Witchcraft and Leprosy: Two Strategies of Exclusion

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The analysis of witchcraft accusations is here extended to the case of persons carrying infection. Inaccurate medical knowledge allows the charge of spreading infection to be used as grounds for exclusion in the same way as the charge of doing harm by witchcraft. In Western Christendom in the mid-twelfth century the social effect of being identified as a leper was loss of civic status; the accused, regarded as a sinner, was removed from public office and not allowed to inherit property or to make legacies. By contrast, in the Eastern Kingdom of Jerusalem during the same period, lepers' civic rights were protected, no association with sin or immorality was attached to the disease, and medical diagnosis was accurate by modern standards. The contrast is explained through an analysis of the social structure and culture of three periods, comparing the strategies of rejection deployed in each.

Insidious harm

This article will discuss two strategies of rejection, both of them through accusations of causing injury, but neither normally linked with the other. They refer to two varieties of insidious damage, witchcraft on the one hand, and on the other, hidden infectious disease. Infection and causing occult harm are both hidden from observation: a carrier can transmit disease to others without showing any signs of infection; a witch looks like anyone else. From their hiddenness both forms of harm afford the same kind of opportunity for accusations and exclusions. To historians the anthropologist's analysis of witchcraft appears in fancy dress, as if the subject is cast to be played in skins or the antique clothes worn by their own seventeenth-century *dramatis personae*. Combining accusations of witchcraft with diagnoses of infectious disease, as two strategies in the same process of exclusion and rejection, may however shed light on some shady corners of medical history. The argument that follows will summarise some anthropological analyses of witchcraft accusations in order to apply the same approach to the supposed epidemic of leprosy in northern Europe in the twelfth century.

Towards the history of witchcraft accusations we generally take a sceptical attitude. A reported outbreak of leprosy is another matter. We do believe what the people thought of it at the time, even though the evidence is dubious. For the argument that follows the reality or unreality of the cause of harm makes no difference: it is enough that the people believe in it. Personally, I take my stand against the reality of witchcraft. To believe in witches would contradict too heavily everything else that I believe. By contrast, infectious diseases qualify for me as real

dangers. The case of infection is different; I realize that not everything that was once thought to be infectious is necessarily so, but in general infections exist. They wipe out populations, cripple, mutilate and kill. The significant fact is that a person who is carrying infection does not necessarily show it. Unless the infected are required to wear a badge, or unless they are confined to restricted areas, or made to declare their condition publicly, contact with the infection can be unperceived. Infectious diseases therefore come into the class of insidious causes of damage. In European belief witches were thought to be difficult to recognize. Both the witch and the carrier of infection are liable to go unsuspected. Both have a capacity to deceive. The hidden power of causing injury that they have in common justifies their being treated together as potential targets for strategies of rejection.

The comparison has been inspired by a remarkable recent article by a medievalist, Mark Pegg (1990). He has compared attitudes to leprosy in very much the same spirit as anthropologists compare reports of witchcraft. The problem which he addresses is why in Western Christendom it should have seemed utterly shocking that a king could be a leper, while in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1174 Baldwin IV, a known leper, was actually anointed and crowned. Pope Alexander III sent out an Encyclical, *Cor nostrum*, in which he deplored the coronation of a sinner, and anticipated disaster for the Holy Land which a sinner on the throne would not be able to hold against the infidel. The answer Pegg gives has to do with the imputation of sin to lepers. As soon as immorality is associated with infectious disease the syndrome of social exclusion is buttressed with accusations of causing insidious harm. The question which is raised by his study is whether it would not be as well to exercise the same scepticism in the face of accusations of leprosy that we exercise in the face of witchcraft accusations. The alleged twelfth century outbreak would have been a curious epidemic from a medical point of view because the bacteria of Hansen's disease do not normally flourish in the cold climate of northern Europe. Moreover there are not enough lepers' skeletons in the graveyards exclusively reserved for inmates of twelfth century leprosariums to support the idea of a widespread epidemic. Another kind of explanation is required, which the comparison with witchcraft accusations may provide.

