From

Purity and Danger: An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo

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Chapter 6

POWERS AND DANGERS

GRANTED THAT DISORDER SPOILS PATTERN; it also provides the materials of pattern. Order implies restriction; from all possible materials, a limited selection has been made and from all possible relations a limited set has been used. So disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realised in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite. This is why, though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognise that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolises both danger and power.

Ritual recognises the potency of disorder. In the disorder of the mind, in dreams, faints and frenzies, ritual expects to find powers and truths which cannot he reached by conscious effort. Energy to command and special powers of healing come to those who can abandon rational control for a time. Sometimes an Andaman Islander leaves his band and wanders in the forest like a madman. When he returns to his senses and to human society he has gained occult power of healing (Radcliffe Brown, 1933, p. 139). This is a very common notion, widely attested. Webster in his chapter on the Making of a Magician (*The Sociological Study of Magic*), gives many examples. I also quote the Ehanzu, a tribe in the central region of Tanzania, where one of the recognised ways of acquiring a diviner's skill is by going mad in the hush. Virginia Adam, who worked among this tribe, tells me that their ritual cycle culminates in annual rain rituals. If at the expected time rain fails, people suspect sorcery. To undo the effects of sorcery they take a simpleton and send him wandering into the bush. In the course of his wanderings he unknowingly destroys the sorcerer's work.

In these beliefs there is a double play on inarticulateness. First there is a venture into the disordered regions of the mind. Second there is the venture beyond the confines of society. The man who comes back from these inaccessible regions brings with him a power not available to those who have stayed in the control of themselves and of society.

This ritual play on articulate and inarticulate forms is crucial to understanding pollution. In ritual form it is treated as if it were quick with power to maintain itself in being, yet always liable to attack. Formlessness is also credited with powers, some dangerous, some good. We have seen how the abominations of Leviticus are the obscure unclassifiable elements which do not fit the pattern of the cosmos. They are incompatible with holiness and blessing. The play on form and formlessness is even more clear in the rituals of society.

First, consider beliefs about persons in a marginal state. These are people who are somehow left out in the patterning of society, who are placeless. They may be doing nothing morally wrong, but their status is indefinable. Take, for example, the unborn child. Its present position is ambiguous, its future equally. For no one can say what sex it will have or whether it will survive the hazards of infancy. It is often treated as both vulnerable and dangerous. The Lele regard the unborn child and its mother as in constant danger, but they also credit the unborn child with capricious ill-will which makes it a danger to others. When pregnant, a Lele woman tries to be considerate about not approaching sick persons lest the proximity of the child in her womb causes coughing or fever to increase.

Among the Nyakyusa a similar belief is recorded. A pregnant woman is thought to reduce the quantity of grain she approaches, because the foetus in her is voracious and snatches it. She must not speak to people who are reaping or brewing without first making a ritual gesture of goodwill to cancel the danger. They speak of the foetus 'with jaws agape' snatching food, and

explain it by the inevitability of. the 'seed within' fighting the 'seed without'.

> 'The child in the belly . . . is like a witch; it will damage food like witchcraft; beer is spoiled and tastes nasty, food does not grow, the smith's iron is not easily worked, the milk is not good.'

Even the father is endangered at war or in the hunt by his wife's pregnancy (Wilson, pp. 138-9).

Levy-Bruhl noted that menstrual blood and miscarriage sometimes attract the same kind of belief. The Maoris regard menstrual blood as a sort of human being *manqué*. If the blood had not flowed it would have become a person, so it has the impossible status of a dead person that has never lived. He quoted a common belief that a foetus born prematurely has a malevolent spirit, dangerous to the living (pp. 390-6). Levy-Bruhl did not generalise that danger lies in marginal states, but Van Gennep had more sociological insight. He saw society as a house with rooms and corridors in which passage from one to another is dangerous. Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others. The danger is controlled by ritual which precisely separates him from his old status, segregates him for a time and then publicly declares his entry to his new status. Not only is transition itself dangerous, but also the rituals of segregation are the most dangerous phase of the rites. So often do we read that boys die in initiation ceremonies, or that their sisters and mothers are told to fear for their safety, or that they used in the old days to die from hardship or fright, or by supernatural punishment for their misdeeds. Then somewhat tamely come the accounts of the actual ceremonies which are so safe that the threats of danger sound like a hoax (Vansina, 1955). But we can be sure that the trumped up dangers express something important about marginality. To say that the boys risk their lives says precisely that to go out of the formal structure and to enter the margins is to be exposed to power that is enough to kill them or make their

manhood. The theme of death and rebirth, of course, has other symbolic functions: the initiates die to their old life and are reborn to the new. The whole repertoire of ideas concerning pollution and purification are used to mark the gravity of the event and the power of ritual to remake a man—this is straightforward.

