Ndau women and men believe that spirits, ancestral spirits and other good or bad spirits, influence their lives, despite their neglect by the churches. Some churches, however, as the Ndau themselves, strategically combine different beliefs, ancestral spirits and God, for example, healing spirits and hospitals, and they use the different beliefs and practices to seek comfort, to understand, be healed, take revenge and to control. This chapter, concentrates on how social actors strategically define spirits and use, reproduce and manipulate spirit and witchcraft beliefs to explain and understand death and illness and achieve control of resources and other social actors, especially women¹. Their strategic use and usefulness are perhaps the reason why such beliefs are not disappearing.

In the first section I explore good spirits. Spirits are perceived to be good when they protect, assist and heal. They must therefore be worshipped or honoured by offering them something (kupira), usually beer. Spirit worship is practised both by women and men.

Section two deals with bad spirits. Two bad spirits are distinguished, i.e. ngozi and bvuri. A ngozi is perceived as the angry revengeful spirit of an innocent person killed. When such a spirit is cast upon another innocent person by the person guilty of the killing it is referred to as a bvuri, a ‘cast’ spirit. Women and men believe that a spirit is bad when it kills or causes illness. I explore four cases of bad spirits, to show how they, and witchcraft beliefs are used by individuals in their search for explanations about death and misfortune. Furthermore, I show how women are often the accused, and how this is a mechanism of control. The first case is about the death of three men. The second is a case of common witchcraft, i.e. the use of ngozi and bvuri. The third is about a spirit house (of a ngozi), and the fourth explores the use of bvuri and shows how men might accuse women of having bad spirits in order to control land. The cases are used to explore witchcraft from a gender perspective. In all the cases, African doctors, n’anga, emerge as important social actors.

In section three, I briefly review the profession of and importance of these African doctors or n’anga. I argue that n’anga are important arbitrators in conflicts, but also strategically use their profession to achieve their own interests to make a living. Their clients endeavour to use them in their strategies to harm and control each other. The conclusion focuses on how social actors use spirit and witchcraft beliefs in practice².

7.1 GOOD SPIRITS: HEALING AND PROTECTION

I explain first which spirits are perceived to be good. Then I explore briefly the worshipping of family ancestors.

¹ That is the focus of this chapter, but I do not deny that ceremonies and beliefs in spirits are of help and provide comfort in difficult situations such as illness, death and conflicts.
² This is a methodological note. While carrying out the research the importance of spirits in life emerged through the many case studies, situational analysis, in-depth interviews, court cases and checklists. I also studied several kurova guva ceremonies (section 2) and witchcraft cases (section 2). Based on such qualitative material I used checklists to understand how women (20) and men (20) define and perceive specific spirits, how they perceive witchcraft (section 2) and the perceptions about n’anga (section 3). After that I conducted in depth interviews and group discussions based on the results of the checklists. I also visited n’anga and prophets on several occasions with people who were ill and had in depth interviews with n’anga.
Good spirits

A family ancestral spirit is called a *mudzimu* (pl: *vadzimu*). *Vadzimu* may be *ziteteguru* (great aunts) or *zibabaguru* (great (grand) fathers) and are defined by both women and men as *dzinza* or *patrikin* who die and then ‘wake up’ (*kumuka*) in a relative or child in the *dzinza*, and use them as their medium for helping *dzinza* members and assisting them to plan things. A relative used as a medium by a *mudzimu* becomes a *n’anga*, who is able to heal and solve problems in the family. People say that the *n’anga* of family ancestors can only do good. This is the first type of *n’anga* distinguished. Two other types of *n’anga* were also distinguished, those who heal and solve problems based on their own knowledge and skill as practitioners. They are not the medium of spirits. However, people regard *n’anga* who use only knowledge, as false *n’anga*. They believe that true *n’anga* are also spirit mediums.

The other *n’anga* discussed are the mediums of *mashavi* (sing. *shavi*3) spirits, who are alien or animal spirits. Bourdillon argues that:

‘Mashavi are the spirits of strangers, who have died away from home, or the spirits of young unmarried individuals. Such spirits will not have been laid to rest with the usual funerary ceremonials and therefore wander around restlessly. Having no living descendants, they seek to express themselves by taking possession of unrelated persons. Sometimes a *shavi* is said to work through a medium to help him or her perform a particular task. A *shavi* spirit is believed to have powers such as those of healing. A person may have more than one *shavi* spirit. Of these, however, the healing spirit is regarded as the most powerful’ (Bourdillon, 1987: 242-47).

*N’anga* are said to have *shavi* spirits, but an individual who is possessed of a *shavi* healing spirit tends to become a *n’anga*. Ndua women and men see a *shavi* spirit as associated with those possessed of spirits that are good and can be inherited. In Manesa village, they mentioned four *mashavi*: *nzuzu*, *zvipunha*, *madzviti* and *zvirombo*.

1. *Nzuzu*, a mermaid, is the spirit of water and is regarded as a good spirit and must be honoured. A village chief said that a *nzuzu* can also live in the mountains and is taken by whirlwinds to a place with water. Whenever a borehole, pump or other water extracting mechanism is established, the place must first be blessed, to honour the mermaid who looks after such places.

2. *Zvipunha*, (sing: *chipunha*) are prayed to and worshipped for rain and the cultivation of crops. I attended a session to honour this spirit before the sowing of seeds. After harvesting, *zvipunha* are expected to be honoured again. While the *nzuzu* works through women and men, the *chipunha* spirit comes mainly through women and is therefore called a woman’s spirit (*chipunha* means girl). People say that very few men are possessed of such a spirit.

3. The *madzviti* (sing: *dzviti*) appear to be spirits of Shangaan warriors. If a *n’anga* is possessed of that spirit s/he dresses like a warrior.

4. *Zvirombo* (sing: *chirombo*) are the spirits of animals and those possessed of such a spirit behave like animals. For example, one of the chiefly spirit mediums of the chieftaincy always roared like a lion when he was possessed.

In general, women say that both women and men have *shavi* spirits. Men say that it is mainly women who become possessed by them. Bourdillon (1987: 164) tells us that:

‘A healing spirit is frequently a *shavi* spirit, who may pick an individual at random as a medium, but once accepted, will generally remain within the family. After some generations of *n’anga* possessed of the spirit, people may ignore the distinction between the *shavi* and the *mudzimu*, the personal spirit of a patrilineal ancestor. A *n’anga* who

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3 Ndua say ‘*shavi*’; Zezuru and Kore-Kore say ‘*shave*’. 
practices through the help of a family spirit (*mudzimu*) is thought to be more powerful than the host of a wandering *shavi* spirit.'

Gelfand (1973: 131) argues that the functions of a healing *shavi* spirit and a healing *mudzimu* spirit are the same and the Shona use the terms almost as synonymous. However, from my own experience among the Ndau-Shona, although some may not distinguish very rigidly between the practices of the *n’anga* used as the medium of a *mudzimu* and the *n’anga* possessed by a *shavi* spirit, *n’anga* themselves know the difference and regard ancestral spirits as the higher, more important and respected spirits. The *mudzimu* is perceived as more important because it has a much wider area to look after, that of a large *dzinza*. A *shavi* spirit has no such responsibility, it simply wanders. A *mudzimu* is generally perceived as doing only good and thus resembles a good *shavi* spirit. But people believe that there are also bad *shavi* spirits. Ancestral spirits need to be honoured, by offerings of beer to the ancestors for example. If ancestors are not honoured then people believe that they become angry and then resemble bad *shavi* spirits or *ngozi*. Let us now turn to the worshipping of family ancestors.

Worshipping family ancestors

*Kurova guva* is a ceremony organised a year after the death of a person. It is a ceremony to bring home the person’s spirit, seen as wandering in the countryside, ‘the bush’. The spirit will then become an ancestral spirit and join other family ancestors in looking after and protecting the family and *dzinza*. The *kurova guva* ceremony among the Ndau usually lasts three days. The first day is for collecting money and consulting a *n’anga*. The second day is for the public hearings of who caused the death (see next section). The third day is for cementing the grave. *Kurova guva* literally means ‘hitting the grave’ and refers to its cementing. The three days are filled with dancing, honouring the spirits and beer drinking.

Bourdillon (1987: 209) states that ‘*kurova guva* is not usually performed for women’. However, among the Ndau-Shona it takes place for both sexes. A woman is usually buried in the place where she dies. If wives are buried at the place of their marriage and have children there, they become guardian spirits of the family. *Kurova guva*, by which the spirit becomes a family ancestor, is performed at the place of burial. We saw in Chapter 2 how money was paid for snuff (*fodya*) during bridewealth payments. The practice implied that the ancestral spirits (*vadzimu*) of wife and husband had a relationship together. Therefore, a woman as wife can be a spirit guardian of the family into which she marries. Likewise, however, a deceased woman as daughter will also protect her birth family. At the place where she settles on marriage, the descendants will worship her as *mai* and *ambuya* (mother and grandmother). At her place of birth her spirit will be worshipped by her descendants as *vatete*. Hence, it is believed that a deceased, married woman’s spirit will protect two families.