Techniques of rejection and control

Sociologists tend to lump together techniques of rejection as ways of dealing with marginal categories. However, the comparisons that follow show that the topic is more complex. Sometimes the person who is to be rejected is not marginal at all: an unpopular leader, a young tyrant, or an aging monarch. It is necessary to realize that the same strategies of rejection may sometimes be used against the powerful. There has to be consensus. There has to be an imputation of immorality. The scale of infamy starts with imputing minor moral weakness to unimportant candidates for degradation, and rises to the full imputation of filthy living. This range of slander is the common backdrop to the slurs and slights of 'orientalism' and the derogatory definitions of feminine gender to which critical studies of the past two decades have made us sensitive. To cause a person's civil claims to be rejected, libel on its own is not enough, it has to be supported by an accusation of causing damage so that the victim can be classed as a public nuisance.

The benefit of considering witchcraft and infection together is that the parallel with witchcraft gives insight into disease as a resource for maintaining particular cultural regimes. British social anthropologists of the post-war era made powerful analyses of the uses of witchcraft accusations in African villages and chiefdoms for maintaining patterns of authority. This article will suggest that a historian of medicine could make similar analyses of the use of infectious disease as a resource for controlling designated public enemies. For such an analysis, medical diagnosis would have to be brought in under the same rubric as 'accusation', and note taken of the destructive effect of some diagnoses on civic status. The result would be a sociological model of the treatment of infectious diseases.

There are various reasons why this synthesis has been delayed. The spectacular European witch trials distracted historians' attention from close correspondences between infectious disease and occult harm, perhaps because of their focus on Satanism. Another reason lies in what William James called 'medical materialism', the reluctance of students of medicine to consider illness as an accusation, and so their reluctance to consider a social epidemiology of accusations.

The libel

The regular strategy of rejection starts with the libel. The simple food libel (foreigners eat disgusting foods), and the sex libel (the demeaned category is promiscuous, effeminate, incestuous), escalate to charges of violence and perversion, and if the determination to exclude is fixed, it eventually resorts to the blood libel (the enemy is murderous, and even murders children). The culminating infamy that incites ethnic persecution combines blood, sex, food and religion. In the Bible the Canaanite enemy was accused of child sacrifice and sexual orgies in honour of the anti-god. In medieval Europe the Jews were accused of child sacrifice and ritual orgies. Tracing the rise and fall of imputed filth, it is remarkable that the arrow of accusation shifts over time from one target to another (Douglas 1970). Sometimes the accusation points upwards to betraying leaders who can be removed if the libel musters enough anger. Sometimes disfranchised masses or hordes of refugees attract the libel, so that they can be put under restraint. Imputing filth to the victims enables them to be rejected without a qualm.

We shall see below that at certain times and places European lepers attracted a version of the blood libel. But my first task is to insist that witchcraft and sorcery accusations are examples of the full libel, covering blood, sex and food. Suspected of satanism and heresy, the medieval witch was also thought to be given to unnatural vice and to an insatiable sexual appetite. Charges of secret sexual deviance, spite, heresy and occult dangerous powers were combined. Everything significant about the European witch was occult, hidden, unknowable by ordinary means. In other regions of the world, leaving out the component of heresy, a similar bundle of evil propensities characterizes alleged witches and sorcerers: anthropophagy, unnatural vice, treason, spite, general depravity and insidious damage by occult means. The cleverer they are supposed to be in occult knowledge the more incredible the crimes that can be attributed to them. For this reason evidence that might count in their favour is regarded as suspect. English witch trials in the sixteenth century relied heavily on character attributes to enhance the likelihood that an

impoverished old widow had sexual congress with the devil: evidence of her importunacy and greedy acquisitiveness would carry the day against her.

An example that I witnessed in the course of fieldwork in the 1950s in what was then the Belgian Congo will illustrate the closure that is placed upon contrary evidence. Two children had died; their grandmother had been accused of causing their deaths by sorcery magic; in evidence was her quarrelsome personality; in proof was the mess of human faeces alleged to have been found in the crown of a tall palm tree by a young man who climbed it to draw palm wine. Since it was at that time very unusual for the Lele ever to accuse a woman, the traditional constraints on accusations were evidently breaking down. Since women never climbed trees and were thought to be incapable of it, the proof was not *prima facie* convincing. To the sceptical query about how a woman could have got up there and defecated whilst precariously perched on top of a palm, the clinching answer was that no ordinary woman could: only a witch with occult powers could fly up there and do it. The woman left the village, her in-laws had proved some point, but nothing more was done against her.

