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Sociality and Its Dangers Witchcraft, Intimacy and Trust

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Witchcraft sits uneasily with sociality. Of course, in a Latourian sense, witchcraft has a sociality of its own – after all, it is ‘intrinsically interactive’ (even in optima forma).¹ Yet for many it constitutes a kind of anti-sociality. Anthropologists, confronted with the tenacity of ideas on secret conspiracies by witches in Africa (and elsewhere), tended to study it as the very denial of society. Compare the famous quote by Gluckman (1955: 94):

An Anglican anthem demands ‘See that ye love one another fervently.’ Beliefs in the malice of witchcraft and in the wrath of ancestral spirits do more than ask this as an act of grace; they affirm that if you do not love one another fervently, misfortune will come.... Though a charge of witchcraft ... may exaggerate and exacerbate a quarrel, the belief emphasizes the threat to the wider social order which is contained in immoral sentiments. Hence the beliefs exert some pressure on men and women to observe the social virtues, and to feel the right sentiments, lest they be suspected of being witches.

In this view, witchcraft is seen as the antithesis of kinship, supposedly the backbone of social order in African societies. Gluckman and other anthropologists of his time certainly realized how closely the two are intertwined in everyday life. Yet, as in the quotation above, witchcraft was studied as the opposite of kinship, the very denial of its basic values. In recent decades anthropologists have analysed the close intertwinement of the two in a somewhat different perspective (Austen 1993; Geschiere 1997; Meyer 1999; *passim*). In my 1997 book on *The Modernity of Witchcraft* I characterized witchcraft as the ‘dark side’ of kinship. Rather than being outside kinship, it seemed to be seen by the Maka people, with whom I lived in Southeast Cameroun, as given with kinship – as part and parcel of the kinship order. This somewhat different accent is becoming particularly important with the increase in scale of kinship relations which are seen now as covering ever wider distances – between village and city or even transcontinentally with new forms of

migrations.² The anthropologists of late colonial times worked mainly in smaller villages, where most people were relatives in one way or another; in such contexts the intertwining of witchcraft and kinship was hardly surprising. Yet, with the increase of scale of social relations, the tenacity with which witchcraft rumours, despite all innovations, remain linked to the familiar truths of 'the house' and the family becomes ever more striking.³

The Maka are certainly not exceptional in stressing the close link between witchcraft and kinship. In many parts of the world, representations that are loosely grouped under 'witchcraft'⁴ emphasize the close link between intimacy and occult aggression. The Maka speak with particular horror about the *djambe le ndjaw* [the witchcraft of the house] since this is supposed to be the most dangerous one. *Ndjaw* [house] has to be taken in a broad sense. In a concrete sense it does not refer just to one building, but rather to a sprawling family compound; in a social sense it includes all people who are in one way or another related to each other, but who do not necessarily live in the compound concerned. As said, in recent times, the *ndjaw* has become even more dispersed: it includes now also urbanites, who spend all their life in the city, and even transcontinental migrants. Even though these migrants may visit the compound most irregularly, they still belong to 'the house' – which implies that they are still in reach of this frightening *djambe le ndjaw*. As elsewhere, 'witchcraft' seems to be so unsettling because it is an attack that comes from within. Yet what might be special to many African contexts is the wide reach of these intimate relations, and hence of intimate dangers.

In this contribution I want to further develop the implications of this vision of the intimate – that is, of relations of proximity: with kin, fellow villagers and so on – as inherently dangerous.⁵ What does this mean for notions of sociality? It may be clear that these implications can be quite subversive for current notions of community and family, as 'normally' constituting safe havens. Anthropology has been quite good at confirming such ideas. A classical example is Marshall Sahlins' famous model of concentric circles, to be found in many anthropology handbooks. The model's key is an arrow that starts in the centre, and moves from the inner core ('household') through the wider circles (from 'lineage sector' to 'village' to 'tribal sector' to 'intertribal sector'). The arrow goes from 'generalized reciprocity' in the inner circle, via 'balanced reciprocity' in the middle, to 'negative reciprocity' in the outer circles (Sahlins 1974a: 199). The message is clear: in the centre reigns trust, but this diminishes the wider the circle becomes. The emphasis on the dangers of intimacy that dominates many discourses on witchcraft and occult aggression conveys a completely opposite view. The Maka horror about the *djambe le ndjaw* – the witchcraft of the house – as the most frightening, is a graphic example of this. The implication seems to be that danger lurks especially within the very core of sociality; it is the attacks 'from within' that are the most dangerous.

As said, such a view is certainly not limited to Africans preoccupied with witchcraft. It is a recurrent premise of discourses on occult aggression in many

parts of the world. Indeed, the realization that intimacy can not only bring protection but also danger might be universal. Yet in this text I want to stick to a few African examples. The aim is not so much to explore the wider relevance of this link between witchcraft and intimacy – to show that Africa is not that exceptional (for this see Geschiere in press) – but rather to follow the implications of this link for studying sociality. The question is what tools do we have to study sociality as inherently dangerous? This raises inevitably the related question of how, despite such a basic threat, trust can be established. If it is precisely your intimates that have such a dangerous hold over you, how then it is possible to nonetheless work and collaborate with them? These might be urgent questions for our understanding of sociality.

Witchcraft and Intimacy

Let me start by giving a more substantial image of this link between witchcraft and intimacy, notably within the family, that confused but also fascinated me so much during my fieldwork among the Maka in the forest region of Southeast Cameroon. The intrusion of *djambe* (witchcraft) into my research came as a sort of surprise. Arriving in the area in 1971, my plan as a political anthropologist was to study local effects of state formation. However, it soon became clear that whenever I wanted to discuss issues of authority and politics, my new Maka friends referred sooner or later to this *djambe*. Clearly to them, the politics in daylight were only understandable in relation to the nightly shadow-world of this occult force to which almost everybody seemed to have access in one way or another. Moreover, people also talked about the close link between *djambe* and kinship (the *djambe le ndjaw*, witchcraft of the house, mentioned before) as some sort of self-evident truth.⁶ Rumours of witchcraft attacks – that in this region were only rarely translated into public accusations – always pointed to people of the same compound, or from within the same family. Urban elites complained that, despite all their commitment to their village of origin, they were really afraid to go back since ‘those people will eat us’. Initially I thought such statements referred to the kind of sponging at which Maka villagers excel (as I knew only too well from personal experience), but I soon discovered that there was a deeper reference here to witches, who are supposed to ‘eat’ their own kin. *Nganga* [healers] would emphasize that they could only heal someone if the family wanted to cooperate and, indeed, they always discovered that the main source of danger lay ‘inside’. My anthropological training had made me see kinship and witchcraft as opposites – witchcraft as an attack on the order imposed by kinship – but to my interlocutors they seemed to be completely intertwined: witchcraft as the flipside of kinship rather than its opposite. I learned also quite quickly that neither witchcraft nor kinship presented themselves as closed systems. The poly-interpretability of kinship relations – in practice each and every relation appeared to allow for contestation and different

interpretations – matched the surprising dynamics of conceptions concerning the *djambe*. Precisely the relation between these two poles – each equally volatile and constantly changing, and even more uncertain in their mutual articulation – seems to give shape to the representations and practices of occult aggression, not as a fixed essence, but rather as an ongoing ‘event’.

