

Occult Imaginaries in IsiZulu Fictional Works: The Dialogic of the Global Political Economy and Local Socio-economic Transformations

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Abstract

Occult imaginaries have remained a constant feature in numerous publications ever since the nascent period of isiZulu literary tradition. Recurrent prismic refractions of this theme in isiZulu fictional works through different political epochs in South Africa are beginning to advance a sense of a continuous dialogical engagement with the global political economy in ways that put forward local understandings of wealth accumulation within those of international capitalist flows. Scholarship in anthropology has shown how proliferation of witchcraft in Africa is the result of contemporary inequalities among Africans, capitalist/neoliberal penetration, and postcolonial political economies that have produced wealth by means beyond the comprehension and control of most ordinary people. Wealth accumulation through ‘hidden secrets’ has thus become a major aspect animating the popular imagination in Africa, the African diaspora and beyond. Nonetheless, popular understandings of this phenomenon, especially within the South African context, have mainly proceeded from understandings shaped by Christian morality, a religious stance that has thoroughly percolated Africans’ perception of their contemporary world. Within such modalities of thought, representations of the occult associate it with the diabolical instead of being seen as a site to explore the repressed, unarticulated criticisms they embody regarding principles of global capitalist accumulation. I argue in the discussion that occult imaginaries not only provide us with rare insights into complex entanglements of socio-economic transformations in the African society, but also the political and economic anomies, particularly of post-colonial Africa, and how these anomies derive their articulations from Africa’s entanglements with the

uncertainties produced by global capitalism. This discussion will draw from the anthropology of witchcraft to explore the ‘modernity of witchcraft’ in contemporary South Africa as explored in Zulu fiction. The focus will be on the popular dialogues they engender, and how these are situated within the ‘basic coordinates of lived-experiences’.

Keywords: Economic Transformation, occult imaginaries, Zulu fiction

Introduction

Fantastic stories about power and wealth gained immorally through ‘hidden secrets’ of the world of the occult have dominated not only modern urban popular stories circulating in the public domain, but also modern African literatures. While these modern narratives take on contemporary significations relating to postcolonial power and political economy, they also show how the ‘modernity’ in witchcraft shares ontological repertoires with precolonial traditions of witchcraft among Africans. The sampled isiZulu fictional narratives in this discussion – considered in a historical timeline as well as against macro-economic realities through different political epochs – illustrate the thought modalities and imaginaries about the occult in the South African social and cultural space and time. These narratives pervade, feed off and entangle with Africans’ lived experiences, share perceptions with other similar popular narratives across the continent and diasporic public spheres, and reveal repressed complex engagements with issues of power and economy in postcolonial states. The narratives further register statements about continuities of colonial and postcolonial political economies in African nation-states or in the African diaspora, and how these economic and political structural constructions engender a cycle of inequality, deprivation and exclusion for some, and the privileging of a few others who are connected to state organs, sources of power and incongruous wealth.

I argue that these narratives advance a conscious, continuous dialogical engagement with the global political economy as introduced in South Africa by colonialism, racial capitalism and now neoliberal capitalism in ways that put forward local understandings of the location of power and wealth accumulation within those of international capitalist flows. Further, I

argue that occult imaginaries not only provide us with rare insights into complex entanglements of socio-economic transformations in the African society, but also critique political and economic anomies, particularly in postcolonial Africa, and how these anomies derive their articulations from Africa's entanglements with uncertainties produced by global capitalism. Linked to these aspects is the location of wealthy black women within a neoliberal post-1994 economic framework. I argue that heteropatriarchal anxieties sit uncomfortably with affluent women because they do not fit an African patriarchal heteronormative mould. Following Garritano's (2012) views, I demonstrate that these narratives not only critique capricious desires for attainment of wealth before human life, but also address the economic anxieties about obscure bases of political power and wealth's mysterious foundations in a global context where power unpredictably attaches itself to and detaches itself from certain personalities, and prosperity seems removed from the work and production ethic. I will concentrate on four themes to illustrate interpretations of power and wealth accumulation in the African societies depicted: 1) how modern significations introduced by Christianity convoluted Christian dogma and Western entrapments, resulting in the bifurcation and conflation of good and evil in pursuit of wealth; 2) the capitalist-occultist connections versus the dispensation of law and justice; 3) the 'hidden' sources of political power in an African postcolony; and 4) locating the occult in the post-1994 *nouveaux riche* within the context of heteropatriarchal anxieties in occult women. Four novels will be deployed to illustrate understandings of the entanglements of African repertoires of wealth accumulation with those of capitalism. These are Bhengu's *UPhuya WaseMshwathi* (1983), Dhlomo's *Izwi Nesithunzi* (1977), Lukhele's *Nakho Phela* (1981), and Nxaba's *Kufeziwe* (2010).