Thus women and men worship their family ancestral spirits, their *vadzimu*. Two concepts are used for honouring or worshipping, namely *kudira* and *kupira*, which have different meanings. *Kudira* means that the name of a deceased person is given to an animal, bull or person. Thus an animal is given the person’s name and from that time the bull etc. will carry the name of the deceased and will protect the people and animals in that homestead. After *kudira* is performed, the animal or person will be honoured and offered beer (*kupira*). The chief’s family members have as their totem ‘cattle’ (*mombe*). A chief told me that everybody keeps a bull in their kraal to keep the family well. Such a bull has no reproduction purpose. Therefore he regarded the totem ‘cattle’ (*mombe*) as superior since people with a hippo or zebra totem will also keep a bull in their kraal. *Kupira* ancestors mean that offerings are made from time to time, so that the family ancestral spirits will guide, protect and assist them to solve problems. People said that ancestors need to be honoured by brewing beer once a year. After harvesting it is also expected to brew beer for the ancestors, to thank them. If ancestral spirits are not honoured, people believe they become angry and cause illness in the family.
Referring only to forefathers as ancestral spirits is a misnomer. Foremothers (madziteteguru) are also very important\textsuperscript{4}. People often mentioned madziteteguru first and then madzibaba when they defined ancestral spirits (vadzimu). Some of those I spoke to were of the opinion that female ancestral spirits are the first to be approached when worshipping ancestors. The female spirits will communicate the messages to the male ancestral spirits. Or as a mother explained during the kurova guva of one of her sons:

‘My son was a married man. He had his own house. We (parents, brothers and sisters of the deceased) enter that house and worship (kupira) just by holding the mukombe (drinking vessel) and drinking beer. We start by worshipping the important madzitete, then the madzibaba (fathers) and then the deceased’.

She indicated that the same ‘channel’ is followed in daily life. In a homestead a child will first approach its mother and she will approach the father. Women also worship ancestors. A vatete explained:

‘Whenever beer is brewed to worship the ancestors, men will not worship without women present. They will wait, because I am following after their dead fathers. If the beer is brewed to worship male spirits, then men will do the honouring. But if the madziteteguru are being worshipped I will do it myself’.

Thus she explains that both women and men need to be present when the ancestors are being worshipped and that women worship the deceased women after the men have worshipped the deceased men. A man present reacted:

‘The entry to the spirit world is through men and not through women. A man leads the way. But women brew beer. After worshipping we go to a n’anga to see if the spirits are satisfied. If a woman worshipped, the spirits might not be satisfied’.

What is clear is that both women and men perform important tasks in worshipping. Women brew beer and clap hands so that the messages will be heard and received by the ancestors. Both women and men communicate with the ancestral spirits, but in general, men will do the talking. I would argue that both women and men are indispensable in worshipping their ancestral spirits (Vijfhuizen, 1997).

7.2 BAD SPIRITS: ACCUSING AND EXPLANATIONS

Both women and men believe that a bad spirit is troubling them when they face death, illness and other misfortune. These bad spirit constructions could be perceived as explanations for the misfortune experienced. Ndadu women and men try to prevent and solve problems and therefore try to appease bad spirits. In their search for explanations, women tend to be the accused and thus controlled since their room to manoeuvre becomes severely restricted (see below). Such accusations usually occur in specific relationships. Often the daughter-in-law, i.e. the wife who married into the husband’s family, is suspected of being involved in the cause of death. Other relationships in which women are accused are conjugal relations (husband (H) and wife (W)); husband’s sister (HZ, vatete) and husband’s wife (HW); and between co-wives.

First let us look at the bad spirits recognised by women and men, and examine four cases of bad spirits. The first concerns the death of three men in which three daughters-in-law are accused. The next explores the cases of two ngozi (the angry revenging spirits of those killed). The first ngozi-bvuri case is perceived as a case of common witchcraft in which women are victimised and one woman is labelled a witch. The second ngozi case, a ‘house for a spirit’, is not perceived as a witchcraft case. A girl has to be married to the spirit. In the fourth case I show how the bvuri (bad spirit) is attributed to women. I argue that to accuse

\textsuperscript{4} See Holleman (1974: 118), who also referred to the importance of maternal female ancestors.
wives of having bad spirits, can also serve as a strategy to control resources. Finally I explore
witchcraft from a gender perspective. I examine the idea that witchcraft beliefs emerge from
disputes and power struggles over health, wealth and love.

Bad spirits

Ndau define the various bad spirits as ngozi, bvuri, mweya, and mhepo. Ngozi are described
by women and men as the spirits of those killed, who ‘wake up’ to take revenge (kupfuka) on
the person or family who killed them. People believe that ngozi can only be stopped from
taking revenge by the guilty person or family compensating or appeasing (kuripa) the spirit.
Ngozi can be spirits of related or unrelated persons. A woman told me that every homestead
has ngozi. This means that in every dzinza there are members suspected of killing a relative
or stranger, past or present, whose spirit wants revenge or compensation because of their
innocence. The ngozi of a stranger is called chikwambo. Thus, when people define spirits as
ngozi, it usually means they know the background of the spirit and the specific issues
involved in the killing. The ngozi is actually perceived by women and men as a family spirit,
because the family who once killed has to solve the problem.

Ndau women and men define a bvuri (lit. shadow, pl: mabvuri), as the spirit of a dead
person that has been cast or sent (kutorwa nekuiswa) by the killer (muroyi or witch) to inhabit
and cause trouble to another person who is innocent of the crime. People explain that mabvuri
are thus different from mashavi and ngozi. They believe that mashavi are inherited and have
chosen for themselves the person who will be their medium. When the term ngozi is used it
means that the spirit is known to people and can be identified. People define a spirit as bvuri
when they do not know the background of the spirit. They believe such a spirit is sent by
varoi (killers or witches) to possess the innocent. When people say the troubling spirit is not
ours, then it is a bvuri. When they say the spirit is ours, then it is ngozi. Both women and men
are of the opinion that it is women who are the recipients of bvuri. The spirit possesses a girl
who does not know that she has the spirit until the spirit starts to talk and make claims to be
compensated (see below). Mweya is also perceived as the spirit of a dead person and many
women and men make no distinction between bvuri and mweya. Mhepo (literally wind) is
seen as the practice of a n’anga or witch who sends bad spirits to other people. It is believed
that they burn medicine or use mirrors so that the wind or mhepo blows to the person they
want to harm or kill. Older people explained that in the past only mhepo was known and not
mabvuri.

The following sequence was constructed to clarify the work of witches and the believed
origin of bad spirits. A witch or n’anga sends a bad wind (mhepo) with a spirit (mweya) to a
certain person and the person dies. The person thus killed becomes an angry revenging spirit
(ngozi) because s/he was killed. The ngozi will go to the witch or n’anga and demand to be
compensated (kuripa). That has to be done by offering beer, money and often a girl. If the
killer refuses to make such offerings and wants to free him or herself from the ngozi then s/he
will send or transfer (kudira) the angry spirit to an animal, or onto money, which s/he throws
somewhere. The spirit will then settle on the person who picks up the money or who
slaughters the animal and eats the meat. The family defines this received spirit as bvuri,
because they do not know the background of the spirit. People who are inhabited by a bvuri
become sick and troubled and will consult n’anga. The n’anga will make the bvuri talk and it
will become clear who the killer was. The n’anga can re-transfer the bvuri to money, which
can then be thrown back into the homestead of the killer or the killer will be given the money
by the n’anga. Then the killer will have to compensate the spirit (kuripa). Let us now explore
the first bad spirit case.
Confessing to be discharged

Ndau women and men believe that social actors are able to break through the ancestral spirits’ protection of a person. Thus, death is perceived to have a combination of causes: viruses, bacteria or accidents, and also people’s actions. Fry (1976: 105) argues that:

‘beliefs in ancestor spirits and witches do not preclude beliefs in atoms and germs; they complement each other because they answer different questions of an existential nature. Epistemologically, there is no reason why both belief systems should not go hand in hand’.