The link with kinship is central to the basic image of Maka notions of witchcraft: the nightly meeting of the witches. Elsewhere I have extensively described the Maka imaginary around *djambe*, the central notion in stories about witchcraft (Geschiere 1997), so a short sketch has to suffice here. People describe the *djambe* as an evil creature living in someone’s belly which gives its owner (*djindjamb* – the one who has the *djambe*) special powers. The main power is the capacity to transform oneself into an animal or a spirit. Especially at night when the owl calls, the *djambe* will leave the body and fly off into the night – ‘along the cobwebs of the *djambe*’ – to the *sjoumbou*, the nightly meetings of the witches. There, terrible cannibalistic banquets are being staged. The stories about the debaucheries of these nightly meetings – marked by shocking transgressions, violent encounters and devious victories – are many.⁷ But one element recurs all the time: each witch has to offer a relative in his or her turn to be devoured by the other witches; in daily life the victim of this nightly treason will fall ill and die unless the *nganga* [healer] is called in who can ‘see’ the guilty witches and force them out. Basic to Maka witchcraft discourse is that it is about the betrayal of one’s kin to outsiders. In many respects witchcraft is at the interface of the private and the public: between the intimate world of kinship or the house, on the one hand, and the outer world and its fascinating opportunities for self-enhancement, on the other. Witches are supposed to have a special hold over their relatives but they use this in order to hand over their victims to outsiders.

The inherent link with kinship is cogently conveyed by a recurrent motif in witchcraft stories, as a kind of further elaboration of this basic scheme: it concerns the notion of the witch as a martyr who sacrifices him/herself rather than betraying another relative. The sad case of Eba’s death was the first time I stumbled upon this kind of interpretation – a trope I was to encounter many more times. During one of the first months of my fieldwork in the village of Bagbeze in 1971, Eba (pseudonym), a man in the strength of his life, suddenly succumbed to a heavy attack of malaria. His family was in shock: one day Eba seemed to be still in good health and the next he was dying! So they made furious but as yet unspecific hints at witchcraft: they clearly were looking for someone to blame. However, other people said the very suddenness of his death showed that he must have been himself a witch. After all, everyone knows that when an ‘innocent’ – that is, someone who does not ‘go out’ in the *djambe* – is attacked, (s)he will die slowly. Only between witches does an attack lead to a sudden death: they can ‘see’ who is attacking them, and then it becomes a battle of life-and-death. Therefore, some people whispered that Eba must have been a

witch himself who in his turn had the worst of the eternal fights among the witches; or, to put it differently: he got what he deserved.

But friends of Eba opted for another interpretation. Maybe he was a witch – after all, he had been very successful in the outlay of cocoa and coffee plantations and that suggested he knew how to defend himself against jealousy – but then it was clear that he had sacrificed himself since he did not want to offer yet another relative to his witch-companions. This image of the witch as a person of special courage returns in proverbs about the terrible loneliness of the witch who has neither ‘brother nor sister, father nor mother.’ If he refuses to give yet another relative, he has to face the wild crowd of witches all alone; people shudder before such an image. Eba might have been a witch but he was also a martyr who, despite earlier betrayals, had made a final stance by refusing to give up yet another kinsman.⁸ His tragic courage offered again a powerful expression of the close link people make between witches and kin – witchcraft as the betrayal of kinship – which seemed to be self-evident to my spokesmen, but came to me as a shock.

Especially in present-day contexts, this continuing link with the local realities of kin and village is all the more striking since, at the same time, this imaginary shows a quite impressive ability to link up with modern developments that far exceed the limits of the village. As one of my Maka spokesmen told me back in 1973: ‘We have our own planes, much quicker than yours – our witches fly to Paris and back within a single night.’ The zombie spirits who in the 1960s and 70s were supposed to be put to work on ‘invisible plantations’ on Mount Kupe in West Cameroon by the nouveaux riches through a novel kind of witchcraft, are now said to be sold off to the mafia, Mount Kupe becoming only a relay station in global circuits of labour exploitation (see Geschiere 1997; de Rosny 1981). But, in the end, even such vertiginous speculations about dark global conspiracies are linked to the familiar, albeit shifting theme of the betrayal of kin to outsiders.

This new zombie witchcraft highlights the paradoxical combining of the global and the local in a particularly pregnant way. People tend to emphasize the novelty of this form of witchcraft, opposing it to older forms of witchcraft in which the witches would cannibalize their victims. Instead they are now supposed to turn them into zombies to exploit their labour or even, as people put it, ‘sell’ them. De Rosny traces the obvious link with traumatic memories of the slave trade, but he relates all the excitement over this new form of witchcraft also to people’s bewilderment by the capriciousness of the new inequalities and the vagaries of the world market – why do a few people become so rich while all the others invariably fail in their plans? Rumours about zombies provide at least a possible explanation for the shocking wealth of the new elites. Yet even this ‘modern’ form of witchcraft is linked to similar ideas as the Maka obsession with the *djambe le ndjaw* [witchcraft of the house]. In his fascinating study of how the *nganga* [healers] try to deal with this new threat, Eric de Rosny shows that they always insist that the whole family has to be reunited. This is quite

remarkable since it often concerns urbanites who have lived in the city for generations and sometimes really have to search for their kin in the faraway countryside. Despite all novelty and increase of scale, the most dangerous attack is still supposed to come from inside, and the family is still the obvious locus of this inside.⁹

This ongoing articulation of witchcraft and intimacy stands out all the more starkly with such an increase of scale. It is not a coincidence that among earlier anthropologists the one who formulated this link most tersely was Philip Mayer who mainly worked in a budding urban centre in South Africa: 'Witches and their accusers are people who ought to like each other, but in reality refuse to do so' (Mayer [1954] 1970: 55). One might wonder whether Mayer's statement leaves enough room for the full ambivalence of these ideas – mentioning witchcraft does certainly not exclude that the relation is continued: supposed attacks can be covered up and forgotten, at least for some time. But he did sum up most effectively the confusing balance between closeness and aggression that makes witchcraft such an uncomfortable threat.¹⁰

