

Congregation: (Witchcraft from the devil has been defeated by Jesus) x 2, Praise be to the saviour.

Sec: Illnesses will be cured by Faith,

Congregation: (Illnesses will be cured by Faith) x 2. Praise be to the saviour.

This chorus continued up to the point where voices of people confessing their evil deeds emit from the bible or the area on the floor near the bible. The voices emanating from the bible followed the same pattern. The secretary listened keenly to the bible and as soon as the first voice was heard from the bible, she would motion the congregation to be silent by lifting up her hand. The process was always the same. A voice emanated from the bible and stated its name. The secretary took note of the name of the person and responded by informing the voice that she/he was accused. For example,

**Voice:** My name is X

**Secretary:** Mr. X, you are accused. Tell us what you have done.

The voice proceeded to narrate what it had done to one of the clients who would be seated in the congregation at this time. Any time a voice identified a member of the congregation, the secretary asked the 'afflicted' member to move and sit next to the bible so that they could listen and respond. For example, a voice emerges and says, 'My name is Mr. X and I am the one who has bewitched client Y'. Usually Y would be asked to move near to the bible so that s/he could hear the voices clearly. In most cases, more than one voice emerged to explain their deeds. In such cases, all the voices of people afflicting one client will come in quick succession before those involving another client come. Let us say for example, a client X has come to the healer and is sitting in the divination room. Client X has a problem with his neighbour Y who has gone to witch Z to procure witchcraft. But in doing this, he has worked together with his wife, brother and mother in law. Usually the first voice would be that of the principal afflicter, the person with whom there is a direct conflict. And so the first voice would be that of Y who confesses to afflicting man X stating the reasons for his actions, followed by the witch and the rest of the accomplices. All the voices always tried to justify their actions.

After every confession, the voices emerging from the bible asked the congregation what they wanted from them, and the congregation responded by saying, 'We want you to howl!' The voice would then howl while the congregation, goaded and guided by the secretary uttered a befitting rejoinder. Voices howled from the bible several times and the congregation responded to each howl by shouting a rejoinder. In the course of my fieldwork, I realized that there was no standard number of howls expected from every voice. Generally, the voices howled for between four and eleven times. The highest number of



howls I encountered in the course of my fieldwork was forty (40). There was also no preset form of rejoinder from the congregation. It all depended on the type of offence committed by the confessing voice. There appeared however to be standard guidelines that were modified by the secretary and the congregation for each type of confession/confessor. I identified the following set of guidelines for the different confessions:

- a) All voices that confessed to be witches and murderers were asked to remain in the bible to wait for ritual burning. Every time they howled, the congregation shouted back; *Baki hapo!!* ('Remain there)!')
- b) All people who had contracted the witches, especially if they did not actively participate in the preparation and acquisition of the witchcraft would be asked to take back their evil deeds. The congregation shouted: '*Ikurudie!*' (May your evil deeds come back to you)
- c) Debtors were always ordered to pay back the debts. The congregation shouted back, *Lipa deni!*' (Pay back your debts)
- d) Run away spouses and children were asked to go back to their homes. The congregation shouted, '*Rudi nyumbani!*' (Go back to your home)

The sessions had differing conclusions depending on the stage of the case. The burning of the bible for instance was only done at the 'judgement' stage of the process. Although there appears to be an informal set of rules that guided the type of punishment to be meted out to the offenders, the secretary at times consulted with the client(s) before pronouncing certain punishments. The secretary would ask the client, 'What do you want us to do with this one?' In such cases the clients were empowered to decide on the destiny of those deemed to have afflicted them. The importance of such empowerment of the client in the healing process is analysed later.

Apart from leading in the songs the secretary performed a couple of other important tasks during the courtroom proceedings:

- a) In the performance, she directed what was to be done and said in the session.
- b) She took notes of the proceedings, which she passed on to the healer. The healer was always absent throughout the sessions except in a few sessions where he participated in the courtroom session. In the course of my fieldwork I observed him only twice attending these sessions. He would later explain to me that he only

attended sessions where powerful witches had refused to submit to the burning ordeal.

c) She assumed the role of a judge or overseer between the clients and the emanating voices. In some cases some of the voices questioned her presence in the proceedings and she responded by saying, '*I am the judge*' (Cf pages 194 in the case of Jael Okoti)

d) She decided, in consultations with the clients, the type of punishment to be meted out to the offenders.

c) She lit the fire that burned the witches during the judgement stage of the X-ray.

In the following pages, I outline the four different stages of the X-ray process, namely the Mention, Hearing, Judgement and Outcome. Initially I explain what happens in these sessions and then later illustrate them with actual cases of clients.

#### **2.2.6. The 'Mention'.**

This was usually the first session of the divination process for a new client. The healer started the session by praying over the bible, placing it on the floor and casually departing from the session. The secretary took over the session and started the chorus up to the point where the voices could be heard from the bible. As the voices emerged, the secretary motioned the congregation to stop singing and listen to the voices. The voices that emerged gave confessions of what they had done to the client or the status of their relationship with the client. Unlike in the following sessions, here the voices neither ask questions nor try to justify their actions. Clients are equally not allowed to ask questions to the voices. There was always confusion for first time clients who often tried to engage the voices in discussion. The secretary always directed the clients not to ask any questions because, as she explained, '*this is only the 'mention'*'. Any client who tried to ask questions (as always happened with excited first time clients) was reminded by the secretary to wait for the second stage, 'the hearing'. It is possible to understand the cause of the confusion. MB and the secretary rarely explained what the clients expected in the X-ray room. But even more importantly, clients were always mixed in the court room sessions between those who were visiting for the first time and those who were in the middle of their consultations with MB. Clients who were advanced to the next stages were allowed to speak to the voices from the bible. New clients would therefore follow suit, when their cases came up for mentioning and demand answers from the voices emerging from the bible. Some complained that the

secretary had not allowed them to interrogate their aggressors while others did. The secretary always directed the different clients concerning what they were required to do. When the voices from the bible concluded their confessions in this session, the secretary would direct them to leave so that other voices could proceed with their confessions. The secretary maintained a detailed record of each client and directed them according to the stage of their X-ray process.

This first session of the X-ray process appeared to borrow from the state law procedures where during the first sessions of a court sitting, accused persons only appeared in court to listen to the charges. In such sessions they were never allowed to enter any pleas. MB explained to me that, the same applied to his courtroom procedures, although here, rather than reading the charges to the accused persons, the accused persons appeared and confessed their evil deeds to the clients. The clients were expected to listen and prepare for the second session where they would be able to respond to the voices emerging from the bible.

#### **2.2.7. The ‘Hearing’.**

This was the second session that proceeded after the ‘mention’ and often took place a week or more after the first. In this session, the very same voices as in the ‘Mention’ session appeared. At times there would be more voices than the ones that appeared during the ‘mention stage. The voices appeared and repeated the confessions they made during the first session. There was however a huge departure from the mention session. In this session, the voices emerging from the bible attempted to justify their actions and demanded responses from the clients. The clients were expected to respond to their questions and ask questions of their own. This session was often accompanied by a lot of drama and interesting arguments where rivalry between clients and the voices was usually played out. The secretary played a judge’s or moderator’s role and allowed the clients and the voices to battle it out while she took notes and intervened only when the clients and the voices appeared to be getting out of hand. In most cases when the voices asked clients questions, the secretary directed the clients to respond to the questions. Occasionally she admonished clients who in her own opinion appeared to have acted unfairly. In one such instance, a young unmarried man had fathered a child with a woman who already had three other children. The voice of a woman emanated from the bible and confessed to have placed charms in the man’s food so that he would not leave her for other younger women. The

female voice justified putting charms on the man and asked the client to explain how he expected her to feed his child and her three other children without his support. As the client appeared baffled by the question, the secretary intervened, first by asking the client to respond to the question. As the client remained tight-lipped the secretary admonished him causing laughter from the congregation. Said the secretary: *'And you, why are you adding to a granary<sup>33</sup> that is already full and then running away?'*

The X-ray sessions were open forums for all clients attending the healing at MB's on any day. As such, the congregation often assisted clients, especially first-time clients, by suggesting answers and/or answering their accusers directly. They also assisted by urging the voices to confess their deeds and even suggested punishments to be meted out in other clients' cases. All this drama was played out in the courtroom with little interference from the secretary and the ever-absent healer. It is in this session where for the first time the voices are made to howl. The session always ended up with the secretary informing the voices to wait for the judgement.

#### **2.2.8. The judgement.**

In the 'Judgement' session as the name suggests, 'appropriate' sentences were meted out to the offenders whose cases were 'mentioned' and 'heard' in the two preceding sessions. I already outlined some of the guidelines that were used in meting out the punishment. Witches and murderers were asked to 'remain in the bible' and were ritually burnt when the secretary set the bible on fire. The healer explained that by burning the bible, the ritual fire was expected to consume the witches and the murderers supernaturally, in which case they would die within a month or so after the performance of this ritual. The other reconstructive processes would also commence within the same period i.e. people who owe money will return the money, run away spouses will come back, lost children will return home, etc.

This session was not very different from 'the hearing' in terms of the procedures. The same voices emerging in the two previous sessions would appear again and still attempt to justify their actions. At the end of their confessions and interrogations by the clients and the entire congregation, they would be asked to howl with the appropriate rejoinder shouted back at them by the congregation. The congregation would for instance ask the witches and the

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<sup>33</sup> The use of the term 'granary' is derived from the confessions of the voice from the bible that asked the client if he thought of her as a granary where he would just fill up and disappear.

murderers to remain captured in the bible. At times the secretary modified the rejoinder by informing the offenders that they were about to be rewarded. As the voices howled, the secretary at times directed the congregation to respond by saying, 'remain there and wait for your reward'. At the end of this session, a characteristic dove like sound would be heard from the bible signalling that the voices had finished their confession and that it was time to set the bible on fire. The secretary then poured kerosene on the bible and set it on fire. As the bible was set on fire, the congregation sat around the room and listened to the voices of the witches crying and wailing that they were burning and begging for mercy. Others asked to be given water to put out the fire. In most cases the congregation laughed at the voices and even yelled at them, informing them that they had received their 'just' reward.



2.2 The New Testament bible as used in simple Judgment session. Note that the white piece of cloth is no longer there as this session ends with the burning of the bible.



2.3 The New Testament bible is placed on firewood for an upgraded Judgment session where stubborn witches will be burned.



2.4 The bible is eventually set on fire by the secretary to inaugurate the healing process.

### **2.2.9. The Outcome.**

This session usually took place about a month after the ‘judgement’ session. Clients were asked to come back to the healer and the procedure was always the same with the healer praying over the bible and placing it on the ground. In this session, the voices that appeared were usually those of the people who appeared in the previous sessions. Majority of the voices that confessed to be witches or murderers reported that they were either dead or sick following their burning in the previous session. The dead confessed to be dead and buried or in the process of being buried, while the sick often stated that they were recuperating. The witches who claimed to have survived the fire ordeal vowed to come back totally rejuvenated and ready to battle with the clients and the healer. Those that claimed to have escaped the fire thumped their chests and claimed to have more powers than the healer. In some cases, the witches claimed their Djinns lifted them out of the fires to safety. Other voices especially those who had contracted witches to cause harm to the clients also appeared, confessing that the witches they had contracted had died. Some of them claimed to have given up their evil designs while others boasted that they had found other sorcerers who would help them bewitch the clients after realising that their former witches were dead. In cases where run away children or spouses had not returned to their homes, they often gave new dates when they would go back.

Where the witches or murderers claimed not to have died, this often meant that the healer and the client would start another fresh round of X-ray sessions for the client. In this case, the healer initiated a new round of courtroom sessions that went through another ‘hearing’ stage and culminated in the burning of the new set of witches and again a waiting period for the outcome. Consultations with the healer occasionally took several months before they could be concluded. In one case involving a client who wished to find out the people who had murdered his father, the processes took over 5 months in which the client intermittently consulted the healer (cf. Kirwas case on page 88 and following). At the conclusion of my fieldwork, the client was still having sessions with the healer and with the supposed masterminds also consulting other healers, allegedly to ‘protect’ themselves.

I refer to the divination process as a ‘Meta-ritual’ as it was the one that determined the other rituals to be conducted. While the ritual burning of witches and murderers took place within the divination session itself, other reconstructive and restructuring rituals were conducted based on the revelations and deliberations in the divination processes. Although different

reconstructive processes are initiated, three were especially common. These are described in chapter 5. These last set of rituals were determined by the X-ray process.

I have this far underlined the four major steps in the X-ray processes designed by *Mtumishi Barasa* in his ritual healing practice. In the sections that follow, I illustrate these procedures with examples of cases from my fieldwork. The aim of this session is three fold: a) to illustrate how the divination or X-ray process took place, b) in line with the first objective of this research, present the range of afflictions or human needs handled by the healer, and related to this, c), show the type of clients who consumed rituals conducted by *Mtumishi Barasa*. All these cases are distilled from divination sessions and interviews conducted with the clients after the healer conducted the divinations sessions. Only a select sample of the cases can be provided here with comparisons and elaboration offered on variants of the same.

### **2.3. MB's divination and redress mechanism.**

#### **Dealing with unresolved deaths or murder cases.**

Many clients that I encountered in my fieldwork at MBs healing rituals wished to find answers to cases of sudden or violent deaths in their family in which they suspected foul play. In this category were two types of deaths. In the first instance were deaths where family members were known to have been murdered yet the institutionalized structures (such as police and court processes) had in the clients opinion failed to apprehend and punish the offenders to the satisfaction of the clients. On the other hand were situations where clients encountered a series of misfortunes, including deaths of close relatives which to them signalled the operations of malevolent supernatural forces. MB was consulted by both type of clients and I illustrate two such cases below. In all the transcripts of the cases that I cite in this dissertation, I have altered the names of the clients for confidentiality.

#### **Case 1. The deaths of Stephen and Ramos.**

This was the case Mrs. Jackie Aoko, a 52 years old lady that I met during her first visit to MB Her divination session was typical of the 'mention stage' of the 'X-ray' process where clients only listened to confessions from the bible. Mrs Aoko came to the healer after her two sons had died in quick succession and her daughter in law deserted her thereafter. Her husband appeared to be having an extramarital affair and was disinterested in her. She also explained that she experienced generalized body pain and extreme fatigue. She stated that



she felt that 'she no longer understood what was going on with her'. She therefore decided to come to the healer 'to be prayed for'. Sitting together with her in the 'X-ray' room were 25 other clients each of who were at different stages of the X-ray session. As was the normal procedure, MB came to the X-ray room and set the X-ray session in motion. After several confessions involving other clients had taken place, a set of voices appeared and made confessions regarding her case. A total of 11 different voices confessed to have been involved in Mrs Aoko's case. I reproduce the transliterated version of the confessions below.

The following key will be used to designate the different characters in a typical confession at MB's ritual practice throughout this dissertation.

**Key**

**VFB:** Voice from the Bible.

**CL:** Client.

**SEC:** Secretary.

**CONGREG:** Rest of the Congregation

**OMC:** Other member of the congregation.

**The Transcript.**

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: My name is Jemba<sup>34</sup>.

SEC: Jemba you are accused.... (Silence).... Jemba, talk!

VFB: My name is Jemba. I am a witch. I am the one who has bewitched and 'finished'<sup>35</sup> all the children of Mike.. ...the guy called Mike Mutiso (Jackie's husband).

(Silence)

SEC: Continue.

(Silence)

SEC: Who hired you to bewitch Mike's children?

VFB: My name is Jemba James. My name is Jemba. I am the one who bewitched and killed that boy called Stephen. Initially I had bewitched him so that he would not marry a wife and live in peace. I am a witch who uses Djinns to do my work. I use Djinns to kill and bewitch. I have Djinns from Mombasa. I also have other Djinns from Uganda. I am a witch who has

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<sup>34</sup> The names of all the characters in all transcripts have been altered and do not bear any connection with anyone whose name may bear any resemblance to those used here.

<sup>35</sup> The term 'finish' is a direct translation from the kiswahili word 'Maliza'. When used by the VFBs in the confessions, it is an all encompassing term that means the same thing as to 'bewitch' or ritually control and direct a person to an end desired by the 'witcher'

killed many other people. Since I started bewitching people, I have killed over 1000 people. I have killed about 1012 people. I also ensure that children do not successfully finish their schooling. I also make men fail to marry and girls not to be married. I have really travelled throughout Kenya. I have even been to Tanzania, and even to Uganda. I have really killed many people. And I am the one who killed the boy called Stephen. I also killed the other one called Ramos. I had spoilt all of them and ensured that nothing about them ever went straight. I have accepted all that. In this work, I was only assisting a lady called Brenda. I am the one who even killed Grace. I killed her; she is not alive at the moment. I have been assisting Brenda's family for some time although the only person I dealt with was Brenda. Brenda is the one who hired me to completely wipe out Mike's entire household. She did not want them to live comfortably. I put medicines in Mike's compound so that he would not live well.

SEC: Let us accuse him!

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse him.

SEC: Continue with your confessions or give way to someone else.

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: I want to tell you clearly, my name is Stephen. I want to explain to my mother that I am dead. I am not alive now. I am dead. I am not alive. I want to explain to my mother that Ouma's<sup>36</sup> family caused my death. I want my mother to know the entire truth; Ouma's family caused my death. If at any time you sit down and wonder why your son died, please note that my death was caused by Ouma's family. The Ouma family did not want you to benefit at all from your children. I died.

3<sup>rd</sup> VFB: My name is Ramos. My name is Ramos. I too want to tell mum that my death was caused by Ouma's family. Ouma's family caused my death. And I am dead.... I am not alive. I and my brother Stephen, we are all dead. We are not alive. And I just wanted my mother to know clearly that I died and it was because of Ouma's family that I died. They caused my death.

4<sup>th</sup> VFB: I want to explain to you clearly, my name is Ouma. My name is Ouma. My work was to completely wipe out Mike's entire household. I did not want him to live well.

CL: Why?

VFB: I agreed with my wife Brenda. I wanted to just tell you the truth.

CL: So you want to wipe out Mike's family?

VFB: I have told you the entire truth. I started bewitching this household long time ago. This is not anything that I started recently. I started this work long time ago. I have accepted all that and I want you to know how things are.

SEC: Let us accuse him!

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse him.

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<sup>36</sup> Ouma is the husband to Brenda mentioned by the first VFB

5th VFB: I want to tell you clearly my name is Brenda. I am the one who has bewitched the entire household of Jackie Aoko. You see when her children were working and progressing in life, she used to laugh at me. She did not want me to eat and also live well. She looked down upon me and other people. She never considered others as human beings. That is what annoyed me and I decided to bewitch her family members. I have been doing this for a long time. We agreed to do this together with my husband called Ouma. I want to explain to you clearly so that you may understand. I agreed to do this with my husband, Ouma. We agreed to bewitch the entire family of Mike. I bewitched Mike's wife so that she may not educate her children properly. I also bewitched their daughter so that she may not school properly. We bewitched the girl so that she may have problems. I don't want her to live well.

CL: Why?

SEC: Let us accuse her!

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse her.

VFB: I want to explain to you guys clearly. When we first killed the first son, we placed 'medicines' on that grave and this caused the death of the second son. Usually the medicines make 'graves to attract each other'. Then there was a second death in the family. Now we have placed more medicines on the last grave and we know before the end of December or January, there will be another death in that family. We want to completely wipe out the entire family of Mike Mutiso. We want to wipe out the entire family. My name is Brenda Jemba.

SEC: Let us accuse her!

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse her.

CL: Why do you want to wipe out my family?

SEC: (turns to client) Be patient, you will ask those questions in the next session, today it is only the 'mention' and so you cannot ask any questions.

6<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Kiptum.

SEC: Kiptum you are accused!

VFB: My name is Kiptum. I am the one who assisted . . . I am the one who assisted the woman called Jane . . . to send sickness to the lady called Jackie. Jane explained to me that Jackie did not want her to live well with her husband. Jane explained to me that she was already in love with Mike (Jackie's husband). I am the one who gave her 'medicines' to put in Mike's food, so that he would love her more than he loves his wife (Jackie). She wanted Mike to hate Jackie and to stop living with her. I am the one who did all that, . . . I gave Jane 'medicines' that she put in Mike's food so that Mike would love her more than he loves his wife Jackie.

SEC: Let us accuse him!

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse him.

7th VFB: My name is Jane.

SEC: You are accused!

VFB: My name is Jane Anyango.

SEC: You are accused.

VFB: My Name is Jane Anyango and I am the one who has given Mike 'medicines' so that he may love me more than any other woman. I have taken 'medicines' and mixed them with my menstrual blood, then cooked them together with food and fed Mike. I want to tell you clearly, this man now completely loves and belongs to me. I have had sex with him everywhere in this country. I have allowed him to have all manner of sex with me; I have even allowed him to have anal sex with me, so that he may completely have fun with me. I have completely taken Mike for myself.

(Silence)

SEC: We accuse her.

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse her.

(Silence)

SEC: Give way to the next one to come.

(Silence)

SEC: Give way to the next one to come!

(Silence)

SEC: Allow the other one to come quickly!

Silence.

8<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Rispah. The lady here (Jackie) is my mother in law. You see when my husband (Ramos) died, I was told that his death had something to do with rivalries at his parent's home. That is why I do not want to stay there any longer. A lady friend of mine advised me to leave immediately after my husband's funeral. She advised that I should not even spend a night there. She informed me that there was a trap set for me, that there was something 'they' would do to me so that I may die and follow my husband. You see, Stephen just died like that without a wife and was buried just like that. But for me, I had my husband Ramos. So, they put a trap for me. They wanted to get me during the funeral, as the arrangements for his burial continued, they would get me and harm me, so that I may die and follow my husband to the grave. So, I already knew that. A friend already told me that I should not spend the night there after the funeral. There is no way I would have agreed to spend the night there, only to end up in problems. My name is Rispah and this lady here is my mother-in-law.

9th VFB: My name is Ken Machoka. My name is Ken Machoka

SEC: Machoka you are accused.

VFB: Yes, my name is Ken Machoka. There was this guy called Ben Mati. There was this guy called Ben Mati. He asked me to help him bewitch the son to his brother called Mike Mutiso. He wanted me to do this because he said his brother's family was quite prosperous. My work was to help Mr. Ben Mati. And this guy, Ben Mati died recently.... actually three days ago. He just died recently even the soil on his grave has not settled. I just wanted to explain to you clearly. We took soil from the grave of that young man called Stephen, mixed it with ashes and 'medicines' and threw them back to Stephen's compound so that misfortunes may just revolve around their compound and not get to Ben's compound. However by bad luck, after I made my charms, they rebounded back to Ben and as I have told you.... right now as I am talking to you..... Ben is dead. Ben is now about 2-3 days dead. You see I had already informed Ben that if I made these 'medicines', and dispatched them to Stephen's family, in the event that Stephen's family was innocent,..... then there would be great danger. But he still insisted that I concoct the 'medicines'. And so I made my 'medicines', my 'medicines' went to Mike's homestead and realized that they (Mike's family) were innocent, and so they rebounded back to Ben. As I am talking to you now, Ben is dead.

SEC: Let us accuse him!

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse him.

10<sup>th</sup>VFB: My name is Okoth.

SEC: Okoth you are accused!

VFB: I want to explain to you guys, my name is Okoth.

SEC: Okoth you are accused!

VFB: My name is Jared Okoth. I want to explain to you, the lady sitting here is my sister-in-law. Jackie is my sister in law. And I want to explain to you, Jackie, that I have brought all types of 'medicines' to your compound so that your compound may experience all manner of problems. I don't want you to live comfortably. I don't want you and your children to live well. I did this because you bewitched me so that I have not been able to get any children. I only got one girl. But you managed to get sons who are well educated and have jobs, you now live very well, but for me I only got one child. I consulted a witch who informed me that your household was responsible for all my woes. I was informed that you were the source of all my problems. It is your household that spoiled mine. Let me tell you clearly, I went to consult a medicine man and he informed me clearly that your house was the one 'sitting on mine'. And I decided that I would not just sit there and watch as you spoil my family. I have now acquired 'medicines' to destroy your entire family in all ways. Do you hear that? And for me, my name is Okoth – Jared Okoth. Do you hear that? And I have brought enough 'medicines' to destroy your entire household. You are the guys who bewitched me so that I may not get any children. I just got one girl and everything stopped there, because of you guys.

SEC: Let us accuse him!

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse him.

11<sup>th</sup> VFB (speaks very quickly): My name is Ruth.

SEC: Ruth you are accused.

VFB: My name is Ruth.

SEC: Ruth you are accused!

VFB: I am the one who bewitched her (Jackie) so that she may not plant any crops and keep any cattle in her compound. I am the one who spoilt her plans to keep cattle and plant crops in her farm. I was not interested in killing anybody. I was not involved in killing anyone. I just did not want her to succeed in planting food or keeping animals. That was my work.

SEC (asks client): What is the relationship between you and Ruth?

CL: She is the wife of my brother-in-law.

SEC: Let us accuse her!

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse her.

12<sup>th</sup> VFB: I want to tell you my name.... I am really jealous of Jackie. But my name is Prisca Oduor. I am really jealous of Jackie's household. I am really jealous.

SEC: We accuse her and her jealousy!

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse her.

(Silence)

SEC: Allow the other one to come.

End of Transcript.

As is consistent with the 'Mention' stage of the X-ray process, the client was expected to be passive: to only listen to voices of people confessing their evil deeds against her. Mrs. Aoko appeared to be interested resolving three main problems, namely the death of her two sons, her seemingly unfaithful husband and her persistent body pains and fatigue. I conducted interviews with clients after they had already talked to MB and at times having participated in part of their X-ray sessions. And since I only talked to them after the intervention of MB and the X-rays session, it was not possible to obtain, (at times even pointless to try) an objective assessment of what their problems were prior to the X-rays sessions. Throughout the interviews, I often got the impression that the clients explained their problems based on

what they presented to MB, what MB divined for them as well as what they heard from the X-ray sessions.

Prior to the X-ray session, Mrs Aoko held a divination session with MB where MB thoroughly interrogated her regarding her family, her husband, her children, the dates of their death and the circumstances surrounding their death, her property, her neighbours etc. At the end of this initial session, MB informed Mrs. Aoko that he would call the people who caused the death of her children to confess their deeds. He also informed her that he would call her sons to confess if anyone had killed them, establish whether her husband was cheating on her, find out whether and why her daughter in law had deserted her as well as finding out if anyone was responsible for her general body pains and fatigue. In short, MB promised to look into the entire realm of her problems. Based on this initial tentative diagnosis, Mrs Aoko waited for the more elaborate divination session from the X-ray session.

In the X-ray session reproduced above, 12 different voices from the bible provided a thorough explanation to each of the afflictions faced by Mrs Aoko. The death of her two sons is attributed to the work of a jealous neighbour as well as an act of both jealousy and revenge from her in laws. The X-ray session reveals an array of actors and motives for the deaths of her children. Initially there was the voice of a witch (VFB 1) who confessed to have been consulted by Mrs Aoko's neighbour (Brenda) to kill her two sons. Besides boasting about his bewitching abilities, the witch explains that initially, he only bewitched Mrs Aoko's children so that they would not succeed in their schooling, and if they did, 'they would not get jobs and live comfortably'. He did this at the behest of Mrs Aoko's neighbour. Eventually he confessed that he killed the two boys using his 'medicines'

In X-ray sessions, witches and the people who confessed to have hired them always spoke and corroborated each other's confessions. Mrs Aoko's neighbours (Mr. and Mrs Ouma – VFBs 4 and 5) equally confessed to have hired the witch (VFB 1 - Jemba) to kill the two sons and 'wipe out' Mrs Aoko's family. Mrs Ouma who was more elaborate than her husband explained that she was motivated by jealousy as well as Mrs Aoko's arrogance and boisterous character. She explained that Mrs Aoko looked down upon them and considered them to be lesser human beings because her children 'worked and progressed in life'. She

corroborated the witch's narration and gave the details of their actions, such as 'placing medicines on graves so as to cause more deaths in the family'.

Mrs Aoko's two sons also appeared in the X-ray session and explained their deaths. In order of their deaths, Stephen (2<sup>nd</sup> VFB) was the first one to confess followed by his brother, Ramos (3<sup>rd</sup> VFB). Both sons explain that their deaths were caused by Ouma's family due to jealousy: *'The family of Ouma did not want you to benefit at all from your children'*.

The X-ray session also revealed other motives and characters to Mrs. Aoko's vicissitudes. There was the voice of another witch (VFB 9) that confessed to have been hired by Mrs Aoko's brother-in-law to 'tie' misfortunes to Mrs Aoko's compound. This move had a tragic twist to it as the witch explained that his sorcery ricocheted to Mrs Aoko's in-law thereby killing him. The witch (VFB 9) detailed his warning to Mrs Aoko's belligerent in-law:

*' You see, I had already informed Ben that if I made these 'medicines', and dispatched them to Stephen's family, in the event that Stephen's family is innocent... then, there would be great danger. But he still insisted that I concoct the 'medicines'. And so I made my 'medicines', my 'medicines' went to Mike's homestead and realized that they (Mike's family) were innocent, and so they backfired to Ben. As I am talking to you now, Ben is dead.*

There is a final confession from Mrs. Aoko's other brother-in-law regarding her affliction by the 10<sup>th</sup> VFB. After giving his full names, the brother-in-law too explained that he used medicines to afflict Mrs Aoko to retaliate her initial witchcraft attack. He claimed that he visited a ritual healer who informed him that Mrs Jaoko's household had bewitched him and curtailed his ability to have children. As a result, he only had one girl while Mrs Aoko had 'progressive' sons who benefitted her. .

This divination shed light to other aspects of Mrs Aoko's, i.e. her suspicions that her husband was having an affair, her pains as well as the reason for her daughter -in-law's refusal to live with her in her homestead. The voice of a witch (6<sup>th</sup> VFB) confessed to have supplied 'medicines' to a female client who had an affair with Mrs Aoko's husband. The witch confessed that he sent illnesses directly to Mrs Aoko as well as supplying 'medicines' to the lady who had an affair with Mrs Aoko's husband. The medicines were to be used by Mrs Aoko's rival so that she would gain control over her husband. This confession by the



witch is corroborated by a detailed explanation by the 7<sup>th</sup> VFB. This VFB, a female voice confessed to have secured medicines that had enabled her to have both access and control of Mrs Aoko's husband providing details of how she had prepared the medicines with her menstrual blood and had all types of sex with him.

Mrs Aoko's daughter in-law also appeared as a VFB and explained why she deserted her mother-in-law. She explained that she was advised by a friend to avoid her mother-in-law's homestead because she would also be killed, just like her husband. She claimed that she did not wish to die the way her husband died. Two final voices confess to have been jealous of Mrs Aoko's progress. While the 11<sup>th</sup> VFB confessed to procuring witchcraft that would affect the client's crops and livestock, the 12<sup>th</sup> VFB, a female voice insisted that she had not procured any witchcraft. She was only jealous.

This X-ray session fits in the typical divination sessions where as many scholars have observed, divination is a way of knowing (Peek 1991), a means by which afflicted persons 'ask the agent of affliction to reveal itself, to say who it is and what it wants (Whyte 1997:60). Divination was also a means of reducing apparent chaos by legitimately allocating responsibility in terms of available causal metaphors (Comaroff, 1980). As already observed, MB invited clients to his X-ray room so that they could 'hear' for themselves as well as 'speak' to the presumed agents of their affliction. In this stage of the X-ray process, Mrs Aoko listened to a) voices of witches confessing to have conspired with her neighbors and in-laws to cause the death of her two sons; b) to her daughter in-law explaining the reasons why she left c) to jealous neighbors who bewitched her crops and cattle and finally d) to gory details of how another woman had taken control of her husband through ritually treated food and how she was having 'all manner of sex with him, everywhere in the country'.

Details appear to be very important at the X-ray session. All the voices appearing always state their names in full. At times they mention their names severally before their confessions or repeated them at the end of their confession as is exemplified by all but three of the VFBs confessing in Mrs Aoko's session. Every time the VFB stated its name, the secretary responded with the formal accusation ('you are accused!'). The VFBs then gave details of their actions, and their accomplices. Witches who acted on behalf of their clients stated the names of their clients as well as the reasons why the clients consulted them. The

clients would in turn validate the witches' account at times providing more details of the actions. In this session, the client and congregation were expected to be passive and any attempts by the congregation or client to intervene were overruled by the secretary. In the case illustrated above, Mrs Aoko shot questions to the VFBs, three times before the secretary intervened and informed her that she would have a chance to ask her questions in the subsequent sessions. It is perhaps understandable that the client would want to ask the VFBs the reasons why they wanted to 'wipe out her family'. Sitting in the X-ray room and observing clients body language, attempts to intervene as well as exit interviews revealed a mixture of surprise, hatred and anger from such sessions. At the beginning of the session, Mrs Aoko was quiet, appearing calm and composed. But after listening to VFBs 1 – 4 she too ventured to ask the VFBs to explain why they wanted to 'wipe out her family'.

The duty of the secretary appeared clear here. She informed the VFBs that they were accused as soon as they mentioned their names and directed them to go ahead with their confessions. After the confessions by a VFB, the secretary would ask them to either 'finalize' their confessions or give way to the next VFB to confess. In the case of Mrs Aoko, there was silence between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> VFB prompting the secretary to demand three times, that the VFB give way to the next one to confess. It was quite common for the sessions to be interrupted by silence. During such times the secretary would demand and at times threaten the VFBs to give way to the next one or risk being burnt. After prolonged periods of silence where VFBs failed to give way to the next one, the secretary would restart the chorus sang at the beginning of the session. The congregation will then sing until the VFBs resume their confessions.

In the course of my fieldwork I observed several instances when the VFBs refused to continue with the confessions. Confessions would be resumed by a chorus from the secretary or by more prayer from MB. In one such incident, the secretary restarted the hymn and the congregation sang for over 15 minutes without the voices reappearing to make confessions. The secretary, completely tired of leading the hymn requested a member of the congregation to assist in leading the chorus. As the congregation continued singing, MB appeared outside the X-ray room unannounced and in a loud voice invited the congregation to pray again. MB repeated the prayer that he always said at the beginning of the sessions and the congregation continued with the hymn once again. The voices resumed the confessions within a short while. In yet another interrupted X-ray session, the voices

stopped confessing after only two had appeared. This was during a private session with a medical doctor. I use this case to illustrate an abandoned mention ritual. In this case, after confessions from two VFBS, no other VFBS emerged in spite of the demands, threats and more song from the secretary. The secretary sent word to MB to intervene but was informed that MB had left his homestead to an undisclosed destination. After more song and no more confessions from the VFBS, the secretary informed the client that the session could no longer continue as MB or his powers were required to restart the sessions. MB and the secretary explained that there were times when powerful witches would block confessions. The solution to such occurrences lay in more prayer, invocation of higher powers and song.

#### **2.4. The abandoned X-ray session.**

##### **Case 2. The 'dark' doctor, 'light' parents and 'dark' twins.**

I use this case to illustrate some of the dynamics of the X-ray sessions and especially the fact that not all sessions followed the neat description I provided at the beginning of this chapter. I use this case as an example of both an abandoned or a failed X-ray session as well as that of a private session. Mrs. Aoko's was a public ritual where all clients visiting the healer assembled in the X-ray room, listened and participated in each other's confession. Other clients acted as the jury in the court sessions. In the private sessions, the healer would only have the client and the secretary in the session. Such sessions were held at night or very early in the morning before the other clients trouped to MB place. The sessions were held for clients who requested private sessions. These were in most cases, clients with a higher economic and social status - lawyers, medical doctors, high-ranking government officials, rich businessmen etc. I requested MB to allow me to attend these sessions when they came up. This was one such case. In view of the privacy of these sessions, MB did not allow me to tape record the sessions and also asked me to behave as if I too were a client. The transcript I reproduce here is therefore my recollection of the session.

The medical doctor arrived at MB's compound at about 8.00 pm and found me chatting with MB in his living room. After exchanging pleasantries with the doctor, MB directed us to wait for him outside the X-ray room. As we waited for MB to set the X-ray session in motion, the doctor chatted freely with me on a wide range of issues including his long term association with MB and that MB had assisted him fight witches hired by some of his family members to kill him as well as to drive patients away from his private clinic. The doctor had been MB's client for close to 10 years. During this time he had also encountered

a female client at MB's ritual with whom he had fathered twins. MB joined us as the medical doctor narrated his sexual escapades and asked us to get into to the X-ray room.

This private session was held about quarter of an hour after the arrival of the doctor. One of MB's wives acted as the secretary since the regular secretary had left for the day. Like in all divination sessions, MB said the opening prayer and we repeated each sentence twice after him. At the end of the prayer he asked God to bless us and then left. His wife led us in the divination session hymn for a few minutes before the following voices emerged from the bible.

#### The transcript.

VFB: My name is Sheba. I came to MB's place eight years ago and met this doctor seated here. I stayed at MB's place for one week and MB prayed for me because I was not having any children. During this time, this doctor also used to come to MBs place frequently and we became friends. We also 'slept'<sup>37</sup> together at MBs place. I do not claim that the doctor raped me. He did not; we agreed to have sex because he was also spending the night at MB's place. I too stayed at MB's place for a week because I could not afford my transport back to Mombasa. You see, my husband and I were not having children and we had visited many hospitals for treatment but the problem persisted. That is when we decided that I should approach MB for help. But while at MB's place I met this doctor and I 'slept' with him. After one week of being prayed for and cleansed by MB, I came back to my husband and we continued with our normal family life. I also slept with my husband and so when I became pregnant I was sure MB had succeeded to cure me and I was now pregnant with my husband's child. I had completely forgotten about this doctor and what we did while at MB. I had a very good relationship with my husband and he was so happy that my trip to MB had borne fruit. But things turned for the worse when I gave birth. I gave birth to twins. You see my husband and I are light skinned. But the twins turned out to be very dark skinned just like the doctor here. It did not take long for my husband to realize that those were not his twins. He was right, there was no denying it and so he divorced me. Since then I have been trying to contact this doctor for support but he has been very evasive. I am asking you doctor, how do you expect me to take care of the twins without your support?

CL: I asked you to bring the twins home and I will take care of them.

VFB: You see your twins are now big and going to school. They are now eight years old. They require food, school fees, school uniform and clothes. How do you expect me to take care of them alone? I am not asking you to marry me; I know you have another wife. The only help I ever got from you was Kshs 18,000 (approx USD 260) that you sent through MB to me. That was a couple of years ago. Do you imagine I still have that money to take care of your children?

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<sup>37</sup> By 'sleeping together' the client meant, having sexual intercourse.

CL: Bring the children or come for money for their up keep. I have not refused to assist you.

VFB: I sent my brother to come to MB and get directions to your place. But you did not even want to meet him. Instead, you sent the Kshs 18,000 to MB who then gave the money to my brother. It is true, I cannot deny it, you have assisted me once, and again I repeat, I am not accusing you of raping me. I had a problem and came to MB to be assisted. Although my initial problem of not having children was solved, I now have another problem of taking care of your twins. The twins are so dark skinned like you, they do resemble you completely. My husband just had one look at them and realized they did not belong to him. My husband is Arabic and very light skinned. And you saw me; I am equally light skinned like most women from Mombasa. There was no way we would have produced dark skinned children. My husband divorced me on this account and I accepted the divorce because the reasons were so obvious.

CL: You make arrangements to come and get money for their upkeep from me. You could even send your brother again to me and I will give you money for their support.

VFB: I am asking you doctor to tell me how you expect me to take care of your children. You either support your children or you will land into serious trouble with me, I promise you!

SEC: (turning to the client) Is that true, Is what the woman is saying here true?

CL: Only nods in agreement.

SEC: Then you should be the one to be accused here! (Turning to me the secretary said) You see, these are the people who really make life for themselves and for us difficult here. Someone gets children and does not want to take care of them. So, doctor, what will you say if this woman spoils you?

Silence.

SEC: Give way to the next one!

2nd VFB: My name is Hassan. And the woman who just spoke before me used to be my wife. Eight years ago, I think it is even 10 (years ago) he came to this place (MBs place) to be prayed for because we were not able to have any children. It is true she came there and she was prayed for and treated. When she came back home we continued with our normal relationship and she became pregnant. I was very happy because I knew those prayers had solved our problem. But when she gave birth, I discovered that the twins could not be mine. The twins she gave birth to were so dark skinned that they could not have been mine. I was so surprised. You see even normal children are usually born when they are somehow light skinned. These twins were dark skinned at birth. I am an Arab and my wife is very light skinned. There is no way two light skinned parents could have given birth to dark skinned

twins. And so I had to divorce her according to the Muslim tradition. I have nothing against her, or the person who made her pregnant. In fact I never bothered to ask her about the person who made her pregnant. I do not know who it is. I agree we wanted to have children and that was why she came there (means to MBs place). But I wanted her to have my own children not another man's children. And so I had to divorce her. For me I am innocent and I do not have any problem with anyone here. Let me go.

SEC: Ok, give way to the next one,

Silence:

SEC: Give way to the next one

Silence.

SEC: Give way to the next one

Silence.

### End of transcript.

After severally asking the VFB to give way to the next one in vain, the secretary restarted the chorus. We sang for close to ten minutes after which the secretary got tired and she directed a mixture of cajolery, threats and prodding to the VFBs to resume the confessions. This did not yield any confessions and she started the chorus for a second time. After a few minutes of singing, she asked one of MB's sons who happened to pass by to inform MB that the sessions had halted. After a few minutes MB's son came back and informed her that MB could not be located in his homestead. She promptly postponed the session to another day.

In my observation in the field though, this was not the only instance where X-ray sessions stopped midway. It was quite common for excessive rain, strong winds or 'stubborn witches' to interrupt or even completely block the sessions. Sessions that were interrupted by rain often resumed when the rains or the winds subsided. In other sessions, the VFBs stopped their confessions mid way in the session and the secretary declared that a stubborn witch might have blocked the session. MB corroborated this assertion and explained that there were times when stubborn witches actually interrupted his sessions. In such circumstances, MB resorted to more prayer and asked God for 'more powers' to fight the witches. MB explains it thus:

You see, even the witches are ranked; there are some that are more powerful than others. And so when I am dealing with the powerful ones I always require a lot of powers, which I pray for. There was this day when I was actually in the X-ray session and there was this witch who dared me to burn him if I was powerful enough. You see in the X-ray room, there

is this metallic chair at the corner. It is the one I sit on when conducting the sessions<sup>38</sup>. There was a very tough witch from Mombasa with whom I had a very long and tough argument. Eventually I burnt him. After this session I planned to visit one of my children in school. As I drove to this school, my car rolled six times on the left side of the road, then turned and rolled another six times on the right side of the road. Although I escaped unhurt from this incident, I knew the witch I had just burnt caused me to have this accident. My work is always a struggle between the powers of God and the powers of the devil.

The two cases so far illustrated demonstrate clear and straightforward X-ray sessions that are characteristic of the 'mention' stage of MB's X-ray ritual. However, the subsequent stages of the X-ray were always complex, twisted and repetitive. This was typical of divination that, as Peek (1991) explained, conducted many sessions to ensure that the same conditions remained operative. In the following two chapters, I produce several examples that will serve to illustrate the twists and bends of divination, intra familial dynamics and perception of MB, alterations of intent as well as the way in which the X-ray session navigates from a pure divination to a reconstruction sessions where clients are accorded more control over the people who allegedly caused their suffering, pass judgment and commute the sentences.

## **2.5. Summary.**

What emerges from the descriptions in this chapter and the illustration provided is that MB's practice is an assemblage of various types of logic, techniques and processes deriving from disparate systems of healing and social redress mechanisms. These are held together by his and his clients' acceptance of his supernatural abilities which lends credence to his prescriptions and convinces clients of their efficacy and authenticity. This does not however exclude instances of skepticism and displeasure and at times disapproval from clients on some of his methods and procedures. Most ethnography on ritual healing agree that divination was the most crucial aspect of any healing practice and that it was controlled by supernatural powers outside the diviner. Peek (1991) comments that divination systems temporarily shifted decision making into a liminal realm by emphatically participating in opposing cognitive modes and that this was its most defining feature. I argue here and in the rest of the dissertation that MB's perceived supernatural abilities combined with a careful organization of space, time and function is what authenticates MB's healing providing not just for its validity and efficacy but also leading to his enormous popularity.

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<sup>38</sup> I have observed MB participate in a few X-ray sessions while sitting on this chair. However MB rarely sat in the X-ray sessions preferring to let the secretary direct them and then getting the notes of the proceedings from her.

From the outset, MB sets out to impress his clients about the ordered and professional nature of his healing practice. There is a clear hierarchy and delineation of labour between him, the secretary and the guard and a bureaucratic procedure adhered to by all clients. The only exception was for private clients who pay more and therefore receive preferential treatment. At the lower end of this hierarchy is the guard whose services are limited, followed by the secretary and finally MB at the top. The secretary acts mainly as the principal assistant to MB. Apart from maintaining a register of all activities, scheduling appointments and controlling the X-ray sessions, she also participates in other rituals conducted by MB (cleansing, ritual extraction of charms and ritual closure).

MB's practice exhibits a clear delineation of time, space and functions between him and his assistants. The guard is always at the gate unless when beckoned by the secretary or MB himself. The secretary too is often in her office except when consulting MB and uses the telephone line to communicate with MB in the course of the day. MB often sat in his house and only met clients on appointments. He too clearly emphasized and respected the functions of the different offices and often castigated clients who tried to bypass the secretary. This always caused the spread of gossip and discontent among clients who complained that the secretary was either delaying or protracting their consultations with MB. The different spaces in MBs compound were also utilized for specific functions. MB held all consultations, (initial and follow – up) in his house without exception. This set them out as strictly private affairs. The X-ray or courtroom was used for X-ray sessions and remained closed in the course of the day until when MB arrived to inaugurate the courtroom process. The church was used for prayer, retrieval of charms and as an expedient lunch time restaurant. Men's and women's lodging facilities too were differentiated, with the women's room doubling up as kitchen. The secretary's office was typical of a modern office for preliminary consultation and maintenance of a register. In between consultations with the secretary, church sessions and lunch, clients brought benches from the church and sat under the shade of a fruit tree outside the secretary's office, chatted, gossiped, appraised each other and lamented about both their predicaments, and occasionally about MB and the secretary's leniency, protracted procedures or high costs.

Time too was cleverly manipulated at MB's ritual practice. The morning sessions were set for registration, initial consultation with the secretary and church sessions. Occasionally MB



started his consultations with clients in the morning which would spread to the early afternoon. The X-ray or courtroom sessions were often held in the afternoon between 2.00 pm and 5.00 pm. MB would at times deliberately delay the X-ray session to later in the afternoon even when not holding consultations. He would be either watching as mechanics repaired one of his many cars or simply observing the skies with his binoculars. Clients who observed him with his binoculars mystified the activity with all types of rumors even though MB repeatedly informed me that there was nothing mystical about his binoculars – he was just enjoying himself.

MB ascribes a higher moral and religious authority to his healing by the use of the bible, Christian religious procedures and prayers. The bible is manipulated as source of encouragement and guidance as well as a tool for the encapsulation of witches and their eventual ritual extermination. All sessions with MB were inaugurated and concluded by prayer and bible readings. Apart from MB's oft stated desire to distinguish himself as a Christian healer, the use of the bible impressed upon his clients that his decisions derived from a supernatural source even where logic alone was sufficient. A female client once informed me that MB asked her to stop her relationship with her boyfriend as he was a 'sucker'. She exclaimed, 'MB has powers, he inquired about my boyfriend and asked me to dump him as he was only out to fleece me of my money. I wonder how he was able to know this'. MB too admitted that some of his clients problems were commonsensical and one only needed to be logical to solve them.

MB valued the need to establish the true state of affairs regarding the clients' vicissitudes. That was why he instituted an array of processes, checks and counterchecks to ascertain various sources of information. Detail seemed to be very important. People who are deemed to have afflicted his clients appear as voices from the bible (VFBs) and state their names in full and provide a detail of their activities at times to an embarrassing or annoying level. Clients listen to the entire detail of their afflictions, e.g. to people who provide gory details of how they murdered their relatives or to how suitors successfully seduced their partners and had exciting sexual liaisons with them. Information from the VFBs was corroborated by MB's tentative divination and through several interrogations, discussions and evaluations between MB and the clients. This is repeated and protracted over time which enabled both MB and the clients to gain control of the facts of the case before designing an ameliorative strategy. Occasionally clients reversed their initial interest or dropped their pleas for

assistance in view of the facts generated by the entire X-ray procedures. Several clients opted to consult other healers while others opted gave up on ritual healing all together after their cases protracted at MB's.

While the organization of space, time and function was important, MB's defining quality as a ritual healer was his supernatural abilities which were the key reason why the clients resorted for his help. These were exhibited both in the tentative divination where MB combined both his ability to read images from the bible as well as interviews with the clients. This is what Peek (1991) referred to as alternating between opposing cognitive modes, the rational and the perceived supernatural and therefore irrational. MB often started his tentative divination with a general discussion with a client regarding their reasons for consulting him. After obtaining the background information from the client, he would ask the client to randomly open a page of the bible which he would read, interpret and then say a prayer. This set of activities would then, according to MB, catapult him to the supernatural realm where the writings of the bible would be converted into images of the clients predicaments. MB would then adjust himself in his chair, stare at the bible, raise his voice and tone and engage the client in what he referred to as a series of '100 questions'. By doing so, MB indicated that the divination had moved from the normal to the non normal mode of information gathering. At this stage he warned the clients to be truthful because he could see the true picture from the bible. MB's transition is less dramatic than what has been reported in the literature with divination sessions where the diviner was either spirit possession or went into trance (eg in Beattie and Middleton 1969). MB never claimed to be possessed nor was there an indication that he used spies or listeners to eaves drop on Clients predicaments. This was in any case impossible as he received clients from all far off distances due to his popularity as well as what Colson (1966) referred to as the desire for clients to seek out diviners from far off distances. Clients arriving at MB's practice in the morning would have their divination sessions in the afternoon followed by the X-ray sessions as long as they had paid the fee. MB claimed to have powers to read a client's predicaments from the bible and his marveled at his abilities. As most of them often quipped, 'this guy has powers, do no joke around with him. He knows everything even before you tell him'. But did MB really posses the powers or did he use his experience, intuition and guess work to discover his clients problems? In all our conversations, MB and his clients always restated their acceptance of MB as someone who possessed supernatural powers. To state otherwise would however be to contradict themselves and their participation in his ritual.

The second and the most complex part of the divination process was the X-ray session. In this session MB prayed over the New Testament bible and placed it on the floor. The congregation would sing the chorus until voices emerged from the bible of people confessing to have afflicted the clients. As the transcripts in this chapter showed, the voices from the bible stated their names in full and detailed their activities against the clients at MB's. The entire X-ray session that formed the crux of MB's healing techniques revolved around this process of offenders appearing as MB's, detailing their atrocities, defending themselves against accusations by clients and getting punished through the burning of the bible. How does MB explain this process? Again, because he possessed supernatural abilities. MB claimed to be able to cause people who afflicted his clients to go into deep sleep wherever they were. He would then snatch their 'inner persons' to come and make confessions in his courtroom. In many X-ray sessions, VFBs complained that MB had stolen their souls and caused them to speak in his courtroom. Several clients that I spoke to informed me that they initially suspected that MB was speaking through a speaker from his house and went ahead to search around the X-ray room for signs of a wire connection to the X-ray room. As I progressed with my fieldwork, I realized that this was one of the most important aspect and most fascinating of MB's healing methods. But how could I explain this phenomenon (about the bible speaking to people) to my scientific audience? I knew I had to be critical of all sources of information and with time I also started looking for hints of MB's trick as my interviews with him and his clients bore no new information. Further as a native of the community in which I conducted my fieldwork, it was expected that I would readily agree to the supernatural explanation. By the end of my fieldwork, I was however not able to discover any explanations of the source of the voices apart from what MB provided. At the same time, I wondered if looking for MB's trickery would not at the same time reproduce the stereotype of the European tradition that tended to characterize a healer as a charismatic charlatan who coerced others through clever manipulation of esoteric knowledge granted inappropriate worth by a credulous and anxiety ridden public (CF: Peek 1991).

## Chapter 3

### **Inside MB' courtroom: Skepticism, Liminality, Drama and 'War' with the Devil.**

#### **3.1. Introduction.**

*Nobody lives in isolation. Everybody has a neighbor on the left and on the right side (of their farms or houses). Other healers usually tell their clients that they have been afflicted by a neighbor on the left or on the right side. This is very easy to do. For me, I let the truth be determined in the court where the clients listen to confessions themselves (MB).*

MB's court room procedures like many divination sessions in Africa exhibited an intense desire to know the true reasons for events, a highly skeptical attitude regarding all sources of information and a persistent concern to adjust knowledge levels in view of emergent information or behavior (Peek 1991). While several studies on African divination systems have observed the skepticism that clients have regarding divination sessions (Hallen and Sodipo 1986, Horton 1964, Colson 1966, Turner 1975), MB's divination sessions articulated his own suspicions that his clients might either be concealing or misrepresenting their own contributions to the problem at hand. MB claimed to be aware that some of his clients withheld information from him especially when they too had acted inappropriately. Faced with this set of circumstances, MB claimed to have been inspired by God to institute the X-ray process as an objective process that enabled him to establish the truth as well as eliminate the possibility of clients suspecting him of manipulating the process. Besides his quest for the truth, the X-ray process as a way of accessing hidden sources of information aimed at revealing the clients' individual life pattern as well as his relationships with everyone in his social network. Like most divination quests, MB's X-ray produced a narrative of a client's life and a correct history of the event(s) in question (Peek 1991). MB often implored his clients to be truthful and warned them that it would be pointless for them to lie or withhold information from him since the X-ray process would expose the entire spectrum of events in their lives that had a bearing to the problem at hand.

As much as the MB and his clients extolled the independence and objectivity of the X-ray sessions, these sessions were interspersed with lengthy dialogue between MB and the client. The X-ray process was divided into four distinct sessions. In between the sessions, MB often held long discussions with the client where they continuously and meticulously reviewed all information and new factors that bore on the client's problem. The role of the

secretary's register became very prominent at this level. The first session for a new client visiting MB was the mention stage where a client would 'listen' to voices of the people who confessed to have afflicted him/her. The second session, the hearing would then be held a couple of days later. Before advancing to the second stage, MB procedurally held discussions with the clients. The aim of these discussions was to compare the information initially provided by the client with the new information emerging from the X-ray process. To enable this discussion, MB requested copies of the notes from the secretary which he used to thoroughly interrogate the client. The secretary always took clear and detailed notes in short form, indicating the names, actions and motives of all the persons confessing to have afflicted the client. The secretary would for instance register in her notes, 'Man X bewitched man Y because of a dispute they have over land or woman W deserted husband V because her husband was not able to cater for her needs', etc. In the subsequent discussions with clients MB studied the notes occasionally seeking clarification from the secretary and the use them to seek more information from the client. He would, for example, ask the client whether he had a land dispute with Man X and seek to know the entire story if Man X had not explained it fully in the initial discussion. MB would also discuss with man V to find out if it was true that he was unable to provide for his wife's upkeep. This dialogue and synthesis of information between MB and the client formed a crucial part of the healing ritual conducted by MB as it enabled the unique integration of cognitive modes, the elaboration of the true state of the clients social, spiritual and material existence, and above all enabled a discussion of possible plans of action between MB and the client.

The protracted court procedures by MB were important since he and his clients were convinced that the courtroom process had the abilities to mete out stiff punishments, (including death) to people accused of deliberately afflicting his clients. And that was why at the beginning of the judgment stage of the X-ray sessions, he often stated that he would be slaying witches and murderers. When MB's secretary set the bible on fire, clients believed that those who had afflicted them, especially the witches and murderers would be mystically burnt and killed by the fire. This was always dramatized by cries from the supposed witches and murderers during this session as well as their confession that they were dead during the outcome session. Clients often sat in the X-ray room at the end of the Judgment sessions, and laughed off the cries of the witches and the murderers as they begged for mercy and claimed to be dying in the fire. This conviction resonates with

Obeyesekere's caution against the evaluation of sorcery and other magical acts from the Western intellectualist viewpoint as symbolic and expressive actions (1975). Obeyesekere argued that the Sinhalese were aware of the substantive differences between physical weapons and magical weapons and their employment of both was viewed as pragmatic and instrumental techniques, radically different from expressive forms of worship. That being the case, he concludes rather strongly, 'I am convinced that many Sinhalese persons would view the sorcery practiced by some of the well-known vas-kavi sorcerers as effective and deadly as hiring a paid assassin (1975:4). Based on the conviction of his magical abilities, MB urged his clients to be truthful and careful to avoid wrongful conviction and punishment to those who had afflicted them especially where the accused persons were close family members. The protracted X-ray process enabled him and the clients to weigh the offence against a multiplicity of possible retribution options before agreeing on the appropriate punishment for offenders. Occasionally, MB advised clients against stiffer punishments for close family members and only set them on fire when the clients insisted and the case deserved a stiff punishment. MB caused laughter at the onset of one X-ray sessions when he related an incident where one of his clients begged him to spare his uncle even though he (client) had initially agreed that his uncle ought to be set on fire:

*'Today I want you to state clearly the people you want to be set on fire and those you want spared. You see one of you came crying to me the other day saying that he did not want his uncle to die. When he realized that his uncle's accomplices were dying one after the other, and his uncle was equally sick and would be the next in line to die, he came back crying, oh no, I did not want my uncle to die,!*

While the interactions between MB and his clients formed an important aspect of the healing rituals, I would like to underscore the role of other actors and spaces within the healing rituals. Naturally the secretary constitutes an important part of the rituals as we shall see in the illustrations that follow. As a principal deputy to the healer, she was in charge of all record keeping, maintained MBs appointments for the day as well as scheduled appointments for subsequent visits by clients, prepared clients spiritually to meet the healer, and above all directed both MB and the clients on the next stages of their rituals. MB often observed that he would not be able to tell the stage at which a client's ritual was without checking with the secretary. As the clients went for further consultations with MB, he would first study the notes from the secretary, which indicated at what stage the client's ritual was and what transpired in the previous session. The secretary too acted as the cashier for MB.

In this way, MB appeared to be completely divorced from the procedural and perhaps distractive aspects of the ritual procedures, elevating and restricting his actions to specialized aspects of his healing.

A closer look at MBs ritual practice exposes what Meyer (1992) referred to as the dualistic theology of Pentecostalism where healers and their clients considered their activities as representing the will of God while that of murderers, witches, thieves and thugs etc represented the Devil. The entire structure of MB ritual healing establishes this duality but even more important is his creation of a congregation of the afflicted that acted both as complainants in their own cases and jury in each other's cases. The congregation also acted as a source of comfort and encouragement to each other. MB referred to misfortunes suffered by his clients as the work of the devil. He and his secretary often interspersed their discussions with clients using the phrase, 'Shetani ashindwe' which was Kiswahili for 'the devil be trounced'. The secretary often referred to witches as 'Shetani ya mguu moja' (one legged devils) during the X-ray processes as well as during the church services.

The reference to the devil as a source of affliction was not restricted to MB's ritual practice. Meyer observed that this concept was introduced by early missionaries' activities in Africa who preached that the devil was responsible for the badness of 'this world' (1992: 103). She further argued that the concept of the devil as a source of all evil in the world was quite easy to preach for both the missionaries and Africanised Christians because the Bible scriptures have never presented the devil in a clear and coherent manner. In Christian doctrine, the devil was an obscure figure, vaguely understood and readily supplied room for speculations about his existence and actions in this world. The devil was seen as God's dark counterpart and formed the shady part of this theology (Meyer 1992:106). And so referring to affliction as the work of the devil automatically provided MB with an unmistakable remedy: the blood of Jesus. The congregation acting as both witnesses and the jury completed the set up where MB sort to portray himself as God's true Mtumishi (Servant). It is also important to note that by involving the congregation in his courtroom sessions, MB empowered the congregation while at the same time spread responsibility for his actions to the entire congregation as they participated as witnesses and decision makers in the court procedures. The secretary enjoined the congregation for each person accused by asking the question in the mention stage 'Ashtakiwe'. (Let us accuse him). This was more of a procedural question or proposal as I never observed any instance where the congregation responded in the

negative. The congregation urged the voices to confess, yelled at them when they did not, assisted in interrogating the voices and more often than not agreed with the secretary on the punishment to be meted.

I would like to provide a few cases to illustrate both the type of cases handled by MB as well as the way in which the X-ray process operated in reality. I argue here that it is precisely the ways in which MB deploys his perceived supernatural powers through this unique arrangement of ritual procedures, similar to Levi-Strauss (1963) description of the bricoleur's activities that enhances the efficacy and popularity of his ritual practice. All aspects of this practice, the incorporation of elements of Christian theology, simulated secular legal procedures, MB's mediation through normal and non normal cognitive process, incorporation of elements of social justice and sympathy, structure and authority in the delineation of obligations and spaces, codification and the spread of decision making between different actors produce a practice whose outcome was seen as fair even when not entirely in the form demanded by the clients. Clients perceive MB as possessing supernatural powers and this justified their decisions to consult him. MB is however cognizant of the need to authenticate his powers as is seen in the quote I provided at the beginning of this chapter. He therefore instituted the X-ray process where clients received consistent information from a medium that was empowered by him, but whose outcome was not controlled by him. He equates it to the X-ray that produces objective images from patient's internal organs. He dramatizes this by withdrawing from the X-ray room, letting clients to listen to the VFBs confessing their deeds, and then requesting and studying the notes from the secretary on the proceedings of each client's X-ray session before proposing a reconstructive process.

The objectivity of the X-ray further enhanced by the fact that it goes through multiple sessions each collaborating the previous sessions and providing more details as the process unfolded. When the sessions start, clients wait for the VFBs to appear and confess from the bible. Nobody knows how many will appear, who they were and what they will say and how the case will progress from there. Everything was contingent to the X-ray process, as the sessions were unpredictable. The most fascinating stage of the X-ray as we shall see in the transcripts below was the 'hearing' session where clients were accorded the opportunity to interrogate the people accused of afflicting them. This was also the point where MB clearly demonstrated his magical or supernatural powers. Clients listened, questioned, yelled at and



countered accusations from the VFBs. VFBs on the other hand responded to the questions from the clients. The X-ray sessions explored all angles to a client's predicament occasionally adducing evidence that incriminated or embarrassed the clients themselves. As the narrative progressed, the cases became clearer and since MB had a set of guidelines for resolving the cases, clients easily agreed with him on one of the options available, of course with minor modifications as directed by the now empowered clients.

### **3.2. The Unresolved murder case.**

#### **Case 1. The Kirwas and their Fathers unresolved Murder.**

*'We just wanted to know the people who killed our Father'.*

Attempts by the family of the late Austin Kirwa to unravel and deal with the bizarre murder of their father clearly exemplify the dynamics of the X-ray session. I met the two children of the late Kirwa, (his 28 years-old daughter and 23 years-old son) during the early stages of my fieldwork at MB's rituals. I selected their case for follow up and recorded several of their divination sessions in what turned up to be over five months of continuous interaction and 'warfare' between them and MB on one side and their father's killers on the other.

I visited the family of the late Kirwa after one of the divination sessions to document their story as well as to get their impressions of MB and their plight. The Kirwas lived in their expansive farm about 60 Kilometres away from MB's compound and in a different district<sup>39</sup>. Before his bizarre murder, Kirwa was married and had four children - Tom and Jane, who I met at MB's place, and their two other siblings, 25 years old Jerry and their 21 years old last born, Bilha. They were a very jovial family with the siblings freely joking and teasing each other, including their mother and talked very freely about their lives prior to and after the death of their father as well as their encounter and experience with MB. Jane for instance joked and openly complained that she suspected her brother (Tom) was gay and even urged me to help them get a girlfriend for him to marry. Tom on the other hand criticized Jane for having two children from two different fathers while both Tom and Jane yelled at their last born sister for being sexually loose and they suspected that she procured too many abortions. They did not spare their mother from their free chat. Jane once

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<sup>39</sup> I have deliberately avoided mentioning the name of the district for purposes of confidentiality. The late Kirwa was a prominent farmer in the district and his death had even been reported in the local daily newspapers.

commented that her mother was too sharp and had 'snatched' their father from another woman as they both studied in the US.

In my first encounter with them, I held a general discussion with the entire family with each member freely discussing the case of their father and their dealings with MB. Most of the information though was provided by Tom and Jane who were more involved in all the processes while their mother and two siblings chipped in with details and clarifications where necessary. Except for their mother, the children appeared to have overcome the grief following the sudden death of their father even though one noticed moments of anger and despair while discussing the different aspects of it. From the initial discussion, I gathered that the first-born daughter (Jane) was an American citizen as she was born while her parents studied in the USA. She currently lived in the USA and only travelled to Kenya for the burial of her father.

The rest of the children were born while the parents were in Kenya. Their mother was a staunch Christian, and a member of the Friends Quakers Church that is popular in western Kenya. Although she provided money for the fee that was required for the rituals, she never attended the rituals at MB, which testified to her desire to keep distance. Tom and Jane were the only ones who frequented MB's place. Their second born brother (Jerry) only went to MB's place once before he developed cold feet. Bilha, their last-born stated that MB's place was too scary for her. 'You see from what I hear from these people who go to MB's place, that place is too scary. I cannot go there! She had consequently never set her foot at MBs even though she appeared convinced that MB would solve their problems.

### **My initial discussion with the Kirwas.**

Okwaro: I would like you to feel free to tell me about your case and your involvement with MB. Tell me what prompted you to consult MB and how your experience with him has been so far. Please note that I am not here to question or spy on any of your actions, and so just feel free to tell me anything you can remember.

Tom: Okay Jane you start, you know we are now in an examination!

(Everyone bursts out laughing!)

Tom: You see for us, our father was killed by thugs. And from the look of things, this was not a normal case of robbery. 'They killed him in the most abnormal way'<sup>40</sup>. At the beginning we did not know what was going on.

Okwaro: What do you mean by 'they killed him in the most abnormal way'?

Tom: It is about the design they used to kill him. It is like they initially wanted to torture him and ensure he really suffered before he died. They broke his legs, then bludgeoned his head, broke his hands, it was like someone really had a grudge with him.

Okwaro: En-he,

Tom: And then they went to the bedroom, and it was apparent they were looking for something....

Mrs Kirwa: They tortured him outside there. (pointing outside)

Tom: And so when we buried him, we thought it was probably about the many court cases that he had and probably the person who sent thugs to kill him was interested in having the cases dissolved following his death. We were not sure of anything.

Mrs Kirwa: You see, the thugs did not steal anything from us. They only took our phones and watches. They ransacked the bedrooms and chopped his briefcases into pieces. They never said what they were looking for even though it was obvious they were looking for something.

Tom: Papers, I guess they were looking for papers such as title deeds, or court case proceedings, something like that.

Mrs Kirwa: They said to him, 'We have searched for you for so long but today we have found you. You will see today', those were their actual words as they pulled him out of the door.

Jane: And so when he died,

Mrs Kirwa: There were many speculations,

Jane: We were waiting for investigations. You see when someone is murdered you expect to have investigations from the police or at least the government to conduct some inquiry. But in our case, we did not see anyone from the police coming to us to investigate anything. And so we did not know what was going on.

Tom: We even went to the Criminal investigation department but they did not seem interested in doing anything about the case.

Jane: And then one of our uncles came and suggested that we should bring 'someone' here who would take samples of blood and other stuff like footprints from the area where the

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<sup>40</sup> I held the interview in the Kiswahili language and what I provide here is the translation. It was however common for many people in Kenya to use English words even while speaking Kiswahili and some of the phrases like this one were actually stated in the English language prompting me to ask for a clarification.

killers had stepped and ritually treat them. These would make the killers confess to the police that they were the ones who killed our dad. We had even hired an advocate to pursue the case but we were not getting anywhere. And so we decided to ask our uncle again about this guy who would help us nab the thugs. But when we asked our uncle about it the second time, he said that it was already too late. He said that we were supposed to have done it before the blood dried. But then again there was this other old man who came to us and told us about someone who knows something about how we can nab our fathers killers. This one turned out to be MB. The old man told me that there was this place in Kamukuywa where you go and there is a real courtroom where the people who have offended you will be called to confess what they did. That was a real shocker for me!

Tom: You see that ‘thing’ (means his father’s death) was really painful for us and we just wanted to know who killed our father. We just wanted to know the identity, and it did not matter to us whether the person was a witch or a Christian. That was not important to us.

Okwaro: Around what date was this?

Jane: It was in July. Just a few days before I was to fly back to the US. I was supposed to fly out on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July.

Okwaro: And when did the thugs attack?

Jane: The thugs attacked on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June.

Okwaro: So that means you started this process with MB about a month after your father was dead?

Jane and Tom: Yes.

Jane: And so I just encouraged my brothers to go to the healer so that I may know the people who killed our father before I go back to the US. So now, you Tom now explain how you went to the healer.

Tom: So I went and entered the homestead.

Okwaro: How did you get to know the healer’s compound?

Tom: I reached this place called Kamukuywa and from there I asked for directions to his place. You see the Bukusu people use the name ‘Musali’<sup>41</sup> to refer to the healer and so I asked the boda boda<sup>42</sup> transporters to show me the place. All of them know mtumishi’s place because they were used to transporting clients to his place. We went to the compound and met the guard, the guy known as GSU and we told him we were interested in talking to the healer. The guard took us to the secretary called Emma. Emma asked us what our problem was. We explained to her that our father was killed and we wanted to know who killed him. He wrote our names on a small piece of paper and sent it to MB. Later on, over lunchtime, MB called me to his house and asked me to explain what my problem was.

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<sup>41</sup> The term ‘Musali’ translates to ‘the one who prays’. It was a title used for MB as well.

<sup>42</sup> Boda boda is the local name for bicycle transport that is commonly used for shorter distances in the region.

I reproduce the discussion to not only illustrate the motivation of clients visiting MB but also the ways in which clients construct their story and re-present it to others. This was a case of a family that had attempted other ways of resolving the murder of their father without success before turning to MB to unravel the mystery. Unknown people had murdered their father and since this was a criminal case they expected the legitimate law enforcement agents to investigate and bring their father's killers to book. Several trips to the police and the criminal investigations department in the duration of slightly more than a month without any meaningful progress gave way to despair and hopelessness. The police were, in the opinion of the Kirwas unwilling to assist them. In the course of my discussions with them, they repeatedly mentioned that the police were unwilling to assist them and even suspected that the people who killed their father had bribed the police to cover up for their deeds.

Faced with this dilemma the Kirwa's got to know about MB from 'an old man who came to us and told us about another woman who knows about another man who knows something....' And to get to MBs homestead they again depended on bicycle transporters who often transported people to MBs place. The role of social networks in ritual healing were important especially due to the fact that MB and most other ritual healers did not advertise their healing practices unlike other traditional healers operating in the cities in Kenya. Many of the clients found out about MB from their colleagues and friends who had a previous experience or information about him and used bicycle transporters for directions to the healer.

Before his murder on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2006, Kirwa had been living in this district for over two decades after relocating with his wife and daughter from the US. Since then his family had grown to four and he had acquired considerable amounts of property. The district in which he settled is classified as a highly potential agricultural zone in Kenya where land ownership was an indicator of wealth. Mr Kirwa had acquired large tracts of land by local standards, a jaggery factory, a high school and various other properties. There had been a long-standing dispute over the ownership of the jaggery factory between Kirwa and an Asian business rival that his children were aware of since their father attended the court cases regarding it. His children initially suspected his Asian colleague was responsible for their father's death but interactions with MB and a reflection of the events following their father's murder made

them rule out that possibility. Their father was murdered in a dispute over the ownership of the school and the land on which it stood.

The Kirwas informed me that prior to their encounter with MB, they never thought that anyone begrudged their father regarding ownership of the school. They explained that their father had acquired the school from a former vice president of Kenya<sup>43</sup>. Their father had loaned the former vice president lots of money before he was elected into office. The former vice-president, who is now deceased, was unable to repay the debt and therefore offered the school and the land on which it stood to their father as payment. All these transactions had taken place before the vice president was elected into office. According to the Kirwas, this transaction infuriated the brothers to the former vice-president, and as soon as their brother was appointed to the position of vice president, they hoped that he would use his political office to repossess the land. The vice president never bothered to repossess this land and unfortunately, died less than six months after his election. With the death of the vice president, his brothers realized that they had no way of repossessing ‘their school’ and therefore hatched the plan to kill Mr. Kirwa. I however need to reiterate the fact that the Kirwas developed this hypothesis regarding their father’s death after listening to the proceedings in the X-ray sessions. Prior to their X-ray sessions with MB, they thought that their father’s death might have something to do with the disputes he had with an Asian over the ownership of the jiggery factory.

