logical assistants, may be characterised – with some stretch of the imagination – as practical or temporary members of the middle class. I deliberately use the word *corpus*, whose textual and finite nature, with its sense of procedural appropriation rather than humble and defenceless immersion, differs so very much from the standard anthropological material based on participant observation over a prolonged period. The last thing I want to do here is criticising Geschiere for methodological procedures which, far from being defective, constitute deliberate and strategic choices on his part. Having done his bit on occult forces at the village level, in his Maka book (Geschiere 1982) and a large number of shorter pieces, he emphatically and justifiably seeks to move away from the village setting – which anthropologists may be tempted to construct as being unique – among the Maka. He wishes to explore how witchcraft operates in a context of 'modernity': the state, the district capital, the city, modern consumption, elite behaviour.

These choices are strategic and commendable, not only in view of the time pressures an anthropological field-worker experiences if, like Geschiere, he is at the same time a leading academic in his distant home country – but also in view of the already vast literature on witchcraft in a large number of African village settings.

All the same, these choices direct the research, however timely it may be, to contexts both geographically dispersed and endowed with such social power that they can effectively impede participant observation by an anthropologist. This would be so for any topic, but all the more so for the topic of witchcraft, where sinister threats and counter threats, and occasional confrontations with both the real and the imagery powers of witchcraft specialists to harm and kill people, create a field-work setting well comparable to that of a front-line position in guerrilla warfare.

> G. THE POST-COLONIAL WITCHFINDER TETANGIMBO IN WESTERN ZAMBIA. The latter is no facile rhetoric. Having from 1972 frequented a village environment in Kaoma District, Western Zambia, where witchcraft was and has been the dominant discourse for discussing misfortune, conflict, and interpersonal relations in general, both within the family and at the local royal court, I became interested, in the early 1990s, in studying the activities of the witch-finder Tetangimbo. He was reputed to be active around Mangango, a thriving rural centre at the other end of the district, at some 120 kms distance from my main field-work site. Shimbwende, the elderly father of my long-standing research assistant (and by extension one of my own adoptive fathers), a strong-headed but righteous and most respectable village headman and courtier from a prominent family, had as most men his age and in his position attracted sorcery accusations. In accordance with regional custom, he was advised to travel to Tetangimbo and have himself officially cleansed – not knowing that the treatment would be inevitably lethal. Shimbwende was however a quarter Kwacha (less than a few Euro cents) short of the small fee required for cleansing at Tetangimbo's village, and when he tried to borrow that trifling sum from a distant relative near Mangango, the latter warned him most seriously of the dangers involved; so Shimbwende returned home without going back to the witchfinder's village – uncleansed, but with his life. When I finally came around to visiting Tetangimbo's village myself in mid-1994, I found a large totally deserted site with a dozen houses, all devastated by fire; I did not stop to have a look at

the extensive graveyard that was reputed to be one of the village's principal features: here Tetangimbo's assistants were supposed to have interred the alleged witches after killing them. Tetangimbo's case has interesting parallels with that of Mwana Lesa referred to above (*cf.* Ranger 1975a; Fetter 1971). Surrounded by a considerable number of locally recruited assistants, drawing his clientele from all over Kaoma district, and relying not on the traditional alkaloid bark poison (*mwathe*, *mwave*) that allegedly some people could still survive by vomiting, but on absolutely lethal manufactured agricultural poison which left the accused no chance whatsoever of escaping with her or his life, Tetangimbo is alleged to have killed dozens of people in the latter days of the Kaunda administration and right up to 1992. A criminal investigation was subsequently initiated, but the accused fled to Namibia, the case was never brought to trial, the police records proved nowhere to be traced, and some key witnesses were reputedly killed. Noticing that my own scholarly interest in the case was interpreted by some of the administrators and by the population at the district capital as an attempt to establish myself as Tetangimbo's successor (!), in a context where local actors had difficulty distinguishing between my Botswana-derived *sangoma*hood and the sinister forms of occult practice as common in Western Zambia,[165] I realised (and was explicitly warned, and threatened) that further insistence would be inviting violence of either an occult or a physical nature; and after being nearly run over by the truck of one of my probable enemies, I have effectively given up the project. One of the lessons I have learned in the process is: to appreciate the amazing difference between

- the relatively open discourse on witchcraft and on specialist occult powers in the village environment, where even the most terrible suspicions cannot take away – in fact, presuppose – the fact that literally everyone is personally acquainted with, and is considered to engage in, witchcraft, as against
- the anonymous, fragmented, veiled and basically secret discourse on witchcraft in even a small urban centre like a Zambian district capital.[166]

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[165] All over South Central and Southern Africa, diviner-healers are known as *banganga*, *bangaka*, from a root which also occurs in Eurasiatic / Nostratic, where the long-range comparative linguist Dolgopolsky (1998) interprets it to mean 'tying, binding' – note the connection with the 'weaving' theme around Nyambi, above; for Bantu as 'super-Nostratic, *cf.* Kaiser & Shevoroshkin 1988. These ritual specialists inspire both respect and fear – in the best traditions of the *ambiguity of the* sacred (Durkheim). *Sangomahood*, too, has its sinister dimensions, and not just in the eyes of the beholder. In the first place the practitioner is considered to need a personal, comprehensive and active knowledge of evil in order to be able to combat it when it has stricken the clients – not for nothing is the *sangoma*'s habitual animal image that of a leopard, and does the *sangoma*, during séances that may attract many dozens local spectators, publicly suck the blood gushing from the cut throat of a succumbing sacrifical animal, usually a goat. And in the second place, especially the richer and more powerful clients commission, for very considerable sums, the *sangoma*'s ancestral powers for success in business and politics, and in that connection some *sangomas* are tempted to perform human sacrifice and to use human bodily substances (boys' penises; the Nkoya *banganga* allegedly prefer children's brains) that can only be procured through murder. There is absolutely nothing in the *sangoma* cult that stipulates such transgressions (personally I have never engaged in them nor *directly* witnessed them – I would not have condoned them anyway). However, at the heart of the *sangoma* cult is the idea of reincarnation, in the light of which murder is lightly considered to be only a minor, routine transition. *Sangomas* who are known to perform such homicidal services for their clients are not admissible to the High-God shrines that constitute the central places of their cult, but nonetheless such practitioners can still occupy leading positions in the cult. *Cf.* van Binsbergen 2003b: 217.

[166] For a preliminary account, *e.g.* van Binsbergen 1996d.