Whether the witch is really able to do harm or not, whether the person is really infectious or not, the attribution of a hidden power to hurt is a weapon of attack. Attributions of occult injury and hidden infection informally entrench the hierarchy of social categories and warn well-placed persons against indiscriminate social intercourse. An element of social discrimination is carried in any attributions of occultism, like the common idea that a miasmic harmful influence emanates from certain quarters, generally those inhabited by the poor, on the outskirts of towns. In different kinds of political regime the accusation of insidious harm will be put to different uses. The accusation can be completely outrageous; it will be credible essentially if the political system which it backs is accepted. The process of formally accusing, testifying, verifying and remedying plays a crucial part in entrenching the system.

Awareness of insidious harm arouses public concern on behalf of the public good. According to how the public good is conceived, accusations of causing insidious harm will be aimed at different targets. A successful accusation is one that has enough credibility for a public outcry to remove the possibility of repeating the damage. This preventative action will entail degrading the accused. However, though anyone may accuse, not all accusations will be accepted. To be successful an accusation should be directed against victims already hated by the populace. The cause of the harm must be vague, unspecific, difficult to prove or disprove. The crime must be difficult to deny, even impossible to refute. One accusation that sticks will make the accused infamous, and will collect other infamy around it. Once defamed, the person will continue plausibly to attract similar charges and convictions. But he or she is not necessarily a marginal person. Insidious harm is an accusation that reaches different targets in different political regimes (Thompson *et al.* 1990).

Targets of accusations in Africa

In the 1950s anthropological studies of witchcraft accusations were mainly focused at the village level. Interest focused on who did the accusing, who was accused, the relation between the victim, the accuser and the accused, and changes in the

general level of accusations. Nowadays the same analysis is applied at state level (Rowlands & Warmier 1988). Witchcraft is used politically in default of other means of redress. From one community to another, the pattern of accusation reveals different political burdens, reflecting the lines of political legitimacy. Where the authority structure was normally strong witchcraft accusations were used at a time of transition to sway the balance by defaming a candidate for office, to hasten the exit of one who was already on the way out (Middleton 1960), or to block his choice of successor. They might be used to fuel dynastic wrangles (Schapera 1971). Usually the possibility of accusation would be one among a rich variety of strategies (Forde 1964). When the legitimacy of political office was weak and easily challenged witchcraft accusations were used continually to disqualify the accused from office-holding.

Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zaire were at the time of study under colonial rule, the land was sparsely populated, the social systems destroyed to a large extent by labour migration and an ineffectual entry into the cash economy. The old political systems were not functioning as they would had intervillage raiding, capital punishment, self help and judicial ordeals still been among the resources available to the officials. In that situation, accusing a rival of witchcraft was the surest way of mustering effective popular support for a cause. Sometimes witchcraft accusations disqualified unpopular incumbents of the office of village headman. This was demonstrated in an exemplary study of the Yao in Malawi, by Clyde Mitchell (1956), whose analysis remained a model for the subject.

Among the Yao the alleged victims of the witch were children, his own nieces and nephews, or his sisters, the female support group on which he depended for his hegemony in the village. The accusers were generally related to the accused witch as his nephews or younger brothers, persons who would normally be subject to his authority, but who were the group from which the heir to the headmanship would be selected in the event of his death. They were bound to him by powerful moral pressures. Only proof of his total depravity would absolve them from their obedience. The accusation that he was a witch and that he killed his own nearest and dearest was further supported by the knowledge that witches get their power by incest, and that it inspires in them a lust for human flesh, preferably decaying flesh exhumed from graveyards; furthermore, he was supposed to belong to a coven of witches whose members engage each other in flesh debts, each witch being forced by the others to hand over his own kin in return for feasting on theirs.