During the marginal period which separates ritual dying and ritual rebirth, the novices in initiation are temporarily outcast. For the duration of the rite they have no place in society. Sometimes they actually go to live far away outside it. Sometimes they live near enough for unplanned contacts to take place between full social beings and the outcasts. Then we find them behaving like dangerous criminal characters. They are licensed to waylay, steal, rape. This behaviour is even enjoined on them. To behave anti-socially is the proper expression of their marginal condition (Webster, 1908, chapter III). To have been in the margins is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power. It is consistent with the ideas about form and formlessness to treat initiands coming out of seclusion as if they were themselves charged with power, hot, dangerous, requiring insulation and a time for cooling down. Dirt, obscenity and lawlessness are as relevant symbolically to the rites of seclusion as other ritual expressions of their condition. They are not to be blamed for misconduct any more than the foetus in the womb for its spite and greed.

It seems that if a person has no place in the social system and is therefore a marginal being, all precaution against danger must come from others. He cannot help his abnormal situation. This is roughly how we ourselves regard marginal people in a secular, not a ritual context. Social workers in our society, concerned with the after-care of ex-prisoners, report a difficulty of resettling them in steady jobs, a difficulty which comes from the attitude of society at large. A man who has spent any time 'inside' is put permanently 'outside' the ordinary social system. With no rite of aggregation which can definitively assign him to a new position he remains in the margins, with other people who are similar credited with unreliability, unteachability, and all the wrong social attitudes. The same goes for persons who have

entered institutions for the treatment of mental disease. So long as they stay at home their peculiar behaviour is accepted. Once they have been formal]y classified as abnormal, the very same behaviour is counted intolerable. A report on a Canadian project in '95 to change the attitude to mental ill-health suggests that there is a threshold of tolerance marked by entry to a mental hospital. If a person has never moved out of society into this marginal state, any of his eccentricities are comfortably tolerated by his neighbours. Behaviour which a psychologist would class at once as pathological is commonly dismissed as 'Just a quirk', or 'He'll get over it', or 'It takes all sorts to make a world'. But once a patient is admitted to a mental hospital, tolerance is withdrawn. Behaviour which was formerly judged to be so normal that the psychologist's suggestions raised strong hostility, was now judged to be abnormal (quoted in Cumming). So mental health workers find exactly the same problems in rehabilitating their discharged patients as do the prisoners' aid societies. The fact that these common assumptions about ex-prisoners and lunatics are self-validating is not relevant here. It is more interesting to know that marginal status produces the same reactions the world over, and that these are deliberately represented in marginal rites.

To plot a map of the powers and dangers in a primitive universe, we need to underline the interplay of ideas of form and formlessness. So many ideas about power are based on an idea of society as a series of forms contrasted with surrounding nonform. There is power in the forms and other power in the inarticulate area, margins, confused lines, and beyond the external boundaries. If pollution is a particular class of danger, to see where it belongs in the universe of dangers we need an inventory of all the possible sources of power. In a primitive culture the physical agency of misfortune is not so significant as the personal intervention to which it can be traced. The effects are the same the world over: drought is drought, hunger is hunger; epidemic, child labour, infirmity—most of the experiences are held in common. But each culture knows a distinctive set of laws governing the way these disasters fall. The main links between persons and misfortunes are personal links.

So our inventory of powers must proceed by classifying all kinds of personal intervention in the fortunes of others.

The spiritual powers which human action can unleash can roughly he divided into two classes—internal and external. The first reside within the psyche of the agent—such as evil eye, witchcraft, gifts of vision or prophecy. The second are external symbols on which the agent must consciously work: spells, blessings, curses, charms and formulas and invocations. These powers require actions by which spiritual power is discharged.

This distinction between internal and external sources of power is often correlated with another distinction, between uncontrolled and controlled power. According to widespread beliefs, the internal psychic powers are not necessarily triggered off by the intention of the agent. He may be quite unaware that he possesses them or that they are active. These beliefs vary from place to place. For example, Joan of Arc did not know when her voices would speak to her, could not summon them at will, was often startled by what they said and by the train of events which her obedience to them started. The Azande believe that a witch does not necessarily know that his witchcraft is at work, yet if he is warned, he can exert some control to check its action.

By contrast, the magician cannot utter a spell by mistake; specific intention is a condition of the result. A father's curse usually needs to be pronounced to have effect.