I would like now to revert to the divinations session at MB regarding this case and link it up again with the construction of the narrative by the Kirwas. In the X-ray session, I sat together with Tom, Jane and the rest of the clients having already decided that I would be checking out for the case involving the two. The X-ray session took the usual format and the confessions regarding the case of Kirwa came up in the middle of other confessions. For their case, three voices confessed to have organised the killing of their father, giving the details of the murder and their future plans. I reproduce their X-ray session below.

**Key:**

**VFB:** Voice from the Bible.

**CL:** Client.

**SEC:** Secretary.

**CONGREG:** Rest of the Congregation

**OMC:** unspecified member of the congregation.

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<sup>43</sup>The name of the former Vice president is withheld as not to compromise on confidentiality.

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: My name is Karinga, I am Karinga.

SEC: Karinga you are accused.

VFB: I am Karinga. And I want to tell you Tom, I am the one who made the plans and organized the people who killed your father. We are the ones who hired the thugs who came to your compound and killed your father. To achieve our goals we used this man called Ganjo who recruited the thugs for us and killed your father. Unfortunately as we are talking now Ganjo died last night and he is in the mortuary. I got the information about his death this morning. I really do not know what is going on with the people we hired. You see, to kill your father, Ganjo hired thugs from Kitale who carried out the activity. But even before the death of Ganjo, all the other thugs he had hired to kill your father have all died over the last few weeks. We had even given him more money to hire more thugs because after killing your father, we were now planning to kill you and your brother Jerry. But Ganjos' death will not stop us from hiring other thugs to finish you. You see, you are the two boys remaining who will inherit your father's property – the property that he stole from us. We are not interested in your sisters and your mother. Those ones we shall just slap and chase away. But the two of you will have to die. We are now hiring a hit squad from Nairobi that will not fail in finishing you. You Tom, I can see you, why are you bending down with those red eyes of yours! I can see you clearly. I know you. And there is nothing you can do to me; you are a very small thing to me. I can finish you at any time. Even if you want to take us to police, what evidence do you have? Did anyone see us murder your father? No one saw us and so you can do whatever you want. Let me go, I do not want to talk to the children of Kirwa anymore.

SEC: No you must howl before you leave!

VFB: I am going away stop disturbing me.

SEC and CONGREG: Howl before you go!

The VFB made a howling sound eight times and every time the VFB howled the congregation responded:

CONGREG: Remain there!

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: My name is Raymond.

SEC: Raymond you are accused.

VFB: My name is Raymond. I want to tell you, you Tom and your sister, this sister of yours who lives overseas, we are the ones who plotted the killing of your father. It was I and my brother, Karinga, who organized the killing of your father because he took away our land. You see your father used his monies to forge the title deeds of the land that belonged to the late vice president. It is your father who started this whole thing. The late VP had no problems with anybody. But your father claimed that the late VP had his debt and used his money to bribe the land registrar and then took our land and the school. And now he even started selling it and this left us with no other option but to kill him. The only way we could get our land back was by killing him, then kill you and your brother and reclaim our land. We have been the master planners. We used thugs from Kitale to execute the murder. For

now, I do not want anybody to bring me any trouble or to ask me any questions. And if any of you children of Kirwa bring me any trouble, I am going to finish you immediately. The things you are doing here are not good. Why are you bringing me to this court? I have suddenly fallen asleep and started dreaming that you guys have taken my soul and have made it speak here. This is not good. Let my soul free, I want to go!

SEC: Okay howl if you want to go, howl!

VFB: What do you want me to do?

SEC and CONGREG: We want you to howl.

VFB: And how do you want me to howl?

The secretary and the congregation demonstrated how the VFB should howl and the VFB howled seven times. Every time the VFB howled the congregation retorted:

CONGREG: Remain there!

3<sup>rd</sup> VFB: My Name is Ganjo.

SEC: Ganjo you are accused.

VFB: My name is Ganjo and unfortunately I am dead. As I am speaking to you now, I am dead. I died last night and I am in Kitale mortuary at the moment. I really regret taking part in the killing of Mr Kirwa because that is what has brought me to this death. You see you guys called me here the other day, poured kerosene on me and burned me. I am now dead. I was the leader of the group that was hired to kill Mr. Kirwa. Karinga and his brother paid me Kshs 200,000 (approx USD 3000) for this job. I took this money and hired five other thugs with whom we went to Mr Kirwa's compound. We had machetes, pick axes and sledge hammers. We also carried a huge stone that we used to break the main door to Mr. Kirwa's house. One of us had a gun and remained outside as the rest of us went into the house. If Mr Kirwa managed to overpower us and run out of the house, our colleague who remained outside with a gun would shoot him. We hired a taxi and went to Mr. Kirwa's home on this night, broke into the house and dragged him outside where we tortured and killed him. Only six of us went on this task but usually we are a group of eight thugs and refer to ourselves by the code name, 'the eight brothers'. We were unable to get a taxi that would fit eight of us and so only six of us went. But the most surprising thing here is that only those of us who went to kill Mr Kirwa have died. All my accomplices have died. I do not know what was wrong with this mission. I think the family of Kirwa must have buried him with medicines because we have all died one after the other except the two we left behind. I really regret taking part in this murder. For me, I am Ganjo and I am dead!

SEC: That is fine, then get out of here, you spirit!

End of Transcript.

The case of the Kirwa appeared to be convoluted with names of high-ranking politicians mentioned, dispute over land and property, murder and plans for more murder. From my observations and interviews with the Kirwas, I gathered that Tom and Jane had been to MBs ritual healing three times before the session reproduced above. In their first session Tom explained that they visited MB together with his brother and cousin. After going through the



ritual motions of registration, church service and lunch, they got their chance to meet MB for the initial interrogation and divination. MB interrogated each of them separately although the questions asked to each one of them were similar. He interrogated them mainly about their family structure and composition, events leading to their father's death as well as about the property they owned and how it was acquired. MB was particularly interested in finding out whether the late Kirwa had any disputes over property or enemies that his children were aware of. Tom stated that they answered in the negative even though they knew their father had numerous disputes and a pending court case involving the ownership of his jaggery factory. Tom would later remark that they got scared of trying to play tricks with MB after realizing that he possessed the ability to find out that they were deliberately misleading him as exemplified by their comments below.

Tom: It is the way in which he fixes his eyes on you, the speed with which he asks you the questions and the fact that some of the subsequent questions point to something completely different from what you told him, but which is true that scares you. It is like he never listened to your answer or he knows you are cheating. You see, the first day when I went with the money, I had Kshs 5,800. But then I told Emma<sup>44</sup> that I did not have all the money. I told her that I only had Kshs 4,000. Emma calmly told me to just pay the amount that I had but also commented that they knew how they would get me to pay the rest of the money. When she said that, I got so scared that I just paid all the Kshs 5,800 at once. This guy has powers!

Jane: I think this guy (MB) usually knows everything that is going on but he just wants you to listen and hear it for yourself. I had never spoken to MB before. You see MB is so scary. The first time I got to talk to him I almost pissed in my pants. (Laughter) You see, he talks while looking directly into your eyes. Then he keeps quiet for some time and you are left wondering 'so what is he thinking about?'

After thoroughly interrogating them, MB declared that he would assist them identify their father's killers by 'calling them' to confess. MB also informed them that they would 'speak' to their father who would tell them the people who killed him and the motive of their actions. He sent them back to the secretary where they paid Kshs. 5,800 (Approx. USD 75). This money was provided by their mother though she was keen to maintain a safe distance from the actual ritual performances. On the first day of their divination, they heard voices of six people confessing to have been involved in killing their father. Although six voices mentioned their names, only one of the voices, the one that appeared last explained that the six were members of the same gang that killed Mr. Kirwa. As was procedural for the 'mention stage' of MBs rituals, the Kirwas only listened to the thugs confess the way in

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<sup>44</sup> Emma was MB's secretary and also acted as the cashier.

which they committed the murder. They listened to the ring leader of the thugs explain how he was hired to kill Mr. Kirwa, how he hired the rest of the thugs, and the fact that he was paid Kshs 200, 0000 for this job. The thug further gave a detailed account of how they actually carried out the murder. Even though in this initial confession the VFB of the thug declined to name the person who hired him to do the job, it explained that the motive for the killing of Mr. Kirwa was that he had used his financial bravado to dispossess others of their property. The VFB mentioned the school as one of the properties that Mr. Kirwa had fraudulently and forcefully acquired by trumped up claims and falsification of land ownership documents.

Apart from the confessions from the thugs, Tom explained that they listened to a VFB of their dead father who explained to them that he was killed because of the dispute over the ownership of the school. Their father advised them to take good care of the property that he left behind but also cautioned them to conduct investigations over his death with care because his killers would also attempt to kill them.

Tom: Our father informed us that he knew he could be killed due to the disputes over property but he never wanted to scare us. After his confession, he cried the way he cried when the thugs were killing him, and then he kept quiet.

At the end of the 'mention' stage of their X-ray session, the Kirwas took an appointment date from the secretary for the hearing. MB's secretary scheduled it two days later. The Kirwas had raised all the money required for the sessions and so the sessions were scheduled close to each other as opposed to sessions for those clients who required more time to raise the fee.

Tom and his cousin reported back to MB's rituals as directed by the secretary. Before the session commenced however, the two of them held another discussion with MB who thoroughly interrogated them again regarding the property his father owned and how he acquired it. MB further discussed the proceedings of the previous X-ray sessions with them and specifically pressed them to confirm whether the issues raised by the VFBs of the thugs were correct. Tom confirmed that the proceedings of the previous sessions were true - that his father had acquired the farm and the school from the former vice president. He however informed MB that it was a clean deal since the former vice president was indebted to their father. Tom further informed MB that he was aware that the former vice president's

brothers, who lived on the farm, were not happy with the transaction and were infuriated when his father paid them and asked them to vacate the farm. The Kirwas case then proceeded to the 'hearing'

The 'hearing' session was similar to the 'mention'. The only difference was that the VFBs justified their action and tried to absolve themselves from blame by claiming to have acted on instructions from their clients even though they never mentioned their (clients) names. In the discussions that ensued in this session, the VFBs questioned and demanded to know from Tom why his father had used his monies to fraudulently acquire property, especially the school. For most of these questions, Tom responded by restating that their father had acquired their property legally and there was absolutely no justification for his brutal murder.

After the 'hearing' session MB held another discussion with the Kirwas where they reviewed the confessions from the two X-ray sessions. This level of discussion was quite important for MB and the clients for it was at this point that MB and the clients decided the type of punishment that would be meted out to those who had afflicted them. For the Kirwas, Tom explained that MB sort to know more about the disputes that the late Kirwa allegedly had in the ownership of his property. Tom was accompanied by his sister, Jane, for this meeting and here again they admitted to MB that they knew their father had disputes over ownership of some of his properties.

After reviewing the mention and hearing stages of the X-ray process, MB asked Tom and his sister to say what they would like to be done to the people who had killed their father. MB gave them several options such as turning them into zombies, killing them or even forgiving them if they wished. After reviewing the X-ray sessions, and considering implications of their actions, Tom informed MB that they would like him to kill the people who killed their father. In my discussion with the Kirwas, they were unequivocal that they were the ones who asked MB to kill those who had killed their father.

Tom: You see, MB will just ask you there and then, what you wish to be done to the person who has afflicted you. Should he die or become mad? We said, 'No we want them dead'. You see if they become mad, their children will come here to disturb us. We just want them to die and sort each other out in heaven or in hell.

Jane: During the X-ray confessions they said they killed our father so that he could go and talk to the former VP. And now we wanted them dead so that they could also go talk to the former VP and our dad.

Tom: Even MB himself tells you that if you want to forgive each other with these people, he can pull all of them to his compound and you will meet them there and make peace. But we really do not want that. If someone has killed your father, how can you forgive him? And he has even promised to kill you!

After MB and the Kirwas decided on the fate of Kirwa's killers, the case proceeded to the 'judgement'. In this session all the six thugs appeared and like in the 'hearing' stage, they only mentioned their names and explained that they were part of the group that was hired to kill Mr. Kirwa. After making this one line confession, the secretary asked them to howl. Each one of them howled and the congregation responded by shouting 'remain there'. The sixth VFB was that of the ringleader who narrated the actual actions undertaken by the thugs. His confession was similar to the narrative he gave in the first two sessions except that this time round, he mentioned the names of the people who hired him. It was during this session that the names of Karinga and Raymond were mentioned for the first time. The VFB repeated the very same details of how they murdered Mr. Kirwa, the motives for the murder and mentioned too that the people who hired him had given him further instructions to raid the Kirwas again and kill his two sons. At the end of this session the secretary set the bible on fire and by this action the six thugs were expected to meet their death.

At the conclusion of their 'judgement' session, MB's secretary asked the Kirwas to report back in a month's time for the 'outcome' part of the ritual. The 'outcome' session was similar to the other sessions. MB prayed over the bible and placed it on the ground, the congregation would sing until voices emerged from the bible. In this session according to Tom, five VFBs that appeared in the previous sessions mentioned their names one after the other and each of them claimed to have died and already buried. The sixth member of the thug however appeared and claimed to be still alive. His VFB corroborated the information from the previous five that they had died. He however stated that in view of the death of his accomplices, he would assemble a new gang from Nairobi (the capital city of Kenya) that would take on the duty of hunting down and killing the two sons of the late Kirwa. This VFB swore that the new gang would be better equipped, better trained and would never fail in the mission. It was in this session too that the masterminds of the killing of Kirwa (Karinga and Raymond) spoke for the first time and agreed to have planned the killing of Mr. Kirwa.

The outcome sessions scared the Kirwas and Tom explained that they rushed back to MB for further instructions.

Tom: We were so scared to hear that the thugs had actually died. You see one of them said that he fought with his father over ownership of battery cells, his father hit him with a stick on his head and he died. We had heard of this case in our neighbourhood but we did not know that this boy was in the group that came to kill our father. But what scared us even more was the fact that the thug who was still alive had vowed to kill us. We went back to MB and asked him to tell us what we ought to do next.

In the subsequent meeting, MB asked the Kirwas not to worry that he would deal with the new killers. In view of the new threats MB and the Kirwas agreed that they needed to deal decisively with the remaining gang member as well as the master planners. MB directed the Kirwas to get an appointment from the secretary for another session where again the remaining thug and the master planners would be ritually burned. It was at this point that I had direct contact with the Kirwas and started my observation of their case. The transcript that I produced on pages 103-105 regarded the events on this second level of ritual burning. Three voices appeared and claimed to be responsible for the killing of Mr. Kirwa. The first and second VFB explain that they were brothers to the former vice president and that they hatched the plot to kill Mr. Kirwa. The motive for their actions was a dispute over the ownership of land and the school. The two VFBs corroborated each other's account and state that their mission would be complete after they kill Mr. Kirwa's two sons. The two VFBs boasted of their abilities and dared the Kirwas to take them to the police if they thought they had any evidence linking them to the murder of their father. After making their confessions, both VFBs were asked to howl and the congregation demanded that they 'remain there' (captured in the bible). The bible was set on fire at the end of this X-ray session and since the Kirwas had decided to exterminate the people who planned and executed their father, it was expected that the two would also die a month after this ritual was conducted.

The third VFB was that of the ringleader of the group that carried out the killing of Mr. Kirwa. The ringleader provided details of their actions on the night they killed Kirwa (i.e. the way they tortured and killed him), explained how much they were paid and that he had been tasked to recruit other killers from Nairobi to kill Mr. Kirwa's sons. The VFB however claimed to be dead and even regretted taking part in this assignment. He attributed his death to the possibility that Mr. Kirwa had been buried with 'medicines' that would cause his

killers to die. At the end of this VFB's confession, the secretary ordered it to leave, as it was now a spirit.

X-ray sessions were communal with many other confessions for other clients coming within the same gathering. At the end of the session, the secretary set the bible on fire and the Kirwas together with the other clients obtained new appointment dates for their cases. By this time, the case of the Kirwas had passed through five different sessions. There was first, the mention, the hearing, and the judgement where the secretary set the bible on fire and thereby ritually burning the perpetrators of their fathers' gruesome murder. The fourth session was the outcome where the Kirwas heard that five out of the six people involved in the killing of their father had died. However the last one, who was the ringleader had not died but was very busy recruiting other thugs to finish up the tasks of killing the two sons of Mr. Kirwa. In view of the fact that there was still one of the thugs alive and that the master minds of the killing were still at large, MB scheduled another session where the last of the thugs as well as the master planners of their father's murder were dealt with. It was in this session that the last of the six VFBs confessed to have died. The bible was then set on fire to punish the two brothers of the former VP who confessed to hatching the plot to murder Mr. Kirwa. The fifth session ended with a second round of burning of the bible. The Kirwas retreated to their homes and waited to hear about the deaths of their cousins in the next 'outcome' session.

I remained in contact with the Kirwas and staked out for their next appointment with MB. Tom was the only one who came for this session. In this second 'outcome' session, however, their story took a different twist with the introduction of new characters and new events. As usual Tom sat together with the other clients and waited, hoping to hear that the masterminds of his father's killing were dead. This was not the case. Instead, there was the emergence of a new character, a traditional healer who claimed to have been approached by both Karinga and Raymond to treat them. A VFB appeared and explained that Karinga and Raymond had fallen sick and gone to him for treatment. The VFB further claimed that after treating the two, he would turn to deal with those who wanted to harm his clients, namely Tom and MB. I reproduce below the transliterated version of the discussion of the case as it transpired in this session.

The transcript.

VFB: My name is Idriss Maalim.

SEC: You are accused Idriss!

VFB: I want to explain to you clearly my name is Idriss Maalim. And I want to ask the complainant; do you know me? Do you really know me?

SEC: (to Tom) You answer him.

Tom: No, I do not know you.

VFB: That is okay, but I want to ask you whether you know Raymond and Karinga? Do you know these two people?

Tom: Yes, I know them

VFB: Do you know these people?

Tom: Yes, I know them

VFB: How do you know these people? Explain it to me.

Tom: I know they are the ones who sent thugs to kill my dad.

VFB: Okay, I want to ask you, do you know Suleiman Bana?

Tom: No, I don't know him.

VFB: That is okay, I do not want many stories now. What I want to tell you clearly now is this: my work is to help my clients. They (Karinga and Raymond) came to me and said,.. let me first explain to you, this guy called Raymond is very sick at the moment. He is very sick and I am the one who is treating him at the moment. And I told him that the first thing we will do is to treat him and then start dealing with the people disturbing him. I agreed to 'finish' the people disturbing him. That was our agreement. They told me that this guy called Kirwa always appeared to them when they slept. I have already 'called' this guy called Kirwa here. I have called his spirit so that I can burn it and make it not disturb my clients any more. I sent my soldiers, I mean my Djinns to pick Kirwa's soul so that I may burn it. At the moment I am preparing to burn his soul. I have not burnt it but I am getting ready to do it in a few days time. So what did you guys want? Explain to me. After treating Raymond, I will embark on a mission to finish those who wanted to finish him.

Tom and CONGREG: Then you howl!

VFB: Raymond is here at my place; I am treating him. I reside in pangani. If you guys have ever heard of a healer who resides in Pangani, then know that I am the one.

Tom and CONGREG: Then you howl!

VFB: I am here with many other clients, and was treating them when I suddenly started sleeping and my soul started talking here. I am treating Raymond and after that I am going to deal with the person who wanted to kill him.

Tom: Then howl, so that Raymond can get cured.

VFB: So, I want to ask you guys, what was your real intention in calling me here?

Tom and CONGREG: We want you to howl!

SEC: Just howl!

Tom: Howl!

OMC: Howl!

Tom: Howl!

OMC: This guy is tough headed! (means arrogant)

VFB: You guys want me to howl?

OMC: Yes!

VFB: How do I howl?

The congregation demonstrated the way the VFB should howl and the VFB howled 7 times. Every time the VFB howled the congregation responded by saying:

CONGREG: Remain there!

SEC: Give way to the other one to come.

VFB: My name is Raymond and I am sick.

SEC: Raymond you are accused.

VFB: My name is Raymond and I am sick. I have come here to be treated by traditional medicines so that I can get better. I have been to many hospitals and have done many tests. All the tests conducted have been negative for all illnesses. I have been tested for typhoid, diabetes and even illnesses related to milk. But I am very very sick. Every time I feel sick I see the image of Kirwa who died.

Tom: Kirwa, the one you people killed, not the one who died!

OMC: Howl

VFB: You see the dreams and images that I see are the same ones that Karinga and all the other guys who were involved in planning the death of Kirwa also see. All the thugs we



hired to kill Kirwa have died. They have all died. The only people still alive are those of us who hired the thugs. But we now have these problems. It looks like when the problems finished up with those we hired, they now turned to us.

Tom: Then howl!

VFB: These are not very good signs. My name is Raymond and I am very sick.

OMC: Then howl!

VFB: So, I want to ask you guys, what was your real intention for calling me here?

Tom and CONGREG: We want you to howl!

OMC: Howl.

Silence.

VFB: You guys want me to howl?

CONGREG: Yes!

VFB: How do I howl?

Congregation demonstrates how he should howl and the VFB howls 7 times. Every time the VFB howls the congregation responds:

CONGREG: Remain there!

Silence.

VFB: My name is Titus and I want to tell you I have been working together with Raymond.

SEC: You are accused.

Silence.

Tom: Say your side of the story we want to hear.

VFB: We are the ones who decided to wipe out the entire family of Kirwa. We are also interested in getting this other guy called Amos. So you also want me to howl?

CONGREG: Yes!

VFB: How do I howl?

Congregation demonstrates how he should howl and the VFB howls 8 times. Every time the VFB howls the congregation responds:

CONGREG: Remain there!

VFB: My name is Karinga. And I stay in Nairobi. I stayed in Nairobi so that I could progress in life economically. We occasionally bought and sold cars. We did this because Kirwa sent us away from where we were living and took over all the wealth that belonged to the former vice president. You see, if Kirwa knew that the former VP had his debt, he should have persevered and given us an opportunity to pay the debt but not invade our property. And that is why we decided to hire thugs to kill him so that we can have back our property. But unfortunately now, I have become very sick. You people called me here the other day and poured kerosene on me. Since then, I have become very sick and I am seeking treatment from a traditional healer here in Nairobi. Every time I fall sick I keep seeing the image of the late Kirwa. But my healer has informed me that he will cure me and then get to deal with you people. I want to tell you Tom that this is now a war between me and you people. I will either finish you or you people finish me.

OMC: You howl!

Tom: You Karinga howl!

VFB: So what did you guys want me to do?

CONGREG: Howl!

VFB: You want me to howl?

CONGREG: Yes!

VFB: How do I howl?

Congregation demonstrates how he should howl and the VFB howls 5 times. Every time the VFB howls the congregation responds:

CONGREG: Remain there!

These four voices concluded this session for the Kirwas on this day and after listening to other confessions for other clients, the secretary set the bible on fire at the end of the session. As the bible was burning, the different voices of witches could be heard complaining that they were burning. The congregation claimed to be able to identify one of the persistent voices of the VFBs as they cried in the fire to be that of Karinga.

VFB (Karinga): Now what is wrong with you guys? Why are you pouring kerosene on people? This is very bad manners. You are making me stink now. Why are you pouring kerosene on me?

OMC: No, that is not kerosene it is water! We want you to be completely clean.

Tom: In fact that is your perfume!

OMC: (addressing Tom) That is the thug who killed your father!

Amidst the complaints by the VFBs, the secretary lit the bible and a huge fire engulfed it. As the bible burnt, the different VFBs could be heard complaining and screaming that they were burning.

VFB: Fire! Fire! Fire! Fire is burning me, fire is burning me. Fire is killing me. Please give me water!

Tom: You burn, no one will give you water here.

As the fire engulfed the bible, the secretary added more kerosene to it and there was such a huge ball of fire that the congregation moved away from it. Clients listened to the different voices and made comments such as ‘the one you had really crying is my witch’ and ‘my witch is so stubborn that he just burnt quietly’. On this day however, midway through the burning of the bible, footsteps were heard from the burning fire as though someone ran away. One of the congregants sort to know from the secretary what was going on. The secretary listened for a few seconds then declared ‘that is Karinga running away from the fire!’ This appeared to shock Tom who inquired about the implications of what had transpired. The secretary assured him that the fire was quite strong and there was no way Karinga would escape from it completely. It was however impossible to tell what would happen to Karinga until after the ‘outcome session’ of the ritual was performed. At the end of this session, the secretary asked Tom to report back to the healer for another outcome session where he would find out what had transpired.

In this session it emerged that MB’s ritual procedures were being counteracted by the action of other ritual specialists. As such, the people he set on fire had not died as expected. In the transcript above, there was the entry of a new character – a healer who claimed to be treating the two for illnesses that he did not disclose. The VFB of the healer however, linked their illnesses to Tom’s father. He claimed to have found out that Kirwa’s spirit was the one tormenting the two brothers and therefore designed a way of taming it by burning. He set three tasks for himself: treating the two brothers, burning and thereby paralysing the spirit of the late Kirwa and finally attacking those who had sent illnesses to the two. In this session too, the two brothers of the late VP confessed to be sick. Both attributed their illnesses to the late Kirwa since he had been appearing to them in dreams. Raymond who

gave a longer expose to their suffering explained that he and Karinga had been seeing images of the late Kirwa every time they fell sick. Karinga on his part attributed his illnesses to having been burnt during the X-ray sessions. He reiterated the fact that the late Kirwa had defrauded them of their property prompting them to plot his killing. He further warned Tom that he and his healer would 'deal with them' as soon as he got cured.

This session also saw the entry of yet a fourth character whose connection to the murder of Kirwa was not well elaborated. The VFB of Titus only confessed to be working with the brothers of the former Vice president without further details of what it had done. The session ended with the secretary setting the bible on fire and it is expected that the two brothers and their healer would fall sick and die within a couple of weeks. At the end of this session the congregation sat around the burning bible, listened, joked and laughed as the different VFBs cried as they burnt. Listening to the VFBs crying confirmed to the congregation that MB had actually captured and burned them. There was even the strange incident of receding footsteps and the secretary's instantaneous explication that one of the accused in Kirwas case had escaped from the fire.

Performing the 'judgment' always implied that the clients would have to come back to MB at least one more time for the 'Outcome' session. Tom was asked to come back a month later to find out what had transpired. At the end of this last session, Tom was slowly getting dejected and frustrated by the whole process. At some point he even wondered if MB would eventually eliminate the people who planned his father's murder. Typical of his jocular, he asked the secretary if he ought to bring an entire truckload of firewood to burn his adversaries. This frustration was not limited to the case of the Kirwas only. Several other clients while maintaining their hope on MB's ability complained that MB appeared not keen to conclude their cases. Some of them attributed this to the fact that the people deemed to have afflicted them had consulted powerful healers to treat them or had laced themselves with powerful medicines. This was borne by several confessions from VFBs who stated that they had powerful healers who treated them from MBs ritual fire. MB's rituals too had a loophole that the offenders at times exploited and escaped from MBs punishment. In the session that I just reproduced, the secretary explained that one of the people who plotted Mr. Kirwa's murder sprinted out of the fire. MB explained to me that in the event that an offender had laced himself with protective medicines, the medicines ought to be removed from their bodies first before the fire could affect them. Other clients though complained

that MB deliberately protracted their cases so that he would earn more money from them in the subsequent sessions. One client explained it thus,

Client: We pay for every session of the X-ray. Sometimes you get the feeling that MB just wants you to keep coming here so that you pay him more money. He has the powers even to see that those people he had burned will not die. But he still asks you to come and go through the sessions and pay more money.

I observed two more sessions in the case for the Kirwas before the end of my fieldwork but even then the Kirwa's case had not fully concluded. Tom attended the sessions, listened to the VFBs and hoped to hear that those who planned his father's murder had finally succumbed to MBs fire. In the next appointment after the session whose transcript I reproduced above, the VFBs of the two brothers to the former Vice president appeared with the voice of yet another medicine man. The new medicine man stated that he was based at a place called Mwembe Tayari in the Coast Province of Kenya and explained that he had taken over treating the two brothers after their initial healer in Nairobi had died. He also informed Tom that he had used his powers and 'seen' that he (Tom) was using a witch (MB) to burn the souls of the two brothers who were now his clients. This VFB boasted to have more powers than MB and declared that he would do everything possible to save the lives of his clients and at the same time declared war against Tom and MB. The VFBs of the two brothers also appeared and claimed to be receiving treatment from a healer from the Coast province. They lamented that the healer they had earlier consulted had died from MBs 'fire' which left them with no option but to seek treatment from a different healer. Like their healer, they too boasted that the new healer appeared to be more credible and powerful than the first one and that he would succeed in treating them as well as dealing with Tom. The VFB of the previous medicine man also appeared and claimed to have died after being subjected to MBs fire. This session was as usual concluded by the bible being set on fire and Tom taking a new appointment date for the 'outcome' session.

In the last session that I observed with the Kirwas, the VFBs of the two brothers to the former Vice president appeared and explained that they were still very sick but had found new healers who were assisting them to remain alive. They claimed that they had used all their monies to pay for the services of their healers to no avail. Even though they justified their actions by stating that Kirwa had defrauded them, they expressed their regrets at

having organized the murder of Mr. Kirwa as the following confession from Karinga showed:

Karinga: My name is Karinga, and I really do not know what is going on in my life. Life has just become a daily struggle for survival. I am running from one healer to another in search of life. Every night I go to sleep I see the image of Kirwa and you guys pouring kerosene on me and setting me on fire. I am not even sure I will wake up at all. At times I do not even sleep. Now I was just sitting here in this hotel at the Coast and I have fallen asleep and you guys have taken my soul and you are making it speak here. I really regret plotting the killing of Kirwa because I know you guys are going to set me on fire again. You see if Mr. Kirwa had not taken over our land and chased us away, we would not have killed him.

All the subsequent sessions ended up with the secretary setting the bible on fire. Even though she noticed the whole ordeal was turning out to be frustrating for Tom, she advised him to be steadfast until they had dealt with the masterminds of his father's killers. Tom, though showing a mixture of frustration and despair appeared convinced that his only hope lay with MB and his rituals. At the end of my fieldwork, Tom was still waiting for the performance of another 'outcome' session to find out if those who had plotted the murder if his father had actually died. He had a very strong resolve as is exemplified in his statement below:

Tom: We shall keep going back there until we ensure that they are all killed. After that we shall be peaceful and may be resort to consulting MB once in a while, just to find out how our security is.

I have outlined the case of the Kirwas at length to illustrate the way in which MB organized his healing rituals and the way he combined normal and non normal modes of cognition to address his clients problems. The key to this healing is the creation of a narrative in collaboration with his clients that more or less captures their plight. This narrative was created using MB's tentative divination as well as confessions from VFBs. MB's healing methods exhibited his possession of supernatural powers (his reading of images from the bible and the use of VFBs) and therefore the narrative so created using this supernatural powers augmented by the clients' clarifications was taken as the truth. The aim of the divination was to lay bare a clients plight with a view to resolving them. Here again MB convinced the clients of his abilities to resolve their problems supernaturally through processes activated by the burning of the bible. In doing so, however MB involved the clients and the congregation in determining the fate of the people accused of afflicting them. Clients decided for instance that the witches ought to be killed and left it to MB's fire to

exterminate them. In so doing, the clients felt empowered to overcome those who afflicted them. This empowerment however started even in the X-ray sessions as clients yelled and forced the VFBs to howl. Howling was seen as a humiliating experience for the people accused of afflicting the clients.

Right at the beginning of his healing of the Kirwas, MB suspected Kirwa's annihilation had to do with rivalry over property. In his discussion with Kirwa's children, he interrogated them at length about their father's property and how it was acquired even before he enunciated the X-ray process. Tom explained that MB repeatedly questioned them about the properties owned by his father. As soon as he had obtained what he considered to be sufficient background information, MB invited the Kirwa's to the courtroom for the X-ray process, where they would 'hear for themselves' the motive and the identity of their father's killers. The Kirwas stated that listening to the VFBs confess to the killing of their father as well as the detail and clarity of their confessions was the most shocking experience for them. According to them, the VFBs explanation was identical to what transpired on the fateful day when their father was killed. They also admitted that they knew there were disputes over some of the properties that their father owned.

In the course of the X-ray process, the Kirwas were 'persuaded' that MB's X-ray process had identified their father's murderers and therefore set the stage for them to design ways of dealing with them. MB's elaborate and ordered X-ray sessions, based on the clients' belief on his supernatural abilities to produce confessions from alleged offenders and augmented by his creativity, intuition and intense interaction with the clients produce what clients perceive to be a credible and authentic unravelling of their afflictions. The Kirwas evaluated the totality of their interactions with MB and compared it with their experience (not only of their father's murder but of the events antecedent to it) and concluded that MB had positively identified their father's killers.

MB's healing methods, like many such methods in Africa supplied clients with conceptual frameworks for making sense out of their chaotic and mysterious feelings and suggest a plan of action. By doing so, he enabled clients to gain a sense of direction and mastery and to resolve their inner conflicts. Having identified the murderers, MB characteristically asked the Kirwas to decide the fate of their father's murderers. The Kirwas admitted that they were the ones who decided that the people who killed their father should be killed as well,

even though they stated that it was not an easy decision since they had kinship ties with the former vice president's siblings.

In the ensuing X-ray sessions MB succeeded in exterminating those who executed Kirwa's murder but then opened up what appeared to be a long protracted war between himself and the Kirwas on one hand and the masterminds of Kirwa's murder and their healers on the other. This struggle illustrated MB's creativity in dealing with stubborn sources of affliction. MB often varied the items and paraphernalia that he used at the judgment stage depending on the strength of the witches and the murderers. He always started by burning the witches with the bible only. As the witches and murderers became stubborn or consulted powerful 'healers' to protect them, MB upgraded the burning ritual by adding firewood and even more kerosene. In the event that the witches did not succumb at the second level, MB would burn them in a tin placed on top of the bible and over lots of firewood and even more kerosene. This was the ultimate test and MB rarely opted for this level preferring to repeat the second level. In my fieldwork, I saw MB resort to this ultimate test only on two occasions.

The Kirwas maintained their consultation with MB and even though they were not able to exterminate the people who planned their father's death during the period of my fieldwork, they were convinced that MB would eventually overcome them. They however maintained that their consultation with MB had been so far successful. According to them they now knew who was responsible for their father's death and the motive for his killing. They were also convinced that those who actually executed the plan were all dead as Tom's comments below show.

Tom: We know one of those guys. There was this day we were going to town and we saw a funeral procession. We later found out that it was one of those guys who confessed to the killing of our father at MBs. We understand he fought with his father, and his father hit him with a stick in his head and he died. There is also another one who got mad. I am told his relatives are hiding him in Eldoret. They will all die.

The Kirwas were also convinced and satisfied that the masterminds of their father's killing were very sick, just as they had confessed in MB's courtroom and that they would eventually die. By stating his willingness to assist them and unrelentingly battling with the people afflicting his clients, MB reinforces his image as a powerful ally in the clients' struggle with the people who have afflicted them. This as Frank (1973) observed,



heightened the emotional intensity of the ritual, increased the confidence of the clients and convinced them that the healer cared enough for them as to risk his own safety on their behalf. As Jane later jokingly commented:

Jane: Don't joke around with MB. When he sets you on fire, you can even choke yourself while eating Ugali<sup>45</sup> and die. But we are not worried we know MB will finish all of them. In any case, Karinga has AIDs and so he will eventually die.

At the final stages of the ritual that I observed, only Tom came to MB's place. Jane had flown back to the US, but was at least happy to have known who her father's killers were. Her two other siblings maintained their distance from MB but nevertheless kept abreast of what transpired at every session. Their mother too, a staunch member of the Friends Quakers church avoided direct participation by attending the rituals although she bankrolled all the sessions as well as provided for Tom's transport to each of the sessions. She was convinced that MB had managed to eliminate the threat posed by her husband's killers. She commented thus in one of my last interviews with the Kirwas, *'I think we have paralysed all their plans'*

### **3.3. Absconding wives and children.**

#### **Case 2. Habib and his run away wife**

*'I want you back because I am the one who got you from your parents house'' ( Habib)*

The case of Habib and his wife was another case that protracted over a couple of months and just like in the previous case of the murder of Tom's father, I concluded my fieldwork before it was completely resolved. The case ran at the same time as that of Mr. Kirwas murder and I met both Tom and Habib within the same period of time though on diverse dates.

Habib was a 24-year-old male, married and had a one-year-old baby with his wife. He was a trained mason who depended on short-term employment contracts in construction firms for his living. There were no guarantees that he would get employment on any one day. Many were the days when he would be without a job and therefore no income. I met him when he visited MB for help. He informed me that a few weeks prior to his visit to MB, he went back home from his work place and discovered that his wife had deserted him. He could not find

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<sup>45</sup> Ugali is a popular meal in Western Kenya made from water and maize meal.

any of her clothes, part of their beddings and the mosquito bed net was also missing. Initially, he suspected that his wife might have gone back to her parents even though the absence of her entire wardrobe was suspicious. His mother-in-law however informed him that his wife was not at her place and exerted pressure on Habib to produce her daughter. Habib's mother-in-law insisted that as her daughter's husband, Habib was responsible for anything that happened to her. None of Habib's neighbours appeared to know about his wife's whereabouts, and if they did, they were disinterested in informing him. After searching for his wife for one month without success, Habib reported her disappearance to the police. It was also during this time that a friend informed him about MB and advised him to seek his assistance.

On the first day of his visit to MB, Habib went through the normal routine of registration by the secretary, payment of the registration fee, church service, lunch and an initial meeting with MB. As with all other initial divinations, MB informed him that he would call his runaway wife so that Habib would speak to her and tell her what he wanted. In his tentative divination, MB informed Habib that his case would be taken to the X-ray process which would examine his entire social matrix and not restrict itself to his initial complaint about the disappearance of his wife. Based on this agreement, and a payment of the initial divination fee, Habib joined the rest of the clients visiting MB on this day for the 'mention' of his case.

The first session of Habib's case was held on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2006. When time came for his case, six different VFBs appeared. The first VFB was that of a man who claimed to have taken his wife and married her. The VFB confessed that he had been having an affair with Habib's wife even when she was married to Habib and had eventually convinced her to desert him because he (Habib) did not have the financial ability to take good care of her. The next VFB to appear was that of his run away wife. As will be seen in the transcript that I reproduce below, Habib's wife confessed that she deserted him because he was incapable of taking good care of her and their baby. She corroborated the confession by her new husband and stated that she had eloped with another man who was taking good care of her. She chronicles her tribulations with Habib, her decision to desert him, her whereabouts and her future business plans with her new husband. At the end of her confession, she vowed never to return to Habib and advised Habib to marry another woman when his financial fortunes improved.

Four other VFBs came up relating to Habib. There was the VFB that claimed to be that of a ‘tough witch’ who was contracted by Habib’s uncle to perform witchcraft on their entire household. The VFB claimed to have been approached to bewitch Habib’s Mother and her children because she was boastful. The witch explained that he had conjured witchcraft that would cause Habib’s mother and siblings to be unsuccessful and stagnate in all aspects of their lives. The next VFB was that of Habib’s stepmother. She explained that she was barren and since she had not had any children with Habib’s father, she considered Habib and his siblings to be her own children. She therefore loved them and had not done anything to harm them. Two other VFBs conclude the confessions for the case of Habib. There was the voice of a female witch who confessed to have bewitched Habib and his siblings at the behest of their neighbour. The witch confessed that she conjured witchcraft that would ensure that Habib and his siblings would stagnate in all aspects of their lives. The last VFB was that of Habib’s neighbour who confessed to have contracted a witch to ensorcel Habib and his entire family. This corroborated the confessions of the two previous witches (VFB 3 and VFB5). The transcript below contains sections of what transpired during the ‘Mention’ stage of Habib’s court process.

**The ‘Mention’ stage for Habib’s and his runaway wife.**

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: My name is Godwin Oloo,

SEC: Godwin you are accused!

VFB: My name is Godwin Oloo, My name is Godwin Oloo and I am the friend of Rispah Akinyi. I am the one who told her to rent a house. I asked her to rent a house in her name so as to conceal the fact that I had eloped with her. .

Silence,

SEC: Continue,

VFB: I want to tell you that I am the one who assisted her to rent the house. I assisted her to start her business. I did not want anyone to know that I am the one because we used to meet when her husband was away. I am the one who befriended her when I was still in Bungoma. And even now, I am still in Bungoma but what I would like to tell you now, is that, I have transported that woman (Rispah) to a place where I have hidden her. I really love that woman.... that woman called Rispah Akinyi. I really want to let you know that I really loved that woman called Rispah Akinyi and even used to give her money for her up keep. She could not survive on her husband’s salary alone. I used to tell her to try and save that money so that we could start a business together. We had managed to keep it discreet so that no one else would know about it. She informed me that to conceal our plans, she would

always walk around with her baby. I told her that I had no problems with that. I agreed to stay with her.

SEC: Continue,

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: I want to tell you guys that I am here.... I am here.. but I do not want to tell my husband where I am because I do not want him to know. I am in Bumala. There is this woman who is teaching me to conduct a business. But I want to start living in Busia. As I am talking to you now, I am visiting a lady friend here in Bumala so that she can teach me how to run a business. But I really do not want to come back to Habib. I do not want to go back to Habib again.... I want to tell you Habib that living with you was such a big problem. On any one day, we could not even be sure that we would have food. We always had problems. I realized that you were not ready to get married and so I left you so that you could find another woman to marry. Getting married to you now is just problematic; I will be troubling your thoughts for nothing because you do not have the means to support a woman. I saw that I was just a burden to you and so I decided to leave you alone. Just relax and when you are ready to marry (financially stable) you will get another woman and marry her. But for me, I am never coming back. Habib, I will not come back to you again.

Silence,

VFB: I am just so surprised because I have just fallen asleep while sitting in my friend's house. I am with a woman who is my mother's age mate. And that is why I am in Bumala right now. In fact this woman was telling me to rent a house here in Bumala. But the man I am staying with wants me to get a house in Busia because he works in Bungoma. Busia would be more accessible for him.

SEC: Let us accuse her!

CONGREG: We accuse her.

SEC: Is there anyone interested in defending her?

CONGREG: No.

SEC: Give way for the other one to come.

VFB: My friend<sup>46</sup> has been working in Bungoma for some time. At some point he ran a taxi business, later he worked as a driver for an Indian fellow. He is not permanently employed; he works on short term contract basis for some people. He is a trained driver here in Bungoma. I just want to tell you Habib that I do not want to come back to you. I am not interested in leading a difficult life like the one I had before with you. It was so difficult to get any food or clothing from you. I only survived from money that I got from other men. I had two male friends here in Bungoma but now I have decided to live with one of them, the one who has decided to help me start a business.

SEC: Continue,

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<sup>46</sup> By 'friend' she means her new husband.

VFB: As I am talking to you here I am asleep. I am Rispah Akinyi. And I wanted to live with Habib but then life became too difficult. And that is why I took stuff from our house, stuff like bed sheets and nets and left. Life with Habib was so difficult. We were never happy. There was no fun in the home, we always quarrelled over everything. There was no difference between my life and that of a prisoner. Everything in the home was problematic. I just realized that I could no longer withstand the difficulties. What I would like to advise you Habib, is that you should just look for another wife to marry. For me, it is over: I will not come back to you.

SEC: Let us accuse her,

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse her.

VFB: You see even if you find I have come back to you, it will be because I fear this healer you have approached. I am really worried that if I refuse, you guys can easily kill me. I am terrified because I was just sitting here and I fell asleep while visiting a friend. I am at a friend's place, and I am just wondering how I could fall asleep here, start dreaming and dream that you guys have taken my soul to answer your questions. That is the only thing that would make me go back to Habib. If he had not used the method that he is using here (visiting the healer) I would not have gone back to him. It is only because he used this method that I will consider going back to him. It seems that you guys even have the powers to kill people. If you can pick people's souls and cause them to speak, then you guys can also kill someone. How can my body be in Bumala and my soul is speaking here? And how can I fall asleep during the day and start having such dreams? This is really scary!

VFB: I want to ask you Habib, what did you really want?

Habib: I want you to come back home.

VFB: Aha ha ha, you see, I have just told you the truth. Don't you see that life is really hard for the two of us? I have given you the chance to work hard and be ready to marry someone else. When you are financially stable, then your life with the woman you eventually marry will be comfortable. At that time life will be fine. You see for us, you often left in the morning to look for a job and at times you never found one and came home empty handed. And so we lived a very uncertain life. For how long did you expect us to live that kind of life? I always told you about starting a business but you never took me seriously.

Silence.

VFB: I can only agree to come back to you because of these people who have taken my soul here. They are the ones who have scared me and made me think about coming back to you. Otherwise I was never going to come back to you.

SEC: We accuse her,

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse her.

3<sup>rd</sup> VFB: My name is Gideon Kano.

SEC: Gideon you are accused!

VFB: My name is Gideon Kano.

Silence:

SEC: Continue,

VFB: My name is Gideon Kano. My name is Gideon Kano. I am a dangerous witch. I am the one who helped the guy called Martin Jumba. I helped him to bewitch the entire household of Daniel<sup>47</sup>. I have bewitched Daniel's household and spoilt everything in that household. I 'called' that woman called Betty Olal<sup>48</sup> and bewitched her. I do not want any of her children to boast around me. My client is a brother to their father. He said to me that he had realized that the woman called Betty (his brother's wife) was not good and that was why he asked me to bewitch her and spoil everything in her homestead. I have accepted everything. I am the one who bewitched and spoilt everything in Daniel's compound; I do not want them to live comfortably. I do not want his children go to school and live well. I have accepted everything. But my client's brother died, it is only his wife who is alive but she is very boastful, she does not think there are other people in this world. That is why I decided to bewitch her and see how far she would go. I have bewitched her and her entire family, and I want to tell you Habib, you people will suffer in your entire lives and at the end of it, you will become robbers and gangsters.

SEC: We accuse him!

CONGREG: Yes we accuse him.

SEC: Is there anyone who would like to defend him?

CONGREG: There is no one!

4<sup>th</sup> VFB: I want to tell you my name is Irene Nekesa. My name is Irene Nekesa. I used to be Daniel's wife. For me I used to love Daniel's children, even Habib here, I love him. I have no problem with Daniel's children. I have absolutely no problem with these children. I have never been involved in bewitching them. You see for me, I am barren, I never got any children. So, these are like my own children, they are the ones I could depend on to help me. And I am one among the wives of Daniel. And so Habib, do not worry about me being far away from your home. It is just that in the struggle to make ends meet, we live separately. And I have no problems with Betty.

SEC: Then go. Allow the other one to come.

5<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Mary Ajok.

SEC: Mary you are accused.

VFB: My name is Mary Ajok.. My name is Mary Ajok and I am the one who was assisting Millie Akumu. I helped Millie Akumu to bewitch the entire household of Daniel. I have bewitched all the children who belong to Daniel so that their life would not progress well. My work was to assist Millie Akumu. I have accepted all that.

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<sup>47</sup> Daniel is Habib's deceased father.

<sup>48</sup> Betty Olal is Habib's mother

SEC: We accuse her,

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse her.

6<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Millie Akumu. I have bewitched the entire household of Betty. I do not want anything in that household to go on well. I have bewitched all the children. I do not want them to grow any crops. I have bewitched Betty and all her children. I have accepted all that.

SEC: We accuse her.

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse her:

SEC: (to Habib) What is the relationship between you and this woman?

CL: She is my Uncle's wife.

SEC: Give way to the other one to come.

End of Transcript.

A couple of aspects emerge from the transcript above both regarding MB's X-ray process in general as well as about Habib's case in particular. As was expected for clients at the 'mention' stage of the X-ray process, Habib only listened to the voices emerging from the bible. He is passive in the entire session except for the one moment when his estranged wife demanded to know what his intentions were. He listened to the VFB of his runaway wife as well as to that of the man who claimed to have married her. The first VFB is that of the man who claimed to have married his ex-wife. The VFB explained that he married Habib's wife because Habib could not support her financially. He detailed his illicit affair with Habib's ex-wife and how he planned and executed her departure from Habib's house.

The second VFB was that of Habib's wife who corroborated the confession of her current husband who she refers to as a 'friend'. Habib's wife talks directly to him and to the congregation and informs him of her whereabouts, the reasons for her deserting him and reiterated her decision never to return to him. In a detailed monologue, his wife repeated several times that she would not return to Habib because 'he was not financially prepared to take care of her needs'. She further painted a picture of a prospective rosy life with her new husband who had not only supported her financially but who had also assisted her start a business. The VFB of Habib's runaway wife complained about the X-ray process and

wondered why she had to fall asleep before confessing in ‘this court’. Even though she initially declared that she would never go back to Habib, she later softened her stand but insisted that if she ever returned to Habib, it would be due to her fear of MB and his court process. Habib’s runaway wife concluded by advising him to first of all, seek financial stability and then find another woman because she was ‘not interested in burdening him financially’.

The next set of VFBs in Habib’s case brought a new angle to his tribulations but, which judged from his lackadaisical interest in them, was peripheral to his reason for consulting MB. There was the VFB of a witch who confessed to have been approached by Habib’s uncle to bewitch his entire family. The witch confessed that he bewitched Habib’s mother and his siblings so that they would face problems in their lives. Following this confession was a VFB of Habib’s stepmother who confessed that she had not done anything harmful to Habib and his siblings and held nothing against their mother. Two more VFBs, those of a witch and another woman explain that they were involved in bewitching Habib and his siblings. The two VFBs did not explain their relationships with Habib prompting the secretary to check whether Habib knew them.

In this first level, a combination of MB’s tentative divination and the X-ray creates a narrative that captures Habib’s predicament. In this narrative, Habib finds out that his wife had eloped with another man due to his poor economic status. He also finds out that his uncle had contracted a witch to bewitch his entire family. Even though there appeared to be two distinct angles to his predicament (his wife deserting him and his uncle bewitching them), MB explained to him that the two were connected. His wife running away was part of the wider scheme of misfortunes orchestrated by his uncles to ‘stagnate their progresses’. The Kiswahili phrase used by the VFBs was ‘*Nimefunga mipango yao yote*’<sup>49</sup> which directly translated to ‘I have closed all their plans’. Habib’s case then moved to the second stage, the ‘hearing’ held on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 2006. Having created the narrative, the case moved to the next stage, the hearing where more evidence would be adduced, and Habib will be accorded the chance to interrogate as well as be interrogated by the VFBs. This stage as already explained was meant to obtain the complete picture of the narrative while checking out whether the clients had played any role that might have incited their affliction.

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<sup>49</sup> This expression was quite common in confessions from witches in many of the cases reported at MBs rituals. VFBs either said directly, ‘Nimeroga’ which meant ‘I have bewitched’ or ‘Nimefunga’ which translated to ‘I have closed’



At the hearing stage of Habib's case, VFBs of his run away wife and new husband engaged both Habib and the secretary in a protracted altercation repeatedly reiterating the reasons why she deserted him and her resolve never to come back to Habib. A heated debate ensued with Habib's runaway wife declaring that she was married to someone else and repeated her justification for leaving Habib. She further explained that her current husband had given her monies and that she had already started a new business. Such arguments and debates between the clients, the secretary and the congregation on one hand and the different VFBs on the other were reminiscent of the 'hearing' stage of MB's X-ray process. I reproduce sections of Habib's hearing session below:

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: I want to tell you guys, my name is Rispah Akinyi.

SEC: Rispah you are accused.

VFB: My name is Rispah Akinyi and as I am talking to you now I am in Busia.

SEC: Yeah, what are you doing there?

VFB: I want to tell you guys that I have stopped my relationship with Habib. I have left Habib. I am no longer interested in staying with Habib anymore. I got someone else that I am, interested in living with. I want to tell Habib to look for another woman to marry and leave me alone.

SEC: Mmh!

VFB: Habib, you see the only reason I could get back to you is because your people have taken my soul and brought it to speak here. That is the only reason that would make me get back with you. But under normal circumstances I would not have come back to you. I got another husband. We wanted to make it a secret so that nobody else gets to know about it. You see even the things I took from our house like mosquito net and bed sheets, I only took them so that I could cover your child against mosquito bites. I took them so that I can cover your child against cold. But as of now, I have two huge blankets that I have been bought, and the two bed sheets that I took from our house. As of now, I am just here, I have started a new life and I just want to stay with this husband. My new husband is the one who is taking care of me; he has given me money to start my business. He has also said that he will give me more money to buy millet, beans and maize and sell it for a profit. He has even promised to give me money to buy fish and sell it at the local market. Those are the businesses that my current husband has initiated for me.

SEC: Howl and go back to your home!

VFB: I am asking you, (Habib) do you want me to come back to the old life? You could not even buy me vegetables, you could not even buy me oil to cook vegetables, clothes were always a problem, even soap in the house was a problem, now I want to ask you, do you want to bring me back to the hardships that I already experienced and from which I already left?

Habib: But where were the soaps that you were using coming from? Were they coming from your current husband?

VFB: What I would just like to tell you Habib, is you should just look for another wife who can manage the difficult life with you. I am not able to tolerate the difficulties that we had in our marriage. And if I cannot tolerate that type of life, why are you people forcing me to go back to a difficult life? Now you people, when someone already explained that they cannot survive that kind of life, and you are forcing them to go back to that life, is this fair even in the presence of God?

Habib: Is God the one who asked you to leave me?

SEC: You go back to your home! ..... Go back to your home.

VFB: I want to ask you Habib, what exactly did you want? Explain to me clearly.

Habib: I want you to come back to my house tomorrow. Come back home because I am the one who got you from your parents.

VFB: Just how am I going to start on that type of life again?

Habib: Who got you out of your parent's home?

VFB: You want me to run away with the money that this man has given me? You see this man lives in Bungoma. He actually works at the Bungoma bus stop.

Habib: Exactly where in Bungoma does he stay?

VFB: If I come back to you in Bungoma, what is he going to think about me? You see, he has given me money to start my business, he has paid for my rent, and he gives me money to buy food. I want to ask you people, you want me to run away from this man? And when he finds me in Bungoma and asks me why I deceived him, what am I going to tell him?

Habib: You should come back home tomorrow!

(Silence)

VFB: The only thing I request you people is to give me a week, so that I may look for ways of running away from this guy. And you know, when I come to Bungoma, Habib should look for a way of concealing my presence. This man should not know where I am. The other alternative is for us to move to a different location.

Habib: You see, when you ran away, I did not give you a week. You just waited for me to go to work then you vanished.

VFB: You see I really love this man, and I do not want him to have a fight with Habib. I really do not want him to fight with Habib.

SEC: Then howl so that you may go back to Habib. We do not want you to give us too many stories. Just howl and go back to your Habib.

VFB: I only beg you people to give me one week to make arrangements to get back with Habib. I do not want to lie to you by saying that I will come back tomorrow. You see today is Friday, so just give me till next Friday. During this time, I will look for ways of running away from this guy and get back to Habib even though I now know that I am going back to a very difficult life.

Habib: Okay then howl, pack your belongings and come back home!

VFB: You see I had promised that I would never ever leave Habib. But life can become completely unbearable until you decide to leave someone. That is why I left Habib, but to be honest, I would not have left him if it were not for the problems. In the first place Habib is quite harsh, if you ask him anything, he quarrels you and makes lots of noise. Even if you people insist that I go back to him, I will just stay for a few days and leave him again if he will not have changed his behaviour.

SEC: You just howl.

VFB: Now I do not want to hear lots of things from you people, I have informed you that I will get back to Habib, next Friday.

SEC: Just howl so that you can come back.

Habib: You howl, pack your stuff and come back home.

VFB: Alternatively, let me see if I can get time to run away tomorrow. You see I cannot just leave now because I have a young child. At the same time, you should also allow me to sell the things that I have already bought so that I can leave with money.

Habib: Even from my home you left with money.

VFB: You see at this moment, I am just from buying groundnuts with a lady colleague of mine. I just came to my house with groundnuts and millet and a few other items for selling. We are just from that trip and I am yet to sell the stuff. So you people should wait for me to sell these items before I can get back to Habib.

SEC: You howl!

Habib: You howl and come back with the money that you left with.

(Silence).

VFB: I have agreed to everything so you people just forgive me like that. Please forgive me.

SEC: Then howl!

Habib: You howl!

VFB: What do you people want me to do?

SEC: Howl!

Habib: Howl and come back to your home!

VFB: Do you people want me to howl?

Habib and SEC: Yes!

VFB: How do I make that howl?

SEC: Just howl and go back to your home.

The VFB howled seven times and the congregation responded thus:

CONGREG: Go back to Habib!

This second stage of the X-ray process had striking similarities with the first one. The VFB of Habib's runaway wife confessed to have eloped with another man who she lavishly praised as loving, caring and financially stable. She was initially stubborn and complained to the congregation that it was unfair for demanding that she goes back to living with Habib. It is instructive to note here that MB justified his institution of the X-ray or courtroom process as a way of determining the truth and meting out justice. As the session progressed the clear character of the 'hearing' stage emerged when the VFB, the secretary and Habib engaged in a heated argument with the VFB insisting that she would not go back to living with Habib while Habib and the secretary demand that she goes back. The VFB stated that she would not go back to Habib because he was too poor and harsh. She explained that she had found a better husband who took good care of her and had even started a business for her. She would not reunite with Habib before she had sold her stock. Besides, she would not want to lie and run away with her new husband's money. She too appealed for justice when she demanded to know from the congregation whether it was justified to demand that she reunites with Habib against her own will.

In reply to his wife's plea, Habib argued that he too cared for her and that she was still married to him. Habib considered himself to be responsible for her as he was the one who took her away from her parents. The secretary too demanded that she goes back to her home. As the argument between Habib and the VFB of his wife raged, the secretary intervened and demanded that the VFB howls and returns back to her home. Although Habib's wife initially insisted that she would never go back to living with Habib, she later relented, begged for forgiveness, and negotiated to be allowed a week to devise a plan to return to Habib. As she toned down her defiant attitude, an emboldened Habib demanded

that she return immediately. He countered her arguments stating that that he had also provided for her up keep (soaps etc,) that she left with his money and that she never took a week to desert him. Habib and the secretary cajoled her to howl and every time the VFB howled the congregation responded by demanding that she goes back to Habib.

The VFB of the man living with Habib's wife was next to make a confession. The VFB unlike many others went direct to his confession without mentioning his name and engaged Habib and the secretary in prolonged and defiant arguments. I reproduce parts of the verbatim accusations and counter accusations below.

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: I am the one who is living with Rispah at the moment. Initially I did not want it to be known that I am the one staying with Rispah and so I sent her to stay with another woman and start her business in Busia. You see, there is this businesswoman in Busia who I used to assist transport her business products. She is the one to whom I sent Rispah to live with and learn business skills. I did not want it to be known that I was her husband. I wanted her to live with this lady and learn how to do business. I advised her to tell anyone who cared to ask that she had no husband; that she only desired to stay on her own and do her business. I told her never to say that I was her husband. And that was why we wanted to start a business in Busia. You see, recently I sent her to the woman who lives in Bumala and I am glad they are now coping well. They have actually started their business. I have given her Kshs 4,000 (approx 50 USD) to start her business. We have actually found a house in Busia. We have rented a flat in Busia from a guy known as Bakari. Bakari has several flats that he rents out. And so this wife of mine lives in Busia and we have solemnly promised each other that she should never ever go back to Habib Okoth. We have agreed on that one. The next thing she would like to do is to get a national identification card so that she may go about her businesses freely. At the moment she has no national identification card. She complained to me that Habib never wanted her to get her national identification card. I now want to explain to you people that at the moment I am the husband to Rispah. And we have agreed to keep it a secret. Now you people tell me what you want?

SEC: You howl and break up with Habib's wife.

VFB: My home is in Mateka. My father is called Simon Keya from Mateka. I am his son. I am from the Baengele clan. I have explained everything to you people and you should now tell me what you want. You see, I have realised that I am falling asleep in public and this is really dangerous.

SEC: Just howl and break up.

Habib: Howl and break up.

VFB: I wanted to transport cement for a client and now I have just suddenly fallen asleep. I am just here at the Bungoma Bus stop.

Habib: Howl and break up.

VFB: I am just here at the Bungoma Bus stop.

SEC: Okay.

Habib: Howl and break up.

VFB: I wonder what the point is in so many stories. I cannot see why you have called me here and so just let me get out of this sleep and go away.

SEC: You howl before you go.

Habib: You howl and break up and get out of here.

SEC: Howl and be fast!

VFB: Let me tell you people, I am not going to leave this woman. You better kill me, but I am not going to leave her. She is such a nice woman. Let me tell you she is a very nice woman.

SEC: Just howl and stop telling us many stories.

VFB: This is such a nice woman, if she gets a nice husband, she can be very nice.

SEC: You howl!

Habib: You howl!

VFB: Let me just tell you, this woman is cute. She is just a good woman.

SEC: You howl and stop giving us many stories!

VFB: This woman is just too beautiful. Habib is just taking her for a ride and mistreating her, yet she is such a good woman. She is a very good woman. Habib cannot take good care of this woman.

SEC: You howl and stop wasting our time with your stories.

VFB: I know you Habib; you are a very useless person. I know you very well; do not imagine that I do not know you. You are a useless fellow. You are just a simple artisan. You are incapable of taking care of such a woman. You cannot even measure up to my financial capabilities. Let me ask you, can your financial abilities measure up to mine? You are just one hell of a useless person.

SEC: You howl and stop your foolishness here!

Habib: Howl!

VFB: Let me tell you, there is no way you can make me leave this woman. Let me ask you, can you even buy this woman a suit? Can you? Even some of the nice clothes she wore when she was still living at your home, I am the one who bought them for her. Let me ask

you, those nice clothes she wore while still living with you, was it you who bought them for her? Who do you think you are?

SEC: Go away, you thief! Howl!

Habib: Howl!

Silence.

VFB: I want to tell you guys, I am not going to let this woman go back, because, you Habib, you cannot even buy her a dress alone.

SEC: You go away, howl! Before you got her, what do you think she was wearing? Howl!

VFB: I don't want to continue talking to someone like this one (means Habib).

SEC: Then howl and get out of here.

Habib: Howl!

VFB: In the first place you are just a miser - a real miser. Let me go away, I don't want to talk to you anymore. You guys now tell me what you want. What do you want me to do?

Habib: You howl and break up!

SEC: Just Howl!

VFB: Do you want me to howl? And really why do you want me to howl? What is the importance of howling or what is the howling supposed to achieve?

SEC: We shall tell you.

The VFB howled seven times. Every time it howled, the congregation responded:

CONGREG: You should break up!

End of transcript.

The content of this confession are similar to those of Habib's wife in many respects. The VFB declared that he would rather die than allow Habib's wife to go back to her home. He showered praise on Habib's wife beauty, boasted about his financial abilities, and then launched a tirade of vitriol on Habib before demanding that the congregation explain the reason for his being called into the courtroom. He humiliated Habib by describing him as 'useless', 'a miser', 'a simple artisan', and someone whose financial abilities could not measure up to his'. Habib on his part did not dispute any of the statements made by the VFB unlike in the first confession where he countered allegations made by his wife. Instead he

restricted his interactions with this VFB to demanding that he howl. The secretary was the only one who argued with the VFB. As the VFB continued with its chest thumping, the secretary lost her cool demeanour and ordered the VFB to split up with Habib's wife. She referred to the VFB as 'foolish' and 'a thief'. The VFB's confession concluded when he howled and the congregation retorting that he should break up with Habib's wife.

Five other confessions were made regarding the case of Habib on this second hearing. These confessions were similar to those made in the first stage with one exception. In the first stage there was a witch who confessed to have been approached by Habib's uncle to bewitch their household. The VFB of the uncle did not make any confessions at the first stage. In the second stage however, the uncles VFB appeared and admitted to have approached the witch. I reproduce sections of the last five confessions as they appeared on the second stage below.

The transcript.

3<sup>rd</sup>. VFB: I want to explain to you clearly my name is Gideon Kano.  
My name is Gideon Kano.

SEC: You are accused!

VFB: My name is Gideon Kano.

SEC: Mr. Kano you are accused.

VFB: My name is Gideon Kano.

SEC: You are accused.

VFB; I just want to explain to you clearly, I am the one who was involved in helping Mr Martin Jumba, to bewitch the entire household of Mr. Daniel. I am the one who bewitched all the children of Mr. Daniel. I have bewitched all the children that belong to Betty. For me, I am not in the wrong. I just took a contract from one of my clients as that is my work. I want you people to tell me; what did you want?

SEC: Just howl and remain there!

(Silence)

Habib: Just howl and remain there!

VFB: You people, just explain it to me well. What did you want me to do?

SEC: (in a loud and commanding voice) Just howl and remain there!



VFB: You people wanted me to howl?

SEC: (Shouts back) Howl and remain there!

The VFB howled five times and the congregation responded:

CONGREG: Remain there!

4<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Martin. I want to explain to you people, my name is Martin Jumba.

SEC: You are accused!

VFB: My name is Martin Jumba. I have accepted my mistakes. I am the one who bewitched the entire household of Mr. Daniel. I did so because he also bewitched my own house. We people bewitched each other. They bewitched my household and I bewitched theirs. We are people who have been bewitching each other. So where is the problem?

SEC: The fact that you bewitched his household is where the problem is.

VFB: I want to explain to you clearly, I was fully involved in bewitching (Daniel's household) and I am still continuing. I am still continuing to spoil all the children that belong to Betty. I have agreed I was involved in all this. Now you people tell me what did you want? Tell me fast, I want to go!

SEC: Howl!

(Silence)

Habib: Howl!

VFB: You people wanted me to howl?

CONGREG: Yes

VFB: How did you people want me to howl? Please explain to me clearly.

The secretary and the congregation mimicked a howl and VFB howled seven times. Every time the VFB howled the congregation responded thus:

CONGREG: May your evils revert back to you!

5<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Irene Nekesa.

SEC: You are accused.

(Silence)

SEC: Tell us about yourself Irene.

VFB: My name is Irene Nekesa.

SEC: You are accused!

VFB: For me I have no problem with Mrs Betty's children. I have no ill feelings against Betty's children.

SEC: Okay. Then leave.

6<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Mary Ajok. I want to tell you clearly, my name is Mary Ajok.

SEC: You are accused.

VFB: My Name is Mary Ajok. I am a witch and I am the one who assisted Millie.... Millie Akumu to bewitch Betty's entire household. I have really bewitched the entire household of Betty. I have bewitched, I have bewitched I have bewitched.... I have bewitched.... I have bewitched .... I have really bewitched. I assisted Millie to bewitch Betty's entire household. And I am just a witch, I really do not know what is going on between these two people, I just assisted. I do not even know who Betty is. The only person I know is Millie. She is the one that I know, and she is the one I assisted. I have accepted that I am the one who did that. So what did you people want? Explain to me clearly.

SEC: We only want you to howl.

(Silence).

VFB: You people wanted me to howl?

SEC: Yes, howl quickly, you are even late?

VFB: You want me to howl?

CONGREG: Yes

The VFB howled six times and the congregation responded every time the VFB howled:

CONGREG: Remain there!

NB: This last VFB spoke in a shaky and stuttering voice.

7<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Millie .... My name is Millie Akumu. I have bewitched the entire household of Betty.

SEC: You are accused.

VFB: So you people wanted me to howl as well?

SEC: Yes

VFB: That howling, how do you want me to do it?

The secretary mimics a howling sound, and the VFB howled six times with the congregation responding every time it howled:

CONGREG: May your evil intentions revert to you!

End of transcript.

The last five VFB's confessed to have conjured witchcraft against Habib, his mother and his siblings. The 3<sup>rd</sup> VFB was that of a witch who claimed to have been hired by Habib's uncle to bewitch them. The VFB pleaded his innocence as he was working on the 'instructions from his client'. The VFB concluded by howling and the congregation asking it to 'Remain there' (means captured in the bible). The fourth VFB was that of Habib's Uncle. The VFB confessed to have contracted a witch to 'spoil' Betty's <sup>50</sup> entire household because Betty's husband had initially bewitched his own household. The VFB stated that his actions were only retaliatory. The secretary demanded that the VFB howls and the congregation retorted; 'May your evils return to you' for each of the seven times that the VFB howled.

The three final VFBs were the same as those that appeared in the mention stage of the X-ray process. The VFB of Habib's stepmother confessed like in the mention stage that she did not harbour any ill feelings against Habib and his siblings. The 6<sup>th</sup> VFB was that of yet another witch who confessed to have been hired to bewitch Habib, his mother and their entire household. The witch, just like the 3<sup>rd</sup> VFB claimed to have been hired to conjure the witchcraft against Habib and his siblings, and even claimed that she never knew who Habib's mother was. The VFB was asked to howl and remain captured in the bible. The final VFB admitted to have hired the witch (6<sup>th</sup> VFB) to bewitch Habib, his mother and her entire household. The congregation demanded that the VFB howled and then responded with the statement 'May your evil intentions revert back to you'. By this statement it was expected that the evil designed or wished for by the VFB would dovetail back to it.

At the end of this session, Habib's case was ready for the 'Judgement stage' where the witches who confessed that they were contracted to bewitch him and his family would be set

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<sup>50</sup> Betty is Habib's mother. The expression 'to spoil' (in Kiswahili 'Kuharibu' ) is similar to the other that I already explained 'to close' (in Kiswahili 'kufunga' ). The two expressions were quite common in witchcraft accusations and equated to the expression 'to bewitch' and always referred to the sending of unspecified afflictions to a victim.

on fire through the bible. The witches would die after this ritual while the evil intentions of those who contracted them would ricochet and affect them. Habib's uncle for instance was expected to suffer the same hardships that he wished Habib's household. At the same time, his runaway wife was expected to come back to him as she had promised in the confession. Habib was given the next appointment for the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2009.

On the judgment day for his case, Habib reported as usual at MB's ritual arena, held consultations with MB and the secretary and later trouped with the rest of the clients to the X-ray room. In the previous X-ray session (the hearing), Habib's wife had requested to be allowed a week to sell her stock and prepare for her return to Habib. Going by her promise, it was expected that she would have returned back to Habib's home by the time Habib returned to MB. This had not happened. MB however informed Habib that the actual effects of the ritual would only take place after the judgement stage

The confessions at the Judgment stage for Habib were similar to the ones at the 'Hearing'. All the seven VFBs involved in Habib's case appeared in virtually the same order as they did at the hearing level. The VFB for Habib's run away wife repeated most of what she said at the hearing stage, initially stating that she would not be returning back to Habib but later begging to be allowed time to dispose off her stock before returning back to Habib. At this stage though, the secretary was very strict and promised to burn her if she would not return back to Habib immediately. Her current husband was however adamant that he would never let her go back to Habib. He repeated his vow at the 'hearing stage' that he would rather die than allow her to go back to her former husband. The VFB of Habib's stepmother too appeared and restated her position, namely that she had nothing against Habib, his mother and his siblings. The witchcraft confessions from Habib's uncle and aunt and the witches they contracted also appeared and made confessions similar to those they made at the hearing stage. They confessed to have contracted witches to bewitch Habib's mother and his siblings. Their narrations were corroborated by the VFBs of the witches they contracted.

The Judgment stage was thus concluded and when the secretary set the bible on fire for this session, Habib knew that the witches confessing for his case would be burnt and later die and his wife would break up with her husband and come back to him.

The next session for Habib's case was the 'Outcome' where it was expected that Habib would come to find out whether the witches had died. He would also return to MB, probably with the all-important news that he was reunited with his wife as she had promised.

I met Habib at MB's place was the 18<sup>th</sup> of November and was anxious to find out if his wife had come back to him. I chatted with him before the X-ray commenced in the afternoon. He appeared desolate, stressed out and despondent. His wife had not returned home. This was in spite of the fact that she had in the previous X-rays sessions promised to go back to him in a week's time. The secretary and MB had assured Habib that his wife would go back to him within this time. Habib informed me that after the expiry of the first week he tried to search for his wife and her new husband using information from the confessions in the last X-ray session. The VFB for his wife had claimed that she lived in Busia and her new husband worked around the bus station in Bungoma. Habib made several trips to Busia to try and trace his wife at the market place as well as in the rental houses where she claimed to live. He also tried to locate her new husband at the bus terminus in Bungoma as was claimed by the VFB in the last session. All his attempts were fruitless. This was when he decided to come back to MB to find out what was going on. He however avoided informing MB that he attempted to locate his wife and her husband using the information from the X-ray sessions. MB had warned him not to. But when the period within which his wife was supposed to have come back elapsed, Habib decided to search for her in the places she claimed to reside.

During this visit, MB informed Habib that he would perform another X-ray session to find out why his wife had not returned. Habib tramped into the X-ray room with other clients on this afternoon and waited for his turn. When it was Habib's turn, six VFBs made confessions. The VFB for his wife was the first to confess. In her confession she claimed to have planned to return back to Habib but her current husband had pleaded with her not to leave him. She claimed that her current husband had threatened to commit suicide if she left him. As is evident from the Transcript, parts of which I reproduce below, she reiterated the reasons for her decision to leave Habib as she had done in the previous confessions. She further insisted that she loved her new husband who had showered her with lots of love and money. In her usual defiant mood, she claimed that she would revert back to Habib only because she feared that MBs rituals would kill her. She further warned that she might not

live long with Habib on her return and could even resort to poisoning him so that he would get out of her way. I reproduce parts of her confession below.