The link with intimacy – in this context especially with family – is certainly not an invariable or straightforward premise. For instance, at first sight the role of the *nganga* [healer] among the Maka and other groups in the forest of southern Cameroon seems to contradict this since they are supposed to work outside kinship. The *nganga* is supposed to use the forces of the *djambe* against the witches themselves and attack them from a distance. Sometimes people will even say that *nganga* should not live with their family since their powers are so frightening that they would be too much of a danger for their own kin.¹¹ In many respects they are beyond the framework of family. However at a deeper level kinship is significant as an essential condition for enhancing their occult powers. People will whisper that in order to be initiated into all this dangerous knowledge, a *nganga* had to sacrifice a close relative, who has to be 'given' to his/her 'professor' as reward for all the lessons.¹²

Even more important is the recent but quite general trend throughout the African continent to complain that witchcraft is breaking through the boundaries of kinship: supposedly in present times it has lost its old moorings in the family; hence a general worry about witchcraft 'running wild'. Indeed, the link between witchcraft and kinship may seem to become ever more stretched with modern changes and a constant increase of scale of social relations. New forms of witchcraft are seen as particularly shocking since they seem to be effective against anybody, kin or non-kin. For instance, in his recent study of *feymen* (Cameroon's equivalent to the Nigerian 419s, who are involved in global computer fraud, false money schemes and other illicit practices), Basile Ndjio (2006) emphasizes that the current association of the mysterious success of these swindlers – and some of them do become amazingly rich – with particular forms of witchcraft is no longer tied to kinship. Their *mokoagne moni* [magical money] rather helps them to find their victims – businessmen or politicians eager to invest in dubious schemes – on a much broader, even global scale: their

fronts are in Europe, South Asia and the Gulf states far outside the reach of kinship. This is indeed a far cry from the idea that 'witchcraft never crosses the water [i.e., the ocean]' as people used to say in earlier decades.

Still, when one follows Ndjio's rich case studies in detail it is striking that references to witchcraft always seem to point back ultimately to the close environment of kin and locality: the helpers of a *feyman* are suddenly bewitched when they accompany him to the village, which in most effective ways takes revenge for the unwillingness of its ungrateful son to share his new wealth; a local community in Douala raises a magical barrier to another *feyman's* activities by closing its ranks. This is symptomatic. Witchcraft may be supposed to work now in new circuits on a much wider, even global scale – this is one of the reasons for people's worries about it getting ever more out-of-bounds. Indeed, the capacity of this local discourse for grafting itself upon the opening up of new, global horizons is quite disconcerting. Yet in most of these global witchcraft stories there is ultimately a pointer back to the local realities of neighbourhood and family. 'The village' and its emotional intimacy may, at least in some respects, become an almost 'virtual' reality to many Cameroonians – modern urbanites with a global outlook – but it is still deeply engraved in witchcraft visions.¹³

The Congolese anthropologist Joseph Tonda (now in Libreville) insists even more strongly that since the colonial encounter *la sorcellerie* largely surpasses the old lineage order (it is from then on 'beyond what is thinkable and possible in the lineage order' [Tonda 2002: 237]). Yet in his books the link with the family is everywhere. Even *Mammywata* – the beautiful lady, often white, with blond hair, who captures young men with evil promises of unheard riches – asks her followers to sacrifice a close relation, often a child (ibid.: 85; Tonda 2005: 177). *Mammywata* may be the very symbol of modernity and its promises of unlimited consumerism, but she is apparently not completely outside kinship. The general relevance of Tonda's insistence on a complete *déparentélisation* of society as a logical outcome of the colonial moment is problematic.¹⁴ In many parts of Africa the remarkable elasticity of kinship claims grafting themselves upon completely novel relations remains quite striking (not to say worrying). Even African migrants in Europe and America fear the telephone calls from home with their endless demands that can be underlined with hidden threats. Precisely the ongoing association of family with witchcraft as a serious threat among migrants far away from home shows the impressive elasticity of the family-witchcraft complex. Tonda is certainly right that in such novel contexts witchcraft takes on new guises, but its precarious yet inherent link with kinship and the family is in many contexts constantly reaffirmed despite staggering distances. Apparently the map of intimacy can constantly be redrawn, stretching the witchcraft-family complex to a breaking point, yet without destroying its grasp.¹⁵

This basic link with intimacy – and in many African contexts this means the family from which one is born, and the soil in which one has to be buried – brings out the full horror of witchcraft. In most parts of Africa the family is still

celebrated as the basic circle of sociability and trust – even though in practice things may be very different. Yet witchcraft introduces lethal aggression in the very heart of the community where only solidarity and serenity should reign. It expresses the shocking realization that there is not only harmony inside, but also jealousy and therefore aggression. Moreover, this aggression is all the more dangerous since there is hardly any protection against it. As said, this fear of aggression from close by is certainly not special to Africa or to other regions marked by poverty and crisis. On the contrary. I am always surprised that to Westerners this theme in many African stories of witchcraft – for instance on the betrayal of your own father or mother – is so shocking. After all, Freud warned us already that the family is not just a happy enclave in society, but also a primal hotbed of aggression. With their deep worries about witchcraft, Africans and others raise a universal issue: how to deal with aggression from close by – with intimacy that is not just a haven of peace but at the same time a lethal source of threat and betrayal?

A relational view of witchcraft as an event shaped by its ambiguous and volatile relation with intimacy may help to highlight the more general implications of Africans' continuing preoccupation with these occult forces – and also academics' continuing struggle over how to address it. The comparative possibilities of the witchcraft–intimacy dyad may be further enhanced by adding a third pole, trust, as a necessary complement. In all the examples above, the vital question is how people succeed – despite all the dangers implied by closeness – to nonetheless establish trust. It may be clear also from the preceding cases that this triangle of witchcraft, intimacy and trust allows for highly different patterns; the exact ways in which people link witchcraft to intimacy – in particular the modes in which they define the intimacy from which such worrying threats can emerge – varies constantly. So do the ways in which they try to establish trust nonetheless.

Clearly witchcraft discourse implies a view of sociality as a constant struggle. 'The collective' is never a given. It is internally undermined in most drastic ways and the establishment of trust against omnipresent threats is always precarious. To what extent can more theoretical explorations around the notions of intimacy and trust – both experiencing a recent renaissance in the social sciences – offer support for analysing this struggle?

Intimacy and the Uncanny

Can the close link with intimacy serve to get a grip on what shapes witchcraft in its ongoing transformations? A problem is that lately the concept of intimacy itself has become so fashionable among anthropologists and other social scientists – maybe as a potential answer to increasing feelings of alienation and isolation – that it risks becoming almost as empty as it is general. Apparently its currency does not stop it from being used in widely differing ways. Yet a

common tendency, behind all these differences, is that a positive view seems to prevail. Reading intimacy from witchcraft suggests special attention to internal tensions. But references to potential dangers are conspicuously absent from recent explorations around this notion.