The horrible stories would not be credible if the accusations were not part of a developing rivalry between the legal heirs of the accused, on the one hand, and on the other his sons who had no formal rights in the succession. The strategy of the headman was to try to reconcile and merge the two lines by marriages of cousins descended from himself and his sisters. While the younger generations were growing up the village would live in peace, but later the two parties, one led by the headman's sons who had no formal rights, and the other led by his legal heirs, his maternal kin, would align in mutual hostility. The village would be riven by strife at some point when its population exceeded a certain size in relation to its resources. It would have to split, and one part would have to go away to new land. Accusations of witchcraft against the incumbent headman would hasten the

process, bring the smouldering disputes to a head, and conclude by dismissing him from office. In consequence the rate of witchcraft accusations was linked to demography, and this to the political cycle of the village structure. Accusations petered out at some periods, and revived at other, ecologically and demographically determined points. Mitchell could predict from longitudinal data when a new wave of accusations was due, who would be accused, by whom, and even what the political outcome would be.

Epidemiology of insidious harm

Latent stereotyped belief in insidious damage emerges regularly at specific crises (Ardener 1970). It enables the community to restructure itself on previous lines by absolving from certain specified moral obligations. In this tradition, Max Marwick wrote of a Central African people that their witch beliefs were a somewhat ruthless way 'to dissolve relations which have become redundant, ... blast down the dilapidated parts of the social structure, and clear the rubble in preparation for new ones [so as to] maintain the virility of the indigenous social structure by allowing the periodic redistribution of structural forces' (Marwick 1952). To turn to a contemporary example, in the current epidemic of AIDS there are some who have tried to work the moralizing to boost the constraints of traditional sexual morality.

In Africa there were variations on this pattern. Among the Lele of the Kasai the suspected sorcerers were the whole class of old men, and particularly those who had been initiated into the diviners' guild. They were the doctors and lawyers, as it were, the professionals who knew who the dead sorcerers were, and how they might punish the living for disobeying their wishes, and who had the remedies. But the theory of the unity of knowledge was used to show that those who could cure could also kill. The older a man was, the more likely he was, so the common theory ran, to be angry and jealous of the young, and embroiled with his own age group. So age and sex were strong indicators of who would be accused of insidious damage. Women were largely excluded, and young persons completely. It was thought to be a learned skill, which eliminated young men from the range of suspects. The incidence of accusations showed the part played by sorcery beliefs in maintaining the balance between the generations. This was a village community in which many privileges went to the old men. In precolonial days the old would have had to defer to the middle-aged and young warriors, but the Pax Belgica had disturbed that equilibrium between young and old. Sorcery accusations restored it. Old men who tried to abuse their privileges, who made exigent demands on the young or who stole other men's wives would in the old days be sooner or later lined up to take the poison ordeal; at the time of research, since the poison ordeal was forbidden under Belgian law, they were banished from their village. This sounds like a minor disadvantage, but it was grave because they carried their infamous reputation with them wherever they settled. The first death in the village which had given them asylum would cause them to be ousted again, until they became wanderers of no fixed abode, dependent on erratic charity (Douglas 1963).

Forty years later the same people were still convinced of much the same ideas about insidious harm from sorcery, but there were a few changes about who might be doing it. It was no longer thought to be a learned skill, so the old men were

no more likely to commit it than anyone else. The range of accusations had widened completely, so that it was plausible to accuse young men and women and even children. The accusations of children against their parents were now taken seriously. The pattern had lost its structure. The little bits of theory about how it worked, which had formerly had the effect of making plausible accusations do the public service of curbing the too exigent demands of the old men, had dissolved. Now it had become plausible to accuse anyone. Even the old idea that sorcery would not work at a distance, which used to rule out some suspects because they had gone too far away, and which made it sensible to exile convicted sorcerers, had disappeared. The danger from sorcery was unlimited in geographical range. Within the country villages it seemed like a raging epidemic against which nothing would prevail. Living without cash in a newly monetized economy, such solidarity as might have helped their situation was sapped by the fear of each neighbour's sorcery. But the incidence of accusations in the new epidemiological model was not entirely unstructured. The arrow of accusation tended to point in the direction from town to country. Townsfolk believed that their kin in the villages were so sorcery-infected that it was dangerous to visit them. The jealousy of the sorcerers was believed to be directed against their well-dressed, well-fed kinsmen in town. It would be a very noble-minded townsperson who could resist the temptation to use the imputed infamy as an excuse not to respond to the continuous begging of his or her country cousins.