Old-New Empires: Capitalism/Neoliberalism and the Protestant Work Ethic

Precolonial Africa has had its fair share of beliefs in supernatural mediums, spirits and magic, and that powers could be accessed by powerful individuals who would in turn prepare charms and concoctions for clients who need them for a range of reasons. Colonial sensibilities, predicated on Christianity and the rationality of Western civilization and modernity, changed African worldviews

from ‘inside out’ and from the ‘ground up’. Western dogmas were regarded as ideal normative models for negating African ‘primitiveness’, ‘paganism’, ‘savagery’, ‘degenerate morals’ and ‘obsession with witchcraft’. Earlier anthropologists believed that these African ‘states of being’ would disappear when Africans took to urbanizing and the dissolution of traditional family groups, given that witchcraft is the dark side of kinship. Conversely, colonialism brought along a new set of challenges that saw the migration of witchcraft from close family/community networks to a broader societal sphere. Colonial modernity went hand in hand with a process of disenchantment, the kind of disillusionment that brought along insecurities that made people submit to the patronage of more powerful groups or individuals. The moral and political panic occasioned by these major transformations saw the transposition of certain precolonial beliefs in the hidden world into everyday domains of ordinary people, and gradually typified popular imaginations around acquisition of fantastic wealth when African states gained independence.

With regard to the missionary enterprise, the commodity economy introduced among converts promised greater prospects of prosperity, an aspect that would have helped converts reconstruct their shattered lives after *Umfecane* wars and colonial invasion. These notions about commodities and acquisition were strictly linked to Christian discourses, and were distilled from biblical teachings. Missionaries applied themselves to these doctrines, and so did their converts, the result of which saw members of the African Christian converts’ ‘normative’ progression to visible distinction in terms of social and economic mobility, as is the case with nineteenth-century African petty bourgeoisie class in missionary stations of Natal, Makapansgat, Mafikeng, among the Southern Batswana, and elsewhere in the country. As Hofmeyr (1993), and Leah and John Comaroff (1997) illustrate, the association of social and economic mobility with inevitable socio-economic progress after conversion to Christian life among converts in missionary stations revealed complex African responses to missionary tutelage and attraction to Western economic systems. Africans’ interest in the commodity economy revealed that fascination with these enterprises was multivalent; it was not Christian teachings, but aspirations to prosperity which served as major attractions to becoming a convert. Nonetheless, the perception of wealth being a predestined progression flowing from self-application with regard to work, commerce and production became a way of life for modernizing Africans socialized in

Christian morality, though this ethic was doubted and contested by other sectors of the African society and the unfolding colonial reality.

The pressures to bring more Africans 'into the demands of capitalist modernity' had dire effects with regard to missionary teachings. Many Africans, turned out from traditional lands and thrust into white employment, were exploited, denigrated and dehumanized. Uncertainty in the future loomed large, and alternative sources of stability were sought. For some Africans outside the missionary enclaves, and other Christian converts who secretly sought the services of the powerful medicine men, the protection and security offered by the occult world became ubiquitous in their minds. For this cohort, continued existence and security depended on spirit mediums believed to be powerful enough to ward off personal misfortunes, real or imagined malicious intentions by foes, as well as bring prosperity. The missionary work ethic was soon to be overtaken by racial capitalism which missionaries (un)wittingly helped to prepare and institute. Polarized divides which translated to white and whiteness associated with affluence, and black and blackness with poverty, led to new perceptions about acquisition of wealth. These perceptions held sway across all classes in African society. The absence of a visible work and production ethic in a racialized capitalist economy led to complex associations of Western lifestyle with enjoyment of the finer things in life without industriousness, but with brute legislative force, and as such called into question earlier missionary teachings about the work ethic.

While some Africans worked in major sectors of white employment such as the mining, industrial or domestic service, many more were unemployed and had to negotiate their social and economic hardships and mediate their survival through the informal economy and cultural activities. Life in appalling conditions in the cities began to fuel visions of a better life, and aspirations to social and economic mobility which could be attained, not only through change in politics, but also in unprecedented illicit measures, since it was apparent that legitimate, formal labour would not yield expected outcomes. It is precisely the outlandish nature of segregationist and apartheid laws, the squalor and outrageous living conditions of Africans in rural and urban areas, which led to a number of them to be drawn to alternative, illicit economies of survival which generated in their wake an outlaw culture that has since absorbed Africa's national, political and economic life.

At the height of counterhegemonic struggles against apartheid, the ANC-led administration rallied the masses' political consciousness with

socialist imperatives which promised immediate change to their material life conditions. The change from this utopian ideal to a dystopian, neo-liberal one in 1996 had negative effects. While the lives of the African masses remained unchanged, that of the new super-affluent African elite – the *nouveaux riche* – was marked by its conspicuous consumption and a clinging to sources of power and material wealth procured through political positions and government tenders. The African *nouveaux riche*'s consumption style in South Africa – driven by desires for distinction and differentiation – invariably engendered disgruntlement and envy from the excluded and remarginalized majority. The major difference between the post-1994 middle class and earlier versions of it is that, while during the colonial and apartheid times, African elites have had mainly their education and nascent mercantile drives as legitimate claims to social distinction, the post-1994 African *nouveaux riche* not only embody all these features, but a greater number of its members are at the centre of the sources of 'glocal' capital structures as black capitalists or black aristocrats.