Indeed, as I will argue, people combine beliefs in practice. They do this for different purposes, but in this first bad spirit case those concerned were seeking explanations for a death. When someone dies, usually, the relatives of the deceased will immediately visit a *n’anga* to consult the spirits. This, however, is in private, and only for the family to know who caused the death and to receive medicine that can be sprinkled on the goods of the deceased before they are inherited, distributed among the relatives. However, when the *kurova guva* is organised to bring the spirit of the deceased home, normally a year after the death, the relatives consult a *n’anga* again, but this time for public purposes. Then, during the *kurova guva* ceremony, people can confess their guilt or not regarding this specific death. Confessing is called *kupembera*, meaning one is discharged of suspicion and therefore cleansed.

Let me now focus on the *kurova guva* of two young men, Tasimba and Wagona, who were both from one family. The ceremony was organised for the 6th April 1996. The family consulted a *n’anga* to be able to inform the public about the cause of Tasimba’s death, the elder of the two. The family was informed privately about the cause of Wagona’s death, who died in a car accident in Harare. His death was related to the death of his paternal grandfather. I show that in all three cases, women married into the family were accused of being involved in the deaths. They were daughters-in-law, wives, mothers and grandmothers. The accusations had important consequences for all three women, who finally had to leave their marital homes and return to their places of origin.

Confessing in public

On the first day of the *kurova guva* ceremony, everybody contributed Z$ 1 to consult a *n’anga* to hear what caused Tasimba’s death. The money was called *gata* and the total amount collected was Z$165. A close relative transferred the spirit of the deceased to the money (*kudira*), saying:

‘the reason why we transfer your spirit to this money is to have light thrown on where we are going. You (the deceased) must help us to know what caused your death and what killed you. You should not hide what took you from us’.

The women and men who were going to a *n’anga* represented different groups of relatives. For example, a *muzukuru* represented all the *vazukuru* (nephews and niece), and a *muroora* (daughter-in-law) represented all the *varoora*. There were also *vatete*, a *mukuwasha* (son-in-law), a brother and one of the parents.

On the second day, the representatives had to confess whether the suspected killer belonged to their group or to whoever else was accused. They all received a spot of white mealie-meal on their foreheads and told the large gathering, one by one, what the *n’anga* had

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5 This consulting of *n’anga* immediately after the funeral is explained by Bourdillon (1987: 205), but in describing *kurova guva* (1987: 209-214) he does not mention the consulting of *n’anga*. However, among Ndau and also Manyika, a *n’anga* is consulted during *kurova guva*, and that is usually a year after the person has passed away.
said. After they professed themselves to be innocent they shook the mealie-meal from their foreheads. A sekuru (elder brother) began:

‘We know that our hama (relatives) already know who took Tasimba⁶. The hakata (divining bones) of the n’anga said that Tasimba died outside this homestead and that all the relatives and vazukuru had confessed and been declared cleansed (kupembera’). Tasimba was killed by an outsider, but not from this homestead. Then he shook the mealie-meal from his head’.

Then the representative of the vazukuru (nephews and nieces) stood up and walked to the middle of the gathering and spoke also for other groups of relatives, saying they were there to hear what caused the death of their relative. He was not going to hide what the n’anga said, but tell the truth. ‘The madzitezvara (wife’s parents) are the ones who killed Tasimba’. He had mealie-meal in a small plastic bag and said while taking a handful and throwing it on the ground: ‘this is the mealie-meal of all the vazukuru of the family. We did not kill’. He took another handful and threw it on the ground saying ‘this is the mealie-meal of all the vakuwasha (sons-in-law). They are innocent’. Then he put a small amount of mealie-meal on the ground and said:

‘Some of the varoora (daughters-in-law) are innocent, but the mealie-meal left in this plastic bag is for one muroora (daughter-in-law) who did not confess in order to be discharged. This muroora is the wife of Tasimba and her parents have also not confessed. They are guilty. They killed Tasimba’.

A man stood up and said to Tasimba’s father-in-law (tezvara), ‘I heard that your son-in-law Tasimba had a bvuri cast upon him and that this bvuri was from your homestead’. The father of the accused daughter, Mavis, said:

‘You returned my daughter saying that I had to remove the bvuri from her. But I heard that my relatives were the ones to cast the bvuri on her. I went to a n’anga and the bvuri was removed and my daughter came back here’.

The brother of the late Tasimba replied: ‘when your daughter came back, we did not know whether you had removed the bvuri or not’. An old woman, Tasimba’s mother, asked to speak and said:

‘In short, I can say that my child died from being barren. I think the misfortune of being barren can make a person die’.

Then the big muzukuru (son-in-law) of the family stood up and said: ‘those who caused Tasimba’s death are on the parent-in-law’s side (tezvara). You are the ones who killed Tasimba’. Mavis’ father denied the charge and said that he was not happy with what the people and n’anga had said. He suggested consulting another n’anga. That suggestion provoked anger among Tasimba’s family. They said how could he think that another n’anga would say anything different. ‘We are not going to another n’anga’, they said. Then the father-in-law declared, ‘it is over’.

Private consultation
Andipa, the sister of the dead Tasimba and aunt to the late Tasimba’s wife, Mavis, explained the following about the causes of Tasimba and Wagona’s deaths:

‘The father of Mavis wanted Tasimba to marry one of his daughters. Mavis, however, already had a boyfriend/partner, though they were not married, and she asked her father how she could get out of this first commitment so that she would be free to completely love Tasimba. The father said that they would kill the boyfriend, who did not have a lot

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⁶ Probably, from the private consultation of a n’anga immediately after death.
⁷ Discharged from suspicion of being the killer and therefore cleansed and innocent.
of money. The parents preferred to have their daughter married to Tasimba, who was well off. Later Tasimba built a house for his parents-in-law. However, through killing the first partner, they had created a ngozi, and the ngozi or bvuri as it now became, was cast upon Tasimba. The spirit of the dead boyfriend asked Tasimba why he was taking his wife. We heard this from a n'anga’, Andipa said, ‘we visited many n'anga and they all said the same. Then our brother passed away because of the bvuri’.

Others said that it was impossible for Tasimba to be possessed by the spirit of the boyfriend. They argued that it was more a case of the spirit of the dead boyfriend having possessed the woman, and she became the wife of this ngozi. The people believed that whenever the couple slept together the spirit on the wife would say to Tasimba, ‘don’t sleep with my wife’, and therefore the wife remained barren, because of this spirit on her.

The explanation of Wagona’s death in a car accident in Harare, could only be understood in the light of the explanation of the death of his grandfather, Andipa’s father.

‘It started’, she told me, ‘when one of my brothers, Mike, fell in love with a woman called Peleshi who then became pregnant and gave birth to a son called Wagona. Mike did not want to marry Peleshi but wanted his son Wagona to grow up in his family. Then Mike’s mother visited the father of Peleshi (tezvara), and told him that she thought the reason her son did not want to marry his daughter was because her husband did not scold the boy sufficiently into marrying her. Peleshi’s father said that if that was the case he would see her husband, Mike’s father, at a beer drink. The two men drank beer together and the father bought beer and put chefu (poison) in the beer. Later Mike’s father said that the beer he had been given by Peleshi’s father was not good and it had upset him. The father was ill for a week and he went for treatment to a place where his relatives lived, but he passed away. A year later the beer for kurova guva was brewed for him and the n'anga told them that their father had been killed. He had been kuroiwa, bewitched, by Peleshi’s father’.

Thus, they believed that the father-in-law had killed the father and Wagona’s mother had to return to her place of birth to live with her accused father. We arrive now at the grandson Wagona’s death. Andipa explained:

‘After Wagona died in a car accident in Harare, we went to consult a n'anga and were told that our dead father wanted compensation (kuripwa) from his wife, because she had gone to Peleshi’s father to report that her husband was not controlling their son Mike. The mother brewed beer to make up for what she had done. She brewed five pots of beer and slaughtered a goat. The spirit was appeased and thanked her. But she had not been the one to kill her husband and now our dead father wanted compensation from the parents of Wagona’s mother. They have paid Z$600 and we are waiting for further compensation’.

Hence, they believed that the spirit of the grandfather had become a ngozi and had caused the death of his grandson Wagona because the parents-in-law had not fully compensated him.

Beliefs and consequences for women
In these three death cases, three women were accused of bad practices. Let us now explore how people explain death by reproducing spirit beliefs in these three cases.

1. People believed that in the case of Tasimba, Tasimba’s wife requested assistance from her father to replace the poor boy friend for a rich one, i.e. Tasimba. People believed that the father assisted his daughter in killing the boy friend, whose spirit became a ngozi. That spirit was believed to have been cast upon Tasimba or his wife, thus becoming a bvuri, which caused the death of Tasimba.
2. In the case of the grandfather, people believed that Mike’s mother had reported her husband to the daughter-in-law’s father, who then killed Mike’s father because he had not motivated his son to marry Wagona’s mother, the daughter-in-law.