The transcript.

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: My name is Rispah Akinyi. .

SEC: You are accused!

VFB: I want to ask you, who has accused me?

SEC: Who do you know here?

Habib: Who do you know here?

VFB: I want to tell you, recently, my heart was telling me to pack my belongings and go back to Habib. But then my husband really showered me with lots of love and money because I told him I wanted to go back to Habib. He said that he would commit suicide if I left him. He really cried at night and did not even go to work for a couple of days. He kept crying and stalking me until I told him that it was okay, I would not be going back to Habib. That is why for the last two days, he has been able to go to work. And I want to tell you Habib, if it was not for the fact that you have called me here, I would never even think of coming back to you. I tell you this for sure because the kinds of problems I got from your place were just enough for me. There were problems every time I asked for anything – soap, food, and even pants were a problem. What did you expect me to do? I want you Habib to look for another wife, not me. For me I am married. I am married to Godwin Oloo. Oloo lives in town although he was born in Busia. As I am talking to you I am in Busia and I am involved in business with another woman. The woman comes from a place called Bumala. I am currently having my own business. Initially I started with Kshs 4,000 and now I have about Kshs 10,000. I am going on very well and I would not want to come back to the problems at your place. The only reason that I would come back is because you have forced me to come back using your system here. I have seen this place is a dangerous place. And that is the only reason that would make me come back to you because I have seen if I refuse, you guys can easily kill me. I really do not want to get myself into difficulties like I had before with you.

SEC: You go back to your husband.

VFB: I want to ask you people, when did you want me to come back?

SEC: You should go back even today.

(Silence)

Habib: Even today!

VFB: It is not possible for me to come back today because I will not have sold any of the things I bought from Uganda recently. I cannot leave them here yet I have invested in them.

SEC: So when do you want to go back?

(Silence)

SEC: Continue talking.

VFB: I do not know why you are disturbing me like this. When I left your place, I never carried anything belonging to you. I only took a few things from you like mosquito net and a blanket for your child. If you want a wife, why don't you marry someone else? You often boasted to me that there were better women than me; you even said you could get a better woman than me. You often abused me and even blocked me from acquiring a national identification card. I only survived at your place because I had other friends (male). They used to give me money secretly - without your knowledge. Otherwise there was nothing I could do.

Silence.

VFB: So you people should give me up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of next month. That is enough time for me to sell the stuff I have bought. Give me up to the afternoon of the 3<sup>rd</sup> November. That will give me enough time to sell my stock and also organise the way I will sneak away from this man. I do not want him to know that I plan to run away. I do not want to lie to you that I will come back today. The other day I told him I would leave, he just started crying and begged me not to go. He said he would take poison. I would rather stay and make him believe that I will be staying with him and then sneak out.

VFB: So what do you people want me to do?

SEC: You just howl and go back to your home.

Habib: Howl and get back to your home.

VFB: Here in Busia I live in Nyangweso's rental houses. Nyangweso has rental houses that people rent and this is where I stay. I am new here and so I cannot explain very clearly where the houses are located. What I want to tell you Habib is that even if I am coming back to you I am not sure if I will stay with you for long. And if you really annoy me, I could even poison and kill you instead of you making me suffer when you do not even assist me.

SEC: You howl and go back home.

VFB: Now you people tell me your last word so that I can go! I do not want long stories from you!

SEC: You just howl.

VFB: You want me to howl?

CONGREG: Yes, howl!

VFB: How do I howl! Just explain it to me.

Congregation mimics a howl. The VFB howls 7 times and the congregation responds:

CONGREG: Go back to your home!

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: My name is Godwin Oloo. And I want to tell you I will not leave this woman.

SEC: You are accused!

VFB: My name is Godwin Oloo. And I want to tell you I am never ever going to leave this woman. This woman loves me and I also love her. If any of you had such a woman, you can decide that it is better to die than to leave her. You see, this woman knows how to love. The only problem is that the man who married her was not taking good care of her. I knew this woman earlier on even when she was married and I started to assist her by giving her money. She loved me and I loved her, I want to tell you that we had a secret relationship and due to this, we decided to just come out and live together. And I want to assure you, I am not going to allow this woman to leave me and go back to that guy called Habib who does not know how to take care of a woman. If you see this woman now in Busia, you would not believe that she is the same woman you saw in Bungoma. I have taken very good care of her and even bought her very nice clothes. You would not recognize her now. She is very lovely now. And I love her and she loves me. We have therefore decided we had rather die than leave each other. I have opened up a business for her. It is a business that Habib could not even start for her. I want to tell you Habib, I actually know you but you do not know me. You see, before I took away your wife, I used to pass by your place and I got to know you without you noticing me. When I was in Bungoma, I used to run a taxi. Then I stopped and became a driver but later I became a bus conductor.

SEC: Howl and leave someone else's wife!

(Silence)

SEC: Hurry up!

Silence.

SEC: Howl and leave Habib's wife alone! Hurry up!

At this point there are no voices from the bible and the secretary leads the congregation in singing the chorus until the previous VFB resumes his confession.

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: I know you very well Habib. In fact the other day, some people informed me that you were looking for me at the bus stop. You know we people working at the stage have a very good information system. There are times when people lose their luggage in the public service vehicles. And so when they come to ask for them from us, our colleagues have the duty to conceal your identity. And so when they explained that someone was looking for me, and then gave the description of that person, I knew it was the guy whose wife I had taken. Do not be afraid about your child. I am just going to take good care of your child. You see I took your wife after you were unable to take good care of her. Your child is also fine. I do not see why you are troubled. You had better just go and look for another woman and marry. You see this one is my fifth wife. The others have been going away and I am not going to allow this one to go away. I have decided that I had rather die than give her up.



Rispah is a good woman and if she gets a good husband, then you wonder why she would leave him and come back to someone like Habib.

(Silence)

VFB: My word for you people is you can do whatever you want but I am never going to leave her. You had better kill me. I cannot stand the thought of leaving her again. You see since she came to my house, she has showed me all her love until it has reached a point where I have forgotten everything. I am almost mad because of the love she has showed me.

SEC: Then howl.

VFB: You guys can do whatever you want but I am never going to leave her.

SEC: You howl fast.

VFB: You see the other day when she told me that she was planning to get back to you (means Habib), I got a serious headache and lost my appetite. I got stressed because of that and I could not go to work. I knelt to her and begged her not to go. This is not a joke, we are not joking here. For this woman, one of us will have to die before she goes to someone else.

(Silence)

VFB: I want to tell you Habib, if you meet Rispah right now, you will not be able to recognise her, she is well dressed now, and she even puts on lipstick, which she would have never heard at your place. I want to tell you nobody can agree to go back to Egypt<sup>51</sup>. You see those people left Egypt after they had really seen trouble there and none of them would agree to go back there. You see, when Rispah was at your place, it was as if she was in Egypt and when she came to me, it is as if she is in Canaan. And so just let her have the fun of having a man take care of her instead of the problems she had at your place.

SEC: Then howl.

VFB: You see now, I really do not want to get into your issues because now this is like the politics of ODM<sup>52</sup> and NARC Kenya. So you try the way you can, if you succeed then it is okay, if I also succeed, then that is okay as well. But I am not going to leave Rispah without a fight. It could actually make me plan bad things for you – plans that I cannot reveal now.

SEC: Howl!

VFB: You let me now go

SEC: Do not go, before howling first!

VFB: What do you guys want me to do?

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<sup>51</sup> The VFB is using the analogy of the biblical journey of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land in Canaan.

<sup>52</sup> ODM and NARC Kenya are two key political parties that were embroiled in a tussle for political supremacy in Kenya at the time of this fieldwork.

CONGREG: Howl!

VFB: What do you guys want me to do?

SEC: Howl and leave someone else's wife alone.

VFB: And that howling, how do you want me to do it?

Congregation demonstrated how the VFB should howl. The VFB howled six times and the congregation responded:

CONGREG: Leave someone else's wife alone!

SEC: Give way to the others to come.

3<sup>rd</sup> VFB: My name is Millicent Akumu. I am the one who had bewitched the entire homestead of Betty. But I am now dead. I died after you people poured paraffin on me and burned me. I am Millicent Akumu.

SEC: Okay you go away, you are a spirit.

4<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Mary Ajok and I am the one who contracted a witch to bewitch Betty's entire homestead. I have however stopped when I learnt that the witch I hired died recently. I am now really scared, I will never do it again. You people forgive me.

SEC: That is okay but if you repeat it again we shall burn you. Make way for the next one.

5<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Irene Nekesa and as I told you I have no problem with you Habib. I have absolutely no problem it is just that with life one never knows. I stayed away from you people but I have nothing against any of you.

SEC: That is okay; just remain like that.

6<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Gideon Kano and I am dead. I am dead. You people burnt me here the other day; I am dead.

SEC: You remain there like that.

End of Transcript.

The outcome session of the X-ray case for Habib ended with this confession for this day. Habib's case was expected to have two types of outcomes, one that was expected to be obvious for him i.e. his wife's return. He would however listen to VFBs to know the fate of the witches who had conjured witchcraft against him and his siblings as well as those who contracted the witches to carry out their activities. Since his wife had not returned the X-ray

session was set to find out why she had not returned. For a Fourth time, his wife confessed to be married to another man and that she was more in love and happy with her new husband than with Habib. Like in the previous X-rays sessions, she lists her business successes and the enormous support she received from her new husband. She explained that she had not returned to Habib as she promised the last time because her new husband threatened to commit suicide if she left and had resorted to stalking her. In what had now become her characteristic defiant mien, she demanded to be allowed to live with her new husband, as she did not want to go back to a life full of hardships with Habib. Later in the confession and under constant prodding by the secretary she agreed to come back but with a caveat: that she had only acquiesced to come back due to pressure from the 'court' and this could even push her to poison Habib so that he 'may leave her alone'. As the confession and interrogation persisted she negotiated with the secretary for a new return date and the secretary asked her to howl as proof that she had agreed to return to Habib. The VFB howled and the congregation responded by asking her to go back to her former husband. Her current husband's confession was similar to hers and even more dramatic. He confessed to be madly in love with Habib's wife and vowed to leave her over his dead body. In an undeterred monologue, he reiterates their love for each other, and likens her (Habib's wife) departure from Habib to the biblical journey of the Israelites from the land of Egypt to their promised land – Canaan. He finally vowed that he would never let her go and dared the congregation to do what it wanted. The VFB defied the secretary's incessant demands that he lets Habib's wife to go back to her home. The VFB stated that he had let go four other wives and he was not ready to let go any other. Just like Habib's wife had done, he too threatened that he could commit unspecified harm to Habib if he persisted in his demands to have his wife back. Eventually the secretary obliged the VFB to howl and the congregation responded by demanding that he lets Habib's wife to go back to her home.

Four other VFBs appear and make confessions regarding to Habib's case. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> VFBs belonged to two witches who confessed that they were dead after they were burnt by MB's fire in the previous session. The two had confessed to have been hired to bewitch Habib and his entire household in all the previous sessions. The outcome of their punishment appeared to have progressed according to MB's ritual prescriptions, in which all witches were ritually burnt and died of natural courses. The fourth VFB was that of Habib's aunt who claimed to have hired the witch (3<sup>rd</sup> VFB). She claimed to have stopped her quest for witchcraft after the death of the witch whose expertise she had previously employed.

Habib's stepmother appeared and again asserted like she had in all previous sessions that she had no ill feelings against Habib and his siblings.

Habib had now been to MBs rituals four times but his major problem had not been solved. Throughout my interviews and chats with him, it was obvious that his main interest was to have his wife back. Even though MB had identified other misfortunes and solved them, these were in his opinion peripheral and to the extent that his wife had not returned home, he still considered it necessary to continue the search by all means. Even though MB and the secretary had asked him to go back home and wait for his wife, Habib augmented the ritual by physically trying to locate her and her new husband. Habib maintained his trust on MB and the X-ray process and blamed the failure of his wife to come back after the last session to her character which he described as crafty and money minded: *'You know women nowadays are very crafty and prefer men who have lots of money. I have listened to her (in the sessions) and realized that she was very crafty and the things she is saying are actually true, It is just that I had not taken a keen interest on what she was doing when we lived as husband and wife'*.

As we bid farewell to each other and promised to meet on his next appointment, Habib asked me to replay the audiotape on which I had recorded the day's proceedings. As I replayed the tape, I noticed him memorizing the town and the name of the owner of the rental flats in which his wife claimed to be living. I knew he would try to locate his wife if she would not come back as she promised.

MB also attributed the failure of the case to Habib's wife's craftiness. He however promised Habib that he would eventually resolve the case by the next session if her new husband would not let her return to her home. MB explained that her new husband would be made to howl 40 times if he would not have released Habib's wife. This would make him grow insane and she would desert him. MB explained that occasionally VFBs failed to act according to the confessions even when the ritual was successfully performed. It was common for witches or murderers not to succumb to the fire by engaging other medicine men and medicines. When this happened, MB modified the ritual the next time as he prayed to God to grant him more powers to deal with them. Modifications would include, forcing VFBs to howl many times, subjecting witches to strong fires, or capturing them in a tin and set them on fire using lots of firewood and paraffin.

### **The VFB howls 40 times.**

Habib reported back to MB on the 4th of December 2006, a day after his wife was supposed to have come back to him. He looked forlorn and desperate. It was becoming obvious that the absence of his wife and child and the repeated trips to MBs for the rituals were taking their toll on him. In the course of the previous three weeks, I was in touch with him and I knew that his wife had not returned. Still, he tried to locate his wife using the descriptions that she gave during the last session at MB's in vain. After a brief discussion with the secretary, she booked an appointment for him with MB. MB was as usual very supportive and full of confidence that he would be able to bring back Habib's wife. During this consultation, MB informed Habib that he would force the VFB of his wife's new husband to howl forty times after which he would have no options but to let go off his wife.

Later in the afternoon, Habib and the other clients tramped into the courtroom for the day's proceedings. Several confessions regarding other clients proceeded before Habib's case eventually came up. Only two VFBs appeared today: the first one was that of his wife followed by that of her new husband. Apparently the witchcraft angle to Habib's misfortunes had been resolved in the last session. In what turned out to be the shortest confessions in Habib's X-ray sessions, his wife's VFB reiterated her stand that she was not interested in coming back to Habib. She was however less defiant and demanded to know from Habib if he would mistreat her when she returned. Every time she asked any question, the secretary would direct Habib to answer them as is clear from the transcript below:

#### The transcript:

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: I want to tell you I am Rispah Akinyi. I am here in Bungoma. The woman I normally work with had brought me oranges to sell and then I started feeling sleepy and so I have come to sleep a little. And right now I am having really bad dreams. So what do you people really want? Habib what do you really want?

SEC: Howl so that you may go back home.

VFB: Habib, I want to really ask you, do you sincerely want me to come back to you?

SEC: (to Habib) She is asking whether you really want her to come back to you.

Habib: You go back to your home!

VFB: You want me to come back so that you may mistreat me the way you used to? Or have you changed your behaviour?

(Silence)

SEC: That question is to you Habib, answer it.

Habib: You go back to your house now.

SEC: (to Habib) She is asking you if you will change her life for the better or if she will have the same problems as she had before?

VFB: I can only come back if my life will be better. Only if it will be different from what I had before. You see previously, any time I asked you for anything, you always quarrelled me and said you had no money. Even when I asked for something as simple as bathing soap, it was always a problem. Whatever I asked for was a problem. You would leave early in the morning saying that you went to look for money but you always came back in the evening empty handed. Who can survive that kind of life?

Sec: (to Habib) She is asking you to tell her who could survive without money?

Silence (Habib does not answer, and the VFB continues)

VFB: You see my current husband started by giving me some little money, I have started a small business and up to now I have accumulated about Kshs 30,000. My business is progressing really well. But if you people want me to go back to Habib, then I have accepted. I cannot tell you the exact day I will come back but it will be any day from today. You now want me to howl?

CONGREG: Yes!

The VFB then howled seven times and the congregation responded by shouting,

CONGREG: Go back to your husband!

Habib's wife was less defiant and promised to come back to Habib as soon as she could. Probably fed up of engaging in his wife's promises, Habib did not respond to her questions even after being prodded by the secretary to respond. The next VFB was that of Habib's wife's husband. As is evident from the transcript below, he was more defiant than in the previous sessions and declared that he was prepared to die than let Habib's wife go back to her former husband. Even after being severely reprimanded by the secretary, he maintained that he would use all means to keep her. He further confessed to have procured charms that would make sure Habib's wife completely dropped her intentions to go back to her former husband.

The transcript.

VFB: My name is Godwin Oloo. And I want to tell you I am never ever going to let Rispah go. You had rather kill me, but I am not going to allow her to go back to her former husband.

SEC: You howl and let her go back to her husband.

VFB: I would rather die than let her go back to her husband.

SEC: If you start talking about death, we are definitely going to burn you here. Just howl and let someone's wife go back to her husband.

(Congregation bursts out laughing.)

SEC: (talking to the congregation) He is saying that he cannot let her go because he has started a business for her and that he had better die than let her go. He thinks we are joking here.

OMC (male): Why did you start a business for someone else's wife? You should get your own wife and start a business for her!

(Congregation laughs even more)

VFB: You see, I have given her lots of money and opened up a business for her. Even the other day, I found her having packed her clothes to leave but I pleaded with her and managed to convince her to unpack her belongings and stay with me. I am not going to let her go. In fact, I have even gone to another woman who has given me 'medicines' to put in her food so that she may no longer have the urge to go away.

SEC: You howl, we do not want to know if you started a business for her, Howl!

VFB: Now you guys tell me what you want. I have told you I am never going to leave her.

SEC: Howl!

OMC: (Female congregant advising Habib) You tell him that you also have money and that you too will start a business for her.

As the VFB continued in his defiant mode, the congregation burst out laughing every time he swore that he had rather die than let Habib's wife go. As this ensued, the secretary informed the congregation that the VFB would be made to howl many times and that every time he howled the congregation should respond by saying, 'Let Habib's wife to go back to her husband'. The secretary commanded the VFB to howl. In my previous discussions with MB he informed me that the VFB would howl 40 times. I was however only able to count 26 distinct howls. The VFB probably howled more times but some could not be heard clearly as the congregation shouted back animatedly. Even though the secretary had directed

the rejoinder to be uttered by the congregation, this later degenerated into an uncontrollable cacophony where the congregation yelled all sorts of rebuttals to the VFB. Besides asking the VFB to let go of Habib's wife, the congregation yelled back other directives like, 'Get your own wife' 'leave Habib's wife', there are many other women you could get with your money'; Habib has really suffered because of you' and 'Go away you thief'!

The X-ray session for Habib ended on this note. According to him, he understood why his wife left him. He also knew that she was married to some other man and she conducted business in the town of Busia. The problem was that MB had not managed to bring her back to him and neither had he been able to locate her and her new husband using the information that her VFB provided during the sessions. He was eager to have his wife and child back and so he augmented the ritual process with an actual physical search for his wife. It is possible to understand his desperation in view of the information that he received from MB. He visited the town of Busia severally and strolled around the market stalls in a bid to trace her. And since her new husband worked in the same town where he lived, he tried to trace him at the bus terminus severally. At the end of this session, the secretary assured Habib that his wife would definitely leave her new husband and come back to him. She further asked him to report back to MB within a month if his wife would not have returned to him. In the course of this month, it was expected that his wife's new husband would go mad if he still insisted on keeping her and she would run away from him.

The next episode in Habib's seemingly unending saga with his wife was on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 2007. It was more than a month after the last X-ray session but his wife had not come back to him. During this visit Habib consulted the secretary who as usual booked an appointment for him with MB. In this consultation, MB informed Habib that he could 'see' that his wife had already left her husband. He could not, however, tell why she had not returned to her home. To find out where she was and why she had not returned to Habib, another X-ray session would be organized where she would reveal her whereabouts and the reasons why she had not returned to Habib.

Habib once again joined the rest of the congregation for the courtroom session for a sixth time. One VFB turned up for Habib's X-ray session - that of his wife. Habib's wife confessed that she had left her husband and was now living with a lady friend. She explained that her immediate ex-husband had become mentally disturbed and even



physically assaulted her and scarred her face. As a result, she had decided to go back to Habib. The only thing that stopped her from coming back was the fact that she was too scared and was looking for an alibi for her absence. She promised to get back to Habib as soon as she was able to overcome her fears. At the end of her confession the secretary asked her to howl and the congregation responded by demanding that she should immediately go back to her home. I reproduce excerpts of the transcript below.

The transcript.

VFB: My name is Rispah Akinyi. And I have already left that man. I left that man in the hospital. He is very sick.

Habib: Where are you?

VFB: I left that man. I am now living with another woman. I am living with this woman who was training me to conduct business.

Habib: Where is that? Where are you?

SEC: Continue! Talk

Habib: Talk:

VFB: I already told you, my name is Rispah Akinyi. I am explaining to you that I am in Bumala at the moment. I already left this guy Gordon in Hospital in Kakamega.

Silence.

There was prolonged silence after the VFBs last sentence prompting the secretary to start the opening chorus. This continued for a couple of minutes until she resumed her confession

VFB: My name is Rispah Akinyi and as I told you I already left that man. As I am talking to you now, I am in Bumala. I am living with that woman who was training me to do business.

Habib: What is her name?

VFB: I want to explain to you, I am looking for a way of coming back to Habib although I do not want him to know that I was already married. I just want to tell him that I visited one of my aunts to train me how to do business. I am planning to make a good story that I will tell him. I am going to come back because you guys have really disturbed me, I do not even sleep well at night. I keep dreaming that Habib is crying and begging me to come back. I want to explain to you Habib; I have just discovered that life in this world is very difficult. You see, I was married to Gordon Oloo, but now he has become mad. I even have a scar on my face. He attacked me with his nails when he got mad. I stayed with him here in Busia hospital but he was not improving. I then transferred him to Kakamega hospital. Now his father has come to take care of him so that I can rest. At the moment I am in Bumala, making arrangements and concocting a story to tell you, but I will never let you know that I

was married. You see nobody knew that I was married. Even my family members were looking for me. I have agreed to go back to Habib. I want you people to get this clearly. I have agreed I will go back to Habib Okoth.

Habib: Which day? (asks in a commanding voice)

VFB: You see I am scared now; I would have come to Bungoma even yesterday. I am just scared and that is why I am staying with this woman.

SEC: You just go back to your home, do not fear.

VFB: I could even go to Habib's place today if I can overcome my fears. If I can overcome my fears, I will sleep at Habib's place this evening.

SEC: I hope you are now speaking the truth. You should not say that and then fail to go.

VFB: You see, I am so undecided at the moment. I could not even sleep well. There is a part of me that tells me I should go back to Habib but then there is also this other part that tells me not to go back. This confusion comes to me every time I remember the hardships I experienced while at Habib's place. I am not sure what to do, as I am talking to you now I am in Bumala.

SEC: You should go back to your home!

VFB: Now you people tell me what you want, I realize it is not so helpful to say too many things now. You guys tell me what you want and I will do exactly what you ask of me.

SEC: You howl and you will be able to go back to your home at once.

VFB: I am just making arrangements to come back to your place although I do not want you to know that I was married.

SEC: We know that already, you howl!

Habib: Howl!

VFB: I am coming back home, I could even come today; the problem is I am a little scared.

CONGREG: Howl

VFB: I am really scared.

CONGREG: Howl

VFB: I have told you everything you wanted. I have told you I will be going back home this evening. So what do you people want?

CONGREG: We want you to howl!

VFB: What do you guys want me to do?

CONGREG: We want you to howl!

VFB: Why should I howl?

SEC: So that you may overcome your fear and go back to your home.

After this confession, the VFB howled seven times and the congregation responded by saying to her: 'Go back to your home this evening'. The secretary tempered the response intermittently by shouting, 'may you cowardice leave you' and 'come back to Habib and live together peacefully'.

This session was the last one I was able to observe in the case of Habib and his wife. This case, like that of Kirwa's death followed a typical MB script. Habib presented himself with the problem of the disappearance of his wife. MB offered to resolve the problem using his X-ray process, but then widened the scope of scrutiny to include witchcraft accusations against Habib and his siblings. Based on this agreement, and the payment of the required fees, MB embarked on both a divination and a reconstructive process for Habib. The complete set of rituals did not lead to the return of his wife at home as was evident in the outcome session. His main reason for coming back to MB in this session was therefore to find out why his wife had not returned even though MB and the secretary had indicated that she would return. In the outcome session, Habib's wife declared again that she was not interested in coming back to him. Her new husband too declared that he would rather die than allow her to go back to Habib. Even though the session ended up with both of them being made to howl, Habib's wife was adamant that she would be going back only because MBs rituals compelled her to. Her husband did not make any promises about letting her go.

Habib's case had gone full circle in MBs ritual cycle. Even though more sessions were conducted to compel Habib's wife to reunite with him, these other sessions did not fit in the four categories that I already outlined. They were referred to simply as court sessions. These sessions appeared to combine both the 'outcome' and the 'judgement' sessions. Clients for instance came to find out if the witches had died and where they had not died, they would be set on fire again. Habib too came to find out why his wife had not come back to him, and after she gave her reason for not coming back, she was compelled to do so immediately. The first four sessions had not succeeded in bringing Habib's wife back to him and it was now time to for MB to alter the rituals to make it more effective. This he did by asking for more powers from his God and subjecting the VFB belonging to the husband to Habib's wife to

make 40 howls. But even with this altered ritual, Habib's wife had not returned to him. There were however new developments as observed during the last session. As promised by MB, Habib's wife confessed that she had left her husband and planned to go back to Habib because her husband had turned violent, was mentally disturbed, and lay admitted in hospital. And that being the case she would be returning to Habib as soon as she got a befitting alibi and overcame her fears.

### **3.4. Commentary.**

I selected this case to exemplify a couple of things in MBs healing rituals. These include, the ways in which MB's ritual are designed to bring a clients entire experience to bear on a case, how the different aspects of a client's case are divined and reconstructed, the ways in which the ritual process transformed from one function to the other, the ways in which the rituals are creatively altered within the lifecycle of a case as well as the ways in which clients combine both the ritual processes and other techniques to resolve their crisis. These cases are also indicative of the type of investments that clients put in the resolution of their cases as well as their trust on what they see and hear at MBs rituals. Even where outcome of the cases did not proceed as envisioned by MB, clients consistently depended on his ability to resolve even the ensuing set of circumstances. In the first case for instance, the Kirwas trusted that MB would not only be able to deal with their father's killers, but also with all others healers that they consulted.

In the initial consultations, MB informed clients that he would commit them to prayer and use the X-ray process to solve all their problems. When clients agreed with MBs identification of the range of problems to be investigated, and paid the required fee, they at the same time agreed with MB's supernatural abilities and X-ray methods to at least identify the actual details of their problems and to solve them. The X-ray process was primarily a diagnostic process where the clients got to know the cause of their afflictions. As the X-ray process advanced, it metamorphosed from a problem identification process to a problem solving – from divination to reconstruction. Witches, robbers and murderers identified at the mention stage were set on fire at the judgement stage, but only after going through the 'hearing' where the emphasis was to lay bare the truth before passing judgment. The hearing stage also gave room for the congregation to participate in the proceedings and for MB to further interrogate the clients to obtain a clear picture of the relationships between the clients and the perceived source of his afflictions. In the case of Tom, MB wanted to obtain

the facts regarding the conflict that the late Kirwa may have had with his business rivals. The protracted debates between Habib and his wife enabled an exploration of the nature of his relationship with his wife and her motive for deserting him.

But what were the real motives and actual effects of instituting such a protracted ritual healing procedure? MB always claimed that he was inspired by God to set the process. This fits well with the literature on divination systems in Africa and the nature and role of the diviners themselves. As is common with shamanism (Frank 1973) the powers of the diviner are always explained and understood within a people's cosmology and fall within their theories of illness and healing. Divination and diviners are perceived as being controlled by supernatural abilities and are unquestionably accepted as genuine. Bogoras (1909) long observed that the Chuckchee of Siberia could not afford the luxury of scepticism and so when the Shaman became hysterical in his spirit possession, the audience knew this as a sign that they would soon hear voices of powerful spirits able to divine their vital problems. The clients did not look for tricks but anxiously and respectfully looked for answers. When MB invited clients to the X-ray room, they knew it was time for them to know the source of their problems, to argue their cases out with the people who had afflicted them and to finally judge and punish them with the ritual fire. MB initiated the sessions by prayer then allowed the secretary to take over with a chorus that would bring the people responsible for the clients' afflictions to confess. MB explained and clients accepted that he had the ability to bring what he referred to as the aggressors' 'inner person' to confess through the bible in the X-ray process. He managed to do this by causing the real person to go to sleep as their 'inner persons' were forced to confess at MB's X-ray sessions. This fact was reiterated many times by the VFBs' complaints that they had fallen asleep and felt that their souls had been snatched from them to make confessions in MB's rituals. In one hilarious instance, a VFB of a policeman vehemently complained that he had been made to sleep while holding a police gun and pleaded to be allowed to wake up so that he could protect the government's property. Clients on the other hand remarked that they were able to recognize the real people speaking through the bible by their voices as well as their character. The Kirwas for instance, observed that Karinga and Raymond exhibited the same arrogance in their normal lives as they did during the X-ray sessions. Raymond had, for instance rammed his car into their main gate severally even as their father was still alive in a bid to break it. Habib on the other hand observed that he recognized his wife's voice as well as her deceitful character during the X-ray sessions. In short the clients trusted that they were speaking to their real

aggressors and even when they set them on fire, they knew they would receive their punishment.

In the case of Habib and the Kirwas the ritual process turned out to be spiral, convoluted and protracted. Every new stage produced a new actors and new circumstances. For each of the new twists, MB appeared to have a remedial step. Habib's wife's husband was made to howl 40 times after which he allegedly became mad while the master planners of Kirwa's murder were subjected to huge balls of fire. In his analysis of sorcery, Obeyesekere (1975) observed that it can be demonstrated in fact that people rarely died as a consequence of sorcery. People however believed that it was effective and therefore practised it rather than commit a direct act of physical violence. MB's clients believed that all the witches and robbers that he set on fire would die and for those who had not died it was a matter of time before they succumbed. The X-ray process too explained and dramatized the fact that it was possible for people to be burned and not succumb to the fire. Offenders subjected to MBs fire could run away from the fire (see the case of Karinga, pg 116), consult other healers when they fall ill or simply change their minds like Habib's wife had. I concluded my fieldwork before the people who planned Kirwa's murder could succumb to MB's fire even though the actual executors of their plan had confessed that they had died. In the case of Habib his wife had not returned to him even though the witches who confessed to have bewitched his family confessed to be dead and those who contracted them stated they would not attempt to bewitch them again. Did the witches and murders die? The Kirwas believed that the people who killed their father died and claimed to have witnessed the funeral procession of one of them. Did he die of the effects of MB's fire or due to a physical fight with his father, totally unrelated to MB's fire? Obeyesekere (1975) argued that in village life, people were constantly beset by personal vicissitudes and the effectiveness of magic is constantly validated by the nature of human experience. In this case any personal misfortune befalling an enemy or a member of their family is not seen as an accident or chance but as a result of ritual manipulation. The Kirwa's understood the death of one of their father's killers as resulting from MB's ritual burning even though the actual death resulted from him fighting with his own father. Based on this case, they also believed that the other five killers had died because they confessed to have died during the outcome session. In the case of the master planners, the Kirwas believed that they were really suffering as a result of MBs ritual and it was just a matter of time before MB's fire completely obliterated them as can be seen

from Jane's comment in the transcript: *'You know Karinga has AIDS, I am told he survives by taking strong teas. And so if MB's fire caught him, it will accelerate his death'*.

### **3.5. MB and the Supernatural.**

In Africa, ritual healers are distinguished from other traditional medical experts by the fact that they possessed extra human abilities that were perceived as emanating from the supernatural realm. The supernatural powers were inherited and the healers experienced a series of afflictions before they could be treated and discover (or their healers inform them) that they were destined to become healers. Such stories are spread by the healers and their clients and become accepted as part of the identity of the healer and his healing powers. Even though MB's ritual healing appeared to combine ideas and logic from disparate healing systems, his healing was directed by his supernatural abilities that controlled every step of the divination and the rest of the healing processes that are described in the following chapters. MB sort to display his supernatural abilities in the course of the client's tentative divination by reading images from the bible that informed him what the clients' problems were. The X-ray process however provided an observer with a complicated showcase of MB's supernatural abilities and one that I grappled with to the end of my fieldwork without finding any rational explanation to. Perhaps I should have expected this in a study of ritual healing. MB explained to his clients that he would call the people afflicting them so that the clients could speak to them directly. This he did by sending the real person to sleep and causing their 'inner person' to make confessions in his 'courtroom' in the form of VFBs. As the transcripts so far provided show, the VFBs provide full names and a comprehensive account of their actions. Their confessions in the 'Mention' sessions were followed by heated arguments involving accusations and counter accusations between them and MB's clients leading to their 'Judgment' in the stage that followed. Most clients I spoke to stated that they recognized the persons making confessions from the bible either through their voices or their character traits as exhibited in their confessions. Clients for instance stated that the arrogance exhibited by some of the VFBs reflected their behaviour in real life.

The judgement session provided yet another of MB's stated supernatural abilities. MB explained that he would set the bible on fire, which would initiate the reconstruction process either by exterminating the witches and murderers or setting in motion several restructuring actions such as return of lost children, payments of debts and cessation witchcraft

consultations. The session is dramatic with witches and murderers crying and begging for mercy as the bible was engulfed by the fire. Murders and witches were expected to die from the fire that MB's secretary set to the bible. But did MB really have the abilities to capture people's inner persons (or souls) and make them confess in his courtroom? If MB had no such powers, then he must possess the ability to produce so many different voices and create many scenarios for the more than 20 clients who often sat in his X-ray room and received group divinations. I have already explained that if ventriloquism was involved then MB could not have been the ventriloquist. He was never in the X-ray room and at times travelled out of his homestead as the X-ray sessions progressed. Who then spoke to the clients through the bible? And could people really die after the bible was set on fire? What about clients confessions that they knew that those who confessed to have afflicted them had actually died? The outcome sessions often produced VFBs of people confessing to have died or to have stopped their witchcraft consultations. The whole enterprise of MB's abilities, however, seemed to fit well with the client's expectations and the African cosmology. Clients believed in the ability of witches to afflict them using supernatural powers. The remedy for such affliction lay in the supernatural realm and with the healer who could tap into this realm. And if witches could afflict using supernatural powers, then healers could also redirect supernatural powers in a way that assisted the afflicted and affected as well. MB's deployment of his powers through the secretary and to texts such as the bible with the associated repeatability of the process provided the divination process with its authenticity and objectivity. This appeared to be MB's answer to those who might doubt the authenticity of his divination. Unable to resolve the question of rationality and the supernatural in the course of my fieldwork, I elected to concentrate on the ways in which MB used the X-ray process to (in collaboration with the clients) create a narrative that explained the client's affliction and enable its resolution.



## Chapter 4

### Ritual Healing and the Variety of Clients.

In chapters 2 and 3 I set out to outline and illustrate the nature of MBs X-ray process in detail. In this chapter I would like to give several examples of the variety of the cases that are brought to MB and the way in which he intervenes and organizes their reconstruction. To allow for an exposition of more cases, I will describe the cases and provide summarized transcripts for sections of their X-ray sessions.

#### 4.1. Disobedient sons, bewitching fathers and MB's Intervention.

##### Case 1. Kaptinge is 'whipped and disciplined' by his father.

Kaptinge appeared at MB's healing ritual accompanied by his two brothers who assisted him to walk. He was limping on the right leg and could not fully stretch his right hand. He spoke very infrequently and in a whisper. I had to rely on his brothers to get the narrative of his case. Kaptinge was 26 years old and employed as a teacher in a public primary school<sup>53</sup>. He had been employed for close to 3 years and worked successfully over the last two. His tribulations began at the beginning of his 3<sup>rd</sup> year of employment, when he inexplicably started experiencing pains in his right hand and leg. Kaptinge did not seek medical attention since he expected the pains to go away without any therapy. After one month of persistent leg and hand pains, he sort medical attention from the nearest District health facility. The health care personnel at the district facility performed a biomedical X-ray on his leg and hand but could not detect any problem with either. They gave Kaptinge some pain killers and discharged him from the hospital. Kaptinge continued working for a couple of months although he still experienced pains in his hand and leg. On several occasions he was unable to go to work as the pains intensified. He visited the District health facility for a second time where another X-ray was conducted. The results were, like in the first instance, negative and the health care personnel gave him pain killers to relieve the pain. Kaptinge decided to consult MB when his condition did not abate. His brothers explained that, two weeks prior to their visit to MB, Kaptinge could no longer stretch both the right hand and leg. Another visit to the District hospital and no conclusive diagnosis led him and his brothers to consider other alternatives. That was when a neighbour advised them to seek the assistance of a traditional healer and specifically recommended a visit to MB.

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<sup>53</sup> A primary school is the first level of formal schooling in Kenya's education system (Known as the 8-4-4) where students study for 8 years in Primary school, 4 at the secondary school level and 4 at the University level.

Kaptinge and his two brothers arrived at MB's compound and were taken through the usual introductory procedures (the registration, initial discussion with the secretary, church service and lunch) before going for the appointment with MB. MB prayed for them before proceeding to thoroughly interrogate them with his bible wide open. The subject of interrogations ranged from the circumstances surrounding the onset of his pains, his relationship with his father, his brothers as well as with his teaching colleagues. MB then gave his tentative divination but as usual instructed them to wait for the X-ray process, which would provide the more complete and accurate divination. In his tentative divination, MB explained to them that the problem lay in a disrupted social relationship with a very close family member who had conjured witchcraft. The identity and nature of witchcraft would be spelt out by the X-ray session. The Kaptinges paid the fee for the X-ray process and tramped to the courtroom together with the rest of the clients at MB's ritual practice later the same afternoon.

In the X-ray process for this day, Kaptinge's case was the first one. Four VFBs appeared relating to his case. They were the VFBs of two witches, a VFB of his father and that of his uncle. The first VFB was that of a witch who claimed to have been contracted by Kaptinge's father to bewitch him. The witch confessed that Kaptinge's father had paid him Kshs 4000 (Approx USD 50) to 'whip and discipline' Kaptinge because he no longer respected his father. His father had complained to the witch that Kaptinge disrespected and abused him even though he (Kaptinge's father) had spent his resources to educate him. According to his father, Kaptinge boasted and disrespected him because of his teaching job. And so he asked the witch to ensure that Kaptinge lost his job so that he could become 'disciplined'. Even though the language of confession was Kiswahili, the VFB used the English term 'discipline' to refer to the ritual actions directed towards Kaptinge. The witch stated, '*Baba yake aliniambia nichape yeye kiboko kali ili apate discipline*' which translated to 'His father asked me to cane him severely so that he can be disciplined'. The witch confessed to have sent Djinn into Kaptinge's right hand and right leg so that he would not walk to school, or use his right hand to hold a pen or chalk. He would then lose his job because he would not be able to walk to school nor use his hands to write.

The VFB for Kaptinge's father was second and corroborated the confession by the witch. He further threatened Kaptinge's two brothers that he would similarly 'discipline' them if

they too disobeyed him. The next VFB was that of another witch who confessed to have been hired by Kaptinge's uncle to bewitch him and his entire household including his father. Thus a father was not only involved in bewitching his own son but he too was a victim of witchcraft from his own brother. The VFBs from the witch and Kaptinge's uncle confessed that they bewitched Kaptinge's father and his entire household to retaliate Kaptinge's father's witchcraft activities against them. I reproduce the transcript of the mention session in the case of Kaptinge below.

The transcript.

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: My name is Baino Ben.

SEC: You are accused!

VFB: For me I just wanted to discipline this boy called Amos Kaptinge. I just wanted to give him proper discipline. This is because he values his teaching more than his father. He does not think and care about his father.

SEC: Continue,

VFB: It is for this reason that I wanted to whip him properly so that he may respect and take care of his father. There was this day when his father came to me and complained that he no longer understood what his son was up to. His father complained that his son never followed his instructions. His father would ask him to do one thing and he would do a different thing – something that was not good. His father complained that he had educated his son, and now that the son was through with his education, he no longer listened to him. And so, his father asked me to give him a proper lashing that would make him stop his teaching job. I should whip him so well that he may not be able to teach. This was because his pride came from the fact that he was teaching. He never respected his father because he had a good teaching job. Because he is teaching, he does not respect his father. Of late he had also taken into the habit of constantly abusing his father and his father was not happy about it. And so, his father approached me and gave me Kshs 4,000 to work out my 'medicines' so that the son may not be able to continue his teaching job. And that was when I bewitched (roga) his right hand. I sent my Djinns to enter his right hand – that hand that he uses to hold chalk or pens. I wanted that hand to completely die. I also bewitched one of his legs so that he would not walk or stand while teaching. His father said we should not kill him. He just wanted the son to get some proper discipline. And for me, I just followed his father's instructions. The person who told me to do all this is called Paul Menjo. Paul Menjo is the one who said that I should give his son proper discipline. And I meted out that discipline. His father clarified that I should not kill him. He said that we could 'open up'<sup>54</sup> his son after he had received sufficient discipline. That was our agreement.

SEC: Let us accuse him,

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<sup>54</sup> As used here the expression 'open up' refers to removal of witchcraft effects on a victim. In this case the witch claims that he will remove the Djinns from the victims hand and leg so that he may go back to being normal.

CONGREG: Yes we accuse him.

VFB: The other day his father came back to me and said we needed to give Amos another one year of discipline. Then after that, we should release him so that he may regain the use of his hand and leg, but this would only be if he became disciplined.

SEC: Let us accuse him!

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse him.

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: I just want to ask you people, why are you accusing me here? I only wanted my son to have problems so that he may get to know and respect me as his father. What I want to explain to you is that this child had reached a point where he never treated me the way a child ought to treat his father. This was in spite of the fact that I had used so much of my money to educate him. But he has turned round and does not treat me as if I am his father. My name is Paul Menjo. I am the father to this boy here. I am his father together with his mother, Christine. But this son does not treat me as if I am his father. That is what made me go to Laibon<sup>55</sup> to help me so that this son can get to know that I am his father. I just wanted to let you know so that you may understand the matter properly. I also want to explain to this other son called Peter, if you want to cooperate with your brother, then the same fate will befall you. I will make sure that you also look like him. If you also agree with your brother and treat me as though I am not your father, then I will ensure you also become like him.

SEC: Let us accuse him!

CONGREG: Yes we accuse him.

Silence:

SEC: Give way to the other one to come.

3<sup>rd</sup> VFB: I want to explain to you, my name is James Omoga.

SEC: You are accused.

VFB: I want to explain to you clearly, my name is James Omoga.

SEC: You are accused.

VFB: My name is James Omoga and what I would like to explain to you clearly is that I assisted someone called Kitur Kirui. I assisted him to spoil his brother's entire house. I have bewitched Menjo's entire household, I do not want him to rear cattle and live well. I have bewitched all his children so that they may not succeed in schooling and get good jobs. I do not want them to finish their schooling and get good jobs and live well. I want to explain to you clearly so that you may understand the whole story. My work was to help Kitur Kirui to bewitch his brother's entire household. I have 'covered'<sup>56</sup> all the children so that they may

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<sup>55</sup> VFB uses the term Laibon to refer to the witch he contracted and who confessed as 1st VFB

<sup>56</sup> Most VFBs used the term bewitch (in Kiswahili 'Roga') and 'cover' (in Kiswahili 'Funika') interchangeably to refer to ritual manipulation meant to cause harm to an intended target.

not read well and get a job. I have done all that. I have bewitched their money. I have bewitched Menjo's money, I do not want him to get any monies and make any progress. I have bewitched everything including the cows that belong to Menjo. I want to tell you clearly so that you may understand.

SEC: Let us accuse him!

CONGREG: Yes we accuse him.

4<sup>th</sup> VFB: I want to explain to you clearly my name is Kitur Kirui. My name is Kitur Kirui I want to explain to you clearly, I have bewitched the entire household of my brother. I have bewitched and finished everything from Menjo and ensured that nothing ever progresses in that homestead. I did this because I and he are the only male siblings in our respective households but Menjo has bewitched my children so that they may not succeed in their studies. He has bewitched and spoilt everything that I have. I have now agreed with another witch to bewitch the entire household of Menjo so that they may not live well. They will not work and live well and nothing will go right with them. I want to explain to you that I have procured witchcraft for two homesteads. I have bewitched Mary's household as well that of my brother Menjo. I have bewitched both of them including the woman known as Christine as well as every other thing in the homestead. I have accepted my offences.

SEC: Let us accuse him.

Congreg: Yes, we accuse him!

End of transcript.

In the transcript above, Kaptinge and his brothers listened to the VFB of their father and uncle as well as that of two witches who confessed to have been used to bewitch Kaptinge. The witches and those who hired them corroborate each other's narration and succinctly explained their actions and the motives behind them. Kaptinge's father is categorical that he employed witchcraft against his son to discipline him because he no longer respected him. Kaptinge's uncle was categorical too that he bewitched his brother and his entire household to retaliate against his brother's initial witchcraft attack on him and his household. As the other cases that I produce later will show, it was quite common that several witches confessed having bewitched a single client in MB's divination processes<sup>57</sup>. At the end of this session, the secretary gave Kaptinge and his brothers an appointment date for the next visit. In view of Kaptinge's handicap, MB advised that it was not necessary for him to be present in the subsequent sessions and that his brothers could represent him.

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<sup>57</sup> This agrees with Evans-Pritchard's famous account of the Azande in which the poison oracle was always asked to identify other witches who may be involved in the illnesses afflicted one of their kinfolk.

The next appointment in Kaptinge's case was after one week. One of Kaptinge's brothers represented him as directed by MB. In this session, the four VFBs appeared just like in the first stage, and as was typical of the 'hearing' session, they engaged Kaptinge's brother in a fierce argument. The VFB of the witch hired by Kaptinge's father absolved himself from blame and demanded that Kaptinge settle his differences with his father and leave him out of it. In his argument, he stated that he only acted on Kaptinge's father's instructions. The second witch had a similar argument and apart from detailing his actions (as in the 'mention' stage), he too stated that he was innocent and only acted at the behest of Kaptinge's uncle. At the end of the confessions by the two witches, the congregation demanded that they howl. Each of them howled seven times and the congregation responded by shouting 'remain there'!

Kaptinge's father's VFB was even more dramatic and engaged Kaptinge's brother and the congregation in a long argument, initially denying any witchcraft activities but later admitting and justifying his actions. I reproduce parts of his confession below.

The transcript.

VFB: My name is Paul Menjo.

SEC: Menjo you are accused!

VFB: My name is Menjo, who has accused me?

SEC: Who can you see here?

VFB: If I look clearly, I see my son here. But I have nothing against this son, so why have you called me here?

SEC: (to Kaptinge's brother) Your father is asking you to state why you have called him here.

CL (Kaptinge's brother): Why have you bewitched my brother?

VFB: What? I am asking you, why have you called me here?

CL: I have called you here because you have bewitched my brother!

VFB: Who told you I bewitched your brother or how do you know I am the one who bewitched him?

CL: But you have admitted here and your witch has also admitted that you asked him to bewitch my brother.

VFB: Okay, but do you know why I did whatever I did?

OMC: Old man, how can you bewitch your own son?

VFB: Let me tell you very clearly, even you, if you continue playing around with me I will bewitch you as well. You see your brother is very stupid. He thinks that because he has a teaching job, he is now superior to his father. He has even turned to abusing me and calling me names that I cannot repeat here. He has never bought me even one kilogram of sugar since he got employed yet I used all my monies to educate him. Every time I ask him to help me, he abuses me.

OMC: But how can you bewitch your own son because of one kilogram of sugar!

VFB: You shut up, who are you and how are you involved in this case?

SEC: This is a court, howl!

VFB: If you guys continue yelling at me, I will do even worse things! I will curse all these children and we shall see what you will do. They are my children and you guys cannot do anything! Exactly what place is this where you guys make others go to sleep before talking? I am really terrified by what you guys are doing.

SEC: Howl and stop wasting our time!

Silence...

SEC: Howl now and stop wasting our time.

The VFB then howled seven times and the congregation responded:

CONGREG: Stop your witchcraft activities and live in harmony with your children!

End of transcript.

There was a long drawn argument between the VFB on one side and the congregation on the other before the VFB agreed to howl seven times. As the VFB howled, the congregation responded 'stop your witchcraft activities and live in harmony with your children'. The VFB of Kaptinge's uncle dragged the congregation in a similar though shorter argument where he argued that he contacted a witch after Kaptinge's father too contracted one to bewitch him. At the end of his confession, he howled and the congregation responded in a similar way though with a slight modification: 'Stop your witchcraft and make peace with your brother'.

Kaptinge's case was now ready for the 3<sup>rd</sup> level, the 'Judgement stage'. Like in the second stage, Kaptinge did not come for this session and was represented by his brother. The four VFBs (that of his father and a witch and that of his uncle and a different witch) appeared and again repeated most of what they had said at the hearing session. This session was concluded by the secretary setting the bible on fire. Kaptinge's brother and the rest of the congregation then left for the day expecting different kinds of outcomes depending on the nature of their cases. For Kaptinge, the two witches contracted by the father and uncle respectively would die of unspecified causes. His father and uncle would on the other hand cease their witchcraft actions. More importantly though, was that the death of the witch contracted by Kaptinge's father would cause the Djinnns that he had sent to afflict Kaptinge to become ineffective. Djinnns according to MB could only afflict someone as long as their owner or the one who sent them was still alive. Kaptinge's hand and leg would then start to slowly recover.

In line with MB's ritual process, Kaptinge's ritual healing was now complete and the only step left was the outcome stage where the fate of the witches contracted to bewitch him would be known. I met Kaptinge's brother several weeks after the 'Judgment' stage of the ritual was conducted. He came to find out what had transpired with the witches who confessed to have bewitched his brother as well as to be advised by MB on the way forward regarding the relationships with their father. In the 'outcome session' four VFBs emerged just like they had in the previous stages. The VFBs of the two witches (one who confessed to have been hired by Kaptinge's father and the one by his uncle) confessed that they had died. Kaptinge's father's VFB was next and confessed after the VFBs of the witches. In his confession, Kaptinge's father stated that he had abandoned his witchcraft activities against his children after he realized that the witch that he contracted had died. He advised that Kaptinge and his brother apologize to him and all would be fine. The VFB of their uncle also claimed to have abandoned his witchcraft consultations against their father.

This session marked the end of the X-ray sessions in the case of Kaptinge. At the end of the X-ray session, the secretary advised Kaptinge and his brother to apologize to their father even though he confessed to have bewitched his son. As the VFB demanded that the sons apologize to him, the secretary responded, *'Did you hear that, your father says you must apologise to him. And so when you go home, you and your brother should find time to*



*apologize to your father*'. This part of the confession turned comical when a member of the congregation who was present in the previous sessions chimed in with more advice: *'You should also buy him that sugar that he demanded so that he can leave you alone*'. MB echoed the secretary's advice as he counselled Kaptinge's brother at the end of the session before he departed. In the consultations and preaching sessions, MB and his secretary frequently preached and exhorted members of the congregation to respect their parents. Even where parents confessed to have offended their children, MB often advised that complete healing would depend on one hand on the paralysation of the parent's evil acts and on the other, an apology from the children to restore social order and harmony within the family.

In my discussions with Kaptinge's brother on this last visit he informed me that his brother's condition was improving. Although he still walked with difficulties and experienced stiffness in his right hand, he had managed to resume his teaching duties for a couple of days. He also attended physiotherapy sessions at the local health facility. As they did not report back to MB after this session, I could only talk to them on phone for the remainder of the fieldwork where they informed me that their brother's condition improved and he had resumed his job on a regular basis.

#### **4.2. Land disputes, Witchcraft Accusations and Premeditated Murder.**

##### **Case 2. Mbago must be killed by all means.**

Dispute over land ownership and the associated sorcery and murder accusations was a common category of social disruption handled by MB. Conflicts between siblings over land inherited from parents and accusations or suspicions of witchcraft were quite common at MB's healing sessions. Land disputes were also common among unrelated persons over boundaries or land transactions gone sour. The case of Mr. John Mbago was one example of how such disputes were interpreted and handled by MB's ritual healing. Even though I use the case of Mbago to illustrate how altercations over land were divined as sources of affliction, this example serves more to show how MB often widened his scope of healing from the initial complaint by a client to other occurrences seemingly unrelated to the initial one but which, in his opinion, were aspects of the same social disruption. Mbago's initial complain revolved around land and an apparent tapering off of his economic fortunes. The land dispute between Mbago and his stepbrothers turned out to be the key explanation not only to Mbago's initial complaints but also to other problems experienced by his children.

The identification of the entire scope of investigation and reconstruction was always done through the X-ray process. Naturally, this then required more time for rituals, a wider range of issues to examine and deal with, inclusion of more of Mbago's children and definitely more resources in terms of time and money from the clients:.

Mbago was a 65 years old farmer and a retired government employee who lived in Kitale. He owned several parcels of land on which he grew maize. One of the parcels was inherited from his father, but he had used his savings from the government job to purchase other parcels of land. Mr, Mbago was a successful maize farmer and owned items that marked him as prosperous. Apart from delivering several hundred bags of dried maize every year to the national cereals board, he owned a pick up track, and a tractor. He had built himself a huge stone house and all his children were well educated. Two of them had attained university education while three had tertiary level education and had good jobs. This apparent huge success by Mbago was in contrast to the life situations of his stepbrothers. Mbago's father had three wives and none of the sons and daughters from his two other families were as successful. Apart from the parcels of land that they inherited from their father, they did not own anything else and their children had not schooled as well as those of Mbago. According to Mbago, his stepbrothers had failed to work hard and resorted to imbibing in local brew and even sold part of their inheritance and squandered the proceeds from the sale on local brew.

Everything appeared to be progressing well for Mbago until two years prior to my encounter with him at MBs. Mbago explained that he decided to visit MB after he experienced a continuous series of misfortunes. In the past two years, he had severally sort police help in confronting thugs who came to his compound apparently to rob or harm him. At the same time, he was involved in bitter altercations with his stepbrothers who complained that he received a disproportionate share of inheritance from their deceased father. His stepbrothers further argued that since he had been able to acquire other parcels of land, it was only fair that he relinquished his own piece of inheritance to them. Within the same duration, Mbago encountered items of sorcery in his inherited farm. They included dead chicken, a huge dissected gecko and several charms. Such items indicated to him that someone was up to harming him through witchcraft. His maize crop was no longer doing well; his tractor had broken down and due to his diminished earnings from his maize crop, was unable to repair it. He could no longer afford fuel for his pick up track. Once in a while, he came with the

pickup track to MB's place but on several other occasions he opted for public transport because he could not afford fuel for his track. He also complained of persistent headaches and dizziness.

In my discussion with MB and Mr. Mbago, I realized that they had known each other for a long time even before Mbago sort MB's help. Apart from his ritual healing, MB too was a prominent maize farmer and he knew Mbago as a farmer. Even with this background, MB subjected Mbago to the entire set of the introductory ritual procedures: the initial discussion and tentative diagnosis, church ceremonies, registration by the secretary etc. The only advantages he seemed to have over other clients was that he often had extended discussions with MB, could easily get an appointment directly with MB while the others booked through the secretary, and on one occasion, the X-ray session was delayed as the congregation waited for him to arrive. Besides, MB appeared to have a better understanding of his tribulations as he was his farming colleague.

In MB's initial diagnosis, he divined that Mbago's problems stemmed from his stepbrothers who had not only cast spells on his fortunes but to those of his own children. The healing processes would therefore involve not only disabling his stepbrothers and punishing the witches they had consulted but also examining the problems within the lives of his own children with a view to solving them. To identify the actual issues to be handled, MB directed Mbago to the X-ray process where all aspects of his case would be laid bare and specific ameliorative strategies agreed upon for each of the problems. As with many such cases, the mention stage for Mr. Mbago in MB's X-rays process identified the people responsible for his problems with a detailed narration of what they had done. There were two basic angles to Mbago's problems all attributed to nefarious actions from his stepbrothers and stepmother. There was on one side, a plan to rob and murder him using hired thugs and a plan to use occult powers to liquidate him and his children on the other. Both acts were planned and executed by members of his stepfamily.

Regarding the plans to rob and kill him, the X-ray sessions produced VFBs of a group of eight people who claimed to have been hired to kill Mr. Mbago. Eight VFBs appeared and made their confessions. The first seven VFBs only mentioned their names with some claiming to be from Uganda and kept quiet. The eighth one mentioned his name and offered a long explanation on behalf of the 7 other VFBs who had only mentioned their names

before his turn. The VFB explained that they were a group of eight members belonging to a hit squad that was often hired to commit murders in Kenya and Uganda. In the case of Mr. Mbago, he explained that they had been hired by a brother to Mr. Mbago to eliminate him because he had grabbed their share of inheritance. In what had now become typical of such cases, the VFB explained that they were only acting on instructions from Mbago's brothers and that Mbago was the one who knew exactly why his brothers wanted him dead. They however reiterated that they would eventually kill him because they had already been paid for the job and since they were 'professionals', they always executed their clients' wishes once they had been paid. As a sign of their professionalism, the VFB stated that he would not reveal the identity of the people (Mbago's brothers) who hired them, only preferring to say that they were Mbago's brothers. The VFBs though did not make the distinction between actual and stepbrothers. I reproduce sections of their confessions below.

The transcript.

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: My name is Jim Kabula.

SEC: You are accused!

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: My name is Ambrose Mani. My name is Ambrose Mani.

SEC: You are accused!

3<sup>rd</sup> VFB: My name is Amayi Peter or Peter wafula. My name is Amayi Peter or Peter Wafula.

SEC: You are accused!

4<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Festus Juma.

5<sup>th</sup> VFB: I have come, my name is Barry Wangwe. I am from Uganda and my name is Barry Wangwe.

6<sup>th</sup> VFB: I have also come, my name is Manoa Matata or you could also call me Manoa Maxwell. My popular name though is Manoa Matata. The Christians call me Manoa Maxwell. I am from Uganda.

SEC: Continue or give way to the other one to come.

7<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Obiero Mavuli, my name is Obiero Mavuli, I am from Uganda and I have come to Kenya to come and kill the guy called Mbago John.

CL: (Mbago) Why do you want to kill me?

(Silence)

SEC: Continue!

8<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Wambaya David and I am a thug from Uganda. I and my colleagues who just identified themselves are thugs for hire. We are always hired to kill people because we have AK 47 rifles. Some of us are from Uganda but a few are also from Kenya. For now we have been contracted to do some work in Kitale. We have been contracted to do this work in 9 different homesteads. We have been asked to rob and kill the people in these 9 homesteads. We never deal with one case, since we are for hire; we often take contracts from different people and then combine the work for one day. This time round, we wanted to kill the guy called Mbago John. Some of his brothers came to us and asked us to help them kill him. We have taken that contract and have even taken photographs of the other homesteads that we have been hired to attack. We shall attack these 9 homesteads, take monies and then kill them. We shall get into the homestead of Mbago John, kill the dog, kill the guard and also kill him. That is our assignment. We are still planning and are yet to agree on a date where we shall do this. We have been paid for this job but our clients also informed us that we could get more money from John if we wanted. They told us that John had money. They told us that John always kept lots of money in his house and so when we attack him, we should demand money from him. But they have already given us monies to enable us travel from Uganda to come do that job. We often get money from the people who hired us as well as from the person we attack and kill. That is how we work. We cannot tell you the names of the brothers who hired us. We only give their names if things become difficult (means in case they are arrested). But if things are not difficult, we rarely say the names of our customers. We always hide their identity. I want to tell you that we are thugs from Uganda but we conduct our 'businesses' both in Kenya and Uganda.

In the transcript above the criminal angle to Mr. Mbago's predicament was identified by MB's X-ray as coming from thugs hired by his stepbrothers to kill him. Although the spokesman to the thugs stated that it would be unprofessional to name his clients, Mbago's stepbrothers claimed to have hired the thugs in the confessions that followed. In MB's ritual rules and prescriptions, the ultimate judgement for murderers and witches was death by ritual burning. The eight VFBs were therefore produced and made to confess in the subsequent stages of the X-rays session and then ritually set on fire at the end of the third session, the judgment. There was however a radical twist to Mbago's case at this stage. While still attending MB's ritual healing, Mbago reported the incidences to the police and provided a list of suspects that he noted from MB's X-ray session. Two weeks after the performance of the 'Judgment' session, Mbago telephoned MB and informed him that the police had arrested some of the thugs who had confessed during the X-ray session that they planned the raid on his farm. Later, the same day, MB related this incident to a very excited congregation before the beginning of the X-ray session. The congregation was so excited to hear this with some of exclaiming praises to MB and God for a wonderful outcome.

MB also divined that Mbago was a victim of witchcraft from his step-brothers. This did not surprise Mbago as he was already suspicious that he was under attack through witchcraft when he encountered items that he associated with witchcraft on his farm. MB's initial divination which was later confirmed through the X-ray session, showed that Mbago's stepfamily was responsible for the charms that he found in his farm as well as affirming that they were the ones who hired thugs to rob and harm him. This angle to Mbago's affliction unlike the case for the thugs dragged on for a long time with several sessions performed in an effort to tame Mbago's stepfamily's witchcraft. In the X-ray session conducted by MB, five VFBs consistently confessed to have been involved in bewitching him and hiring thugs to steal his property. There was the VFB of his stepmother, three representing his three stepbrothers and one of a witch who agreed to have been approached to harm him through ritual means. All the VFBs explained that they decided to bewitch their stepbrother and his family because he had fleeced them of their rightful share of inheritance. The VFBs confessed to have sent misfortunes to Mbago's entire family including his children. Mbago's stepmother's VFB was the most eloquent giving details of why they resorted to witchcraft. At some point in the X-ray sessions, she even suggested that Mbago was seducing her. The witchcraft angle to Mbago's predicament produced fiery and bitter exchanges and counter accusations between Mbago and the secretary on one side and Mbago's stepfamily on the other. The stepfamily vowed to kill Mbago and his family while Mbago and his children vowed to use MB's powers to defeat them. In the exchanges that ensued, the stepfamily claimed that Mbago was using a witch (meaning MB) to kill them as can be seen in the sections of the transliterated X-ray sessions below.

### The Transcript

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: I have come my name is Grace Nekesa (initially talks in Lubhukusu language<sup>58</sup> then turns to Kiswahili.) Nowadays we do not sleep. We are always walking day and night in search for treatment. When we try to sleep, we get short of breath and almost die in our sleep – all of us. Even Samuel (one of her sons) – when he goes to sleep, he is almost dying in his sleep. Why is this happening to us?

CONGREG: Howl then we shall tell you.

SEC: Howl!

VFB: That is what made us consult witches. Nowadays we are not able to sleep. Anytime we go to sleep, we stop breathing. I have talked to my sons, Samuel, Moses and even to my other son Kassim, and they are all experiencing the same thing. They all have bad dreams.

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<sup>58</sup> Lubukusu is one of the sub-dialects of the Luyia ethnic group.

We have realized that John must have performed witchcraft on us this time round. And so we have decided to take all possible measures to ensure we have eliminated him too. As I am talking to you, we have already brought a witch to help us 'cover'<sup>59</sup> Lydia (John's wife), to 'cover' John and all his children, we have sent all manner of misfortunes to them including road accidents so that they may die. None of his children will ever get a good job and succeed in life. We have covered all their marriages, all their daughters will be divorced from their husbands and all their sons will lose their wives. They will never ever be able to marry and settle down in life. We want all of them to come back here and resort to drinking 'Chang'aa'<sup>60</sup> and his daughters to be prostitutes selling Chang'aa. This is because John and his mother conned my husband and obtained all the land while I and my children got nothing. You see, John is my son but from another mother. We were in total, three women married to his father. But John and his mother got more land than any of us. And he has been using his inheritance and monies to grab even more land from us. So we have decided to terrorize him until he either dies or leave's this land.

SEC: Okay then howl!

VFB: Yes, there is this witch called Nahashon Mshombe, he is the one helping us. What did you guys want then?

CONGREG: You howl!

VFB: You guys want me to howl?

CONGREG: Yes!

VFB: And this boy called John keeps on following me all the time, I am of your father's age, if you were interested in me, why don't you just say it? You keep following me every time you want to kill me; you want to kill my children. You see for me I inherited my witchcraft from our family. And I came with this witchcraft to your home. And I must bewitch because this is like Misambwa<sup>61</sup> for me. I must bewitch. So what did you guys want, please explain it to me, I want to go.

CONGREG: You howl!

SEC: Howl.

VFB: That howling, how do you want me to do it?

The congregation demonstrated how VFB should howl and the VFB howled 5 times: The congregation responded by shouting, 'Remain there!'

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: I have come my name is Nahashon Mshombe. I have been bewitching since 1974 and so far I have even acquired a pot of Djinn's that I use to bewitch. As of now, I have acquired all paraphernalia that are used for bewitching. I do not have to borrow anything

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<sup>59</sup> As used here, the expression 'to cover' is the same as 'to bewitch'

<sup>60</sup> Chang'aa is an illicit local brew

<sup>61</sup> Misambwa is the term for spirits in the lubukusu language.

from anyone. I have Djinnns, mangoes, all manner of wild animal parts and bones that I need for bewitching – I have all of them. I even have human parts that I can use. At the moment I am the one who has started assisting the woman called Grace and her son to eliminate the house of Mr. John Mbago. We want to eliminate that house completely. You see of late one of her children (Grace’s children) has also started getting sick and so she asked me to eliminate the entire household John Mbago. However she had asked me to keep the information secret between herself and one of her sons; the one called Samuel. And so I have assisted only the two and the rest do not know about it. So what did you guys want me to do?

CONGREG: You howl!

VFB: You guys want me to howl?

CONGREG: Yes!

VFB: That howling, how do you want me to do it?

The congregation then made a howling sound, which the VFB repeated 5 times. Every time the VFB howled, the congregation responded by saying, ‘Remain there with all your Djinnns’

SEC: Give way to the next one!

3<sup>rd</sup> VFB: My name is Samuel Mbago and I am working together with my other brothers. We have all decided we must kill ‘this one’ (means John) because he also wants to kill us. Nowadays, I am not even able to sleep and we have seen that this is very dangerous. You see, since the time we started making our plans, we had never encountered these kinds of problems before. And now we have found out exactly where the problem is coming from. Every one of us encounter’s our elder brother, John in our dreams. We are now so surprised, we ask ourselves, ‘how can our brother be such a shameless witch that he now wants to kill all of us? We do not sleep at night. Two nights ago I collapsed in my sleep, I do not even know if John is aware of this. It is not just I alone experiencing this, but all of us are experiencing the same thing in our sleep. And we have discovered that it is due to John’s witchcraft. So we have decided if it is about dying, we shall die but only after we have done wonders.

SEC: Howl!

CL: Howl!

VFB: So what did you guys want me to do, explain it to me?

CONGREG: Howl!

VFB: You guys want me to howl?

CONGREG: Yes!



VFB: That howling, how do you want me to do it?

The congregations made a howling sound, which the VFB repeated 7 times. Every time the VFB howled, the congregation responded by shouting back, 'Remain there'!

4<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Kassim. My name is Kassim. Like my brother just said, we have decided we must kill our brother, this guy called John. And we are going to do that by all means. We have been trying to use thugs to attack him from here in Kitale but most of them were amateurs. Every time we gave them money, they would try to attack him but he and his guard would repulse them. You know he has a very strong guard, I think he is a retired soldier who guards him. And you know he has hired a soldier because he knows what he did to us. He and his mother ensured that they got the bulk of the land from our father. Even you imagine, how can one person have so much land and property from a family and the others have nothing? Is he the only one who knows how to farm? We have therefore decided that he must die. We have also tried to use witchcraft but that one it is only my mother who knows more about it. But we have vowed he must die. You know I just do not understand how bad someone can be. You see even after taking our land, he now wants to kill us. We have been getting terrible dreams every night. Sometimes we fall asleep during the day and dream that we are being burnt. John is a terrible witch! We keep collapsing on our sleep every night and now my mother has approached a witch who informed her that it was John who was trying to 'finish' us. But now it is a matter of life and death. We shall either 'finish' him or he will finish us. That is how things will be. It is total war now!

SEC: Then howl so that you can kill him properly!

VFB: You guys want me to howl?

CONGREG: Yes!

VFB: That howling, how do you want me to do it?

The congregations made a howling sound, which the VFB repeated 5 times. Every time the VFB howled, the congregation responded by shouting back, 'Remain there'!

5<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Moses, and I want to ask you Mbago: why have you refused die?

(This question elicited lots of laughter from the congregation)

CL: You will be the one to die!

VFB: You have refused to die, isn't it?

CL: I will not die; you will be the one to die!

VFB: You John, you have decided that you will not die, isn't it? I want to assure you, that you will die if you do not give back our land. You either agree to leave the land or you will be buried in that land. That is the only thing that will happen.

SEC: Then you howl so that you can bury John this evening!

VFB: You guys want me to howl?

CONGREG: Yes!

VFB: That howling, how do you want me to do it?

The congregations made a howling sound, which the VFB repeated 5 times. Every time the VFB howled, the congregation responded by shouting: 'Remain there'!

End of transcript

In the transliterated transcript above, Mbago is pitted against his stepbrothers and the object of their altercations is what his stepbrothers claimed was an unfair distribution of land inherited from their father. The VFBs of his stepbrothers and stepmother are unequivocal that Mbago and his mother had duped them of their rightful share of inheritance and for this reason he ought to either agree to redistribution or be killed. They also detail their plans to employ both physical (use of thugs) and preternatural (witchcraft) mechanisms to ensure that they have eliminated their stepbrother. Their confessions were as usual moderated by the secretary's pejorative instructions. For instance when the 5th VFB stated that he intended to kill Mr. Mbago, the secretary responded, '*Okay, then howl so that you can bury him this evening*'.

In their initial discussions Mbago and MB identified three aspects to his misfortunes that needed to be addressed: there was the problem with thugs attacking Mbago, the use of preternatural forces to harm him and his wife and finally the misfortunes that dogged his children. I met Mbago and three of his children on separate occasions at MB's ritual arena and on each occasion, MB used the X-ray sessions to try and resolve the cases. The problem with thugs was resolved with the identification of the thugs and the arrest of some of them by the police. Both Mbago and MB corroborated this story.

The second angle of Mbago's tribulations where his stepbrothers claimed to have used sorcery to harm him however dragged for over three months. During this time, Mbago and his children, alternated in their visits to MB. In the X-ray sessions that ensued battle lines appeared to have been drawn by the X-ray sessions where MB and Mbago on one side fought the sorcery attempts from his (Mbago's) stepfamily and the witches they were alleged to have consulted. MB would conduct the entire set of X-ray rituals, from the

mention to the judgment and executions of the witches consulted by Mbago's stepfamily members. In the subsequent 'outcome sessions' the witches would report to be dead. Mbago's stepfamily would however state that they had found another powerful witch who was assisting them to eliminate Mbago. The X-ray sessions thus degenerated into an accusation and counteraccusation sessions with Mbago accusing his stepfamily of witchcraft while his stepfamily accused him of trying to kill them. This can be seen in the transcript that I reproduced above with one of Mbago's stepbrothers claiming that Mbago had not only taken their land but was now trying to kill them. The other of his stepbrothers caused lots of laughter from the congregation when he demanded to know why Mbago had refused to die. In the final session that I attended, Mbago's stepbrothers claimed to be very sick while MB had ritually burnt all the VFBs who confessed to have been involved in attempts to bewitch him. All VFBs of witches who had been contracted to bewitch Mbago always confessed to have died after being set on fire by MB, and in subsequent sessions, Mbago's stepfamily stated that they had approached another witch to treat them and counteract Mbago's 'witch' i.e. MB.

In MB's divination and X-ray session, VFBs representing his stepmother consistently confessed to have cast spells on Mbago's children and used witchcraft to 'block their fortunes' and ensure they had miserable marriages. Given these set of events, MB informed Mbago that his children too ought to be subjected to the X-ray sessions so that the various aspects of their predicaments could be identified and solved. Based on this agreement and perhaps convinced of MB's abilities, Mbago brought two of his sons and a daughter on several occasions to MB for ritual healing. I met the three on several occasions at MB where they had come for a follow up of their own X-ray sessions and at times for a follow up of their father's X-ray sessions. The first-born son, Arnold, was a graduate in law and worked in the Attorney General's office in the capital city of Kenya, Nairobi. I analyse the case of Arnold in chapter 6 under modernity.