South Africa's neoliberal turn created a new class of the super affluent whose source of wealth does not proceed from the visible ethic of work and commerce, but is beyond the comprehension of the remarginalized African majority. This African empowerment entrepreneur's class, characterized by spectacular theatrical displays of consumption practices, shared not more than twenty years ago the same historical and geographical spaces with the rest of the African majority. Within the first ten years of democracy, the black aristocratic class/black capitalist amassed wealth listed at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange as worth 67 billion rand by the end of 1999 (Iheduru 2004). According to Greenblo (1994, cited in Randall 1996), the South African black aristocratic/black capitalist class has no independent base of its own, but instead it has risen on 'expedient structures'. In Greenblo's analysis expedient structures entail production for profit through government dependency for capital accumulation, dependency on the banking system for capital procurement, dependency on multinational corporate joint ventures for capital accumulation in exchange for political capital, and exploitation of one's own. The latest statistics by Stats SA indicate that the unemployment rate, especially among the African majority in South Africa, has reached national crisis proportions¹. The rise in unemployment occurs against the background of

¹ <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/ramaphosa-apologises-for-buffalo-bid-20120920>.

twenty years of capital accumulation by the black capitalists whose wealth combined within such a short space of time far surpasses the GDPs of some African states (Seekings & Nattrass 2002:12-13; Iheduru 2004:15-17). The ANC-led government, following postcolonial governments on the continent, slavishly followed the IMF's inspired indigenization of capital programmes which produced no true capitalists who are able to develop African entrepreneurship in post-1994 South Africa. However the downside effect is that the preferred macro-economic policies that prepared the ground for the growth of this class overlooked growth-seeking paths for the African majority which would have reduced intra-black inequality. Post-1994 South Africa has become one of the most unequal societies in the world, with its African citizens being the poorest and most economically inactive.

‘The Modernity of Witchcraft’: The Occult and Western Entrapments

Scholarship on witchcraft, the occult and other modern magic (Geschiere 1997; Ferguson 2006; Smith 2007) is increasingly attributing the re-emergence of the hidden world to unpredictability of power, hidden sources of wealth and the decline in personal and societal security in postcolonial states. Although the issues cited above are the basic principles of agreement in this scholarship, divergent views prevail regarding the sources of decline. Most Western anthropological literature points to general moral decline – a moral crisis – in postcolonial states. The overall discourse of this scholarship gives impressions that are in line with the rationale and justification of colonialism. In this kind of view, it is noted that pre-civilization European societies also experienced almost similar events, but the institutionalization of power in the form of a modern state, and the innovations brought about by modernity saw to the advancement of European societies. This advancement was to such an extent that issues of witchcraft and sorcery are no longer plaguing these societies. The strengthening of democratic institutions, science and the rule of law eventually effaced these problems, and it was believed the same could occur in Africa.

Contrariwise, these Western-driven anthropological studies are increasingly overtaken by scholarship that links witchcraft, occultism and modern black magic to capitalism and neoliberal imperatives in postcolonial African states. The most recent study of Nigerian state decline and the re-

emergence of the occult are revealing (Harnischfeger 2006). According to Ellis and Ter Haar (2003), the large-scale challenge of regulating power in postcolonial Africa has made power to become unpredictable and has made it to be perceived as connected to hidden forces, engendering a desire in everyone in society to have an interest in manipulating these forces. In all spheres of life, it now seems advisable to take occult influences into consideration, because despite the introduction of ‘democracy’, the use of power has not become more transparent; rather, power is located in other localities than where the law proclaims it to be (Harnischfeger 2006). This development compares with past beliefs and practices where witchcraft accusations focused on marginal persons (Harnischfeger 2006:72-73). Today people in ruling circles are also implicated. These contemporary accusations attest to the perceived loss of legitimate authority and power among upper classes. Of course, this should be the logical development in popular imagination, because when the masses are becoming impoverished while the ruling elite and businessmen openly display their wealth, it is inevitable that in such a cultural milieu the power of the elites is seen to be located in illegitimate, demonic sources.

Harnischfeger’s views above bring in another aspect to occultism in postcolonial Africa: its economic dimension. The nature of capitalist and neoliberal capitalist imperatives are considered predatory and incomprehensible; while undergirded by the rationalities of progress, civilization and democracy, they allow catastrophic abuses and atrocities that result in a large majority of the world’s population having to live in abject poverty and a few to not only lead lavish lives, but also control the resources of production and wealth accumulation. Comaroff and Comaroff (1999:279-303) point out that in the African context, the occult has become linked through a range of ‘magical technologies’ to the incoherence and obscene inequalities of the ‘free’ market. Furthermore, the economic anxieties plaguing postcolonial Africa have created uncertainties, where wealth, because of its separation from formal, discernible labour practices, appears through seemingly supernatural or mysterious networks. Barbara Frank (2008, cited in Lindsey Green-Simms 2012:39) adds that fraud, speculation, pyramid schemes, and scams are also sources that are inscrutable, and wealth in these economies appears as if by magic, even when magic per se is not involved.

As can be noted above, much of the literature discussed focuses on what Geschiere (1997) has phrased ‘the modernity of witchcraft’. According

to Auslander (1993:168), occultism, witchcraft and black magic and the dialogues about them,

are not archaic or exotic phenomena, somehow isolated or disjointed from historical processes of global political and economic transformation. Rather, these are moral discourses alive to the basic coordinates of experience, highly sensitive to contradictions in economy and society.