This positive trend remains implicit in the current, but also somewhat facile, use of the term as a euphemism for sexual relations, whether or not in a conjugal setting. A good example is American anthropologist Jankowiak's recent collection *Intimacies: Love and Sex across Cultures* (2008). Typically the notion of intimacy is not at all problematized throughout this voluminous book.¹⁶ It seems mainly to function as a buzzword. Precisely because its meaning is taken for granted – no need to analyse it – it takes on quite happy implications: intimacy seen as a self-evidently comfortable niche, a domain of trust in a hostile society.

However, the prize for the most paradisiacal version of the notion goes without doubt to British sociologist Anthony Giddens. In *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992), Giddens analyses intimacy between partners as the pinnacle of modernity, marking the transition from 'romantic' to 'confluent love'. He closely relates intimacy to autonomy and trust: in his version intimacy expresses the ideal of two adult persons who respect each other's differences and thus leave scope for the other's autonomy so that they can trust each other. Heavily leaning on psychotherapeutic literature, he poses intimacy cum autonomy as the opposite pole of addiction cum dependency – a view that is in striking contrast with basic elements of witchcraft discourse cited above. Any idea that intimacy can be fraught with special dangers and lead to stifling dependency is lacking here; the notion has only positive overtones, creating a safe haven of trust.¹⁷

A completely different view has been forwarded by the British-American anthropologist Michael Herzfeld in his publications on 'cultural intimacy' (1997).¹⁸ For him this is certainly not the highest stage of modernity. It is rather the counterpoint for official nationalism. Herzfeld's main point seems to be that the formal truth of Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community' is complemented by more hidden everyday truths – he speaks of 'rueful self-recognition' (ibid.: 6) – that are at least as important to the reproduction of national sentiments. Examples are Greek jokes about their own machismo (and probably Dutch ironies about their stinginess) which create an informal or even ironic acceptance of one's identity. For anthropologists, this version of intimacy is certainly much more promising. In Herzfeld's use of the notion there is clear interest in its ambiguities – the tension between formal denial and implicit recognition of certain disreputable truths. Moreover, Herzfeld places his notion on the threshold of the private and the public: he refers to sentiments that are quite private, yet nonetheless half-heartedly publicized. Here there is indeed an interesting link to witchcraft as a discourse that brings out into the open what should remain private – that is, the hidden tensions within the family or community that become exposed to the public gaze. We are already further away from the vision of intimacy as a nice, protected sphere.

Clearly we need versions of the intimacy notion that go further in this direction if we want to address why to people in Africa – and certainly not only there – it is quite evident that there is a close link with witchcraft. We may have to look outside anthropology to find explorations that come closer to the idea of intimacy as a tension-ridden sphere. An interesting impulse comes from the American literary and cultural theorist Lauren Berlant who launched a whole project on the notion in *Critical Inquiry* (1998). For her, intimacy is full of ambiguity. It seems to belong to the private, but it is always on the border of the public: ‘the inwardness of the intimate is met by a corresponding publicness’ (ibid.: 281). For her intimacy is not necessarily related to the small scale. On the contrary, she speaks of the ‘modern, mass-mediated sense of intimacy’ and adds that ‘intimacy builds worlds: it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation’ (ibid: 282). She sees it as a notion intrinsically related to mobility: ‘liberal society was founded on the migration of intimacy expectations between the public and the domestic’ (ibid.: 284). All this may not seem to relate directly to the witchcraft examples above. Yet, her emphasis on intimacy ‘usurping places meant for other kinds of relation’ is surprisingly relevant for the new dynamics of witchcraft notions in changing circumstances. Even more relevant is Berlant’s argument that ‘in its expression through language, intimacy relies heavily on the shifting registers of unspoken ambivalence’ (1998: 286). We are a lot closer here to the witchcraft vision of intimacy as a sphere of life that can be expanded in novel ways, and is full of deep tensions and ambiguities.

Another riddle is how so many recent authors with a quite positive – not to say paradisiacal – view of intimacy manage to completely ignore Sigmund Freud. After all, the latter, much criticized as he is now, did have basic things to say precisely on this point that are still highly relevant. Of course, Freud never used the term intimacy. Still, his insistence that the family is a hotbed of aggression and guilt remains highly relevant for the present discussion. In particular an essay by Freud, *Das Unheimliche* (The Uncanny), offers seminal starting points for exploring the tension between intimacy, trust and aggression ([1919] 2003).¹⁹ This short essay can be seen as part of Freud’s ongoing project to prove the relevance of psychoanalysis for gaining a deeper understanding of works of art. Indeed, the main purpose of the text seems to be to prove that Freud’s approach allows him to discover a deeper meaning in the fairly enigmatic story ‘The Sandman’ (from 1816) by E.T.A. Hoffman, the king of the German *Romantik* storytellers. Freud focuses on the role of *das Unheimliche* [the uncanny] in the story in the figure of Coppelius alias Coppola – the ‘Sandman’ – who keeps appearing at unexpected moments and thus drives Nathaniel, the young man who is the story’s main character, to madness and suicide – a fate that befell so many unhappy torchbearers of the *Sturm und Drang* [lit. tempest and drive] that haunted the German *Romantik*. However, Freud does not start with the story, but rather – in line with his general focus on language as a main tool to riddle-solving – with an extensive analysis of the central terms *heimlich*

[homely] and *unheimlich* [lit. unhomely – ghastly, uncanny]. A major part of the text consists of a very long quote from a dictionary of the German language (by a certain Daniel Sanders, produced in 1860) summing up all the different meanings of both terms. At the beginning this seems to be quite boring until one notes that the consecutive meanings of *heimlich* gradually verge towards their opposite, *unheimlich*! Indeed, the ambiguous meanings of *heimlich* emerging from Freud's long enumeration are quite intriguing: the term seems to have strong positive notions – since it is closely related to *Heim* [home]; but these more positive implications are balanced by another array of meanings centred around an association with secrecy (*Heim* as a place where things remain hidden, withdrawn from sight). Freud is not bothered by the fact that German is about the only language where this strange trend of *heimlich* switching into its very opposite gets linguistic expression. He does note that in English, French, Italian, Portuguese, Arabic and Hebrew the equivalent terms do not show this tendency, but apparently he feels that German expresses here a basic ambiguity on which he bases his further analysis.²⁰

The central theme in Freud's analysis is that *das Unheimliche*, the uncanny – in this case the figure of Coppélius/Coppola – is so frightening since it is about repressed memories that come back with a vengeance. It is such repression that turns the familiar (*das Heimliche*) into the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*). Nathaniel is no longer capable of containing the fears that plague him from childhood when he unexpectedly sees emerge from the crowd an optician, Coppola, in whom he thinks he recognizes Dr Coppélius, an old friend of his father, but maybe also his father's murderer.