Mbago's second son (Gregory) also had an X-ray session with MB. He too was a university graduate in engineering and worked in a private engineering firm. In his X-ray sessions, three VFBs appeared. The first one to appear was the VFB of his immediate supervisor who wondered what the problem was and why he had been 'accused'. Gregory responded by demanding to know why he wanted to dismiss him from his job. The VFB confirmed that he planned to sack him because he had received information that Gregory was inciting other

workers to strike. This initial accusations and counter accusations developed into a very long discussion in the X-rays session where Gregory's supervisor lectured him on his duties and advised him to choose between trade unionism and his job. At the end of the confession Gregory's supervisor was categorical that he would only reconsider his decisions to sack him when he stopped inciting other workers. The secretary then concluded the session by asking the VFB to howl. As had become common with such cases, the VFB demanded to know why he was asked to howl and the secretary responded 'Howl so that we can know you have agreed not to sack him'. The VFB howled seven times and the congregation retorted: 'Do not sack Gregory!' At the end of this confession however, the secretary too admonished Gregory for inciting other workers. She said to him: *You heard what your boss has said; he will not sack you but if you want to keep your job, then you should stop politicking and respect your boss. You really must choose between your job and politics!*

Mbago's daughter too attended X-ray session at MB's at times with her father and at other times with her brother, Gregory. Mbago's daughter appeared at MBs healing after listening to her stepmother's confessions that she had blocked their career and marital progress so that they would come back home 'to sell chang'aa and become prostitutes'. After her initial discussions and tentative divination with MB, she advanced to the X-ray session. From the X-Mbago's daughter appeared to have problems with her husband and mother in law. Even though she had not quarrelled with either of them, she complained that her husband had fathered a child with another woman and her mother-in-law appeared to be encouraging her husband to marry the other woman and kick her out of her matrimonial home. After listening to her step-mother's confession, she was convinced that the problems she experienced in her marriage were caused by her stepmother's witchcraft. In the X-ray session, three VFBs appeared in her case: her husband, her mother in-law and a witch who agreed to have supplied medicines to cause her to quarrel with her husband and be kicked out of her matrimonial home. The VFBs of her mother-in-law and the witch were categorical that they wanted her kicked out of her home and had procured medicines to that effect. But in what turned out to be a prolonged X-ray session, the VFB of her husband skirted around the issue and completely refused to comment about the baby that he allegedly had with the other woman. I reproduce sections of these discussions below.

The transcript.

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: My name is Eddie Malombe or you could call me Eddie Anyanga. What is the problem?

SEC: You are accused.

VFB: I was just sitting at home and suddenly fell asleep and started dreaming that you have taken away my soul and are making it speak here. That is why I am asking you people to tell me what is going on. It is not normal for an adult like me to fall asleep during the day and start speaking here. That is why I am asking you people to tell me, what is going on here?

SEC: Who do you know here?

VFB: I do not know what is going on here. You see here, the only person I see that I know is Leah Maraba<sup>62</sup> and our father<sup>63</sup> called Mbago. So I do not understand what is going on here.

(Silence and no one speaks and the secretary too appears puzzled).

SEC: You talk about your family.

VFB: I do not know what is going on here because I do not understand. You see, you people have brought my soul to speak here, what is the problem?

CL: (Mbago's daughter): I want you to speak about the other woman and the child. We want to know your stand today.

(Silence)

CL: I want you to talk about that child.

(Silence)

SEC: Talk

VFB: I want to tell you Leah, you are my wife and I love you. I have no problem with you. So what has made you take my soul and force it to speak here? That is what I want to know.

CL: I am asking you about the other child. You see, you brought the other child to be shaved by your mother, and your mother is asking the other woman to come home, but you are here saying... (VFB interrupts)

VFB: You answer the questions the way I am asking you, where have I offended you? Please explain this clearly to me.

CL: I want you to give me your stand: is that your child or is your mother lying?

VFB: I do not understand your aim and intentions here.

CL: Where do you stand?

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<sup>62</sup> This is Mbago's daughter.

<sup>63</sup> VFB refers to his father in law as 'father'. It is quite common to refer to one's father - in - law respectfully as 'father' in many African cultures.

VFB: I honestly do not understand your position. I have no problems with you. I am just surprised that you brought me here. And I am not going to discuss my mother here in public. That is stuff to do with me and my mother. She is my mother and I must respect her as my mother.

CL: What about that other woman and child?

VFB: You see that is my mother. There is no way I am going to disagree with my mother because I have married you. It is upon you to try and agree with my mother. She is our mother and you must look for ways to relate well with her so that we can live together in peace. My mother is not your co-wife and so you do not need to fight or compete with her for me. And frankly, I do not want to discuss women stuff here anymore. I know mothers can be strict and may even say terrible things at times because they are women. And so I do not want to say anything about either you or my mother. That is women stuff.

CL: The child: Why don't you want to discuss anything about that child? I want you to talk about the child.

Silence,

CL: Talk!

VFB: I have asked you to explain very clearly if my mother or I have offended you, but you are not saying anything! I want you to tell me if my mother or I have offended you in any way.

CL: No, I want you to talk about the child. I want to know your stand regarding the child, not about your mother.

(Congregation bursts out laughing as this discussion ensues as the VFB completely avoided any discussions regarding the child that the client persistently repeated)

VFB: I only want to discuss if there is a problem between you and me. If you have a problem with my mother, then we can discuss that and agree whether the best way is to look for land elsewhere and leave my mother's compound so that you do not have contact with her and minimize the chances of you two quarrelling. That is something we can discuss and agree on. You see you are my wife and I love you. And there is no way I can start discussing issues that do not exist.

CL: What about that child?

VFB: If I have offended you in any way, then you should forgive me. And if my mother has offended you in any way, then you should forgive her as well.

(Client interrupts)

CL: No, no, no, the child, I want you to talk about the child.

VFB: You see, if my mother has offended you, you should come to me and explain when there are only two of us, that way I can understand and find out where the problem is. But as of now, I cannot talk about anything that I have never seen.

CL: Yes, we have finished with your mother, but is that your child? We want to know the truth, why don't you want to talk about the child yet the child was brought home? We want to know the truth!

VFB: I do not deny, people say that my mother is a witch, but you see I cannot agree with such opinions because I have never seen her bewitch anybody. If I knew that she is a witch, I would have advised her to stop it. But I have never seen her bewitching anyone.

CL: Okay, we have finished your mother's issues. We want you to talk about your child. Why are you denying that, that is your child yet he has been brought home and was shaved by your mother?

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: My name is Anna Shikoti and I am the one assisting Peris Minna to enable her son to marry another woman and divorce the other one called Leah (Client). He should divorce Leah and marry another woman who will agree with his mother. He should marry a woman who can keep his mother's secrets. I am the one assisting Peris so that her son can divorce Leah and marry a woman that is acceptable to her. I am giving Peris all types of medicines that will make Eddie<sup>64</sup> disagree with Leah and eventually divorce her. I have given all types of medicines to be put on the doors so that Eddie may quarrel with Leah on very flimsy grounds. I have also given them medicines that will give Eddie the urge to marry another wife. I have done all that to assist Peris.

SEC: Let us accuse her!

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse her.

VFB: My name is Peris Minna. I want to explain to you Leah, that I want you to leave my son Eddie alone. I want my son Eddie to marry another wife. I want a wife to my son who will not disagree with me even when I show her witchcraft. She should be a woman whose blood agrees with mine. You see, I looked at Leah and realized that she would not agree with me when it comes to my witchcraft activities. That has really annoyed me and I decided to ensure that she left my son so that he could marry another wife. That is the only thing I want.

CL: Why don't you get saved then? You and I have not quarrelled. If I cannot accept your 'medicines' then you should get saved so that both of us can go to church.

SEC: Let us accuse her,

CONGREG: Yeah, let us accuse her!

End of transcript.

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<sup>64</sup> Eddie is Mbago's daughter's husband whose VFB confessed prior to this one.

Mbago and his daughter were in attendance during the session where her case was mentioned for the first time. This case however exhibited one other dynamic of MB's healing rituals, namely that members of the same family could attend the same X-ray sessions even when the different problems afflicting them were at different stages in the divination process. The confessions by Mbago's daughter's husband and mother in-law were succeeded by confessions from Mbago's stepbrothers and step-mother. While issues revolving around what one may call Mbago's exclusive case (land disputes with his stepfamily) were at the judgements and executions stages that of his daughter was just beginning at the mention stage. Mbago's daughter engaged the VFB of her husband in a long discussion where she unsuccessfully attempted to make him declare the status of the child he had with another woman. Her husband skirted around the issues and eventually evaded answering the questions to the frustration of his wife. Mbago's daughter's mother-in law and a witch also appeared and confessed both their intention and actions aimed at kicking her out of her matrimonial home. As this is the mention stage, the secretary did not intervene in the discussions and only took notes of the proceedings. This was in stark contrast to the sessions that ensued immediately after regarding the confessions for Mbago where she yelled and threatened members of Mbago's step family and the new set of witches that they had hired. At the end of the session, the secretary gave both Mbago and her daughter a new appointment dates. Mbago would come for a new outcome session while the daughter would come for the hearing stage regarding the issues that exclusively concerned her.

The case of Mbago and his sons was one classic example of MB's ritual healing and concurred with what many studies on African ritual healing where conflict and tension in social relations were basic factors underlying many interpretations of illnesses and misfortunes (Good 1987, Handloff 1982). Socially induced conflict between loyalty and aggressive competition for scarce resources was a principle source of discord within the social structure. Aggrieved parties or those who felt aggrieved always adopted a variety of mechanisms to hit back at their perceived oppressors. In the case of Mbago, the principal cause of tension as divined by MB was what his stepmother and step brothers perceived to be an unfair distribution inheritance. Mbago's step-mother and her sons argued that Mbago had received an unjustifiably larger portion of their inheritance. According to them this was what had made him prosper more than them. They vowed to liquidate him so that the inheritance would revert back to them. Mbago on the other hand argued that he and each of



his step-brothers got their fair share of inheritance according to the wisdom of his father. Even though he did not clarify whether or not he got a larger portion than his brothers, he was categorical that his father distributed his inheritance fairly in order of seniority of his three households. It was decipherable from his position, and also judging from the fact that his mother was the senior of his father's three wives, that he probably received a larger portion of land than his step brothers. He also maintained that he had invested his own money in the farm and used his savings to buy other pieces of land while his step-brothers sold their inheritance and imbibed in local brew. There was therefore tension and jealousy between the step brothers and Mbago which MB construed to be the main source of affliction for Mbago. According to MB's initial divination and the X-ray process, Mbago's stepbrothers were using preternatural forces (witchcraft) as well as physical means (robbers) to kill him.

Another notable aspect in this case was the way in which affliction is distributed not merely to the principal target but to the other members of his family (his wife and children) and in spheres of their lives that would not normally be associated with the narrow definitions of disease and illnesses. Mbago's children are seen as facing difficulties in their lives and this is attributed to ritual manipulation aimed at their father. The nature of these afflictions is summarized in Mbago's stepmother's confession, *'And so we have decided to take all possible measures to ensure we have eliminated him too. As I am talking to you, we have already brought a witch to help us 'cover' Lydia (John's wife), to 'cover' John and all his children, we have sent all manner of misfortunes to them including road accidents so that they may die. None of his children will ever get good jobs and succeed in life.'*

Successful farming, educating children, children having stable jobs and marriages were all seen as markers of success in life and this is especially the case with rapid 'modernisation'. This attracted jealousy from neighbours and other close family members who may not be as successful. Ritual healing gains prominence and efficacy by defining and addressing the social field as the object of therapy as opposed to restricting itself to the individual. By rapidly adapting itself to the changes in the social field, ritual healing addresses tensions in the social field opposed to treating the physical body only.

### **4.3 Fluid connubiality, Child custody and envisioned benefits.**

#### **Case 3. 'I will not allow anyone to eat my children'.**

Social conflicts revolving around the devolution of inheritance were common but not the only source of competition. In the course of my research, I observed that conflicts between co-wives over the control of their husbands resources both material and non material were quite common, probably only second to conflicts over property ownership between kin and non kin. The conflicts were as varied as the clients. They ranged from wives accusing their husband's of neglecting them, wives complaining that their co-wives had used charms to control their husbands and that of co-wives ganging against their husband's wish to marry extra wives. In some cases, mothers assisted and supported their sons to marry other wives, a situation that often generated tensions and conflicts in the homesteads. These cases were common at MB's ritual practice and their solution often led to the examination and uncovering of intricate webs of relationships, accusations and counter accusations, and tales of clients' vicious cycles of dalliance with perceived supernatural powers.

The case of Jael was one such example and in typical MB's ritual healing practice, a client's initial complaint always invited an examination of the status of their relationships with their social, material and spiritual contexts. I met Jael at MB's ritual arena and struck a conversation with her. She was a lively, slightly built and talkative 43 years- old lady who was separated from her husband at the time of her visit to MB. Her husband had married another woman and she resorted to small scale business to eke out a living. At the time of our meeting, she had lesions spread around her face, especially around her mouth and her feet and her legs were swollen. One could easily spot her swollen feet as they seemed to be almost bursting out of her shoes. Jael had been experiencing problems in her business and recently due to her swollen legs could no longer go to the market place. At the same time, she was involved in a tussle with her husband over the custody and ownership of her children. After separating with her husband, Jael moved out of her matrimonial home leaving her children with her husband. It was not very clear from our conversation what actually led her to desert her matrimonial home and by this time in my fieldwork, I had come to the conclusion that it was pointless to try and get an objective story from the clients regarding the initial cause for a visit to MB. Clients explanation of their predicaments were always a composite of their initial complaint as well as what MB had told them about the nature and cause of their problems. It was however not too difficult to tell what their real interests were based on their behaviour during the X-ray sessions. Clients would listen very

attentively and react sharply to certain sections of their X-rays sessions yet go through other sessions in a routine almost disinterested manner. Jael explained to me that she sought MB's help to find out the source of her illnesses as well as the reason why her business fortunes were dwindling. She also wanted MB's help to enable her either get back to her husband or at least have access to her children. As can be seen in the transcript below, she stated categorically that she did not want anyone to 'eat her children'.

Jael was, like other clients, taken through the initial rituals of registration, initial divination and her case brought to the X-ray stage. In the initial divination MB informed her that she was a victim of jealousy from her business colleagues at the market place who had used medicines to drive her away from her business. However, the greatest source of her misfortunes came from her co-wife and mother-in-law. She (Jael) had been involved in several physical fights with her husband's new wife which made her a target for ritual attack. Jael informed me that she had bitter quarrels with her mother-in-law while she was married. She also boasted to me (probably because I was a man) that she occasionally fought and subdued her husband and his new wife. Her boisterous and domineering character is very evident even in the conversations during the X-ray sessions. She yelled and commanded the voices of her adversaries and vowed to beat them up in spite of the secretary's caution that she would be accused and punished for her actions. In the transcript that I reproduce below she vows to beat up her husband and new wife if they continued mistreating her children. Jael's case went through the four stages of the X-ray and culminated with the burning of the witches who procured witchcraft that was used against her. I reproduce sections of one of the sessions (the hearing session) and give a commentary on the other sessions as well as the end result of her healing sessions.

#### Transcript of Jael's X-ray session.

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: My name is Dickson Munyambu. I want to tell you I am the one who assisted Mary Anyangu.

SEC: Dickson you are accused!

CL: Yes, Talk!

VFB: I assisted the woman called Mary Anyangu Mboka.

SEC & CL: What did you assist her to do?

VFB: I am the one who assisted Mary to bewitch another woman known as Jael Okoti. I am the one who assisted Mary Anyangu to bewitch that woman to die.

CL: Okay, so you assisted her to bewitch and kill me, right?

VFB: I am the one who sent ‘things’<sup>65</sup> to go to her mouth, to go to her head, to go to her entire body and to bewitch her business so that it would not progress well. I have blocked all her plans so that they are not successful. I have bewitched her in all ways. I am the one who bewitched her money. In doing this work, I was assisting Mary Anyangu to bewitch Jael so that she would not be able to come to the market to do her business.

CL: Continue,

(Silence)

SEC: Let us accuse her.

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse her!

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: I want to tell you guys, my name is Mary Anyangu.

SEC: You are accused.

VFB: I want to explain to you people I am the one who bewitched Jael to become very sick, I even thought she would die. But she has recovered. I did not want her to survive. I have bewitched her. I did not want her to come to the market to sell her stuff. I put medicines where she used to spread her wares to sell. In bewitching her, I did not do this alone. I collaborated with my sister Opita. We collaborated to ensure that Jael experienced problems, so that she would use the proceeds from her business to sort out her problems. We do not want her to make any progress in her life until she decamps from this place. I am the one who made her completely sick through witchcraft. There was this day I borrowed Kshs 20 from her and used it to bewitch her.

SEC: Let us accuse her,

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse her!

3<sup>rd</sup> VFB: My name is Helen Abila. My work was to assist Farida to send away the wife to her son, that wife called Jael. I wanted her to be sent away completely and never to come back to that homestead again. I am the one who used ‘medicines’ to send away the wife of that son called Ryan ....

CL: (intervenes) Ryan Mambo!

VFB: Yes, the son called Ryan Okoth Mambo. I wanted him to marry another wife and not to stay with that woman called Jael. I have blocked all her plans. I do not want this woman to come back to this compound ever. I have accepted I did that.

SEC: Let us accuse her,

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse her!

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<sup>65</sup> By ‘things’ the VFB means substances with harmful ritual power.

4<sup>th</sup> VFB: I have come, my name is Farida Inganga.

CL. & SEC: You are accused.

VFB: I do not want Jael to be married to my son. I wanted Jael to be sent away completely. I wanted her to be sent away because she is not a good woman. I observed her very well and realized that she cannot agree with me in what I want to do. I decided to use witchcraft to ensure that she does not live with my son Ryan, anymore.

CL: Continue!

SEC: Let us accuse her,

CONGREG: Yes we accuse her!

5<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Ryan.

CL: (shouting) Yes Ryan, talk!

VFB: My name is Ryan Okoth Mambo. I want to ask, what is going on here?

SEC: You are accused!

VFB: Who has accused me?

SEC: Who can you see here?

VFB: I want to ask, who has accused me?

CL: Who do you know here?

VFB: If it is you Jael Okoti, I already left you and since I left you, I do not have any relationship with you. I do not want to come back to you ever. I say this for one reason: I have my wife called Janet. Have you ever seen Janet Imbia? Janet Imbia is my wife, and I am going to live with her as my wife for the rest of my life and not you. But for you, I left you a long time ago and your children are already grown up. There is no way I am ever going to come back to you again. As of now you should know, there is even the possibility that you have HIV/AIDS. The way I see it, you do not want to die out there, you want to come back and die in my compound. That is what I do not want. What I want you to explain to me today is this: since we left each other, is there anything that I owe you?

CL: Yes you owe me. The children that you have are mine and I do not want anyone else to benefit from them!

VFB: I want to ask you one thing: Is it not over 11 years since I left you? What are you calling me here to do? Why are you calling me here?

CL: I am calling you because those children belong to me and I do not want anyone else to 'eat them' (benefit from them).

VFB: This idea of bringing my soul to such a dangerous place is not good. This is a place where they kill people. Why are you calling me here? What do you want?

CL: I want to stay close to my children! I do not want you to 'eat them with your wife'! They are my children, I gave birth to them.

VFB: This matter is not as simple as you think, I cannot agree to your demands just like that! I want to ask this woman who is sitting here with a pen and book writing: Who are you in this case? Before I can continue saying anything, who is this woman here with a pen and a book?

SEC: I am a judge in this matter! Now continue explaining.

VFB: You see, this woman here is not the type that someone can live with. I showed her all my love, even my (new) wife showed her love, even my children showed her love but she was a loose woman, she moved around with other men and eventually she was unable to take care of her house and she left me.

CL: You are a liar. We have just heard clearly, it is your wife and mother who sent me away. Which men are you talking about? Which man did you find me with?

VFB: It is over 11 years since we last related, why are you calling me here?

CL: (interrupts) You are now lying here! Which man did you find me with?

SEC: Allow him to give his side of the story.

CL: Yes, just give your side of the story but know you are lying.

VFB: I do not refuse, if it is about us getting back together, you should give me one month to think about it, but just know, if I ever agree to live with you again, it will be because this court has forced me, it will not be out of my own wish. I have seen that you guys can kill me if I refuse.

CL: Yes!

(Congregation bursts into laughter)

VFB: I will only do it because you guys can kill me.

CL: I can actually finish you and if anybody 'eats my children' that is when you will know that I am Jael!

VFB: That is why I am asking you guys to allow me one month to consider how she will come back, and if she comes back where she will stay and that kind of thing. I want to make it clear that I have only agreed because of fear. But I am asking you to give me one month to think about it and then I will give you an answer.

CL: Keep talking we are listening.

SEC: You should bring your wives back to your homestead, disagreements are part of life.

SEC: Let us accuse him!

CONGREG: Yes, let us accuse him.

6<sup>th</sup> VFB: I want to tell you my name is Janet Imbia.

SEC: Janet, you are accused.

CL: You are accused.

VFB: My name is Janet Imbia.. I want to tell you clearly my name is Janet Imbia. I want to explain to you, this woman was unable to live with her husband. And when she could not live with the husband, I persevered and lived with him. And so I do not want to see this woman ever again. I have put all types of medicines in my husband's food so that he may never bring this woman back to our homestead. I have used all types of medicines to ensure this woman never returns to my compound and never resumes her relationship with my husband. I have fed Ryan Okoth all types of medicines in his food so that he may forget about this prostitute. This is not a good woman; she could easily infect us. In fact this woman beat me up many times.

SEC: (to client) If you actually beat her up, we shall also accuse you for beating up someone.

CL: I agree, I beat you up because of your own mistakes. You were beating up my children and so I decided to beat you up together with your husband. That is true, I cannot deny it, yes, I beat you up!

VFB: Why did you beat me up? You are such a crude person!

CL: And even when I come back, if you will not have changed your behaviour, I will still beat you up again. That one I will not stop.

SEC: If you beat her up, you will be the one to be accused here!

VFB: I went to a witch who 'covered' (bewitched) this woman, so that all her plans fail wherever she goes.

CL: Now I have reached the end of the rail<sup>66</sup>. For me I am working with God, I am not using any monies. But for you, your money will go freely.

SEC: Let us accuse her!

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse her!

End of transcript.

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<sup>66</sup> I have directly translated this expression 'I have reached the end of the rail' from its Kiswahili version 'Nimefika mwisho wa reli'. When used in this manner it means that the person has reached the limit of what they can tolerate.

In the transcript, the X-ray process provided several explanations to Jael's predicament. The first voice from the bible was that of a witch who claimed to have been contracted by Jael's business rival at the market place. The witch admitted that she sent sickness to Jael's head and mouth through sorcery. This confession is substantiated by the VFB of Jael's business rival who speaks next. She confirmed that she did not want Jael to continue selling her wares in the market and as a result obtained medicines and sprinkled them at the place where she spread her merchandise. Her aim was to make Jael sick so that she would spend all her resources seeking treatment and eventually smoke her out of the market place.

But perhaps the most important aspect of Jael's predicament (and one that she really seemed interested in) revolved around her relationships with her mother-in-law, her ex-husband and his new wife. In the X-ray session, a VFB claiming to be that of her mother-in-law (4<sup>th</sup> VFB) confessed to have used witchcraft to send her away from her husband. Her mother-in-law is adamant that she never wanted Jael to be married to her son as 'she was not a good woman'. Her confession however only served to confirm what the previous VFB had stated. The 3<sup>rd</sup> VFB confessed to be a witch who was consulted by Jael's mother-in-law to concoct 'medicines' that would be used to ensure that Jael was divorced from her husband. These confessions lead up to Jael's ex-husband's confession. A heated altercation between Jael and her ex-husband (VFB 5) ensued. Jael's ex-husband stated unambiguously that he was not interested in remarrying Jael as he was already married to another woman with whom he intended to spend the rest of his life. He was initially very adamant and claimed that it was over 11 years after he divorced Jael. Amidst protests from Jael, he claimed that she had been adulterous and unloving and might even be infected with the HIV/AIDS virus. Jael denied all his allegations and in a very harsh tone labelled him a liar. When asked by her ex-husband if he owed her anything, her answer is categorical: *'I want to stay close to my children! I do not want you to 'eat them with your wife'! They are my children, I gave birth to them'*. Later in the conversation and seemingly emboldened by the fact that she had cornered her ex-husband through the bible, she made her case and intentions very clear: *'I can actually finish you and if anybody 'eats my children' that is when you will know that I am Jael'*.

In this X-ray session, Jael's husband started his confessions in an adamant attitude and declared that he was married and not interested in remarrying Jael. At some point, he even demanded that the secretary identify herself before he continued with his confessions, to



which the secretary responded firmly, *'I am the judge'*. After the secretary's declaration, he toned down his voice and mannerisms, offered a candid explanation as to why he deserted Jael but eventually offered to reconsider bringing her back to her homestead. As he offered to consider remarrying Jael, he stated clearly that he only did so because he feared for his life: *'I will only do it because you people can kill me'*. However as he toned down, Jael became more bellicose, even disregarding the secretary's warnings to refrain from interrupting her husband's confessions. As her husband appeared to be shaken by the X-ray ordeal, she revelled in it and declared, to the amusement of the congregation that she could actually *'finish him'* (her husband).

The last VFB was that of Jael's co-wife and she too, like her husband got a serious tongue lashing from Jael. In her confession, she brazenly explained that Jael was a terrible woman who could not live with any husband. She had therefore taken over Jael's husband and proceeded to put 'medicines' in her husband's food so that he may never think of reuniting with Jael. To illustrate Jael's crude conduct, she confessed that Jael had beaten her up in the past which prompted her to resort to witchcraft to 'spoil all her plans'. In the course of this confession, Jael interrupted her, agreed to have beaten her up and declared that she would beat her again if she continued mistreating her (Jael's) children. The secretary intervened again and warned Jael that she would be accused and punished if she resorted to violence against her co-wife. On the other hand the secretary entreats Jael's ex-husband to bring back her ex-wife and counselled him to live peacefully with both of them; *'You should bring your wives back to your homestead, disagreements are part of life'*

With this session, Jael formally started the X-ray process in MBs ritual healing. Like all other X-ray sessions, Jael's case moved to the 'Hearing' and then the 'Judgment' sessions. The subsequent sessions were quite similar to each other as well as to the first one whose transcript I have provided above. The sessions were held a week apart from each other. The discussions were however shorter compared to the first session. The six VFBs appeared virtually in the same order as they did in the first session. There was first the VFB of the witch who repeated his confessions that he had been hired by Jael's business colleague to send sickness to her head and mouth as well as to conjure medicines that would make her fail in her business pursuit. The VFB repeated the same confessions at the hearing and Judgments stages. At the end of his confession at both stages, the secretary led the congregation in demanding that the VFB howls. The VFB howled six times and the

congregation ordered it to remain captured in the bible. The second VFB was that of Jael's business rival and she too confessed, as she had in the first session, to have consulted a witch to harm Jael. At the end of her confession in both sessions, the secretary directed that she howls. In her case, the congregation retorted, *'May your evil deeds revert back to you'*. The third VFB was that of the second witch who had been consulted by Jael's mother-in-law to conjure 'medicines' to ensure that Jael got divorced. Like in all other VFBs that confessed to be witches, the secretary and the congregation demanded that she howls and remain captured in the Bible. Jael's mother-in-law was next and she too repeated her confessions that she consulted a witch to ensure that her son divorced Jael. As she howled at the end of her confessions, there was some initial confusion over the rejoinder that the congregation should utter. Initially the secretary directed the congregation to capture her in the bible but after the first howl, she realized the error and directed the congregation to reply by saying, *May your evil deeds revert back to you'*. In the X-ray process only witches and murderers were asked to remain captured in the bible so that they would be set on fire. Anyone who consulted witches, especially one's own family members would be asked to take back their evil desires and designs.

The last two confessions were those of the VFBs for Jael's ex-husband and his current wife. In the two sessions (hearing and judgement) Jael's former husband verbalized his fear of the court sessions and promised to invite Jael back to her matrimonial home. He however maintained his defiant attitude over the reasons for his decision to remarry Jael. He was unequivocal that he decided to remarry Jael due to his fear of the court process: *'I have seen that you people can actually kill someone: If you can take my voice and make it speak here, then you guys are really tough'*. In these two sessions he even negotiated for extra time to make arrangements to come and pick Jael. Jael was however in her defiant self, threatening him and demanding that he comes to pick her immediately. These prompted the secretary to intervene and request her to give her ex-husband time to get ready to pick her. I reproduce a few lines of their conversation below:

#### The Transcript.

VFB (Jael's ex-husband): I do not think I have anything to tell you people today. But because you have forced me, I will just accept to go back, search for Jael and just stay with her. You people are quite tough and I have seen today's session is really dangerous. I do not want to be killed.

SEC: Yes, if you do not want to be killed then you howl and re-unite with Jael.

VFB: As of now, I would beg you to allow me to make plans till the end of this month, as you can see we are in October, give me till the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> of November. I already had other plans for this month, and I will come for her by the beginning of November.

CL: I want you to stop everything that you are doing and come for me. You will see fire if you play around with me again!

Congregation bursts into laughter.

SEC: No. Let us be fair and allow him time to get ready. You heard him explain and excuse himself clearly.

CL: Yes, and if you do not, then you will see fire!

Congregation bursts out laughing again!

End of transcript.

At the end of the confessions by Jael's ex-husband, the secretary demanded that he howl and the congregation retorted, *'May you go back for Jael and live together in peace!'* The last VFB to confess in the X-ray process for Jael was that of Jael's ex-husband's current wife. In both sessions ('hearing' and 'judgment'), she is defiant that she would not allow Jael to be reunited with her husband. The sessions, like the initial one are hilarious with the VFB justifying her use of medicines because Jael beat her up. In spite of admonitions by the secretary, Jael repeated her vows to beat her up if she continued mistreating her children. Her confessions in both sessions concluded with the secretary asking her to howl and the congregation responded by cajoling her to *'cease using medicines and agree to live together with her co-wife in harmony'*. At the judgement stage, the secretary set the bible on fire to signify the beginning of the healing process. The two witches involved in conjuring witchcraft were expected to die, Jael's husband was expected to come for her on the dates he suggested and his current wife would stop using medicines to stop her ex-husband from reuniting with her. Equally, her mother in-law and business colleague would cease using 'medicines' against her.

Jael's case typified the ways in which MB dealt with cases of marital discord as well as the general principles of his healing procedures. MB always informed his clients that he would summon all the people involved in afflicting them to his courtroom so that the client would talk to them directly. All cases, regardless of their nature went through the X-ray process

and the clients would make their demands with the assistance and moderation from the secretary. Witches were always sentenced to death by burning, and with their death their ability to afflict the clients was considered to be neutralized. Those who contacted witches would be asked to take back the effect of their witchcraft or be afflicted in equal measure. In this case, Jael's mother in-law and her business rival's abilities to afflict Jael were considered neutralized by the conclusion of the ritual. However the reunion between Jael and her ex-husband would have to wait till the end of the month. Jael was therefore asked to come back to MB if her husband would not have come to pick her as he had promised.

This aspect of the ritual exemplifies MBs position on marriage arrangements, family union and harmony. MB repeatedly informed me and preached that his healing rituals were never meant to break up families but maintained family unity and justice. Even though his position appeared inconsistent and at times, not very clear, he followed certain broad guidelines. He never preached against polygamy and in one of his Sunday church service sermons, he told a comical story to his congregation on how he made marriage arrangements for one of his seven wives. He maintained that dissolution of a marriage could only be done by mutual consent from both partners. It was the duty of the husband to take care of all his wives and children in the event that he married another wife. Many clients came to him to complain that their husbands had neglected them after marrying other wives. MB conducted rituals to reunite wives with their husbands. MB would perform rituals to bring back wives who deserted their husbands like in the case of Habib that I illustrated in chapter 3.

MB's support for polygamy even though he was a Christian preacher is made clearer in the case that I discuss below.

#### **4.4. Disputed Polygyny within Polygyny.**

##### **Case 4. 'You will not marry our husband; his hoe no longer digs'**

This was the case of Hilda who came to MBs healing rituals ostensibly to know why her business fortunes were tapering but in the ensuing X-ray process, it became clear that she was interested in getting both emotional and financial support from her husband. Hilda was 38 years old, married as a 3<sup>rd</sup> wife to a primary school teacher. She had two children, one with her current husband and the first one from her previous relationship. It was not clear to me whether she was ever married to the father of her first child. Hilda explained to me that she had been married for 8 years and was a businesswoman who conducted her trade at a

local market selling fruits and other farm produce. Her current husband and father to her last born provided her with capital to start her business. Even though she knew that her husband had two other wives by the time they got married, she did not mind as long as he supported her and her baby. Her business was progressing well until about a year to our meeting. She complained that over the past one year, she had experienced inexplicable and persistent health problems ranging from severe headaches, stomach trouble, and skin rashes. She had visited several biomedical health facilities but had not received any proper explanations and treatment for her condition. In the meantime, she experienced dwindling economic fortunes, as a result of not attending to her business, but also spending lots of the earnings from her trade to seek medical attention. In the course of her tribulations, her husband ceased supporting her and her children. As she encountered this distress, a friend suggested that she visits MB and this marked the beginning of her encounter with MB's ritual healing.

Hilda was taken through the administrative procedures before finally having an appointment with MB as per MB's standard procedure. According to Hilda, MB's tentative divination identified tensions and jealousies from her social matrix, specifically from her co-wives as responsible for her misfortunes. After discussing her plight and initial divination by MB, she proceeded to the X-ray sessions where she would get the details of her afflictions and start the healing process.

Hilda's X-ray sessions were like many other X-ray sessions, full of drama, suspense, and the unearthing of embarrassing aspects of both her private behaviour and that of her co-wives. Her X-ray sessions went through all the four stages of the X-ray. Five characters emerged through the four stages of the X-ray. These were two witches, two of Hilda's co-wives and another woman who claimed to have been married to Hilda's husband but was currently married to someone else, because Hilda's husband's 'hoe could no longer dig'. This expression was used by the VFB to mean that Hilda's husband suffered from erectile dysfunction and caused lots of laughter from the congregation every time she mentioned this in the X-ray process. Although I attended all sessions of Hilda's X-ray, I reproduce the summarized proceeding of only of them, 'the hearing' to illustrate the issues in her case.

#### The Transcript.

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: I have come my name is Dishon Murwa. I am a witch and I am the one who assisted Grace Maloba to bewitch Hilda and send her away because she has made her husband not assist his other wives. I concocted medicines and advised Grace to sprinkle

them in the market place where Hilda spreads her fruits to sell. This was intended to make her fail in her business, become sick and use all the proceeds from her business to treat herself. Grace came to me and asked me to ensure that Hilda was divorced from her husband and failed in her business. This was because she had used money from Grace's husband to start the business. Due to this, Grace's husband had stopped supporting her (Grace) and her other co-wife and their children were suffering.

Silence:

SEC: Continue.

VFB: For me, I already assisted Grace Maloba. So what do you guys want? You see this is a job that I have already completed.

SEC: You howl!

Silence

SEC: Howl now!

The VFB howled six times and the congregation responded:

CONGREG: Remain there!

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: My name is Grace Maloba. I am Jacob's wife. I want Jacob to divorce Hilda. I want Jacob to disagree with Hilda. This is because since Jacob started relating with Hilda, he has stopped assisting his own children with me. At the same time, Hilda could infect my husband who will also infect me as well (means with STDs). Because of that, even my other co-wife, Timona is complaining. So my question is: why have you people accused me in this court?

SEC: (to client) She wants you to explain why you have accused her.

(Silence):

OMC: (to client) Why have you accused her?

Silence. (Hilda does not respond to any of these questions)

VFB: For me I have agreed, I am Grace Maloba, and as I have explained, I went to Dishon so that he could help me spoil everything that belongs to Hilda. So what did you people want?

SEC: Howl and stop your evil deeds!

VFB: You see, even Timona is complaining about this woman called Hilda. We are the ones who have planned and obtained medicines to make the teacher (Jacob) stop his relationship with this woman completely. We have really suffered because of this woman. They (Jacob and Hilda) even moved away from our main compound and went to stay far away. And therefore, all the money that Jacob gets from the rented houses or from the lodges is spent by the two of them – Jacob and Hilda. We do not get anything and Jacob does not care for

us. He does not want to help us and he does not want to assist the children. I know he has educated the children but nowadays one must not just educate the children but must also help them find jobs. Merely educating a child is not enough. This is what annoyed me. So do you guys want me to howl or just keep quiet?

SEC and CONGREG: Howl!

VFB: You see my main aim was for Jacob to stop his relationship with Hilda. I do not want them to live peacefully together. This is because since Hilda got into the relationship with Jacob, life has become completely difficult for me; Jacob no longer assists me and my children in any way. He does not even assist the children to find jobs. So I decided to ensure that Hilda does not succeed in any of her plans. So what did you people want? Please explain to me.

SEC: Then howl.

VFB: You want me to howl?

CONGREG: Yes

VFB: How do I howl?

Congregation demonstrates how the VFB should howl.

VFB: Why should I howl?

SEC: You howl, we shall tell you!

The VFB howled seven times and the congregation responded:

CONGREG: Stop your witchcraft deeds.

NB: As the congregation uttered the above rejoinder, the secretary intermittently uttered a separate rejoinder, i.e. May you love one another and cooperate! This rejoinder strongly indicated MB's position regarding polygamy, a stand that was strongly supported by the fact that on this day, one of his wives acted as the secretary.

SEC: Allow the other one to come.

3<sup>rd</sup> VFB: My name is Beatrice Sungu and I have been Jacob's wife. But as of now, I am no longer his wife. I am now the wife to Ian. As of now, Ian is looking for money. He found someone else in Eldoret who is constructing a house and since he is a mason, we shall move to Eldoret and live there as he works on this construction site. Like I told you before, I am not going back to Jacob. I am not going back to Jacob. I want to tell you a few things that make me not want to go back to Jacob. The first reason is that 'his hoe does not dig'.

SEC: What?

VFB: The farm is still intact, the farm is there but the hoe does not dig. (VFB bursts into laughter and elicits laughter from the congregation). When I say 'his hoe does not dig', I am sure you understand what I am talking about.

CONGREG: (Laughing) Yes we do!

VFB: And so I was not able to understand whether this was due to his advancing age, or whether he was bewitched etc. I could not understand. The second thing is that his children were treating me as though they were the ones who had married me. They ordered me around the way they wanted. At times you find a child demanding that I cook for him anytime he wanted. Initially I really loved Jacob as my husband. But later he brought his children to live with us and his children started abusing and ordering me around the way they wanted. They would even order me not to go to the salon and instead cook for them. They uttered things that I should not even hear as their mother. That is why I decided that I would not live with Jacob any more.

OMC: But aren't you their mother?

VFB: You see even though Jacob is a retired teacher, he really had wealth. It is not that he has no money. But then he refused to buy me anything, even a pant (congregation bursts out laughing). And that is why I decided to start my own business, buying and selling sugarcane. But when I started this business, it became difficult for me to buy the sugarcane. That was when I started sending this guy called Mayavi because he used to come to our home for work. There were times when he would help us saw timber from trees here in our compound. I became used to Mayavi and even started sending him to buy me sugar cane that I sold. This is how I started my relationship with Mayavi and eventually got married to him. Can you guys imagine a situation where I stoop as low as getting married to one of our employees? It is because of problems. I just decided to get married to one of our employees and make my life with him. I decided that it was much better to start life with Mayavi, persevere with him as he tried to make ends meet. This is how it was. So for now, I just want to tell you people I am in Bukembe. I came to buy potatoes and will be going back to Eldoret to sell them. There is another lady friend who is teaching me how to do business. We go to such places like Bukembe to collect potatoes, and sell them in Eldoret. I just want to tell you people that I loved and respected the teacher (Jacob), but as for now, things are impossible.

SEC: Howl and go back to your home.

The VFB did not howl and instead, the next VFB comes on.

4<sup>th</sup> VFB: I have come my name is Ruth Imbaya and I am a witch. I am the one who assisted Timona Mwimbi. I am not sure of the second name though. Her second name might even be Nyongesa. I am the one who assisted her in blocking her husband from marrying another wife. I assisted Timona Mwimbi to do that. Timona Mwimbi is Jacob's wife. She said I should not give Jacob any chance to marry another woman. I should make some magic that will make all the extra wives that he married desert him. I have accepted that I also blocked all his means of getting wealth. So do you people want me to howl too?

SEC: Yes, howl!



VFB howls five times and congregation responds:

CONGREG: Remain there!

5<sup>th</sup> VFB: I have come my name is Timona Mwimbi. You see, Jacob is my husband and is also the husband of all of us. But when he married another wife after the two of us, he changed completely and started behaving very differently. His behaviour became completely different. And the woman he married is called Hilda. We know Hilda quite well, she 'sleeps around with many men'. She has prostituted everywhere - we know her quite well. We realized that she could easily infect us. And we realized that, it would not be a good thing if we were all to be infected. That was why we decided to ensure that our man does not marry another wife. His children should inherit the farm that he is now living in with Hilda. Jacob should just come back to his compound. But if he also wants us to leave this compound, he should buy us land and let us move there. This farm here should just remain here, as it is his ancestral land. You see, even one of our children complained to us that Hilda wanted to have sex with him. I want to ask you people if you really claim that this is a court, Should we allow this type of woman to get married to our man? This woman is asking the son to her husband to have sex with her – the son is supposed to 'enter in to his father's porridge' do you think this is fair? I am asking you people in this court, 'is this woman doing a good thing or a bad thing?'

SEC and CONGREG: No, that is very bad!

VFB: Yes, that is what really annoyed us and we decided to do everything possible to ensure that this woman left our husband.

SEC: Then howl!

VFB: Yes, I heard you people telling others to howl. Should I also howl or just keep quiet?

SEC: Howl

VFB: Howls seven times and the congregation responds:

CONGREG: Stop all your witchcraft activities!

End of transcript.

As this transcript shows, Hilda's co-wives had ganged up against her relationship with their husband and complained about Hilda's character. The first VFB was that of a witch who explained that he was approached by Hilda's co-wife to conjure 'medicines' that would ensure that Hilda got sick, was divorced from her husband and failed in her business. The confession is corroborated by the 2nd VFB, Hilda's co-wife. She candidly explains that she feared for her life as Hilda was a prostitute who could infect her husband with a sexually

transmitted infection. She chronicles a litany of complaints against Hilda who she blames for the fact that her husband no longer supported her other co-wives and children.

The third VFB was the most elaborate and dramatic in this case. Although she was not involved in any forms of atrocious activities against Hilda, her divulgence, was a blunt and somewhat embarrassing revelation of her sexual life and that of Hilda's husband. The VFB uses euphemisms, *'his hoe does not dig'* and *'the farm is still intact'* to explain her decisions to divorce Hilda's husband. She explains that Hilda's husband suffered erectile dysfunction and this was the reason she deserted him and married one of his farm workers. This confession produced prolonged laughter from the VFB and the congregation. The VFB offered a candid explanation of her life with Hilda's husband, his financial abilities, his waning age and sexual capabilities before engaging in yet another long explanation of her dalliance with their farm worker and her eventual, and in her opinion, humiliating decision to elope with him. Although her confession is the most elaborate, she does not seem to have committed any offences against Hilda and even declines to howl at the end of her confession. The secretary too appears confused over what to tell her at the end of the confession. Rather than howl, the 4<sup>th</sup> VFB's confession ensued. The VFB turned out to be that of yet another witch who confessed to have been approached by Hilda's other co-wife to concoct 'medicines' that would ensure that Hilda got divorced and that their joint husband never married any other woman.

The last VFB was that of Hilda's second co-wife who corroborated the explanation proffered by the witch she consulted (4<sup>th</sup> VFB). The VFB gave candid details of Hilda's behaviour, explaining that she was a well known prostitute who would infect their husband. She further complained that Hilda seduced one of her sons. She too used euphemisms to explain her position, i.e. *'the son is supposed to enter his father's porridge'*. At this point she confronted the congregation and demanded to know whether the congregation agreed with the kind of behaviour that Hilda exhibited: *'I want to ask you people, if you really claim that this is a court: Is this the type of woman that we should allow to get married to our man?'* The congregation answered in the negative and the VFB used the response to justify and conclude her confession. Even though Hilda's co-wife eloquently tried to justify her use of witchcraft, the secretary asked her to howl and led the congregation in admonishing her to refrain from witchcraft activities.

In the course of this and other sessions conducted in Hilda's case, I noticed that she (Hilda) maintained a studious silence throughout the sessions, leaving it to the secretary and the congregation to guide the proceedings. Throughout the confessions, she sat in the front row, listening attentively and one could not tell from her expressionless face whether she was scared or embarrassed. The only time she responded to the VFBs was in the judgment stage of her X-ray session where the VFBs increased to six with the inclusion of her husband. At this stage the VFB for Hilda's husband appeared for the first time and pledged to resume supporting Hilda and her children. He promised to allocate her land where she could live with her son. It was at this point that Hilda confronted him and claimed that he had made that promise many times in the past without fulfilling it. I provide a part of the discussion as an illustration.

The transcript.

VFB (Hilda's husband): I have not refused to support you. In fact I have even set aside a plot where you and your children can live.

Hilda: No, that is what you have been saying and yet you have never showed us the plot.

VFB: I have already said that I have set aside a plot so that you can stay with your son away from my other wives. I have seen it is not possible for you to stay with my other wives without quarrelling.

Hilda: You are lying. If that is the case, why have you never showed us the plot?

VFB: You come home and I will show it to you in due course. I have so far kept it a secret so that my other wives do not get to know about it and cause problems.

Hilda: You stop your lies and open up the way for your son!

End of transcript.

At the judgement stage of Hilda's X-ray session, the two witches involved were set on fire after being captured in the bible. Hilda's two co-wives were asked to howl and the congregation retorted by a mixture of 'may your evil deeds revert back to you' and 'stop your witchcraft activities and live together in harmony. There appeared to be no clear direction from the secretary in both instances. The Hearing and the Judgment stages of the X-ray were conducted by two different secretaries. In the hearing session, MB's wife, herself a co wife to six others was the secretary. In the Judgment session, the regular secretary was in charge of the sessions. I observed that it was mainly during the hearing session by MB's

wife that the reconciliatory response (i.e. stop your witchcraft activities and live together in harmony) was used while the secretary led the congregation in uttering the retributive response (i.e. may your evil deeds revert back to you).

Hilda's and many other cases served to illustrate MBs acceptance, support and respect for all forms of marriages and family unity as a way of forestalling conflicts. In the Judgment session, Hilda and her co-wives were encouraged to live together in harmony. Surprisingly though, like in Habib's case ( see pgs 120 ff ) Hilda's 3<sup>rd</sup> co-wife, who confessed to have deserted Hilda's husband was compelled, amidst strong protests from her to reunite with him. In her confession during the 'Judgment' stage of the X-ray sessions, she complained that her former husband was stalking her and even using police to try and locate her. She demanded that she be left alone and beseeched the congregation to stop bothering her. She confronted the congregation and demanded that the congregation desists from disturbing her. In utter disgust to the X-ray process, she referred to her former husband as 'thing', 'Do you (congregation) have to force me to live with a 'thing' that I neither want nor love? The congregation led by the secretary was however adamant that she should reunite with her husband.

It was not clear to me whether Hilda asked MB to assist her husband reunite with one of his ex-wives. As the nature of relationships exhibited here signalled competition for one husband and his resources between four wives, it was unlikely that Hilda would have wanted her husband to reunite with his fourth wife. MB was equally vague when I sort clarification on the nature of the healing in this case. He maintained that his healing rituals primed family cohesion. As a comprehensive ritual healing process, it was important to bring all co-wives to live together in harmony because a discontented wife would always be a source of ill will and may from time to time seek to afflict the husband or her co-wives. That was why all wives had to be reunited with each other and with their husband. The key processes for the healing in Hilda's case were therefore to neutralize the witches contacted by Hilda's co-wives and to ensure that the co-wives (including one who had deserted) lived together in harmony with their joint husband. During the judgement session, the two witches (1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> VFB) howled and got captured in the bible. Hilda's two co-wives were rebuked and asked to desist from their witchcraft activities. There was then the third angle to the healing where the 3<sup>rd</sup> co-wife who had deserted was asked to come back and live with

Hilda's husband. All these processes are activated when the secretary sets the bible on fire at the end of the judgment session.

At the end of this session Hilda was asked to report back to MB for the 'outcome' session within a month's time. I met Hilda a couple of weeks later at MBs when she came for the 'Outcome' session of her healing rituals. Her outcome session went more or less according to MB's textbook healing formula. In this session, the VFBs of the two witches set on fire at the judgement session appeared and confessed to have died after being set on fire in the bible. Hilda's co-wives confessed to have ceased their witchcraft activities. They did not however commit to leaving with Hilda harmoniously. The third co-wife however maintained her defiant attitude. In this session, she confessed that she had moved back to her parents homestead and once again reiterated her position that she would never be married again to Hilda's husband. Hilda's husband on the other hand promised to resume his assistance to her and this was the last time I encountered Hilda at MB's healing rituals.

#### **4.5. Reuniting children with their parents and cornering crafty boyfriends.**

As most of the illustrations provided in this section clearly show, a large proportion of healing rituals by MB concerned repairing broken social relations. In my introduction I mentioned that broken relationships were not only a source of distress by themselves but also an indicator of the possibility that aggrieved parties may resort to using preternatural forces to get even. I have this far illustrated the ways in which MB reconstructed broken relationships between married couples. In the following session I give two examples of cases where clients came to MB to help them, in one instance, locate their sister who went missing from their home and in the second case, to compel a father to pay college fees for her daughter.

#### **Case 5. Betty and her sister.**

In my interactions with MB, he repeatedly informed me that among the cases he handled most frequently were those of clients who had lost contact with close members of their families. The most common cases were of children who went missing as well as young girls who were either abducted or secretly married or who simply lost contact with their families. In one such case, MB introduced me to a client whose daughter he had helped locate and reunite with her parents. I met the client with the said daughter on several occasions at MBs as she consulted for other problems. I was eager to find out exactly how MB ritually located

lost children and spouses and when the case of Betty came up, I was naturally attracted to finding more about the ritual process.

Betty was 32 years old and the first born in a family of five girls. None of her sisters were married and they all lived together with their parents in Kitale. Betty explained to me that the main reason for her consultation with MB was to locate and bring their last born sister home. Their last born sister, who was 19 years old, had completed her high school education and was due to join a tertiary college for further education. Betty and her parents were in the process of discussing and finding out what type of college and training she would take when she disappeared from home one morning. All attempts to find her among their relatives and close family friends were unsuccessful. Fearing for the worst case scenario, they reported the case to the police and even visited several morgues in case she had been murdered. Three and a half months down the line and with no trace of her sister's whereabouts, they decided to consult MB.

I picked up a discussion with Betty during the usual lunch breaks. The lunch break was always a time when clients talked uninhibited about everything including their predicaments, and their consternation at MB's abilities. Occasionally some of them criticized the secretary and MB. The secretary was often criticized for denying clients the opportunity to meet MB before the church service (even though this was the general procedure) while MB was occasionally criticized for either protracting the rituals or refusing to mete out stiffer punishment to the people who were accused of afflicting the clients. It was during one such general conversation that I listened in on Betty narrating to another client how her sister went missing from their home and what a relief it would be for all of them if MB helped them bring her back home. She complained that her parents were aging and the disappearance of her sister was causing them a lot of distress.

On the first day of her visit, MB gave his tentative divination where he assured Betty that her sister was alive and living somewhere with 'a man'. The details of her actual whereabouts and 'her man' would be determined by the X-ray session. MB informed her that the next step was for her to go the X-ray session where she would speak with her sister and her sister would give her the details of her whereabouts, the reasons for her disappearance and her future intentions.

Betty paid the X-ray fee and waited with the rest of the clients for the X-ray session later in the afternoon of the very day she visited MB. Her X-ray sessions were like many of them full of drama, long drawn discussions and negotiations including threats from the secretary and a final agreement between her and her sister. The most fascinating thing however in this X-ray sessions was that for the first and only time in my entire fieldwork period, a VFB identified MBs ritual healing arena. In the first session of the healing rituals, the mention, two VFBs spoke from the bible. The first one was that of Betty's sister, Mercy. She explained that she was currently married and did not wish to be bothered by her parents or any of her siblings. Mercy claimed that she was comfortably married and that she planned to get pregnant so that her parents would not bother her anymore. She asked Betty to tell her parents not to worry about her prospects for further training as she would be attending college from her husband's residence. The next VFB was that of her husband. He gave his name and explained that he was Mercy's husband. He explained that he had hidden her where no one would find her. The first session was thus concluded and the case progressed to the 'hearing' session.

In the hearing session, Mercy engaged her sister, Betty in a protracted argument where she denounced her sister for meddling in her affairs, criticised her for listening too much to her parents and warned that she (Betty) would age at home without a husband if she continued listening to her parents. She vowed that she would never return to her parent's home because her mother beat her up severely on one occasion. Her husband's VFB also vowed that he would never allow Mercy go back to her parent's home. The discussion became tense at the end and when the VFB of Mercy's husband remained adamant, the secretary intervened and threatened to kill him. I reproduce sections of the hearing session of this case below:

#### The Transcript

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: My name is Mercy Jeptoo.

CL: Where are you?

VFB: I want to tell you Betty to leave me alone. There is no day I am going to disturb you asking for any assistance. In fact, I just told my husband that we should continue hiding for at least four years so that you people can leave us alone.

CL: Okay, just tell us where you are and continue staying there.

SEC: You get out of your hiding place so that your people can see you and let you continue staying there.

VFB: I am not getting out and I am never coming home. Are you telling me that my mother should be the one to get me a husband? And I want to tell you Betty that you people will stay at home and age there and will never get any husbands because of our mother.

CL: It is okay, let us stay at home and age, but you must come home with your husband, so that we can know him and then you can continue living together.

VFB: Whatever you are doing now is not fair. The other day you took my soul and made it to speak here when I was a sleep. Today you have repeated the same thing. I have just fallen asleep and started speaking here. What do you people want (she spoke in a completely agitated tone).

CL: You must tell us where you are! If you tell us, we shall leave you alone.

SEC: You tell them where you are and they will leave you alone.

VFB: I want you people to tell me the last thing. What are you interested in?

SEC: You, if you are married, then bring your husband home. You should not hide.

CL: We want you to bring your husband home so that we can know where you are.

VFB: You see, I do not have to come back home in order to go to college. I can go to college even when I am married. I cannot bring my husband home. You see, if my husband left me, will you people find me another one?

At this point, the VFB, the secretary and the client all spoke at the same time and a shouting match ensued.

CL: Nobody is interested in your husband, just come back home, show us your husband and that will be it.

VFB: You see, you and my other sisters are being fooled around by our mother. She is asking you to continue staying at home as you get older; you will never get husbands to marry you.

CL: It is okay, let us continue to be fooled by our mother but you must come back home!

SEC: You should go back home and let everybody know who your husband is. You should introduce your husband to your father!

VFB: For me I have found my husband; you should leave me alone.

CL: Where are you living with your husband?

VFB: I am not going to come back home because if I come back home, my mum is going to beat me up.



SEC: Okay just take your husband home to your father; nobody is going to beat you up.

CL: Okay, then don't come back home alone; you could come with your husband.

VFB: I left home because I did not like our mother's behaviour. So I do not want you people following me up and telling me to go back home. I am okay here.

(Silence)

VFB: I want to tell you Betty: all your age mates are married and some even have up to five children. And for you, you are just at home. So, how can you be advising me about marriage? There is nothing you can tell me. I do not want you to interfere in my life, just take care of yourself.

Congregation bursts out laughing.

CL: And how many of your age-mates are married?

VFB: I want you to leave me alone and if you continue bothering me, I am going to commit suicide.

SEC: Just agree to bring your husband to your parents and get their blessings. Then your husband can take you to college with your parent's permission.

VFB: Okay, I have agreed, I will come back home on Monday and listen to what you people have to say. But I want to assure you if I will not be impressed by what you say, I will go back to my husband and never come back again. The reason why I left in the first place was because I was beaten for no apparent reason. I did not see why my mother had to beat me up so much and that was why I decided I did not want to stay at home any more.

CL: That is why I am telling you, if you want to avoid being beaten again, tell me where you are and with whom you are staying. I will then tell you what to do next.

VFB: My plan is to stay with my husband who has agreed to take me to college, and only come back after four years when I am through with my college. What would be wrong with that?

CL: That is why I only asked you to tell us where you are, that is all. You come with your husband or even your husband's parents and that will be it.

VFB: I have agreed, I will come back on Monday so that you guys can tell me what you want. I do not want more stories from you.

SEC: Okay then, howl.

VFB: What do you people want?

SEC and CONGREG: You howl.

SEC: (to client) Did your parents beat her up?

CL. (nods to agree).

VFB: How do I howl?

Congregation demonstrates how she should howl and the VFB howls seven times. Every time the VFB howls, the congregation responded by saying:

CONGREG: Go back home with your husband!

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: My name is Gilbert, and I am the one who has taken Mercy and hidden her. I do not want you people to know where I have hidden her.

SEC: Where have you hidden her? You must tell us the truth or else we shall come for you.

VFB: My name is David, and I really do not want to argue with you guys. I am the one staying with this girl in Kimilili.

SEC: You go home and introduce yourself to the girl's parents.

VFB: I understand you are searching for me using policemen.

SEC: Why are you are disturbing this old man by hiding his daughter? If you want peace, just go home and introduce yourself to the girl's parents. Otherwise, you will even go to jail.

CL: You come home with your wife. Come home and make it clear that you are married and that will be enough.

VFB: I really do not want to argue with you people: You have your own issues here. You should just let me go away.

SEC: We shall kill you!

CL: We shall kill you, Howl!

OMC: You could even send your parents if you are scared. Send your mother if you are scared.

CL: Then howl.

VFB: Howls five times and the congregation responds,

CONGREG: Go and introduce yourselves to her (Mercy's) parents.

End of transcript.

The conversation between Betty and her sister was typical of many X-ray sessions at MBs rituals. It started with Betty's sister identifying herself by name, explaining that she was married and had no intentions of going back to her parent's home. In the drawn out conversation, Betty and the secretary attempted to convince her to go back home but she

remained adamant for a long time. She mentioned her disapproval and dislike of her mother's behaviour, especially the fact that her mother beat her up as the main reasons for her reluctance to return to her parent's home. In a discussion that tickled the congregation, she advised her elder sister to get married or risk aging at home and fail to get a suitor to marry her. Mercy's VFB maintained her defiant attitude, complained of harassment by MB's ritual methods and even threatened to commit suicide should Betty and MB continue compelling her to return to her parent's homestead. Eventually, when put under constant pressure by Betty and the secretary, she agreed to return home and gave a date for her return. She however made it very clear that she would only be returning home to listen to what her parents had to say and *'if I will not be impressed by what you say, I will go back to my husband and never come back again'*.

The second VFB was that of Mercy's husband. He too was adamant that he would never succumb to the congregation's demand to allow Betty's sister to go to her parent's home. He did not however explain why he would not allow her to go back to her parents. A member of the congregation joined the debate and advised the VFB to send his parent if he was too scared to face his parents-in-law. Apparently angered by the VFB's defiant attitude, the secretary suddenly threatened to kill him. Betty too repeated the threat to kill her sister's husband. At the end of the conversation, the VFB howled five times and the congregation responded by demanding that he introduces himself to his wife's parents.

The discussion that I have elaborated above took place during the 'hearing stage' of the X-ray process. The X-ray process advanced to the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage of the X-ray process, namely the 'judgement'. Unlike many of the cases that I have so far illustrated, this case did not involve witches or murder. The final stage was therefore to initiate the process for the return of Betty's sister through the burning of the bible.

### **MB is identified by a VFB.**

In the case of Betty and her sister, the conversations that ensued during the 'judgment' stage were similar to the confessions and conversations during the 'hearing' stage whose transcript I reproduced above. Mercy was in her usual defiant mood but eventually succumbed to pressure and promised to go back to listen to what her parents had to say. But in a surprising move that appeared to shock the secretary and the congregation, her VFB declared that she knew MB and she was aware that her sister was using MB's ritual

techniques to compel her to return to her parents. The ensuing conversation is reproduced below.

The Transcript.

Mercy's VFB: I want to ask you people; why do you keep on taking my soul and make it speak here? I know this is Mtumishi Barasa's place. I know the place very well. This is brother Patrick's place. I understand everything that goes on here... (Client interrupts)

CL: Who told you about this place?

VFB: I know everything that goes on here. (Client again interrupts and for the rest of the confession, both the client and VFB speak at the same time).

CL: You better come back home or tell us the person that you are living with now!

VFB: I am never ever going to come back home. I will never come back home.

CL: Then tell us where you are!

VFB: Just leave me alone and let me go away now.

End of transcript.

In the course of my fieldwork and observations at MB's X-ray process, this was the only time I encountered a VFB that identified MB by name. In other sessions involving other clients, VFBs especially those of witches only referred to MB as another witch and boasted that he would not be able to subdue them. Even though the congregation appeared stunned by this confession, MB did not seem to be surprised. MB explained that the people whose souls he commanded to come to his X-rays sessions could also perceive and recognize him during the X-ray sessions. MB agreed that there were witches who in their sojourn in the spirit world were able to locate him and his powers and occasionally attacked him. To illustrate his point, he gave the example of an accident he was involved in where he rolled several times in his car after personally presiding over an X-ray session. I have made reference to this story while describing MB in the first chapter.

The case of Betty and her sister appeared to have been concluded at the judgment stage as I did not encounter Betty again at MB's rituals. Betty was asked to report back to MB if her sister would not have returned to her parents home a month after the performance of the judgment stage of the X-ray. I did not meet her again and I concluded that her sister might have gone back home or she gave up trying to follow it up with MB. MB did not bar any of

his clients to employ other means of locating their lost relatives even as they continued participating in his ritual healing. Even where he cautioned the clients, this never stopped them from engaging other help and even employing the information obtained from the X-ray sessions. Betty, for instance, informed me that they had approached the police with new information obtained from MBs rituals. The VFB of her sister's husband also complained that he was aware that Betty and her parents were trying to locate him using the police. MB later informed me that Betty telephoned and informed him that her sister had been found and brought back to her parent's home.

### **Case 7. A Crafty Father and a cagey Boyfriend.**

I bring this case immediately after Betty's case mainly because of their resemblance but also because the two cases appeared in the same X-ray sessions prompting MB's secretary to jokingly remark: *'Hmm, looks like today I will be dealing with girls' issues'*. In this case, a young girl, Elsie approached MB for assistance to force her father to pay her college fees. I should however mention here that initially I had the impression that Elsie only happened at MB's place accompanying her friend and only opted to seek assistance from MB after observing and getting excited by what transpired in the healing rituals. In my interviews with her though, she explained that she sort MB's assistance to convince her father to pay for her college fees. She explained that although she had completed her high school education, her father had refused to pay for her college education.

Although Elsie approached MB to assist her compel her father to pay her college fees, the greater part of her X-ray sessions revolved around her relationship with her boyfriend who confessed that he intended to desert her. This was however not surprising as MB always promised to solve all her clients problems, even those the client did not mention or was unaware of. In the X-ray sessions of her case, whose excerpts I reproduce below, Elsie's boyfriend is compelled to resume his relationship with Elsie and her father is ordered to pay her college fees.

#### The transcript.

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: My name is Mark, Mark Bii.

SEC: You are accused!

VFB: I want to ask, who has accused me?

SEC: Who can you see here?

VFB: If I look clearly here, I see Elsie Kemei, Elsie Kemei is the one I know, I know her because she is my friend. She has been my friend for a long time now. I want to ask her, what is the problem here?

CL: Why don't you call me nowadays?

Silence;

VFB: Let me tell you clearly, I had reached appoint where I really did not want anything to do with you. In fact every time you called me, I used to feel as if you were insulting me. I used to either disconnect your call or just switch off my mobile phone so that I do not get any calls from you. But since you people started calling me here and talking to me the other day, I have decided to agree with your demands. I see you people can actually kill me if I do not agree with you. And that is why I invited you to Nairobi. This is something that I would not have done. I am only agreeing to do this because you have called me here. If you had not called me here, I would have completely forgotten about you. You remember I asked you a few days ago to come to Nairobi, isn't it?

CL: Yes,

OMC: Just accept her to avoid more trouble!

VFB: Yes, I only invited you because you called me here. I only changed my mind after you brought me here. I have started falling in love with you once again. And I want to tell you, if there is a woman I want to marry, then that woman is you.

CL: When will you marry me? I want you to marry me now!

VFB: I told you the other day, I am still in school so there is no way I can support you, did I not tell you this?

OMC: Just call her, to Nairobi now!

CL: We could do some farming to support ourselves:

VFB: Could you please tell this court of yours exactly what I told you? Just tell the court all that I told you?

CL: I know you told me that, but I want you to marry me now. I have now matured and we could do farming to support ourselves!

(Silence)

VFB: Like I told you the other day, I am still going to school and I even told you I have applied for a job. I am yet to get the job and so you should wait until I get a job, so that I can support you. When I get a job, there will be no problem.

CL: We could do some farming to support ourselves:

VFB: I want to assure you I am doing all this because you people have called me here. You have really scared me by calling me here. I want to let you know clearly if you had not called me here, I would have completely forgotten about you. Since you called me here, I even called you to come to Nairobi and did 'everything' with you, some of which I cannot say in the presence of a crowd like this one. I have decided to love you because you called me here. I have realized that if I refuse to love you, you could easily kill me. So what I want to tell you Elsie..... the first thing I want to tell you if you want to listen to me clearly.... You come to me on Sunday and I am going to tell you everything about our future. I am going to tell you when we shall live together and how we shall do it.

CL: Do you mean that I come to Nairobi?

VFB: And you see that will require that I look for another house so that we may start living together. And you know that I do not have a job, so life will initially be difficult. Aren't you the one who has decided that you want to live with me now?

CL: Yes.

VFB: I want to ask you Elsie, do you love me?

CL: Yes,

VFB: (Bursts into laughter and the congregation too bursts into prolonged laughter).

SEC: Okay, so that is what you wanted to hear?

VFB: You see this thing, started actually with my parents. They are the ones who had chosen another woman for me. And that is why I was not interested in you. My parents wanted me to marry another girl of their choice. Do you hear me well? My parents wanted me to marry a girl of their choice, not the one I wanted.

CL: Which girl did they want you to marry?

VFB: They want me to marry a girl of their choice: what do you think about that, Elsie?

CL: That one will not happen!

(Silence)

SEC: You marry the girl of your choice; leave your parents out of it!

VFB: I want to tell you since you called me here, I just want to marry you. I have accepted everything you said, I want us to move on like husband and wife, and I will not go back on my promise.

CL: Then you should be calling me!

VFB: What you should do now, is to release my soul, so that it can come back to my body and let me go. I will tell you the last word on Sunday. Everything will be okay, do not worry.

At this point there is a prolonged silence where voices do not speak from the bible. The secretary then starts the chorus and the congregation joins in until the voices resume from the bible. Marks's voice speaks in an agitated tone.

VFB: You also want me to howl?

SEC: Yes,

VFB: What is going on here? Why do you want me to howl?

SEC: Just howl!

VFB: What is going on here Elsie? Why are you allowing these people to make me howl?

SEC: Just howl so that the two of you can live together.

VFB howls six times and the congregation responds,

CONGREG: Go back and live with Elsie!

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: My name is Mathias Bor.

SEC: You are accused.

VFB: My name is Mathias Bor.

SEC: You are accused.

VFB: My name is Mathias Bor and I am the father to this girl here. What is going on here?

SEC: You have been accused here.

VFB: You tell me what is going on here. Elsie, I am here and I am your father. What is going on here?

CL: I want you to take me to college.

VFB: I want to ask you, you are my daughter; why have you started engaging in witchcraft?

CL: No, this is not witchcraft.

VFB: You are such a young girl, what kind of stuff is this you are getting into? Why are you getting involved in such things?

SEC: You take her to college!

VFB: I want to ask you my daughter,

CL: Mmh!



VFB: How is it that I start falling asleep at this time? How is it that I am falling asleep now and beginning to talk to you? What kind of business is this?

(Silence)

CL: I want you to take me to college!

Silence:

VFB: I have not refused to take you to college! Who told you that I have refused to take you to college?

CL: Since I finished my high school you have not taken me to any college.

VFB: I am ready to take you to college, but then you must stop this business of jumping up and about telling everyone about it. You keep jumping up and about till I get confused about your real interests. There is no problem I am going to take you to college. Do you hear that?

CL: Yes,

VFB: Then that is okay with me. You see you are my daughter and I am going to ensure everything is okay with you. You get it?

CL: Yes.

VFB: You know you guys have really scared me. How could you take my soul and make it speak here? You guys have really scared me today!

SEC: You have been stubborn, that is why we called you here!

VFB: I have accepted everything, let me go.

SEC: The final bit is for you to howl so that we may know that you have accepted.

(silence)

SEC: Hurry up and howl.

VFB: Howls severally and the congregation answers back:

CONGREG: Take her to college'!

NB: Elsie too answers in the same general way i.e. 'Take her to college'

End of Transcript.

The case of Elsie followed a typical MB script accompanied with the usual drama. According to Elsie, her main problem was the refusal of her father to pay for her college

fees. In this session, a VFB claiming to be that of Elsie's boyfriend appeared and confessed that he was willing to resume his relationship with Elsie. The VFB is however explicit that he only opted to resume his relationship with Elsie due to the cajolery and badger from the X-ray process. The VFB engaged Elsie in a long conversation in which he sought to reconfirm from Elsie whether she really loved him, outlined his plans to marry her and promised to disregard his parents advice to marry another girl. At the end of the confession the congregation demanded that he howl. The VFB protested and pleaded with Elsie to convince the congregation not to force him to howl. As can be seen from the transcript, the VFB pleaded, *'What is going on here Elsie? Why are you allowing these people to make me howl?'* The VFB eventually howled and the congregation demanded that he resumes his relationship with Elsie.

The next VFB was that of Elsie's father who was extremely agitated at being subjected to the X-ray process and demanded to know from his daughter why she had resorted to Witchcraft. He questioned the daughter: *'I want to ask you, you are my daughter; have you now started things to do with witchcraft or what?'* Elsie denied that she was involved in witchcraft. Her father counselled her and denied ever refusing to pay her college fees. He eventually agreed to take her daughter to college and to bind him to this decision, the congregation asked him to howl as they responded by shouting *'take her to college'*. As both VFBs howled, Elsie joined the congregation in uttering the rejoinder in a general manner. As her boyfriend's VFB howled, she joined the congregation in shouting *'Go back and live with Elsie'* rather than *'come back and live with me'*. Her response as her father howled was in the same generalized manner as that of the congregation, i.e. *'Take her to college'* as opposed to *'take me to college'*. Such responses were not restricted to Elsie's X-ray session but were common to many of the X-ray sessions. Apart from seeking to rhyme with the congregation, they also showed an attempt by the clients to resign to the decision of the court as well as absolving themselves from any blame should a harsh decision be taken against some of the people deemed to have afflicted them.

Elsie's X-ray session too exhibited another dynamic of MBs healing rituals. In the process of the X-ray session, there was a disruption of the process where VFBs halted their confessions. In response to this scenario the secretary started the chorus until the voices resumed their confessions. In the course of my fieldwork, I observed severe cases of disruptions where even with the chorus, the VFBs would not resume their confession. In

such circumstances, MB would be informed, upon which he would come to the X-ray session, conduct another prayer session to reenergise the sessions and produce the voices. Another dynamic in the course of this session was the involvement of a member of the congregation in cajoling the VFBs even where the case did not involve them. In several cases that I observed, members of the congregation who were familiar with the court sessions often joined in the conversations, asked supplementary questions depending on the case, uttered their own demands to the VFBs (even without consulting the clients over what they wanted from the VFBs) and at times advised the clients on what to say to the VFBs. In the case of Elsie, a member of the congregation joined in the conversation on two occasions and advised her boyfriend to resume their relationship ‘to avoid trouble’. Clients who had previously attended the same X-ray sessions also requested each other for verbal support in their cases.

The case of Elsie moved to the judgment stage. The discussions at this stage were similar to those at the ‘hearing’ stage whose transcript I provided above. Her father is compelled to pay her college fees and her boyfriend is goaded into resuming their relationship. At the end of the session, the secretary advised Elsie to report back to MB if her father did not pay for her college fees. The secretary elicits laughter from the congregation when she advised thus, ‘*If he does not take you to college, come back here and we shall deal with him. ‘Your father sounds very crafty’.*’ I did not encounter Elsie at MB’s practice again and my observation of her case terminated at the judgment stage. Like most other cases, I assumed that she was satisfied by MB’s healing or she opted to solve her predicament through other means.