Where does pollution come in the contrast between uncontrolled and controlled power, between psyche and symbol? As I see it, pollution is a source of danger altogether in a different class: the distinctions of voluntary, involuntary, internal, external, are not relevant. It must be identified in a different way.

First to continue with the inventory of spiritual powers, there is another classification according to the social position of those endangering and endangered. Some powers are exerted on behalf of the social structure; they protect society from malefactors against whom their danger is directed. Their use must be

approved by all good men. Other powers are supposed to be a danger to society and their use is disapproved; those who use them are malefactors, their victims are innocent and all good men would try to hound them down—these are witches and sorcerers. This is the old distinction between white and black magic.

Are these two classifications completely unconnected? Here I tentatively suggest a correlation: where the social system explicitly recognises positions of authority, those holding such positions are endowed with explicit spiritual power, controlled, conscious, external and approved — powers to bless or curse. Where the social system requires people to hold dangerously ambiguous roles, these persons are credited with uncontrolled, unconscious, dangerous, disapproved powers — such as witchcraft and evil eye.

In other words, where the social system is well-articulated, I look for articulate powers vested in the points of authority; where the social system is ill-articulated, I look for inarticulate powers vested in those who are a source of disorder. I am suggesting that the contrast between form and surrounding non-form accounts for the distribution of symbolic and psychic powers: external symbolism upholds the explicit social structure and internal, unformed psychic powers threaten it from the thing it is difficult to be precise about the explicit social structure. Certainly people carry round with them a consciousness of social structure. They curb their actions in accordance with the symmetries and hierarchies they see therein, and strive continually to impress their view of the relevant bit of structure on other actors in their scene. This social consciousness has been so well demonstrated by Goffman that there should be no need to labour the point further here. There are no items of clothing or of food or of other practical use which we do not seize upon as theatrical props to dramatise the way we want to present our roles and the scene we are playing in. Everything we do is significant, nothing is without its conscious symbolic load. Moreover, nothing is lost on the audience. Goffman uses dramatic structure with its division of players and audience, stage and back-stage to provide a frame for his analysis of everyday situations. Another merit o£ the analogy with theatre is that a dramatic structure exists within temporal divisions. It has a beginning, climax and end. For this reason Turner found it useful to introduce the idea of social drama to describe clusters of behaviour which everyone recognises as forming discrete temporal units (1957). I am sure that sociologists have not finished with the idea of drama as an image of social structure but for my purpose it may be enough to say that by social structure I am not usually referring to a total structure which embraces the whole of society continually and comprehensively. I refer to particular situations in which individual actors are aware of a greater or smaller range of inclusiveness. In these situations they behave as if moving in patterned positions in relation to others, and as if choosing between possible patterns of relations. Their sense of form makes demands on their behaviour, governs their assessment of their desires, permits some and over-rides others.

Any local, personal view of the whole social system will not necessarily coincide with that of the sociologist. Sometimes in what follows, when I speak of social structure, I will be referring to the main outlines, lineages and the hierarchy of descent groups, or chiefdoms and the ranking of districts, relations between royalty and commoners. Sometimes I will be talking about little sub-structures, themselves chinese-box-like, containing others which fill in the bare bones of the main structure. It seems that individuals are aware in appropriate contexts of all these structures and aware of their relative importance. They do not all have the same idea of what particular level of structure is relevant at a given moment; they know there is a problem of communication to be overcome if there can be society at all. By ceremony, speech and gesture they make a constant effort to express and to agree on a view of what the relevant social structure is like. And all the attribution of dangers and powers is part of this effort to communicate and thus to create social forms.

The idea that there may be a correlation between explicit authority and controlled spiritual power was first suggested to me by Leach's article in *Rethinking Anthropology*. In developing

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the idea I have taken a somewhat different direction. Controlled power to harm, he suggests, is often vested in explicit key points in the authority system, and contrasted with the unintentional power to harm supposed to lurk in the less explicit, weakly articulated areas of the same society. He was mainly concerned with the contrast of two kinds of spiritual power used in parallel contrasting social situations. He presented some societies as sets of internally structured systems interacting with one another. Living within one such system people are explicitly conscious of its structure. Its key points are supported by beliefs in controlled forms of power attached to controlling positions. For instance, Chiefs among the Nyakusa can attack their foes by a kind of sorcery which sends invisible pythons after them. Among the patrilineal Tallensi, a man's father has a correspondingly controlled right of access to ancestral power against him, and among the matrilineal Trobrianders the maternal uncle is thought to support his authority with consciously controlled spells and charms. It is as if the positions of authority were wired up with switches which can be operated by those who reach the right places in order to provide power for the system as a whole.