Witchcraft traditions, beliefs and practices are not archaic, but are firmly located within the dynamism of modern life experiences, even though they tend to draw from a host of older African archives. This is an aspect raised by Comaroff and Comaroff (1993; 1999), who argue that modernity and witchcraft must be understood within their historical and economic contexts. The notion of ‘the modernity of witchcraft’ presupposes ‘the antiquity of modernity in Africa’, where witchcraft traditions become relevant responses to modern social dynamics while simultaneously establishing historical continuities with the past. Scholarship on this notion, such as espoused by Fisiy and Geschiere (1991), Geschiere (1997), and Comaroff and Comaroff (1999), concurs that the spread of witchcraft in postcolonial Africa is directly connected to the infiltration of neoliberal capitalism and the position of local political economy vis-à-vis the global capitalist sensibilities. The inequality that results from this relationship gives rise to simultaneous resentment and attraction, where people resent the gross inequalities of wealth in modern African societies, but they also wish that they could be recipients of this fantastic wealth themselves (Smith 2001).

***UPhuya WaseMshwathi*: Wealth’s Conflation of Binaries of the Christian Doctrine**

The portrayals of the phenomenon of *ukuthwala* among commoners as described by Turrell (2001) abound in the novel *UPhuya WaseMshwathi*. The plot of *UPhuya WaseMshwathi* is about the life of a country lad, Mbizeni, whose torpid rural life is transformed when he gets to the city. Responding to a longstanding Shepstonian principle of inducing young Zulu men into exploitative labour in the cities, that is, accruing enough money to pay *ilobolo*

(bride-wealth), he joins the file of other young men who hope for greener pastures in the mining, industrial and domestic service sectors of white employment. His work at a hotel for a pittance under heavy managerial control and unfavourable conditions ends shortly with his dismissal. He ends up living in the dead end of the city, where informal economic survival schemes throw him into the world of fast wealth accumulation through the occult. In return for fast wealth, he promises his daughter, Tholakele, as sacrifice to the dual Christian-Satanic priest, Mkhokhobi. He finds after years of enjoying this wealth, he cannot keep the promise of his sacrifice, and attempts to hide his daughter among strangers. For by this time, his only son, the twin to Tholakele, and his wife have long since died. The journey of his downward spiral begins as he transforms into a 'subhuman' lunatic, hiding in caves, forests and the havens of 'good-spirits' to elude capture by evil forces that have been sent out to seize him in lieu of his daughter, because on the verge of Tholakele's sacrifice, it is discovered by Mkhokhobi that she has become impure. By this time his wealth has suddenly disappeared, with a major part of it having been stolen by his trusted cousin, Nhlamvu, and the rest of it by his bosom friend, Nombolo, who initiated him into the occult world.

Published toward the close of the twentieth century, during the years when the positive feelings toward colonial modernity and African modernity have sobered up in the popular imagination, and the effects of colonialism and civilization discourses were unambiguously and ubiquitously imprinted in the dire African cultural and socio-political landscape, *UPhuya WaseMshwathi* registers crudely the appalling life conditions of urbanizing Africans. It also conveys discontent with the exclusionary nature of South Africa's racial economy. Notable about Bhengu's social influences is that he is mission-schooled and has been subjected to missionary discourses of the commodity and mercantile economies the missionaries introduced among Zulu converts of Natal. However, land expropriation, forced labour and the marked decline of African moral and social life, together with precarious transformations in the political economy legislated by colonialism and apartheid, and supported by Christianity, inevitably induced an awakening and a need to give a realistic picture of African life in the cities.

In his critique of Africans' desire for fantastic wealth, Bhengu presents as central criticism the blurred Janus-face of missionary morality. On the one hand, money is perceived to be the source of all evil, and on the other, it is associated with prosperity, and good, pious, Christian life (Comaroff &

Comaroff 1997). By the time of Bhengu's writing, when the realities of colonial/apartheid capitalism have made their mark on the social and moral fabric of Africans, these missionary instructions were found to be wanting and dismissed by different sectors of African society. For example, while Mbizeni carries the moral of the surface theme, there is tacit understanding in his portrayal regarding his decisions for fast wealth, which are portrayed as the natural consequence of life experiences of structural racial exclusion and deprivation. On the contrary, Mkhokhobi, the occultist, who is an embodiment of evil in the narrative, is ambiguously represented as a Christian prophet and a diabolical angel of Lucifer. In his temple, paraphernalia relating to Christian worship landscapes characterize his sanctuary; and symbolic figurations such as the priestly clothes, the cross, the altar and liturgical vocabulary and demeanour punctuate his practice and ritual performances. However, these symbolic configurations have been subverted, at once signalling an ambiguity in the reading – that they are two sides of the same coin and vacillations of the same thing (Bhengu: 65-72). This is attested to by the description of the sacrificial process which echoes biblical vocabularies of the sacrifices Israelites offered to God, and, notably, the sacrificial rituals from African traditions of witchcraft. The cutting of body parts is not part of the biblical discourse, but firmly located in Africans' occult vocabularies:

Njengoba wayesezandleni zikaMkhokhobi wasemdlulisile emigilingwaneni yokulungiselwa ukuba wumhlatsshelo omsulwa. Kwase kusele ukuba ayiswe ethempeleni likaLusifa, amiswe phambi kwe-alithari enqunu, aboshwe amehlo, nomlomo, ngendwangu emnyama, kusondezwe izitsha zakhona zokukhongozela igazi. Wayezoboshwa izandla, nezinyawo, alaliswe phezu kwe-alithari bese kuqalwa ngokusika ulimi, ukuze angakhulumi amazwi angajivaza, noma aqanganise umsebenzi kaLusifa, kugcinwe ngokukhishwa kwegazi enhliziyweni, elalizophophozela ezitsheni ezimnyama. Umzimba wakhe wawuzocwiywa izitho ezithile.