3. In Wagona’s case, people believed that the angry spirit of the grandfather had taken revenge by killing, because he was not fully compensated by the parents-in-law.

Hence in these cases, the relatives who belonged to the dzinza of the deceased were innocent, but the outsiders, the fathers of the daughters-in-law and the daughters-in-law themselves, were accused of causing death. People perceived these tezvara (parents of daughters-in-law) as varoyi (witches). The perception was that they killed in order for their daughters to be married. Such beliefs and accusations have enormous implications for daughters-in-law. They can be chased from the families into which they have married and be obliged to live again in their parents’ homesteads. All three of the accused women above had to leave and return to their places of birth. Let us look at the situation for these three women.

1. Tasimba’s wife, Mavis, was sent back home because she and her father were the suspects. Even before her husband Tasimba died, Mavis was sent home several times because of a suspected bad spirit (bvuri). Most probably Tasimba was ill for a long time and then his family accused his wife for the illness by accusing her of a bad spirit and sending her home to be treated. Also if women do not act according to their expected marriage role, they can be simply accused of having bvuri (see below), and sent to their natal home for treatment.

2. The mother of Wagona returned to her natal home, because her father was the suspect.

3. The wife of Mike’s father, who reported him to the tezvara, also returned to her natal home.

Therefore, women as wives, may be seen as outsiders because they stand for their own family in witchcraft cases, regardless of age. That is also a reason why married women usually carefully maintain bonds with their own family, because they never know when they will need them again. Thus a married woman clearly has two homes. However, not all women return to their place of birth. They can also establish their own homestead, in consultation with their own families, as we saw in Chapter 3. Thus, despite the fact that a married woman as a daughter-in-law becomes a mother and grandmother, she can always be victimised by the people she lives with, as an outsider, a mutorwa, ‘taken from outside’. And it is why both women and men of a family and dzinza may accuse such women, when trying to explain death in the family and dzinza. Let us now explore a common witchcraft case.

A common witchcraft case

Before colonial times, witches were killed as a punishment for their perceived bad deeds. However, the Colonial Government of Rhodesia did not believe ‘witches’ should be sentenced to death without evidence, and formulated a law to more or less protect them (Bourdillon, 1987: 194). Some people in Manesa village are of the opinion that the law prohibiting the killing of witches, is the cause of so many ngozi and bvuri today. They believe that an innocent person will not awake to become an angry revenging spirit (ngozi), if the witch who killed him/her was also killed. Several people think that witches should be sentenced to death, but the majority says that they should be fined and chased away from the area. Many suggest placing a sign in front of the house of the witch, which seems to have been a practice in the past.

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8 During a kurova guva, the inheritance of a wife of a deceased (kugarwa nhaka) is usually arranged (see Chapter 2). However, during this ceremony, Tasimba’s wife was not inherited because people believed that she had a bad spirit, which needed to be removed first. This bad spirit construction could also be a metaphor for the illness HIV/AIDS.
Below I explore a ngozi case, seen as a common witchcraft case, which shows that women are believed to be witches who threaten and kill. A woman, Batina, killed her father-in-law by putting poison in the meat of a chicken. Therefore Batina’s husband divorced her, but she married again. Then a daughter of the brother of her second husband became sick. She became possessed, and indicated that Batina was a muroyi (witch). Then the second husband divorced Batina too. Batina was troubled by the ngozi, i.e. the angry revenging spirit of the father-in-law whom she was believed to have killed. Batina refused to compensate the spirit. She then sent the spirit (bvuri) to Farasia, one of the daughters of her second husband’s first wife. Then that bvuri started to talk. People believe that it can take years before a cast bad spirit (bvuri) starts to talk. They believe that certain things can be done to keep the spirit quiet. For example by brewing beer. But when the spirit reveals everything, then treatment also ensues. The case is presented in chronological sequence, and in terms of the principal actors involved.

The girl Farasia
The girl Farasia was 17 years old and the daughter of Batina’s second husband, who had divorced her. Farasia was at a boarding school when she became sick. The matron gave her tablets but later Farasia collapsed and the matron took her to a n’anga. The spirit on her talked and said he was Mapfeka (the father-in-law whom Batina was said to have killed). Her parents came and looked for a n’anga, but they had all gone to other places. So the following day they went to a prophet. When people came to church, Farasia was laid in the centre and people sang and prayed for her. Farasia became possessed and the prophet wanted to chase away the demon, but it said: ‘you do not know me? I am Mapfeka and I want to go home. I come from Manesa’. The prophet replied: ‘I want you to go home right now and you must leave this girl. She is sick because of you’. Then Farasia felt better but she still had the spirit. The parents and daughter travelled to Manesa village. In Manesa, Farasia ran to the late Mapfeka’s homestead. Mapfeka’s son (Batina’s first husband) was very surprised to see Farasia. He did not know that she was possessed. Farasia said: ‘I am your father, I want to say something to my family. Go and call the relatives’. The relatives gathered at Mapfeka’s homestead and the spirit through Farasia said: ‘I am happy you are here. I want to say something to Batina, my daughter-in-law. She put poison in the chicken meat and gave it to me. That was why I died’. The son of the deceased said: ‘we have heard what you have said, but it is impossible for us to call the daughter-in-law without her father’s knowledge. We must inform the father that his daughter is wanted here. The best way is to report the case to the village court’, which they did. The court case was held a few days later. The police of village head Manesa arrested Batina’s father. Many people came to listen to the court case. Both families, Farasia and her relatives, Batina and her father and brother were present.

Mapfeka spoke through Farasia and said he was killed by Batina. He was given poisoned chicken meat, after which he died. He (the spirit) went to Batina who said that he could be given a woman. Then Batina gave him Farasia. He said he had been given her a long time ago. He said that sometimes Batina cast his spirit onto money or other people, but he discovered that he lived with another family. Batina had sent him to Farasia so he could kill her. He had thought of killing her, but she had done him no harm, so I was unable to do so. That was why Farasia was ill. It was because of him. ‘I want Batina to give me two claypots of beer, a wife, two goats and money’, he said.

This last request of the spirit is the so-called muripo, the fine. Batina responded that the spirit talked false. To prove this an appointment with a n’anga was made. Farasia and her father and his brother, and Batina with her brother and father, went to a n’anga accompanied by one of the village head’s policeman. The n’anga repeated what Mapfeka had said during the court session and Farasia became possessed. Then the n’anga sniffed the spirit from Farasia and also became possessed. The n’anga asked Batina for a Z$20 note, which Batina asked her father for. He gave her the money and she handed it to the n’anga who then
sneezed (kufemha) Mapfeka onto the money. The n’anga told Batina to keep the money until the day she would brew beer, provide two goats and a wife for Mapfeka. The police wrote down the number of the Z$20 note, to ensure it was kept. Batina took the money and tied it in a cloth. Mapfeka was thus kept in Batina’s homestead. The n’anga asked Farasia to visit her the following day. That day she made some small cuttings in Farasia’s body and told her not to take a bath for three days, and gave her medicine.

The brother of the second husband
A brother of Farasia’s father, explained the following. ‘A bvuri can be sent to somebody after 20 years. Batina killed her father-in-law in 1975. He had quarrelled with his wife and Batina took her mother-in-law’s side and killed him. The spirit went to Batina and she was very much troubled by the ngozi and wanted to be released from it. Now, in 1995, it has been discovered that the bvuri was sent to Farasia. Batina burned mafuta (fat) and said to the spirit, ‘go to that person, she will be your wife’. She sent the spirit to Farasia because she was angry at being divorced by Farasia’s father. As Farasia was unrelated to Mapfeka, it would take time before it was discovered who the spirit was. Now, the n’anga has cast the spirit onto a Z$20 note. She has ordered Batina to brew six pots of beer, to kill a goat, and to bring a cloth of one metre and a wife. Batina’s family should give a daughter (wife) to Mapfeka’s family. If they cannot do so then they will have to pay Z$600. Mapfeka’s family has to use the money for bridewealth, to look for a wife for the spirit. If they squandered it then the ngozi would be very angry and kill members of Mapfeka’s family. Mapfeka’s family has had to build a house for the spirit, which will be called the house of baba munini’.