#### **4.6. Dishonest debtors.**

##### **Case 8. Miriam’s money and her mother’s secret admirer.**

MB was often consulted by clients who loaned money to their friends when their friends failed to refund it in spite of their frequent demands. In the cases that I observed in my fieldwork, clients reckoned that they could not use legal means to compel their friends to refund their money as they had entered into informal arrangements, with no written contracts and no witnesses to the transactions. Faced with a scenario where their friends appeared unwilling to refund the money, clients sort MB’s assistance to compel them to pay. MB’s technique of ‘calling people’ to his courtroom appeared well suited for the performance of these tasks. MB always informed the clients that he would call their debtors

into the courtroom so that they (clients) could tell them what they wanted, i.e compel them to refund.

The case of Miriam was one such example. Miriam was in her mid 20s and worked for a Mobile phone communications company in the capital city of Nairobi. Miriam appeared at MB's healing rituals accompanied by her mother. I gathered from my initial encounter with her as well as listening to the proceedings from the court session that her mother had held previous ritual healing sessions with MB. It was from her mother's previous encounters with MB that she too opted to seek MB's help. This case was therefore similar to Mbago's children's case where they sort MB's help after their parent's divination sessions indicated that they might be afflicted as well. She attended the divination sessions as part of the healing rituals conducted for her mother who was a continuing ritual healing client for MB. According to Miriam and listening to her divination session, the main reason for her seeking MB's help was to compel a friend to refund her the money she had loaned her. Miriam had loaned lots of money to her friend (Kshs 80,000 – approx USD 1100) but her friend had resorted to giving her empty promises about refunding the money. She had also acquired a loan from a bank which put her in dire financial straits.

Since her mother was already in the ritual process, Miriam did not have to register a fresh as a client. She however participated in the initial preparatory procedures, i.e. the church service and lunch before being ushered into the interrogation and the '100 question' session by MB. Miriam explained to me that she discussed a wide range of issues with MB. Besides asking her about the circumstances under which she had loaned the money to her friend, MB interrogated her on her relationship with her mother and other siblings as well as her relationship with her boyfriend. MB divined that her friend was unwilling to refund her money and should be 'taken to court'. He also informed Miriam that something was amiss with her relationship with her boyfriend without elaborating further. MB concluded this session in his usual style, i.e. by promising to help her in all her problems, praying for the client and directing that she proceeds to the X-ray session so that 'she could talk to the people involved in her case'.

Miriam and her mother joined the rest of the clients for the X-ray session of the day. When it was time for Miriam and her mother's case, the first VFB to appear was that of Miriam's boyfriend who angrily demanded to know why he had been summoned to the court. As can

be seen from the transcript reproduced below, the secretary informed the VFB that he was accused, but when the VFB adamantly demanded to know what the problem was, the secretary too became confused and turned to the congregation with the question, '*Who knows this person?*' Miriam answered in the affirmative and the VFB demanded to know why she had accused him. In the ensuing conversation the VFB confessed that he was dating Miriam and three other girls at the same time. In spite of persistent prodding by Miriam, the secretary and a member of the congregation, the VFB declined to declare who among the four girls he was genuinely interested in. He vehemently complained about being asked to make such declarations in the presence of many other uninterested people and eventually concluded his confession by informing Miriam that he would let her know his final decision over telephone.

The second VFB was that of her debtor. The VFB calmly but candidly admitted to have loaned money from Miriam. She however explained that she was not able to repay the money because she, too, had a bank loan that she was servicing. When prodded further by Miriam and the secretary, The VFB informed Miriam that there was nothing she (Miriam) would do if she opted not to repay her money. In a move that made Miriam's mother join the debate, the VFB declared that she even contemplated killing Miriam if she continued demanding her money. Miriam's mother wondered aloud why the VFB would loan money from her daughter and contemplate killing her instead of refunding the money. The secretary warned the VFB to refund the money or she would be the one to be killed instead. Miriam rejected the VFBs offers to refund the money in instalments. Apparently her friend had not honoured any of her earlier promises to refund the money in instalments.

After the two confessions, the case reverted to disputes involving Miriam's mother. Five VFBs appeared in respect of Miriam's mother's predicaments. There was the initial VFB (3<sup>rd</sup> VFB) who confessed that he was in love with Miriam's mother and wanted to have an affair with her. The VFB belonged to the head master of the school where Miriam's mother taught. This was rather embarrassing for both Miriam and her mother as the VFB appeared to seduce Miriam's mother in public. This prompted a quick intervention from the secretary who declared, '*We do not want that type of love here*'. The 4<sup>th</sup> VFB was that of yet another of Miriam's mother's colleague who confessed to have incited Miriam's workmates and students against her. In a quick confession, he begged for forgiveness claiming that he had

nothing against Miriam's mother and but had an inborn propensity to incite people against each other.

Apart from her workmates, six other VFBs appeared and their confessions revolved around a land dispute that Miriam's mother seemed to have with them. The first one to confess (5<sup>th</sup> VFB) was a male witch who claimed to be severely sick after he was set on fire in MB's rituals. This one was followed by a female VFB (6<sup>th</sup> VFB) who confessed that she 'swore by licking soil from a graveyard' that she would kill Miriam's mother because she (Miriam's mother) bought the land that she previously occupied and evicted her. Yet a VFB of another witch appeared after this one and confessed to be dead after being set on fire in a previous session by MB. After this confession, an 8<sup>th</sup> VFB that claimed to be the mother-in-law to Miriam's mother appeared. In a long drawn monologue, the VFB declared that she had bewitched Miriam's mother's entire household because Miriam's mother and her husband had swindled her and her children of their land inheritance. The VFB declared that she had cursed Miriam's mother and her household and provided a long list of misfortunes that she willed in her curse to Miriam's mother: i.e. 'her children would never get educated and benefit her, she should never rear any cattle or grow any crops on her farm, her tractor should always break down and cost her immensely to repair, and her children studying abroad should come back empty handed'. The VFB further claimed that Miriam's mother-in-law (at this point, it was getting rather difficult for me to follow the conversation until I figured out that the VFB was actually Miriam's mother's step-mother-in-law) was a witch and that she and her son (Miriam's father) forged the title deed of the land in dispute. It was for this reason that she opted to equally bewitch Miriam's mother and her entire household. Two final VFBs appear, and confess to be Miriam's mother's brother-in-law and sister-in-law. They both confessed to be working with their mother (8<sup>th</sup> VFB), to bewitch Miriam's mother.

In this sub-section, I endeavoured to show the ways in which MB ritually dealt with crafty debtors. Although the key accent is on debtors, I have also dealt at length with other aspects of the dispute which exemplify both MBs view of afflictions as embedded in wider social processes and actions. I reproduce the transcript relating to Miriam's debt and her mother's vicissitudes. Like in the case of Mbago daughter that I discussed before (Pg 165 - 183) MB treated Miriam's debt as part of a wide range of misfortunes suffered by her mother and whose comprehensive amelioration required actions in all the affected persons and spheres.

Miriam's misfortunes were not isolated but were part of wide range of misfortunes directed to and suffered by her mother as a result of disputes with her in-laws. Miriam only suffered because she was her mother's daughter.

The Transcript.

1<sup>st</sup> VFB: My name is Amwayi Erick or Erick Amwayi. What is going on here?

SEC: There are accusations here!

VFB: Why have you people called me?

SEC: You have been accused here?

VFB: What place is this?

SEC: This is a court; you tell us what you have done.

VFB: What place is this?

SEC: Tell us your story, Erick. (Turns to congregation) Who knows this person?

CL (Miriam): I know him.

VFB: I want to ask you, in what capacity are you calling me here?

CL: I am your friend.

SEC: Hm, today I seem to have issues to do with girls and their men

(This statement elicits prolonged laughter from the congregation)

VFB: I want to tell you, Miriam, issues between you and me concern just the two of us. Why have you brought them here in the presence of so many people?

CL: I just want to hear the truth from you.

VFB: Our friendship is between the two of us, and so I do not understand why you want to extend it to everybody here. What you should do is to leave it to me and wait for me to call you on phone.

SEC and CONGREG: No! We want you to come out clean and say the truth here in public; we do not want secrets with phone calls.

VFB: You see, together with you are four other girls and I wanted to select one of you and marry.

SEC: You tell us whoever you have selected now.

VFB: The only thing I am going to say now is for you to wait for my phone call and I will let you know whomever I have selected. I will let you know if I want us to get married or if I just want us to be friends. I will tell you everything.

CL: I want you to declare your stand now!

VFB: I want you to tell me now, what is my crime (fault)?

SEC: She just wants you to declare your stand now.

OMC: She wants you to marry her.

SEC: Just tell her the truth so that she does not waste her time.

OMC: She wants you to marry her.

VFB: You see, you are not supposed to ask me this kind of questions because you are not my wife. You have no rights to ask me such questions. You should just go back home and wait for my answer to you. We can discuss and agree on such things but you cannot start asking me such things now.

Silence.

VFB: I want to tell you Miriam, what you should do is to wait till I give you the information. If you start calling me in the presence of so many people, how am I going to know what and to whom am talking?

CL: Just say it now!

OMC: This guy is very crafty!

2<sup>nd</sup> VFB: My name is Doreen Mavisi. My name is Doreen Mavisi

SEC: You are accused!

VFB: Who has accused me?

SEC: Who do you know here?

VFB: My name is Doreen Mavisi, and I am asking, who has accused me?

CL: Just say what has brought you here.

VFB My name is Doreen Mavisi, and I am asking, who has accused me?

SEC: Who do you know here?

OMC: And what have you come to do here?

VFB: If I look clearly, the only person I know here is Miriam. Miriam is the one I know here.



SEC: What is the problem between the two of you?

VFB: I know her as my friend and I know that I owe her some money.

SEC: Okay,

VFB: I want to ask you Miriam, why have you accused me?

CL: Because you owe me money and you do not want to pay.

SEC: We want you to pay the money you owe her.

VFB: I want to tell you, I am going to pay your money in instalments.

CL: I want you to pay all the monies at once because you have told me those stories of instalments for such a long time. I want you to just finish it up with me at once.

VFB: There is no way I can manage to pay you all the Kshs 80,000 at once.

CL: No, I want all my money at once.

VFB: I know you have a loan and that you have serious difficulties repaying it.

CL: It is good you know that, now I just want my money back!

VFB: You see there is this place I expected to get money from but then I was not successful.

CL: No, you have become quite crafty. I just want you to pay my money now. I have heard that story from you for a very long time

VFB: I am therefore asking you to agree that I pay you the money in instalments.

CL: I have heard about this instalment story for such a long time and so today I just want you to pay all my money at once.

VFB: You see there is no need for me to cheat you that I can pay all the money at once when I know very well I cannot manage. I am looking for ways to pay your money. I also need money for my own use and so, how can I give you money yet I also need money?

CL: I want you to pay all my money.

VFB: You see even now, there is some money I am supposed to pay back to the bank. And so, how do you expect me to pay your money when I also need to pay money somewhere else? I would rather struggle and pay the bank because that is an official deal and then look for money for my friend. A personal loan like yours can delay but not the one at the bank.

CL: Will you pay my money or not?

VFB: I even wanted to break any communications with you because a friend of mine explained to me that I could avoid paying you by claiming that you never gave me any

money. He explained to me that for as long as we did not sign a contract anywhere that shows you gave me money; there was nothing you could do to me. I was therefore planning to cut my relationship with you. I just wanted to bring up something that would make the two of us quarrel and each one of us to go their own way. Those were my plans but now because you people have brought me here, and I have seen this is a dangerous place, I am going to pay you but only in instalments. But if you had not brought me to this place, there was no way I would pay your money. I would not have paid you even a single cent. For me I had decided that it would even be better for me to kill you rather than pay you back your Kshs 80,000.

OMC (Miriam's mother): So you borrow some money but rather than pay back the money, you are even contemplating killing the person who gave you the money?

VFB: But I was very grateful for your help, anyway.

OMC (Miriam's mother): But now you prefer to kill her? Just what kind of devil are you?

VFB: You should just allow me to look for money and pay you. Just give me time to pay you in instalments; if I get 10,000 or 20,000, I give you,

SEC: You better hurry up or else we shall be the ones to kill you.

VFB: You see, if I said now that I will pay you in one instalment I will be cheating you. But I will try to be paying you bit by bit every month till I finish paying.

SEC: Then you pay?

VFB: I do not refuse, I agree you assisted me.

CL: Then you pay and stop your tricks of postponing it every month.

NB: After this confession, the proceedings reverted back to the case of Miriam's mother and the following conversation ensued.

3<sup>rd</sup> VFB: My name is John Simani.

SEC: John, you are accused.

(Silence)

SEC: Talk John!

(Silence)

OMC: Talk!

(Silence)

VFB: My name is John Simani and who has accused me?

SEC: Who do you know here?

(Silence).

OMC: Who do you know here?

VFB: If I look carefully, I see this lady called Nelly Nalule (Miriam's mother).

SEC: Yes, what is going on between the two of you?

(Silence)

VFB: She is one of my teachers. She teaches in a school that I head as an administrator. What I do not understand is why you have decided to bring my soul here.

SEC: What is the problem between the two of you?

VFB: Even as I am talking to you, I am really scared; my heart is beating really fast. I am just wondering why I have fallen asleep at this time.

(Congregation laughs at the VFB as his voice stutters in fright)

SEC: Just say what problems you have with Nalule and stop freaking out.

VFB: I just want to tell you Nalule, this is just about our relationships at the work place. I cannot say that I have anything personal against you. Besides, I was actually interested in having an affair with you but I did not know how to approach you. So I just left it at that. But I have absolutely nothing against you. You see I am only the head of the school; I am not the owner of the school. I am employed just as you are. We are all employees. I have no intention of making life difficult for you. Sometimes I am just mad and you may not understand why I behave like I do. If you ever get to know how I feel inside of me, I really love you, then you will understand why I behave the way I do.

SEC: We do not want that type of love here!

CL: Stop your stupidity here!

VFB: Sometimes I become very harsh to you just because of what is in my heart. I know deeply in my heart that I love you. Sometimes I just wish we could sit together so that I can tell you how much I love you. The trouble is I have not been able to let you know this and this makes me really behave differently, because I am frustrated. I ask for your forgiveness. Unless there is any other thing you would like to say, that is the only problem there is between me and you and I really beg for your forgiveness.

SEC: Then stop that behaviour! Let us accuse him!

CONGREG: Yes we accuse him.

CL: Stupid!

4<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Mr. Onami.

SEC: You are accused.

VFB: My name is Onami and I work together with this teacher. I am the one who has been inciting and spreading falsehoods about this teacher even among students. I have been telling the students that she does not know how to teach and such things. But frankly speaking, that is just my nature. It looks like something I was born with; I always incite people against others. I just ask for forgiveness, I did this due to jealousy.

SEC: Let us accuse him.

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse him.

5<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Nicodemus Akutsa

SEC: Akutsa you are accused.

VFB: My name is Nicodemus Akutsa, and I am very very sick. You see the other day you guys poured paraffin on me and wanted to burn me, My Djinns pulled me out of the fire but then I fell as they pulled me out and I got really burnt.

SEC: It is okay, just remain there.

(silence)

SEC: Give way to the rest to come!

6<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Catherine.

SEC: Catherine, you are accused.

VFB: My name is Catherine, and I have decided I must kill this woman called Nalule. And for me when I say I will kill anyone, I will definitely kill someone. You see this woman found when I was taking care of someone's farm. The farm was my source of livelihood. And then she bought the land and fired me, just because she had money. You see, I lived in this farm with my father since my childhood. And now this woman came and bought the farm and is trying to show us that we do not know how to farm. I am going to ensure that I kill her. I have sworn to kill you and I have even sworn by licking soil from a grave. I am assuring you, I will not rest until I kill you.

7<sup>th</sup> VFB: I have come my name is Mayaka and I have died. You people killed me when you poured kerosene on me. I am the one who bewitched that woman called Nelly. By bad luck, I have died. My grave is still fresh and there are people who are still coming to mourn me in my compound.

8<sup>th</sup> VFB: I have come, my name is Zipporah Naliaka and I am the mother in-law to this woman.

SEC: Naliaka you are accused!

VFB: What I want to say to you Nalule is this: you will never ever educate your children and benefit from them in any way, any one day. Two, you will never ever rear cattle and live comfortably: you will never ever grow any crops and get any benefits from their sale; there is no way your tractor will work for you without breaking down and demanding money for its repair from your pockets; you will never ever get monies and make any developments in your homestead; none of your daughters will ever get husbands and live comfortably; none of your children who live abroad will ever come back with anything – they will all come back empty handed. That is a curse that I have uttered on Nalule's compound. I am the one who has cursed that house. I usually collaborate with my son known as Edwin Nyongesa but you people have bewitched him and made him sickly. A few weeks ago, you people bewitched one of my sons and he started letting out secrets about my witchcraft. And that is when I collaborated with my other sons, and we beat him up till we killed him. He was my own son, but we beat him up and killed him. I want to assure you people that I am a tough witch and I have vowed to ensure that I kill this woman. None of your children will ever have a descent life.

VFB: Do you people want me to tell you the reasons why I am doing all this?

SEC: Yes, tell us!

VFB: The reason is because of my husband's farm. Why did your husband allocate himself our farm and corruptly altered the names on the title deed? I realized that your house (family) has taken all the luck from my house (family). You people are getting rich, getting monies and even sending your children abroad but nothing comes to my house. This is because your mother-in law (the mother who gave birth to your husband) was a witch. She bewitched my family and so I decided to bewitch your family as well. I now want us to subdivide the land afresh. There is about 70 acres of land that belonged to my husband, so why did your husband register these 70 hectares in his own name? Your husband calls me her mother, but why did he register my land in his name?

CL (Miriam): But was he not given that land by his father?

CL (Miriam's mother): His father gave him that land.

VFB: That is why I have gone up to the chief so that he can arbitrate over this matter. I want us to even go to the high court so that we can have the land question properly arbitrated.

9<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Edwin Nyongesa and I am sick. The woman here is my in-law and I am the one who is collaborating with my mother and my sister, Lynette to finish the house of Nelly Nalule. I have accepted that and want to let you know that we shall not stop here, we shall continue doing that.

SEC: You will see fire.

OMC: There is real war here.

SEC: Let us accuse him!

CONGREG: Yes, we accuse him.

10<sup>th</sup> VFB: My name is Lynette and this woman here is the wife to my brother, and there is this daughter of hers sitting here, I think she is called Miriam. We have bewitched her house and ‘spoilt’ that house completely and ensured that the children will never school properly, they will never progress in anything they do. We even want the ones studying abroad to come back home with nothing. We want them to get stupid and be unable to pursue their studies. We have sent Djinnns to them to ensure that they do not live together in harmony. We want the boy who is studying abroad to come back in a coffin. My name is Lynette.

SEC: Let us accuse her,

CONGREG: Yes we accuse her!

End of transcript.

The X-ray session as can be seen in the transcript above opened up a complex set of relations within Miriam’s extended family network with accusations and counter accusations of violence and witchcraft which led one congregant to remark, ‘*There is real war here!*’. As the title to this subsection suggests, I intended to illustrate the way in which MB dealt with cases where clients complained of their friends’ unwillingness to refund money they had loaned them. I observed many such cases and each of them had their own complexities. MB however handled them in practically the same way. He often produced the VFBs of the debtors who would then be compelled by the clients, with the help of the secretary and the congregation to commit to refunding the monies. Miriam talked tough and demanded that her friend refunds her money. The secretary further warned the VFB that she would be the one to be killed if she failed to refund the money. Miriam’s friend eventually promised that she would refund the money. It was left for Miriam to wait for her friend to refund the money, failure of which she ought to come back to MB for further ritual enforcement. Miriam’s boyfriend was equally accused in MB’s court and cajoled to declare whether his relationship with Miriam was serious or he was taking her for a ride. In spite of his admission that he was dating three other girls, he declined to make any declarations and appeared to have had his way when his confession was terminated with the emergence of the third VFB.

The turn of events in what I could call Miriam’s mother’s case proper was complicated. I was not able to observe her preliminary X-ray sessions and what I explain here is mainly from Miriam’s mother’s recollection. Before my encounter with them, Miriam’s mother had been to MB’s ritual process and her case had moved through the mention, hearing and judgment stage. The session that I encountered with them was the ‘outcome’ stage in the

series of earlier sessions for her case, and at the same time, the ‘mention’ stage in the issues that affected her daughter. Miriam’s mother was a widow and her decision to consult MB was due to persistent quarrels with her in-laws (specifically her stepmother in-law, and her two children) and her apprehension that they were attacking her and her family through witchcraft. MB’s divination and ritual healing confirmed her fears and identified land disputes and jealousy from her in-laws as the cause of her affliction. Miriam’s mother’s husband hailed from a polygamous household. His mother was the eldest of his father’s three wives. Miriam’s mother admits that her husband was allocated a larger portion of inheritance since he was the eldest son from his father’s three wives. Apart from his inheritance, Miriam’s husband bought another piece of land from their neighbour and evicted one of the tenants from the farm as revealed by VFB number 6. Miriam’s mother admits that they evicted the tenant from the farm as they had no agreement with her. This opened up another source of grievance as exemplified by the sixth VFB’s reprobation. A third angle to Miriam’s mother’s troubles was from her teacher colleagues. Her boss admitted that he harboured ill feelings against her because he was unable to bring himself to confess his love for her. Yet another of her colleagues had resorted to inciting teachers and students against her in what he referred to as ‘his nature’. He confessed, *‘But frankly speaking, that is just my nature. It looks like something I was born with; I always incite people against others’*

Typical of MBs ritual practice, all aspects of Miriam’s and her mother’s predicaments are laid bare and a comprehensive course of action to counteract each of them is designed. Her workmates are summoned to MB’s courtroom, rebuked and ordered to desist from their activities against Miriam’s mother. She even gets an opportunity to insult her boss, something she would not easily get away with in real life. In the previous sessions MB already identified two witches and burnt them using the bible. The two witches appear in the transcript that I reproduced above as VFB 5 and VFB 7. The 5<sup>th</sup> States that he was very sick as a result of having been burnt in the previous sessions but was rescued from the fire by his Djinns. The 7<sup>th</sup> VFB was not as lucky as the 5<sup>th</sup>. He stated his name and confessed that he had died from MB’s ritual fire. Miriam’s mother explained to me that the two confessed in the previous court sessions that they were hired to kill her through sorcery by her in-laws.

Active and direct manufacture of witchcraft by close relatives of a client provided MB with a dilemma. In MB’s ritual healing criteria, all witches would be set on fire. It was however

complicated when the said witch was a close family member. In this case MB always advised clients against setting such family members on fire. Instead he appealed to them to allow him to neutralize the witches' power and additionally perform a ritual to protect the clients against future attacks by these or any other witches. I describe one such this ritual in the next chapter. MB would only set close family members on fire on three conditions: a) if the client insisted; b) where their witchcraft activity had resulted in death and c) where MBs rituals did not succeed in stopping their witchcraft activity. In the case of Miriam's mother, three close family members were actively involved in concocting witchcraft against her. Miriam's mother's step mother- in- law confessed to be a 'tough witch' and vowed that she and her two children would kill Miriam's mother as well as ensure that all her children suffered from a myriad of misfortunes that she listed. To demonstrate her resolve, she confessed to have killed one of her sons who exposed her witchcraft secrets. There was also the squatter who occupied the farm that Miriam's mother's husband bought and who, following her eviction, vowed that she would kill Miriam's mother. In the healing rituals conducted for Miriam and her mother, MB advised that he would neutralize Miriam's mother's step mother's witchcraft instead of exterminating her through ritual burning. He reasoned that in view of the already existing tension within the family, misfortunes befalling any of the two would be easily attributed to actions by the other which would lead to more tension. He would only set her on fire if his rituals failed to subdue her witchcraft. Miriam's mother however insisted that she wanted both her step-mother and her ex-tenant exterminated through ritual burning. Although MB convinced her to spare her stepmother at least for the time-being, she vowed that she would suggest that she be burnt if the next round of ritual processes did not subdue her witchcraft.

I observed in my fieldwork many cases where clients were dissatisfied with MB's punishment to the people accused of afflicting them but never mustered enough courage to confront him. Clients at times felt that MB meted out very lenient punishments. Unlike MB, many clients did not distinguish between kin and non kin when it came to those deemed to have ensorcelled them. They always wanted MB to indiscriminately exterminate them. Others read economic interests in MB's advice and argued that MB never wanted to exterminate the people who contracted witches so that the clients would frequent his place and pay him more money. Clients paid fees for every new set of X-ray sessions as well as for any extra ritual that MB conducted for them. A medical doctor who frequented MB's place once complained to me that MB had succeeded to exterminate more than 10 witches



approached by his enemies to afflict him, yet every time he exterminated a witch, his enemies would contact a new one. He had therefore requested MB to exterminate his enemies once and for all but MB had declined since they were his relatives. This resulted in him paying lots of money to MB and making over 10 return trips to MB for more X-ray sessions. For this reason, he consulted another healer who agreed to exterminate his enemies after which he now experienced peace for the last eight months.

Miriam's mother attended two other X-ray sessions, the hearing and the judgement stages of her new round of courtroom sessions which culminated in the ritual burning of the witch (VFB 5) who confessed to have been lifted by his Djinns from MB's ritual fire. Her colleagues at work were ordered to desist from their aggression against her. Miriam's mothers step family and neighbour continued in their defiant attitude and promised to ensure that she was either dead or encountered a series of misfortunes that would make her give back their land. At the judgement stage, their VFBs were ordered to stop their witchcraft activities and threatened with death if they persisted. At the end of this session, MB as well as his secretary agreed with Miriam's mother's suggestion to exterminate her neighbour and relatives through ritual burning if they persisted with their witchcraft against her. After this I did not encounter Miriam and her mother at MB's rituals again. This could mean that either of three things happened: a) MB's rituals worked for them; b) they opted for another ritual healer or c) they gave up on ritual healing all together.

#### **4.7. Conclusion.**

In chapters 2- 4, I give an expose to the divination process that MB and his clients referred to by either of the two terms, X-ray or courtroom process. The X-ray process formed an important aspect of MB's healing as it was the process through which he and the clients arrived at what they considered to be an objective diagnosis of the clients afflictions, an exposure of its entire dimensions as well as providing a redress mechanism for some aspects of the said vicissitudes. The central role of the X-ray process by MB conforms to Turner's (1968) earlier observations that divination and redressive rituals are stages in a single process and that it was specifically through the divinatory process that quarrels competition and alignments were brought to light. A diviner regards his tasks as the practical one of revealing the causes of misfortunes or death. These are almost invariably 'mystical or non empirical in character although human wishes, desires and feelings are involved (ibid). MB subjected all his clients to the X-ray ritual regardless of their problems and the X-ray

process as we have seen in the cases illustrated did not restrict itself to the problem presented by the clients, *ad initio*. But even before participating in the X-ray process, clients undergo a surfeit of preparatory procedures that impact on them and their entire healing process. I summarize some of the preparatory processes and discuss them and their possible influence on the healing process here and later in the subsequent chapters.

The first point of entry into MB's ritual healing arena is the meeting with the guard at the gate who directs clients to the secretary without much discussion. The guard stands for security and order, and apart from guiding the new clients to the secretary, he also ensured that no clients idled around MB's house in the course of the day. It should be remembered that one of MB's rules, stated clearly that clients were not allowed anywhere near his main house without the secretary's clearance. Like MB, the secretary always humbly greeted the clients, registered them on a blue card, collected the registration fee and ushered them into the church. Occasionally new clients mistook her for the healer and explained their problems to her which she listened and directed them to wait for the healers intervention. Immediately after the ordering by the guard, the secretary introduces yet another aspect of the healing that serves to impress the professionalism of MB's ritual healing to the clients: the register. Clients encounter an office complete with two benches for clients, a table full of books and a secretary who has an intercom telephone line to the healer. The next step was the church service conducted by the secretary and followed by the lunch break. MB considered spiritual nourishment as an important aspect of his healing rituals and he explained to me that he often engaged in long periods of individual prayer and meditation. There were many times when the guard repulsed clients' attempts to talk to MB by informing them that MB was praying in his inner room. But perhaps the crucial aspect of the church service was to give MB his often repeated identity of a Christian healer who derived his healing powers from the Christian God. His directives and judgments derived from God and clients had no option but to respect them even when they appeared undesirable or contrary to their wishes. A case in point was when he overruled client's demands for 'deadly' punishments for the people deemed to have afflicted them. One client bitterly complained thus: *'Since I started coming to MB, he has burnt up to eight of my witches. I have asked him to burn the people who have been consulting the witches to harm me but he does not want. I wonder for how long he wants me to keep coming to his place.'*

Another unmistakable aspect of MB's healing was the fact that both he and the secretary claimed credit for and at the same time denied responsibility for the healing or lack of it in the rituals. The success or failure of the healing rituals was a matter of faith. When a client got the intended result from the ritual, it boiled down to the fact that both he and the healer had faith. Alternatively, when the desired end was not realized, for example, the witches did not die or the voices from the bible failed to appear, it boiled down to the congregation having less faith. During the church services, MB and the secretary often asked the clients to have faith and to also pray for the healer to have more faith and power to heal them. This message is consistent with the Christian teachings regarding the importance of faith in healing<sup>67</sup>. At the beginning of the X-ray sessions when the voices took too long to appear from the bible, the secretary often remarked, *'Today you people have very little faith'*. She would then beg the congregation to sing louder and have more faith. When fewer charms appeared in the sessions where the healer retrieved charms used to afflict clients (See chapter 5), MB often declared that there was low collective faith in the congregation. MB explained that clients could be represented by their relatives and their healing worked through the faith of their relatives present during the performance of the rituals. Clients too exhorted each other to have faith in MB's ability to solve all their problems. By reducing the success or failure of his ritual to faith, MB appeared to be both empowering clients, spreading responsibility while exonerating himself from blame at the same time. He further enjoined the collaboration and active participation of the clients at group and individual level impressing on them that the solution to their misery depended on them.

The bible is central to MBs healing rituals as is exemplified by its multiple uses. MB uses the New Testament bible as well as both the combined new and Old Testament bibles in different rituals and in different ways. The New Testament was used during the X-ray process while the combined old and New Testament were used for all the other rituals. MB read from the bible to determine the clients problems, used the bible to burn witches and murders and, as we shall in the next chapter, to cleanse, retrieve charms as well as to provide long term protection to ritually treated clients.

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<sup>67</sup> MB and his secretary often quoted several verses from the bible such as Mathew chapters 9:22, 29 and John 8:30 where Jesus too healed but never claimed credit for it. In Mathew Chapter 9:22 Jesus heals a girl who had been bleeding for 12 but then declared: *'Take heart daughter, your faith has healed you'*.

MB has adopted obvious pseudo-biomedical procedures and spatial organization for his healing rituals. He has a clearly defined hierarchical structure and division of roles between him, the guard and the secretary. At the lower ranks of the consultation is the guard whose duties appear to be limited to receiving clients, directing them between the secretary's office and MB's house as well as setting the charms on fire after MB has retrieved them (See chapter 5). Though she acted as and always appeared to be the healer's deputy, the secretary was a central, indispensable and complementary figure in MB's healing rituals. She performed several duties as a receptionist, secretary, counselor, prosecutor, judge, executioner, and assisted MB in all other healing rituals conducted. She was always present in all the ritual consultations either alone or with the MB. The only ritual process that she rarely participated in was the initial consultations between the healers and the clients. MB came at the top of this hierarchy and all elements of the healing rituals point to his elevated stature. On a typical day, MB spent most of the morning session in his house having consultations with the clients sifted by the secretary. He held initial consultations with new clients and designed ameliorative strategies for them. Before holding further consultations with the continuing clients, MB studied notes from their previous X-ray sessions and occasionally sought clarification from the secretary. Later in the day MB inaugurated the X-ray sessions before retreating into his living room for more consultations and prayers. By so doing, MB appears to cut the image of a professional with a premium on his time and abilities and only appearing for specialized aspects of the rituals while allowing his assistants or his powers to control the rest of the processes. After inaugurating the X-ray process through prayer, MB departed the room with a parting shot '*bado niko na ninyi*' which translated to 'I am still together with you people'. MB explained that his powers controlled the X-ray process even as he held consultations or performed other private non-ritual duties like watching mechanics repair his vehicle. Mb confirmed that his powers controlled the X-ray process and that he was aware of what transpired in the X-ray process by making sudden appearances sudden appearance in the X-ray room when voices failed to appear from the bible. In one such occasion, MB abruptly appeared outside the X-ray room and in his characteristic commandeering voice, implored the congregation to pray with him. This was after the secretary had led the congregation for over 20 minutes of song and the voices had not emanated from the bible. After the short prayer in which he asked for the voices to appear and confess, he declared that a member of the congregations had laced him/herself with charms (*hirizi*) that ought to be removed for the X-ray session to commence. There was a hush and flurry of murmurs from the congregation before a female

client, perhaps in fear, declared that she wore beads around her waist, but these were for decoration. The secretary ordered her to go to the toilet and remove them and the sessions then proceeded.

The construction and separation of rooms for different functions was yet another noticeable aspect of MBs ritual practice that resembles the organization of space and function in biomedical facilities. MB used his living room for consultations with all clients as well as for the performance of rituals for clients who desired privacy. The secretary's office was indispensable in MB's ritual and the enormity and variety of tasks performed were evident in the daily healing activities. The church was reserved for prayer and worship sessions as well as the retrieval of charms. Occasionally lunch was also served here. The X-ray room as the name suggested was for the X-ray sessions where both divination and partial reconstruction was performed. Two other rooms served as lodging and kitchen for clients who would not be able to travel back to their homes after the divination session or those for whom MB prescribed nocturnal rituals. While men had their separate room, the kitchen served as the bedroom for female clients.

MBs divination process placed a high premium on the exposition of both the breadth and detail of affliction both at identification of source of affliction and the determination of the required ameliorative strategies. MB usually gave a vague tentative diagnosis and invited clients to listen to the details regarding their afflictions in the X-ray room. The confessions in the X-ray room were specific, on the questions of 'what', 'who' 'how', 'when' and more importantly 'why'. These questions were revisited in all sessions (from the initial mention to the outcome) with clarifications as the cases wore on and the clients engaged the people deemed to have afflicted them in dialogue, accusations and counter accusations and final declarations of guilt and judgment. As I have shown in the transcripts illustrated, on average a case took more than four visits to the healer and several hours and pages of notes to conclude. And while there accrued minor variations as each case progressed, the key actors and actions remained consistent. A case would for instance, start with 5 VFBs confessing but end up with 7. As the case progressed, new characters and new angles to the case would be introduced. In the determination of ameliorative procedures, MB in consultation with clients designed strategies for control of each of the sources of afflictions. The control involved a multiplicity of actions that combined both ritual and non ritual actions. In the case of Kaptinge illustrated on page 163, the client's father is cajoled to desist from his

witchcraft consultations, the witch is ritually set on fire during the X-ray process and the client is advised to seek forgiveness from his father and to buy him sugar to appease him.

In this elaborate set of rituals MB allowed himself both the time and the abilities to consider and verify from various sources of information. He used both his divination, and intuition, confessions from clients and more importantly from the X-ray process to understand the complex nature of a client's situation before setting to heal them. His range activities is thus a mix of interpretations and clients are neither sure nor interested in assessing when his directives derive from his normal intuition or from his 'perceived supra-human abilities. As Turner (1968) too observed, diviners, through the divination processes establish an ascendancy over their audience to a point where their logic is most often deemed magical. On any one day, MB processed loads of information on each client and it is inconceivable how the process would ensue without some form of register taken by the secretary. MB often depended on the notes taken by the secretary to update himself on the nature of each client's case as well as the stage of the case. Time was of essence both in the daily routine at MB's practice as well as in the staging of the different stages of the rituals for clients. Registration of clients was done in the morning, roughly between 8.00 am and 11.00 am. The church service followed till 1.00 pm followed by lunch between 1.00 pm and 2.00 pm. X ray sessions were always held in the afternoon anywhere between 2.00 pm and 6.00 pm. X-ray sessions were never held in the morning except for private clients. Even where the morning sessions ended earlier than 2.00 pm MB would keep the clients waiting till later in the afternoon even where he was only chatting with the anthropologist, watching a film or assisting mechanics repair his vehicle. MB allowed a minimum of a week between the different sessions for each client except for those who requested a fast tracking of the ritual duration. In which case, they paid all the required fees and at times paid more for expediting the ritual process. Generally, therefore, the ritual cycle often took longer than one month to conclude or for the clients to stop the ritual process for a variety of reasons. The importance of this protracted ritual process in resolving client's problems is examined further in the chapter 7 dealing with the efficacy of rituals.

I have considered it necessary to reproduce transcripts of the different phases of MB's healing primarily to show that although the clients trusted MB's supernatural abilities, the protracted nature of the healing rituals as they progressed through the different sessions resolved some of the cases brought to MB's attention. There was an incredible shift in the

dispositions of the clients as they progressed through the sessions. Clients would be timid and unsure in the mentions sessions. But as the sessions moved to the hearing, clients gained confidence not just in the process but over those who were perceived as afflicting them. In the hearing sessions confident clients yelled at the VFBs and accused them of afflicting them. The appearance of enemies in the form of VFBs followed by their confessions and responses served to convince the clients of their powers over them. When they were eventually judged and heard to cry for mercy as the bible went up in smoke, clients triumph over those who had afflicted them could be seen through their excited faces and comments. It is this choreographed movement of clients from a state of vulnerability, through empowerment and eventual vanquishing of their opponents assisted by MB's supernatural abilities that produced a healing effect and thus my decision to focus more on these aspects.

Even though I have identified the X-ray process as the critical part of MB's healing practice, three other rituals distinct from, but deriving from the X-ray process complete the gamut of rituals conducted by MB. These are the retrieval of charms, cleansing ceremonies and ritual prophylaxis. All these rituals are known by their Kiswahili terms, and it is to them that I would like to turn to in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5

### Cleansing, Charms Retrieval and Ritual of Prophylaxis.

#### 5.1. Introduction.

Kirmayer (2004), Dow (1986) and Frank (1973) have remarked that most systems of healing shared a couple of universal elements as well as culture-specific features. All systems of healing shared some theory of affliction, defined roles for patient and healer, a circumscribed place and time for healing ritual, specific symbolic actions with healing efficacy and consequent expectations. Frank, for instance, points out that the first step in healing was to identify the affliction by naming it. According to him, naming something was the first step in controlling it, 'for naming a sin is to recall it, to give it form and substance, so that the officiating medicine man can deal with it in a prescribed manner' (Frank 1973:65). This naming according to Dow is achieved through the particularization of a part of the general cultural mythic world<sup>68</sup> for the patient and the interpretation of the patient's problems in terms of disorders in this particularized segment. In this dissertation however, I prefer to use the term cosmology as opposed to what Frank (1973) refers to as assumptive world or Dow's (1986) Mythic world, as this captures the people's perception of the world without calling to attention the distinction between real and symbolic nor false and true understandings as might be implied by the use of the former two terms.

In the preceding chapters, I have described the nature and the functioning of MB's X-ray method which was the standard procedure in which he and the clients, employing a variety of techniques (intuition and divination, dialogue with patients, confessions by VFBs, synthesis of multiple sources of information and experiences, register, observation of unfolding events etc) arrived at the source of a client's affliction. In the process, witches, murderers and those who contacted them were identified, run away children and wives were located, thieves were identified, debtors were identified, rogue work colleagues were reprimanded, charms were identified as either hidden in clients' bodies or compounds etc. The elaborate nature of the X-ray process exposed in great and consistent detail the client's known and unknown afflictions, realizing them in an order and on a level which permitted them to unfold freely and lead to their resolution. The X-ray processes were part a divination process and part a reconstructive procedure (cf. Turner 1968).

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<sup>68</sup> Other scholars such as Comaroff (1980) refer to this as the patient's cosmology while Frank (1973) referred to it as the patient's assumptive world. Frank categorically states that the theory of illness and healing, and the healing method itself are integral parts of the culture's assumptive world.



Ritual healing by MB did not however stop at the X-ray level. MB conducted three other rituals that were quite crucial in the healing of most of his clients. In this chapter, I look at these three rituals conducted by MB and referred to by their Kiswahili terminologies as '*Kusafisha*' '*Kuvuta*' and '*Kufunika*'. Directly translated, '*Kusafisha*' is 'to clean, or to 'to wash'. As used by MB and his clients, it referred to the dislodging of ritual objects such as charms, ritually treated seeds, djinns etc from the bodies of afflicted persons. As such it approximated more to the concept of cleansing, which I use to describe the ritual. The direct translation of the term '*Kuvuta*' is 'to pull'. MB and his clients used this term to refer to the ritual where MB retrieved charms and other ritual objects used by witches to harm clients through prayers and use of the bible. The belief that witches could harm their victims by the use of charms hidden in their homes or placed on their paths was quite common in Western Kenya and is well described by Wandibba (1995). Such objects were believed to be hidden or buried in secret places and MB used his powers to 'pull' them from wherever they were buried and into his church compound where he opened them up, displayed and had them set on fire by his guard.

The third ritual described in this chapter is known by the term '*Kufunika*' which translates to 'to cover'. Surprisingly though, witches and sorcerers also used the term '*kufunika*' to refer to their witchcraft activities. In numerous X-ray sessions, witches confessed that they had 'covered' their victims to ensure that they did not prosper. When used in the ritual conducted by MB, however, the term referred to the protection for already treated clients against future evil machinations of witches. At the end of the ritual cycle, when clients considered themselves to be healed and the source of their afflictions controlled, MB gave them the option of a lifetime prophylaxis against future attacks through the '*Kufunika*' ritual. MB also described the ritual using the English terms, 'reflector' or 'mirror'. By this he meant that any evil designs or will directed to any client he had 'covered' would ricochet back to its sender since the client was covered by the blood of Jesus. Unlike the X-ray sessions that were standard procedure for all clients, these three rituals were contingent on the nature of affliction as determined by the X-ray sessions.

## **5.2. *Kusafisha*: the Cleansing ritual.**

In the course of my fieldwork, many clients explained to me that MB extracted witchcraft items from their bodies during the '*Kusafisha*' ritual. One client for instance claimed that MB had retrieved three Djinns from his stomach. At the same time, MB and his secretary

often mentioned that certain clients required to be ‘washed’ as part of their ritual healing. Cleansing rituals were conducted privately and I was therefore on the lookout for an opportunity to observe them.

### **5.3. *Kusafisha*: the case of Karama.**

I got the opportunity to observe MB’s cleansing ritual for a client that I will refer to as Karama. A closer look at this ritual recalls Boas’s 1930 description of Quesalid, the Kwakiutl Indian from the Vancouver region of Canada, who apprenticed and became a member of the shamanic group in a bid to discover the secret of the Shamans. In his apprenticeship, Quesalid learned the *Ars magna* of the shamanistic schools where the shaman hid a little tuft down the corner of his mouth, and threw it up, covered with blood at the proper moment – after having bitten his tongue or made his gums bleed – and solemnly presented it to his patients and the onlookers as the pathological foreign body extracted as a result of his sucking and manipulations. MB’s cleansing ritual was different even though he still ‘extracted’ foreign objects from client’s bodies. In his cleansing ritual (as in all his rituals), the bible was a central feature and was the one that sucked foreign objects from clients’ bodies as opposed to using his mouth. He, in his usual mien explained that the bible distinguished him from other healers who used their mouths or other traditional techniques of sucking out foreign objects from client’s bodies. Wandibba (1995) has detailed the various ways in which healers in Western Kenya extracted objects intermitted into victim’s bodies using a cupping horn or a tennis ball to remove the evil substances lodged into one’s stomach or simply through massaging with an ointment made from ghee and medicines.

I use the example of a client that I refer to as Karama to illustrate MB’s cleansing ritual. I met 52 years old Karama and his sister during my routine observations at MB’s ritual practice. Karama was quite weak and only walked assisted by his sister. His stomach was noticeably big even though his entire body was emaciated. I later learnt that Karama’s stomach was bloated and that was the main reason he visited MB. His sister sat him next to me outside the X-ray room as we waited for MB to launch the day’s X-ray session. Every few minutes, he either vomited or attempted to vomit and a green substance emitted from his mouth. And every time he vomited, his sister urged him to vomit more: ‘Vomit all of it out’.



**5.1 A picture of Darama's swollen stomach that *Mtumishi Barasa* divined as ensorcelled with *Ekikata*.**

There were a large number of clients when Karama visited MB as it was the weekend popularly referred to as 'General' when MB scheduled mass burning of witches and murderers. Karama and his sister therefore stayed the night at MB's homestead and got an appointment with him the following day on Sunday. This was also a busy day for MB as he not only conducted the church service but he also performed the ritual for the retrieval of charms. It was in between the church service and the retrieval of charms session that MB held the initial divination session with Karama and his sister. MB used the standard procedures for his initial divination. First the hearty welcome followed by prayers, thorough interrogation, bible reading and interpretation, tentative divination and final concluding prayer.

In Karama's initial divination, MB in his characteristic style, prayed for him, opened his bible on Hosea Chapter 5, read and explained it, and then embarked on his interrogation of Karama and his sister. Karama was too weak to speak and his sister responded to most of the questions. MB obtained a history of Karama's ill health, his job, workmates, family status and a host of other issues related to his well being. After collecting the narrative, he divined that Karama's swollen stomach was due to ritual food poisoning by a colleague who coveted his promotion at the work place. In the course of interrogating Karama and his sister, MB figured out that Karama's vicissitudes commenced when he was promoted to the

position of a chief<sup>69</sup> in Kenya's provincial administration. MB divined that a colleague who hoped to be promoted in place of Karama, fed him or organized him to be fed a ritually treated seed as he attended a funeral in the course of his duties. The ritually treated seed had lodged itself inside Karama's stomach causing it to fill up with water and swell.

In my discussions with locals from the location where Karama administered (Malakisi location), I gathered that the belief that someone could ritually treat a seed and feed an enemy to cause slow poisoning was quite common. The grain could be a maize, bean or pea. But once it was treated ritually, it was transformed to a poison known by the Lubukusu term, *Ekikata*. A witch ritually a boiled grain with harmful herbs and uttered a spell on it. The grain would then be mixed with the food served to the intended victim. When the victim ingested the food, the *Ekikata* lodged itself in the stomach and dissipated the poison into the abdomen<sup>70</sup>. If left untreated, this would cause the blockage of the victim's stomach and he would slowly waste and die. The ritual process was preferred as the action of the seed was slow and the victim would not be able to tell when, where or even who actually fed the *Ekikata* to them. Since locals and especially chiefs often visited many homes in the course of their duties and ate food, it would be virtually impossible to tell who among their friends and subjects had fed the seed to them unless one consulted a ritual specialist.

MB's initial divination would be followed by the X-ray session where Karama would get the identity of his nemesis and determine the types of penalties to be meted as well as other remedial measures. However, in view of Karama's poor health, MB altered the sequence of the ritual process and used his tentative divination to cleanse Karama of the effects of the *Ekikata*.

The cleansing ritual took place inside the healer's compound, near his gate and was conducted by MB assisted by the secretary and Karama's sister. The secretary asked Karama who was by this time sitting on the grass, to remove his shirt and she applied white oil known by the brand name Dipak all over his swollen stomach and back. A few minutes

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<sup>69</sup> Even though the position of a chief was the second lowest cadre in Kenya's provincial administration, such administrators yielded immense powers at the local level as they were the government's representatives at the local level.

<sup>70</sup> See Wandibba (1995) for a detailed description of the different ways in which charms were prepared to cause harm to victims. Wandibba talks about the use of items such as the hairs of a dead fox, bits of grass, beans, excreta of a hyena etc that were secretly inserted into the victim's food. Some of these particles could cause immediate death while others simply brought about stomach ache and vomiting.

later, MB emerged from his house, holding his bible and proceeded straight to where Karama was seated. After exchanging a few words with the secretary, he began to stroke Karama's stomach vertically and at times horizontally using the bible. At every stroke around Karama's stomach, he uttered the words, '*Shetani ashindwe*' (May the devil be trounced). The secretary and Karama's sister responded with the words '*Ashindwe*' (let him be trounced). At some point as he continued massaging Karama, he stopped and exclaimed in lubukusu language, '*kamechi kechule yumu*' which translated to, 'the water is filling in here'. He continued stroking Karama's stomach and repeated the same statement as above in the Kiswahili Language, '*Maji inajaa hapa*'. As he did this, he asked Karama to point to the part of the stomach that really pained him. Karama pointed a spot on the left side of his abdomen and MB massaged this point repeatedly.



**5.2 Mtumishi Barasa massaging Karama's back and stomach to glean the *Ekikata* out of his body. Karama's sister is assisting him to sit upright.**

MB massaged Karama's entire stomach and back some more then stopped and opened the bible on Hosea chapter 5. This was the same chapter he used to divine Karama's problem. The opened pages revealed clotted blood and small boluses of what looked like rotten beans and flesh, which MB claimed the bible had gleaned out from Karama's stomach. He showed this to a bewildered Karama and his sister and also expressed shock himself. And then looking at me he exclaimed, '*Mmmmh, this guy had serious trouble, look at all these, these have come from his stomach*'. MB then gathered the clotted 'blood and flesh' in the middle of the bible using a stick, folded and tore the pages of the bible with the stuff in it and asked Karama's sister to discard them in the toilet. MB then asked Karama who was by now leaning on the ground, in obvious discomfort, to sit upright so that he could pray for him.



5.3 *Mtumishi* Barasa displays the *Elakata* gleaned from Karama's body.

MB in his characteristic loud voice started a prayer in Lubukusu but later turned to the Kiswahili language after the first sentence of the prayer. Initially MB asked Karama to repeat the following sentence which he uttered in Lubukusu:



*Oh mwami yesu., umbonie* (Oh Lord Jesus, heal me')

He then prayed in a loud Kiswahili voice. I provide the translated version of the prayer.

*In your love oh God, I block the spirit of death on this man. I block all the events that shock and give him shocking emotions. May the devil be defeated: and I bestow on this man the power to fight the spirits and be a winner. And it is in Jesus name that I pray, Amen.*

After the prayer MB chatted with the secretary as Karama's sister dressed him. Karama sat on the grass occasionally slumping and lying on one side. MB looked at him once again, tried to make him sit upright and requested that he be given Paracetamol tablets as he appeared to be in lots of pain. One of MB's children fetched the pain killers from MB's house and Karama took two tablets. MB repeatedly assured Karama that he would recover and that he should have faith. He instructed Karama be taken to any health facility where 'the water would be pulled from his stomach' and he would recover: He repeated, '*When they remove this water even here in Kamukuywa<sup>71</sup> you will get cured*'.



**5.4 Mtumishi Barasa prays for Karama before discharging and directing him to go to a biomedical facility to 'remove the water from his stomach'.**

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<sup>71</sup> By Kamukuywa, MB meant the government run dispensary located at the Kamukuywa shopping centre. This was the lowest ranked government facility and often perceived to offer basic health interventions. MB was however so confident of his ritual that he did not consider specialized biomedical intervention to be necessary.

MB said yet another loud prayer before discharging Karama from his ritual healing. He asked Karama to repeat the following words of the prayer in Lubukusu. I provide the English translations below:

*Oh Jesus Christ, heal me, and my children, thank you Son of God. And let these words uttered by the servant of God lead to my respite. Son of God, let me be healed as soon as they extract this waters from my stomach, so that I can go home and take care of my children, my home, my cattle and farms. O God, erase my name from the list of the dead people and write it among the living. I want to become healthy and take care of my farm. I reject the powers of Satan,*

MB then turned to Kiswahili and concluded the prayer thus:

*God it is in your love, that I block the powers of heart burn on this man. And by this evening, may wonders be seen on this man. And it is in your blessing and wisdom that I pray, Amen. May the lord work wonders for you.*

After this prayer MB concluded the cleansing and proceeded to the church to perform the ritual for the retrieval of charms that I discuss later in this chapter. I made a follow up visit to Karama and his sister (as was my general procedure for selected cases) to collect the rest of the ethnography of his illness. Unfortunately, by the time of my visit, Karama had been operated at a government health facility but died a few minutes after the operation and had been buried. His sister took him to a health facility as directed by MB. The surgical operation was ‘successfully’ performed, but Karama died two hours after he was discharged into the ward. Interviews with the health care providers at the District hospital confirmed that the operation was conducted there and that Karama had regained his conscious before he was readmitted into the wards. He however developed breathing complications and died in the ward. The medical superintendent explained that Karama was booked for a surgical operation on suspicion that he suffered from intestinal obstruction. Even though Karama was operated on, on suspicion that he had an obstructed stomach, the Medical superintendent later explained to me that Karama’s was a case of cancer of the pancreas that was detected too late. This was despite that fact that cancer of pancreas was not mentioned anywhere in Karama’s diagnosis file and even on the report of his death<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> In spite of my constant assurance that my interest in Karama’s case was purely for research purposes, the health care personnel at this district hospital were extremely suspicious of my intentions and very reluctant to divulge any information. It took me two days to secure an interview with the medical superintendent and even on the day of the interview, I spent the entire morning assisting the clerk at the registry to locate Karama’s file.



Now going back to MB's ritual processes, especially the ways in which he manipulates the client's social relations in divination and healing requires recourse to some of Karama's antecedent circumstances prior to his visit. Karama's sister informed me that prior to my encounter with them at MB's ritual healing, Karama had incessantly struggled with a myriad of health problems and tensions within his social matrix for over a year. He was married to two wives and had a total of 28 children. According to his sister, his ailments commenced around the time he was promoted from the position of a sub chief to that of a Chief in Kenya's provincial administrative structure. The position of a chief was the second lowest rank in Kenya's Provincial Administration and the holder of the office was in charge of an administration unit referred to as a location. Mr. Karama was the chief of Malakisi Location. Below the location were smaller administrative units called sub-locations, headed by assistant chiefs. Although low in rank, chiefs were the government's representatives at the local level and wielded immense powers, both officially and unofficially. They were involved for instance in certifying citizenship through the issuance of letters confirming residence in the location, confirming land ownership and adjudicating in land disputes, security operations and settlement of disputes in their jurisdiction and even arbitrated in conflicts between husbands and wives. In view of their important role location residents often ingratiated themselves to the chiefs through gifts while the chiefs extorted goodies from residents. This was thus the enviable position to which Karama had been promoted.

Karama had been taken ill on several occasions in the course of the previous year and had been treated unsuccessfully in biomedical facilities as well as by traditional healers. His sister, a retired nurse, decided to bring him to her place so that she would take him to better medical facilities. Initially she took him to a district health facility in Webuye town where he was diagnosed as suffering from intestinal obstruction whose remedy was a surgical intervention. They also suspected him to be suffering from an enlarged spleen. Karama was admitted to the hospital on Thursday, the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2007 and booked for a surgical intervention on Tuesday the 16<sup>th</sup> of the same month. On Friday (12<sup>th</sup>) however, Karama's sister received a phone call from one of her cousins who suggested a visit to a ritual healer (specifically to MB) because Karama's case 'did not look like an ordinary type of illness'<sup>73</sup>. Karama's sister used her knowledge of hospital procedures to secure her brother's discharge

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<sup>73</sup> As I have stated in other chapters, such expressions in reference to witchcraft were quite common in illness narratives. Clients often avoided using the term witchcraft and preferred to use euphemisms.

from the hospital promising to bring him back on the eve of the surgery. She argued that 'it was too expensive yet unnecessary for her brother to spend the weekend at the health facility'. Her brother was discharged from the health facility on Saturday morning and I met up with them at MB's the same afternoon.

Such was the background to Mr. Karama's ritual cleansing. In their initial interaction, MB thoroughly interrogated Karama's sister on all these aspects and obtained a detailed description of Karama's life story including all the steps he had taken in search of a cure. MB divined (tentatively pending confirmation for the X-ray process) that Karama was a victim of *Ekikata*, from a jealous colleague. The pattern emerged throughout the interrogation. In the cosmology that MB shared with his clients, conflict and tensions in social relations were basic factors underlying many interpretations of illness and misfortune. Quimby (1971) for instance showed that in Bobo-Dioulasso (Cameroun) the principle source of conflict within the social structure was the socially induced conflict between loyalty and aggressive competition for scarce resources including wives. Jealousy by itself did not cause illnesses. However, in societies where belief in magic, witchcraft and other forms of ritual manipulation was universal, fears of jealousy fostered a belief that the jealous ones would and could easily exact revenge. In Mr. Karama's case, MB divined that a jealous colleague fed him or caused him to be fed on the *Ekikata* so that he could die and they would take over his position.

MB's ritual procedure was a combination of rigid procedures adhered to by everyone as well as creative and eclectic deviations depending on the factors and circumstances of a case. Had Karama's physical condition not deteriorated, he would be directed to the X-ray process where the extent of his affliction would be laid bare and an ameliorative strategy, which would include cleansing, designed. MB however used his intuitive divination to cleanse him even though he often declared that his divination was tentative and required conformation from the X-ray. According to him, the cleansing extracted the *Ekikata* and served to neutralize the spell uttered against Mr. Karama. Besides neutralizing the ritual effects, *Mtumishi* Barasa's ritual intervention addressed the wider frame of interpersonal relations that are part and parcel of such cases in the African medical system, where the logic of treatment frequently demanded the prior allocation of responsibility for the affliction and subsequent repair of the disrupted relationship, which it signaled (Comaroff 1980). Dow (1986) rightly observed that certain symbolic components of healing also

applied effective physical and pharmacologic therapies. MB advised Karama to visit any biomedical health facility for intermediate surgery, but reckoned that his healing would not be complete until his case was taken through the court process where the people who afflicted him would be named, and punished. MB never objected to the use of biomedical facilities, he even kept biomedicines in his house, like the Paracetamols he administered to Karama after he cleansed him.

### **Commentary.**

Although Karama's healing ritual cycle was interrupted by his death, most of the processes he underwent articulate the key aspects of MB's healing practice in which a client's afflictions was understood in terms of a breach in his/her cosmological existence. Its reconstruction involved action at both individual, natural social and spiritual realms. This action is enunciated through a carefully designed ritual process where primacy is accorded to procedure, time and space as well as the inescapable role of the bible both as object, text and determinant of afflictions. Karama appeared at MB's rituals in the afternoon and since he had not been processed through the routine procedures, he missed out on the initial X-ray session. He was only able to get an appointment with MB the following day, after he was registered by the secretary, paid the registration fee and attended the church service. Church services were compulsory for all clients visiting MB as it was important for the clients to be prepared spiritually to meet him as well as for their healing. Besides spiritual nourishment, the preparatory period discussed the possible rituals to be conducted and their costs, and after an agreement with the client, MB initiated the healing process.

MB used the bible (Hosea chapter 5) to divine Karama's stomach problems. In the divination, he stated that he could see Karama had been fed a ritually treated seed by a jealous colleague. He could not tell exactly who it was but instructed Karama to come back to the X-ray sessions where the guilty person(s) would identify themselves. He used the same bible again as a magnet to magically glean the *Ekikata* from Karama's stomach. The *Ekikata* was captured in the middle of Hosea chapter 5 and was shown to Karama and his sister. MB also uses Dipak oil to cleanse Karama. MB explains that his powers and prayers enable the bible and the Dipak oil to extract intromitted substances from victim's bodies. The physical need for Dipak oil is however understandable. In stroking the victim's body, MB applied lots of pressure on the skin and it would be extremely painful for the client if a lubricant were not used. In line with his divination, MB produced the *Ekikata*, which again

appeared magically placed in the very same chapter he used to divine. There is a consistency between the divination, the substance and the bible verse. He opened the bible and showed the *Ekikata* to Karama and his sister. The *Ekikata* thus removed, MB assured him that he could proceed with the treatment at a biomedical facility without any problems. Like in the case of Boas' Quesalid, MB produced the substance causing Karama's affliction and destroyed it. Frank (1973) has argued that in healing rituals, legerdemain may be employed and the important thing to note is not whether the clients consider this to be an element in chicanery or not. Rather the healing ritual reinforces the image of the healer as a powerful ally in the patient's struggle with the malign forces that have made him ill. The ability of MB, first to identify and then extract ritual objects intruded into clients' bodies was attributed solely to his supernatural abilities both by him and his clients. In the course of my fieldwork, clients retold even more dramatic incidents where MB had extracted Djinns and dead fetuses from clients' bodies. Karama's case was however one that I witnessed from the beginning to its end and so my decision to include it here.

The equation of jealousy and its resultant sorcery with the work of the devil is unmistakable in all of MB's ritual procedures<sup>74</sup>. MB punctuated all his strokes on Karama's stomach with the expression, 'May the devil be defeated'. After massaging the stomach strongly with the bible, he engaged in loud prayer where he and Karama beseeched the Lord to cure him. MB's explanations and prayers were often double edged where he both denied and credited himself for the healing. At the end of the prayer, he said to Karama, '*May the Lord work wonders for you*'. The implication here, though not stated was that if the client did not get better, then the fault would either be on their faith or the Lord's failure. This type of explanation by MB is quite common in the biblical literature where even the son of God explained that success or lack of it in his healing rituals to his father or to the faith of the healed<sup>75</sup>. MB therefore aligned his healing rituals with those of the biblical Jesus.

### **5.5. 'Kuvuta': Ritual retrieval of charms.**

This was yet another of MB's ritual healing procedures that derived from the X-ray process. The logic of this ritual is similar to the cleansing one, the only difference being that in this

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<sup>74</sup> Meyer's 1992 article details the ways in which the Ewe of Ghana equated witchcraft with the work of the devil as captured by the title of the article: If you are a Devil, you are a Witch and if you are a witch then, you are a Devil.

<sup>75</sup> MB and his secretary often quoted many verses in the bible where Jesus healed people based on their faith. Examples include books of Mathew chapters 8:13; 9:22; 15:26; Mark, 9:23; Luke, 4:17; 7:9; 8:49. In Mark chap. 10: 52 Jesus is reported to have healed a blind man named Bartimaeus by declaring, 'Go your faith has healed you'

one, the charms were believed to be hidden outside a person's body and their retrieval and destruction was necessary for complete healing. Wandibba (1995), and Wagner (1970) eloquently describe the Luyia beliefs on the use of herbs and other medicines that were tied together with objects collected from victims by witches to cause illness. Wagner explains the methods used thus:

The collection of objects from victims was done by both men and women; this was, of course, done secretly. To achieve the evil purpose, the witch had to tie them with certain poisonous or magically destructive roots known among the Babukusu, as *kamalesi*, which is also the generic name of modern medicines. Once the collected materials and the poisonous roots had been tied in a small bundle (*liloko*) they were placed in some appropriate receptacle for protection as a spell was recited. The receptacle was then hidden in some damp soil near a river, stream or spring. This kind of witchcraft led to a slow wasting of the victim's health. (1970: 118).

Wandibba and Wagner concur that witches could also hide 'medicines' to cause a victim to run into danger, such as falling victim of sudden accidents, or mishaps such as snake bites, attacks from wild animals, suicides, drowning, or falling from a tree and breaking one's limbs<sup>76</sup>. The deadly 'medicines' were usually hidden either in the homestead of the victim or at a spot over which the victim will pass. These 'medicines' were believed to emit their poison in the air to the victim and either injure them or cause them to die instantly. To counteract the effects of these mystical forces, Luyia employed a variety of measures. The commonest options for counteracting the mystical forces once they became active was the detection and destruction of harmful magic as well as the use of counter magic (Wandibba 1995)

The '*Kuvuta*' ritual by MB was the standard procedure for the production and destruction of charms in the healing process of clients whose divination procedures showed that they were victims of such substances. In MB's tentative divination and in numerous X-ray sessions, tales abounded of clients whose aggressors claimed to have used charms to afflict them. In the first transcript of MB's divination that I reproduced in chapter 2, MB divined that the young man's ex-girlfriend had collected his semen and used it to cause him erectile dysfunction. In numerous X-ray sessions, VFBs of witches confessed to collecting objects from their intended victims and used them to concoct charms to harm their victims. In the

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<sup>76</sup> This compares to Evans Pritchard's narrative of the young boy who injured his toe as he walked in the forest and declared that witchcraft must have been involved because, it was not normal for him to injure his toe and for the toe to fester and take too long to recover.

case of Mbago (cited in chapter three), he explained that he found items in his farm (including an opened up gecko) that he believed were meant to harm him. Wagner (1970) discusses how the Luyia believed that a special kind of lizard could be used to cause harm to a victim<sup>77</sup>.

The witch would procure a special kind of lizard, cut it open and place some Kamalesi (medicines) inside. Then without tying it, he hides the object at a place near which the intended victim will pass or over which he will step. While burying it there, he mutters a spell, specifying the kind of accident or death which he desires the victim to meet with. (pg 115)

### **5.6. Anatomy of ‘Kuvuta’.**

This ritual was conducted either publicly or privately. The Public ‘Kuvuta’ was conducted once a month in the weekend christened ‘General’ and was communally done for clients whose divination sessions proclaimed them to be victims of witches’ charms. The private sessions were conducted in MB’s living room for clients who did not wish to be lumped together for the communal ritual, and who, naturally, paid extra for the privacy. Both private and public rituals followed the same pattern. The public ritual was conducted in the church on a Sunday afternoon. The secretary asked the congregation to enter the church and when everyone was in the church, she placed the bible (the combined Old and New testaments) wide open at the door steps of the church. Members of the congregation stood in the church with their backs to the front wall of the church. All the windows of the church were locked and only the door was open. The secretary entered the church from her office, stood behind the congregation and started a chorus - the very same chorus that was sang during the X-ray sessions. The secretary and the congregation sang for between 5 and 10 minutes when MB joined the congregation through the secretary’s door. Standing behind the congregation, he announced his entry by shouting ‘Praise the lord’. The congregation answered by saying ‘Amen’. MB then asked the congregation to kneel down as he made the following announcement:

‘The time has now come to chase away the demons.’<sup>78</sup> And when I chase the demons away, you too should chase them using lots of force! Chase the demons away with lots force! If you do not chase away the demons with force, when another person’s demon comes out and notices that you do not have lots of force in you, this demon will attack you. The time has now come for us to chase the demons. And when I chase the demons away, you too should

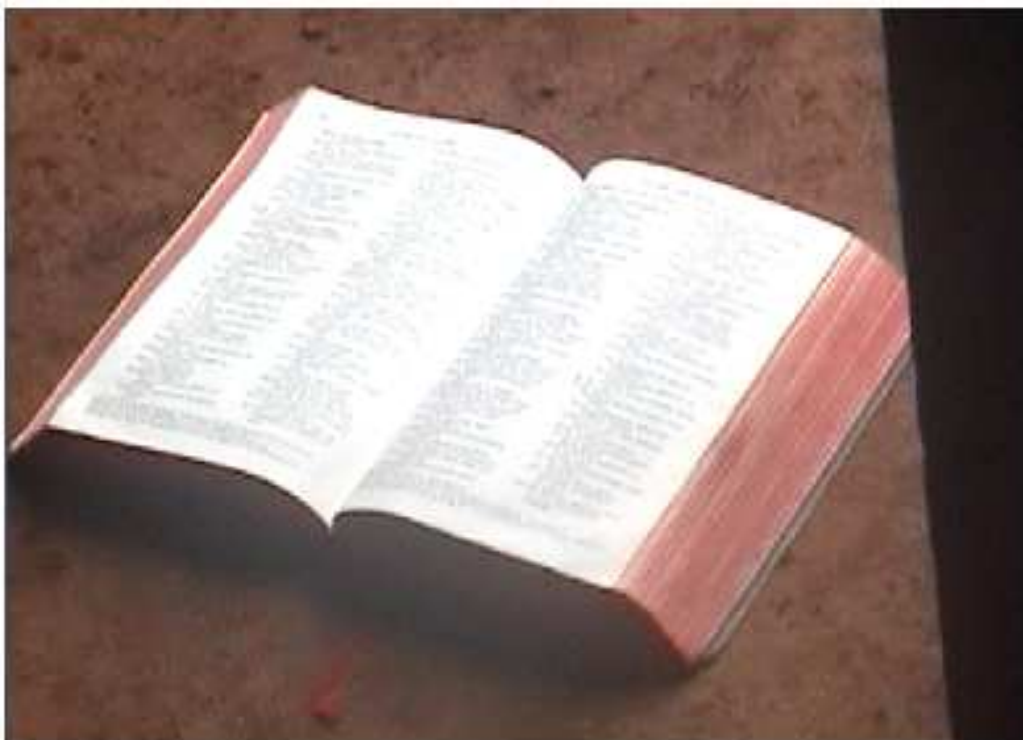
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<sup>77</sup> This method of causing harm is also cited by Wandibba (1995: 118)

<sup>78</sup> The actual Kiswahili word he used was ‘Mapepo’ which translates to spirits - in this case bad spirits or demons.

chase the demons using lots of force. Chase the demons away with lots force. And any time you hear me say 'Amen', you should keep quiet immediately'.

After making the announcement, MB also knelt down and took over leading the chorus. The sessions were conducted in virtually the same way every month. It comprised of the church service where charms were recalled, a session where charms were collected, then MB identified them with each client and opened them up. At the end of the ceremony the guard collected the charms and set them on fire. I elect to describe the ritual as it was conducted on the same day Karama (whose case I described above) was cleansed. The day was sunny and the congregation numbered over 60, with an almost equal number of male and female clients. Their ages varied considerably with both the young and the old evenly represented. The session started as usual with the secretary assembling the congregation in the church and placing the bible at the steps of the main door to the church. The windows were as usual closed.



5.5 The open bible (complete with new and old testament) is placed at the entrance of the church to act as a magnet for charms in the charm's retrieval session.

### **5.6.1. The Church Service.**

Once inside the church, the secretary started the chorus which went on for about five minutes when MB came in through the secretary's door. He stood at the back of the church and characteristically announced his arrival by shouting, 'Praise the Lord! The congregation responded, 'Amen'! MB then asked the congregation to go on their knees as he, in his usual loud voice, announced that it was the time to cast out demons. He beseeched the congregation to be steadfast, to chase away the devil with force and to keep quiet every time he shouted, 'Amen'. He led the song for another 2-3 minutes and as the congregation sung the last verse of the chorus, MB started praying. I too was kneeling near him but could only hear a few words of the prayer as the rest were muffled by the singing. MB concluded his prayer as the congregation sang the last lines of the chorus. He then asked the congregation to cry their problems to Jesus. The congregation broke into a cacophony with each congregant half shouting and half mumbling their problems. As the congregation engaged in animated prayer, MB loudly urged them to cry to Jesus in the following words:

MB: Tell Jesus your problems! Cry your problems to Jesus! Tell Jesus all the problems that are disturbing you! Cry to Jesus! Jesus is the Healer! Jesus is able! When you believe you are healed and you are healed in Jesus name! Cry your problems to Jesus! Tell your problems to Jesus!

MB then broke into personal prayer again allowing the congregation to continue with their personal prayers and shouts to Jesus. This continued for another 2-3 minutes and was halted when MB shouted, Amen. The congregation was quiet as MB had instructed at the beginning of the session. MB then asked them to bow their heads and he led them in a loud prayer. The congregation animated and punctuated every sentence in this prayer guided by the secretary. I provide the transliterated version of this prayer below:

MB: Oh Lord of love,

CONGREG: Yes Lord!

MB: Our closest healer, who lives,

CONGREG: Yes Lord!

MB: The only son of God,

CONGREG: Yes Lord!

MB: The one, who defeated death,



CONGREG: Yes Lord!

MB: And resurrected!

CONGREG: Yes father (others shout, Yes Lord)!

MB: And ascended into heaven,

CONGREG: Yes Lord!

MB: And you are seated on the right hand of the father,

CONGREG: Yes Jesus!

MB: Jesus is lord,

CONGREG: Yes Jesus!

MB: Jesus you are able,

CONGREG Yes Jesus!

MB: When you believe you get healed!

CONGREG: Yes Jesus!

MB: Cry your problems out to Jesus!

After this last sentence, MB allowed the congregation to lapse into yet another cacophony of shouts as he too got into prayer amidst the shouting. Again this prayer was drowned by the congregation and I could only hear MB repeatedly saying, 'God I thank you'. This went on for 2-3 minutes before MB halted it by shouting, Amen! For a second time MB asked the congregation to bow down and pray. The prayer was similar to the first one I reproduced above but with minor alterations and was also animated by the congregation:

MB: Oh Lord of love,

CONGREG: Yes Lord!

MB: Our closest healer, who lives,

CONGREG: Yes Lord!

MB: The only son of God,

CONGREG: Yes Lord!

MB: The one, who defeated death,

CONGREG: Yes Lord!

MB: And resurrected,

CONGREG: Yes father (others shout Yes Lord)!

MB: And ascended into heaven,

CONGREG: Yes Lord!

MB: And you are seated on the right hand of the father,

CONGREG: Yes father!

MB: Thank you Jesus,

CONGREG: Thank you!