This can be argued along familiar Durkheimian lines. Religious beliefs express society's awareness of itself; the social structure is credited with punitive powers which maintain it in being. This is quite straightforward. But I would like to suggest that those holding office in the explicit part of the structure tend to be credited with consciously controlled powers, in contrast with those whose role is less explicit and will tend to be credited with unconscious, uncontrollable powers, menacing those in better defined positions. Leach's first example is the Kachin wife. Linking two power groups, her husband's and her brother's, she holds an interstructural role and she is thought of as the unconscious, involuntary agent of witchcraft. Similarly, the father in the matrilineal Trobrianders and Ashanti, and the mother's brother in matrilineal Tikopia and Taleland, is credited with being an involuntary source of danger. These people are none of them without a proper niche in the total society. But from the perspective of one internal sub-system to which they do not belong, but in which they must operate, they are intruders. They are not suspect in their own system and may be wielding

the intentional kind of powers on its behalf. It is possible that their involuntary power to do harm may never be activated. It may lie dormant as they live their life peacefully in the corner of the sub-system which is their proper place, and yet in which they are intruders. But this role is in practice difficult to play coolly. If anything goes wrong, if they feel resentment or grief, then their double loyalties and their ambiguous status in the structure where they are concerned makes them appear as a danger to those belonging fully in it. It is the existence of an angry person in an interstitial position which is dangerous, and this has nothing to do with the particular intentions of the person.

In these cases the articulate, conscious points in the social structure are armed with articulate, conscious powers to protect the system; the inarticulate, unstructured areas emanate unconscious powers which provoke others to demand that ambiguity be reduced. When such unhappy or angry interstitial persons are accused of witchcraft it is like a warning to bring their rebellious feelings into line with their correct situation. If this were found to hold good more generally, then witchcraft, defined as an alleged psychic force, could also be defined structurally. It would be the anti-social psychic power with which persons in relatively unstructured areas of society are credited, the accusation being a means of exerting control where practical forms of control are difficult. Witchcraft, then, is found in the non-structure. Witches are social equivalents of beetles and spiders who live in the cracks of the walls and wainscoting. They attract the fears and dislikes which other ambiguities and contradictions attract in other thought structures, and the kind of powers attributed to them symbolise their ambiguous, inarticulate status.

Pondering on this line of thought, we can distinguish different types of social inarticulateness. So far we have only considered witches who have a well-defined position in one sub-system and an ambiguous one in another, in which they none the less have duties. They are legitimate intruders. Of these Joan of Arc can be taken as a splendid prototype: a peasant at court, a woman in armour, an outsider in the councils of war; the accusation that she was a witch puts her fully in this category.

But witchcraft is often supposed to operate in another kind of ambiguous social relation. The best example comes from the witchcraft beliefs of the Azande. The formal structure of their society was pivoted on princes, their courts, tribunals and armies, in a clear cut hierarchy down to princes' deputies, through local governors, to heads of families. The political system afforded an organised set of fields for competition, so that commoners did not find themselves in competition with nobles, nor poor against rich, nor sons against fathers, nor women against men. Only in those areas of society which were left unstructured by the political system did men accuse each other of witchcraft. A man who had defeated a close rival in competition for office might accuse the other of bewitching him in jealousy, and co-wives might accuse one another of witchcraft. Azande witches were thought to be dangerous without knowing it; their witchcraft was made active simply by their feelings of resentment or grudge. The accusation attempted to regulate the situation by vindicating one and condemning the other rival. Princes were supposed not to be witches, but they accused one another of sorcery, thus conforming to the pattern I am seeking to establish.

Another type of unconscious power to harm emanating from inarticulate areas of the social system is illustrated by the Mandari, whose land-owning clans build up their strength by adopting clients. These unfortunates have, for one reason or another, lost their claim to their own territory and have come to a foreign territory to ask for protection and security. They are landless, inferior, dependent on their patron who is a member of a land-owning group. But they are not completely dependent. To some real extent the patron's influence and status depend on his loyal following of clients. Clients who become too numerous and bold can threaten their patron's lineage. The explicit structure of society is based on land-holding clans. By these people clients are held likely to be witches. Their witchcraft emanates from jealousy of their patrons and works involuntarily. A witch cannot control himself, it is his nature to be angry and harm emanates from him. Not all clients are witches, but hereditary lines of witches are recognised and feared. Here are

people living in the interstices of the power structure, felt to be a threat to those with better defined status. Since they are credited with dangerous, uncontrollable powers, an excuse is given for supressing them. They can be charged with witchcraft and violently despatched without formality or delay. In one case the patron's family merely made ready a big fire, called in the suspect witch to share a meal of roast pig, and forthwith bound him and put him on the fire. Thus the formal structure of land-holding lineages was asserted against the relatively fluid field in which landless clients touted for patronage.