The witch Batina
Batina clearly constructed her own story, when I visited her in her homestead. She explained that she was divorced by her second husband because he said that she was ill, but that he refused to accompany her to a n’anga. She told me how difficult it is to be divorced when you have children. The previous year she had paid the schoolfees by selling firewood. When she was small her father had been in need of money and she was promised to someone in marriage while still young (a practice called kuputswa, see Chapter 2). She was promised to an old man named Chikwama, who said he was going to give her to his son. Once in a while he would send a message saying he had bought something for his wife and she was to come and collect it. ‘That is what happens’ she said, ‘when you are the subject of kuputswa. They want to see how you are growing’. When she was grown up¹¹, she was sent to Chikwama, but she ran away (kutizira) from the homestead because she did not want to be given to a husband. She wanted to choose her own, and she chose someone who was living in Manesa. Her husband paid Z$80 to her parents who gave it to Chikwama. That was for everything Chikwama had already paid for her. Chikwama accepted it. ‘Now, yesterday,’ she said. ‘July 1995, Farasia woke up (kumuka) with that old man Chikwama to whom I was promised. We went to the court and n’anga’. According to her it was the spirit of tezvara Chikwama who spoke. They left the n’anga and were still waiting. They were going to have to look for another n’anga. She did not know why the spirit was waking up with Farasia. ‘How can other people be possessed of your family spirit?’, she said. ‘If somebody of my family is killed then the spirit will wake up in my family. It is not possible that for Farasia to be possessed with our family spirit’. Batina answered my questions about Mapfeka and said she did not know Mapfeka. ‘I was never married in that family’.

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¹ To reduce the chance of being HIV infected, a friend of Farasia bought new razor blades.

¹⁰ In 1995, 1 guilder was Z$5 ; 1 US dollar was Z$10.

¹¹ When I asked how old she was at that very moment, she explained that she could not remember, but said afterwards that she had started menstruating and her breasts had grown.
The N’anga

The woman n’anga explained that Farasia was possessed by a bvuri. ‘The bvuri was not from her relatives, but came from outside. Farasia has had a bad spirit cast on her (kudirirwa) by a muroyi, (a killer, a witch) while she was sleeping’. Farasia had been possessed while there and had spoken out that she was Mapfeka. He wanted to be paid cattle and a girl. ‘When Farasia was possessed, I as n’anga also became possessed. Her spirit told me ‘leave this girl, she is tired and sick’. Then Mapfeka asked my spirit: ‘where are you going to put me? There are no children here’. My spirit could not find a person to cast the spirit on. Then I sneezed the bvuri onto a Z$20 note. The police of village head Manesa wrote down the number on the money. My spirit said look for the person who put the bvuri on the girl. She has to take the money. Then Batina was given the money. My spirit gave the girl medicine’.

She continued to explain that there are many mabvuri, because people do not want to compensate the revenging spirit and therefore send the spirit to others. Removal of bvuri from people are difficult cases. ‘For example’ she said, ‘the spirit of Mapfeka was fire. It could have burned me up. Many n’anga die when they remove spirits. Especially from people who have asked for the spirit to be removed while knowing that they have killed. The spirit will say: ‘why n’anga, why? You know that this person caused my death, so why are you removing me’? Then the spirit will kill the n’anga’.

In section three I will explain more about n’anga and the beliefs, values and norms they reproduce in practice and thereby shape it.

Mapfeka’s son and the first husband of Batina

The son of the late Mapfeka, who was also Batina’s first husband, explained that he divorced his wife Batina because of uroyi (witchcraft) and prostitution. He gave this explanation of how mabvuri are sent to other people.

‘When you are dead and buried, the witch doctor opens the grave during the night and takes certain parts of the body and dries the meat to mix with medicines. Then she visits a person during the night and makes small cuttings in that person into which she puts the mixture. She will then say ‘you are keeping my meat, so you are keeping my spirit, and the spirit of the person is passed with his meat and the medicine’.

He explained that Batina had to pay Mapfeka’s family Z$1600. He wanted the money, but did not want to be given a girl or use the money to marry a girl. He claimed that area was ‘full of varoyi (witches), because people use a lot of medicine to become rich’.

Thus in conclusion I would say that people use and manipulate different spirit beliefs to explain the illness of Farasia and to treat her and achieve their own interests. People use these bad spirit beliefs to construct explanations and implicitly control those whom they do not like. For example, Batina was accused of being witch and did not want to compensate the angry spirit (ngozi) of somebody she had killed and thus she cast the bvuri or bad spirit that was demanding compensation onto the girl. Those beliefs were constructed because the man had passed away and the girl was ill. Since Batina was a woman who was disliked, and divorced by the girl’s father, people accused her of death and illness. People labelled Batina a witch because they believed she was taking revenge for the divorce by making the girl ill. Let us now turn to a ngozi case that is not regarded as a witchcraft case. Thus there is a ngozi, but not an accused witch.

A house for a spirit

After Independence in 1980, the government formulated a law that prohibited the practice of compensating angry spirits with girls/wives. However, today, many people believe that giving a girl to an angry spirit is the only way to appease such a spirit. They believe that the real treatment for a ngozi is for the family responsible for a death to pay a daughter to the family of the dead member. That daughter is then supposed to be married to the angry spirit.
If someone is killed by a member of their own family, then that family is supposed to give one of their own daughters to the angry spirit. Many families find this very difficult, perhaps for lack of a daughter to give, or the daughter chosen does not consent. They prefer therefore to look for an ‘outsider’ and pay bridewealth for her. Let us now explore such a ‘ghost marriage’.

Various families of a chief’s’ house in Manesa village were struggling with death, illness, divorce and unemployment. They therefore consulted different n’anga for an explanation of their misfortunes. But they not only wanted an explanation, they also wanted to hear from the n’anga what they should do to stop and prevent all the problems. All the different n’anga seemed to point to the same conclusion, namely, that ambuya (grandmother) wanted a house. It was believed that her spirit was constantly asking for the house, but the family had not arranged it. The forefathers had once started to build a house for ambuya, but they had never completed it. Various members of the different chiefly families believed they had problems because they had never fulfilled ambuya’s request. An old female member of the family said: ‘Long ago ambuya was well known, but now the ambuya awakes to say ‘you have forgotten me, you have thrown me away’. The dzinza members argued that ambuya was an angry ancestral spirit (mudzimu). An ancestral spirit usually looks after the families of the dzinza and is seen as a protective shield through which no one can enter to harm them. Therefore they said that ambuya needed to be honoured through the offering of beer, money, a wife and the building of a house. They also saw the building of the house as honouring women in general. If that was done, the ambuya’s spirit would look after the families again.

The family members also argued that the place for ambuya’s house should be miuyu misere (the place of the eight baobabs, the main court of the area). It was already considered an important place in the chieftaincy area, but with the house of ambuya it would reach the importance of Ngaone and Madzadza, they argued.

All the heads of family (52) in this chiefs’ house were requested to contribute Z$20. That money would be used to pay bridewealth (pfuma) for a ‘wife’ for ambuya. The wife would come and live in the house of ambuya. Then the family was approached by a poor man who wanted his daughter to be married in the chiefs’ family. The chiefs’ family explained to him that his daughter would become the wife of ambuya. The girl’s father accepted it. She was only five years old and so could not possibly understand or consent to what took place. ‘When she grows older’ said one of the chiefs, ‘she may run away at the age of fifteen. But then we can tell ambuya that we did our work, but that the girl ran away’. The wife of ambuya was not to be allowed to go to school. Sons of the chief’s families paid the bridewealth in March 1995 at the girl’s homestead, but still left a debt outstanding for the first stage of the bridewealth (mabvunziro). When the debt for the first stage was complete, the ‘wife’ of ambuya would come with her father. Beer would be brewed and kudira would take place, i.e. ambuya’s spirit would be transferred to the girl. After that, the girl would go back with her father and would return to stay in the house they had built for ambuya when she was older. The wife of ambuya should have children. Therefore a son of one of the families in the chiefs’ house would be chosen to be the genitor. However, concerning clothes and food, she would be looked after collectively, i.e. by the different families.

The above accounts were given by the family members of this chief’s house. It was left to others in the chieftaincy to tell me that this chiefs’ house once had a daughter-in-law whose bridewealth was not paid and who was so completely ignored by the members of the chiefs’ house that she died of hunger. That is regarded as killing, and therefore her spirit became a

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12 A chieftaincy is looked after by a Paramount chief from different rotating houses. A house has different families (see Vijfhuizen and Makora, forthcoming).

13 In Chapter 6 I explained that Ngaone and Madzadza are the two most important places of the Mutema chieftaincy; Ngaone is the residence of the Paramount chiefs and Madzadza is the place where the first Paramount chief started the chieftaincy. In both places Paramount chiefs are buried and both are important places of worship.
The spirit of that woman, the ambuya in question, was angered. It wanted to be compensated and was therefore causing misfortune. Family members, however, maintained that the spirit was an angry ancestral spirit and not of an outsider and ngozi. People in the village explained to me that people in general are not very open about their ngozi. They want to hide their ‘skeletons in the cupboard’ or bad deeds and they also do not want to sacrifice their own daughters to angry spirits. Indeed, according to beliefs and practice, the dzinza should have paid with a daughter of their own, because the killing had been done by themselves in the past. But they decided to collect money from among themselves to bring in an outsider as ‘wife’. Thus they had reason enough to change the image of the spirit and construct the story that the house of ambuya would be of importance for the whole chieftaincy and would honour all women.