European witchcraft

History may show that Monter (1976) is short-sighted in his stated view that 'all things considered, non-Western social anthropology provides keys that do not fit continental European beliefs', and that 'forays beyond Europe' are useless for understanding European witchcraft (1976: 11). The historians tend to focus on particular moments, the outbreaks of accusations being treated as one-off events that are exceptions to a more regular appreciation of material cause and effect. The anthropological approach is similar except for a focus on recurring structural problems that are expected to reproduce the same effects over and over again. Consequently they find that accusations work with other normative pressures.

In European studies the wild rash of witch trials that erupted in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and died out in the seventeenth has been the subject of various speculations. Individual historians have tended to think that their own case studies rule out the explanations advanced to explain mass executions of witches in other regions. But the African experience suggests, on the contrary, that the various explanations could each be right in different places. As a technique of exclusion and control, accusations of committing the same kind of crime have been used to achieve different objectives. The use of torture for obtaining confessions, the demand by the ecclesiastical courts for further denunciations, vows of secrecy from those who denounced others as witches, all these judicial practices made a difference to the way the witch craze developed in different countries.

In early fourteenth-century England occasional witch trials were political and courtly in character: only in the fifteenth century did witchhunting begin to be directed against the common people (Kieckhefer 1984: 10-14).In Scotland and in France there was the same progression from courtly intrigue to mass repression

from the end of the sixteenth century. The arrow of accusation, having started by pointing neither up nor down but across palace factions, changed direction.

The historians of seventeenth-century England arrive at the point when the arrow of accusation is pointing downwards, and so pay attention to changes in the economic structure which destituted certain categories of people and led to their posing social problems at national and neighbourhood levels (Thomas 1971; Macfarlane 1970a,b). European witch trials were more mixed up with heresy than in England (Monter 1976). Although the conception of the witch as the child of poverty much influenced French historians (Muchembled 1978: 37; Palou 1957: 50), the history of French witchcraft was inevitably more involved with the contest between the Catholic Church and the civil authorities (Mandrou 1968). In Italy, accusations tended to be launched by the clerics against rival religious practitioners in the surviving rural cults, humble purveyors of cures and predictions attacked by the dominant religion: a downward pointing arrow (Ginzburg 1983). In Spanish Basque country the Inquisitors found that the clergy themselves were denounced by peasant women, the original victims of accusations: here the arrow pointed upwards (Henningsen 1980).

Historians of European witch trials confess themselves as much at a loss to account for the decline of the beliefs as for their rise. The nineteenth-century historians saw it as a contest between superstition and reason, with the eventual triumph of the latter (Henningsen 1980: 19). A patient piecing together of the state of knowledge at the end of the seventeenth century hardly bears out that consoling picture. The question is not one of intellectual advance, the end of superstition, the demand for new standards of proof following in the great scientific developments of the period (Shapiro 1983). There was still plenty of superstition around. Nor did a moral improvement make judges feel so much more kindly that they wished to mitigate the severe punishments that convicted witches received; on the contrary, the Parlement of Paris went on burning other criminals whose cases had nothing to do with magic (Mandrou 1968: 353). Nor does it help to consider a wave of witchcraft accusations as a response to relative deprivation, for there are many very deprived populations which resist that resource for settling scores.