Jews in English society are something like Mandari clients. Belief in their sinister but undefinable advantages in commerce justifies discrimination against them—whereas their real offence is always to have been outside the formal structure of Christendom.

There are probably many more variant types of socially ambiguous or weakly defined statuses to which involuntary witchcraft is attributed. It would be easy to go on piling up examples. Needless to say, I am not concerned with beliefs of a secondary kind or with short-lived ideas which flourish briefly and die away. If the correlation were generally to hold good for the distribution of dominant, persistent forms of spiritual power it would clarify the nature of pollution. For, as I see it, ritual pollution also arises from the interplay of form and surrounding formlessness. Pollution dangers strike when form has been attacked. Thus we would have a triad of powers controlling fortune and misfortune: first, formal powers wielded by persons representing the formal structure and exercised on behalf of the formal structure: second, formless powers wielded by interstitial persons: third, powers not wielded by any person, but inherent in the structure, which strike against any infraction of form. This three-fold scheme for investigating primitive cosmologies unfortunately comes to grief over exceptions which are too important to brush aside. One big difficulty is that sorcery, which is a form of controlled spiritual power, is in many parts of the world credited to persons who ought, according to clients are held likely to be witches. Their witchcraft emanates from jealousy of their patrons and works involuntarily. A witch

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the world credited to persons who ought, according to my hypothesis, be charged with involuntary witchcraft. Malevolent persons in interstitial positions, anti-social, disapproved, working to harm the innocent, they should not be using conscious, controlled, symbolic power. Furthermore, there are royal chiefs who emanate unconscious, involuntary power to detect disaffection and destroy their enemies — chiefs who according to my hypothesis should be content with explicit, controlled forms of power. So the correlation I have tried to draw does not hold. However, I will not throw it aside until I have looked more closely at the negative cases.

One reason why it is difficult to correlate social structure with type of mystic power is that both elements in the comparison are very complex. It is not always easy to recognise explicit authority. For example, authority among the Lele is very weak, their social system makes a criss-cross of little authorities, none very effective in secular terms. Many of their formal statuses are supported by the spiritual power to curse or bless, which consists in uttering a form of words and spitting. Cursing and blessing are attributes of authority; a father, mother, mother's brother, aunt, pawn owner, village head and so on, can curse. Not any one can reach out for a curse and apply it arbitrarily. A son cannot curse his father, it would not work if he tried. So this pattern conforms to the general rule I am seeking to establish. But, if a person who has a right to curse refrains from formulating his curse, the unspit saliva in his mouth is held to have power to cause harm. Better than harbour a secret grudge, anyone with a just grievance should speak up and demand redress, lest the saliva of his ill-will do harm secretly. In this belief we have both the controlled and uncontrolled spiritual power attributed to the same person in the same circumstances. But as their pattern of authority is so weakly articulated, this is hardly a negative case. On the conerary, it serves to warn us that authority can be a very vulnerable power, easily reduced to nothing. We should be prepared to elaborate the hypothesis to take more account of the varieties of authority.

There are several likenesses between the unspoken curse of the Lele and the witchcraft beliefs of the Mandari. Both are tied to a

particular status, both are psychic, internal, involuntary. But the unspoken curse is an approved form of spiritual power, while the witch is disapproved. Where the unspoken curse is revealed as the cause of harm restitution is made to the agent, when witchcraft is revealed the agent is brutally attacked. So the unspoken curse is on the side of authority; its link with cursing makes this clear. But authority is weak in the case of the Lele, strong in the case of the Mandari. This suggests that to test the hypothesis fairly we should display the whole gamut from no formal authority at one end of the scale to strong effective secular authority at the other end. At either extreme I am not prepared to predict the distribution of spiritual powers, because where there is no formal authority the hypothesis does not apply, and where authority is firmly established by secular means it less requires spiritual and symbolic support. Under primitive conditions authority is always likely to be precarious. For this reason we should be ready to take into account the failure of those in office.

First consider the case of the man in a position of authority who abuses the secular powers of his office. If it is clear that he is acting wrongly, out of role, he is not entitled to the spiritual power which is vested in the role. Then there should be scope for some shift in the pattern of beliefs to accommodate his defection. He ought to enter the class of witches, exerting involuntary, unjust powers instead of intentionally controlled powers against wrongdoers. For the official who abuses his office is as illegitimate as an usurper, an incubus, a spanner in the works, a dead weight on the social system. Often we find this predicted shift in the kind of dangerous power he is supposed to wield.