In conclusion, the families in this chief’s house had indeed many problems. I saw a number of people in their families pass away, some due to HIV/AIDS. Such sickness and death requires an explanation and must be prevented from occurring. The problems were explained by pointing to an angry spirit, which was believed to be causing the misfortune. To prevent problems continuing to occur, the angry spirit was to be appeased by building it a house. That suggested that the spirit was most likely not an angry ancestral spirit but a ngozi. But they reconstructed the image of the ancestral spirit, because otherwise, according to the beliefs surrounding ngozi, they would have had to ‘pay’ with one of their own daughters. This is also a clear indication of how people use and manipulate spirit beliefs in practice and thereby shape that practice. They look for explanations in order to be able to solve problems and prevent further misfortune and make life bearable. It is also important to mention that the particular social actors in this case were members of a chief’s house. We have seen in the previous chapter how chiefs derive their authority from the spirit ‘domain’. This may be why they were particularly interested in using and reproducing beliefs and practices to do with compensation by offering the angry spirit a girl, despite the government’s prohibition of such practices. In the previous chapter we saw how chiefs prevent their authority and ability to wield power from being undermined by government.

Evans-Pritchard discusses different types of marriage among the Nuer and also notes ghost marriages (1951: 109-113). Among the Nuer, when a man dies without male heirs, a younger brother or other kinsman, who would be the pro-genitor, usually marries the wife in the name of the dead husband. The legal husband becomes the ghost in whose name bridewealth was paid and the marriage rituals were performed. Evans-Pritchard tells us that ‘more rarely a man marries a wife in the name of a dead sister or other kinswoman. This is perhaps only done when the dead woman’s ghost causes sickness to draw attention to her unhappy condition’ (1951: 112). He adds that for such a marriage a stranger (an outsider) will be chosen. He calls this marriage also ‘ghost marriage’. In Chapter 2, when explaining the various types of marriages recognised in Manesa village, I labelled the marriage to a spirit as a ‘ngozi marriage’. Such a marriage is organised when people face many problems that they believe are caused by the angry spirit of someone they harmed. To appease such a spirit, or in other words to prevent problems continuing, a man must marry a wife in the name of the angry spirit. In Manesa people believe that the spirits’ biggest wish is for their kin group to be extended. Therefore ngozi have to be compensated and appeased with wives. Let us now turn to the bvuri spirit.

Bvuri cases

People in Manesa village believe that many mabvuri are transferred nowadays. They believe that it is caused by people who are bad, who harm others. They believe that mabvuri are transferred to others through money, either picked up or given by others. That is also why, for example, during the payment of bridewealth or fines, people may ask if the money is clean. They do not want to receive bad spirits from the family paying them. Many cases in the village court deal with mabvuri. Both sexes believe that women are the principal hosts of
mabvuri, transferred by other women and men. For example, it is believed that when madzitete (aunts) and vanababa (fathers) are not happy with their daughters-in-law (varoora), they can cast a bvuri on them. People believe that women are the main hosts because the spirit of an unknown person killed, wants to be compensated and requests money and beer, but also a wife for the reproduction of children who will then belong to the dzinza. Therefore it is believed that bad spirits are sent to women. Men can also have mabvuri, but their number is much lower.

I analysed the court books (1987-1995) of village head Joel Manesa in 1995 and it became clear that divorces are often related to mabvuri. When somebody in the husband’s family becomes ill or there are other problems, husbands divorce their wives, believing them to have mabvuri which cause the family woes. I described in Chapter 3 the court case of Maona, where it was believed his previous girl friend had made him ill. If a wife lives with her husband and problems arise in his kingroup for which she is blamed, then she will be sent to her natal home for treatment. The following case from Manesa’s court books shows such a regular practice.

A husband approached his father-in-law telling him that his daughter had a bvuri. He wanted the parents to have her treated to remove the bad spirit. Later, the husband sent his wife for a second time for treatment to her natal place, at which time the woman’s father reported the matter to the village court. The judgement of the village chief was to send the woman with his police to a n’anga. The n’anga explained that the wife did not have a bvuri but that a husband’s relative died on his way to South Africa a long time ago, and beer and a goat should be offered (kupira) to that spirit. The n’anga told the husband that a relative hated him and had hired a n’anga to put medicine into his homestead so that he would divorce his wife.\(^{14}\)

This written court case shows how complex witchcraft is. In fact both the hired n’anga and the relative can be perceived as witches since both try to threaten and control another. But, the husband, who accuses his wife of having bvuri and continues to send her to her parents, also threatens and controls, namely, his wife. A person who falsely accuses another person of having a bvuri will be sentenced in the village court and will have to pay money to clear the person’s name. That is also a common court case. But the woman in this case did not report her husband to the court. The n’anga arbitrates in this case and explains that it is an angry ancestral spirit (madzimu) from the husband’s dzinza, and explains that the medicine which is thrown in their homestead also makes the couple unsettled. Since the nanga’s arbitration, the husband and wife have stayed together.

When women are accused of having bvuri, it can also have consequences other than being sent home. She can thereby be denied access to land. We saw in Chapter 5 how a wife was denied access to the irrigated plot, because both husband and chiefs agreed that the bvuri with her should first be removed. However, the wife had visited several n’anga together with her husband, who all told them that the wife had no bvuri. The wife explained that her husband’s dzinza had a ngozi, because her husband’s father (HF) killed a person whose spirit now wanted to be compensated. She said that her husband refused to compensate the spirit and the spirit therefore troubled the family and made them unsettled. The wife said that the husband had tried to cast the spirit on her, but had failed. She believed that the ngozi lived in the husband’s homestead where she also lived. She planned to build her own homestead, but said that the spirit would follow her when her husband tried to transfer the spirit to her. Maybe her husband believed that he had managed already to put the bvuri on his wife, and therefore used that argument in the conflict over the irrigated plot. The chiefs were on his side, because they also believed the wife had bvuri. However, according to existing witchcraft beliefs, the husband could be accused of practising witchcraft, because he did not want to compensate the ngozi spirit and had tried to cast a bvuri on his wife. Or in other words, he threatened and

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\(^{14}\) This woman would be the second wife to be divorced.
controlled his wife, by denying her access to the plot and accusing her of having bad spirits. This example shows again how complex witchcraft is. Men especially, try to hide that they are witches as we shall see, and accuse women in order to control them and resources.

When a husband and a wife often fight, then many believe that the wife must have *bvuri*, because a woman is not supposed to fight back. Also if a woman does not have a nice character, she will be said often to have a *bvuri*. Some men are also said to have bad spirits but not as frequently as women. The *bvuri* argument could be purposely constructed to rid a husband’s family of an unwanted or disliked woman. Sometimes when women are accused, they suggest that a *n’anga* is consulted, but the request is not always followed, especially when the accuser knows the accusation to be false. When wives wield more power than their husbands, or are physically and/or mentally stronger and more intelligent, the husband and his relatives usually accuse the wife of having *bvuri*. The wife will then be divorced. Some will acquiesce to the accusation because it suits them to leave the husband’s family. And in many cases, where only a first bridewealth payment has been made, the women and their families may chose to ignore the matter. The *bvuri* construction can become a controlling mechanism by which women can be kept in line, divorced or denied access to resources in their marital setting. This certainly appears to be one aspect of witchcraft beliefs and practices. Let us now explore the gender of witchcraft

**Gender of witchcraft**

Witchcraft has emerged in all the cases explored above and I would now like to look at the phenomenon of witchcraft again from a gender perspective. Bourdillon (1987: 176) asserts that the most powerful witches are believed to be the hosts of evil ancestral spirits or of *mashavi*, just as the best diviners and healers are believed to be the hosts of healing spirits. Chavunduka (1994: 93) argues that Zimbabwe has three principal kinds of witches: 1) those possessed by a deceased family member who was also a witch; 2) those possessed by a stranger or alien spirit and 3) those sponsored by a practising witch.