As she was already in the hands of Mkhokhobi, she had already been made to observe the rituals preparing her for a sacrifice that was pure. What remained was that she should be taken to Lucifer's temple, and made to stand in front of the altar naked, her eyes and mouth were to be bound with a black cloth, black dishes that served as blood receptacles be brought nearer. She was to be bound hand and foot, laid

on top of the altar and then started off by having her tongue cut out so that she would not utter words of condemnation, or curse the work of Lucifer; and then the ritual would be ended by letting out her blood from her heart, which was to collect into the black dishes. In her body certain body parts were to be cut off as well (Bhengu: 166).

The complicity of the two traditions is castigated, as is the complicity of all the characters involved and who supported Mbizeni's daring decision, which is undergirded by insatiability and avarice. However, the Christian morality becomes even more critiqued because its introduction to Africans was meant to root out continuities of the very 'barbarism' – pagan practices – which are the dialectics of capitalist modernity. As can be noted from the sacrificial ritual above, the performance of it is not an antiquated vestige of a primitive past, but located in the ever-evolving dynamism of everyday life and the influences of Western religious beliefs as ordinary people articulate their life experiences vis-à-vis the capitalist economy. Bhengu's criticism of witchcraft is couched within the capitalist ideology and praxis which aim to accumulate wealth through exploitation of the innocent. In the narrative Tholakele, the innocent, needed to be exploited; sacrificed to the devil for her father to lead a lavish life supported by riches whose sources are unknown, just as capitalism is predicated upon the exploitation of the labour of innocent marginalized people to benefit and prop up the lifestyle of owners of capital and production.

Izwi Nesithunzi: The Marauding Capitalists-Cultists and the Western Justice System

The notion that occult narratives are compelling because they articulate resistance to Africa's 'initiation into capitalism' (Medley & Carroll 2011:283) also finds credence in the depiction of blood-money rituals to access wealth depicted in Dhlomo's *Izwi Nesithunzi*, published in the middle of the last century. In this novel, Ncibijane Zuma, a proud, haughty, unsociable young man, becomes a traditional doctor upon the death of his uncle, and after years of being an apprentice to his dead uncle's craft of traditional healing. Because of his conceited demeanour, offending patients all the time, he loses their patronage and runs the practice down. He thereafter seeks the services of an

occult master, Shibasa Mfulamfula, from Thongaland, to help him restart his business, and access a fantastic fortune in the process. In return for the riches he is to murder people to appease the ‘shadow’ and the ‘voice’, which protect him from discovery and supply him with wealth. The first victim is his beautiful, modern wife, Zenzile. Police investigate, but do not have convincing proof to put him behind bars yet. His second victim is a daughter of a client, and this time around, there are witnesses, but the charges cannot be directly connected to him. When Zuma is visiting one evening, MaNkosi, the mother of Zuma’s second victim, discovers the protective medicine-laced snake-belt that Zuma wears around his waist, and tears it away from him. The belt, which has been the source of Zuma’s power, is destroyed, as is his power that drives him to commit murder, and the supposed protection. The law closes in on him, and he is incarcerated. During his court hearing he denies the charges laid against him, claiming he was not responsible for the crimes he was said to have committed. He only acted on the instructions of the ‘shadow’ and the ‘voice’.

Wema ephuzwini elithi zonke izenzo lezi okuthiwa wayezenza zazenziwa umoya omubi ongutikoloshe abuya naye eButhonga. Yena uqobo kazange abulale noyedwa ngesandla sakhe...’Konke engangikwenza ngangithunywa Izwi elalikhuluma nami bangalizwa engihlezi nabo. Kodwa babone ukuthi kukhona okungehlelayo. Ngiphenduke omunye umuntu ngoba ngikwesaba okwakushiwo Izwi lelo. Ofakazi laba bayesaba ukukhuluma iqiniso lokuthi ukhona ngempela umoya omubi emhlabeni...Usiza ababulali, amasela, abaphangi, izinswelaboya njalonjalo. Bonke bafuna imali eningi ngezindlela ezimbi.’

He stood on the position that all the murderous acts it has been said he has committed were not of his own doing, but that of an evil spirit, a witch’s familiar (*utikoloshe*) he brought back with him from Buthonga....’Everything that I did was because I was instructed by the Voice which spoke to me alone and not anyone else with whom I was. However, they would realize that there is something wrong with me. I would turn into a different person because I was afraid of what the Voice said to me. These witnesses are afraid of telling the truth, that there is an evil spirit such as that flowing in the world....It helps murderers, thieves, plunderers, people without conscience, etc. All these people want fantastic wealth through evil means’ (Dhlomo 152).

