

DEVIANCE

Read: Bourgois 174-337

- I. Witches as deviant “others”
 - A. How they are different teaches us about ourselves
 - B. What are our ideas about witches?
 1. Ugly
 2. Black magic, spells
 3. Do things in secret
 4. Women
 5. Puritan dress, ride on broomsticks, black cats, etc.
 - C. We know all this lore, but we don’t believe in witches
 1. But in our past we did
 - a. Salem witch trials
 - b. In the Old Testament Saul talks to a witch
 2. Beliefs and accusations about witchcraft continue in parts of Normandy, or did until very recently¹
 3. I have had several students in this class who definitely believed in witches
 - a. “Shape-shifters” in the Southwest USA
 - b. An African student who didn’t believe in them but brought in newspaper articles about witches from his home country, Nigeria
 4. Such beliefs definitely don’t go away with increased modernization, urbanization, globalization
 - a. Sometimes the incidence of accusations increases
 - 1) This happened in Indonesia several years ago in the capital city of Jakarta

¹ Jeanne Favret-Saada, “Unbewitching as therapy.” *American Ethnologist* 16, 1, 1989: 40-56.

D. General anthropological definition of witchcraft

1. A witch does evil and secret antisocial behavior connected with magic and the supernatural in some way
2. If it's just evil and secret (like secretly poisoning someone), it's not a witch
3. The word "sorcerer" is sometimes associated with witchcraft; other times it's got a different meaning—the relationship between the two words in general is dynamic and unstable
4. This definition is more general than our folk" definition of "witch"—can serve as an analytic term for cross-cultural comparison

E. Variations cross-culturally:

1. In some societies it's possible that people don't know they're witches
2. But in general they do, and are malevolent—intentionally bad
3. In some societies witches choose to actively seek relationships with other witches to acquire their power
 - a. In other societies witches are born with their power
4. Almost always witchcraft involves illegitimate power over others

F. **Who** is a witch also varies cross-culturally

1. Age, sex, etc.
2. Who one does witchcraft **against** varies: kin, in-laws, strangers
3. The things a witch **does** varies
4. And how one is **cured** of being a witch or being bewitched varies

II. *Why* do so many people believe in witches?

EXERCISE: possible functions of witchcraft

A. Explanations in terms of causes and maintenance

1. Types of causes:

- a. Material, functional, historical
- 2. We are concerned not so much with explaining the origins of witchcraft beliefs (historical cause) but with their maintenance
- 3. Notion of a causal chain very important
 - a. Proximate, distal, final causes

III. Social science explanations of witchcraft beliefs

A. Social structure

- 1. **Politics** and social structure
 - a. Political infighting explanation
 - 1) Ndembu of Zambia: dispute over political succession—for headmanship—both sides hurl accusations of sorcery at the other
 - a) A power struggle: whoever succeeds in making the accusation stick will have insured that that rival will not become headman
 - b) Particularly effective if rival is executed or banished
 - b. Eliminate antisocial, deviant individuals explanation
 - 1) Kuikuru of Brazil
 - a) Shaman said the lightning that set fire to 2 houses was sent by a Kuikuru man who had previously left the village
 - b) This man had only 1 male relative, also no longer living in the village
 - c) The accused had been engaged to a woman but hadn't taken her with him
 - d) Shaman's accusation clearly was not based on a spur-of-the-moment decision

(1) Long incubation period during which the shaman sounded out villagers

e) The accused:

(1) History of disputes and quarrels

c. Social Control explanation

- 1) Probably more people are accused of being witches than there are practicing witches
- 2) It's practiced in secret, so everyone is afraid to some extent of being accused
- 3) So the Kuikuru try to act in an amiable, open, generous manner and avoid quarrels
- 4) Do everything to maintain the support of kinsmen

d. The reverse: witches are those with power who want to be seen as witches

- 1) Strong people may encourage beliefs that they are witches whereas weak people don't
- 2) "Papa Doc" Duvalier, dictator in Haiti
 - b) Wanted people to believe he had an army of zombies, practiced very powerful black magic
- 3) Among the Kaguru (in Tanzania): powerful men want to be feared, if they can do so with impunity

2. **Economics and social structure** explanations

a. Accusations seen to be economic leveling mechanisms

- 1) Peasant communities: the idea that peasants have a notion of the "limited good"
 - a) The pie is only so big, so if someone is doing well, then someone else necessarily has less
 - b) So, if a man starts to dress better or spend more money

- c) The conclusion might very possibly be that he's made a pact with the devil and someone else has misfortune
 - d) If someone has more money, the pressure is on that person to spend it during a saint's day festival
 - (1) Or run the risk of being suspected of antisocial behavior
 - b. This explanation sees witchcraft beliefs as a redistributive mechanism
 - 1) "Institutionalized envy": the power of gossip, the belief that some people have the evil eye, or fear of witchcraft, is an effective leveler
 - c. Also, fear of possible witchcraft accusations seen to inhibit accumulation of wealth
 - 1) Which can be disruptive—social ties
 - 2) Encourages people to conform to society's rules
- 3. A **boundary-maintaining** social structure mechanisms explanation:
 - a. Zuni veterans returning home
 - b. If seen as imitating whites too much, they were considered to be witches
 - 1) One veteran said he had had the idea of opening a store in the village
 - a) But was afraid to because of possible witchcraft accusations
- 4. Social structures produce **psychological tensions** which become expressed in witchcraft accusations
 - a. Salem witch trials
 - b. McCarthy witch hunt