In the Book of Samuel, Saul is presented as a leader whose divinely given powers are abused. When he fails to fill his assigned role and leads his men into disobedience, his charisma leaves him and terrible rages, depression and madness afflict him. So when Saul abuses his office he loses conscious control and becomes a menace even to his friends. With reason no longer in control, the leader becomes an unconscious danger. The image of Saul fits the idea that conscious spiritual power is

vested in the explicit structure and uncontrolled unconscious danger vested in the enemies of the structure.

The Lugbara have another and similar way of adjusting their beliefs to abuse of power. They credit their lineage elders with special powers to invoke the ancestors against juniors who do not act in the widest interests of the lineage. Here again we have conscious controlled powers upholding the explicit structure.

But if an elder is thought to he motivated by his own personal, selfish intcrests, the ancestors neither listen to him nor put their power at his disposal. So here is a man in a position of authority, improperly wielding the powers of office. His legitimacy being in doubt, he must be removed, and to remove him his antagonists accuse him of having become corrupt and emanating witchcraft, a mysterious, perverted power which operates at night (Middleton). The accusation is itself a weapon for clarifying and strengthening the structure. It enables guilt to be pinned on the source of confusion and ambiguity. So these two examples symmetrically develop the idea that conscious power is exerted from the key positions in the structure and a different danger from its dark, obscure areas.

Sorcery is another matter. As a form of harmful power which makes use of spells, words, actions and physical materials, it can only be used consciously and deliberately. On the argument we have been following, sorcery ought to be used by those in control of key positions in the social structure as it is a deliberate, controlled form of spiritual power. But it is not. Sorcery is found in the structural interstices where we have located witchcraft, as well as in the seats of authority. At first glance it seems to cut across the correlation of articulate structure with consciousness. But on closer inspection this distribution of sorcery is consistent with the pattern of authority that goes with sorcery beliefs.

In some societies positions of authority are open to competition. Legitimacy is hard to establish, hard to maintain and always liable to reversal. In such very fluid political systems we would expect a particular type of beliefs in spiritual power. Sorcery is

unlike cursing and invocation of ancestors in that it has no built-in device to safeguard against abuse. Lugbara cosmology, for example, is dominated by the idea of the ancestors upholding lineage values; the Israelite cosmology was dominated by the idea of the justice of Jehovah. Both these sources or power contain an assumption that they cannot be deceived or abused. If an incumbent of office misuses his power, spiritual support is withdrawn. By contrast, sorcery is essentially a form of controlled and conscious power that is open to abuse. In the Central African cultures, where sorcery beliefs flourish, this form of spiritual power is developed within the idiom of medicine. It is freely available. Anyone who takes the trouble to acquire sorcery power may use it. In itself it is morally and socially neutral and it contains no principle for safeguarding against abuse. It works *ex opere operato*, equally well whether the intentions of the agent are pure or corrupt. If the idea of spiritual power in the culture is dominated by this medical idiom, the man who abuses his office and the person in the unstructured crevices have the same access to the same kind of spiritual powers as the lineage or village head. It follows that if sorcery is available to anyone who wants to acquire it, then we should suppose that positions of political control are also available, open to competition, and that in such societies there are not very clear distinctions between legitimate authority, abuse of authority and illegitimate rebellion.

The sorcery beliefs of Central Africa, west to east from the Congo to Lake Nyasa, assume that malign spiritual powers of sorcery are generally available. In principle these powers are vested in the heads of matrilineal descent groups and are expected to be used by these men in authority against enemy outsiders. There is a general expectation that the old man may turn his powers against his own followers and kin, and if he is disagreeable or mean, their deaths are likely to be attributed to him. He always risks being dragged down from his little elevation of senior status, degraded, exiled or put to the poison ordeal (Van Wing, p. 359-60, Kopytoff, p. 90). Then another contender will take his official role and try to exercise it more warily. Such beliefs, as I have tried to show in my study of the Lele, correspond to a social system in which authority is weakly

defined and has little real sway (1963). Marwick has claimed for similar beliefs among the Cewa that they have a liberating effect, since any young man can plausibly accuse of sorcery a reactionary old incumbent of an office which he himself is qualified to occupy when the senior obstacle has been removed (1952). If sorcery beliefs really serve as instruments for self-promotion they also ensure that the ladder of promotion is short and shaky.