Hoffmann's haunting story and Freud's ambitious analysis have many more layers that are of interest to us. But of special importance is that Freud offers clear starting points for studying the uncomfortable link between intimacy and the uncanny: his leading question is how to understand the switch of *Heimlich* into its very opposite, *das Unheimliche*; and even more how to understand the reverse: how *das Unheimliche* can be turned again into *das Heimliche*. Or, to relate this to witchcraft discourse: when closeness breeds fears of hidden aggression, and how the threat of hidden aggression can be neutralized so that trust can be established. Of course, Freud himself wants to go a lot further than this. He also wants to offer a definitive explanation of such transitions, which in this case are seen as turning around repression. *Das Heimliche* – in Nathaniel's case a horrible childhood memory that was repressed – becomes *unheimlich* when it turns up later and is experienced as completely out of place.²¹ It remains to be seen to what extent this specific explanation holds for witchcraft fears. The great merit of Freud is in any case that he definitely leaves behind the view of intimacy as a domain of harmony, and even more that he suggests steps for understanding the complex intertwinement of security and fear in people's experiences of intimacy. All the more surprising that so many social scientists after him continue to cling to the conception of intimacy as simply a sphere of security.

The Struggle over Trust

The above may already suggest that recent theorizing around the other corner of our triangle, trust, offers an equally positive image of proximity. In this respect the apparently obvious link of trust to intimacy remains very influential – including in anthropology. To optimistic authors like Giddens and the psychotherapists he quotes with such enthusiasm, it seems to be self-evident that intimacy and trust are complementary. Yet in witchcraft discourse it is instead a continuous challenge to combine the two. To my Maka friends, the particular dangers of the *djambe le ndjaw* (the witchcraft from inside the house) imply there is good reason to distrust one's intimates. Indeed, all over the world a key word in discussions on how to protect oneself against the witches seems to be closure. Among the Maka the key word is *bouïma*, always translated as 'to armour oneself'. To them a good armouring is essential, preferably by a specialist (*nganga*) – even though contacting a *nganga* implies already that one is entering the *djambe* domain. Again, the Maka are certainly not exceptional in this. Favret-Saada (1977) describes farmers in the French countryside as obsessed with the need to magically close their compounds from the attacks of jealous or simply evil neighbours. The question all this raises is, of course, how one can ever fence oneself off from one's intimates, with whom one shares so much? The more general implication seems to be that trust is never a given, not even in kinship societies (or, rather, especially not there) – this in striking contrast to current stereotypes of what are sometimes called 'anthropological societies'.²² Clearly, even within small-scale communities, trust is constantly tested and, therefore, it is of vital importance that it is time and again reaffirmed. To the Maka, the family is essential – it is highly questionable whether one can survive without it – yet it is at the same time the source of mortal threats. It might be precisely because of this absolute necessity of kinship that it is seen as fraught with dangers. The Douala, a group on the Cameroonian coast – the 'autochthons' of the huge city of the same name – have a saying that 'One has to learn to live with one's sorcerer' (de Rosny 1992: 114). This might be a much more common problem, also in so-called modern societies, than Giddens and the therapists he quotes are prepared to admit.

What has the general literature to say about such predicaments around trust in zones of intimacy? Recently, the very popularity of the notion of 'trust' risks turning it into another buzzword across the disciplines, just like the notion of intimacy, cropping up in the most unexpected places. Not only anthropologists evoke issues of trust as crucial to the quality of relations; representatives of the 'harder' social sciences have also become quite fond of the term. For many economists trust has become a black box invoked when the gap between their computer simulations and everyday developments becomes too big. Organizational sociologists and management experts have followed suit. When I decided to further explore the notion of trust I expected to stumble on the tenacious tendency of economists and others to stick to a rational choice model,

explaining trust or its absence from the well-understood self-interests of the actors involved. Of course such starting points might raise problems in a field like witchcraft that is so strongly characterized by secrecy and ambiguous interpretations.

Yet somewhat to my surprise, certain anthropological ideas – or even premises – about trust were as much a stumbling block, notably the tenacity of many anthropologists, already highlighted above, to simply equate kinship with solidarity and reciprocity – and, therefore, with trust (see Sahlins 1974a; 1974b). This is quite striking in view of the discipline's long-standing interest in witchcraft, magic and such. However, these later aspects tended (and still tend) to be seen as exceptional moments of crisis after which reciprocity would be restored again (cf. Gluckman 1955: 94 [above]). Indeed, reciprocity – which in its more simplistic versions seems to imply automatic trust – has attained an almost sacred status in anthropology. In a critical essay, Chris Gregory (1994) discusses gift-giving with its obligation for reciprocity as the anthropological answer to theories of wealth as determined by commodities and capital (like the Marxian vision). It would certainly be interesting to do a genealogy of the notion of reciprocity and how it acquired such a central place in our discipline. Probably it would be necessary to go back even beyond our direct ancestors. Apparently Edward Tylor had already simply linked kindred to kindness, 'two words whose common derivation expresses in the happiest way one of the main principles of social life.'²³ But beyond him looms Tönnies – with his sympathy for a disappearing *Gemeinschaft* that was in everything the opposite of the *Gesellschaft* – and beyond this the German *Romantiker* with their nostalgia for a lost innocence due to progress and rationalism.²⁴

However, in this context it may not be necessary to go so far back since Marshall Sahlins' by now classic text 'On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange,' quoted at the beginning of this article, offers a convenient landmark for situating the heavy emphasis on reciprocity in anthropology.²⁵ In particular, the concentric circles model with the arrow going from the inner circle dominated by 'generalized reciprocity' to ever wider circles marked by 'balanced' to 'negative reciprocity' confirms the equation of the inside with reciprocal exchange. Or, as Sahlins himself neatly sums up the implications of this ambitious scheme: 'It follows that close kin tend to share, to enter into generalized exchanges, and distant and non-kin to deal in equivalents and guile' (Sahlins 1974a: 196 and 198). Family is trust, haggling is outside. Of course since then many anthropologists (notably feminists) have insisted on the tensions within this inner core. Still, it is striking how widespread the use of a notion like reciprocity remains in our discipline.