The explanation has much more to do with the growth and effectiveness of centralised judiciaries in the European states. The worst witch trial terrors were in the seventeenth century when the Thirty Years' war started and ended. As a backdrop to the rise and decline of witchcraft we should take note that national boundaries were realigned, and that France and England both started and ended a civil war. The end of the century, when the witch craze died away, saw one of the periodic arrivals of the nations of Europe at a new level of centralisation and judicial control. The movement to standardize the legal process would have ended the resort to accusations of insidious harm for controlling rivals. The effective assertion of the rule of law, a single law for the realm, would have been much more influential for the decline of such accusations than any advance in scientific thinking or in the intellectual practice of demanding proof. The idea of insidious harm, of harm that is by definition hidden, can best exert its disruptive influence when separate rules are allowed for private and ecclesiastical courts. The comparison with leprosy beliefs that follows pays attention to political effects and especially to

the disturbances that follow in the wake of a move to centralize, and that are calmed after it has been achieved. The analysis of authority and responses to authority which will be sketched below in respect of leprosy could well be applied to the variety of situations in which witchcraft was prosecuted.

Imputed leprosy corrects abuse of office

Up to this point, we have used witchcraft cases to show how the accusation of insidious harm works with the political balance. We have seen how it changes its direction, and how it is not exclusively used against the poor and the outcast. We have seen how, by inculpating some, it exculpates others. The next step is to discount the spectacular phantasmagoric effects of the witchcraft cases, so as to extend the analysis more widely to all kinds of social context.

Pegg (1990) approaches leprosy as a historian working within the framework of the comparison of *mentalités*, in keeping with the tradition of the *Annales*. His first interest is the shift in attitudes to the body through twelfth-century Europe. Evidently, at that period in England and France the body was made into an image of society in a much more thoroughgoing way than before. But why so? Or rather, why in France and England, and not in Jerusalem? Pegg's answer deploys a compact and densely argued comparison of three cultural regimes.

The first period is from the end of the eleventh century through to the beginning of the twelfth, roughly to 1125. This would be the time when the tremendous effort to centralize the Church had just begun, in response to the Moorish threat in the Mediterranean, and after the First Crusade. The Crusades were to bring profound upheavals into Europe; new wealth and monetisation of what had been largely a barter economy; new classes with rich burghers rivalling the nobility in splendour, demanding to marry their sons and daughters to noble families but being refused; and a new, large class of poor. A learned bureaucracy was developing, economic power was concentrating.

By the end of the twelfth century the standard ideas of the person, the body and society were transformed. The secular powers put in hand the centralization of the kingdoms to keep pace with the centralization of the Church, so that hierarchical principles came to be established on a larger scale and more effectively than ever before. But the movement could not have been smooth. In the background of the major transformation, in the small face-to-face societies of the rural demesne, little hierarchies were in place, the little hierarchy of a monastery, of a lord and his knights, a bishop and his priests. The small local hierarchies were threatened by new forms of wealth, new temptations, loss of respect for old obligations.

In this first period of the comparison, to the beginning of the twelfth century, leprosy seems to have been rare. The few recorded charges were always made against persons in power by their own subordinates. Monks complaining of the harsh and arbitrary rule of their abbot, priests complaining of the peculation of their bishop, knights dissatisfied with their lord, would charge the unpopular holder of office with leprosy. The charge is analogous to the charge of witchcraft made against a village head to resolve conflict in the Yao village. Its object was to restore the proper functioning of a small-scale hierarchy. A leper went through a ceremony of ritual death, inspired by the Biblical law controlling lepers. He lost control over

his property and was automatically and definitively removed from office. Leprosy was associated with sin, it was a chastisement by the hand of God, but as it was not considered to be a source of infection at that stage there were no restrictions on the leper's freedom of movement.

Filth imputed to the disentitled

In the course of the stressful next fifty years the accusation of leprosy changed its target. New wealth combined with centralization threw up masses of poor. After 1170 vagabonds, beggars and heretics were the category charged with leprosy, while the rich and powerful seem to have suddenly become practically immune. Instead of being deposed from office (for they held none) the new class of lepers were segregated into leprosariums, as part of the successful attempt to create order that resulted in the highly structured society of the thirteenth century. The comparison with witchcraft has already prepared us for the physical constraints and the systematic vilification of lepers that belongs to this period. The idea of the disease was transformed. Lepers were now held to be highly infectious, the disease was thought to be transmitted by sexual penetration. Endowed with an inordinate sexual appetite, lepers were incestuous, lepers were rapists, lepers sought to spread their condition by forced sexual intercourse with healthy persons. Segregated for the public good, they were not allowed to move freely in the streets, they were not able to prosecute at law, nor to inherit land nor to transmit land rights that they might otherwise have gained by inheritance. They were effectively stripped of citizenship.