MB repeated this last sentence 10 times and again the congregation lapsed into shouting and clapping. After yet another animated session, MB launched another chanting session where he named different ailments and the congregation responded by yelling the word, 'Devil' every time he mentioned an ailment. By listing the different types of afflictions, MB appeared to be informing the clients that his healing methods dealt with all their afflictions and is common practice in many healing traditions (CF: Sax 2008)

MB: We are now coming against the Devil!

CONGREG: Devil!

MB: We are now coming against the Devil!

CONGREG: Devil!

MB: You devil!

CONGREG: Devil!

MB: The one who causes head pains!

CONGREG: Devil!

MB: The one who causes chest pains!

CONGREG: Devil!

MB: The one who causes back pains!

Congreg: Devil!

MB: The one causes stomach pains!

CONGREG: Devil!

MB: The one who causes leg pains!

CONGREG: Devil!

MB: The one who causes toothaches!

CONGREG: Devil!

MB: The one who causes hand pains!

CONGREG: Devil!

MB: You devil!

CONGREG: Devil!

MB: The one who is cursed!

CONGREG: Devil:

MB: Dirty spirit!

CONGREG: Devil!

MB continued chanting the different types of afflictions as the congregation shouted back with the same rejoinder of 'Devil! In between the afflictions he also shouted 'Dirty spirit!' and the congregation responded back 'Devil'! He mentioned, the devil of ear pains, djinns, witchcraft, curses, accidents, uncontrolled bleeding, lightning, poisoning, 'bad medicines', barrenness, AIDS, Malaria Pneumonia, Disabilities, deafness, blindness, family discord, land disputes, court cases, thugs and miscarriages. The congregation was getting excited and animated as MB shouted and chanted. At the end of the listing, MB clapped and yelled and the congregation joined in the shouting and clapping. MB still kneeling at the back of the church equally shouted as he threw his arms with clenched fists in the air. He allowed the congregation to shout and clap for close to 3 minutes as he prayed in low tones occasionally raising his voice although he could not be heard above the clapping and shouting. For the

third time MB shouted, ‘Amen!’ As everybody went quiet, a woman stood in the middle of the congregation and started wailing and shouting praises to God. She wailed,

*May the devil be defeated! Thank you. Thank you lord of the army, Thank you God! God, you are the only one! Thank you Jehovah! You are the true God, Thank you Lord! Thank you Jesus.*

MB allowed the woman to continue wailing even though he had instructed everyone to be silent when he shouted ‘Amen’! When the woman stopped wailing, MB embarked on yet another prayer animated by the congregation.

MB: Oh Lord of love,

CONGREG: Yes Lord!

MB: Our closest healer alive,

CONGREG: Yes Lord!

MB: The only son of God,

CONGREG: Yes Lord!

MB: The one defeated death,

CONGREG: Yes Lord!

MB: Fill me with energies,

CONGREG: Fill (him)

MB: Fill me with energies

CONGREG Fill (him).

MB repeated the last sentence (‘Fill me with energies’) eight times as the congregation shouted back the rejoinder. He then altered the sentence and started shouting, ‘Bring them lord’. The congregation adjusted the rejoinder appropriately and both MB and the congregation’s chanted themselves into a cacophony.

MB: Bring them Lord!

CONGREG: Bring them!

MB: Bring them Lord!

CONGREG: Bring them Lord!

MB shouted this last sentence of the prayer seven times as he threw his hands in the air with his fists clenched. MB then prayed loudly as the congregation shouted. The first few words of the prayer were in English, but the rest of the prayer was unintelligible. As he prayed, a woman (the very same who wailed earlier) too broke into shouts of ‘Thank you Jesus’ and her loud prayer muffled MB’s. She shouted,

*‘Jesus Glory, thank you Jesus, you are the lord of Glory, you’re the lord of the army, you are the true God, Lord lift me up, Lord cleanse me, Lord you are God, May you be praised Jesus, may you be lifted!’*

Half way through her animated prayer, she was joined by two other female voices that also yelled and mumbled words and cries. Her voice was however the most persistent and could be heard above the two as she further prayed:

*‘You are the O lord, Thank you holy one, Thank you Lord of grace, Jesus forgive me, Jesus lift me and forgive me my sins, Jesus you are the King, I will praise you day and night, Thank you Jesus’.*

The three women stopped shouting and wailing when MB shouted, ‘Amen’. He then said the following short prayer to conclude the session:

‘We thank you lord for all that you continue to do for us. And it is in Jesus name that we pray, Amen’.

MB then made the following announcement:

‘The beloved of God, many charms have arrived here. Some of them have arrived at a very high speed, some of them have even lost control, but they are all spread in the compound of this church. Many things have arrived in this compound. You will be required to be very careful because some of them are very small. The beloved of God, 6 charms are yet to arrive here from the area of Moi’s bridge and Eldoret. They are still in the air as that line was interrupted by a huge wind. 2 other charms are yet to arrive from Kakamega and Webuye. From Bungoma and Naitiri, 15 charms are yet to arrive and most of them had harmful medicines. 1 charm is yet to arrive from Mt. Elgon. That line was very good today. 7 charms are yet to arrive from Kitale. Those charms also had medicines of *misashio*. That line was very good as the majority of people have been blessed today. And as we leave the church, one of you should remove the bible from the door step. I also ask you to be very careful because the charms are spread all over this compound. Let us all rise and go out. You should

be very careful because at times you leave and your charms are discovered when you are not here’.

### **5.6.2. Commentary.**

The charm retrieval session was heavily animated as can be seen from the transliterated version that I reproduced above. The sessions took between 25 – 30 minutes and comprised different sessions that MB took the congregation through in the same way every time albeit with minor alterations. In the sessions, he also allowed emotional outpouring and wailing amongst members of the congregation even when he instructed them to be silent. Even though the prayer session was continuous, one could identify several subsections repeated every time MB conducted the sessions. MB started the sessions by announcing the purpose of the ritual .i.e to chase the demons away. Incidentally he never mentioned that the session was to retrieve charms even though charms were recovered in the end. This was followed by song and several prayer sessions. All prayer sessions degenerated into a cacophony that MB halted by shouting ‘Amen’. MB’s shout of ‘Amen’, appeared to be the standard procedure by which he brought one prayer session to an end only to inaugurate the next one. In the first prayer session MB asked the congregation to cry out their problems to Jesus. This was followed by the second session in which MB led the congregation in cursing the different afflictions facing the clients. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> sessions MB prayed to God to fill him up with energies and to bring the charms into his church compound respectively. MB concluded the session by a final prayer and then announced the charms that had been retrieved. According to him, the prayer session infused powers into the bible placed at the door of the church to act as a magnet that recovered the charms and scattered them around his church compound. He asked the congregation to collect them and bring them to him for identification.

This ritual was conducted in the same manner once a month except for private sessions that were held as and when demanded by clients. Private sessions were conducted by MB from his living with the secretary and the respective clients in the same prayer format. In this case, the charm (s) fell in MB’s living room or on his verandah

### **5.6.3. Collecting the charms.**

At the end of the prayer sessions, MB asked the congregation to search around the church compound for the charms. They scoured all round the church in the grass and in the fields around it collecting the charms and laid them in front of the church. The congregation appeared to know exactly what to look for. They collected any suspiciously bound articles -

bones, bundles of leaves tied together, small balls or round objects covered in soot, etc. Occasionally they brought items that MB dismissed. On this occasion, the congregation collected 19 items. Out of these, MB discarded three items as they were not charms. He also informed them that there were 9 other charms around the compound that they were yet to collect.



**5.6 A client displays charms that he collected outside *Mtumishi* Barasa's church after the charms retrieval session.**

After the items were collected, clients congregated outside the church as they waited for MB to identify the charms for them. MB identified each charm located with the clients in attendance. Like in all stages of ritual, MB started by saying a prayer and then asked the guard<sup>79</sup> to separate each charm from the heap, one after the other as he identified them. He used the bible to identify the charms as MB read through it to identify the person on whom a charm had been used.

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<sup>79</sup> This was the only time the guard was involved in the rituals proper. Most of the other times, he would be seated at the gate, ushering clients between the gate, the secretary and to MB as well as running errands between the secretary's office and MB's house.



5.7 Some of the charms collected are spread outside the church for *Mtumishi* Barasa to identify and unpack.

#### 5.6.4. The Identification of charms.

MB said the prayer below and identified each charm with members of the congregation. He also gave a short commentary on each charm and the dangers it had or would cause were it not captured and destroyed.

MB: Praise the Lord,

CONGREG: Amen,

MB: In your love oh God, we ask you to help us identify the charms here with those present. And it is in Jesus name that we pray,

CONGREG: Amen.

The guard then pointed at each charm separating it from the rest using a cane and MB identified the client on whom the charm was used. His speech in the identification process varied but had several redundant features. As the guard moved the charm away from the rest, MB would state: ‘the beloved of God, the charm being moved, belongs to man (or woman) X and was intended to cause accidents to his whole family. He has been blessed



today and has saved his entire family'. Occasionally MB would remark that a client ought to attend another charm retrieval session where more charms needed to be retrieved in their cases. Although a total of 26 charms were retrieved on this day, I will describe three of them in detail and link them up with their X-ray sessions to show the ways in which MB's system of healing worked. As each charm was identified MB asked the clients to note which charm belonged to them for ease of identification as he unpacked them. There were over 60 clients attending the ritual on this day and with only 26 charms retrieved, more than half of them looked at MB dejectedly as they knew they would be scheduled for another charm retrieval session.

#### **5.6.5. Unpacking the charms.**

After MB identified the charms, clients congregated and formed a ring around him as he squatted on the ground and unpacked each of the charms, displayed their contents and dumped them on a metallic slab (measuring roughly between 44 by 60 cms) next to him. This was a relaxed session full of chats and jokes as the charms were opened up. The congregants marveled at the charms, occasionally expressing shock and anger but also cracked many jokes about the charms, the witches, clients etc. They often tried to second guess the contents of the charms and the harm they were intended to cause. MB too joined in the free discussions occasionally offering explanation, at times asking for clarifications from clients and at other times expressing incomprehension.



5.8 *Mtumishi* Barasa unwraps the charms one after the other and dumps them on the metallic slab on the floor.

Although I give three examples of charms in detail, there appeared to be a general trend in the contents and intentions of charms retrieved every time the ritual was conducted. Several items recurred in most of the charms unpacked and the congregation was unanimous on the intentions of those who conjured them as was evident in their discussions.

Money in form of notes and coins was found in many of the charms retrieved. Members of the congregation appeared unanimous that money used in the charms was intended to cause economic stagnation. Several comments made every time money appeared concocted in the charms confirmed this:

**Congregant 3:** You know money is everything and when you combine it with the sole of a shoe<sup>80</sup>, you have blocked all ways. You will keep walking and never get money.

**Congregant 2:** These people ask you for money, they say, give me some money, only to spoil you with it.

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<sup>80</sup> Congregant made this comment when a Kshs 20 coin was unearthed from a charm wrapped in the sole of a shoe.

**Congregant 1:** Not just at home, even at the work place. Everything that I attempt always gets blocked. You start this project, and it stalls, you start another one, it stalls again.

**Guard:** You see when they put money together in that ring, it means your money will go in circles like that ring.



5.9 A heap of opened up charms. Note the coins at the bottom right corner of the metallic slab.

These comments were made as MB unpacked one of the charms on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January. Members of the congregation used their knowledge regarding the use of charms but also recalled VFBs confessions in the X-ray sessions where details on how money was used to concoct charms were frequently made.

Black soil was quite common in the charms. This was used to bind the different items in the charm together. There were however occasions where clients guessed that the soil was from the grave or collected from the footprints of the clients. When collected from the grave, the soil was intended to kill the clients as the comments below show.

**Congregant 3:** There is even soil from the grave, and also sand. You were really going to die you!

Soil collected from a person's footprints was believed to cause pain and swelling of feet.

**MB:** And this person (means witch) really loves you.

**CL:** No, she has finished me, (congregation bursts out laughing) look at my feet, I walk as though I am handicapped.

Different types of farm produce were found in many of the charms - maize grains, beans, maize stocks, banana peelings, onions, rice, cooked Ugali, and even popcorns. Most clients visiting MB's practice were farmers and believed that their farming activities could be targeted by conjuring charms using produce from their farms as the following comments reveal.

**Congregant 3:** (Addressing client) Mum, even if you planted maize 500 times, you would not harvest it. They have blocked all your maize. (Laughter)

When foodstuff was found in cooked form, the congregation believed it caused stomach pains or indigestion to the client. As MB unpacked one of the charms with his bare hands for instance, he discovered, to his dismay that it contained cooked Ugali and human feces. The charm was believed to be the one causing stomach problems, among others ailments to the client.

Different types of papers, most in a semi-decomposed state were unpacked from many of the charms. Examination papers and pencils, receipts and newspapers were in several charms produced at MBs. Most of these were believed to have been used to curtail children's progress in education. The use of these items could also be used to block a teacher from effectively performing her/his duties. MB unpacked many charms containing examination papers. As MB unpacked a charm that contained examination papers, identified as a biology examination paper<sup>81</sup>, the congregation chatted thus:

**Congregant 4 (Teacher):** This looks like an examination paper as it has both questions and answers.

**Congregant 1:** Looks like they have blocked the children's education.

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<sup>81</sup> Biology is one of the subjects taught and examined in Kenyan high schools.

**Congregant 3:** And then you complain that your child is stupid yet they (witches) have captured him.

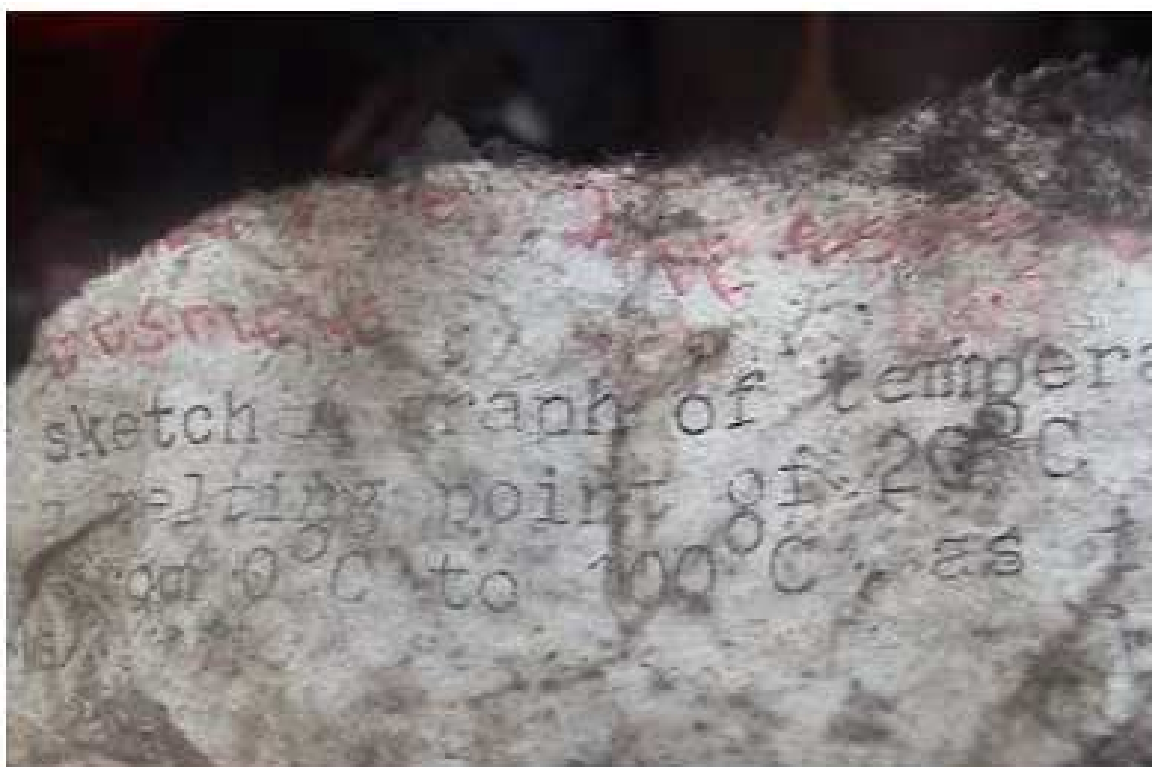
**Congregant 2:** Will our children ever succeed in their education?

**MB:** Where is the teacher? Teacher, can you have a look and tell us the subject of this examination paper?

**Congregant 4:** (teacher as he tried to read what was written on the paper): This looks like a Biology test paper as I can see stuff to do with temperature.

**Congregant 6:** Some people just identify a household where people are well educated and decide to spoil them.

**Congregation 5:** There are people who just walk around and declare: ‘mmh, nobody in compound X will go to school’.



5.10 A partly torn biology test paper unwrapped from one of the charms used to ensoreel Mtumishi Barasa's client.

Decomposing clothes and hairs were also common in the charms. Congregants believed that these were used to cause ailments to clients based on the wishes of the witches and their collaborators. Clothes especially inner wear were mostly associated with infertility while hairs were thought to be mixed with other ‘medicines’ to cause incurable headaches.

**Congregant 1:** There is hair, Ugali, clothes,

**MB:** Do you have headaches?

**CL:** Yes,

**MB:** You have serious headaches?

**CL:** Yes,

**Congregant 3:** The head ache's someone until you feel as if it will burst!

Other items unpacked commonly included bicycle and vehicle parts (clients believed these were used to stall bicycles and vehicles), mattresses, shoe insoles, bones and feathers. Congregants often laughed and made fun of the witches and the charms as MB unpacked them. At times they expressed anger and shock at the amount of resources that witches put in the preparation of the charms as can be seen from the following comments:

**Congregant 1:** These people really take their time to wrap all these items together.

**Congregant 2:** They must do this stuff at night

**MB:** No, they also do it during the day. That is why when you visit them during the day, you hear some funny noises, (MB mimics funny noises causing laughter from the congregation) and when you knock at their doors, they do not usher you into their houses immediately..... I usually say for such people, just knock on their doors and get in: do not even wait for them to say 'come in'

**MB:** These are examination papers. But these people are really bad. They make you pay school fees but you do not get any results.

**Congregant 2:** Children cannot school properly.

**Congregant 3:** And then we say that the teachers are not good!

**Congregant 4** (teacher): I think we need to get these a people into a school for witchcraft (Congregation laughs).

**Congregant 1:** These people are really schooled in the art of sorcery!

**Congregant 4:** (teacher): All this science used here, why can't they use it to design roads? They could actually construct highways for us!

## **5.7. Charms and the Ethnographic cases.**

Going back to the charms retrieval session on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January, I select the case of three clients, describe their charms and link them up with their X- ray process. I select the case of Jael, whose X-ray sessions were discussed in chapter 4, the cases of Ben Oruko and Julius Oboya.

### **5.7.1 The case of Jael.**

Jael Okoti was the 43 years old combative lady who swore that she would not allow anyone to ‘eat her children’ (see transcript on page 185). Jael’s business rival confessed during her X-ray sessions that she had approached a witch to bewitch Jael so that she would no longer come to the market. The witch she approached too corroborated her story, agreeing that she concocted charms and supplied Jael’s business rival with medicines that she sprinkled on the grounds where Jael spread her stock. Jael’s case was processed through MB’s normal courtroom procedures ending up with judgment and punishment of the witches and those who had approached them. But since one of the witches confessed that she had taken money from her and used it to bewitch him, her healing would not be complete until the charm was located and destroyed. Jael came to the charm retrieval session where MB identified one of the charms retrieved as belonging to her.

#### **The Charm.**

The charm was formed into a small ball, the size of a tennis ball wrapped in a maroon handkerchief. MB opened this charm and cracked jokes about the color and configuration of the charm. The following conversation ensued as MB unpacked the charm.

**MB:** Whose is this?

**CL:** It is mine:

**MB:** And this person (means witch) really loves you.

**CL:** No, she has finished me, (congregation bursts out laughing) look at my feet, and I walk as though I am handicapped.

MB struggled to untie the bundle in vain and decided to cut it open using a razor blade. The first thing that popped out of the handkerchief was a 20 shillings coin. MB asked again:

**MB:** Who does this (charm) belong to?

**CL:** It is mine.

**MB:** Looks like there is more money here. These look like more notes. (MB unraveled the charm and revealed soil, rotting examination papers and decomposing clothes.

**CL:** Wow! Those are my sister's test papers. They are my sister's papers for standard eight!

**MB:** Yes, these look like examination papers.

**CL:** Those must be my under wear!

**MB:** Your under wear?

**CL:** Yes.

MB crushed the rest of the charm and dumped it on the metallic slab on the ground.

There were consistencies and new discoveries with the charm retrieved for Jael. The charm contained a 20 shillings coin that was mentioned in the X-ray sessions but also other items that had not been mentioned in the X-ray sessions: examination papers that Jael immediately claimed belonged to her sister, other decomposing (unidentifiable) papers, rotting clothes and soil. Jael commented that the decomposing clothes were her inner wear. MB often explained that his healing powers exposed everything, whether the divination sessions mentioned it or not. The presence of new items in the charms was therefore not surprising for MB and the clients. With the production of the charm, Jael was scheduled for a cleansing session to cleanse her face that had lesions alleged sent to her by her business rival. The charm session was however declared successful for Jael who remained in her usual social and at times combative self, even during the charm retrieval session. I was however not able to attend her cleansing ceremony and I am not sure that it ever occurred in the course of my fieldwork..

### **5.7.2. Case 2. Ben Oruko: Djinn, Erectile Dysfunction and a troubled Life.**

Ben Oruko was one of the clients at MB's ritual retrieval session on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January. He was 29 years old, married and taught in a primary school. He was also a part time student, pursuing a Bachelors degree in education in one of the Kenyan universities. I met him a couple of times as his case went through the X-ray sessions. He was quite unreserved and held lively discussions with me as well as with other clients. He was the teacher consulted by MB to identify the subject matter of the papers retrieved and described above. Oruko complained of persistent stomach problems, headaches and a 'troubled/blocked



life<sup>82</sup>. However what seemed to concern him a lot was his erectile dysfunction. In one of my chats with him, he remarked, *'Imagine not having sex with your wife for over 2 years?'* *These people have finished me.* Ben was equally worried about his degree course at the university. According to him, he had met all the requirements for the award of the degree but the records of attendance and grades for some of the courses that he sat for had inexplicably disappeared. Ben would therefore not graduate unless his grades could be traced. He bitterly complained that he could not understand how the records of his grades could disappear yet he filed them at the end of every semester. Ben discussed all his problems with MB who promised to assist him. MB as usual gave him his own tentative divination before inviting him to attend the X-ray sessions. Ben's X-ray sessions were long and I only reproduce excerpts that reveal his afflictions, especially those that indicate that charms were concocted to afflict him.

Transcript.

**1<sup>st</sup> VFB:** My name is James Wamala.

**SEC:** You are accused!

**VFB:** My name is James Wamala. And I am the one who assisted Faith Auma to bewitch Dorcas' children. I am the one who bewitched that boy called Ben Oruko.

**CL:** (Ben): And who are you?

**VFB:** I am the one who bewitched that woman called Peris Oruko

**CL:** Mmh, Why?

**VFB:** And I am the one who bewitched Ben so that he may not succeed in his university education and get a job. I am the one who ensured that Ben did not pass his University examinations; he would never succeed in anything. I ensured that he did not live peacefully with his wife. I am the one who sends female Djinnns to Ben's bed at night so that every time he wants to have sex with his wife, the Djinnns sleep in between him and his wife, and take away all his energies.

**SEC:** Let us accuse him,

**CONGREG:** Yes we accuse him.

**VFB:** I have agreed I am a witch and I am the one who did all that. I am the one who used Djinnns to snatch his examination papers and pens. I have taken a thread from his shirt,

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<sup>82</sup> To be 'blocked or troubled' was a euphemism used by many clients to state that they believed themselves to be ensorcelled.

trousers, and socks and have used them to bewitch him so that he may not be able to walk in future. I also took one of his socks that were torn and used them to bewitch him.

**CL:** Okay, continue,

**VFB:** I am currently bewitching him so that he does not succeed in anything and when I am through with him, I will get on to his wife, that wife called Peris Oruko.

**SEC:** Let us accuse him,

**CONGREG:** Yes, we accuse him.

**VFB:** I have agreed that I am the one who was involved in bewitching Ben and his wife. I want them to be involved in accidents and never succeed in doing anything. There is also another boy who works as a cop<sup>83</sup>, I want him to lose his job, come back home and have problems every day of his life.

**CL:** When did you plan all that?

**VFB:** And I am the one who supplied the medicines that were placed on Dorcas' footprints and others that were sprinkled round her house and homestead so that she can have problems in her life.

**SEC:** Let us accuse him!

**CONGREG:** Yeah, we accuse him!

**SEC:** Allow the other one to come!

**2<sup>nd</sup> VFB:** My name is Faith,

**SEC:** Faith you are accused.

**VFB:** My name is Faith, I want to tell you very clearly, I have bewitched Dorcas' son, the son called Ben. I have bewitched this son so that he does not succeed in anything he does, so that he may have problems in his entire life. I am a witch and I have bewitched the entire household of Dorcas Auma. I have taken their exam papers and bewitched them, I have bewitched their money, I want them...when they get money,, that money should only bring them problems. All her money should end up being used up to solve their problems and not for anything progressive,

**CL:** Why?

**VFB:** I have bewitched this son, and taken money from them and bewitched them so that they do not live well with their wives. I have bewitched their cows and their farms so that they do not produce anything. I have taken Ben's money...

**CL:** How much?

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<sup>83</sup> Oruko's brother worked as a policeman.

**VFB:** I have taken Ben's Fifty shillings and bewitched it. I have used the money to bewitch him. I want him to continuously encounter problems.

**SEC:** (to client) What is the relationship between you and this person (speaking)?

**CL:** She is my stepmother.

**SEC:** Continue or allow the other one to confess,

**3<sup>rd</sup> VFB:** My name is David Wanyama. I want to let you know I have been involved in bewitching Dorcas' entire household. I assisted Alice Chepngeno in bewitching the entire household of Bramwel. I am the one who caused lightning to strike Bramwel's<sup>84</sup> homestead. I am the one who spoilt Bramwel's son called Ben.

**CL:** Mmh!

**VFB:** I am the one who has ensured that Dorcas Auma has problems together with her children. In doing all these, I assisted the woman called Alice Chepngeno to spoil these children's lives. I have spread medicines in Dorcas compound to ensure that she separates with her husband. I do not want them to live together.

**SEC:** Let us accuse him!

**CONGREG:** Yeah, we accuse him.

The X-ray session above outlined Ben's afflictions and their source. Ben was a victim of witchcraft conjured by a witch (VFB 1) at the behest of his step-mother (VFB 2). The witch narrated how he sends Djinns to sleep in between Ben and his wife causing him to suffer erectile dysfunction. The witch further explained that he used his Djinns to collect items from Ben (examination papers, pens, a thread from his shirt, trousers, socks, etc) that he used to bewitch him. This was understood to mean that he had conjured a charm using the items. The witch admitted that he 'blocked' Ben's progress and that of other family members (his wife, brother and mother). The witch's actions were meant to cause problems to Ben and other members of his family. The narration by the witch is corroborated by Ben's stepmother who in addition to other items taken by the witch, admitted to have taken money from Ben and also bewitched their cows and farms. There were other confessions from another witch (VFB 3) who claimed to have spread medicines around Ben's mother's homestead to cause them to be struck by lightning. The medicines were also supposed to cause Ben's mother to divorce her husband. This second witch claimed to be working at the solicitation of her client, Ben's mother's neighbour.

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<sup>84</sup> Bramwel is Ben's father.

Part of Ben's affliction were handled in the X-ray sessions through the burning of the witches involved in afflicting him and restraining those who consulted them to harm him. The slaying of the witches who caused him erectile dysfunction rendered the influence of their Djinn's impotent and this was expected to solve Ben's erectile dysfunction. What remained in Ben's healing rituals was the retrieval of the charms used to afflict him. Ben attended the retrieval session and the following charm was retrieved.

### **Ben's charm**

The charm was a hollow stem wrapped in thread. MB tried to untie the thread in vain and resorted to cutting them with the razor blade. MB opened up the rest of the charm using his hands to scrape some of the contents. As he did so, he suddenly realized that part of it was human feces and Ugali. He threw the charm on the ground and wiped his hands on the dust as the congregation bursts out laughing. He unpacked the rest of the contents of the charm using a stick. The following conversation ensued as he unpacked the charm.

**MB:** And whose is this one? It is really tied up.

**Congregant:** (Ben) That is mine.

**MB:** Mmmh; and this looks like dried up feces!

**Congregant:** Yes, that is why it does not smell.

**MB:** (throws the charm down and wipes his hands on the soil profusely) Yeah, these are feces! May the devil be defeated!

**Congregation:** May he be defeated.

**Congregant 3:** There is also Ugali

**MB:** Yes, this looks like Ugali. This is Ugali wrapped in a paper, isn't it?

**CONGREG:** Yes,

**MB:** And this other one is faeces. Isn't it?

**CONGREG:** Yes,

**MB:** May the devil be defeated,

**CONGREG:** May he be defeated!

**MB:** And you will be 'repeated'.

**CL:** Okay.

Ben's charm comprised of faeces, Ugali and other decomposing papers and substances stuffed in a hollow stem. The congregation deduced that the presence of faeces and Ugali in the same charm blocked a victim from successful farming activities. The dried up Ugali was believed to ensure that the maize crop did not do well, while the dried up faeces blocked the victim's digestive system leading to stomach problems and eventual death if not properly treated. The rest of the charm was decomposed making it impossible to make out what else was included. However, in view of the confessions in X-ray sessions and the fact that one of the VFBs claimed to have used Ben's examination papers to bewitch him, he assumed that the decomposing papers might be what the VFBs claimed to have snatched from him using Djinnns. MB opened up the rest of the charm and dropped it in the heap with other unpacked charms. MB informed Ben that he would be 'repeated' which meant that there were still more charms to be retrieved in his case. Ben therefore attended the following month's session as directed by MB.

In his second appearance at MB's charm retrieval sessions, MB produced a ball shaped charm covered in a sooty black cloth. Inside the charm was a decomposing Kenya shillings 50 note, black soils, and pieces of decomposing papers and clothes. Although it was not possible to read what was written on the papers, Ben and the congregation concluded that the papers unpacked belonged to him and must have been used in an attempt to stall his academic progress. The decomposing pieces of clothes and threads were also deemed to have been taken from his old clothes and used to conjure the charm. MB unpacked the entire charm and dropped the pieces on the metallic slab together with the other charms retrieved and unwrapped on this day. At the end of the session MB's guard set the unpacked charms on fire to mark the end of this session. Ben was however not finished with his ritual request at MB's. Apparently convinced of MB's supernatural powers, Ben brought his academic certificates and a job application letter for MB to bless. Later in the evening, MB held a prayers session with Ben where he prayed over his certificates and application letter to enable him get the job he was applying for. After this session, Ben's case appeared to have successfully concluded as I did not encounter him again at MB's rituals.

### **5.7.3. The case of Julius Oboya.**

Julius Oboya was an enterprising mixed farmer, who grew sugarcane, reared cattle and owned two trucks that he hired out to people for transport. His children were well educated, (two had a university education, two in college and three in secondary school), and he and his wife lived in a well built stone house. These were all indicators of success and he was considered wealthy in his neighbourhood. On the contrary, his brothers, with whom he lived in their inherited land, were not as successful. Even though they inherited equal pieces of land from their father, his brothers were relatively poor, their children were not as well educated, and had little to show in terms of wealth. Julius grew maize on their inherited land and bought extra land on which he grew sugarcane. At MB's practice, Julius was always accompanied by his wife and his story was typical of many other narratives by clients at MB's. He complained of persistent stomach and head pains, (untreatable or unrecognizable in biomedical facilities), tapering economic fortunes as his two trucks had developed persistent mechanical problems and poor proceeds from his once prosperous sugarcane farms. His wife complained of persistent body pains and her legs were swollen. Julius problems were persistent and unyielding for close to five years before a friend suggested that he visits MB to find out where the 'real' problem was. This was a typical narrative in the rural areas as the relatively wealthy societal members, especially those from polygamous backgrounds suspected that they would be victims of ritual attack from their unsuccessful relatives and neighbours.

Julius attended several sessions typical of rituals healing procedures at MB. The X-ray process divined that Julius problems originated from his extended family, namely jealous step-brothers and their wives who approached witches to harm him and his business. Two of his step-brothers and their wives approached witches who attacked him because he was successful and his wife bragged at her in-laws. One of the witches eloquently confessed that he had unsuccessfully tried to use Julius' walking stick to paralyse him at the behest of his sister in-law. In consistent X-ray sessions, a witch and Julius' sister in-law stated that they had used Djinn to snatch test papers and pens from Julius children, money from his wife and faeces (they do not specify whose) which they used to bewitch Julius entire compound. They also claimed to have ensorcelled their sugar cane and lorry so that they would not obtain any income from them. Julius wife was also a victim of sorcery from her own extended family. Like Julius, her parents were polygamous. A VFB from his stepmother

confessed to have ensorcelled her legs to swell using soil from her footprints so that she would not 'walk to school, get an education and be successful in life'.

A total of 7 VFBs confessed to have ensorcelled Julius and his family. His wife and children, sugarcane crop and truck business were all under attack from his jealous step brothers and their wives. The critical confession however came from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> VFBs who detailed the ways in which they acquired Julius' walking stick; exam papers, pens and as well as his wife's money, all of which were used to ensorcel Julius' household. The 5<sup>th</sup> VFB was that of Julius' wife's stepmother who claimed to have used soil from her footprints to bewitch her. The culprits in the case of Julius were processed through the X-ray sessions, given a chance to defend themselves and eventually punished at the judgement session. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> VFBs who confessed to be witches were sentenced to death by ritual burning. Julius' step brothers (3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> VFB) as well as their wives (2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> VFBs) were ordered to desist from witchcraft and live in harmony with their brother. The 4<sup>th</sup> VFB was that of Julius' wife's step mother and since she was already dead, no action was taken against her for her witchcraft.

The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> VFBs confessed that they had secured items from Julius household and used them to bewitch him. This was an indication that they had conjured charms to injure Julius. After the X-ray sessions then, the next step was to retrieve these charms and destroy them. Julius attended the charm retrieval session on the same day as Jael and Ben.

### **Julius' charm.**

The charm was ball-shaped, the size of a tennis ball wrapped in black cloth. MB unpacked the first layer and a feather dropped out. The rest of the substances, glued together with soil were, two red pencils, decomposing paper, a polythene paper bag that had tobacco, rotting leaves, clothes, an animal's skin, threads and pieces of cloth. The congregation chatted both among themselves and with MB as he unpacked the charm.

**MB:** Whose is this?

**CL:** It belongs to Julius.

**MB:** This looks like it was stored in a wet container as it is still wet. Whose is it?

**CL:** It belongs to Julius.

**Congregant 1:** Those are pencils

**Congregant 2:** It shows that he is a teacher.

MB held the pencils in his hands, then opened up a small polythene paper that had brown powder in it and the congregation engaged in animated banter about it.

**Congregant 1:** That looks like salt that is fed to cattle.

**Congregant 3:** Yeah it is salt for cattle.

**MB:** It looks like it also has medicines in it.

**CONGREG:** Yes!

**MB:** But this looks like tobacco.

**Congregant 3:** No, those are medicines,

**MB:** No, this smells like tobacco.

**CONGREG:** Yes, it is tobacco.

**MB:** Can you people smell it?

**CONGREG:** Yes,

**MB:** Isn't it tobacco for the nose?

**CONGREG:** Yes it is.

**MB:** And these others are pencils that are used by students sitting for examinations in schools. May the devil be defeated,

**CONGREG:** May he be defeated.

**MB:** These others look like rotting leaves: the leaves that grow near the rivers that are used as medicines.

**CONGREG:** Yes,

**MB:** May the devil be defeated?

**CONGREG:** Yes, may he be defeated.

**MB:** Whose are these?

**CL:** It is still for Julius.

**MB:** These ones are already decomposing.



**MB:** And this one looks like the skin of an animal. It has hairs on it.

**Congregant 3:** Yes, that is the skin of an animal.

**MB:** It looks like it is from an animal that is used to make the witchcraft more effective. And these others look like clothes, like trousers. But this other one here is quite tough. It is probably from seat cover.

**MB:** May the devil be defeated.

**CONGREG:** May he be defeated.

MB unpacked the contents of the charm and displayed them to Julius and other congregants. At the end of this session, MB asked Julius to schedule an appointment for another charm retrieval session for the retrieval of other charms that had not been recalled on this day. The contents of these charm were however consistent with the confessions made by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> VFBs in Julius's X-ray sessions. MB and Julius were in agreement that there was at least one charm that was yet to be retrieved, which contained monies picked from Julius' wife as well as vehicle parts used to ensorcel their truck. He asked Julius to attend the following month's charm retrieval session. At the same time, MB asked Julius's wife to schedule an appointment where her swollen feet would be cleansed. With the retrieval of the rest of the charms, Julius and his household were expected to recover.

All charms collected and opened up were set on fire by MB's guard at the end of the session and this marked the end of the ceremony. With the retrieval and destruction of the charms, clients would recover from their afflictions. .

### **5.8. Commentary.**

The charm retrieval ceremony was based on three interrelated beliefs in MB's and his clients' cosmology: one, clients conviction that illnesses (specifically their illnesses) were caused by the use of charms concocted by their enemies; two that MB had the powers to retrieve the charms through prayers; and three, that the retrieval and destruction of the charms were necessary procedures in their healing process. Clients held mixed opinions about how MB actually retrieved the charms. Majority of them however avoided discussing the mechanism of charm retrieval by MB and only said 'MB had lots of power'. Some commented that they thought MB had Djinns that collected the charms and dropped them outside his church. It is instructive to note that MB also believed that Djinns could be used to collect items from clients that were used to ensorcell them. Clients were however not too

keen on the mechanism that MB used to retrieve the charms. They simply knew that MB had powers to 'pull' the charms from their hidden localities and produce them in his church.

The church service was mainly controlled by MB and comprised of animated song and prayer sessions, each with a climax of clapping, yelling, animated prayer and speaking in tongues in a session filled up with emotions and outpouring of faith. One could identify four sections in the prayer each ending up in frenzied clapping and shouting. Initially MB led the congregation in song then urged them to cry their problems to God, This part concluded with shouts of 'Thank you Jesus'. In the second part, MB cursed the devil and the various afflictions he caused. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> part MB asked God to fill him up with energies ('Jaza nguvu') and finally in the fourth he asked God to 'pull' the charms ('leta bwana') into his compound. After the charged up prayer sessions that lasted close to half an hour, MB informed the congregation that the charms had been 'pulled' into his compound and it was time for the congregation to go out and collect them.

The charms retrieval church session bore a striking resemblance to Frank's (1973) description of the healing sessions at the Lourdes Shrine in France. Frank describes the pilgrimage Lourdes as conferring merit to itself and the atmosphere at Lourdes as spiritually fulfilling.

On arrival at Lourdes after an exhausting even life-endangering journey, the sufferer's expectation of help is further strengthened. He is plunged into 'a city of pilgrims and they are everywhere; people who have come from the four corners of the earth with but one purpose: prayer and healing for themselves or for their loved ones. One is surrounded by them and steeped in their atmosphere every moment of existence in Lourdes. Everyone hopes to witness or experience a miraculous cure. Accounts of previous cures are on every tongue, and the pilgrim sees the votive offerings and the piles of discarded crutches of those who have been healed. Thus the ritual may be said to begin with a validation of the shrines power, analogous to the shaman's review of his cures in primitive healing rites. (1973:68.)

Although charm retrieval was the core of these sessions on this day, other preparatory activities like in all other rituals played an important role in creation of expectations and eventual healing for the clients. The activities of this day always started with the normal church service followed by the lunch break. In the lunch break, clients comforted and impressed each other on their knowledge or experience of MB's healing powers. Clients who were new to MB's rituals received accounts, often exaggerated of MB's healing abilities and the processes involved. I once overheard a client narrate how MB retrieved

(‘pulled’) a gun from robbers who planned to attack a client’s homestead. *‘The gun just fell outside MB’s compound: Don’t joke with this man, he has powers’*. Such ‘validating’ tales were common at MB’s and it might appear that he deliberately set a long lunch break<sup>85</sup> to allow for such discussions. MB explained that he had powers to recall the charms, but his powers were unleashed through the bible. The bible was therefore placed at the door of the church to act as magnet for the charms.

Inside the church, MB set the tempo of the prayers with his loud voice and repeated chants that were responded to by the clients. Several clients appeared to be possessed and even defied his instructions to be silent when he shouted ‘Amen’. MB did not seem to mind that they disobeyed his instructions to be silent. Apparently, he expected his prayers to lead to such confession and prayers by some of the clients. The key moment in the prayers was when he asked God to ‘fill him with energies’ and to ‘bring’ the charms to his compound. This session was the loudest and most animated. At the end of it, an exhausted MB announced to the equally fatigued congregation that charms had ‘arrived’ and it was time to collect them. In this announcement, MB also disclosed that some charms were yet to ‘arrive’ in his compound and that they were still on their way. This announcement dramatized the session and captured the imagination of clients about charms flying at high speed in the air and their encounter with winds and heavy clouds as they cruised to his compound. The congregation scoured the fields around MB’s church collecting all manner of suspicious items and laid them in the open area outside the church for identification. The identification session, like all other sessions, was inaugurated with prayer and proclamations of ‘Praise the Lord’ by MB every time a charm was identified. The session was controlled by MB assisted by the guard whose task was to separate each charm from the rest with a cane. In the identification process, MB stated on whom the charm was used, their town of residence as well as a brief commentary on the evil intention of the person who conjured the charm. MB also instructed some clients to come for more charm retrieval sessions as there were still other charms used to afflict them, but which had not been ‘pulled’ to his compound. The charm identification session were filled up with excitement for those whose charms were retrieved and disappointment for those who were unlucky.

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<sup>85</sup> The lunch break often lasted between 1-2 hours and at times up to 4 hours. On most occasions MB would be holding prayers and consultations with clients in his house. There were, however, days when he would be sitting in his house, watching a film, talking to a friend, at times with the anthropologist or even supervising mechanics as they repaired one of his cars. Clients sat under a tree waiting for him and others could be overheard informing the rest that MB was late because he was praying.

All charms were then unpacked one by one. This session was relaxed and just like in the X-ray session, clients talked and joked freely. MB carefully opened up each charm and exposed its contents to the congregation who expressed their shock and anger, derided witches, second guessed the witches' intentions, revisited their suffering, joked about the wisdom of sorcerers and occasionally beseeched MB to afflict the people who consulted the witches. For instance, as MB unpacked a charm that had money wrapped in an insole, the congregation joked about the use of money and a shoe sole to ensorcel others. But when the afflicted client displayed her disfigured toe, the entire congregation (including MB) was shocked and sympathized with her. Two members of the congregation earnestly pleaded with MB to send the affliction back to the person who willed it for the client. They pleaded,

**Congregant 2:** But *Mtumishi*, I think you should also make the person who bewitched her to also go lame so that he can feel the pain as well.

**Congregant 3:** Please return this to the person who sent it!

MB did not respond to their pleas but allowed them to freely chat about the effects of charms on people. There appeared to be common themes surrounding the form and contents of the charms unearthed by MB. Most charms were small ball-shaped items, the size of tennis ball and made up of several layers of substances. Wrapping charms with threads conformed to the clients' perception of a closure or blockage of their lives. Clients could be heard complaining, *'These people have really closed/blocked/tied me'*. The contents of the charms were always fastened together using threads or ropes or inside metallic encasings and comprised decomposing substances which indicated that they were mostly buried or kept in dump and/or even sooty environments. Clients seemed to be well versed with the implications of the items recovered from the charms as is evident from their discussions. Members of the congregation, especially those whose charms had been retrieved were completely fascinated and astounded by MB's retrieval of their charms. Most of them looked at the contents of the charms and agreed that they owned the items reproduced in the past. Their admissions were however heavily influenced by the X-ray process that preceded the charm retrieval where they listened to VFBs from the bible confessing to have snatched the very items from them, conjured charms and ensorcelled them.

### **5.9. Ritual prophylaxis.**

Ritual prophylaxis was the final ritual in the cycle of MB's ritual healing processes. At the end of the ritual cycle, i.e divination, X-ray, cleansing, and retrieval of charms, MB gave the clients the option for a life time of protection for affliction 'willed by other people or by spirits'. MB referred to this ritual with the Kiswahili term, '*Kufunika*' which translated to 'to cover'. In this ritual, MB 'covered' clients with the blood of Jesus so that they would not be harmed by any evils willed by humans through physical or preternatural means. Included here were illnesses and deaths caused by sorcery, accidents produced by witchcraft, stagnated academic, occupational or business progress, murder etc. MB also used the English terms 'reflector' or mirror to mean that all evil aimed at any of the clients that he had 'covered' would either be neutralized or ricochet to the sender. The ritual was elective, and like all other rituals attracted an extra fee. Besides, it was also accompanied by many restrictions. A 'covered' client was not allowed to fight with anyone because a simple slap from him/her would cause death. S/he was not supposed to have ill thoughts against anyone as those thoughts could easily transform into actions. If in the middle of a crowd, s/he needed to watch out if anyone trembled or collapsed since the cleansed person's body acquired abilities to detect and afflict people in their vicinity who willed evil against them. If anyone collapsed or trembled near a cleansed person, s/he was supposed to hold the trembling person, mention his secret bible verse and ask God to release him if his 'cover' was the one causing the person to tremble or collapse. This was over and above the requirement to be morally upright. I did not encounter many people asking for the '*Kufunika*' from MB. Many of the clients explained that they feared they would not be in a position to abide by the restrictions set by MB for the prophylaxis to be effective. Others claimed that MB had the powers to tell if they would abide by the restrictions and since they would not, they opted against it.

The '*Kufunika*' ritual was a private ritual conducted in MB's main house. The secretary was always present and when conducted in the night, one of MB's wives assisted. The ritual was conducted using a white rectangular cloth, a bible and eight candles. The white piece of cloth, measuring about 6 by 2 feet was spread on the floor. MB stood at one end of the cloth and asked the client to kneel in the middle of the cloth. The eight candles were lit at the four corners of the white cloth with the rest placed on the sides of the cloth. MB handed over his bible to the secretary who in turn handed it over to the client kneeling on the white cloth. The client was asked to open a verse of the bible at once without shuffling the pages. MB

read a complete chapter from the opened page of the bible. Where the open page revealed two chapters, MB selected one of them and read it for the client. He interpreted the chapter for the client, preached and advised the client based on the teachings of this chapter. The client was asked to always remember this chapter and if s/he was in trouble or anyone else was in trouble on account of the client's powers, this was the secret verse that he was to mention. It was important for the client to remember this verse since if he never mentioned it, the trouble would not abate and could even result in death.

The final part of the ceremony was a long drawn prayer in which MB called on God to protect the client against all forms of afflictions which he freely listed. MB also led the client in reciting and rejecting the powers of a long list of afflictions that he creatively constructed. MB asked the client to repeat the statement 'I reject the death caused by witchcraft/accidents/humans etc'. At the end of the prayer again MB would recite another long list of wishes which the client repeated. They included wishes for good health, academic and economic prosperity, career development, family love and stability, peace with neighbours, acquisition of luxury items such as cars (BMW's Mercedes) etc. The wish list was constructed according to the nature and type of client and often reflected general aspirations of the clients. By this stage MB had had a lot of contact with the clients and was not only privy to their afflictions, which he had resolved, but also their ambitions which he promised to secure. For young clients at the beginning of their careers, MB made them recount wishes for good health, career development, happy and prosperous families, economic prosperity etc while older clients recited a peaceful twilight with peace in the homestead. At the end of the session, MB held the client's head and prayed for him/her one more time before declaring the session over. He however reiterated that the client ought to keep the rules of the ritual as well as have lots of faith that what they had recited would come to fruition in their real lives. Once again, the success of the ritual depended as much on his powers as the faith of the client.

#### **5.10. Conclusion.**

MB's healing rituals comprised a diagnosis through divination (both tentative and X-ray process) a designation of a healing strategy and a prophylaxis against future attacks by forces of affliction. All the stages of the healing were controlled by his supernatural abilities which he clearly dramatized and corroborated with long drawn discussions with the clients. The key to ritual healing in Africa was divination, which was the standard way of

unravelling the course of affliction in a manner that enabled its resolution. Since the source of affliction was hidden, and most often involved supernatural causation, a specialist with supernatural abilities was always consulted. All MB's healing procedures indicated his supernatural powers that were accepted by his clients. It would however be contradictory to expect his clients to openly doubt his powers as this would be to criticise their decision to consult him. MB claimed to his supernatural abilities in his tentative divination to read a clients affliction from images in the bible. To confirm his diagnosis, he produced disembodied voices of persons who had afflicted his clients and made them confess in his courtroom. The importance of these confessions was to create a narrative that captured the client's affliction. This narrative was however compiled with the collaboration of the clients who MB required to authenticate the confessions from the voices from the bible. Once a satisfactory narrative was obtained gain MB used his powers to inactivate witches and murderer (through death) and to cause the evil desires of the people who wished to afflict his clients to ricochet back to them. This was done through the burning of the New Testament bible in MB's courtroom. Where charms were lodged into a client's body, MB's powers were again called upon to retrieve them through cleansing. Charms that were hidden in far off places were also retrieved through MB's powers of prayer and made to appear in MB's compound. The bible was central in all these process as MB activated his powers through it.

Most of MB's ritual healing appeared to be designed to impress his clients with his authenticity and professionalism. As a healing practice that comprised several stages and actions, consistency between these processes was important and was treated as such by MB. The stages were not only consistent within themselves, but also consistent within the clients and healers cosmologies. In MB's and the clients shared cosmology it was known that one can be afflicted when charms and other harmful substances were lodged into their bodies or were hidden somewhere in their homes, paths or sorcerers' homes. And once MB identified charms as responsible for the clients affliction, clients expected that he would retrieve them. The three rituals described in this chapter emanated from the X-ray sessions which also exhibited a high level of consistency. The X-ray session was self explanatory with VFBs not only stating that they use charms to injure a client, but actually stating what the charms comprised, where they had been hidden and to what effect. The consistency in the X-ray processes prepared the clients for the eventual production of the charms themselves. As the charms were retrieved or recalled by MB, clients were convinced that the charms were

actual substances afflicting them and did not mind the minor inconsistencies between the substances in the charms and what had been stated in the X-ray processes. Where a VFB stated that they had taken a clients dress and coins to concoct a charm, MB retrieved a charm that had these substances. And even where the clothes could not be identified due to rot, the presence of coins and decomposing clothes convinced clients that the charm was the substance causing their affliction. In any case MB already informed them that his powers could unearth much more than they knew or heard from the X-ray sessions. And therefore unlike what Frank (1973) described as a double faced approach to ritual where at one level clients assented to the proposition that the bloody bit of cotton was the patients illness that had been extracted from his body, while at another level they know too well that it was a piece of cotton, ritual healing clients at MB's practice did not exhibit such a frame of thinking. They see in the extracted charms, the source of their illnesses and this is confirmed by the consistency in MB's healing procedures, a belief in MB's supernatural abilities and the consistency between MB's explanatory model and the shared cosmology.



## Chapter 6

### **Ritual healing, Modernity and Social justice.**

#### **6.1. Introduction.**

This chapter addresses the questions I put at the beginning of my dissertation, i.e how does ritual engage with and adapt itself to the criticism of modernity or rather how does ritual alter itself to fit in with the changes occasioned by the process of modernity?

In the *Modernity of Witchcraft*, Geschiere (1997) states that it is difficult to argue that there is a self evident opposition between witchcraft and modernity mainly because rumours and practices related to the occult forces abound in more modern sectors of society. Ferguson (1999) also argued that witchcraft was both an idiom and an effective mechanism of control of workers by rural kin in the *Zambian copper belt*. Contemporary witchcraft, occult practices, enchantments and magic are neither a return to traditional practices nor a sign of backwardness, or lack of progress, they are instead thoroughly modern manifestations of uncertainties, moral disquiet and unequal rewards and aspirations in the contemporary moment (Moore and Sanders, 2001, Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999). Gaonkar eloquently states that in the face of modernity one does not turn inward, one does not retreat: one moves sideways, one moves forward. All this is creative adaptation (2001:22).

In the introduction to this dissertation, I asserted like many other scholars on this topic have that ritual healing was not merely a resistance to change but was part and parcel of modernity itself. However to do so, it creatively adapted and refashioned itself to suit new challenges and situations. While alluding to ritual healing as being modern I reiterate concomitant observation that modernities were also multiple (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, Moore and Sanders 2001). Ritual healing, witchcraft and occult beliefs articulated different trajectories of modernity. Most of the ethnographies I have reproduced in the previous chapters, far from exhibiting the wide range of problems brought to the attention of ritual healing, also show the ways in which ritual healing was not only contiguous with but was also understood in Africa as part and parcel of the project of modernity. In this chapter, I wish to cite two cases and use them to directly speak to rituals' attempt to do what Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) referred to as plumbing the magicalities of modernity and later outline some of the observable alterations of ritual healing to meet the needs of its clients.

## 6.2. Ritual healing and the Quest for Certificates and Employment.

### Case 1. Arnold: the quest for a Masters degree and a new job.

The case of Arnold is not completely new as he was the son of Mbago whose case I analysed in chapter 4. Mbago's affliction was divined by MB as stemming from the dispute he had with his step brothers and step-mother over land. In the divination sessions that I extensively discussed earlier we encountered his step family who complained that Mbago and his mother had unfairly influenced his father to allocate to them a disproportionately large piece of land as their inheritance. Since their father had already died, they vowed to exterminate him if he did not relinquish part of the land. The divinations session determined that the thugs who often attacked Mbago had been hired by his step brothers. They had also contracted witches to conjure witchcraft to afflict him and his household. MB's divination identified the thugs who had been hired to kill Mbago and he (Mbago) gave their names to the police leading to their arrest. MB's divination also showed that Mbago's stepmother and one of her sons had approached a witch to 'cover' Mbago's household. The transcript that I reproduced in chapter 4 (especially on page 172) shows a VFB claiming to be that of Mbago's step-mother stating that she had vowed to afflict Mbago's entire household through witchcraft. Mbago was convinced that he and his family were under a spell of ritual attack and therefore in need of healing or protection. MB's healing strategy focussed on the social unit as opposed to individuals and therefore Mbago's entire household was required to undergo ritual healing and protection. MB promised to handle all afflictions affecting a client and their households in the event that the X-ray showed evidence of affliction targeting different members of the family. Part of Mbago's step mother's confession is reproduced below.

**John's stepmother:** As I am talking to you, we have already brought a witch to help us 'cover' Lydia (Mbago's wife), to 'cover' Mbago and all his children, we have sent all manner of misfortunes to them including road accidents so that they may die. None of his children will ever get a good job and succeed in life. We have covered all their marriages, all their daughters will be divorced from their husbands and all their sons will lose their wives. They will never ever be able to marry and settle down in life. We want all of them to come back here and resort to drinking *changaa* and his daughters to be prostitutes selling *Chang'aa*

After the arrest of the thugs who planned to kill him, Mbago brought his three children for healing rituals at MB's. The case of his second born son, Gregory and daughter are documented in chapter 4. Arnold was the last of Mbago's children to come to MB's ritual

accompanied by his brother. He was in his early 30s, a lawyer by profession and working in the attorney general's office. This is by all means, a very prestigious office, located in the capital city (Nairobi) in Kenya. While working in the city, he had enrolled for a master's degree in law and attended evening classes at the University of Nairobi. He had completed the coursework and his project was in the process of being evaluated by his professors for the award of the degree. At the same time, Arnold had applied for a new job in a different institution<sup>86</sup> and had been invited for an interview. I encountered him at the healer where he had apparently come to consult the healer to 'assist' him go through the final hurdles in the pursuit of his degree as well as help with securing the new job. Mbiti (1969) observed that apart from healing the community members' afflictions ritual healers represented the members' hopes for success and prosperity. In discussions with Arnold's father, MB offered to not only remove the spell cast on his children, but also assist them to meet their aspirations in life.

In typical MB fashion, Arnold was processed through the initial preparatory steps (registration, church service lunch) before having the initial consultation with MB and later congregating with the rest of the clients for the X-ray session. In Discussions with MB, Arnold informed MB that he had been invited for an interview for a job with a reputable state agency in the next couple of days. He was also apprehensive of the fact that he might not be able to complete his studies and graduate from the university as his professor did not appear keen to evaluate his project in time for him to be eligible for graduation later in the year. MB in turn prayed for Arnold and promised to call his (Arnold's) prospective employer and his university professors so that he (Arnold) could talk to them and tell them what he wanted. Arnold congregated with the rest of the clients for the day's courtroom session. His X-ray session was conducted during one of the weekends referred to as 'general'. On this day there were over 50 clients attending the courtroom session as was typical of 'General' sessions. When it was Arnold's turn, three VFBs appeared. The first one was that of his prospective employer, a well known judge and director of the state corporation to which he had applied for a job. The second voice was that of his university professor while the last one was that of the university officer in charge of preparing the graduation list of graduands. The following conversation ensued between Arnold and the three.

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<sup>86</sup> The institution to which Arnold had applied for a new job is a well known public institution and giving its name would compromise confidentiality of the case.

Transcript.

**1<sup>st</sup> VFB:** My name is Caleb.

**SEC:** Caleb you are accused!

**VFB:** My name is Caleb Kuya. I am asking you, who are you?

**SEC:** He is Mr. Arnold.

**VFB:** What does he want?

**SEC:** He wants you to help him.

**VFB:** What does he want? You explain to me clearly, what does he want?

**SEC:** (Turning to client) He is asking you to state the type of assistance you want.

**CL:** I want that job.

**VFB:** What do you want?

It started to rain heavily at this point and the session was interrupted for close to 20 minutes. When the rains subsided, the conversation resumed.

**VFB:** My name is Caleb. I have asked: who are you?

**SEC:** He is Mr. Arnold.

**VFB:** I have asked you, what do you want?

**CL:** I want your job..... the job that you are offering, it is the one I want. I want the job that was advertised at your organisation.... It is the one I want.

**OMC:** (Arnold's brother, Gregory) 'Tell him it is the job whose interview you will be attending on Monday'.

**VFB:** My name is Mr. Caleb Kuya and I want to ask you this. Why do you want me to help you?

**CL:** I want that job whose interview you have invited me to attend.

**VFB:** Of what use will my assistance be to you?

**CL:** I want you to give me that job.

**VFB:** I have accepted, I will help you the way you want. Do you hear that? Did you send us your application?

**CL:** Yes

**VFB:** Did you get any response after you applied?

**CL:** Yes, I got a response.

**VFB:** Tell me your names again.

**CL:** My names are Arnold Mulwa.

**VFB:** What did you say again? What is your name? Arnold who?

**Client:** Arnold Mulwa.

**VFB:** Okay, what is your occupation at the moment?

**CL:** I am a lawyer.

**VFB:** And how are you involved in this matter here?

**CL:** I want you to give me that job whose interview you have invited me to attend.

**VFB:** And who told you that I am the one who can help you?

**CL:** You are the one who has the powers.

**VFB:** Why do you think I am the one who could help you?

**CL:** There is no other person; it is only you who has the ability to do this.

**VFB:** Have you ever met me in person?

**CL:** No.

**VFB:** Okay, I have accepted to help you. So what do you want me to do for you to believe that I have accepted to help you?

**SEC:** Just Howl

**CL:** Howl so that I may know you have accepted to help me.

The VFB howled three times and the congregation responded by shouting:

**CONGREG:** 'Give him the job!'

**2<sup>nd</sup> VFB:** My name is Dr. Opudo, what do you want?

**CL:** I want you to hand in my project, stop sitting on it. You have handed in the other students' projects, haven't you? Hand in my project so that I may graduate for my Masters' degree.

**VFB:** What did you say you want?

**CL:** I want you to hand in my project, stop sitting on it!

**VFB:** You see I can only pass your project over if it meets the academic standards required. I can only hand over your project if you are qualified and your work meets the standards.

**CL:** I am qualified; you are the one sitting on my project? Why don't you want to hand it in?

**VFB:** Fine, I have accepted to help you the way I can. Let me go away.

**CL and SEC:** You howl so that we can know you will help us.

**VFB:** I will help you, haven't you heard?

**CL and SEC:** Howl so that we know you have accepted to help.

**VFB:** You also want me to howl?

**SEC and CONGREG:** Yes!

The VFB did not howl, instead the next voice spoke from the bible.

**3<sup>rd</sup> VFB:** My name is Mr.Maina.

**SEC:** Maina, you are accused!

**VFB:** My name is Mr.Maina.

**SEC:** Maina, you are accused!

**VFB:** By whom?

**CL:** Arnold has accused you.

**VFB:** By Arnold?

**CL:** Yes.

**VFB:** What do you want?

**CL:** Why are you not including my name on the graduation list yet I have met all the conditions?

**VFB:** What do you want now?

**CL:** I want you to put my name in the graduation list.

**VFB:** I have no problem with that; I am going to assist you.

**SEC and CL:** Okay then howl

**VFB:** No problem, I will assist, you anything else you want?

**CL:** That is the only thing.

**VFB:** So you want me to howl?

**SEC and CONGREG:** Yes!

**VFB:** So that howling, how do you want me to do it?

The congregation demonstrates how he should howl and the VFB howled three times. The congregation responded to each howl by saying, 'Help him get on the graduation list!'

In the transcript above, MB summons the VFBs of three people who were directly involved in Arnold's quest for a new job and his graduation. The first voice to speak from the bible is supposedly that of the director of the institution from whom Arnold was seeking to be employed. The VFB (which the client and everybody present identified with the voice of Mr. Caleb Kuya – a well known public figure in Kenya) appeared to be initially startled and demanded that the client (Arnold) identify himself and what he wanted. The secretary

answered on behalf of the client, but as the VFB demanded to know why he was summoned to the court, she turned to Arnold and asked him to respond to the VFB's questions. Arnold responded by stating that he wanted the VFB to give him the 'job'. In the unfolding conversation, the VFB questioned why Arnold wanted to be assisted, and specifically why he thought he should be the one to assist him. The VFB interrogated Arnold, asking him whether he applied for the job, if he got a response, where he worked, and if he thought he was qualified for the job. Arnold responded to each of the questions from the VFB in the affirmative. At the end of the interrogation, the VFB reconfirmed his full names before promising to assist him. As a sign that he agreed to assist Arnold, the VFB was asked to howl and the congregation responded, beseeching him to offer Arnold the job. The second voice was that of the university professor supervising Arnold's project. At this point, Arnold appeared to be gaining in confidence (unlike in the first conversation where he seemed to be confused and required his brother's assistance) and boldly castigated the university professor for what he termed as 'sitting on my project'. The university professor stood his ground and argued that he would not pass Arnold's project unless it (the project) met the university's academic requirements. Arnold claimed that he was fully qualified and that the professor ought to pass his project just like he had passed the projects from other students. Although the professor initially stood his ground, he later softened and agreed to assist Arnold without specifying the type of help he would lend him.

The final VFB in Arnold's case was that of the officer in charge of compiling the graduation roster. Just like in the case with the professor, a bold Arnold accused him of not including his name on the graduation list yet 'he was qualified'. This was obviously an erroneous position as Arnold knew his supervisor had not examined his project and unless this was done, he would not be eligible for inclusion in the graduands list. In the ensuing conversation, Arnold demanded that the official includes his name on the graduation list since he was 'qualified' for the graduation. At the end of the discussion though, the official promised to help him and was asked to howl as proof that he would help Arnold. The X-ray session for Arnold ended with this last VFB.

Arnold's case and that of many other clients at MB's rituals were an instance of modernity's varying trajectories in which clients embracing modernity did not consider it contradictory to engage in ritual, at the same time. Gaonkar (2001) has argued that even as the debate of modernity versus alternative or multiple modernities raged, there was no doubt that

something like modernity was taking place throughout the world. Outside of the debate in academia, populations do unequivocally see and attribute modernity to certain aspects of their lives and do not even talk in terms of alternative modernities. Geschiere et al. (2008) have argued that in Africa the term modern has lost non of its magic – it is just the people’s ideas about whether and how it can be achieved that have changed. In Most of Africa, going to school, living and working in the city with electricity, driving a car and having an expensive mobile phone, a good command of the white man’s language (or being unable to speak one’s mother tongue), nice dressing, etc are all associated with being modern. I mentioned in chapter 1 that my informants, often referred to me as someone who ‘grew in the light’, an allusion to the fact that they considered me to be ‘ more modern’, even as I tried to disguise myself by riding a bicycle and dressing like any other young man in the village. Arnold by all accounts came across as a ‘modern’ and therefore rational man in that modernity was associated with the triumph of science over ‘superstition’. He was well educated and appeared to prime education as the route for upward social mobility. His enrolment for a master’s degree in the evening programme was a common occurrence among Kenyan Young professionals from the beginning of the mid 1990s. A couple of processes were taking place in Kenya around this time that that had a bearing on Arnold’s predisposition that require some bit of back grounding.

Kenya gained independence in 1963 in a period of global expansion and stability, where the GDP grew by 6.6% (Rono 2002:81) savings and investments, number of educational institutional improved while enrolments grew exponentially, life expectancy improved (from 44 years at independence to 69 years in 1980) while the mortality rate dropped considerably from 219/1000 in 1962 to 68/1000 in 1982 (Rono 2002:82, Fahnbulleh 2006, Manda and Sen 2004). The first two decades were popularly referred to as the ‘Golden years’ marked with a steady record of economic growth as the independent government maintained an impressive record of macroeconomic management. (Rono 2002, Manda 2004, Fahnbulleh 2006). The government’s economic policies were characterized by a cautious financial policy that saw inflation and external debt kept within manageable levels, increased development expenditure, reduction in foreign aid dependence, a high degree of price stabilization among other policies. Although recurrent expenditure increased, the Kenyan government’s good revenue performance enabled it to meet its expanding recurrent expenditure while making substantial contributions to the development expenditure (Rono 2002, Manda and Sen 2004, Fahnbulleh 2006). This impressive record however faltered by



the end of the second decade of the post independence period due to several factors, which included, increase in oil prices of the 1970s, the world economic recession, fluctuating prices for the country's major exports, (coffee and Tea), low levels of technology, drought, famine, high population growth, the collapse of the East African community, high rates of urbanization, increasing debt, land fragmentation, widespread poverty and disease. These had a negative impact on the country's economy. The gross domestic product fell followed by food shortages and declining standards of living (Rono 2002, Manda and Sen 2004, Fahnbulleh 2006). Faced with these challenges, the government responded in a number of ways. The most notable change in the management of the Kenyan economy was the implementation of Structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) as from the beginning of the 1980s initiated at the behest and support of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Rono 2002, Manda and Sen 2004). Structural adjustments programmes entailed a wide range of radical economic changes which had numerous effects on the economy, such as inflationary pressures, the marginalization of the poor in the distribution of educational and health benefits, and a reduction in employment (Manda and Sen, 2004; Rono 2002; Ikiara 1990; Mweiga and Ndulu 1994; World Bank-UNDP 1993; Swamy 1994).

In regard to my discussion of Arnold I wish to highlight three outcomes of the structural adjustment programmes. SAPs called for the liberalization of the labour market and the reduction of the government deficit which of necessity required the restriction of government expenditure especially on public servants wages, salaries administration, economic and social services as well as on lending and investment services. This trend led to the privatisation of many government corporations and the onset of massive retrenchment programmes for workers in government institutions. To enable retrenchment processes in private and public sector employment, the government allowed the relaxation of wage guidelines that made it possible for employees and firms to negotiate and change the level of wages on the basis of productivity and performance (Manda and Sen, 2004). Liberalization of the wage market also led to the amendment of the redundancy laws in 1994 that allowed firms to fire redundant workers when necessary without having to seek approval from the ministry of labour (ibid). As the century came to a close, many firms either encouraged their employees to retire early offering them a one off payment package referred to by the popular name as 'golden handshake' or simply retrenched large populations of their workers. During this period, workplaces were characterized by extreme anxiety as the retrenchment programs by the different firms did not appear to be governed by any coherent

and understandable rules and regulations. Some companies adopted the so called 'last in first out' criteria where those who were recently employed were the first to be retrenched while others retrenched on the basis of qualification and experience. Most workers however felt that the retrenchment process was guided by corruption, tribalism and nepotism. Retrenched workers were informed of their 'retrenched status' either through the press or through lists that were hang on the companies' notice boards. The workplace was therefore turned in to a zone of extreme anxiety, fear and competition, an arena where workers used all means at their disposal to secure their retention in the work place. This anxiety resembled Comaroff's (1980) categorization of the bush in its potent and deleterious forms in Tshidi cosmology. The bush was a sphere of unmediated nature in its potent and dangerous forms. Here men hunted and fought, and they sought undomesticated vegetable and animal substances with the powers to heal the ills of the community. Structural adjustments processes transformed the Kenyan workplace into a potent but dangerous place as well, where one could be employed today and be disemployed the following day. Extreme competition amongst employees and the need for them to search for survival were heightened by fears of retrenchment. Since experience and qualification were thought of as determinants for retention, many workers opted to reduce their chances of retrenchment by enrolling in part time degree courses. Arnold and many other workers therefore enrolled for evening classes at local universities and other tertiary colleges.

Structural adjustment programmes called for a reduction on government expenditure on social services including health and education. Public universities that traditionally depended on government funding to carry out their activities were among the first institutions to be affected by the adjustment as the government support from them declined forcing the universities to operate under very tight budgets (Rono 2002, Nyaigotti-Chacha 2004). To meet their budget deficits, the government challenged the universities to look for alternative sources of funding. Many universities started the so called privately sponsored Module II programmes – popularly referred to as Parallel degree programmes, whereby, apart from the regular students sponsored by the government, universities also admitted students who paid directly for their studies at prevailing market rates. These classes targeted the employed and held lectures separately in the evenings or weekends.

It is in the context of these and many other processes all discussed under or associated with modernity or globalization that I wish to locate Arnold and his recourse to ritual healing.

Arnold is cognisant of the need for a proper educational qualification and experience to secure his retention or promotion in the job market. He takes an important step to not only retain his job but to also increase his chances to secure another job by enrolling for an evening course at a local university. He is well advanced in his education and his pursuit for a new job seems to be on the right path as he is already shortlisted for a job interview. While Arnold worked on his education and job prospects, his father was facing other types of problems that led him to recourse to ritual healing. Arnold's father experienced dwindling financial and farming fortunes, persistently fought off thugs, and had a land dispute involving his step brothers. He is anxious about his poor relationships with his step brothers. His fear and suspicion appeared to be heightened when he encountered sorcery items on his land which made him consult MB - his old friend, farming colleague and healer. MB's divination, in line with the nature of divination in Africa focussed on a client's entire social, natural and spiritual existence. Arnold as a member of his father's social matrix was therefore as much the subject of the divination as was his father. MB's divination opened up a new source of anxiety for Arnold - that of supernatural manipulations popularly referred to as 'blocking' or 'remote control'. Arnold's grandmother confessed that she had conjured witchcraft that would ensure that Arnold and his siblings would not succeed in their jobs, careers and marriages, would encounter accidents and retire to their father's home to imbibe in local brew.

MB's divination opened up a new angle to Arnold's perception of his situation and set the stage for his consultation with MB. The belief that one could hinder another person's progress was common not only among MBs clients but in popular discourse as well. In chapter five we saw that currency in different denominations featured in most of the charms unearthed by MB and that concern over business fortunes were common among MB's clients' complaints. Clients believed, and MB's divination reinforced their belief that witches and sorcerers could 'block' another person's progress by use of items, especially currency that were once held or owned by the victim. A concomitant belief among MBs ritual healing clients as well as in local discourse revolved around what both the Comaroffs and Geschiere have referred to as occult economies in various disguises. The dangers and promises associated with the potent bush were not only linked to the search for jobs as in Arnold's case but pervaded other sectors of the modern economy. There was, for instance, a rumour circulating around Kakamega town in Western Kenya, in various versions in the aftermath of the post elections violence in 2007/2008 that an extremely wealthy

businessman in town stored his money in a dried up corpse as opposed to banking it to multiply it. After the house burnt down, so this version of the rumour continued, local residents were shocked to find a corpse stuffed with money in one of his bedrooms. This rumour was linked to the belief that many rich people acquired their wealth through devil worshipping and that they periodically caused accidents to feed the devil with the victims blood. Such rumours were widespread in Africa and resonate with what Sanders (2001) described in Tanzania where most citizens experienced their recent involvement in free market with great ambivalence since some had greatly enriched themselves while the vast majority had remained excluded from novel forms of wealth (CF: Ferguson, 1999). According Sanders, this had led to increased speculation in idioms of occult related acquisition, in idioms of occult related trafficking in human skins, about new relations of production accumulation and consumption and people's differential access to these processes through occult means. The local and international media (cf: BBC 17<sup>th</sup> March 2007 and The East African, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2009 ) has over the years carried reports about albino killings in Tanzania in search of their body parts that are believed to be used to make charms that enrich people. Even though Arnold's case pales in comparison to these reports, they help to shape the imaginations of clients desirous of advancing in their careers. The experiences of small scale businessmen/women such as Jael and many others I encountered at MB's place reproduced the potent bush where their market stalls where they traded their wares could be a source of their livelihood as well as a source of danger, economic and physical. In Jael's case for instance, a neighbour was accused at MB's divination of ensorcelling and sending her lesions in her face in an effort to smoke her out of the market. In this case her market stall that was expected to be her source of livelihood was turning out to be a source of competition and affliction.