Sahlins presents this text as building on Marcel Mauss' famous *Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques* [An essay on the gift: the form and reason of exchange in archaic societies] (1923–4).²⁶ Yet it is clear that Mauss' vision of the central role of gift-giving in 'archaic' societies was much more complicated. He strongly emphasized the dangers of the gift: if it

was not properly returned in due time, it could kill the original receiver.²⁷ In his writings on 'The Spirit of the Gift', Sahlins (1974b) pays due attention to this aspect of Mauss' interpretations (and even to the close link between gift-giving and witchcraft in the case of the Maori, whose notion *hau* stood as the model for *le don* for Mauss). But apparently Sahlins preferred to omit this flipside of the gift in his more general text on 'primitive exchange' (1974a). This extrapolation helped to further reinforce his very positive image of 'generalized reciprocity' in the core sector, 'the house'. It fits in also with the general anthropological trend highlighted above to see witchcraft not as the dark side of kinship, but somehow outside of it – an exception rather than part and parcel of the kinship order. More recent commentators – notably Tim Ingold (1986) – tried to give reciprocity a more ambivalent meaning by pointing to different trends in exchange, even within the inner circles. Indeed, with the recent renaissance of interest in Mauss' work, especially in the U.S. and the U.K., it may be all the more important to emphasize that his version of exchange was much more ambiguous than is suggested by the incorrect translation of *rendre le don* as 'to reciprocate' in the 1990 English version of his essay. One may hope also that simplistic versions of the latter notion, like Sahlins' one – which had so much impact also outside anthropology – will continue to be relativized.

The general literature seems to leave us with a choice between, on the one hand, a rational choice approach or, on the other, accepting trust as an essence of 'anthropological societies' – neither of which are very helpful for understanding how witchcraft blossoms at the interface of the intimate and the public. Yet here, as well, a very useful lead comes from an older social scientist, whose work on trust seems again to be unjustly neglected in present-day debates on the concept – at least by anthropologists. Already in 1900, Georg Simmel – more or less Freud's contemporary – had published his challenging reflections on trust as containing, next to knowledge, 'a further element of ... quasi-religious faith'. This element may be 'hard to describe', since it concerns 'a state of mind which is both less and more than knowledge'; yet he sees it as crucial for understanding trust (Simmel [1900] 1990: 179). In a seminal contribution, Guido Möllering, a German organizational sociologist, tries to capture the complex interplay Simmel construes between knowledge, ignorance and trust by referring to the 'suspension of doubt' as crucial to any form of trust:

Suspension can be defined as the mechanism that brackets out uncertainty and ignorance, thus making interpretative knowledge momentarily 'certain' and enabling the leap [of faith] to favourable (or unfavourable) expectation. (Möllering 2001: 414)²⁸

This perspective of 'a leap of trust' requiring the 'suspension of doubt' may help to surpass both the rational choice and the anthropological vision of trust. Or to put it in more general terms: the tendency to understand trust as respectively just knowledge, or as an essence that is more or less given and only broken in exceptional circumstance. Simmel seems to speak directly to the Douala proverb quoted above that 'one has to learn to live with one's sorcerer'. If witchcraft

discourse expresses the gruesome realization that the most dangerous form of aggression comes from inside, the main challenge it raises might be how one can suspend knowledge of this danger. What 'leap of faith' might help to re-establish trust in one's relatives? Clearly different answers are possible for dealing with this terrible challenge, varying from often desperate attempts to expel the threatening elements from the inner circle, to efforts to neutralize the dangerous forces or assuage jealousy by just redistribution of new forms of wealth (but what is just? [see Geschiere in press]). The conclusion must be that, as for intimacy, trust is never given or self-evident. It has to be studied as a product of specific historical circumstances, as a constantly emerging 'event'. All we can hope to attain is to indicate certain factors or settings that make for a possible 'suspension of doubt' as a condition for a trust that is never a given.

Back to Sociality

The dangers of intimacy, so strongly outlined by witchcraft discourse, can serve to highlight certain more or less implicit premises in current ideas about sociality (see Long and Moore, Introduction). It might be good to emphasize that pointing out the dangers of a vision of intimacy – whether within the community, the household, the family or 'confluent love' – as intrinsically based on reciprocity, à la Sahlins or Giddens, is doing more than flogging a dead horse. In Africa, for instance – as in other parts of the 'developing' world – this view is making an unexpected comeback with the imposition of neoliberal views on development. Neoliberal development experts seem to combine in quite unexpected ways a solid belief in the blessings of the market with an equally categorical appeal to the old idea of 'the' community as a starting point for new-style development projects.²⁹

Against such romanticizing visions the candid view my Maka friends taught me of witchcraft – seen as part and parcel of kinship – might help to give notions of family or community a more realistic profile. An inspiring comment on my somewhat disappointing explorations of how theoretical approaches to the notion of intimacy could give me more insight into what was at stake in witchcraft imaginaries came from Jan-Georg Deutsch when I presented some of my ideas to the Africa seminar at Oxford University. As a good historian he sternly admonished me to stop theorizing about the witchcraft–intimacy link, but to instead try to study its changing articulations historically. If both poles of the relation are constantly shifting, like their mutual articulations, it might indeed be history that could bring more clarity.

Following up on this sound advice I tried to summarize the changes in the intimacy–witchcraft link in the Maka area, where I have done fieldwork since 1971. It is striking indeed that even over this relative short period of forty years people's definitions of this link keep changing. In the 1970s the distance between village and city was supposed to bring substantial protection against the jealousy

of the villagers and their witchcraft. One of the new elites of the village where I lived, who had made his career in the city, decided to return and live again with his 'brothers' in the village. However he immediately fell ill, and was only cured by a powerful *nganga*, who admonished him to return immediately to the city, and thereafter keep his distance from village life. Other people commented that, of course, he had been most imprudent venturing again into the intimacy of his family 'at home'. Yet in the 1990s a cousin of this *évolué* became also involved in a witchcraft affair. But this time people supposed that he had brought an urban form of witchcraft into the village. By now, village and city have become so intertwined that the geographical distance between the two is certainly no longer seen as an effective protection against witchcraft attacks. Above I referred already briefly to a saying, popular in the 1980s, from another part of Cameroon – the Southwest, colonized by the British and therefore Anglophone – that 'witchcraft does not cross the water'.³⁰ Yet since the 1990s people in this area have become obsessed with the idea of 'bush-falling' – a new and quite surprising notion since 'bush' stands for Europe (or in general the richer parts of the world) while people relate 'falling' to the image of a hunter who has luck and returns with large amounts of booty.³¹ However, the metaphor of the hunter has its ambiguities since everybody also knows the stories of hunters who stumbled upon an attractive spot in the forest and chose to create a new village there. So the families who are often very actively involved in enabling younger members to leave for 'bush' set great store on making sure 'they will not forget' (Alpes 2011). Talliani's seminal article (in press) on the heavy pressure on Nigerian prostitutes in Italy not to 'forget' the family at home shows how heavy the burden can become. In a study on Ghanaians in Tel Aviv, Galli Sabar (2010) shows most graphically how transcontinental migrants can come to fear angry phone calls from home reminding them of their obligations to share. Apparently witchcraft threats are now supposed – and most emphatically so – to cross the ocean. Clearly, the scope attributed to witchcraft threats can change over time in important ways, marking people's changing perceptions of what counts as intimacy.