Ideally, Zuma's portrayal provides an example of a classic replay of the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde cognitive psychological disorder. When he commits his murderous acts, he assumes a different personality, one possessed by evil, and outside this possessed state he is a changed being, a thorough drunk. Of course, Western legality does not have any doubts as to what has to be done with such social miscreants. They are convicted and jailed. Scholarship, though, indicates that the Cameroon justice system makes provision for witchcraft cases. However, the manner in which the legal process is handled makes the entire provision a farce and a miscarriage of justice (Harnischfeger 2006; Obiwulu 2010). Nonetheless, Dhlomo's stance is against the nature of Western legal justice as it relates to capitalist sensibilities. For instance, Zuma's testimony indicates that there are many like him who are fuelled by imaginaries of fantastic wealth and fame to kill, thus his death sentence does not solve the problem. Interestingly, though, in his testimony about numerous social miscreants like him, he invokes and provokes grammars with which the historicity of global capitalist acts has been perceived by victims of capitalism who have been on the receiving end of old, colonial and new, global capitalist empires' aggression all over the world. It would seem that therein lies Dhlomo's criticism of the Western legal system. It is able to make insignificant individuals, who are on the lowest rung of the capitalist ladder to face retribution even though their actions have been founded on designs and aspirations similar to those who are on the highest rungs of its hierarchy. Accordingly, small-time thieves and murderous cultists are not in any way different from capitalists – all want to amass enormous wealth, all are fuelled by greed, all want to splash out in their lavish lives – and the path to accrue this wealth is immoral and destructive to humanity.

Dhlomo's criticism of Western justice is even more profound when he points out that because of its dismissive attitude, it falls short of understanding worldviews that would have contributed to capitalism's inward criticism. Succumbing to enchantments of wealth cuts across two traditions, Western and African, in equal measure as far as the juxtapositions of capitalism and occultism are concerned in this narrative, just as the vocabularies describing capitalists and cultists as covetous and insatiable are the same. Nonetheless, in Western law, only those frames of reference falling within its ideological views are embodied, and those outside it are dismissed. Dhlomo draws from tropes common to older African discourses about witchcraft to stake a claim for the relevance of their effects on black people within a Western legal framework:

*Ngangenziwa umuthi owaboshelwa okhalweni lwami nguShibasa
Mfulamfula ukuba ngicebe. Uma nina Makhosi amhlophe niyihleka
imithi yaBantu nokusebenza kwayo nithi yimbudane, kodwa yona
ikhona. Iyasebenza futhi ngezindlela nina uqobo beLungu eningeke
niziqhaqhe*

I have been made by medicine that was tied on my waist by Sibasha Mfulamfula so that I get wealthy. If you, my white Lords, laugh at Black medicine and the manner in which it works, saying that it is nonsense, you should know that it exists. It works in ways you yourselves, White people, will never understand (Dhlomo 154).

In this narrative, the Western legal system becomes a symbol of concealment, an institutionalized censoring system covering up the designs of capitalism, and through its prison system, its excesses. This symbol also works in similar ways to others that are central in both *UPhuya WaseMshwathi* and *Izwi Nesithunzi*. In these narratives capitalist metaphors of exchange and transformation are used to link the neoliberal individualizing ideologies predicated upon relentless pursuit of success and prosperity. In both texts, the altar in Mkhokhobi's shrine in the former novel, and the medicine-laced snake-belt in the latter novel, stand in exchange and transformation of human subjects in a manner that Comaroff and Comaroff (2002:782) labelled 'the experiential contradiction at the core of neoliberal capitalism'. Capitalism appears to offer up enormous, instantaneous riches to those who control its technologies, and simultaneously, threaten the very livelihood of those who do not. The altar and the belt in these isiZulu narratives are metaphors for the mysteries of wealth's sources, whereby one experiences riches without work or production, but extracted from human life – an allegorical reference to capitalism.

Nakho Phela: The Sources of Political Power in a Postcolony

Nakho Phela also invokes and provokes the metaphors of capitalism described above, but explores its dialectic – political power – in a fictional postcolony named Shamba, whose capital city is Dodo. In this postcolonial state, the white colonial government, which had an iron hand in its enforcement of the rule of law, has left the institution of the government in the hands of African traditionalists and conservatives who are uneducated and lack a systematic

understanding of running the country lawfully. Now governance through witchcraft and ritual murders, by the ruling elite, has become the basis of law and political succession. Nonetheless, the state is 'progressive', with all the markings of a democratic constitution and governance. The state of Shamba is constituted by a monarchy – not absolute, but King Bhunga III has ultimate powers over the constitution, the judiciary and the law when he unilaterally deems it fit to protect vested interests. There are to be elections in Shamba, and it seems a new, progressive Congress Party is poised to overtake the anachronistic, backward-looking Isiko Party of the conservatives, which is in power. After the King and his traditionalist, conservative party realize that they have lost political power, King Bhunga III declares that the current constitution is being dissolved so that all powers revert to the monarchy, making Shamba an absolute monarchy but which has a modern democratic constitution. When re-establishing the constitution, the King announces a right to monarchical pardon, which entails that some of those convicted to die because of involvement in witchcraft and ritual murders are pardoned. These Ministers are thereafter freed by the re-establishment of an arbitrarily constituted traditional council which in the past has been and now still appointed by the King himself.