Following MB's divination, Arnold and his father were convinced that he had done everything possible to enable him complete his studies and gain promotion into a new job but his grandmother's witchcraft stood in between him and this realization. According to MB's ritual healing procedures, Arnold's grandmother's witchcraft was nullified in his father's X-ray session. She did not feature in Arnold's X-ray session. This session was specifically aimed at ritual manipulation by MB of the people involved in Arnold's career and who held the key to his prospects for advancement. This probably explains the VFBs consternation at being 'accused' in MB's court. Arnold spoke to the VFBs and cajoled them into agreeing to assist his quest for the new job and his masters' degree. In a discussion with

me after the X-ray sessions, Arnold was not only convinced of MB's ability to disembodied people's voices and cause them to speak to clients in his courtroom, but also of MB's ability to compel people to act in specific ways through his rituals by speaking to their 'souls'. Even though he was educated and lived in the city, Arnold did not rule out the existence of witchcraft and its ability to afflict him or any other person through supernatural means. Like many of MB's clients Arnold is not only convinced of his vulnerable state but of MB's ability to neutralize the spell and secure his fortunes. Given the reality of the presence of witchcraft, Arnold rationalized his visit to MB's rituals by arguing that supernatural powers needed to be fought by similar powers and since MB possessed such powers, his visit to him was both pragmatic and necessary. He further argued that the unemployment and the resultant competition for the few available jobs led to the deployment of witchcraft, tribalism and nepotism as modern day strategies for survival. These then were Modernities malcontents that ritual helped to unscrew. Arnold's behaviour should not surprise us since as already stated, much ethnography from Africa have contested the view that modernity and occult forces are opposed or mutually exclusive. Under modernity as Gaonkar (2001) has argued, all societies will undergo certain changes in both outlook and institutional arrangements but that does not amount to convergence. Assuming as Foucault does that modernity implies an attitude a mode of relating to contemporary reality, ritual healing clients adopt a modern outlook in which both science and technology are deemed to co-exist with occult forces as opposed to their eradication. It is this then that alternative or multiple modernity scholars deem to be a site based reading of the effects of modernity in which people make themselves modern as opposed to being made modern by alien and impersonal forces (Gaonkar 2001). In Kenya's alternative modernity, science and ritual were both alive and peacefully coexisted.

### **6.3. Prosecuting a Kenyan Court process in MB's 'Superior' court.**

The second example is that of Mary Cherop whose land dispute with her co-wife and her co-wife's son was already filed in Kenya's statutory courts of law for determination. Mary was in a polygamous relationship prior to her husband's death. Before his death, her husband allocated Mary and her co-wife pieces of land on which they grew crops and fed their families. Mary had no known dispute with her co-wife when their husband was alive. Things however changed after the death of her husband when Mary got a lover and the two planned to get married. Her co-wife was infuriated by Mary's action and ordered her and her lover to decamp from her husband's farm. Mary's co-wife and her son forcefully

acquired sections of Mary's inheritance claiming that she had no rights to the farm for as long as she married someone else. Mary then approached a lawyer who filed a case on her behalf in the court of law against her co-wife and step-son. The court case had however protracted for close to two years, within which time Mary had not been able to till her land. As the court case dragged on, Mary became suspicious that her co-wife had bribed the judge and the court clerks to rule in her favour. The court clerk as always arrogant and dismissive when dealing with her, while her own lawyer was not too eager to fight for her course even though she had paid him all his dues. The judge on the other hand did not appear keen to make a ruling on the case even as she continued to be disinherited from her land. These were, according to Mary, indications that the court process was unduly influenced by her co-wife and she opted to approach MB for assistance to obtain justice.

Mary underwent the routine preparatory steps before having the opportunity to speak to MB and have her divination process started. After welcoming and praying for her, MB interrogated her about her background, family, former and current marital status as well as obtaining a thorough explication of her predicament through his 100-question technique. At the end of the interrogation, MB gave his tentative verdict, that that her co-wife was manipulating the court officials through bribery and witchcraft. He promised to assist Mary by neutralising her co-wife's witchcraft and calling her and her accomplices to the courtroom to confess their actions. MB also promised to call the judge and other court officials so that Mary could speak directly to them and compel them to heed her wishes. The next step in Mary's case was the courtroom where the following conversation took place between her and the VFBs of the people involved in her predicament.

#### The transcript.

**1<sup>st</sup> VFB:** My name is Geoffrey Masaki. My name is Geoffrey Masaki. I am the one assisting this guy called Evans to kill another woman called Mary Cherop and her husband called Philip Ngeny. I have already covered (bewitched) the court case involving Mary. I do not want Mary to win that case. I want the other woman called Chepkurui Ann to win the case. I have given her 'medicines' to chew and spit at the entrance of the courtroom every time she goes for the case. This will assist her win the case. After winning the case, I will help her eliminate the other woman called Mary. After killing Mary, I will also kill Philip. I do not want any 'nonsense' from these people.

**SEC:** Let us accuse him,

**CONGREG:** Yes, we accuse him.

**SEC:** Is there anyone who would like to defend him?

**CONGREG:** There is no one.

**SEC:** Allow the other one to come.

**2<sup>nd</sup> VFB:** My name is Ann Chepkurui. And I want to finish this lady called Mary. I do not want her to continue with that court case. I do not want her to sell the farm that belonged to my husband. I want Mary to move away from my husband's farm empty handed just like she came, with nothing. I have even bewitched her new husband so that he does not inherit my farm. I have gone to a witch who has given me 'medicines' to assist me win the court case. It is a kind of medicine that I chew and spit at the entrance to the courtroom. This will assist me win the case. I want the farm to revert back to me.

**CL:** Okay, howl so that you may go to court tomorrow properly.

**VFB:** Now tell me, what do you people want?

**SEC:** We want you to howl.

**VFB:** How do you want me to howl?

The congregation and secretary demonstrated how she should howl and the VFB howled seven times. Every time the VFB howled the congregation responded,

**CONGREG:** You should fail to attend the court case tomorrow!

As the VFB howled, the secretary changed the response and the congregation followed suit and responded by shouting,

**CONGREG:** May you lose that case because you are using 'medicines'

**3<sup>rd</sup> VFB:** My name is Evans. I want my mother, Chepkurui to win the case. I want Chepkurui to win the case. I do not want Mary to win the case. We want to kill Mary. What do you want me to do?

**SEC:** We want you to howl and leave Mary's farm alone.

Silence

**SEC:** Howl now and do it very quickly.

**CL:** Howl and then ask your mother for your own farm. That farm does not belong to you

**VFB:** How do you want me to howl?

The congregation and the secretary demonstrate how he should howl and the VFB howled 5 times. Every time the VFB howled the congregation responded,

**CONGREG:** Leave Mary's farm alone.

**4<sup>th</sup> VFB:** My name is Okoth Amwayi. And I am a judge. My name is Okoth Amwayi. And I am a judge.

**CL:** How will you help me?

**VFB:** What do you people want? My name is Okoth Amwayi. What did you people want? Explain it to me.

**CL:** I have been on this case for a long time and I do not see any conclusions to it. I want you to decide on this case tomorrow. I want you to chase the other party away.

**VFB:** I have accepted, I am going to make a ruling tomorrow.

**CL:** And also give them the dismissal letter from my farm immediately!

**VFB:** I have accepted that, I will assist you, is there anything else you are interested in?

**CL:** I want you to give them the dismissal letter tomorrow.

**VFB:** Do you people want me to howl as well?

**SEC and CONGREG:** Yes.

**VFB:** How do I howl?

The congregation demonstrated how the VFB should howl, and the VFB howled three times. Every time the VFB howled the congregation responded by saying,

**CONGREG:** Deliver the ruling on this case tomorrow!

**5<sup>th</sup> VFB:** I am the court clerk. I was helping Chepkurui to win the case. My name is Charles. I had reverted to helping Chepkurui to win the court case.

**CL:** (Laughing) Charles, speak clearly! How much money did Chepkurui give you?

**VFB:** But now you have called me here, I am going to stop assisting Chepkurui and assist Mary. You know Chepkurui is the one who was telling me to confiscate the files and make sure the case protracts so that Mary may give up and move away. But now I will stop and follow the law as it should be.

**CL:** Charles, just speak clearly and stop panicking. Why were you assisting Chepkurui? How much money did she pay you?

**VFB:** Do you also want me to howl?

**CONGREG:** Yes,

The VFB howled 3 times and the secretary directed the congregation to respond thus:

**CONGREG:** Stop the practice of taking bribes!



**6<sup>th</sup> VFB:** My name is Lambert Makori and I am Mary's lawyer. I have agreed, I will assist Mary to win the case. I do not have anything else to say. I will work very hard to ensure that we win that case. Do you guys also want me to howl?

**CONGREG:** Yes!

**CL:** And talk to Charles as well.

The VFB howled 7 times and every time the congregation responded by saying,

**CONGREG:** Assist Mary and ensure the case is concluded tomorrow!

End of transcript.

In the transcript above, MB summons the voices of 6 people who were involved in Mary's affliction providing her with the opportunity to compel them to do her bidding. The first voice is that of a witch who confessed that he supplied Mary's co-wife with 'medicines' that would enable her to win the case. He also confessed that he intended to kill Mary and her new husband so that the land could revert to his client. Mary's co-wife's VFB was next. She corroborated the witch's narration and explained that she obtained 'medicines that she chomped and spat at the entrance of the courtroom to enable her win the case against Mary. The VFB expressed her fear that Mary was about to sell the farm and abscond with her new husband. She had therefore procured medicines that would ensure Mary's new husband did not inherit what she termed as 'her land', and if Mary wanted to marry another man, she should 'leave with nothing just the way she came'. The VFB felt that it was wrong for Mary to enjoy her late husband's property yet she intended to marry another man. Mary's co-wife confessed that she procured medicines to ensure that Mary's new husband did not inherit her late husband's land. The third VFB to confess was that of Mary's step-son who reiterated his mother's position insisting that they planned to kill Mary.

The next three VFBs belonged to court officials involved in the dispute between Mary and her co-wife. The first to appear was the judge in the case who demanded to know why he was summoned in the court. Mary responded asking him to state how he would assist her. She further complained that the judge had protracted the case for too long and demanded a speedy resolution of the case. Prodded by the VFB to state what she wanted, Mary demanded that he rules on the case on the next court day and issue orders evicting her co-wife from her land. The judge promised to issue a court ruling but did not commit himself to issuing the eviction orders as demanded by Mary. The court clerk was next and he

confessed to have been persuaded by Mary's co-wife to protract the case. He however promised to abide by the law and ensure the case was ruled in a just manner (in what was understood to be in Mary's favour). The final VFB was that of Mary's lawyer who promised to ensure that the court case was expedited and ruled in Mary's favour.

Many rituals healers stated in their advertisements, as was evident in the sampled advertisements that I reproduced on pages 13-14, that they would assist their clients deal with protracted court cases. To the extent that ritual healers responded to the needs of their prospective clients, then this could be taken as an indicator that the legal system was perceived to be either ineffective or problematic in dispensing justice. In a report on the justice system in Kenya, the International Federation of Women lawyers (FIDA) Kenya chapter described the western-based state law systems operating in postcolonial Africa as incomplete in geographical cover. People faced geographical and financial difficulties to access the formal justice systems as most courts were situated at the administrative headquarters. The costs of travelling to the courts were prohibitive, while legal fees, (i.e. the money paid to the court as filing fees) and advocates fees raised the cost of litigation. The long delays<sup>87</sup>, cumbersome procedures and technicality of legal proceedings coupled with legal illiteracy exacerbate the alienation of the population from the court process (FIDA 2009, Scharf 1998). 'Modernity' has been associated with societal transformation that was expected to lead to the emergence and institutionalization of market driven industrial economies, bureaucratically administered states, modes of popular government, rule of law, mass media and increased mobility, literacy and urbanization. In the legal institutions, modernity has for Africa resulted in the installation of what has been referred to as a Western based state law systems (FIDA 2009, Scharf 1998) over the indigenous law systems variously referred by the terms 'informal justice', 'Traditional justice system', 'popular justice', or 'community justice'. These were community based systems of justice that existed before the colonial era among the different ethnic communities. Traditional justice systems are still in existent in various forms in different localities in Kenya but their jurisdiction is restricted. Even though it is the dominant or institutionalized system of legal redress, the state legal system has been criticized for perpetuating the authoritarian colonial "law and order" orientation, which does not focus on meeting the needs of the people for substantive justice (FIDA 2009). State systems are viewed as individualistic and rule-

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<sup>87</sup> This perception is captured graphically in the second advertisement that I reproduced on page \*\*by the healer who stated unequivocally that he will assist clients to deal with 'cases that took too long to resolve'. See affliction numbered 9.

oriented, and thus antithetical to the communalistic, process-oriented nature of traditional justice systems which emphasized restoration of harmony and cohesion in the community (Elechi 2006). More often as Obeyesekere (1975) also remarked, modernization led to the breaking up of the old authority structure but this was not accompanied by the creation of a satisfactory alternative structure as the problems of the people multiplied. The police for instance were extremely distrusted and the courts were too impersonal and expensive for most people. More critically however was the fact that most people considered government institutions to be inefficient, corrupt while tribalism and nepotism prevailed. This then portends what the Comaroffs (1993) referred to as modernity's malcontents that give rise to ritual attempts to penetrate the impenetrable, to unscrew the inscrutable, and to recapture the forces suspected of redirecting the flow of power in the world.

Mary finds herself on the brink of being disinherited by her co-wife and a legal system that she perceives to be unjust. Her attempts to salvage her land are frustrated by the very system that is supposed to protect her rights. Scharf (1998) states that where the state fails to serve the needs of its citizens, the citizens tend to create their own structures and processes, which express their values, in order to meet their needs. But Scharf's observation on the use of informal justice systems does not consider the use of ritual healing to control the decisions of an ongoing courtroom process. For Kenya, informal courts are subordinate to the official structure of formal courts. Although formal courts are known to refer cases for arbitration in the informal courts, decisions by the informal courts can be overruled by the formal courts. Litigants who are dissatisfied by the informal court process can appeal to the formal court system, while the reverse is not true. Moreover, informal court decisions must be filed in the formal courts structure. Mary had already sort justice through the formal court process and to the extent that the formal court process had not referred the case to the informal courts, her options remained limited to the formal court process. She is however apprehensive that the formal court process will not result in justice since her rival had corrupted the process. That was when she opted for MB's intervention. MB confirms her suspicions that her co-wife had corrupted the process. In MB's court, Mary also gets to learn that her co-wife had contacted a ritual specialist who had conjured medicines that influenced the court process. MB's courtroom examined Mary's entire cosmology and places her current predicament in context. As a result, MB revealed that Mary's co-wife not only planned to take away her inheritance but also planned to kill her husband to stop him from benefit from their deceased husband's land. Having identified the range of issues to be

addressed, MB initiated the process for redress through his own courtroom. Due to his perceived supernatural powers, MB's courtroom demonstrably supersedes the formal court process as illustrated by his ability to summon all those involved in Mary's predicament, including the judge in the case and subject them to his brand of justice. At MB's court, Mary is enabled to speak to and compel the judge to make a ruling soon and in her favor. The previously inscrutable formal court system is thus unscrewed and subjugated to MB's court and compelled to rule in Mary's favor.

Mary's and Arnold's cases are however not isolated incidents at MB's of what in the literature on alternative modernity has been referred to as a likely response to contradictions created and engendered by processes of social, material and cultural transformation. The case studies reproduced in this and the preceding chapters indicate that when faced by a problem, most people do not rule out the use of rituals which are, to them, entirely pragmatic, secular means to plumb the magicalities of modernity (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993). Obeyesekere (1975) long argued against seeing magical practices in sorcery from the western intellectualist viewpoint as symbolic and expressive actions. Commenting on the practice of sorcery and premeditated murder, he stated that the Sinhalese people were aware of the differences between physical weapons and magical weapons, but the employment of both was seen as pragmatic and instrumental techniques radically different from expressive forms of worship. This then laid the ground for a comfortable and non contradictory coexistence of modernity (science) and magical actions in the attitudes of ritual healing clients at MB's practice. Many of the clients visiting MB considered themselves as having taken a rational decision to deal with their problems in the most appropriate way.

In much of Africa, people experience modernity as a something from which they are excluded (Ferguson (1999) or that others have access to via nefarious means (Moore and Sanders 2001). The case for Arnold and Mary as well as many others at MB's practice exemplify this. Mary was convinced that her co-wife had corrupted the court process and that she would not be able to attain justice. Her suspicions are confirmed by MB who equally informed her that her co-wife had engaged occult powers to defeat her cause. Modernity as experienced in the postcolonial Africa had bequeathed Mary with a system of recourse to justice through formal justice sector institutions that have been described as individualistic rule oriented and breeding hatred (FIDA 2009). Chopra (2010) observed that

many formal justice sector institutions barely reflected the norms and values of the societies they served even though they have been in operation for many years. Local communities did not perceive them as 'just', and found them antithetical to communalistic orientation that emphasized restoration of harmony and cohesion in the community. Alongside the complexities perceived in pursuing justice through the formal system of courts is the belief that the court processes can be penetrated and influenced through supernatural means. Modern court processes have therefore not displaced ideas about supernatural manipulation but provided a new context in which they made sense (Moore and Sanders 2001, Van Dijk 2001)

Witchcraft accusations are central to Arnold and implicated in his and his family's quest for prosperity. Many of the scholars on witchcraft and modernity agree that the powers of witchcraft are ambivalent, a quality that enables it to reinvent itself easily in novel situations and incorporate modern changes (Geschiere, 1997). Witchcraft has been part engaged with modernity if not entirely part of it. Arnold starts his ritual process as a victim of witchcraft, an apparent leveling mechanism perpetrated by his stepmother. His progress is inhibited through what local people understand as 'blocking'. It is instructive to note that many ritual healers claimed that they could 'unblock' closed up homesteads. Arnold's stepmother's confession is clear on what 'blocking' involved: lack of prosperity, failure in education, marriage, unemployment, retreating home to imbibe in local brew etc. Witchcraft is here deployed in processes and aspirations associated with modernity which gives credence to the observation that the occult and modernity has often gone hand in hand. MB neutralizes the witchcraft, but he too engaged another process to enable Arnold acquire a job – a process that by his admission snatched people's souls and caused them to act in certain ways desired by the clients. In the X-ray process Arnold compels the soul of his prospective employer into giving him the job. He equally compels his university professor to pass his project and the administrator to include his name in the list of graduands. This is however done by causing people to sleep, then capturing their souls and finally compelling them to act according to the wishes of the clients before releasing them. Herein lay MB's powers to use ritual to recapture the forces suspected of redirecting the flow of power in the world. Judges and prospective employers with the powers to hire and fire, to jail or release, or empower or disinherit are all summoned by MB and compelled to act in certain ways.

Ritual is not only evident where malcontent gathers as the Comaroffs suggested but is also deployed as an appendage to various processes associated with Modernity. But while modernization processes have been characterized and discussed as global processes mediating in local economies, Scott makes an important point when he stated that, ‘for the victims as well as beneficiaries of large abstractions that some have chosen to term capitalism, the experience itself arrives in quite personal, concrete, localized mediated forms (1985: 125). Arnold’s search for education and job prosperity, Mary’s struggle to retain her inheritance are instances of the ways in which most people coped with their daily struggles in what has been described as societies experiencing rapid transformation (Peek 1991). In the search for solutions to their vexing problems, people attempt all types of actions without a consideration of whether they were acting in rational or irrational ways. The most important consideration was pragmatism, whether the adopted cause of action would yield the desired effects, whatever the means.

While agreeing that modernity experiences occur in personalized concrete and localized mediated forms, it is also important to note that non western people, (described by Gaonkar (2001) as latecomers to modernity) do not experience modernity as a set of neatly bound social and cultural instructions detailing their transformations but rather by its referents and processes. Modernity has been experienced intensely in Africa for close to a century now through colonial and post colonial programs, by the development of new forms of governance structures, creation of nations from disparate ethnicities, intrusion of markets and market driven economies, urbanization, new laws and new law enforcement institutions, new systems of production and land ownership, mass media, western education institutions, increased mobility, urbanizations etc. Societal transformation has inevitably been associated with concomitant cognitive adjustments since as Gaonkar (2001) observed one cannot freely choose whatever one likes from the offerings of modernity. One cannot for instance choose the good things like technology and avoid the bad ones like excessive individualism. The likes of Arnold’s father cannot for instance choose agricultural prosperity associated with private land ownership and avoid the individualization and alienation from their ‘lazy’ relatives that such a pursuit engenders. The Western education system in which Arnold enrolled, for instance, encourages the development of one’s fullest potential, but also breeds competition for few available employment opportunities. New system of land ownership assures improved production but also pits family members against each other as both cases cited here illustrate (Arnold’s father against his step brothers and Mary against her co-wife).

The introduction of these modern institutions was expected to be related to mental dispositions and forms of social behavior, to what Eyoh (2009) referred to as psychocultural attributes. Against such a view of modernity as a process that was internally balanced, clear and bound, Geschiere et al. have argued that modernity should not be viewed as a package deal but as a set of powerful ideas held together by family resemblance, the different combinations of which may evoke a variety of responses. Societies experiencing these set of ideas may not transform in the same ways under different set of circumstances. The spread of science and education for instance may not necessarily lead to the eradication of what eighteenth century philosophers termed as ‘superstition’. Wherever the project of modernity has spread, it has occasioned some form of creative adaptations by the populations and as the examples in this chapter show, such creative adaptations involve the use of rituals to make sense of modernity.

From the proceeding chapters it is clear that ritual and ritual healing does not wither with modernization. Rather modernization creates new grounds for the demand for rituals. As Evans-Pritchard famously observed, ‘new situations demand new magic and European rule which is responsible for the new situations has opened up roads into...which can supply the new magic’ (1937:513). The relationship between ritual and modernity is however not unidirectional. Rituals are enlisted by their users to try to control or make sense of modernity but they themselves are forced to adapt to the changes occasioned by the modernization process. Transformations associated with the processes of modernity obviously alter the manner in which rituals are performed, which brings me to the second part of this chapter: to the ways in which ritual adapts itself to fit in with the changes occasioned by the process of modernization. Scholars on ritual have observed that rituals are dynamic and engage creatively with modern processes, and even more importantly reacts responding to criticisms of its opponents. Many scholars (Auslander 1993, Reissland and Burghat 1989, Bhabha 1994, and Greene 1998) have observed that systems of ritual healing do not passively react to their critics. They are active, resist scientific or biomedical hegemony and develop new ritual techniques. Hybrid ritual forms are created that do sometimes incorporate biomedicine in their practical routines. MB’s appropriation of the notion of the X-ray that I turn to now is just one of the many adaptations that show how his rituals adapt to its critiques.

#### **6.4. MB and his Adaptations.**

MB regarded himself as a healer who was different from his grandfather from whom he inherited his healing powers. According to him, the key difference between him and his forefather was the fact that he was a Christian healer who attributed the source of his powers to the Christian God while his father attributed his healing powers to the powers of his ancestors. In this regard he adopted the use of the bible both as artifact and source of the doctrine while his grandfather used a buffalo switch to divine and heal. In the case studies that I discussed in the preceding chapters, several modifications are discernible.

##### **6.4.1 New language, new Labels.**

One major alteration to the healing practices of *Mtumishi* Barasa is the adoption of a new language and terminologies and the embedded meanings they bring to the processes. The language used in the healing procedures is predominantly Kiswahili, the national Language that is understood by the majority of Kenyans, since MB's clients come from a wide ethnic and linguistic spectrum. All communications with clients in communal and private rituals were conducted in Kiswahili. The only exceptions were made for clients who could not understand Kiswahili and who shared MB's ethnic language. Ritual processes were named in Kiswahili, and occasionally English terms such as 'mention' and 'hearing' for the courtroom procedures were used. Besides the ease of communication with the entire congregation, the use of Kiswahili language helped to propel MB as national healer whose healing practice served beyond his ethnic boundaries.

##### **6.4.2. 'X-ray' and 'Courtroom'.**

The use of the terms 'X-ray' and/or 'Courtroom' together with organisation of the ritual divination process to resemble the procedures and meanings in actual courtrooms sessions is yet another of obvious influences of modernisation. *Mtumishi* Barasa explained that he received inspiration from God to adopt such a system. The term 'X-ray' is used in the rituals figuratively to refer to the divination process and relates to the local term for verb '*Khulaula*,' which refers to the unravelling of the hidden causes of affliction.

The term X-ray is obviously borrowed from the biomedical terminology and space organization. The clients and the healer are all aware that the term is biomedical and that the processes involved do not approximate the biomedical procedure in any way. The X-ray is a biomedical technique that allows the practitioners to locate the causes of bodily



malfunctions that are presumed to be hidden inside the human body. Biomedicine searches for the sources of illnesses within the human body. Ritual healing is predicated on the comprehensive etiology that locates the source of illnesses within the social, spiritual and natural realm. The term X-ray is therefore MB's adaptation to refer to the process by which he gets into the courses of illnesses that may be hidden anywhere within the social spiritual or natural realms. As the X-rays are perceived to be accurate diagnostic tools, MB used the term to impress the clients on the accuracy of his divination techniques. A similar case where biomedical terminology was used is reported by Auslander (1993) in his study among the Rural Ngoni community in eastern Zambia. Auslander documents the healing rituals by one Dr. Moses the senior, who used a small magic mirror that he called the 'temperature' which he used to observe clients and assign them a number with children and youths assigned a low digit signifying their relative goodness and quality while the elderly ones received a longer numerical string in English. The numbers were then tattooed on their skins and medicines rubbed to cure the miscreant of future witch activity. The numbers assigned by Dr. Moses were seen to resemble the temperature readings by modern medical procedures. MB's X-ray process combined with the courtroom procedures where the actual picture was not just unraveled by the X-ray but was constructed with the intervention of the secretary, the congregation and the clients. Accuracy of the process was ensured through the repetitive nature of the process and a clear elucidation of the problem by the accused persons. MB and his clients are well aware of the obvious differences between his procedures and the X-ray procedures performed in biomedical facilities. The X-ray procedure in biomedical operations is associated with biomedical sophistry, precision and depth. By adopting this term, MB hoped to convince his clients that his divination is equally sophisticated, self explanatory and precise. While the biomedical X-rays get into the depth of human bodies to unravel the cause of malfunctions, MB's X-ray peer into a clients social, spiritual and material matrices to unravel the hidden causes of affliction with a view to resolving them.

The other term that the MB uses interchangeably with 'X-ray' is 'court processes or simply "the courtroom." The healing process incorporated a 'courtroom' procedure where interrogations, accusations and counter accusations took place enabling the healer to establish the true state of relationships between the clients and those in their social networks. The term courtroom and courtroom procedures were, according to MB intended to establish whether clients might have initially acted unjustly and therefore earned the

vengeance of their enemies. The court process, which, combined with MB's perceived mystical ability to 'call' disembodied voices into the courtroom, worked to establish the true nature of the conflict and design the appropriate remedial or reconstructive strategy. By labelling the healing process a court, MB emphasized his just and impartial nature and the need for clients to be truthful in the consultations with him since lies would be detected by the court.

In the court process, the secretary took clear notes that she shared with MB who in turn used the notes to interrogate the clients before deciding the next course of action. If the client had actually engaged in witchcraft activities, *Mtumishi* Barasa explained that he would first 'cleanse' the client before punishing the accused witches. In the preceding chapters I have produced transcripts of the proceedings in MB's courtroom to demonstrate the ways in which the court system worked. All clients were regarded as plaintiffs while the rest of the people who appeared as voices from the bible (VFBs) were defendants even where they had not committed any offense. The secretary acted as the judge who declared the VFBs from the bible as accused persons by her famous declaration, 'You are accused'. In the case of Arnold reproduced in this chapter, for instance, the secretary responded with her trademark response when the VFB of Arnold's prospective employer appeared even though strictly speaking, he had not committed any offence. The VFB was therefore justified in demanding to know who his accuser was and why he was accused. Most of the cases provided however indicated clear disputes between MB's clients and members of their social matrix and as the cases show, the court system was instrumental in apportioning responsibility for the occurrence of affliction. The key to the courtroom procedure was however MB's magical abilities to bring accused person's into his courtroom thus combining a seemingly secular rational procedure with supernatural abilities, again collapsing modernity's categories of rational and irrational acts.

#### **6.4.3. Specialized spaces: Specialized procedures.**

Apart from the terms and their associated meanings, many of *Mtumishi* Barasa's practices contained an implicit response to the biomedical critique of ritual healing. MB has modelled his healing practices on the biomedical system by incorporating apparently "modern" medical procedures and hospital-like spaces. At the onset of the ritual process, a client or observer encounters the reception room, fully equipped and staffed by a secretary, appointment cards, record books and an intercom telephone line between the secretary and

the healer. A client encountering this type of modern office spaces, equipment and apparatus is made to feel that the healer is professional, confident and in control of the healing process. Clients were screened by the secretary and attended a church session, both of which were intended to prepare them to meet the healer. This process has parallels to the procedures in a biomedical facility, where patients initially pay a registration fee and get a card in which their biodata was entered, had their body temperatures, blood pressure and weight taken before proceeding for consultations with the doctor. The procedures at the ritual, like the biomedical ones, strictly followed this order.

Adherence to the ritual procedures was controlled and ensured by the organisation of space within the healer's homestead that apportioned different rooms and spaces for the different procedures. There are different rooms for consultations, exorcisms, divinations and church rituals, as well as boarding facilities for clients who required nocturnal rituals or those who could not travel back to their homes after a consultation. The secretary's room was designated for registration and appointments and thus the presence of many record books, registration cards and an intercom phone facility for ease of communication between the secretary and the healer. This room also acted as a cashier's office for it was here that payment for the ritual procedures was made. Only one client was allowed into this room at a time. The next room in the ritual procedures was the church, which was in the same block as the secretary's room, facilitating an easy transition from the procedures with the secretary to those within the church. The church was also used for the ritual 'pulling' of charms.

The next important room for ritual healing was the consultation room located in the healer's living quarters. It was situated away from the rest of the rooms and about 25 meters away from the block that housed the rest of the rooms used for rituals. This enabled the secretary to control the client's movement to the healer and gave the consultations some privacy. Apart from ritual consultations, the healer used his living room for ritual cleansing, ritual prophylaxis and occasional ritual 'pulling' of charms for private clients. When the living quarters were not used for ritual purposes, they reverted to a normal living room.

The 'X-ray' room, sometimes also called the 'court room' usually brought together all the clients regardless of the stage at which their cases were in the ritual process. The importance of record keeping becomes obvious both for background reference and direction of the daily events. The secretary must always have the correct records for each client present. A typical

day has between 10 and 20 clients in attendance. And since the clients were always at different stages in the ritual and the VFBs appeared and progressed from one client to the next at random, the secretary kept the records of what transpired in the previous session for each client to enable her direct the proceedings. The secretary appropriately guided the different clients depending on their stage of the ritual process. A client whose case was at the judgement level was directed to demand that the VFBs remain captured in the bible for punishment, while those at the 'mention stage only listened to the VFBs confessions. Part of the secretary's preparation for the sessions was to consult the clients and her notes prior to the commencement of the sessions and agree on the next course of action. The register of events as compiled by the secretary was therefore a critical aspect of the ritual process. The secretary took clear notes that she shared with the healer, who used them in further consultations with the clients. A look at the notes taken by the secretary revealed a general pattern. The secretary took the confessed name of the offender, the offence committed, the reasons or justification that the clients gave for their actions, the names of their accomplices and the accomplices' actions, etc. In subsequent consultations the healer studied these notes before interrogating the clients and designing the reconstructive process.

#### **6.4.4. Order, Authority and Hierarchy.**

There was a clear delineation of duties and responsibilities among the different actors in MBs rituals which roughly corresponded to their status. At the lowest level was the guard whose work appeared to be to usher in clients to the secretary and to ensure none of them strolled into MB's house without an appointment. The guard's services were also peripherally employed during the ritual retrieval of charms, to gather the unpacked charms and set them on fire. The secretary's position came in between the guard and MB and her role made her the most visible, (at times more visible than MB) in the healing rituals. She was the first one to officially meet the clients, register them, lead them in church service and set appointments with the healer for initial and subsequent appointments. She controlled the courtroom sessions and participated with MB in cleansing and ritual retrieval of charms sessions. Although she performed most of the tasks at MB's ritual healing, she was regarded (by both MB and the clients) as MB's secretary and principal assistant. At the top of the hierarchy was MB whose powers controlled the rituals even where he was not physically present during certain parts of the ritual process, such as the courtroom process. He cut the image of a professional with a premium on his time and therefore only appeared in person for the very important duties. He allowed the secretary and the guard to handle the routine

duties such as welcoming guests, registration and prayer, as well as the court proceedings. This hierarchy is similar to what one observed in biomedical facilities where doctors and surgeons, for instance let nurses and other lower cadre medical staff prepare patients for surgical operations before they can step in to carry out the surgical operations.

#### **6.4.5. Availability of Resources and its effects on ritual processes.**

Direct monetary payment was rare in traditional African healing (Wandibba 1995, Okwaro 1999). Amongst the Luyia for instance, healers only received a token payment at the beginning of the healing referred to as '*Olume*'<sup>88</sup>. And they never referred to it as a payment for treatment but rather, as a token to enable them 'fight the morning dew' while searching for the herbs (Okwaro 1999). Prestations from successfully healed clients were thought of as gifts rather than payments. Recently however, traditional African healers have been accused of charging exorbitant fees for their services, a development that contradicted the world health organisation's observation that traditional healing was a cheap health care alternative that third world countries ought to embrace. .

A closer analysis of the processes at MB's rituals reveals the effects of modern forms of economic organization. Availability of resources by the clients determined whether the rituals would be conducted publicly or privately, and whether the ritual processes will be fast-tracked. Every stage of the healing process attracted a fee and the healer only embarked on the subsequent stage when the client has paid. The first step of the ritual process is the registration, requiring a fee of Kshs 20. Although the healer indicated that he never turned away clients who were unable to pay fees, my discussions with clients revealed that payment of fees in fact, determined when a ritual would be conducted. On different occasions, I overheard the secretary implore clients to raise the required fee in order to have their cases 'solved once and for all'. Clients told me that after the registration, every further session of the divination process was charged at between Kshs 2000 (approx Usd 30) and Kshs 5000 (approx Usd 75).

The ritual process could take anywhere from three days to over five months, depending on the nature of the case as well as the client's ability to raise the fees. The secretary often

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<sup>88</sup> The term '*Olume*' was used by the Kisa, one of the dialects of the Luyia people. It is likely that other dialects used a different name for this payment. The term is derived from '*liime*' which means morning dew. *Olume* was thus the payment that was supposed to assist the healer fight the morning dew as he searched the bushes for herbs to cure the patients.

scheduled appointment dates based on the client's ability to pay the fees. In most cases, she gave the clients a week in between sessions. She always advised them to contact her to schedule new appointments in the event that they were able to raise the fees earlier, or when they were not able to raise the fees within the stipulated time for their rituals healing sessions to be postponed. Wealthy clients could have their rituals conducted over a weekend while the poor ones' rituals dragged on for months as they raised the fees. The healer admitted that he could complete the ritual process in two or three days by scheduling more than one court session on the same day, and he often did so for clients who did not have time for protracted rituals or who came from far away. Invariably, these were well of clients from urban settings who could not take time of their work schedules to make many trips to the healer. MB's ritual healing required a minimum of four visits for the ritual process to conclude. This meant that clients required a minimum of four different days for them to be completed. MB insisted on a strict compliance with all the ritual steps for all clients. For clients who had not time, he fast tracked their rituals by conducting the different processes during the day and the night to ensure that they were concluded within the shortest time possible, at times in the space of one weekend. Such fast-tracking attracted an extra fee.

#### **6.4.6. Group versus Individual rituals and ritual by representation.**

*Mtumishi* Barasa conducted both group and individual rituals. Individual ritual ceremonies were conducted for clients who due to their status in society did not wish to suffer the embarrassment of having their social narratives exposed to the public. Included in this category of clients were medical doctors, judges, lawyers, and high ranking civil servants. These clients frequently came to the healer and had their rituals conducted either at night or very early morning and were charged a high fee. These alterations were thus a preserve of the wealthier clients. They tramped into MB's compound in the night in very sleek cars and left either in the same night or very early in the morning. I attended two cases involving medical doctors who had their 'X-ray' sessions conducted in the night on two separate occasions.

Wealth was moreover related to social status, privacy and excessive individualism. The development of individual/private ritual healing option mirrored health care practices in the biomedical sector (or exclusive membership clubs) where the rich often patronized expensive private health care facilities which were perceived to be of high quality. The poor were served in public health care facilities that were less costly, often crowded and

perceived to be providing poor quality services. Patronizing private health care facilities was always seen as a marker of social class and by replicating the same structure in his healing practice, MB's reproduced the social stratification occasioned by modernity.

Another way in which the healer had adapted his healing rituals to fit in with the changing modern times was healing by representation. In recognition of the fact that clients may not be available all the time for the protracted ritual processes, the healer allowed that one may send a representative to listen to the divination process and report back to the client. This process allowed different members of the household to make alternate visits to the healer based on availability of time. Parents would send their children, husbands and wives would alternate their visits based on their availability. In Mbago's case, for instance, different members of the family came on alternate days for the X-ray sessions. In the case of Kaptinge (see chapter 4) MB directed his brothers to represent him in the rituals that followed his initial appearance since his affliction had almost crippled him. According to MB, ritual healing was still effective even when the principal person afflicted was not present for as long as another family member represented them. This development is cognisant of ritual healing clients' mobility and consequent inability to be present over the long duration for the rituals. The protracted nature of MB's rituals would make them unattractive for clients in regular employment. To take care of this, MB had devised the concept of liminal space and ritual by representation. By liminal space, MB informed his clients that he had committed them to prayer and protection as soon as they presented themselves for ritual healing. Their situation would not deteriorate as MB had neutralized the ability of their enemies to afflict them further.

#### **6.4.7. The Prominence of the Bible and Christian Worship Procedures.**

The incorporation of Christian religious practices and paraphernalia was a major modification in the ritual processes conducted by *Mtumishi* Barasa. He explained that his healing rituals were guided by powers given to him by the Christian God, and the prominence of Christian or quasi-Christian practices confirmed this assertion. By his own assertion, the main use of the bible was to differentiate his practice from that of his Grandfather who used a buffalo switch together with other traditional divining techniques that were unacceptable to the Christian faith, and to leave no doubt in the minds of the adherents that they were participating in a Christian ritual.

The most striking feature of the healing rituals however was the complex fusion of African and Christian cosmologies, which both comforted and confounded the clients. For the Christianised Africans, the use of the bible and the seemingly Christian procedures reassured them that they were participating in a Christian ritual although they might not agree with all aspects of the rituals, especially the burning of bibles. Christianised Africans, who formed majority of the clients, might also not agree with the ritual execution of the witches, since judgement, in Christian theology, is the prerogative of their God. MB however, explained that his task of exterminating the witches was ordained by God since the Bible condemned witchcraft and witches especially in the old testament of the Christian bible. He often cited the Old Testament book of Ezekiel Chapters 13:17-24, which according to him justified his extermination of witches. For clients who did not strongly profess the Christian faith. MB's retention of the African nosological concepts in his healing rituals appealed to and confirmed their importance. In a way, this filled the void left by the mainstream Christian churches, which preached healing but failed to minister to the flock in spite of the parallels between Christian and African concepts of healing. This fusion mirrors the situation with Africanised Christians as already observed by Ranger (1981) in Tanzania. He observed that Africans silently defied the early missionaries in their rejection of African healing practices and invested some of the Christian paraphernalia such as the priest's cloak and sacraments with healing power. Meyer's (1992) work amongst the Ewe Christians in South Eastern Ghana is quite illuminating regarding the ways in which Africans have integrated their own ideas about the universe into their Christian practices, thereby generating peculiar and new forms of doctrines and practices. Meyer argues that this peculiarity is characteristic of the confluence of the missionary discourse about the devil with indigenous discourse regarding witchcraft. The development of healing rituals such as those by MB that fuse African and Christian cosmologies can therefore be seen as an attempt to legitimise or regularize this defiance. Part of *Mtumishi* Barasa's popularity can be attributed to this strategy of deploying resources from both cosmologies, and from disparate medical systems thereby appealing to a wider clientele.

#### **6.4.8. Ritual and the Social unit.**

Peek (1991) stated that divination (Ritual) was a basic source of vital knowledge since throughout Africa, whether in the city or in the country, no matter the religion sex or status, of the individual, questions emerged for which, every day knowledge was insufficient and yet action must be taken. The cases that I have produced in the preceding chapters show that



ritual was not a preserve of any category of people and that as Moore and Sanders (2001) equally observed, it was alive and well in Africa both among the disenchanting and downtrodden as well as the elite. Modernity has however resulted in certain irreversible changes to the composition, attitude and practice of the members of the social units from whom ritual locates sources of misfortunes and seeks their resolution. Part of the ideals advocated for by the modernisation process was the reconfiguration of personal relationships towards the bourgeois nuclear family and/or the individual (Geschiere et al. 2008). The question then arises as to how ritual navigates through some of these changes so as to remain relevant and effective to the needs of the clients. Some of the alterations have already been observed in the preceding sections. The focus of ritual healing was the social unit and the success of ritual required the collaboration of all the members. Where the source of affliction was attributed to a breach in the categorical relationship between man and man, a repair of this broken relationship was considered as a requisite for successful healing. But what happens when it is not possible to bring the different actors in the social unit to agree to the performance of the ritual? When members of the same family do not espouse the same beliefs or when there is considerable distance ideologically and physically among the different members of the social unit? Many of the cases produced in the preceding chapters show that social relations were central to the cause of affliction in MB's ritual healing. MB was however cautious of his limited powers as well as the complications that the prospects of reconciliation of the different members of the social unit would raise. Given the fact that ritual healing was proscribed by Kenyan laws, accusing members of a social unit of being witches could even result in litigation against him. Ciekawy (1998) has detailed some of the legal tribulations of Kajiwe, a famous healer at the Kenyan coast whose healing ritual practice often landed him in prison while reports in the local press have over the years, chronicled instances where purported witches were arraigned in Kenyan courts. It is perhaps cognisant of this altered social matrix that MB has made the possibility for physical reconciliation optional. Where the divination revealed the existence of a dispute between members of the same social unit, MB often gave his clients two options: he would through prayer cause the parties to appear at his ritual healing practice for him to reconcile them. Alternatively he asked the clients to try and reconcile themselves with the people accused of afflicting them after the conclusion of the ritual. The second option was for MB to paralyse the activities of the people accused of afflicting the clients. In the course of my fieldwork, I never came across a situation where clients had agreed to be reconciled by MB even though MB claimed to be able to more or less cause accused persons to appear to his

homestead through prayer. In the case of Arnold's father, for instance, MB offered to reconcile him and his step-brothers. Arnold's father did not however wish to be reconciled with his stepfamily. He only asked MB to paralyse their actions. Many clients did not seem to consider having a harmonious relationship with members of the social matrix as an important aspect of their existence. They were however conscious that extreme individuality and competition for scarce resources, a process that was intensified by modernity could breach social relations and heightened the possibility of ritual attack by their competitors. Ritual healing adopted itself to this new situation by replacing the need for reconciliation with protection against ritual attack, reversal of the effects of ritual attack once activated as well as a blockade of persons inclined to afflict the clients. These processes were preferable as they were within the control of the ritual healer and the consenting clients.

### **6.5. Conclusion.**

In this chapter I have provided two examples which are by no means the only ones in the field to argue along the alternative modernity critique that modernisation does not result in the elimination of ritual healing and many other cultural aspects that have been labelled traditional superstitions. Moore (2001) even posits that the general sentiment in Africa is that witchcraft is increasing. To argue for the persistence of ritual, a position contrary to the promises of countless western social theorists that such enchantments would die a sudden death with modernity I have borrowed the approach suggested by the Comaroffs (1993) and Moore and Sanders (2001) of using detailed ethnographies to show how ritual articulates with particular modern settings, how it works its transformations and how in practice it (re)makes and recasts cultural orders. Modernity is everywhere both in its guises and disguises, and just as there are many different narratives of western modernity among scholars, the people experiencing it especially in the non western societies too have a different narrative of what it does or should create and destroy. One of the key expectations on the outcome of the modernisation process was the spread of scientific knowledge and attitude which would lead among other things to the progressive eradication of traditional superstitions. Vuori observed that many health care practitioners in the third world believe that traditional healing methods were as 'dead as a dodo' (1982: 129) while Turner maintained that 'where novelty and change characterize the life of a society, fewer people take part in public ritual (1968:23). According to Turner, ritual is only to be found and function among people less influenced by technological change. But what can one say of the experience of a university graduate in law or a medical doctor whose training and daily

occupation is a critique of actions described by science as 'superstitious' but who drives hundreds of kilometres to partake in a ritual at night? Clearly many African aspire to become modern since as Gaonkar (2001) eloquently stated, modernity was more often perceived as a lure than a threat and people (not just the elite) everywhere and at every national or cultural site rise to meet it, to negotiate it and appropriate it in their fashion. Young people like Arnold go to school, acquire skills and compete for and acquire jobs in the city. They are however always cognizant of the cosmological settings within which they operate, cosmologies that incorporate beliefs in supernatural manipulations. The spread of science has not eliminated the belief in witchcraft for instance, since as many scholars have reported, witchcraft powers are believed to be ambivalent and able to reinvent themselves in novel situations. It is for this reason that ritual and witchcraft are often referred to in social discussions using such terms as 'African chemistry,' 'remote control' or 'research'. Such terms evoke the understanding that Africans believe that witchcraft exists and had conditions similar and parallel to those in science. The spread of science does not necessarily lead to the eradication of 'superstition', nor is the eradication of 'superstition' a necessary condition for the spread of a scientific attitude. Modern communities in Africa as Nyamnjoh (2001) observed, marry the so called natural and supernatural, rational and irrational, objective and subjective, scientific and superstitious, visible and invisible, real and unreal, making it impossible for anything to be one without also being the other. The reality of mental illness as defined by biomedicine, and whose rules the learned doctor in chapter 7 observed while dealing with his patients did not preclude his son's attack by what he referred to as 'demonic' forces for which ritual healing was the appropriate recourse. In the same way, Arnold believed that he could fail in his quest for a Masters degree and a new job by his poor performance as well as due to preternatural manipulation. In this case hard work which contoured more with purposive instrumental rationality did not obviate the need for ritual enhancement of the process.

## Chapter 7

### Ritual healing and Efficacy.

#### 7.1. Introduction.

The question of efficacy is key to any healing system or practice (Sax 2010, Kirmayer (2004). While this would seem to be a clear and pragmatic question, it provokes a wide range of responses, possibly because efficacy and effectiveness can be assessed against many different outcomes. The question of efficacy of traditional African medicine has been a subject of debate since as Peek (1991) observed, traditional healers especially ritual healers who employed divination tended to be characterized as charismatic charlatans who coerced others through clever manipulations of esoteric knowledge. It is perhaps for this reason that in its exhortation of African countries to revert to the use of traditional medicine, the WHO does not give room for ritual healing. Scholars on traditional medicine such as LeBeau (2003) appear to shy away from consideration of the efficacy of ritual healing when she states that the question of efficacy of traditional medicine be left to chemists, a proposal that I consider somewhat erroneous for a volume appropriately titled, 'Dealing with Disorder'<sup>89</sup>. Prominent among those who deny the efficacy of ritual are those who do it in the 'name of science, or modernity or orthodoxy asserting that those who believe in them are victims of ignorance, superstition, even the devil' (Sax 2010:1). The Kenya Medical Association for instance refers to traditional healers as people who conduct their healing in a way that professionals in the health care providers considered to be unethical. By professional health care providers, the KMA refers to biomedical practitioners. This was in spite of the fact that some of its members routinely utilized the services of traditional healers. My experience with one medical practitioner who actually referred to a category of illnesses caused by demonic forces was quite illuminative of this contradictory position between group and individual positions. I was excited in my fieldwork to encounter medical practitioners at MB's practice and, probably naively, hoped for a stimulating discussion with them regarding their public professional statures as biomedical practitioners (therefore perceived critiques of ritual healing) and their private patronage of ritual healers. The differences between their private and public images were clearly discernible in the pattern of

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<sup>89</sup>LeBeau's work on traditional medicine in Namibia is definitely one of the most impressive among the studies on traditional medicine in Africa. However her contention early in her book titled, 'Dealing with disorder' that the efficacy of traditional medicine should be left for chemists falls in the trap of those who strip traditional healing off its ritual perspective and redefine it as herbalism..

consultations: their rituals were conducted at night<sup>90</sup> as opposed to the other clients whose rituals were communal and conducted in broad daylight.

For a multiplicity of reasons I was not able to conduct a satisfactory interview with any of the medical practitioners save for a 5 minutes chat with one of them<sup>91</sup>. After renegeing on our appointments a couple of times, I finally caught up with him by arriving at his clinic two hours before our appointment time. However as he saw me waiting at the reception to his private practice, he hurriedly finished up with his patient load and excused himself since he was supposed to pick his wife from the airport, which naturally meant, he had no time for me. But as we walked out of his clinic, and as I excused myself and asked for another appointment, he quickly asked, 'But generally what did you want to hear from me?' 'I wanted to discuss your experience with MB's healing but since you are in a hurry, I could come back when you have more time', I answered. The doctor then gave me a quick overview regarding his experience with MB, which went something like this<sup>92</sup>:

**Medical doctor:** I have been having lots of problems in my family. The main problem is with my son who suddenly stopped talking, became mentally disturbed, ran away from home and started living in the forest. No amount of persuasion would convince him to come back home and even when we went for him with six strong men, he would overpower all of them and run back to the forest. This was definitely too much energy for a 16 - years old boy. That was when I decided to ask for MB's help. I have been dealing with MB for quite some time now.

**Ferdinand:** What made you seek MB's help and not a psychiatric hospital?

**Medical doctor:** No, you know there are some of these mental illnesses that are caused by demonic forces and which cannot be treated in biomedical facilities. Anyway, MB has assisted me to find out the people who have been using witches to send demons to my son. They are my wife's relatives. And you know with his method, he exterminates witches through the bible in that court of his. Every time I went to him, we would identify the witches afflicting my son and burn them and my son would come back home. But a month or two later, he would again run away from home and when I went back to MB, we would discover that my in-laws had approached yet another witch who had sent demons to my son's head. We would burn them (witches) again and my son would be fine and come back home. But sooner than later, my son's mental illness would relapse and he would run away

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<sup>90</sup> Medical practitioners were not the only ones whose rituals were conducted nocturnally. Any client who wished for privacy could request for a private healing ritual in most cases conducted at night when the rest of the clients had left MB's compound.

<sup>91</sup> My impression was that they were unwilling, if not embarrassed to talk about their visits to MB's practice. They often gave me appointments that they did not keep and often changed agreed upon appointments at the last minute, even when I had driven over 100 kilometers to met them.

<sup>92</sup> This transcript is a reconstruction of my conversation with the doctor soon after our discussion as I did not record the interview on tape. The discussion was done in English.

from home. It became some kind of a cycle. I asked MB severally to burn the people approaching witches to harm my son but he was reluctant. He wanted me to keep going to his place and pay him more money. Recently I approached another healer who agreed to paralyze these people. Since then, my son has been fine for the last six months. I can see he is slowly recovering and he can even make up his mind to do some house duties without being directed by anybody. Like this morning, he is the one who cleaned my car before I came to work.

**Ferdinand:** Mmh,

**Medical doctor:** Generally you know MB is a very good healer and he can heal many of the diseases that cannot be treated in the hospital – like diseases caused by demonic forces. But at times, he pretends to heal illnesses that are best left for biomedicine. I know of a case where he tried to treat a case of liver cirrhosis. He is also extremely money minded. Every time I went to his practice I paid him over Kshs 5,000 (approx USD 60). But he did not want to deal with the real problem and that was why I approached another healer. I think this second healer has managed to paralyze my enemies and we now have peace. I think I have told you most of what you wanted to know. I have to leave for the airport. Just give me a call and we can talk some more if you have more questions.

My discussion with the doctor ended abruptly as he had to leave for the airport and I never got an opportunity to talk to him again even after several attempts to contact him by phone. By referring to his sons illnesses as caused by demonic forces and thereby adopting the services of the ritual healer, the doctor appeared to be in agreement with Kirmayer (2004) and Sax (2010) who have stated that all systems of healing ought to be judged according to their own set of standards. The doctor did not attempt to equate his son's mental illness on terms of any biomedical category nor did he try to check similarities between MB's ritual healing and psychotherapy. In doing so Kirmayer argues further that any account of efficacy within a system ought to include an 'analysis not only of what, how and why things work, but of more basic or anterior questions of what it means for something 'to work' what is supposed to be working on and toward what end' (2004:46).

In this dissertation, I started by earlier on stating the position that ritual healing practices persisted in Kenya because they were effective for the purposes for which they are invented and maintained. I therefore set as one of the objectives to discover how ritual healing accomplished the healing process. Kirmayer (2004) thus observed that although diverse forms of healing are recognized by their common concern to alleviate suffering, prolong life and reduce disability, their effectiveness could be judged against their ability to achieve goals that vary widely across different settings and traditions. An African diviner, a biomedical doctor, a shaman, an Ayurvedic doctor each have different set of standards against which they assess efficacy. Above all their pursuits, are the standards of the patient

and their families which might be different (Sax 2010, Kirmayer 2004). What counts as a good outcome may range from change in a discrete behaviour viewed as troublesome, or improved quality of life, to the restoration of harmony between body, social order or cosmos (Kirmayer 2004). But since all systems of healing vary on most of these indicators, ritual healing scholars agree that one ought not to evaluate one system by the criteria of another. And regarding specifically to non western forms of healing, Schepper-Hughes called for the 'development of an anthropological discourse on problematic non-biological forms of healing in terms of their own meaning centred and emic frames of reference' (1990:193).

While admitting to the uniqueness of each system of healing Dow (1986), however, attempted the formulation of a general structure that can describe and explain the organization of all forms of healing regardless of the culture in which they occurred. The structure formulated by Dow is based on four points: the experiences of healers and patients are generalized in culture specific symbols in cultural myth; a suffering patient comes to the healer who persuades the patient that the problem can be defined in terms of the myth; the healer attaches the emotion of the patient to transactional symbols particularized from the general myth and; the healer manipulates the transactional symbols to help the patient transact his own emotions. Frank (1973) spoke in the same vein when he noted that in spite of the fact that the theoretical foundations of disparate healing systems differed profoundly, they shared a lot in common and their persistence through the ages suggested that their efficacy may lie partly in their shared common features. Evaluations of outcome however are always made with reference to specific problem definitions, hierarchy of values and contextual frames all of which are culture specific. Besides, discrepancies may arise not only between systems but also between healers and patients due to personal, professional and cultural differences in the calibration of health and illness.

In the evaluation of efficacy in ritual healing and in reference to the data that I present here, I would like to make two remarks. While agreeing with the requirement for making evaluations based on the criteria within a healing system, one needs to keep in mind, as Kirmayer (2004) did that in any locality one finds a plurality of healing practices available to prospective clients. Migration, mass media telecommunications and entrepreneurship etc have exposed everyone to diverse healing traditions, but also to a diversity of healers with different healing techniques though sharing (or not) the same assumptive world. In many urban centres in Kenya today, for instance, a client is not only exposed to modern

psychotherapy, Ayurvedic or Chinese healing but to different type of healers from other African communities and countries. At the same time, globalization has increased the pace of cultural transformation and thereby contradicting the notion of local worlds that reflect a coherent and well integrated social system (Sax 2004, Kirmayer 2004, Comaroff 1980). Further in multicultural urban settings, many people only have a shallow connection to a tradition and healing practices themselves undergo creative change and hybridization. Mtumishi Barasa's healing rituals are an example of such hybridization. The settings in which ritual healing currently occurs is that in which the coherence of traditional systems of healing and their links to an underlying culture and worldview are challenged and strained. Systems of healing that were rooted in a particular cultural tradition, community and way of life have been uprooted, packaged and made available in a global scale, and this has implications for the efficacy, ethics and politics of healing practices (Kirmayer, 2004). An important point for healing in Africa is however made by Comaroff (1980) who observed that in spite of thorough going societal transformation, the contours of daily life for many in Africa remained largely those of the indigenous cosmology; all innovation such as presented by Christianity and allopathic medicine are adopted to its logic.

The other point to consider, also made by Dow (1986) and Frank (1973) is that healing is often accompanied by the use of physical and pharmacological therapies. And in a plural medical system, ritual healing from one medical system might be accompanied or augmented by pharmacological or surgical intervention from a different healing system. The case of Karama that is analysed in chapter 5 is one clear example where the client initially visited a biomedical facility before presenting himself to MB for healing and reverting back to the biomedical facility for surgery. Ritual healing may also be augmented by other strategies such as the use of law enforcement agencies in the event of theft, murder or fear of death. It is on the basis of such health seeking behaviour that Kirmayer's question regarding the meaning of efficacy is relevant. One ought to ask on what a certain health care intervention is supposed to work on before judging or commenting on whether it was efficacious or not.

In plural medical systems, as Whyte (1997) stated, clients pragmatically selected amongst the available healing systems based on their understanding of the problem at hand and the available resources. The goal of any intervention in the event of an affliction is the amelioration of suffering and at times from the point of view of those involved both



medicinal and relational measures sometimes help. Amelioration of suffering is in most cases not a one stop shop activity and as both Comaroff (1980) and White (1997) observed, many options may be tried in resolving the problem, and certain methods may be adopted for specific reasons in the life history of an affliction. Comaroff (1980) observed that a broken leg was both a fracture and sorcery at the same time. Clients may therefore come to the diviner only to name and punish the sorcerer and then revert to a biomedical facility for surgical intervention. In African healing, the crux of the healing process was the act of divination which brought the cosmological repertoire to bear upon specific instances of affliction, and reduced apparent chaos into order by legitimately allocating responsibility in terms of available causal metaphors (Ibid). Divination was therefore the formal occasion for making uncertainty explicit (Whyte 1997), a manner of imposing meaning upon a seriously disorganized experience (Comaroff 1980), and for developing the ideas that form plans of action for dealing with it. Divination was however often tenuous and tentative until all the symptoms of affliction have been resolved to the satisfaction of the client and those involved in the search for healing (ibid).

With time, and in a plural medical system, clients come to associate various aspects of their afflictions with particular sources of help. Healers become increasingly associated with afflictions for which social and spiritual agents are suspected or are evidently deemed to be involved. A comparison of two advertisements 30 years apart, the earlier one reproduced by Good (1987) and others that I encountered in the course of my fieldwork bear striking resemblance in the listing of the types of conditions handled by different healers. (See pages 13-14) In this chapter I argue that efficacy of ritual healing can only be assessed based on what clients bring to the attention of the ritual healers and that their expectations are judged from what the healers claimed to be able to do. When a client comes to a healer to find out if sorcery is involved in causing his headache, or who made his bone to fracture, and then proceeds to a biomedical facility for further treatment, the efficacy of the ritual in the eyes of the client is the extent to which the healer confirms or dispels his suspicions even though other remedial measures might be proposed by the healer.

The question of the efficacy of ritual healing must start by recalling the notion of nosology within the traditional African healing that I articulated in the first chapter. The basic argument here was that African healing practices were based on a comprehensive aetiology in which affliction is seen as stemming from a disruption of the categorical relationship

between man and man, man and spirit and man and nature and is experienced as a dislocation of self from context. Illnesses were perceived in terms of their causes. Within this multiple causation set up, however, there were no fixed relationships between causes and symptoms. Particular causal metaphors like sorcery can be applied to a wide range of sensations and conversely similar sensations may be associated with various aetiologies. As Foster (1976) eloquently stated, the same deities, ghosts, witches and sorcerers that send illnesses may blight crops, reverse financial gains, sour husband-wife relationships, and cause all manner of affliction. Importantly too is the fact that notions of causality are always entailed in multi-vocal symbols that made no distinction between the how and the why of illness, between proximate and ultimate causes. The idiom of sorcery subsumes the notion of malevolent intrusion both material and non material into the being of the victim. In such societies then as Karama's case in chapter 5 showed, a distended stomach was both fracture and sorcery and both components were part of an adequate description. Intervention in such affliction required addressing all the causal parameters and this is where the complications lay in assessments of efficacy.

Ritual healers in Africa were not only consulted to intervene in the event of an affliction but as pastors of the communities in which they operated (Mbiti 1969) they were consulted to assure prosperity of community members at times through ritual. Healers were and still are consulted for problems such as securing a job appointment, retention or promotion, assistance to win court cases, assistance to gain profits in business etc. This wide range of issues that ritual healers handle, complicate the discussions on efficacy and specifically the possibility to provide general principles for judging efficacy. There have however been various attempts at clarifying the principles of efficacy of rituals.

## **7.2. The influence of Cannon's 'Voodoo' death.**

Cannon's (1942) work on 'Voodoo' death clarified the possibility of death or illness occurring after the performance of certain magical practices, including exorcism, sorcery, and uttering spells or curses. Citing many examples from reports all over the world, Cannon (whose work is also cited at length by Levi-Strauss) links the effect of sorcery or taboo to excessive and unmediated fear compounded by societal rituals ceremonies that dispatched the ensorcelled person to the land of the dead. Cannon goes ahead to show how this complex phenomena expressed at the physiological level. Fear, like rage, he argues was associated with a particularly intense activity of the sympathetic nervous system. This

activity is ordinarily useful involving organic modifications which enable the individual to adapt himself to a new situation. But if the individual cannot avail himself of any instinctive or acquired response to an extraordinary situation, the activities of the sympathetic nervous system become intensified and disorganized: it may sometimes within a few hours, lead to a decrease in the volume of blood, and a concomitant drop in the pressure which result in irreparable damage to circulatory organs. The rejection of food and drink common among patients in the throes of intense anxiety precipitates this process, dehydration acts as stimulus to the sympathetic nervous system and the decrease in blood volume is accentuated by the growing permeability of the capillary vessels. In these circumstances, they might well die from a true state of shock in the surgical sense – a shock induced by prolonged emotional tension (Cannon 1942).

Cannon (1942) and Frank (1973) cite cases where this tension brought about by excessive fear is alleviated even without any pharmacological or surgical intervention simply by the elimination of the object of fear leading to immediate recovery of the patient. The studies by Cannon, Frank and others have been useful at least in identifying some of the neurophysiologic mechanisms to explain the efficacy of rituals. Useful as Cannon's work may be, the set of cultural circumstances from which he derives his conclusions are difficult to compare with Africa and specifically to my field setting in western Kenya. While it is true that most of the ritual healing clients I encountered at MB's healing recounted illnesses and conditions that had not been diagnosed biomedically, and which had protracted for a long time, the treatment of victims of sorcery was quite different from that of the Australian aborigines. Victims of sorcery were rarely isolated and cut from society and ceremonies to dispatch them to the lands of shadows as described by Cannon were rare if at all present. Most clients at MB recounted how their social networks had assisted them to locate MB's healing rituals and supported their quest for healing which points to the outpouring of support for victims of sorcery. The degeneration that follows when victims are dispatched to the land of the dead as described by Cannon's second wave is thus impossible to compare with events in my field site. But more importantly however, as others like Sax (2010) pointed out, the critical weaknesses in such approaches have been their application of biomedical criteria of efficacy to ritual healing. Moerman (2002) whose work on placebo effect has been useful in isolating the importance of a healer's confidence in his methods as a critical component of efficacy suffers the same critic of applying biomedical criteria to ritual healing. Frank's (1973) work on persuasion as a healing technique is also quite useful

when he argues that healing alters the consciousness of the patient but his focus on an individual's psyche is typical of what Comaroff described as 'the biological individualism upon which western medicine was predicated' (1981: 373). Such an approach is impotent when applied to ritual especially when one recognizes the fact that majority of the issues handled by healers may actually not have a malady that exhibited itself objectively and physically. How may one use such a criteria to assess the efficacy of a man who seeks the assistance of a healer to locate his runaway spouse, or lost property, for instance?

Discussion on the efficacy of rituals then must distinguish between various models of it across the different healing systems. Efficacy is inextricably intertwined with the theory of illness and disease which differs across healing systems. Regarding illness and health, each system has its own definitions and expectations (Sax 2004, Weiss et al 1986). Foster famously remarked that if we are provided with a clear description of what a people believe to be the causes of illnesses, one could always fill out the other elements in a medical system (1976:774). Healing may even within one system of healing be judged using different criteria at different times, or the different criteria may be used at different stages in the life history of a disease. At some point, ritual may actually work by changing the perception of the patient and those around him, at another by transforming the social field while others when combined with herbs, pharmacopoeia or surgical interventions, act through physiological alteration of the body. Evaluations of healing must at the same time include the range of expectations, models, evaluations and experiences and incorporate the views of both healers and their clients: (Kirmayer 2004, Sax 2010). There may be discrepancies between how healers and patients judge improvement because of personal, professional and cultural differences in the calibration of health and illness (Kirmayer 2004). Besides, evaluations of outcome are always made with reference to specific problem definitions, hierarchies of values and contextual frames. Even within biomedicine, it is common for surgeons to consider themselves to have done a technically correct procedure but blame death or persistent of symptoms on a patient's personality (Kirmayer 2004, Frank 1973). These factors are well illustrated and articulated at MB's ritual healing where clients present a bewildering complexity of problems, intentions and expectations. Clients engaged in the rituals evaluating and changing their expectations as rituals progressed, others dropped out of the ritual process when part of their desires were met or after realizing that their desires would not be met while others beseeched MB to simply exterminate their enemies once and for all.

### **7.3. Efficacy and African Cosmology.**

Evaluation of efficacy of ritual healing at MB's healing rituals requires that one link it to the notion of healing as understood within the African healing systems, if one takes note of Kirmayer's suggestion on what efficacy implies. Efficacy evaluations are hinged on the comprehensive aetiology as outlined in my introduction chapter especially to the location of sources of affliction to a variety of sources. Affliction was identified in terms of disruption in the categorical relationships between man and man, man and spirit and man and nature and is experienced as dislocation of self from context. Healing was the objectification and restructuring of such dislocation. The mobilisation of the healing process depended upon the seriousness of the disruption implied by particular symptoms. Signs on their part were not assessed based on their inherent threat to perception of well being alone but based on the overall experiential context of the sufferer. Symptoms had no significant diagnosis when divorced from the wider context in which they occurred. If I broke my leg on the day I am supposed to sit the oral defence of my PhD or on my way to pay bride price, for instance, the time and manner of the injury or circumstances preceding it are important aspects of my affliction, at times even more important than the fracture itself. Trivial sensations that occurred in periods of interpersonal strife or prior to a major life event, have more serious implications and the coincidence of a series of minor afflictions might signal more thoroughgoing dislocation (Comaroff 1980). In view of such disorder, clients often resort to the services of a healer whose skill makes it possible to translate specific symptoms and contextual indicators into the idiomatic language of causality.

I would like to reiterate two points as I get into the discussions of the efficacy of MB's healing rituals. One is that ritual healing is just one of the many options available to clients in the event of an illness. There are two implications of these judged from my observations at MB's healing rituals. One is that clients will tend to bring only certain type of conditions to the attention of MB. Secondly, even within the same illness episode, clients will isolate certain aspects of the affliction for the healer's attention and leave the rest to other sources, the biomedical sector for complicated surgery or the police in case of theft. Looking at the advertisement boards for ritual healers that I reproduced earlier or skimming through the list of clients reporting to MB one cannot fail to notice the preponderance of afflictions for which the rupture in the categorical relationship between man and man is implicated. In fact, MB's invitation to clients to the X-ray process through his famous statement 'I will call them for you' and the clients' acceptance of it is a clear indication of what their perceptions

to the nature of their illness were. Be that as it may, the most persuasive argument for efficacy is one that starts with the recognition that the social field is considered the most potent source of affliction. Secondly ritual healing works first by locating the source of the problem in the social field. In many cases, afflictions stemming from the social field did not affect individuals, but a group of individuals, usually related to each other by blood or marriage. Therefore the object of therapy was a 'social field' a household, lineage, neighbourhood or village (CF Sax 2010). In this case, the healing ritual as argued by Comaroff (1980), Sax (2010) and others, worked by repairing or restructuring broken relationships. However under conditions of modernity, the social unit that is often the object of therapy has changed. Further the role and ability of healers to enforce their authority is considerably withered and often challenged. The role of social disharmony in the production of illnesses is recognized but restoration of social harmony is not considered as a necessary condition for healing. Ritual healers too are aware of their inability to subject warring siblings, relatives, neighbours or workmates to a ritual in allocating responsibility for affliction. Given this scenario, clients do not demand for social harmony, rather they ask healers to discreetly paralyse the abilities of their neighbours to afflict them. In many observations at MBs healing rituals reconciliation was only offered as an option where clients were interested in reconciling with the people accused of afflicting them. This was however quite rare an occurrence. Most of the illustrations provided in the preceding chapters exemplified this, E.g. in the case of the murder of Mr. Kirwa, after his children recognized that their cousins were implicated in his murder, they did not seek to be reconciled with them. Instead, and especially due to the fact that the cousins planned to kill them (at least according to MB's divination), they asked MB to also kill their cousins. Mbago's affliction stemmed from a dispute over land between him and his cousins, MB's divination discovered that his step-brothers had hired witches and thugs to harm him. In the healing process, Mbago did not seek to reconcile himself with his step brothers. He asked MB to eliminate the witches and block the possibility of his step-brothers afflicting him. Clients coming to MB to compel their debtors to refund their money were only interested in getting their money back as opposed to reconciling with their debtors as Miriam's case showed. Ritual healing did not therefore act by reconciling or repairing broken social relationships, even though it acknowledged their role in afflictions facing clients.

Another important consideration has to do with the nature of afflictions brought to the attention of the healer. In this category are problems like runaway spouses and children,

debtors, rogue husbands and boyfriends, employment, etc. The question of efficacy can only be assessed based on the nature of problems and issues brought to the attention of the healers as well as to the ascribed position and assumed abilities of the healer. Most ritual healers in Africa employed divination which is believed to be directed by spiritual powers outside the diviner himself. Peek (1991) while noting the diversity of divination systems remarked that they nevertheless followed some type of routine by which otherwise inaccessible information was obtained. Some diviners employed self explanatory mechanisms that directly revealed answers while other systems required the diviners to interpret cryptic metaphoric messages. Legitimacy and objectivity of the process are crucial and the higher the clients appraised the divination process on these two scales, the higher their efficacy ratings will be. If the efficacy of the healing practices depended on the divination process, then it is important to have a closer look at this process, especially the way in which the various aspects combined to enhance its efficacy.

MB's healing methods, especially his divination known as the X-ray or Courtroom were well calculated to appeal to these two requirements (objectivity and legitimacy) which contributed to their being regarded as efficacious. The efficacy is linked to the ways in which they create and fulfil the expectations of the clients through well organized and carefully manipulated processes. MB's courtroom procedure is perceived by his clients to be authentic, legitimate, and objective due to its unique production of disembodied voices from the bible that unambiguously state their connections with the clients. The voices were in turn assumed to belong to people who afflicted the clients. All clients at MB's rituals identified the voices emanating from the bible with people they knew in real life. MB's absence in the courtroom, his leisurely strolls around the X-ray room, occasionally holding binoculars, the secretary and her notebook, different sessions to confirm and authenticate each other, MB's confessed ignorance of the details of the X-ray process and reliance on notes from the secretary etc are all features that impressed clients on the legitimacy and objectivity of the process. The clients trust MB's X-ray system to be objective and participated in the rest of the healing strategies based on the confessions from the X-ray process.