The Ndau explain that those who kill and violate have a *shavi rekuroya* (a spirit for killing). They also believe that the same *n’anga* can both treat and kill. Furthermore, they say that people can also be called witches without being the medium of a *shavi*. In other words, if people are suspected of or do bad things they may be labelled a witch (*muroyi*). *Muroyi* literally means killer, from *kuuraya*, to kill, harm or violate. Everything bad is called *uroyi*. Every violation, revenge, or bad practice, whether it is purely belief or can be seen/proved, is called *uroyi* and is carried out by killers/ violators (*varoyi*) and is a permanent danger. Thus the Ndau-Shona do not make a distinction between witchcraft and sorcery. Bourdillon (1990: 192) says that ‘witchcraft and sorcery are not always carefully distinguished in practice’. Elsewhere (1987) he says that the distinction between witches and sorcerers is not very rigid in the Shona view, as suggested by the use of the word *varoyi* for both. But he maintains that the Shona do distinguish witchcraft from sorcery in the sense that the sorcerer does not represent a permanent danger to the community as does the witch. Chavunduka (1994) also makes a distinction between witchcraft and sorcery. Real witches are people who travel at night and are said to eat corpses, dance naked in the fields at night and cause sickness, death and other misfortunes. Witchcraft refers to things that cannot be seen and cannot be proven. Sorcery is a technique or tool employed by an individual under certain circumstances in order to harm other people. Thus sorcery can be seen and therefore proved. He distinguishes three types of sorcery, namely, putting medicine or poison in the victim’s food; planting poison or dangerous objects on a path or in the victim’s homestead; using medicine from an animal horn (1994: 89-91).

The dual distinction between witchcraft and sorcery was first made by Evans-Pritchard (1937) among the Zande people. Marwick (1970:12-13) calls it ‘the Zande distinction’, in which the main difference between a sorcerer and witch is that ‘the sorcerer achieves his evil ends by magic and the witch achieves hers by some mystical power. Witches are weird and
sorcerers are ordinary people’. From distinctions emerge questions, and in this case we might wonder what the difference is between magic and mystical power. Marwick (1970:13) argues that ‘While most anthropologists see the advantage of following the Zande distinction between witchcraft and sorcery, there are some, particularly those writing on Oceania, who use the term ‘sorcery’ for all forms of destructive magic.’

Bourdillon concludes that witchcraft can refer to any threat to personal security by the violation of the person or life, or by the violation of any deeply held value (1987: 181-183). The conclusion that witchcraft can refer to any threat, can help understand why Ndau-Shona people do not distinguish between witchcraft and sorcery. Despite the fact that Ndau women and men themselves do not make the distinction between witchcraft and sorcery, the distinction has led to dualistic categorisations, also related to gender. I now look at three such dualistic categorisations.

A first categorisation emerging from the witchcraft-sorcery distinction is, as Chavunduka (1994:89) says, that ‘recourse to sorcery is always on a deliberate, conscious, voluntary basis’. He and other authors perceive sorcery as intentional and witchcraft as unintentional. However, all witchcraft is perceived by Ndau women and men as intentional in that it aims to threaten, kill and violate. Due to conflicts people will always have their reasons to threaten or control each other. Food poisoning (as sorcery) is intentional. But to make people believe that they are visited during the night or that dangerous things and spirits are sent to them, is also a threat and intentional.

A second dualistic categorisation is that witchcraft rites are defined as ‘bizarre’, such as riding hyenas during the night and eating human flesh. Sorcery is defined as less ‘bizarre’ and refers for example to food poisoning. Ndau people distinguish between different witchcraft beliefs, but do not categorise them into witchcraft and sorcery as I will show. Women and men believed the following to be witchcraft, ordered according to the frequency of the answers to various questions.

1. Being abroad at night (kumuka usiku) was often indicated as a witchcraft practice, without explaining what the witch might be doing in the night. Some said that their purpose was to visit and get people to eat in their sleep and so poison them; or kutemera nyora, to get people to drink medicine while asleep in order to transfer a bvuri or make the person a witch also; to have sexual intercourse with a woman without her knowing it. A less heard explanation was riding hyenas.

2. Food poisoning.

3. Zvifura, meaning to insert dangerous objects into the body whose movements can be felt (kapfura, to pass or to shoot).

4. Zvidhoma, believed to be very small, dangerous, human like creatures kept by certain women and men (witches) to violate and kill others.

5. Lightening. People believe that n’anga are able to make and send lightening.

Witches are also given names according to the practices they are believed to perform. One who visits in the night to kill or violate is said to be a person ‘who does not tear his or her blankets’ (haabvaruri machira or magumbeze). One who poisons others is said to have a big thumb (ane gunwe). One who assaults others with an axe or knife is a Mhondi. One who visits women for sexual intercourse in the night without their knowledge, is called Mukwarakwato. The practices most often mentioned as practised by women are food poisoning and zvifura. Most probably because they cook and look after the sick. Men mentioned most often waking in the night and zvidhoma. This could be an indication that men practice more severe methods. Men in particular did not distinguish between food poisoning and other types of witchcraft. They tend to distinguish the different types of things sent to them.

A third dualistic categorisation emerging from the witchcraft-sorcery distinction, is that witchcraft is performed by women and sorcery by men. For example, Bourdillon (1987) writes ‘women do horrible deeds’ (p.174) and ‘men are lesser witches’ (p.179). He (1987:
Chapter 7

178) indicates that the healer normally uses his powers for good, whereas a witch uses her powers for evil. The healer is a man and the witch is a woman. Marwick (1970: 12-13), like Evans-Pritchard, does the same, i.e. the sorcerer and his magic, the witch and her mystical power. Marwick (1965), cited in Bourdillon (1990: 192), shows that sorcery is often performed by men. Thus ‘bizarre’ practices are performed by women and less ‘bizarre’ by men. Fry (1976: 28) seems to imply that all evil in society is done by women when he says ‘the inherent evil in society which is passed on as witching shaves from mothers to their daughters’.

However, these constructions as found in the literature, that women are perceived to carry out bad and bizarre practices, does not correspond with the perceptions of Nda women and men. I asked 15: Women bewitch by doing what?; men bewitch by doing what? (Vakadzi kana varume vanouraya sei?, lit: women or men, how do they kill). Men answered (N=36) 16:

Table 7.1: Perceived witchcraft practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage of men who said</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women do:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food poisoning</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending <em>mabvuri</em></td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostituting</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending dangerous things</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending ghosts</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men do:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food poisoning</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending ghosts</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending dangerous objects to others</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending <em>mabvuri</em></td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending lightening</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending miracles</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting/murdering</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When we look at the figures we see that both women and men are believed to practice food poisoning. But men are believed to be experts in sending things. Men were of the opinion that men’s witchcraft practices are more developed and that men kill straight away, whilst women only send *mabvuri*. A man explained: ‘men are mainly witches because they kill, whereas women are only sent by men’. Indeed, people believe that men use women for their evil purposes and practices. Thus the notion that women perform worse deeds than men, is not borne out in the statements of Nda women and men. Men actually said that men have more developed methods for doing evil.

In Shona literature, women are usually depicted as witches. Holleman (1974) and Wilson (1951) claim that women, as daughters-in-law, are usually perceived as witches because they are outsiders, who marry into the patrikin. But among the Nda in Manesa village, women and men were alike convinced that both women and men are witches. Marwick (1965), cited in Bourdillon (1990: 192), also argues that both women and men can be witches. That both sexes are witches can be understood if we take into account the reasons for practising witchcraft. 1a) The reasons given by women for men practising witchcraft were that men defend their riches, wife and family; men want to be feared; men take revenge on other men.

15 Checklist September 1996.
16 60% of the women said that they did not know, and the research assistant did not ask further. The other 40% of the women said: it is known by the witches themselves; food poisoning; stabbing with knives; sending ghosts; visiting others during the night.
who sleep with their wives (adultery); men kill their brothers to inherit goods and wives. It was less often said that it was because men want to be the head. 1b) The reasons given by women for women practising witchcraft was envy or jealousy (godo, meaning a bone which is difficult to chew), often in association with polygyny. 2a) The reasons given by men for men practising witchcraft were that men revenge other men who sleep with their wives (this was said by almost all men); men defend their property (cattle etc.). 2b) The reasons given by men why women practice witchcraft was envy or jealousy without a reason.