In the depictions of the disbanding of parliament, Lukhele echoes a well-known aspect about issues of political power in postcolonial Africa; cliques of powerful politicians, and businessmen arrange among themselves who will fit which positions, as whoever wins any power must defend it tirelessly since the possession of it is no longer guaranteed by institutions (Harnischfeger 2006:7). Lukhele's concerns with the political dimension of the occult in this narrative are not a conceit. For Harnischfeger, as he describes with the Nigerian example, just as much as for Lukhele, issues of state decline and the unpredictability of power as linked to fast wealth in a postcolony are significant in as much as they explain the collective traumas resulting from Africa's collusion with capitalism by way of colonialism.

The delegitimization of state institutions that are based on Western systems have unleashed among some of the postcolonial ruling elite and upper classes, too, a frenzy to engage in ritual killings to gain access to this invisible power which is believed to help them cling to political power. In *Nakho Phela*, the ritual murders and cutting of victims' body parts undergird the view that power is located in invisible sources. On the surface level, these murders are fuelled by visions of loss of political power and the ascendancy of political opposition. However, there are underlying concerns, and these are echoed by

the popular view that ‘...siseAfrika. Ngesinye isikhathi ivoti alisho lutho. Kusebenza isibhamu’ (Lukhele 55), which directly speaks to the limits of Westernized institutions. This statement points to undercurrents of instability, uncertainty and lack of vision for the future prospects for Shamba state in the narrative, and for the African continent generally, where violence in the usurpation of political power might be the only way to rid the state of greedy, corrupt and wicked individuals as seen in the Ministers of the traditional council and the monarch. It is an indictment against the powers that be that are prepared to bring political mayhem in the state in order to protect selfish, narrow interests at the expense of the African majority. It is against such realities that violent coups are deemed an alternative (Lukhele 55-56) which at some point characterized the postcolonial political landscape in many African states. The lack of trust not only in the leadership of the state but also in all state organs, just as depicted in the novel, is the basis on which people think that an alternative form of taking on the sitting political power is justified, thus making power unpredictable and uncontrollable. For in the novel, parliament is dissolved in order to absolve Minister Shiba, whom the law and the justice system of Shamba state have proven beyond doubt is guilty and therefore deserves to be punished. However, as it emerged in the court proceedings, the Minister is the ‘Government’ itself, and therefore he is the ‘Law’ unto himself (Lukhele 86, 87, 89, 90, 92). Further, these politicians, as exemplified by Minister Shiba’s demeanour towards the underclasses, are characterized by some sort of undermining of the masses’ intelligence, exploiting normative observances of cultural ruler-ruled relations, as well as devaluation of their lives as human beings. Wendy Brown (2010:115) talks about this: she phrases it as ‘the mystified nature of production of value’ under capitalism where human life is transformed into surplus, and the human costs of prosperity depend on the exploitation of another, by making them purchasable. The events leading to the murder of the boy and countless other people by the cabinet ministers of Shamba state illustrate the purchasability of human life in an African postcolony.

The reversal of the gains of modernity, and the uncontrollability of institutionalized power in Shamba state, demonstrate Harnischfeger’s (2006:59) views that ‘Power that defies institutional regulations grows out of public control. It becomes unpredictable and appears to be linked to invisible forces that may be manipulated by secret techniques’; in the same way wealth accumulation in capitalist sensibilities is linked to invisible sources. This view

captures Lukhele's moral panic about postcolonial states in Africa. Political power and wealth have become synonyms and both reconfigure traditionalism as they engage the modern. In the novel, in spite of Shamba being a 'democracy', a foundational tenet of modernism, Western rationality is turned upside down as beliefs in traditions considered to be anachronistic are made to engage modern politics as they affect power, wealth and prestige for the ruling elite and the upper classes. In this state of affairs the promises embodied in democratic discourses are actively delegitimized.

The allegorical dimension of this narrative can never be overstated. The context of the novel is after independence and the fruits of independence were crudely felt throughout the continent as many African states attained independence from colonial rule. South Africa's political turmoil around the publication of the novel clearly demonstrated that it was just a matter of time before it gained its independence. It is precisely on this Janus-faced dimension of political power and its relation to the erosion of human morality and democratic gains that Lukhele stakes his criticism of the African postcolony. The postcolonial elite invokes grammars of tradition, in many instances, to hold onto interests linked to colonial and capitalist imperatives, thereby un(der)developing the continent.