Since efficacy was strongly related to the divination process, efficacy evaluations are as much evaluations of the divination as they are of the healing process that ensued. Comaroff (1980) made an important point when she observed that while divination was the recognized

manner of imposing meaning upon seriously disorganized experience, it was always tentative and continued for as long as it took to construct a discourse which satisfactorily characterized the disruption between the victim and agent of cause. The efficacy of the healing is only to the extent that the divination provides information that is not only considered correct, legitimate and authentic by the clients but also sets the correct reconstruction strategy. MB's system of information production is one such. Ritual therefore worked by providing answers to clients vexing questions. These answers are provided in the form of a narrative that is produced by MB's divination procedures (both tentative and X-ray) but which is augmented by MB's thorough and progressive interrogation of the clients. The narrative that eventually emerges to characterize a client's affliction is one that is agreed upon and therefore acceptable to the client. But the creation of this narrative through divination is not only diagnostic but therapeutic in its own right. Turner (1968) and Comaroff (1980) provide useful insights into the role and nature of divination in the healing process. For Turner, divination and redressive rituals are stages in a single process, an observation that is true for MB's rituals. The different sessions in the X-ray process at MB's rituals were designed in a way that divination seamlessly progressed into redress in the latter stages. In chapter 2, I outlined the X-ray process which is the standard procedure where the extent of a client's affliction was unraveled. During the first sitting (known as the mention), clients listened to VFBs confessing their crimes. The second session, known as the 'hearing', involved the confessions from the VFBs as well the response from the clients. According to MB, this session was designed so that clients and those who had afflicted them would argue out their cases. It was for this reason that the X-ray was also referred to as the Courtroom. The third stage of the X-ray process was the judgment where the X-ray process moved from purely divining to purely healing by the elimination of the afflicting agent. But as I have already observed clients at MB's rituals appeared to credit MB's process first and foremost for the creation of a narrative that named each source of their affliction, and once the extent of their affliction was unraveled to their satisfaction at the mention, some of them engaged other strategies to solve their problems. In the case of runaway spouses or children, clients used information obtained from MB's sessions to try and physically locate their wives even as MB tried to bring them back through ritual manipulation. Habib (see chapter 3) always tried to locate his wife and her new husband using information from MB's X-ray sessions. Mercy too, tried to locate her younger sister and her new husband using the police (see chapter 4) while Mbago provided the names of those who planned to attack him to the police. MB did not object to the use of other ameliorative strategies and even advised some



of his clients to use biomedicines. The case of Karama in chapter 5 where MB advised him to seek biomedical care after the divination and cleansing ceremonies exemplified this. Unraveling the sources of affliction through the process of naming enabled their control by a variety of means. Frank (1973) remarked that naming something was the first step towards controlling it, and that confessions, especially when expressed or interpreted in terms of a tribe's cosmology, brought the patient's vague, chaotic, conflicting and mysterious feeling to the center of his attention and placed them in a self consistent conceptual system. They are therefore realized in an order and on a level which permitted them to unfold freely leading to their resolution. Confessions do have many implications but more importantly is their ability to counteract a patient's anxiety, strengthen their self esteem and help in the resolution of conflicts.

MB's X-ray comprised a double confession. The confession from the VFBs formed the major part of the X-ray. In response to questions and issues raised by the VFBs clients completed the converse side of the confessions by detailing their involvement in the dispute and thereby brought to the limelight, quarrels, competition and alignments in social relations. MB's institution of the X-ray process was based on his conviction that clients at times did not tell the entire truth regarding their participation in causing a dispute. The X-ray process enabled him to find out if the clients stated the entire truth and if they had not acted in a manner that provoked their affliction. In the case cited on page 140, Jael admitted that she often beat up her husband and co-wife. Tom and Jane in the case I cited in chapter 3 also admitted that their father acquired the piece of land and evicted their cousins which led to them plotting to kill him. The drawn out nature of the X-ray processes, thus enabled the isolation of all aspects of a client's affliction leading to the proposition of an elaborate scheme for control. A part from laying out a reconstructive strategy Most persons seeking treatment as (Frank 1973 and Obeyesekere 1975) also observed, were gripped by disturbing emotions (depression, fury, anger) that led to fears of insanity and further heightening their distress. In such circumstances, healing diminished such feelings or caused them to disappear by simply naming them and offering an interpretation of their cause. In many ways clients reporting to MB simply wanted to know the cause of their suffering and this knowledge was therapeutic in itself. Whyte described divinations sessions as sessions where clients went to 'ask the presumed agent of misfortune to reveal itself, to say who it is and what it wants' (1997: 60). In cases where clients came to MB to find out the reasons for the death of their family members, the identification of the guilty persons and the reasons for

their actions was in many cases sufficient to start the healing process for them. As the case for Kirwa's death protracted and as MB wrestled with his killers, Kirwa's children appeared to be relieved by this knowledge as was evidenced by their comments on various occasions. Jane remarked in one of the interviews, 'I just wanted to know the people who killed my father before I went back to the US. Her brother, Tom, on another occasion commented, 'At least now we know why our father was killed and the people responsible. We now live it to MB to deal with them'.

The central role played by divination is further exemplified by many healers' innovation of complex divination strategies, an array of preparatory processes as well as reconstruction strategies that incorporate many healing aspects, that though disparate, remained faithful to the information unraveled at the divination. The divination process by MB was preceded by elaborate preparatory steps enumerated already as the registration, the church service, elaborate discussions with MB, encouragement by co-clients etc. These mandatory steps and the discipline with which they were enforced often raised the clients' expectations to the extent that once MB and the secretary constituted the X-ray session with prayer and song, clients anxiously awaited to listen to voices of those who had afflicted them to confess their actions and receive a punishment. But while the first session of the X-ray was limited to divination, it together with the other sessions within the X-ray process combined a range of activities with varying effects. MB explained that the hearing session allowed him to assess the validity of the information provided by the clients while allowing both the client and the VFB to argue out their cases. What was however left out in the explanations was a consideration of the emotional effects of the long periods of detailed confessions to the clients. Might the detailed and protracted confessions constitute a moment of abreaction as described by Levi-Straus (1963) and others regarding a Shaman's activities? Clients visited MB who invited them to his courtroom to listen to confessions from the people who afflicted them. The confessions were detailed and extensive and explained the entire breadth of a client's affliction. It involved, as Comaroff (1980) remarked, an establishment of the status of a client's cosmology. In the mention session of the X-ray session, MB subjects clients to a process where they listen to gory details of their afflictions, essentially reliving the initial situation from which their afflictions stem. Clients listened to the confessions attentively, often following MB's rules not to respond to the VFBs, but on other occasions, getting overcome by anger and responding to the voices of people confessing to have afflicted them.

Although I have argued before that the key to efficacy of ritual depends on the accuracy of the narrative that MB's divination techniques unravelled, the manner of this naming contributed to this efficacy by combining logic from disparate healing systems as well as other social processes. I would like to recall three examples that appear in the preceding chapters to illustrate this. In the case of Habib referred to in chapter 3, he endured the harrowing experience of listening to the VFB of his wife confessing that she had not only deserted him but had married someone else because of his inability to financially provide for her. She provided details of her liaisons with her new husband and eventually restated her resolve not to return to Habib. Her new found husband corroborated her story in transcripts that I provided on pages 120ff, Habib listened attentively to detailed confession from the man who had married his wife as well as to his wife confessing that she would not be coming back to him.

In this X-ray session, the stated intention by MB was to divine, to lay bare the extent of Habib's affliction, in the form of a convincing narrative and design a reconstructive strategy. In the process however, he is subjected to listening to the voice of his wife and that of her husband as they chronicle their actions and intentions. Although Habib (and many other clients at the mention of his stage of their cases) maintained a studious silence in the course of the deliberations, the emotional effect of such confessions cannot be ignored, especially due to the fact that MB's hybrid rituals combined ideas and practices from many disparate healing systems but which maintained their conformity to key ideas within the African cosmology.

Mrs. Aoko's affliction, discussed in chapter 2 (pg 74 onwards) was one other case whose mention was accompanied by emotion-packed confessions which made her defy MB's instructions to remain silent. She interrupted the confessions from some of the VFBs with questions forcing the secretary to remind her to wait for the 'hearing' stage. In Mrs. Aoko's case, her two sons mysteriously died in quick succession while her husband eloped with another woman. In the X-ray sessions, MB produced VFBs of her two sons, her brother in laws, her husband's snatcher and witches who subjected her to details of her afflictions. Jackie's agony as she listened to the different confessions in her case was obvious from her facial expressions and her inability to contain her emotions as the different voices made their confessions. She was visibly irritated and occasionally mumbled 'stupid' to the voices confessing especially the VFB of her 'co-wife.

The final example is that of the murder of Kirwa as explained in chapter 3 (pgs 98 ff) Kirwa's two children are reminded of the gory details of their father's grisly murder before they and MB decide the next course of action. In one of the sessions, MB reproduced the voice of their father crying as his killers tortured him. The Kirwas exclaimed that they were really pained to hear the cries of their dead father and the confessions and chest thumping by those who planned and executed his murder.

The emotional effects of these procedures often came out in the second stage of the X-ray sessions where clients often yelled back, insulted and cajoled the VFBs and later, emboldened and empowered by the X-ray, decided their fate. As the cases that I reproduced in the preceding chapters clarified, clients assisted by the congregation engaged the VFBs in bitter arguments that were often moderated by the secretary. The second session known as the hearing culminated with the VFB being asked to howl and the clients demanding certain actions from them. Abreaction translates into empowerment and the beginning of control for the client. The clients' sense of control is complete at the judgement stage where their demands are enacted when the secretary kindles the bible. The feeling of triumph and emotional outpouring is evident among the clients as they sit around the burning bible, listening to VFBs howl and beg for mercy. Clients however often sensed their triumph simply when MB promised and actually produced confessions from the people suspected of afflicting them from the bible. Clients would be heard saying, 'I just want MB to make them howl'. The act of howling was in itself seen as humiliating for those who had afflicted the clients. This was linked closely to MB's explication of his healing process. MB explained to the clients that their conditions were already under control as soon as he committed them to prayer and enunciated their X-ray sessions. The process was further dramatized when several VFBs failed to appear, calling for more prayer from MB. Some VFBs interrupted the confessions, while others appeared and refused to make confessions until they were persuaded by a mixture of pleas and cajolery. The appearance of the voices from the bible was equated to their capture and the VFBs incessant complaints of being captured, made to sleep and forced to make confessions from the bible convinced the clients that the very act of confessions through the bible was humiliating, agonizing and punishing for the people accused of afflicting them. Most clients would be heard expressing satisfaction at the capture of their enemies: 'Yes, this witch (or woman or man) thought he was clever. He has found his match today. I really made him howl!'

Most clients coming to MB felt aggrieved by their enemies and wished to revenge or for some misfortune to befall those who afflicted them. This wish was partly resolved when the VFBs howled and begged for mercy as the bible was set ablaze. This action alone was enough to reduce the tension in the client and satisfy their immediate desire for vengeance (cf. Obeyesekere, 1975).

It is however the very act of placing the clients in control of the situation that produces some of the healing effect. And since the X-ray session unravelled every bit of a client's affliction, the client got the opportunity to get in control of every bit of his affliction (known and unknown to them) independent of the final outcome of the healing ritual. The last sessions at MB known as the outcome produced VFBs with confessions of varying results. Witches stated that they had either died, were very sick or were treating themselves from the effect of MB's fire. Those who consulted witches or robbers to commit crimes against the clients confessed to have stopped their intentions while the adamant ones claimed to have engaged new witches after their previous ones had died. Debtors promised to repay, runaway spouses promised to come back, neighbours promised to stop their quests for witchcraft etc. Regardless of the outcome, this session confirmed to the clients that their problems were either under control or in the process of being controlled by MB. Back and forth sessions with MB, the upgrading of the bible burning sessions (from simple burning with kerosene, to burning with firewood and finally burning the bible on top of a tin that has captured the witches) and the increase in the number of howls for stubborn aggressors (as in the case of Habib's wife's husband) convinced clients that MB had a solution to their problems, even the stubborn ones. Clients who had visited MB over a long time often counselled the new clients, 'Just leave it to MB, he will solve all your problems'.

In his analysis of healing rituals at the Lourdes shrine in France, Frank observed that healing was never instantaneous but like 'normal healing' (seems to be referring to physical or biomedical treatment) it required time. 'Actual tissue healing takes hours, days or even weeks and persons who have lost much weight would require the normal time to recover'(1973: 70). MB's 'outcome' sessions, scheduled a month or more after the Judgment were clear that results were not expected immediately. Actual results might be recognized much later after the performance of the ritual or after the visit to a shrine such as the Lourdes, but as Frank (1973) and Obeyesekere (1975) observed, most cures occurred at

the moment of greatest emotional intensity and spiritual fervour, while taking communion or being immersed in water, or as in MB's rituals as the bible goes up in smoke or in the emotional outpouring in the charm retrieval sessions, etc. In the case of Kaptinge, for instance his brothers informed me that he was slowly resuming the use of his limbs a couple of weeks after the performance of the rituals.

In chapter 5, I described three other rituals that followed from the X-ray process, namely cleansing, retrieval of charms and ritual closure. These three, especially the first two were consistent with the X-ray sessions. In the cleansing ceremonies, MB retrieved from the client's bodies, substances that had been intermitted in their bodies to afflict them while the retrieval of charms targeted charms hidden in various localities and which afflicted the clients for as long as they were still uncovered. MB produced all of them and destroyed them in the presence of the clients. The consistency between the X-ray confessions and the substances retrieved was remarkable. Where X-ray sessions stated that witches had used examination papers to bewitch child or their pencils, MB retrieved charms with these items encapsulated. Clients, as was clear from chapter 5 never doubted the powers of MB to retrieve the charms and even identified the items in the charms as belonging to them, their siblings or children at some point in time. Their disposition is different to what Frank (1973) described of clients who at one level gave emotional assent to the proposition that the bloody piece of cotton extracted was the patient's illness, while at another level, they know perfectly well that it is only a piece of cotton. Clients at MB's rituals had no doubt in their minds that the retrieved items were the very ones causing their afflictions. This derived from an elaborate X-ray sessions in which the process by which the charms were concocted was elaborated, but even more importantly to their cosmology that included the notion of charms as source of affliction. MB's carefully crafted ritual process validated itself by a set of processes, schemes and practices that confirmed and reinforced each other thus raising their perception of efficacy.

#### **7.4. Clients and their views.**

The organisation of MB's ritual healing clearly indicated that he considered the efficacy of his healing methods as important for his practice. The 'Outcome' session of the X-ray, conducted a month after the judgment session was specifically set for him and the clients to assess the result of the ritual. After the judgement session, MB promised and clients expected several specific things regarding their afflictions to happen. Witches would be

exterminated, debts would be repaid, runaway spouses and children would come back, spouses would be reconciled, various body ailments would heal, business would flourish, etc. The outcome session could be conducted through ritual or by self reporting. MB expected clients to come back and report improvements in their life conditions to him. Included in cases of self reporting were situations where clients recovered from their illnesses, runaway spouses and children returned home or were found, property had been recovered or debts repaid. In these cases, the outcome was evident. MB recounted the success of his healing with confidence and clarified that in his healing history involving thousands of cases, he knew of only 3 cases that he was unable to resolve. He also claimed to have received a host of items as prestaton for successful healing. Included here was a cow, a set of binoculars, television sets etc. A retired senior policeman who was a regular client of MB recounted that MB had assisted him resolve a famous case of the kidnapping of an Asian businessman. 'I came to MB and through his bible, the kidnappers narrated where they were hiding the Asian. With this information, I went with policemen and rescued the Asian after which the family rewarded me with a truck but my bosses took it away from me', he recounted. But perhaps the clearest evidence of efficacy was in the case of Ruth whom I encountered at MB's ritual accompanied by her daughter who she claimed had disappeared but was 'called' back by MB. She recounted, 'You see this daughter of mine here disappeared from home after the death of my husband. But MB discovered where she was and ordered her to come back through the court sessions. I just saw her walk home one morning'. With MB's efficacy thus confirmed, Ruth entrusted him with the task of assisting her children retain their occupancy of the government house even though their father no longer worked for the government.

In cases where the outcome of the ritual could not be demonstrated by clients' experience of them, MB used the X-ray method to produce confessions of outcomes. In these sessions, clients listened to confessions from those who confessed to have afflicted them and were judged in the previous court sessions. Witches, who were sentenced to death through burning often, confessed that they were dead, sick or recovering and ready to do battle with MB and his clients. The same was for murderers who were equally set to death through burning. In the case of the Kirwa's, the people who participated in the killing of their father confessed that they were dead in subsequent outcome sessions as was evident in their confessions at the outcome stage. The Kirwa's confirmed that they knew one of the people

who confessed killing their father had died. Jane and her mother stated the following in a conversation with me:

**Jane:** MB has so far exterminated all the people who carried out the actual killing of my father. In fact one of the boys died after he fought with his father in a dispute over the ownership of batteries. His father hit him with a cane on the head and he died. MB is now dealing with the masterminds. I am sure he will get them. But we know Karinga will actually die, he has the HIV virus and so if even a small fire from MB touched him, he will die.

**Jane's mother:** We have paralyzed their moves.

Even though MB continued to do battle with the people who planned Kirwa's murder in several other X-ray sessions, the Kirwas did not doubt that he would eventually subdue them as Jane's statement shows. MB's formulation of a graduated scheme of punishment where he upgraded the type of fires used for adamant witches and robbers like in the case of the Kirwas heightened the emotional intensity of the ritual which increased its therapeutic effect (Cf: Frank 1973). I met Tom several months later as I conducted the second phase of my fieldwork. He informed me that he no longer went to MB's rituals even though the master minds of his father's killers were still alive. He was however convinced that it was just a matter of time before they died as they had exhausted all their income fighting to remain alive after MB's ritual burning.

**Tom:** I have not been to MB's practice for some time now but I met Karinga the other day and he was extremely emaciated. I could not recognize him at first. He actually ran away when he saw me. These guys (Karinga and his brother) have really suffered. The last time at MB's they said they had spent all their money looking for cures against MB's fire. Karinga claimed that his car import business had collapsed and so he had no money to pay a healer to protect him. It is now just a matter of time before he dies.

In the outcome sessions, witches threatened the clients and dared MB to a battle. By engaging and fighting the witches, MB showed that he was confident of his powers, he cared about his clients and that he considered them important enough to risk his own safety on their behalf. Apart from the commitment demonstrated in the processes, MB often recounted instances where his life was imperilled as he battled the witches. MB repeatedly gave the example of an accident that occurred to him after attending an X-ray session where a witch from the Kenyan coast dared him to a duel to find out who was stronger. That he emerged unscathed after his car rolled 12 times was a clear testimony to his powers. Obeyesekere (1975) argued that it was common for priests to brag about the powers of deities and this combined with testimonies from other clients about successful outcomes,



such as deaths in the most dramatic fashion may reduce the client's tension and satisfy their immediate desire for vengeance.

Another client who testified to the efficacy of MB's rituals was Ben Oruko in chapter 6 who happily stated that after the X-ray sessions and the retrieval of the charms, he had not only graduated from the university but was slowly recovering from his erectile dysfunction. Mr. Mbago was equally so convinced of the efficacy of MB's rituals that he furnished the police with the names of the people who claimed during the X-ray sessions that they were planning to attack him leading to their arrest. He further brought his three children to be assisted by MB in their marriages and careers.

In view of the complex nature of nosology in African understanding of health and illness, healing rituals addressed a wide range of problems, inevitably protracting the process. Many of the clients visiting MB were divined as having more than one problem as evidenced by the transcripts in the preceding chapters, which required them to visit MB at different times for different rituals. The resultant scenario was a beehive of dizzying activities at MB's rituals with different clients requiring different rituals and individual clients following up on different aspects their affliction. Clients frequented MB's rituals over a long durations of time, others for over five months without resolving all of their needs. A case to recall is that of Habib and his runaway wife. In Habib's X-ray case, his wife confessed to running away and getting married to someone else. Apart from this key aspect of his affliction, other voices confessed to have bewitched Habib's entire homestead. While the Judgement and outcome sessions showed that the threat of sorcery had been eliminated with the extermination of the witch who concocted it, the chief complaint from Habib was about his runaway wife and this had not been resolved by the time I concluded my fieldwork. This did not stop Habib from frequenting MB's ritual healing hoping for a solution. He at the same time used the information from the courtroom sessions to try to locate his wife from the places she mentioned. Other clients like the medical doctor mentioned in this chapter frequented MB's rituals for some time before resorting to visit another healer who would solve the problem in the manner that he wanted.

Clients visiting MB provided interesting tales of their vicissitudes and the different ways in which MB was wrestling with those who planned to afflict them. A common scenario at MB was that of repeated X-ray sessions with extermination of one set of witches, only for

another set to emerge and another cycle enunciated. This cycle of events, increased rather than diminish the client's confidence in MB's powers as an ally in their fight with the forces of affliction. Rather than criticize MB's inability, clients attributed the failure of their rituals to achieve the results within MB's stated time to other reasons. Habib, for instance, attributed his wife's failure to come back home to her deceitful character: 'My wife was always like that, She is very crafty, even while we lived together, she behaved like this, It is just that I do not seem to have realized it then'. The medical doctor on his part attributed his son's relapses in mental illness to MB's refusal rather than inability to exterminate the people who consulted the witches to afflict him. He argued, 'I know MB has the powers as he burns people in that court of his. But I wonder why he does not want to 'stop' (meant to say kill) the people who contact witches to harm my son. That was why I contacted another healer who paralyzed their efforts'. Other clients rationalized that their witches were really tough, thus requiring MB to pray some more and burn them with even more firewood to control their affliction.

An important point regarding efficacy was raised by Cannon (1942) when he stated that while reading narratives on voodoo death, one must question whether those who testified to its reality exercised good critical judgement. Natural causes of death such as food poisoning must be eliminated for one to declare a death to be caused by supernatural forces. Obeyesekere (1975) takes this point further and argues that at times complex sociological factors may intervene at the local level and resolve the crisis that instigated the client's action. Police might intervene and resolve the case, stolen property might be recovered, husbands might return home of their own volition etc. Further, once a client has contacted the healer or visited a shrine, returned home and immersed themselves in the normal lives, he may give less and less attention to the problem. Moreover in a village life, people are often beset by personal vicissitudes such as crop failure, illnesses, deaths, business failures, accidents etc. In such a scenario, a client is likely to interpret any personal misfortune that befell his enemy or a member of his family not as coincidence but as a justified intervention of the ritual process (ibid). In many of the X-rays conducted by MB, clients did not know the witches who were contacted to ensorcel them, in which case the mere performance of the burning rituals followed by an accompanying confession at the judgement stage of their death convinced clients that their aggression against their enemies had borne fruit. The Kirwas explained that one of the people who were involved in the murder of their father had died after an altercation with his own father. The other thugs involved in the mission to kill

their father were unknown to them, but since they confessed that they were dead, the Kirwas believed them to be dead, just like the one they knew. In the case of Mbago, the police intervened and arrested the thugs after he provided them with the list of suspects obtained from MB's ritual. Might it have been possible for the police to intervene and arrest the thugs who planned to attack him even without his supply of this evidence? And might Oruko's concentration on his studies and family after the performance of the rituals at MB helped him resolve both his sexual and academic problems?

Most of the clients I talked to however were unequivocal, that their life circumstances changed for the better only after the intervention of MB. It was not expected that they would claim otherwise, for to do so would be to question their decisions to consult and participate in the rituals in the first place. Another possibility for the bias in their appraisal of MB's rituals was my position as a student allowed to document the rituals by MB and who held lengthy discussions with MB long after the clients had left for their homes or before they arrived at MB's. Many clients would not want to criticize MB or claim that his rituals were ineffective to someone they perceived to be his ally.

### **7.5. Conclusion.**

The question of efficacy is at the centre of all healing practices especially in plural medical settings where clients and patients select and reselect amongst healing options based on this criterion, *inter alia*. In this chapter I have argued that the efficacy of ritual healing in Africa especially for MB lay in his ability to construct a narrative that in the opinion of the client captured the range of his affliction. This narrative was however constructed in collaboration with the client. MB used his unique divination technique to construct this narrative. In doing so, he worked closely with the clients who clarified the divination outcomes at every stage of MB's complex divination procedures. The narrative created by MB was closely related to the client's cosmology that espoused a comprehensive aetiology where afflictions are believed to stem from multiple sources and their amelioration involved intervention in each of the aspects of the affliction. The narrative unravelled in a manner that it more or less prescribed its amelioration. Where witches were deemed to have afflicted a client, healing involved their extermination. Murders were equally exterminated while debtors were ordered to repay. Many of the clients visiting MB however already had an idea about the source of their affliction and as Comaroff (1980) stated healers were not usually concerned about the reality of the illness. Clients' experiences of it were sufficient to indicate its

existence. Many of the narratives recounted by clients were circular detailing a host of conditions and occurrences that heightened their feeling of insecurity, lack of control and in many instances physical malfunctioning. The healer then tapped into the clients' cosmology to supply the patient with a conceptual framework for making sense out of this chaotic and mysterious feeling and suggest a plan of action. In this way, the client gained a sense of direction and resolved his inner conflicts. In this scenario, the healer's most important task was to unravel the entire nature and source(s) of this affliction and place it in a self consistent conceptual system that allowed them to unfold freely leading to their resolution. The cosmological repertoire of a culture provided healers and their clients with the metaphors that allow them to allocate responsibility for affliction. The unravelling process involved the naming of sources of affliction through divination, a process that was believed to be guided by supernatural forces outside of the healer.

As the process that determines the healing strategy divination or naming in whatever form it takes is the crucial aspect of the healing process, and the efficacy of the healing practice is to be judged based on the accuracy and subsequent acceptance by the clients of the narrative created by the healer. The creation of this narrative was, however, a joint enterprise between the healer and the client and its authenticity was never doubted. At the same time one must remember that healers currently operated in a plural medical system where alternative explanations and courses of recourse in the event of an affliction varied. Clients at times appeared to be more interested in finding out the source of their affliction then determining the course of action to take, which may or may not involve ritual. Naming the source of affliction was therefore an end in itself for the clients. It is for this reason that scholars like Frank (1973) stated that naming was the first step towards controlling a problem. Other clients, having known the source of their affliction, or eliminated their suspicions, may choose to do nothing or to engage other alternative strategies - biomedicine or other agents of social control like the police, the courts etc.

The stated objective of divination was to create a narrative that named or unravelled the source(s) of affliction. Since after naming the sources of affliction healers were no longer capable of controlling the action of their clients, the efficacy of their rituals could be adjudged solely on the provision of an acceptable narrative that leads to the resolution of the clients' problems – whatever the means. A mother who has lost her two sons mysteriously, whose husband has eloped with another woman, whose daughter in-law absconded and

whose business fortunes tapered was definitely looking for a scheme that can supply meaning - a reason for all these occurrences. This meaning is achieved through an elaborate naming process where the healer (MB) unveils a credible explanation that involves the action of witches, jealous neighbours and in-laws and a conniving admirer to her husband. MB supplied a vivid explanation to her affliction and in a way that he, with the cooperation of the client, could resolve them. Witches and murderers were exterminated, debtors cajoled into agreeing to repay their debts, runaway spouses ordered to return home, those who consulted witches were ordered to desist from the practice etc. MB offered to reconcile family members who were conflicting but only in circumstances where the client wished to be reconciled. In the course of my fieldwork I did not come across any client who wished to be reconciled with those who afflicted them. Further MB was well aware of his limitations in arbitration especially in situation where one of the parties involved in the disputes did not recognize his powers. He instead offered to paralyze the ability of those who afflicted his clients from further harming them. In this case the argument that ritual healing worked by restoring or reorganizing social relations was inadequate in the explanation of the efficacy of rituals. Clearly, social relations played a great part in explanations of the course of affliction as exemplified by MB's confession system. In fact MB's system would not work if social relations were not at the heart of affliction as confessions can only come from social beings. But in societies experiencing rapid social transformation, with plural means of resolving social and medical problems, once the source of affliction had been identified, clients were free to choose among the available alternatives for resolution including a combination of several means. This left the naming process as the only mechanism that was fully controlled by the healers and the ways in which the efficacy of their rituals can be assessed.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion.

In this dissertation I have focused on ritual healing in Africa as one of the areas in which the project of modernity appears to derail from the prophesies and predictions of the eighteenth century enlightenment philosophers and their twentieth century elaborators whose faith in the emancipatory potential of human reason led to their believe that the rationalization of social and cultural life resulting from the spread of scientific knowledge would lead to the eradication of traditional superstitions prejudices and errors. But modernity still remains problematic term both theoretically and empirically. Scholars of modernity in Africa (See Geschiere et al. 2008) observe that before the rise of modernization theory in the 1950s the classical social thinkers to whom modernity is attributed (Karl max, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber) cherished a far more ambivalent understanding of modernity. The ambivalence prevalent in this vision of modernity was however erased by Talcott Parson whose 'The social system (1951) fed and epitomized the optimism of post 1945 modernization theory. (Geschiere et al. 2008). Parson produced a seemingly dichotomous set of variables that could be used to juxtapose two ideal typical societies: a 'modern' one characterized by universalism, functional specificity, achievement-orientation and collective-orientation, and a 'traditional type combining particularism, diffuseness, ascription and self orientation. Such dichotomies of societies based on reason, law and merit and societies versus communities determined by religion custom and birth recurred at the time in many guises: literate versus oral communication, constitutional versus personal politics, free versus fettered life – all varieties boiling to an ideological distinction of the modern goal towards which all people should evolve away from the traditional bondage in which everybody except the west was still enmeshed (ibid). Political scientists turned to Africa for empirical support for such theories where they argued that traditional or tribal systems, characteristically made up of hereditary chiefs, kinship relations and personal and diffuse authority could be modernized by political institutional transfer of the secular authority thought to be characteristic of European parliamentary models (Geschiere et al. 2008, Apter, 1965). This conception rested on and legitimized the technocratic conception of development as a transfer of appropriate political technology (Ulrich 1992: 275, also cited in Geschiere et.al 2008). It adopted much of its inspiration from British colonial development (Esteva 1992: 10) in the context in which these theorists did their research often in collaboration with British colonial administrators

(Almond and Coleman 1960, Apter 1965, Coleman 1958). Colonial administrators and modernization theorists basically agreed on the explanation of the emergence of modernity in these circumstances: it either happened through colonial conquest and subsequent technological transfer or through an (usually elite) African individual's decision to become modern (CF. Eyoh 2009).

As a British colony, the influence of this theoretical and empirical orientation was evidenced in both colonial and post colonial era in Kenya. As I observed in chapter 1, Kenya was referred to as the 'Laboratory of development' in which key assumptions of the modernization theory were tested and refined. The task of shepherding socioeconomic change in newly independent East African nation was put in the hands of the Pro – Western Kenyatta government assisted by the likes of Tom Mboya and Julius Kiano, all who were not only trained in the west but are described in the literature as being full of confidence of the technical promises of Modernity (Speich 2009: 453). The technocratic perspective was taken up by many leading African intellectual while Kenya's Mboya sent students to several US universities who later returned and formed the basis for a growing network of growing relations between the US and Kenya. Kenya and many other newly independent countries of the 1950s and 1960s thus firmly based their domestic policies on the promise of modern science and technology.

With respect to health, independent Kenya's policy very much mirrored the biomedical critique of traditional healing where health development was synonymous with the training of biomedical personnel and the development and spread of biomedical facilities (Wassunna-1997). Not so much was said or done both in policy and practices to promote traditional healing even though national development plans haphazardly mentioned plans to improve traditional medicine. An example of this is casual approach to the development of a traditional medicine strategy is discernible in the fact that the 1978– 1983 Government development plan which came in the aftermath of the WHO's exhortation to third world countries to resort to traditional medicine included plans to develop a traditional medicine action plan in Kenya. The next five year's development plan (1983-1988) does not include a follow up to this plan even though a traditional medicine unit with a pharmacology emphasis was established in the Kenya medical research institute. Another follow up step to this came over 20 years later in the 2001-2002 attempts at the drafting of a traditional

medicine bill but even that appears to have stalled since the bill has never been debated in Kenya's parliament close to 10 years after its drafting.

Even though ritual healing suffered some of its worst forms of ignorance in the post colonial era, the beginning of this process lay in the colonial era. Okoth-Owiro (1994) traced it to the policy of 'legal abstention' whose aim was to deny indigenous medicine the legal, administrative, and institutional resources that were needed for its proper development. It is however important to observe that when compared to the Belgian Zaire as described by Janzen (1978) Kenya's colonial history could be regarded as benign in its treatment of traditional healing practices. The Belgian authorities in concert with Christian missions launched concerted attacks against traditional healing practices where its practitioners were arrested, detained or even sentenced to death while their paraphernalia were burnt in public. Out of fear of insubordination, the Belgian authorities sentenced, Kimbangu, one of the most celebrated prophets, to death and then imprisoned him for life in Katanga where he died in 1952. In Kenya, however, the passing of the Witchcrafts Act was the only decisive action taken that influenced the practice of traditional healers while the colonial authorities' attitudes varied. Some colonial administrators favored certain aspects of traditional healing such as administration of oaths to catch thieves or obtain confessions from law breakers. Good (1987) for instance raises attention to entries by the Kitui District commissioner in 1952 who observed a person who had taken an oath die within three days and remarked, 'I cannot help believing that there is some supernatural power we know nothing about'. While some colonial administrators were impressed by certain aspects of traditional healing, others did not hesitate in evoking its statutes and deporting suspected 'witches' merely from the evidence of the accuser (ibid)

The post colonial government in Kenya repealed the witchcraft's Act without changing its fundamental character in its treatment of ritual healing in Kenya where both the witchcraft and key aspects of ritual healing are outlawed. The ambivalent treatment given to ritual healers still persists as was evident in the on and off licensing, and arrests of Kajiwe, the famous ritual healer at the Kenyan coast (Ciekawy 1998, Brantley 1979). A more recent incident is that of Achiba Bakari whose ritual healing, christened by the press as 'ghost bursting' received popular national coverage in 2003 leading to his arrest. (Sci & Dev. Net. 2004). He was however later released for lack of evidence.



Main stream churches in Kenya have continued their criticism of ritual healing while the schooling system, urbanization and migration continue to dislocate and disintegrate people from their communal settings in which ritual healing had its control. All these developments in Africa are rightly or wrongly attributed to Modernity's hyperreal constructions of Europe and the West (Geschiere et al. 2008).

For sure people in Africa and in my field site have an idea what it means to be 'modern' and as Gaonkar (2001) elaborated, perceive it as a lure, something they rise to meet, negotiate and appropriate in their own version but reject these neat delineation of it as a package. Notions of being or becoming modern (whatever that may be) continue to wield tremendous power in every day African lives with the people having varying ideas of whether and how it can be achieved, or lost. (Geschiere et al. 2008, Gaonkar 2001, Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). There is thus the need to unpack and disaggregate this modern package and study alternative trajectories of its elements to see how they are creatively reconstructed in everyday life in Africa.

In this dissertation, I started by concerning myself with the topic of ritual healing as a health seeking strategy that persisted and even flourished in Africa in spite of the spread of biomedicine. But as soon as I stepped in the field, I realized that my concentration on ritual purely as a health seeking strategy would be to misunderstand and therefore misrepresent the entire scope of ritual healing in Africa. For their, in front of me both in person and in advertisement boards were ritual healing clients with needs and demands of bewildering complexity. From Arnold who needed assistance with his job interview, Miriam who needed to obtain money she had lent her friend, Karama and his swollen stomach, the Kirwa's bid to unravel the cause of their father's death. Hilda's fight with her co-wives, to Elsie attempt to force her father pay her college fees, the cases were as varied as they were unpredictable. The ritual healers on the other hand were consulted specifically for this reason: that they handled what might be regarded as health problems in the strict sense of the word as well as other social economic problems brought to their attention by their clients. The term affliction then became appropriate as opposed to illness or disease. This is as well in line with the characterization of ritual healers as the friends, pastors, psychiatrists, of traditional African communities and villages who symbolized the hopes of society, hopes of good health, protection and security from evil forces, prosperity and good fortune, and ritual cleansing when impurities have been contracted (Mbiti, 1969:171). In spite of its

critiques, ritual healing persisted as it maintained this expanded view of health that does not separate physical, psychological social, moral and economic aspects of a client's problem. Recent studies of ritual healing in Africa (eg, Geschiere 1997, Moore and Sanders 2001, Comaroff and Comaroff 1999) all agree that modernity as a whole and the spread of biomedicine in particular have not succeeded in effacing ritual healing. While agreeing with these studies my dissertation further argues that the circumstances under which modernity and its influences unfolded in Africa necessarily led to the escalation of ritual in its many guises. Moore and Sanders (2001) indicate that there is a general feeling throughout Africa that witchcraft is increasing. But can the spread of biomedicine efface ritual healing? In the African experience the logic in the constitution and consequent organization of the two systems make it impossible for one to efface the other which has led to some kind of 'peaceful' coexistence between the two. The introduction of biomedicine by colonial authorities and Christian missions confronted Africans with a reality and construction of knowledge very different from their own. There are fundamental differences in the way traditional African medicine and biomedicine conceived the relationship between physical and social being, the cause and meaning of affliction and the logic of healing (Comaroff 1980). Biomedicine was predicated on western cultural categories that separated religion from healing and therefore violated the essential African identification of religion with the practical ordering of physical, social spiritual and natural relations. This in turn threatened healing as the primary context in which this integrity is achieved.

Given its foundation in a cosmology which envisaged a world founded on material rather than social relations and the predicament of a person as depending upon his own initiative rather than his location in a social environment, biomedicine embodied a series of axioms that contradicted African culture (ibid). Such contradictions did not however lead to the rejection of biomedicine in its totality. As Gaonkar rightly observed, in the face of modernity, one does not turn inward, one does not retreat, one moves sideways, one moves forward (2001:22). But are the practices of biomedicine and the entire corpus of traditional healing completely opposed? A critical analysis of both ritual healing in Africa and the practice of biomedicine and the expectation that the spread of biomedicine would efface ritual healing is more of an ideological power game, a narrative relating to a tale of science (modernity) superseding myth (Seidman 1996). Post colonial theorists rejecting modernity's prophesy of the death of superstition at the footsteps of the spread of science have argued that the dichotomy between science and non science was created by the west as a discourse

to legitimate the imposition of power and that there is no clear point at which the distinction between science and non science can be drawn (ibid: 699 – 720). Sax (2010) has argued that ‘superstition’ (Ritual) and ‘modernity’ (science) are not natural categories but relational entities mutually defined and strategically evoked. In their characterization of Modernity in Africa as genealogies, Geschiere et al advocate for a relational concept of modernity that identify its historical origins in Europe real as well as hyperreal (in the sense of illusory yet effective) but also in Africa, or even better, in Europe’s relationship with Africa (2008: 5). Such an approach combines the awareness and empirical study of hyperreal modernity in Africa with critical research into local forms of globalization, extraversion and appropriation by inhabitants of the African continent and its ‘others’ and the creative recombination of elements of modern package with its local or global alternatives (Ibid).

This brings me back to the point of departure of this study mainly, the persistence of ritual healing in spite of the spread of modernity. Moore and Sanders (2001) already reminded us that we can only expect ritual healing and such other enchantments to wither if we think in narrow teleological terms of progress development and modernization. As I observed in the introduction, the comprehensive etiology of traditional African healing rejected the separation of physiological, sociological and spiritual dimensions of an illnesses preferring to assess all of them in the event of an illness and determining what aspects were prominent in any episode. Biomedicine has been characterized as giving prominence to the physiological dimensions of illnesses. Medical knowledge in this paradigm is constituted through its depiction of empirical biological reality with disease entities perceived to be resident in the physical body; whether grossly apparent as the wildly reproducing cells of cancer or subtly evident through their effects, as in the disordered thoughts of schizophrenia or major depression (Good 1994, Young 1976). Traditional ritual healing acknowledges such notions without necessarily excluding the social and spiritual dimensions. As the case of Mr. Karama in chapter 6 eloquently showed, Traditional African medicine in which ritual healing is prominent was an open system (Haram 1991). In its encounter with biomedicine, it considers biomedicine to be just one of the varieties of medicine and is not limited by the paradigm of biomedicine that excludes ritual. The healers and their clients in this case do not consider the new and different explanations and treatments they encounter as providing new knowledge that is more valid than their own. This is evident from most of the cases reproduced in the study. Although Karama’s sister was a retired biomedical nurse who initially chose to approach her brother’s illness as a case for physical intervention in a

biomedical facility, a simple call from her cousin raised her suspicion to the involvement of sorcery and the next courses of action in Karama's case adopted a combination of physical and supernatural interventions. Arnold's case in chapter 6 exemplifies a young man who adopts fully rational steps in the search of a job but the process incorporates a ritual angle as soon as his father's ritual consultation indicates that he could be a victim of ritual manipulation.

An interesting angle to ritual healing especially with respect of *Mtumishi* Barasa's rituals is the influence of Christianity which spread to Africa to the same time as colonialism and modernity. The Christian mission provided a three pronged critique to ritual healing by establishing schools, hospitals and churches. But in view of the lack of a distinction between physical and spiritual aspects to health within the African cosmology, many churches described as syncretistic (Comaroff 1981) emerged and provided their own interpretation to the bible and incorporating spiritual healing as part of their ministries (LeBeau 2003, Meyer 1998, Comaroff 1981). *Mtumishi* Barasa's church is one such denomination and his popularity derived primarily on his abilities to bridge the discontinuities between western and indigenous cultural principles. Missionaries who were in the forefront of the spread of biomedicine, western education religion in the colonial unwittingly provided traditional healers with a lifeline by their continued perpetuation of the dichotomy between physical and spiritual health.

But if the expanded etiology provided for the persistence of ritual healing, due to its ascription to sources of affliction ignored by biomedicine, the expanded range of what were considered to be afflictions and therefore brought to the attention of the ritual healer provided yet another reason why ritual healing survived the modernist critique. There is an obvious link between etiology and range of affliction. From my research with MB and other healers in Western Kenya, it is obvious that the range of afflictions brought to the attention of healers is wide and heavily linked to the pursuit of health and of prosperity. This provides then a clear link to modernity, which is generally understood in Africa to encompass an upward movement towards a better life. In most of the ethnographies that I have reproduced in this dissertation the notion of witchcraft explained by many through euphemisms such as being 'blocked', 'remote controlled', or 'under the spell of African chemistry' recurred in practically all tales of affliction. As is explained by Moore and Sanders (2001) popular beliefs about witchcraft were seen as a form of political action from below where witchcraft

accusations were used as leveling mechanisms to prevent social inequalities to develop beyond the point of community control. Handloff (1982) on the other hand attributed the use of witchcraft especially the type linked to economic progress to socially induced conflict between loyalty and aggressive competition for scarce resources including wives. Majority of the charms reproduced at MB's charm retrieval sessions contained money, soil and other items such as vehicle and bicycle parts, grains from different crops etc associated with the quest for economic progress. In the transcripts of the interviews that I reproduced throughout the chapters, the question of economic progress occupied the central position in all accusations and explanations of misfortune. In the case of Stephen and Ramos that was discussed in chapter 2, their death is attributed to jealousy from their stepmother and one of their neighbors. The extended case of Mbago and her children discussed in Chapter 4 (pg 162 ff) shows how disputes over land and property ownership are central to witchcraft accusations that afflict entire households. This conflict extends to Mbago's children where one of his son's education and employment prospects are presumed to be affected leading to his consultation with MB as is explained in chapter 6. Most of the comments by ritual healing clients in the course of the charms' retrieval and their opening up showed their conviction that witchcraft was solely to blame for their blocked progress. While MB unpacked a charm that contained grains of maize, one of the congregants explained to the client thus, 'Mum, even if you planted maize 500 times, you would not harvest it. They have blocked all your maize' (cf pg 253). In the same session another charm contained examination papers and one of the congregants commented, 'There are people who just walk around and declare: 'mmh, nobody in compound X will go to school' (see pg 254). In her attempt to obtain justice in her struggle over land ownership Mary Cherop enlisted the services of MB to counter her co-wife's alleged manipulation of the court process through witchcraft (pg 285 ff).

Observing the range of problems that clients bring to the attention of the healer exposes what Geschere et al (2008) and Fergusson 1999) refer to as the struggle with an unwarranted optimism of the post war movements of decolonization and the promises of modernity and the building of new nations. The promises of modernity have not arrived for Africa and at the individual level, every day in Africa is increasingly marked by a growing gap between people's dream for a better life and their actual disconnection from the structures from which the materialization of this dream depends. Amidst these struggles is the conviction among the populations that the supernatural realm plays a crucial part in the empowering

and disempowering people's quest for modernity's promises. Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) observe that although witchcraft exemplified in the form of draining the vitality diffused in the organs of others to enhance one's own vitality have been part of indigenous ritual repertoire, these practices appear to have been relatively rare in the past. Presently many Africans attempt access to modern life through increasingly transnational forms of seeking wealth while others, who are the majority, seem to feel trapped in downward spiral of deprivation and despair (Fergusson 1999, Weiss 2004). Witchcraft is implicated both as a source of power from below (as a leveling mechanism motivated by jealousy or by a desire to prevent obscene social inequalities) as well as a way of enhancing and protecting the accumulation of political and economic power at all levels, from the very rich whose source of wealth is attributed to the deployment of occult powers to the lowly vegetable vendor at the local market whose failure to progress is attributed to witchcraft activities of her competitor.

As modernity and modernization have in the 21<sup>st</sup> century lost all their promise and optimism of the 1960 and 1970s, the populations have equally lost faith in and become skeptical about its postulations and conditions for progress. Modernity according to Geschiere et al. (2001) often promised solution but offered embarrassment instead. Clearly my informants did not find any contradictions between ritual healing and modernity and do not consider themselves as non modern or superstitious. Their aspirations to modernity can be seen in their embracing of institutions and processes associated with modernity such as state bureaucracy, schools, hospitals, churches, universities and the policies and practices instigated by such institutions. But if modernity is to be understood in Foucaultian (1972) terms as an attitude, a mode of relating to contemporary reality, then Africans might be seen as looking at the promises of modernity as embraced by the 1960s to the 1990s belief in education and bureaucratic advancement with scorn which has led them to chat their own genealogy of modernity that shares the same aspirations, material standards and social institutions with the west without necessarily sharing the means towards these achievements. In this case, ritual is perceived as modern and their use of such terms as 'remote control' or 'African chemistry' attests the fact that they seek rituals equivalents to processes and technologies of the modern. Comaroff and Comaroff are therefore right when they propose the bringing of ritual and modernity together in a methodological counterpoint since as they observe, modernity carried its own historical irony, its own cosmic oxymoron (1993: xxx). In view of modernity's failures, ritual is seen as a perfect technology to bridge

the gaps. Where modern education fails to provide employment for the likes of Arnold, and biomedicine does not provide solution to doctor's son's mental illness, ritual healing steps as an effective technique and further reinforces the notion that ritual and modernity are not mutually opposed.

The spread of science should not necessarily lead to the eradication of ritual in its many forms. Even in the West where science supposedly originated, one comes across many lottery shops alongside normal business shops while the emergence of new evangelical churches that dot the African continents with promises of prosperity have their headquarters in Europe and the Americas (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). Sitting in Germany and writing this dissertation at the time of the Football world cup championships in South Africa, one cannot fail to recognize the use and influence of Octopus Paul the Oracle who lived in sea life centre in Oberhausen Germany. Octopus Paul was used as an oracle to predict the results of the football matches involving the German football team by presenting him with two boxes containing food in the form of a mussel, each box marked on the outside with the flag of the football team in the upcoming match. The oracle would decide the winner of the match by selecting the mussel from one of the boxes. By this method Octopus Paul not only correctly predicted the results of all the seven matches involving Germany but also the results of the final match involving Spain and the Netherlands. Evans-Pritchard's Azande and their poison oracles where they administered poison to chicken whose subsequent behavior provided a response to any matter under investigation would find very good companions amongst 21<sup>st</sup> century Germans.

In this dissertation I have not only concerned myself with the reasons why ritual persisted but also the adaptations it has to make to meet the needs of its clients. Amidst this rapid societal transformation, ritual has not only maintained its relevance but has also adapted its techniques to fit with the changed times and circumstances of its clients. The alignment of ritual with the new religion and in MB's case the Christian religion is obvious. While one may attribute this alignment to the need to be relevant to Christians and non Christians alike, the conscious incorporation of the bible in his healing techniques is an expression of discontent with the type of religious doctrine taught by the missionaries. Missionaries, as Ranger (1981) remarked, devoted a great deal of their time and energies to refuting African Christian ideas about the healing powers of sacraments and the miracles of living holy men. This was a deliberate move not based on a biblical prohibition (since spiritual healing was

much more employed in England right up to the 1960s than it was in Africa) but on the belief that the young African church was not yet ready for the introduction of the concept of spiritual healing. Apart from feeling the thirst for spiritual healing left by the hard-line insistence on exclusively material and scientific medicine aligning ritual healing with Christianity has led to the equation and renaming of African healing with prayer sessions, while ritual healers have adopted new titles such as *Mtumishi* (Servant). While seeking to distance himself from his father by adoption of Christian titles and techniques, MB speaks the language of modernity, a desire to distinguish between traditional way of doing things and a modern way of doing things. Apart from appealing to a wider clientele, MB's renaming of his ritual healing as prayers enables him to escape legal scrutiny that his healing ritual would attract.

But perhaps the most crucial aspect that ritual healing practice is confronted with is the changed circumstances of its clients and forms of social organization that emerge. Geschiere et al. (2008) mention some of the different dimensions of modernization process as commodification and monetization, institution of constitutional governments, representative democracy, taxation, reconfiguring of personal relationships towards the bourgeois nuclear family and or the individual, introduction of institutions such as schools, hospitals, churches, modern sector employment and associated urbanization. The introduction of modern hospitals with their standards of practice, professionalism, division of labour and business attitude has had a strong influence on the practice of ritual healing. Ritual healers find themselves under pressure to confront the criticisms labeled over it directly by biomedicine but also by the fact that ritual healing clients are equally biomedical clients whose experiences with biomedicine influence their experience and expectation for ritual healing. One aspect of ritual healing that becomes directly affected is the tying of payment for ritual healing to the traditional group centered morality and to the non cash economy. Ritual healing clients or relatives gave prestations after successful healing. Transport and communication has widened the client base of traditional healing beyond the traditional society as ritual healing clients traverse large distances in search of healing. Ritual healers have adopted their healing practices along biomedical terms as a business or a public service. In this case as MB's practice shows, a registration fee is charged before the commencement of healing while each of the different ritual healing procedures attracted a fee that was always paid up front.



The industrial organization of time associated with employment in formal sectors and the urbanization process mean that ritual healing clients may not have time for elaborate day long ritual healing practices as well as rituals that span over a long duration. MB's elaborate healing rituals involved several sessions, (at least 4) which would make it difficult and expensive for clients originating from far off distances. MB's healing exemplifies the ways in which ritual healing deals with such changes through the compression of time and space by reducing the duration between one ritual stage and the next one. Ritual healing clients are afforded a choice between rituals protracted over weeks or months and rituals conducted in the space of one or two weekends. An interesting feature with MB's rituals was the fact that he never skipped any of the ritual procedures. Instead he fast tracked the ritual process and clients whose rituals were fast tracked paid more for them. Availability of resources affected ritual practice in the same way as it affected other processes in clients' life circumstances. With modernization, affluent members of the society (considered more modern) could for instance afford more improved and fast technological devices such as fast cars, computers, mobile phones etc as well as patronizing expensive biomedical facilities with their personal doctors and reduced waiting time for services. MB's ritual healing similarly reproduced this set up where rich clients paid more and had their ritual shortened, conducted in private and occasionally causing the postponement of communal rituals. MB for instance never set the bible on fire twice in a day. In the event that a private client whose ritual was conducted early in the morning ended with the burning of the bible, communal clients whose rituals would be conducted in the course of the day would have their judgment sessions postponed to another day. Ritual by representation, where one family member represented the rest is yet another modification. In this case, family members alternated in their visits to the healer or allowed one of them who resided near the healer to attend the rituals. The case of the Kirwa and Mbago showed how healing by representation worked at MB's rituals.

The introduction of biomedicine and its organization and specializations of space, personnel and functions have obviously influenced the practice of ritual healing as is exemplified by MB's adoption of similar spaces and practices. There is no doubt that biomedicine is considered to be a highly professional service and MB's adoption of practices and procedures similar to those in Biomedicine strikes one as an attempt to professionalize his rituals. The use of biomedical terms such as X-ray and adoption of what is considered by both the healer and his clients as objective and self reinforcing knowledge production procedures – the bible talking in the absence of the healer – authenticated the divination

process and legitimized his healing. An X-ray is considered an objective assessment of an ailing body organ available to the eye of any trained health care personnel. MB's X-ray on the other hand was an open forum whose evidence was clear to the ears of all present in the X-ray room. The notion of objectivity and reliability of evidence in MB's healing was reinforced by the fact that subsequent X-ray sessions produced the same evidence. MB's X-ray sessions sort to simulate processes in biomedical laboratories whose evidence Latour observed was 'even more reliable than ordinary mortals, to whom will is attributed but who lack the capacity to indicate phenomena in a reliable way (1993: 23). MB explained this objectivity when he says that he allowed the clients to listen for themselves as opposed to him telling them that their afflictions stemmed from their right door or left door neighbors'. Further, rather than pit his clients and their offenders in a verbal altercation, MB preferred to 'snatch the souls of the people afflicting his clients and cause them to speak in his courtroom. In his opinion, the souls of the offenders, which he referred to by the English phrase as 'inner person', were more truthful than the real people. MB did not however have any concrete explanation about what he meant by the 'inner person'.

Record keeping of ritual healing is necessitated by the fact that MB received a large number of clients while the division and specialization of roles between the healer, the secretary, is a replication of biomedical practice. One might however argue that ritual healers traditionally had helpers who performed different tasks for them. Turner (1968), for instance, eloquently describes healing rituals where healers were accompanied by assistants who collected herbs and prepared concoctions under their supervisions. Good (1987) on the other hand lists other specialists such as the drummer and soloist who performed different tasks during rituals performed by ritual specialists. Although MB explains that his ritual healing was inspired by God, its close resemblance to biomedical space organizations, and division of roles with their associated hierarchy resonate more with what Eisentadt (2007) refers to as the specialization of roles that are assumed to be characteristic of modern societies.

Whyte observed that as part of their professionalization African healers compared themselves to western style health workers adopting some of the same forms of organization, establishing a code of ethics, distancing themselves from superstition and emphasizing their herbal medicaments which can be tested in pharmacological laboratories (1989:295). This might be true for a certain category of herbalists whose desire to be included in the formal health care sectors has forced them to submit their herbs to national

laboratories in Kenya where their efficacy has been determined leading to their mass production. A number of prominent herbalists (such as Dr. Jack Githae) and herbal firms (such as Kamirithu herbs) are now common in Kenya with their herbs packaged in capsules and bottles while their suppliers dress in white lab coats. The strength of ritual healing and ritual healers such as MB however derived from their possession and their clients convictions that they possessed supernatural powers. Professionalization such as the one described by Whyte (1989) does not apply to them. Ritual healing as Peek (1991) observed was controlled by powers outside the healer. And it is especially here that ritual healing derives its strongest criticisms as superstitious and based on non or even anti-scientific theories. Tambiah (1990) traces the characterization of ritual healing as non scientific to E.B Tylor who saw the magical and the occult as superstitious and as having no basis in truth in terms of a positivistic conception of science. Their practice was therefore attributed to wrongheadedness and conservatism on the part of humanity. According to Tylor then, magic and occult practices were a false art and the magician, sorcerer and diviner hypocritically and falsely exploited a credulous public. Peek (1991) observed that the European tradition characterized the diviner as a charismatic charlatan who coerced others through clever manipulation of esoteric knowledge granted inappropriate worth by a credulous and anxiety public. A number of British anthropologists treated divination with derision. Commenting about a diviner Lienhardt wrote, 'When he divined for me I deliberately misled him (1970:69). Beattie on the other hand commented that the diviner was well aware that 'he was simply putting an act' (1967: 64). Fortes characterized divination as 'the game' (1966:421) while Middleton referred to the speech of a spirit possesses diviner as 'gibberish' (1971:271). The story of Quesalid as retold by Boas and Levi-Straus was perhaps the most eloquent attempt to expose ritual healers as charlatans who misled their clients by hiding a piece of meat in their mouth and spitting it out as evidence of the foreign object causing affliction. This narrative influenced the study of shamanism even for a long time not withstanding Whiteheads (2000) later exposition of Quesalid as George Hunt and Boas as academically disingenuous with this account.

### **My status as a native Anthropologist.**

Peek's (1991) edited volume sets as its main objective the desire to reverse this negative portrayal of divination by European, American Anthropologists and theologians. In this study I concentrated on the entire realm of ritual healing, to which divination was a critical component and devoted lots of space to the description of MB's X-ray as a divination

sessions. This task was not without its complications if not contradictions. As a student of anthropology, I was trained to be skeptical, to have a questioning scientific eye and interrogate my sources of information since as anthropologists we have always advocated for long term research methods to discover the real picture far from what our informants reported to us. In the case of ritual healing, this skepticism is more heightened by the position taken by previous studies as cited above. In the course of my fieldwork, I was not only concerned with a detailed observation of the ritual but as set out in my objectives, discovering how ritual really worked. Above all however, I was concerned by the fact that I would be presenting my research to a scientific audience that still viewed ritual as irrational behavior. The X-ray process as it turned out was the most fascinating aspect of MB's ritual healing. But how would I explain and convince a scientific audience that a bible could talk and tell people their problems? This sounded scandalous. I spent many days in and around the X-ray room hoping to discover some kind of device, may be some speaker or wires connecting to a speaker that someone possibly spoke through. I held numerous discussions with MB and his clients hoping to discover the source of the voices. MB recounted his abilities to arrest people's voices and cause them to speak to his room every time we discussed the X-ray process. Was someone sitting somewhere and speaking through a speaker to the audience? If this was the case, then a second question begged for an answer. Assuming that someone was speaking through a speaker, how were they able to reconstruct situations involving over 20 clients (at times over 50), each with their between 4-12 VFBs in one sitting? In the course of my research, I formed the opinion that, if someone spoke through a speaker, that person could not be MB or his secretary. On several occasions I held discussions with MB, or he supervised the repair of one of his cars as the X-ray sessions continued. When I sort clarifications regarding the actual mechanisms of the X-ray, MB explained that he was not aware since the powers came from God and he only acted as 'a pipe that delivered God's healing'. As a native anthropologist both MB and his clients assumed that I had a fairly good idea about witchcraft and ritual healing and would definitely have a positive, if not sympathetic attitude to the practice. How then could I ask questions that would show that I did not trust the explanations provided to me by MB without antagonizing myself with him and his clients? As a native anthropologist, one is not able to ask questions that may be considered as naïve and stupid by the natives. On the other hand how could I explain the talking bible to a scientific audience?

The first time I presented my ethnography to my doctoral colleagues, the question that always came up was, 'so did you eventually discover the sources of the voices? But in the search of alternative answers from what MB and his clients offered, would I not be drifting into the pitfalls of skeptics who viewed ritual healers as charlatans and therefore sort to either discover their trickery or provide alternative explanations to their healing? Such questions did not just concern the X-rays sessions. Mr. Karama's cleansing described in chapter 5 was one of the most fascinating cases that I observed at MB's. At the end of the cleansing, MB opened the bible to expose the bloody mass in the middle of Hosea chapter 5. One could ask, but had not MB placed the same in the middle of the bible just as Boas' Quesalid did? But could I especially as a native anthropologist request to inspect the bible without exposing my skepticism? How about my scientific audience? How could I explain the mechanism in which a bible and oil could extract bloody meat from a client's stomach without rupturing the skin?

In the retrieval of charms session, MB conducted a prayer and worship session that recovered charms from wherever they were concealed. The session was dramatic and took place with the doors of the church closed. In private sessions however these ritual took place inside MB's living room. Is it not possible that someone would spread the charms outside MB's compound as the sessions transpired? Clients too joined in this skepticism and some explained to me that they were aware MB possessed Djinns that retrieved the charms and spread them in his compound as the prayer sessions went on. But even these alternative explanations from clients would pose other problems with rationalists. What were djinns for instance? And who might have concocted the charms? How were they able to maintain the consistency between the X-ray sessions and the contents of the charms? Unable to confront MB with clever request for answers without appearing to distrust of his explanations, I was therefore left with the option of conducting though observations and hope that I could unobtrusively get answers to some of my vexing questions.

Although I have strived in the chapters to show that MB had instituted an elaborate and structured healing practice, it should not be lost that he was first and foremost a ritual healer whose main source of healing lay in his possession of supernatural powers. Clients visited MB in search of supernatural answers to their afflictions and even though some of their solutions came through rational means adopted by MB, the entire ritual process was held together by MB's perceived possession of supernatural powers. This is consistent with what

scholars of ritual healing in Africa have remarked with respect to divination. Crawford for instance proposed a tripartite division of forms, allowing that the same diviner might employ all three: psychic (involving possession), psychological (diviner interviewing client) and causal (chance cast of objects) (1967: 179 – 191), Zahan (1983: 86) categorizes diviners as interpreters (an intellectual process) and messengers (a mediumistic process). As a ritual healer, MB combined many of these divination processes as well as other ritual healing procedures like charms retrieval and cleansing. But since ritual healing combined the use of pharmacological substances or surgical interventions, MB advised his clients to adopt these techniques after his healing. His healing theory and practice therefore called for the establishment of complex ritual healing practice whose procedures and effects comprise both rational and supernatural interventions. His key identifier however was his possession of supernatural abilities that he used to execute several magical actions such as capturing people's souls and causing them to confess in his court room, retrieve charms hidden far away, cleanse his clients and provide them with a prophylaxis against future affliction.

The question of efficacy is central to any healing practice. For ritual healing in Africa however, the importance of this question is elevated by the criticism leveled against it by science that defined it as both irrational and ineffective. Arguments against ritual seem to borrow heavily from enlightenment philosophers who saw the eradication of ritual with the spread of science as well as Tylor's (cited by Tambiah 1991: 45) deeply evolutionary approach that characterized magic, sorcery and divination as a product of erroneous application of principles of association especially the relations of analogy. Since this early times, rituals in general and ritual healing in particular have been understood or interpreted in terms of underlying ideas, emotions, structures or relations that it represents, symbolizes or expresses rather than the ends towards which it conduces (Sax 2010). Peek (1991) laments the fact that research in African divination has been lost in exclusively functionalist modes which assumed the practice to be at best simply supportive of other social systems and at best irrational and detrimental to its adherents. As part of the modernization process the spread of biomedical knowledge and the structures that it adopted both in Europe and in the colonies reproduced this conceptualization, and while it tried to identify and systematically exclude ritual from its own therapeutic practices, it, quite naturally, left no room for the consideration of ritual healing practices in the medical systems it confronted. In Kenya for instance, ritual healers are defined as 'practitioners who practice in a manner that professional (read biomedicine) find unacceptable' (Nyikal 2001).

Recent scholarship in ritual rejects the notion that ritual is ineffective as evidenced by many ethnographic accounts. I proceeded in this study from the assumption that ritual healing works and therefore set out to describe and discuss the various ways in which it performs that which it claims to do. I did this borrowing from Kirmayer's (2004) and Sax (2010) suggestion that the efficacy of any practice must be adjudged with respect to the system in which they occur. Further any account of efficacy ought to include an analysis not only of what, how and why things work but of more basic anterior questions of what it means for something to work, on what it is supposed to be working on and toward what end. In the discussion of efficacy however, whether with the lay public or a scientific audience, I always got quick and direct questions. Do patients really recover from their illnesses after a ritual healing episode? In respect to Karama for instance, the quick question on efficacy was always, 'well did he get well? Did Habib's wife come back to him after the performance of the ritual? What about Arnold, did he get the job? And did Miriam get back her money from her friend?

The efficacy of ritual healing in Africa then has to be understood within the African cosmology and within the African understanding of afflictions and their nosology. Africans espoused what has been described as a comprehensive etiology where illnesses could be caused by from a wide range of sources – displeasure by gods and spirits, sorcery, insect bites, evil eye etc. All these sources have been condensed into either social, spiritual, or natural. An important aspect of this etiology is the fact that the ascription of one source as the cause of an affliction did not exclude the rest. One must then recall Evans Pritchard's story of the young boy who hits his toe on a tree stump and immediately implicated sorcery in his predicament. Illnesses were classified in terms of their sources which did not distinguish the how question from the why question, between proximate and ultimate causes. At the same time when patients consult a healer, a healer is never so much concerned with assessing the reality of the illness because the sufferer's experience of it is often sufficient indication of its presence. The language of the clients as they retold their reasons for consulting MB were indicative of their perception of their affliction as well as their decisions to consult a ritual specialist and not any other specialist. Clients talked about being 'remote controlled', being blocked or closed up, or being finished etc. Their narratives not only point to the perception that their afflictions were caused by the use of preternatural powers but justified their presence at the healers. They therefore considered their actions as pragmatic since supernatural powers were countered by supernatural means. There was,

however on the other hand, clients who consulted MB to use supernatural means to unlock problems that could be solved by non supernatural means but which had failed or protracted. All these showed that ritual healing was not reserved for problem with supernatural causation, which led me to conclude that ritual was used for all manner of afflictions and resorted to resolve all types of difficulties. This type of consultation stemmed from the notion as Good (1987) explained among the Akamba of Kenya that supernatural powers stemmed from the same source and could be used for good or harmful purposes. If witches could harm people through manipulation of evil forces, healers could not just reverse these harmful effects but could also tap into the same forces to cause positive effects such as enhancing a client's chances of obtaining a job. In this case MB was consulted to assist clients obtain jobs, admission into colleges or avoid being transferred at the work place or to ensure justice in a court of law.

In the comprehensive etiology that governed the ideas and practices of ritual healing, healing was understood as a way of repairing the ruptured relationship between person and context by legitimately allocating responsibility for the cause of affliction. Since affliction disrupted a person's coexistence with his environment, the task of the healer was to unravel the source(s) of misfortune in a self consistent manner, realizing them at an order and on a level that permitted them to unfold freely and result in their resolution. The efficacy of MB's ritual healing can therefore be assessed on the ways in which he unravels a client's affliction leading to its amelioration. This was done through the creation of a narrative by a variety of means by MB and his clients that adequately captured their affliction with a view to resolving them.

From the descriptions and transcripts produced in this dissertation, it is evident that MB has organized his healing rituals in a way that he maintained both the etiological and nosological logic of traditional healing. His healing strategy too maintained the logic of healing in traditional healing even though it incorporated new terminologies, items and well organized and standardized procedures in what looks like his adaptation to the criticisms of modernity. Even though MB's healing methods showed resemblances to naturalistic psychotherapeutic methods, there was no doubt in his and his clients minds that he was a healer whose main strength lay in the fact that he healed by supernatural means. Clients visited him so that he could use his supernatural abilities to heal them. In this case all his healing rituals involved consort with the supernatural with the objective of creating a



narrative that explained a client's source of affliction and set out the mechanisms of its resolution. The divination process involved both a tentative divination where MB used interrogation techniques to obtain a client's perspective before engaging the supernatural source in which MB read images from the bible regarding a client's affliction. This set the range of issues to be investigated and healed. The X-ray process was purely directed by VFBs perceived to be snatched using MB's supernatural abilities and made to confess their evil deeds. This appeared to be the most important aspect of MB's healing based on the rigorous manner in which the sessions were conducted and MB's insistence that it was impossible for him to perform any healing without this process<sup>93</sup> The X-ray sessions revealed the entire breadth and depth of client's problems and their authenticity was verified through consultations between MB and clients. The aim of this rigorous process was to enable MB and the client to create a narrative of the client's affliction in order to formulate an ameliorative strategy.

Depending on the client's problems however, the X-ray process started the healing or problem solving process. Where for instance, clients came to find out who had killed their relatives, or stolen their property, the healing or solution to the problem started as soon as the X-ray process provided the answers to these questions. Legitimacy and objectivity were imbued in the process by its repetitive nature, MB's absence in the X-ray and further by MB's interrogation of the clients in view of the evidence obtained from the X-ray. The X-ray process was explained by MB and understood by the clients purely as an aspect of MB's magic. Clients often mentioned MB's abilities to produce people's voices as a sign of his healing powers and were never willing to speculate on other sources of the voices. MB for his part explained it as God's power working in him which he could not further explain. The follow up rituals, cleansing and ritual retrieval of charms were all conducted following the results of the X-ray process and MB again showcased his supernatural powers. He could heal clients by cleansing them of harmful substances intromitted into their bodies. MB also used his powers to turn the bible into a magnet that retrieved charms hidden elsewhere and reproduced them into the church compound. It was only in this ritual that I overheard clients claim that MB used Djinns to retrieve charms as opposed to his stated prayer claims.

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<sup>93</sup> MB always insisted that he could not perform any healing rituals without the X-ray session. In emergency cases, however, he performed cleansing rituals like in the case of Karama but insisted that such clients would have to revert back to the x-ray sessions after their emergency treatment. .

Accompanying these set of seemingly supernatural processes MB was an organized and structured set of procedures that each client went through. This is where his creativity and adaptability appeared to be at its best. From the guard who ushers in the clients and maintains order, to the secretary who prepares and sifts clients for the eventual meeting with MB at all stages and finally to MB himself, the order of events and procedures is clear and strictly adhered to. Further there is a clear delineation of duties between the guard, secretary and MB that more or less corresponds to their status. Although MB maintains mystery regarding his supernatural abilities, the structure of his healing is clearly understood by the clients. The creation of a standard organizational structure as well as a self regulating system where results and their implications were predictable appeared to be in line with MB's desire to impress his clients about his professionalism. Clients, for instance, knew that their X-ray processes would go through three stages, where they would talk to those afflicting them and culminate in the burning of the bible. There were standard rules and regulations regarding the punishment to be meted out on offenders. Stubborn witches and thugs would be specially burnt while charms would be recalled. MB had several rooms for the different rituals and a regular timetable for activities of the day i.e registration, prayer sessions, lunch break, X-ray etc. Time was well manipulated and the different activities had a specific time for their performance. X-rays for instance were always performed in the afternoon. Retrieval of charms was done once a month except for private charm retrieval sessions that were performed at the request of the clients.

Some of the effects of the healing process could be explained rationally or in terms of what Frank (1973) referred to as their resemblance to naturalistic psychotherapeutic methods. The setting up of a structured ritual healing practice and the deliberate creation of waiting time, for instance, allowed the clients to comfort each other, gossip about MB's abilities therefore raising the expectation for a cure especially for new clients. While the stated objective of the X-ray process was the creation of a credible narrative to a client's affliction in order to resolve them, the protracted X-ray processes did at the same time provide an opportunity for clients to abreact. In some instances, even without fully solving the problem of the client, the protracted process enabled clients come to terms with their predicament, and therefore function well even in the face of an unchanged condition (CF: Kirmayer, 2004, Obeyesekere 1975). Yet in others the problem may resolve itself with time through the intervention of other sociological factors, such as the police stepping in and arresting the thugs or a father killing his son after a fight over battery cells. The operation of such factors was

accommodated as an explanation to misfortune befalling any of the people accused of afflicting his clients. MB explained that after he had set the bible on fire any of the accused persons would fall sick or die of natural causes. In this case any deaths or misfortunes befalling any of the persons accused of afflicting his clients were attributed to MB's ritual intervention.

It is probably due to the fact that the effects of some of MB's rituals and by extension rituals conducted by other healers can be interpreted rationally that students of ritual set themselves the task of trying to find out ritual's hidden logic, its principles of efficacy, the things that it represents which must be different from what the natives relate to us. This seems to go against Kirmayer's (2004) contention that healing ought to be understood in terms of the logic of the healing system in which it operates. This logic is obtained through careful observation and listening to the view of the healers and their clients. The key to MB's ritual healing is the ways in which he, together with the clients created an acceptable narrative that clearly named the causes (sources) of the particular clients' affliction. This narrative is linked to the African cosmology that perceives misfortunes as emanating from the natural, social and spiritual realms. In most of the cases, the narrative unfolded in a manner that suggested the means to resolve them. Charms for instance had to be removed and destroyed. Witches were accepted as a reality and exterminated through burning. Supernatural powers could also be used to trace lost people, money or property and lead to their retrieval as outlined in the African thought system. Once an acceptable narrative was created, MB set out the task of resolving them through his powers with the collaboration of the now empowered clients. While MB proposed to solve the clients problems, he never barred them from adopting other ritual or non ritual solutions to their afflictions. Consequently other problem solving techniques such as law enforcement agents, biomedical facilities or self initiative by the client were incorporated by MB and his clients in problem solving. The persistence of ritual healing is thus neither a rejection nor a resistance to modernity. Ritual healing accommodates and in some instances attempts to domesticate modernity as ritual healers and their clients grapple with the issues and problems occasioned by rapid societal transformation. This societal transformation in the name of modernization had solved many problems, created new ones but also created new avenues for the expression of old problems. Ritual healing played an important role in solving some of the problems faced by the people, since as one of my clients reiterated regarding his consultations with MB, 'We are dealing with African chemistry here'.

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