The fact that anyone may lay hands on sorcery power and that it is available for use against, or on behalf of society suggests another cross-classification of spiritual powers. For in Central Africa sorcery is often a necessary adjunct to roles of authority. The mother's brother must be acquainted with sorcery to be able to combat enemy sorcerers and to protect his descendants. It is a double-edged attribute, for if he uses it unwisely he can be ruined. Thus there is always the possibility, even the expectation, that the man in an official position will fail to fill it creditably. The belief acts as a check on the use of secular power. If a leader among the Cewa or Lele becomes unpopular the sorcery beliefs contain an escape clause enabling his dependents to get rid of him. This is how I read the Tsav beliefs of the Tiv, checking as much as validating the eminent lineage elder's authority (Bohannan). So freely available sorcery is a form of spiritual power biased towards failure. This is a cross-classification which puts witchcraft and sorcery in the same bracket. Witchcraft beliefs are also tilted to expect role failure and to deal with it punitively, as we have seen. But witchcraft beliefs expect failure in interstitial roles, while sorcery beliefs expect failure in official roles. The whole scheme in which spiritual powers are correlated with structure becomes more consistent if we contrast those powers which are biased towards failure with powers which are biased towards success.

Teutonic notions of Luck, and some forms of *baraka* and *mana* are success-biased beliefs which parallel sorcery as a failure-biased belief. *Mana* and Islamic *baraka* exude from official positions, regardless of the intention of the incumbent. They are either dangerous powers to strike or benign powers for good. There are chiefs and princes exerting *mana* or *baraka* whose

merest contact is worth a blessing and a guarantee of success, and whose personal presence makes the difference between victory and defeat in battle. But these powers are not always so well anchored to the outlines of the social system. Sometimes *baraka* can be a free-floating benign power, working independently of the formal distribution of power and allegiance in society.

If we find such free-lance benign contagion playing an important role in people's beliefs, we can expect either that formal authority is weak or ill-defined or that, for one reason or another, the political structure has been neutralised so that the powers of blessing cannot emanate from its key points.

Dr. Lewis has described an example of an un-sacralised social structure. In Somaliland there is a general division in thought between secular and spiritual power (1963). In secular relations power derives from fighting strength and the Somali are militant and competitive. The political structure is a warrior system where might is right. But in the religious sphere the Somalis are Muslims and hold that fighting within the Muslim community is wrong. These deeply held beliefs de-ritualise the social structure so that Somali do not claim that divine blessings or dangers emanate from its representatives. Religion is represented not by warriors but by men of God. These holy men, religious and legal experts, mediate between men as they mediate between men and God. They are only reluctantly involved in the warrior structure of society. As men of God they are credited with spiritual power. It follows that their blessing (*baraka*) is great in proportion as they withdraw from the secular world and are humble, poor and weak.

If this argument is correct it should apply to other Islamicised peoples whose social organisation is based on violent internal conflict. However the Moroccan Berbers exhibit a similar distribution of spiritual power without the theological justification. Professor Gellner tells me that Berbers have no notion that fighting within the Moslem community is wrong. Moreover it is a common feature of competitive segmentary political systems that the leaders of the aligned forces enjoy less

credit for spiritual power than certain persons in the interstices of political alignment. The Somali holy man should be seen as the counterpart of the Tallensi Earth shrine priest and the Nuer Man of the Earth. The paradox of spiritual power vested in the physically weak is explained by social structure rather than by the local doctrine which justifies it. (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p. 22).

Baraka in this form is something like witchcraft in reverse. It is a power which does not belong to the formal political structure, but which floats between its segments. As witchcraft accusations arc used to reinforce the structure, so do people in the structure try to make use of *baraka*. Like witchcraft and sorcery its existence and strength is proved empirically, *post hoc*. A witch or sorcerer is identified when a misfortune occurs to someone against whom he has a grudge. The misfortune indicates there is witchcraft at work. The known grudge indicates the possible witch. It is his reputation for quarrels which essentially focusses the charge against him. *Baraka* is also identified empirically, *post hoc*. A piece of marvellous good fortune indicates its presence, often quite unexpectedly (Westermarck, I, chapter II). The reputation of a holy man for piety and learning focusses interest on him. Just as the witch's bad name will get worse with every disaster that befalls her neighbours, so the saint's good name will improve with every stroke of good fortune. The snow-ball effect is the same.

The failure-biased powers have a negative feed-back. If anyone potentially possessing them tries to get above himself, the accusation cuts him down to size. The fear of accusation works like a thermostat on everyone in advance of actual quarrels. It is a control device. But the success-biased powers have the possibility of a positive feed-back. They could build up and up indefinitely to an explosion. As witchcraft has been called institutionalised jealousy, so *baraka* can work as institutionalised admiration. For this reason it is self-validating when it works in a freely competitive system. It is on the side of the big battalions. Empirically tested by success, it attracts adherents and so earns more success. 'People in fact become

possessors of *baraka* by being treated as possessors of it.' (Gellner 1962).