Kufeziwe: Corruption and Occultism in Post-1994 African Nouveaux Riche and Heteropatriarchal Anxieties in Occult Women

The invocation of witchcraft traditions for African elites' socio-economic mobility in a state that is avowedly neoliberal is also what is explored in Nxaba's *Kufeziwe*. Vuka, a married man and a high-end political figure, keeps a lover, Gabisile, whom he plies with government contracts procured through corruption. Gabisile quickly rises through the ranks and becomes extremely wealthy. She wills all she owns to her only son, Thulebona. It is only upon Thulebona's death, and in the event that Thulebona has no progeny, that Vuka can have the inheritance diverted to him. He discovers this secret will, and it does not sit well with him. Just at that moment, Gabisile's handyman, Mkhize, who is a traditional herbalist, informs him that Gabisile has been bewitching him with medicine she procured from a female occultist, Sithombe, who is also preparing her with wealth medicine. Mkhize reassures Vuka, as he, an expert

in hidden powers, has altered the positionalities of Gabisile's ancestors' spirit and delinked her from them. Vuka thereafter kills Gabisile and her son, but the execution of the latter act is clumsy as he leaves many clues that make it easy for the investigating officer to link him with the murder. He is arrested, but Mkhize is able to stem the tide for a while, and his court case never sits as Mkhize bewitches the proceedings. Mkhize later dies when searching for potent medicine in the forest at a point when Vuka's managers are investigating the manner in which he awarded government tenders. Mkhize's death before Vuka's strengthening ritual portends ill-fate for him. On the day he is to reappear in court, Vuka learns that Thulebona's death occurred after he had impregnated a girl. It dawns on Vuka that all his attempts to get at Gabisile's wealth have been to no avail, but merely cost him jail time.

The fabulous claims for the occult in this narrative sit precariously and uncomfortably with realistic views of the world. For example, Gabisile's car crash, the corruption case Vuka is investigated for at work, and the first court hearing for his murder case can be ascribed to causes other than bewitchment, which Mkhize claims for his medicine. Yet, the belief in the influence of charms to alter the course of life's events is paramount in the lives of characters in the novel, and reflects sentiments proliferating in the popular imagination. The novel could easily be dismissed by following Obiwulu's (2010:81) conclusions:

Traditional medicine men who claim to have the power of making people rich do not really have such power. Even people who join secret societies and clubs do not become wealthy on account of the occult power which they have 'acquired', rather the association with highly connected and wealthy people helps them get money for their business and opens to them other avenues to financial growth....If the ability to have and manipulate occult powers is very widespread and efficacious, why have Africans not used them to solve their socio-political and socio-economic problems?

A pertinent conclusion, but which does not damper the historicity of fast wealth sensibilities in the popular imagination. Yet the question remains: the post-apartheid *nouveaux riche* and some of the ruling elites are being suspected to not only engage in corrupt activities, but also to be consorting with the occultists. Of course the expediency with which this class transformed from a

state of poverty to that of affluence within a very short time after the advent South Africa's democracy shatters the myth of hard work leading to wealth. Their acquisitions are set against unprecedented intra-African inequality, deprivation and high rates of unemployment, while the consumption practices of the upper classes are on a scale of First World economies. There is thus a subtle demonization of their acquired wealth and social distinction.

Complicating the matter further in this novel is that it is a woman character who has not only gained prestige by the use of her female charms – 'bottom power' – to drain off favours from her lover, but she also bewitches her lover and uses wealth medicine. The novel exudes senses that tend to underline heteropatriarchal anxieties regarding women who do not fit the heteronormative moulds. As Doane (1991) observes, such women are never really what they seem to be, and are never 'entirely legible, predictable, or manageable'. Gabisile, as an occult woman, embodies these extremes of moral corruption in ways that men do not. According to Mkhize's justification of his unsolicited assistance, it is precisely the unpredictability of Gabisile's moral transgressions, and their threat to social integrity, which spurred him to save Vuka from total domination by a woman (Nxaba 24-34). Since she seems to be out of the control of the power – physical, ideological and supernatural – patriarchy can control, she is deemed not fit to live.

Conclusion

Several observations can be made regarding the representations of the occult in these novels. Firstly, all are modern reactions to issues of political economies designed to exclude the majority of people from economic participation, thereby causing inequality and desperation in the African society. Lukhele's *Nakho Phela* and Nxaba's *Kufeziwe* are amongst a few fictional accounts of how power and the economy illustrate that witchcraft, the occult and black magic are not anachronistic vestiges of a tribal, primitive past, but their currency is invested in modern moral and political economies at the macro-economic policies of a postcolonial state. Secondly, the popular view that in contemporary times wealth and power are detached from traditional notions of engagement and a work ethic have led people to seek their sources in alternative, invisible locations. Thirdly, the economic anxieties brought about by massive transformations which result in uncertainty, insecurity and

reversals of the gains of modernity and progress have spurred on the proliferating – to precolonial proportions – of beliefs in witchcraft, occultism and other modern black magic. Linked to reversals of the gains of modernity is the delegitimization of Western institutions of the state such as democracy, law and order. These rational institutions of modernity are shown to have been undermined by their collusion with capitalist dogmas. The rigour of criticism directed at capitalist thinking has established perceptions that are beginning to link – at least in African anthropology and social studies – capitalist foundational thought to the occult world. And lastly, the subjectivity of women continue in capitalist practices and thinking to embody moral anxieties and panic in ways male identities do not, even though all are subjected in equal measure to massive social transformations which affect their daily lives. Within a neoliberal African context, wealthy women are extraordinarily different. They have to contend, in ways dissimilar to men, with resentment which once characterized older, precolonial views about ‘odd’ women who were perceived as witches.

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