The comparison with Europe – both with the historical studies of the witchcraft trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and with Favret-Saada's seminal study of the Bocage in France in the 1970s – highlight again different variations. Favret-Saada (1977 and 2009) and others (for instance, Briggs 1996) emphasize that witches in Europe are not relatives, like in Africa, but rather neighbours. Compare Favret-Saada's mesmerizing image, invoked above, of French farmers who desperately try to close off their farm – often with the help of a healer – against dark threats emanating from neighbouring farms. Yet it is quite clear that she – like historians for earlier periods – applies a very restricted definition of kinship. Even cousins who do not live in the same compound are seen as neighbours rather than as relatives (Favret-Saada 1977: 322). An important difference with African contexts, also emerging from historical studies, might be a more strict localizing delimitation of 'the house'.

The contrast with the very elastic conception of the house in these African settings is striking. As illustrated by the examples just mentioned, the house now easily bridges the distance between village and city – and one can even say that the house has acquired transcontinental allures with the increasing migration overseas. Such a context might explain the strong resilience of witchcraft ideas and the ease with which they graft themselves upon globalization and increasing mobility.

The varying delimitations of what count as intimacy are crucial for understanding how the balancing between danger and support – that is, between witchcraft and trust – will work out. But it is quite clear that the ambiguity is always there. Or to put it in more concrete terms: in some contexts – as in many African societies – family networks may be extremely resilient, bridging new distances and new inequalities. But they are never the haven of safety and reciprocity that some development organizations and even some anthropologists believe them to be.

A related – but more general – implication of the above may be that a major challenge for turning sociality into an incisive analytical notion is to get rid of moralizing associations that apparently creep in quite easily. The notion's attraction might be an implicit positive tenor: sociality, in the sense of 'being social', as a human endeavour. This implication may have been particularly appealing to anthropologists. Witchcraft discourse rather highlights the fundamentally ambiguous character of social relations as such.

Notes

* This text contains elements that are further developed in my book *Witchcraft, Intimacy and Trust – Africa in Comparison*, now in press with University of Chicago Press.

1. See the Introduction to this volume.
2. Of course, kinship is in such context not a biological given but a social concept: the use of kinship terms is an attempt to order social relations with all the claims, obligations and emotions that these terms imply.
3. Neither of the poles in this nexus are fixed: kinship or people's ideas about 'the house' are also constantly evolving with this increase of scale.
4. It is worth noting that popular ideas on 'witches' exhibit surprising correspondences in very different parts of the world: 'witches' are mostly supposed to have acquired a special ability to transform themselves; they can leave their bodies at night and fly away to secret meetings with their fellow-conspirators to plot attacks on people in their immediate environment (see Hutton 2004).
5. Thus the aim of this text is not to work towards an analytical definition of the notion of intimacy. My interest is rather in following the changing ways in which people demarcate an intimate sphere. Through an ethnography of such changes, I hope to map the changing context in which witchcraft suspicions thrive.
6. As said, it is quite clear that this is not special to the Maka. See, for instance, Ralph Austen's emphasis that 'witchcraft efficacy is held to be a direct function of the intimacy between witch and victim' (Austen 1993: 90). It may not be by accident that this aspect is so heavily emphasised in Austen's text since his was one of the first contributions that addresses, in a

most pioneering way, the link between witchcraft and globalization. Indeed, it was precisely when witchcraft studies in Africa began to address the role of this imaginary in wider contexts than the village that the continuing emphasis of intimacy became all the more striking. See also also the central place of this aspect in historian Hutton's attempt at a 'global definition' of witchcraft, covering both the historical data on Europe and anthropological studies elsewhere (Hutton 2004).

7. Another recurrent theme, briefly mentioned above, in the Maka stories about the *sjoumbou* is same-sex intercourse: these nightly encounters are marked not only by cannibalism but also by sexual debauchery. Yet in the nightly world everything is turned upside down. So sex is same-sex intercourse, which according to most Maka is unheard of in everyday life (although that remains to be seen): in the *sjoumbou* men do 'it' with men and 'even' women with women. This equation of homosexuality with witchcraft has taken on new vigour with quite dramatic effects now that recently (especially since 2005) not only the state and the Catholic Church but also the population at large have embarked – as elsewhere in Africa – on ferocious witch-hunts against homosexuals. One reason that homosexuality has quite suddenly become a burning issue all over the African continent might be the propagation of a challenging global gay/lesbian identity over the Internet; but the backlash against international human rights missions insisting that homosexuality should no longer be a criminal offence also plays an important role. 'Who are these people that they come here to impose the depravities of the West on Africa?', as a Cameroonian prosecutor asked me in a fit of rage during a private dinner – on the very day he had also received a delegation from the Canadian Human Rights mission (see Geschiere 2009a).
8. This trope of the witch-as-a-martyr is certainly not restricted to the Maka.
9. See also the film *Le Cercle des Pouvoirs* by Daniel Kamwa. Also from Douala, he is inspired by similar ideas – notably the betrayal of intimates as the crucial condition for getting access to the new magic of wealth (see also Alexei Tcheuyap's [2009] sharp analysis of this film).
10. Cf. also Isak Niehaus' insightful work (2001) on often violent accusations of witchcraft and the complex articulation between, on the one hand, tensions within the family/ neighbourhood and, on the other, a longer history of migrant labour in the South African Lowveld; he shows also that recently accusations concern direct kin more often than in the past. Florence Bernault (2006) offers a challenging extension of the witchcraft/intimacy theme by developing the idea that under colonial rule there emerged 'destructive understandings' (rather than distance and opposition) between colonials and locals – the first becoming even 'intimate partners in the remaking of local cosmologies'.
11. See also Elisabeth Copet-Rougier (1986) on the Mkako of Eastern Cameroon.
12. See the seminal account by Eric de Rosny, a French Jesuit who was initiated as an *nganga* in Douala in the 1960s. The climax in his initiation was when his master demanded of him 'a hairless animal' (i.e. a human being). However, in view of his special position, de Rosny was allowed to offer a goat – hence the title of his beautiful book *Les yeux de ma chèvre* (1981).
13. The notion of the village becoming a 'virtual reality' for Africans comes from Wim van Binsbergen (2001).
14. Regional differences may play an important role in this context. It is striking, for instance, that – as Tonda shows in rich detail (2005: 223) – in Brazzaville and Kinshasa (and probably in other cities in Congo) there is hardly any question of bringing back deceased urbanites to their home village to be buried. This is a marked difference with other parts of the continent where the funeral at home – that is, in the village – is still a high point in the reaffirmation of belonging and the coherence of the family; it is also a moment deeply feared by many urbanites since their obligatory attendance at funerals in the village offers the villagers a moment of choice to get even with their 'brothers in town' who neglected their duty to redistribute (see further Geschiere 2009b: chapter 6). In both the DRC and Congo-Brazzaville the general practice of burying in the city itself (where funerals are

