

SwahiliWeb

ELECTRONIC DEPOSITORY AND RESOURCE ARCHIVE

www.swahiliweb.net

Archive: Pat Caplan

Document: Interview with Mohamed Juma

File reference: SW/PC/I3004

This document has been downloaded from the SwahiliWeb archive on the understanding that it is copyright under the laws of the United Kingdom and the Berne Convention, and that no further copying, storage or distribution, in any form or by any means, including electronically, is permitted except under the provisions of fair dealing.

Copyright of all materials deposited with SwahiliWeb remains with the copyright holder. Those seeking copyright and associated permissions will be referred to the copyright holder.

Interview with Mohamed Juma on witchcraft 1966

Before leaving Kanga village after a stay of a year to go and live in Baleni village, this conversation is one of the very few that I tape-recorded during this first period of field-work, with Mohamed Juma the spirit possession singer: I was puzzled about the distinction between two kinds of witches – wachawi and wanga, so I asked him to explain to me what wanga do. For more information on links between witchcraft and spirit possession (not discussed below), see Caplan 1997

Pat. I wanted to ask you, what is the difference between a witch (mchawi) and a mwanga?

A. Each one uses its own methods. A mwanga just uses medicine (dawa).

Pat. What medicine?

A. A mwanga's medicine. The medicine which s/he has, like the flesh of of a human being. And there are special parts of a human which are good for this. ...

Pat. But is this witch the same as a mchawi or ?

MJ. A witch (mchawi) is a shaman (mganga)

Pat. What spirit (shaitani) does s/he have? Does a mwanga have a spirit or not?

MJ. They don't have a spirit, only medicines (dawa).

Pat. But have they learned this work or what?

MJ. They have learned it.

Pat. And how did they get it?

MJ. When people die they go and dig (the corpse) up.

Pat. They go and exhume (the body)?

MJ. Sometimes that of small children. It is like this. When someone lives in a house like this, a child is born, and that child is killed (kuchinjwa). You will hear that children are lost (it is true that they are lost, (for example) in Zanzibar people are lost in the city, (it is because) they have been taken by wanga.witches

Pat. But here in Mafia there aren't any?

MJ. Oh, in Mafia there are not. Just now and then (hivi hivi tu) they get them.

Pat. So what do those people do at night?...

MJ. They gather together on the path, they go to kwanga (perform this kind of witchcraft) again in Jimbo, or Futa, or Kirongwé, or wherever they go to do their thing. They take people who are sleeping inside, they take them away.

Pat. And do they go around naked?

MJ. No. they wear clothes. But only up to here (indicates) Only a few. They put on medicine. There is a special kind of plant (mjiti), they cut it, grind it with a stone, that is, they dig it up, they grind it, they mix it all up (-poromoka), they apply it.

Pat.. Do they apply is with water? (i.e. make it into a paste) or do they put it on like powder?

MJ. Yes.

Pat. So it's not as if they go to buy it at the shop, they have to dig it up for themselves. And do they put any medicine in this flour?

MJ. No, they do not. So you can come to his/her place, and you will know that their time for doing this has not yet come, so you take [your own medicinal] roots and you scatter them around, or plants let us say, you scatter them so that when s/he comes out, they can't do that witchcraft (kwanga), they will be defeated.

Let me give you an example. There was a man and his wife, here in the south. And that man was a mwanga witch, but he did not want his wife to know that he performed this kind of witchcraft (kwanga), although the husband knew that his wife was one. (One

night) they had already gone to bed, so the wife put this medicine on herself and she came out to go and perform witchcraft (kwanga). The man was sleeping, but at the time when she came back home, because he was a mwanga, he woke up. He asked her "Where have you been?" She said. "I just went outside for a bit, I had to go to the toilet". But he said to her, "I hear that you perform witchcraft (kwanga), and you did not tell Pat. But I (too) am a mwanga witch, and I will outstrip you in the work of doing that witchcraft (kwanga).

So that woman went to sleep. [and he called her] He did not call her in the usual way (kwa sauti), he called 'Heee'. And that one (the wife) was startled and for that reason, she did not see the way and she banged into the door. In her cleverness (ujanja) afterwards, she came here that day. [she said] 'I did not show you, my husband. And I told you I wanted to go there, I wanted to go and defaecate, but I did not see the door'. And her husband said to her " No, your work is to kwanga, and I came and called you, but I tell you one thing, that in the work of kwanga, bibi, you will not better me, I will beat you at that game, I went to the outside door, and I closed the door, and I took your charms (hirizi), so go and do your work now (if you can).

Pat. But without her charms she couldn't go, could she?

Atasha,. No she could not.

Pat. So then what happened?

MJ. He said to her, the next morning, the man, I do not want you to be my wife [any longer]. And the day will come when I will show you...

Pat. So did he divorce her?

MJ. Oh, they are divorced to this day, and that woman has married someone else.

Pat. And is the man she married a mwanga witch?

MJ. Yes, he is, they perform that witchcraft (kwanga) together.....

Pat. Would you know if someone is a mwanga?

MJ. You should know, everyone would know. First of all, a mwanga does not stay like this, looking directly at you, sometime s/he does this (looks sideways), sometimes they go inside all of a sudden. And when they come to a ritual, you will see it is their custom always to stay in the west. They do this (demonstrates) so you will know that that person is a mwanga.

Pat. Why do they do this?

MJ. Because s/he is a mwanga, of course. Isn't that their work? That's what wanga do, they do like this and this (he jigs around turning his head from side to side). In a ritual you might be talking to one, and suddenly he starts doing this so you know that s/he is one.

Pat. But why do they do to dance at night? Do they dance like in a normal dance? All together?

MJ. Yes, they dance is like this 'ndin ndin' (he beats rhythm on table). They meet together, they just clap 'kwa kwa kwa', in a crazy way, they dance the whole night until the morning.

Pat. What do they do in people's houses?

MJ. They perform their witchcraft (kwanga), when they meet a person like this, they can catch him or her and slaughter them.

Pat. How do they slaughter people?

MJ. They slaughter them in their throats (rohoni) especially. Do you think that only women go? Men go too, taking their knives with them, and some of them carry panga too.

Pat. But around here there is nothing like that?

MJ. No, there is not a single one.