- c. The Barotse of Zambia: a built-in tension between wife and mother-in-law
 - 1) Which can't be resolved because they want the same things
 - 2) A man who is closely attached to his wife and ignores his mother-in-law will likely be considered bewitched by his wife

 - d. Sexual antagonism
 - 1) Nupe men (Nuba mountains, Sudan) do not practice witchcraft, but accuse women of it
 - a) Witches are always women and are organized into societies headed by women
 - 2) Tension: men are supposed to be dominant, but the economic activities of women threaten this
 - 3) Men say their evidence comes from women being ill-tempered and bossy
 - a) Women are affluent, independent, and “immoral”
 - 4) Analysis: it's more convenient to believe in witchcraft rather than examine their own assumptions about women's nature and proper role
5. **Changes in social structure** as the cause of witchcraft beliefs explanation
- a. Witchcraft accusations in Tudor and Stuart Essex: Alan MacFarlane's studies²
 - 1) New conflicts occurring in the context of old moral patterns
 - 2) Old patterns:
 - a) Neighborliness
 - b) Charity
 - 3) The Reformation ended various ways of obtaining comfort via ritualization of conflict

² Alan MacFarlane, “Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex. In Mary Douglas, ed., 1970, *Witchcraft Confessions & Accusations*. London: Tavistock, pp. 81-102.

- 4) Of course, conflict had always existed, but there used to be universal standards
- 5) During the 17th century: new institutions, and new ethics were introduced

B. Ecological explanations

1. Hopi: social control necessary because of scarce resources
 - a. Cooperation is vital for survival in a difficult life
 - b. “If you have a good heart”—everything of importance is done communally
 - c. Each adult is responsible to and for the whole community
 - d. A slight mistake in a ceremony can ruin it, and so can a trace of “badness” in one’s heart
 - e. All distress—from illness to crop failure—is the result of bad hearts or possibly witchcraft
 - f. A witch has “2 hearts”: an extreme form of personal wickedness in which an individual sacrifices others, particularly his own relatives, to save himself
 - g. Witchcraft explains famine and thirst
 - h. If you think bad thoughts you are more vulnerable to witchcraft

C. Psychological explanations

1. Scapegoating
 - a. McCarthyism—“witch hunts”—makes things reassuringly simple
 - b. A process of psychological projection
 - c. Scapegoats are symbols of society’s worst fears
 - 1) Women who don’t nurture babies, but eat them—witches

- 2) Government officials who aren't patriots and civil servants, but in fact are in the pay of the international communist conspiracy
2. Explanation for why bad things happen to good people
3. "Hydraulic" theories
 - a. Witchcraft beliefs reduce anxiety, etc., accusations channel free-floating anger
4. Make the world more secure
 - a. You *can* cure illness (by determining who is the witch and reversing the spell)
5. Witchcraft beliefs reassure, and hide contradictions in the system:
 - a. Nupe *women* aren't aggressive by nature, *witches* are
 - b. The European witch craze
 - 1) One hypothesis is that women with power were the most likely to be accused
 - 2) Midwives, herbalists: quasi legitimate power because women in general weren't supposed to be independently powerful

IV. Deviance

- A. Anomalous, unusual
- B. Statistical deviance
 1. May be seen as positive or negative
 2. Gifted children (but are not called "deviant")
- C. Deviance, everyday meaning:
 1. Not just variation, but negative loading: disapproval (moral, aesthetic)
 2. "Normals" conform to cultural norms; deviants do not
- D. **DISCUSS:** kinds of social deviance?

- E. Clearly, what is considered deviant depends on context, on one's perspective
1. Do we see those guerrillas as counter-insurgents, subversives, or Freedom Fighters?
 2. Challenge authority, or a hierarchical status system
 - a. Religious dissenters: Quakers
 - 1) Addressed their superiors with “thee, thou”
 - 2) Why we no longer use the “familiar” 2nd person pronoun, although every other European language has it
 - b. Resist an oppressive government
 - 1) Colonialism
 - a) U.S. Founding Fathers
 - b) Mahatma Gandhi
 - c) Che Guevara
 - c. Rebel against a corrupt or unfair system
 - 1) Nelson Mandela
 - 2) Robin Hood and his band of merry men
 - 3) Jesse James robbed the rich and gave money to the poor—
or so the legend goes
 - d. **DISCUSS:** Examples of romantic images of criminals or other rebels?
 3. Deviant because is a member of the vanguard, the avant-garde, a distinct subculture, or the counter-culture
 - a. The counter-cultural movement: hippies
 - b. Artists—painters, composers, choreographers
 - c. “Race music” evolved into crossover music, evolved into rock and roll

- 1) Chuck Berry, etc.
- d. “Approved” deviance—transgressive, “in your face,” etc.
 - 1) Again, romantic notions about the rebel
 - 2) Bourgois: “I guarded myself consciously in this work from a voyeuristic celebration of street dealers and inner-city street culture...pornography of violence” (p. 15)
 - 3) Rock stars
- F. Context is everything, especially if we’re looking at other cultures
 1. Montezuma’s reported use of people with *pinta* (a cousin of yaws, a distant cousin of syphilis)
 - a. As his personal guard
 - b. One stage of the disease produces very colorful blotches on the skin
 2. **DISCUSS:** other examples?

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