It would seem that the discrimination against lepers was a solution to the problem created by masses newly disadvantaged by the individualism eroding the feudal system. Landless persons whom no one wanted to know about were tidied away in leprosariums. Legislation began to segregate lepers from the rest of the community. The Third Lateran Council prohibited them from attending church with healthy persons, they had to have their own churches and their own graveyards. The segregation and control of lepers was part of the generally increased control of sexuality through the period: marriage laws were tightened up, sexual control over lay persons and clerics was asserted, celibacy for the clergy and continence for the unmarried, fidelity for the married laity. Endowing a leprosarium was a much approved form of philanthropy and numerous refuges sprung up in the West. The donors themselves might be classified lepers: it was fair enough, if one was not allowed otherwise to hold one's own property, to endow a refuge for oneself. Living in the controlled conditions of a leprosarium would have been relatively comfortable, but the less fortunate either wandered or lived in segregated leper settlements (Moore 1987: 54-5).

By the end of the twelfth century writing about leprosy was so prolific that it is thought to indicate a veritable epidemic (Foucault 1972: 16; Brody 1974: 103; Turner 1984: 66-151, and see also Beriac 1988). However, the anthropological context of imputed filth throws doubt on the idea that a leprosy epidemic in England and France appeared and gradually died away in those seventy-five years. It is hardly credible that the disease itself, which had formerly chosen its few victims among the elite, now chose them in large quantities among the dispossessed, leaving its former victims alone. Since they had not been immune earlier, the idea

of epidemic leprosy would be more plausible if there were some record of an equivalent number of nobles, bishops and abbots being afflicted with it in the later third of the twelfth century. Perhaps a soap and water barrier blocked the spread of the disease, perhaps the rich did wash more, but that is doubtful. More plausibly, the arrow of accusation had changed direction in the same way that it did with witchcraft four centuries later.

Filth imputed to outsiders

The third component of the argument developed by Pegg is the extraordinary contrast between the theory of leprosy held in Western Christendom and that held in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in the East. The first surprise is that in the East the disease was known and accurately described. It is a surprise because the weakness of diagnosis in the West could have been attributed to the general lack of medical knowledge at the time. Detailed and precise descriptions of a disease called 'elephantiasis', corresponding in symptoms and prognosis to Hansen's disease, show that leprosy as we understand it was well-known. In the West, though the disease attracted so much attention, there was no precise diagnosis or description. Evidently many kinds of skin disease counted as leprosy: eczema, psoriasis, scrofula, skin cancers, ulcers of various kinds. It is very likely that in France and England poor people who were not infected were herded into leper houses. If there had been an epidemic, then the skeletal remains from leper graveyards should contain deformed and scarred bones, but those who believe in the real increase of leprosy have to contend with the very small archaeological traces it left. Turner maintains that the people of the period were confusing a real disease with imaginary sins (Turner 1984). It is more likely that they were trying to cure a real social blight by isolating an imagined disease.

In the West the medical diagnosis was not specific, and the infamy imputed to lepers shows the idea of insidious harm being put to political use. In the East the precise diagnosis went hand in hand with moral detachment, for sin was not associated with leprosy. So far from being stripped of civic status, a leper, competently diagnosed in the Kingdom of Jerusalem, had his civic rights safeguarded. There was an order of leper knights, which would have been unthinkable in the West. Leper houses were governed by lepers, again something unheard of in the West. There was no theory of the king's body implicating the body politic, and no objection whatever to the anointing and crowning of a leper as king.