I should make it clear that I do not believe that *baraka* is always available to competing elements in tribal social systems. It is an idea about power which varies in different political conditions. In an authoritative system it can emanate from the holders of authority and validate their established status, to the discomfiture of their foes. But it also has the potentiality of disrupting ideas about authority and about right and wrong, since its only proof lies in its success. The possessor of *baraka* is not subject to the same moral restraints as other persons (Westermarck, I, p. 198). The same applies to *Mana* and Luck. They can be on the side of established authority or on the side of opportunism. Raymond Firth came to the conclusion that at least in Tikopia, *Mana* means success (1940). Tikopian *Mana* expresses the authority of hereditary chiefs. Firth reflected on whether the dynasty would be endangered if the chief's reign were not a fortunate one, and concluded (correctly as it happened) that the chiefship would be strong enough to ride such a storm. One of the great advantages of doing sociology in a teacup is to be able to discern calmly what would be confusing in a larger scene. But it is a drawback not to be able to observe any real storms and upheavals. In a sense all colonial anthropology takes place in a teacup. If *mana* means success it is an apt concept for political opportunism. The artificial conditions of colonial peace may have disguised this potential for conflict and rebellion which the success-biased powers imply. Anthropology has often been weak in political analysis. The equivalent of a paper constitution without any dust or conflict or serious estimate of the balance of forces is sometimes offered in lieu of an analysis of a political system. This must necessarily obscure interpretation. It may be helpful to turn to a pre-colonial example.

Luck, for our Teutonic ancestors, like the opportunist or freelance forms of *mana* and *baraka*, also seems to have operated freely in a competitive political structure, fluid, with little in the way of hereditary power. Such beliefs can follow swift changes in the lines of allegiance, and change judgments of right and wrong.

I have tried to push as far as possible the parallel between these success-biased powers and witchcraft and sorcery, both failure-biased and both capable of operating independently of the distribution of authority. Another parallel with witchcraft is in the involuntary nature of these success forces. A man discovers he has *baraka* because of its effects. Many men may be pious and live outside the warrior system, but not many have great *baraka*. *Mana* too may be exerted quite unconsciously, even by the anthropologist, as Raymond Firth wryly recounts when a magnificent haul of fish was attributed to his *mana*. The Sagas of the Norsemen are full of crises resolved when a man suddenly discovers his Luck or finds that his Luck has deserted him (Grönbech, Vol. I, ch. 4).

Another characteristic of success power is that it is often contagious. It is transmitted materially. Anything which has been in contact with *baraka* may get *baraka*. Luck was also transmitted partly in heirlooms and treasures. If these changed hands, Luck changed hands too. In this respect these powers are like pollution, which transmits danger by contact. However, the potentially haphazard and disruptive effects of these success powers contrasts with pollution, austerely committed to support the outlines of the existing social system.

To sum up, beliefs which attribute spiritual power to individuals are never neutral or free of the dominant patterns of social structure. If some beliefs seem to attribute free-floating spiritual powers in a haphazard manner, closer inspection shows consistency. The only circumstances in which spiritual powers seem to flourish independently of the formal social system are when the system itself is exceptionally devoid of formal structure, when legitimate authority is always under challenge or when the rival segments of an acephalous political system resort to mediation. Then the main contenders for political power have to court for their side the holders of free-floating spiritual power. Thus it is beyond doubt that the social system is thought of as quick with creative and sustaining powers.

Now is the time to identify pollution. Granted that all spiritual powers are part of the social system. They express it and provide institutions for manipulating it. This means that the power in the universe is ultimately hitched to society, since so many changes of fortune are set off by persons in one kind of social position or another. But there are other dangers to be reckoned with, which persons may set off knowingly or unknowingly, which are not part of the psyche and which are not to be bought or learned by initiation and training. These are pollution powers which inhere in the structure of ideas itself and which punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate. It follows from this that pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined.

A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone. Bringing pollution, unlike sorcery and witchcraft, is a capacity which men share with animals, for pollution is not always set off by humans. Pollution can be committed intentionally, but intention is irrelevant to its effect—it is more likely to happen inadvertently.

This is as near as I can get to defining a particular class of dangers which are not powers vested in humans, but which can be released by human action. The power which presents a danger for careless humans is very evidently a power inhering in the structure of ideas, a power by which the structure is expected to protect itself.