- increasingly monopolised by unruly youths) might be a sign of a much further weakening of urban–rural ties: indeed a true *déparentélisation*? (see also de Boeck 2006 – and his recent film on funerals in Kinshasa).
15. See Benneduce (forthcoming) and Taliani (2010) on Nigerians and Cameroonians in Turin; and Sabar (2010) on Ghanaians in Tel Aviv.
 16. In Jankowiak (2008) the only exception among the ten contributions is Daniel Smith's perceptive analysis of the intertwining of different 'arenas of intimacy' among the Igbo in southeastern Nigeria. Smith shows how intimacy among (male) friends affects the intimacy of men with their (female) lovers and their wives (the last two spheres are also in constant interaction). The great merit of his analysis is that he thus shows that intimacy is never taken for granted, but continuously reshaped and under constant pressure. See also Povinelli (2006) who tends as well to associate intimacy with love, sex and the conjugal family (at least in the modern, liberal version of 'the intimate event'), but in a highly sophisticated argument shows what deep ramifications can be deduced from this: the liberal view of the intimate (love) is central to the disciplining of the subject; in contrast to what many observers think, this sphere of intimacy/love cannot be opposed to society's constraints as an area of relative freedom but is instead closely interwoven with the constraints of what Povinelli calls the 'genealogical society' (see especially *ibid.*: 3, 13, 182, 210). Apparently, even when intimacy is equated with love, it can still imply a more negative view of it.
 17. The blandness with which the learned sociologist follows publications by psychotherapists – for instance a certain Jody Hayer who insists in his book *Smart Love* (1990) on the link between intimacy and autonomy – is a bit worrying (see also Bersani and Philips and their criticism of 'the pathological optimism of ... ego psychology' that they see as 'a complete distortion' of Freudian ideas [2008:74]). Even in the modern West, that seems to be Giddens' only orientation point, people may be quite reluctant to become involved in any form of intimacy precisely because it is seen as entailing a growing dependency (and thus threatening one's autonomy). In this sense there is not much distance from the African view of intimacy as potentially dangerous precisely because it entails vulnerability. More attention to the ambiguities of modernity might have helped Giddens to do more justice to the flip side of intimate relations.
 18. For an again completely different take on 'intimacy', see Richard Sennett's 1974 book – at the time quite famous – on *The Fall of Public Man*. For Sennett, the public space that was expanding during the nineteenth century becomes more recently invaded by considerations that rather fit with more intimate spheres of life. People tend to judge relations in the public sphere ever more on the basis of intimate experiences. This leads to a loss of autonomous public know-how, earlier forms of sociability in the public sphere being ever more undermined by what he calls 'the tyranny of intimacy'. Again, this is in striking contrast to Giddens' celebration of intimacy as some sort of pinnacle of modernity.
 19. Many thanks to Susan van Zyl and Laia Soto Bermant for counselling me so wisely on Freud.
 20. Dutch is of interest here since it has similar terms but splits up the double meaning of *heimlich*: this term can be translated in Dutch as *huiselijk* (from *huis*, home) in its more positive sense (homely), but also as *heimelijk* in its more negative sense (secretive). It is worth noting, however, that the Dutch *heimelijk* relates to *heim*, which in Dutch is an old-fashioned word for home. So despite the split between *huiselijk* and *heimelijk* there is some trace here of the double meaning of home (*huis/heim*) – more or less parallel to the surprising tendency of the German *heimlich* to turn into its very opposite, *unheimlich*.
 21. There is an interesting parallel here with James Siegel's analysis of witchcraft as being experienced as particularly frightening since it makes impossible links between things (see Siegel 2006).
 22. Even a sharp observer like Charles Tilley – in his 2005 book *Trust and Rule* – seems to take it for granted that trust only becomes a problem when society undergoes an increase of

- scale and thus becomes increasingly complex. The flipside of this grand view is that apparently trust is not a problem within small scale societies (like the local communities in Europe's early Middle Ages).
23. This is quoted in Sahlins 1974a: 196 – who unfortunately does not give a reference for this quote.
 24. Similarly, Hoffmann's *The Sandman* story can be read as a defence of the family (the father tried to protect Nathaniel against the terrible Dr Coppelius, and was maybe even killed for this). It is only when modern science, in the person of Dr Coppelius, invades the house that its intimacy becomes uncanny.
 25. The text was first published in 1965 (in M. Banton's *The Relevance of Models for Social Anthropology*), but a slightly revised version published in *Stone Age Economics* (1972) became the standard source; I quote here from that version.
 26. See also Sahlins' text in the same volume on *The Spirit of the Gift* (Sahlins 1974b: 149–185).
 27. See Mauss [1923–4] 1950: 155–160, 254; see also Mauss' digression (ibid.: 255) on the double meaning of the word *gift* in German: 'gift' but also 'poison' (with parallels in other Germanic languages). At the very end of the text (ibid.: 279) Mauss gives an example of King Arthur and his *Table ronde* that approaches Sahlins' image of 'generalized reciprocity' in small-scale communities. Yet even here the trust is clearly balanced in Mauss' view by hidden competition. It might be significant that the word *réciprocité* is hardly present in the French original of Mauss' text (and *réiproque* occurs only a few times). In the most recent English translation (1990), on the contrary, the term reciprocity appears to be central to Mauss' work since *rendre le don* is consequently translated as 'to reciprocate the gift' (instead of the more adequate and more neutral 'to return the gift' – perhaps this particular translation was influenced by Sahlins' essays?). In the earlier 1954 translation, the English rendering of *rendre le don* is 'to repay the gift', which although inaccurate is less distorting than 'reciprocate'. Such distorting translations make it all the more interesting to follow up in more detail the genealogy of the notion of reciprocity in anthropology, and the implications this notion acquired. With many thanks to Patricia Spyer and Rafael Sanchez for reintroducing me to Mauss.
 28. Many thanks to Mattijs van de Port for drawing my attention to this article.
 29. Striking examples are to be found in Juan Obarrio's thesis (2007) on the emergence of what he calls the 'Structural Adjustment state' in Mozambique. He describes how, for instance, during a meeting a senior American UNDP official angrily replied to the doubts of a few social scientists about the ease with which he took 'the' local community as the starting point for projects: 'These communities know who they are and know also their boundaries perfectly well'. Similarly a British USAID consultant insisted that communities 'will be like corporations, unified single legal subjects under the new land law' (ibid.: 105).
 30. Miriam Goheen drew my attention to this common saying.
 31. See Maybritt Jill Alpes (2011) 'Bushfalling: How Young Cameroonians Dare to Migrate'.

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