To account for the difference, Pegg renews his research into political and economic patterns and finds in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem a pattern of control very different from the simple hierarchical kingdoms of Europe at the end of the eleventh century. It was also very different from the economic competitiveness of burghers and nobles in the later period, contained from the middle of the century by the centralising power of the king. In the Eastern Kingdom he describes the ten noble families sharing power with the king, more as equals. Instead of a hierarchical gradient of rank, the polity is a plateau. It sounds like an egalitarian political enclave, the Christian state in the middle of the Muslim world, surrounded by enemies, militarily weak, relatively poor, and very valiant. In those conditions cultural theory would predict that the members of the community would be far more impressed with the need for solidarity than preoccupied with carving out

distinctions among themselves. Indeed Pegg notes the existence of a law that imposed severe penalties on any Christian having sexual relations with a non-Christian. The external boundary looms so much more significantly in such conditions that infectious disease will not be made into a political weapon for keeping down the system's derelicts, nor will the system be sufficiently hierarchical for there to be occasion to use imputed filth to remove unpopular incumbents of high office.

Conclusion

Thanks to a brilliant article, much richer and far better documented than this summary has suggested, three cultural patterns of response to insidious harm from lepers have been illustrated. They correspond to three of the types of witchcraft accusations identified in Africa. In the first case the arrow points up, against the office holders attempting to abuse their privileges. In the second case it points down, against the disfranchised majority. In the last case it points outwards, against the outsiders who threaten the tight, beleaguered community.

Given his point of departure, the central interest for Pegg is the role that the newly transformed idea of the leper played in a new idea of society that emerged in the West: the leper's diseased body was the reprehensible metaphor of social disorder. But much more than a metaphor, as he shows, leprosy was credited with dangerous effects which had to be controlled. The anthropological analysis supplements the *mentalités* approach of French historians by drawing attention to the context of discrimination. Phrasing the situation in terms of accusations, the idea of contagious leprosy was used to solve social dilemmas by shifting legitimacy into a new pattern. Tracing the resulting benefits for the accusers and the loss for the accused reveals the social context in which it was plausible to believe such outrageous libels. Pegg even argues that the change in the direction of accusations against lepers in the twelfth century played an integral role in the process of centralising Church and State in Western Christendom.

To suggest that ideas about leprosy enabled hordes of vagabonds, mendicants and homeless wanderers to be put under control is very much in keeping with the work of Foucault on the disciplines of society. The direction of that work has been to warn researchers to watch out for despotism and take note of attacks against the weak and helpless. The normative implication that the perfect society would be non-persecuting has so strongly gripped the imagination of social science writers (Richards 1988) that it has left no room for a more open-ended, comparative framework. It is true that any community whatever is liable to try to control its boundary by accusing the fringes of harbouring infection or by limiting the influx of poverty-stricken strangers by a theory of imported disease (Douglas & Calvez 1990). But there is more to be said.

Sociologists are very impressed by the ferocity with which a community constitutes its boundaries and oppresses its marginal members. They recognize at once that accusations of immoral conduct are a technique of control against the weak and powerless (Nelkin & Gilman 1988). This article has sought to show the more complex uses of accusation. The histories of the definition of a disease remind us that the community also constitutes itself in a struggle for power among its members. Fears of witchcraft or fears of infection are easily mobilized for sending the blood

libel to its target. Within the more complex framework of cultural comparison suggested here there should be scope for a partnership between cultural theory and medical history. In such a framework we should be able to reconsider the prolonged outbreak of leprosy in a cold climate, that apparently devastated the region, but then cleared up and went away without leaving the marks of its depredations on the population.

NOTE

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Sorcellerie et lèpre : deux stratégies d'exclusion

Résumé

Cette analyse de cas de sorcellerie inclue des personnes porteuses d'infections. La méconnaissance médicale permet d'accuser des personnes d'être contagieuses afin de justifier leur exclusion, comme c'est le cas pour la sorcellerie. Dans le christianisme occidental des années 1150, être déclaré lépreux équivalait à perdre le droit de cité : l'accusé, considéré comme étant en état de péché, était démis de ses fonctions publiques et perdait ses droits d'héritage ou de faire un legs. Par contre, dans le royaume oriental de Jérusalem, à la même époque, les droits civiques des lépreux étaient protégés, aucune notion de péché ou d'immoralité n'était attachée à leur maladie et le diagnostic médical était tout aussi exact qu'un diagnostic moderne. Le contraste est expliqué à partir d'une analyse de la structure sociale et des valeurs culturelles caractérisant chacune de ces trois périodes ainsi que des stratégies de rejet déployées dans les trois cas.

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