Thus women and men gave the same answers. Men bewitch with a sound reason - to defend riches or revenge adultery. Women bewitch without a sound reason, or as one woman said: ‘a man can bewitch when there is a case for doing so (revenge), but women can just kill because of envy’. Thus envy, here, was not perceived as a reason for exercising witchcraft. Also men were of the opinion that men bewitch people who have done wrong to them (revenge) and women bewitch innocent people. The results show that men as well as women have reasons to threaten or violate and it is more or less accepted therefore that men practice witchcraft. People were of the opinion that women have no reasons to threaten. Thus from this logic, women are perceived as the real witches, because they kill the innocent. However, if we look at the reasons of both women and men for practising witchcraft, then the context becomes important and must be taken into consideration. The view is that women bewitch because of envy or jealousy. But this appears to be a concomitant of polygynous, virilocal marriage. For example, there is a Shona saying which goes: ‘if you start polygyny in your homestead, you also create a lot of graves’. Marwick (1964: 286) also makes reference to this idea when he says:

‘Cattle and polygyny finish people. Meaning that quarrels over the ownership and inheritance of cattle and over polygyny are frequent, and often culminate in believed attacks of sorcery’.

Thus we must conclude, where polygynous marriage exists, that envy and jealousy is not without reason. Women bewitch other women, because their husbands have girl friends and other wives. And like men, women also revenge adultery. Thus it is apparent that women likewise have their reasons for practising witchcraft, and that witchcraft practised by men also emerges from envy and jealousy. And yet despite the evidence leading one to argue otherwise, it is the view of both sexes that men bewitch to revenge specific incidences, and women bewitch for nothing. Thus both women and men might practice witchcraft and be witches, but women are perceived as the real witches. But it is not surprising that both sexes share the same opinions over women and witchcraft, since both were socialised into such beliefs and values.

Witchcraft beliefs and practices emerge from conflicts over love and money, with envy as the most important force for violence and murder. Those who practice it are probably those who wield less power. Maybe women threaten and violate more often than men, but that must also be related to their more vulnerable position in a patrilineal polygynous society that restricts their access to resources. Men threaten and violate in defending resources. Women have fewer resources to defend, but when necessary they will defend the little they have in the face of claims from their husband’s other wives. Second, since women are more vulnerable, or less powerful where conflicts over resources are concerned in a virilocal society, they can be more easily accused of witchcraft. Men are regarded as better witches and also perform witchcraft practices through women, which allows them to point the finger and say the woman is the witch and not they themselves. Chavunduka argues (1994: 99) that it is ‘mainly women [who] confess that they are witches, because they want to be feared and build up a reputation as a powerful individual. Women want to enhance their status by confessing to witchcraft because in general it is very difficult for a woman in traditional African society to enhance her political and social position’.
I doubt if women confess to being witches to enhance their status. First of all, men too are seen as witches. Secondly, we have seen in previous chapters that women have status and derive authority from their ‘domains of activities’ and wield power accordingly. Thirdly, confessing to be a witch may not improve either a woman’s or a man’s status and for women the consequences can frequently be dire. The point that needs to be emphasised here is that it is especially the powerful women who are accused of witchcraft. It is a way of controlling them. Control is the driving force of accusing and practising witchcraft, i.e. controlling wives/husbands, kinship relations and resources. An example follows.

**Witchcraft beliefs mean control**

People believe that witchcraft and threats of violation mainly emerge from envy. If one person does better than others, s/he becomes almost automatically a target for witchcraft accusations. The migrant son in Chapter 3, who prospered well, was also afraid of witchcraft. He explained that good spirits were with him. Things that happened could not be explained scientifically, only spiritually, he said. He pointed out that in 1992 a cheap welding machine, a cheap car and a cheap grinding mill came his way and to him it was a token of the goodness and protection of his ancestral spirits. But he was also afraid of bad spirits. ‘Ngozi and bvuri are related and have a bearing on many things, but a ngozi has no bearing on business’, he said. ‘A ngozi has more to do with violence. It is a vengeful spirit’. But he believed that bvuri had something to do with business in the sense that neighbours could become affronted by one’s progress, and then unexplained illness occurred. Practices relating to mabvuri he thought to be based on natural hatreds (envy), because people are not happy about the progress of others. ‘In 1992’ he said:

‘I bought a grinding mill and I have recently installed it. I waited. When I started to build the big house in the homestead of my father, I delayed purposely because I was afraid of mabvuri. I first finished other things in Harare. When I informed my parents in 1980 that I wanted to build a house in their homestead, my parents said I would be killed if I built such a house’.

He believed that witchcraft was used by neighbours in such circumstances. But it is not only neighbours who are suspected of practising witchcraft.

Witchcraft can also come from within the family and this was a reason why the migrant son involved his brothers in his projects. He wanted to make sure they had a vested interest in his progress and that way he could control any desire to practice witchcraft on him. He explained that witchcraft comes from within the family. It has to do with totems, and the one who would like to kill you can do so because only someone from within the family has the knowledge of how to worship (kupira) family ancestors and break down their protective shield. Hence it must be somebody from within the family. The ancestors are there to defend one. ‘So let’s say my brother wants to kill me’ he said:

‘and cannot because the spirit is there to protect me. If my brother despite his knowledge cannot break the shield, he will go to a n’anga, a witchdoctor, who can make the spirits give away because of the brother’s information about worshipping. If they manage to kill me, then my brother and the witch doctor will be troubled by my ngozi. Only my family members can kill me. They know how to worship together with the witch. Foreigners cannot kill me, because they do not know this. Many of those who came back from the war and wanted to develop their homesteads and families, were killed. I can do my business because my brothers are under my control. They cannot kill me. I can give my family a good life. But I have to look after my brothers, because they are my children and culturally witchcraft is at play’.

People in the village talked about this family and its progress due to the investments of the migrant son. People believed that it was impossible to do all that from a salary and there were suspicions that the family had killed somebody and used the private parts to start their
business. According to Bourdillon (1987: 192) the Shona believe that there is a continual threat from persons endowed with evil. He also states (1987: 193) that a man who changed his lifestyle and became rich is suspected of using witchcraft to obtain the wealth that changed his life. But he is likely to arouse envy and so become the victim of witchcraft.

Hence developing local networks (see Verschoor, 1997) in an African context, is also related to the fear of witchcraft. People are convinced that witchcraft is practised by both insiders and outsiders of a family, though never by complete strangers. It is always practised within existing relationship bonds. Hence those who harm and violate others and each other are acquainted with each other already (see also Marwick, 1964: 288). They are neighbours, friends or relatives (see nhaka case Chapter 2). All of them can approach a n'anga to request medicine, or issue threats to victimise those they want to hurt. Therefore, those who are ill or have problems and conflicts in their lives, feel under threat because of those around them who may have wished them harm. We have seen that outsiders with whom a bond exists, such as for example daughters-in-law, are particularly vulnerable when there is death and illness in the family. Bourdillon (1987b: 268) makes the same point when he says that occasionally strangers can be accused of witchcraft and refers to women married into the kin group. The women are thus in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, they are seen as insiders because they live in the homesteads where they marry and know how to worship the ancestors of their husband’s family and break through their protection. On the other hand, they can be seen as outsiders, because they will always side with their own family in witchcraft cases, as we saw above. But there are real outsiders, such as n'anga (African doctors) who confirm or deny that particular women are involved in causing misfortune. Let us now explore this profession.

7.3 N’ANGA IN CHIPINGE

In previous sections and chapters, n'anga (African doctors) emerged as important negotiators and arbitrators in relationships. However there are two sides of the n'anga, seen as good and bad. Why then do people consult them?

Two sides of a n’anga

Ndau people live in Chipinge district. Chipinge means ‘you control it’ (from kupinga, to control) and that refers to its famous n’anga and spirit mediums. Women and men come from all parts of Zimbabwe to consult doctors (n’anga) in Chipinge. They are renowned for their use of ‘medicine’ (mushonga), and people travel long distances to be treated there and get help for their problems, to resolve conflict or seek control over others by receiving medicines.

People believe in the existence of bad shavi spirits, and that a person can have more than one spirit and that n’anga have healing spirit (shavi rekurapa), as well as vengeful spirits, shavi rekuroya. My neighbours in Manesa village believed that it depended on the problems brought to the consultations as to which spirit the n’anga would consult. If people consult a n’anga for treatment, then the n’anga is assisted by a healing spirit. If people are looking for vengeance or to bring about a break-up in relationships, a n’anga may consult a bad spirit. Thus people believe that all n’anga practice good and bad. They are both healer and witch. Bourdillon states that some people say that all professional healers are witches (1987: 178).

Fry (1976: 27), who lived among the Zezuru, writes that:

‘they (n’anga) are of ambiguous moral standing, for it is believed that the miti (medicines; among Ndau called mushonga) they handle may be used for harm as well as good and it is from the n’anga that the sorcery is supposed to be acquired’.

N’anga explain that they cannot refuse the healing or any other spirits, because the spirit itself chooses the person. In the first section of this chapter I explained that there are different types of n’anga, those possessed with dzinza ancestral spirits, those possessed by shavi spirits
and those who work without spirits. It is believed that every dzinza has a n’anga who inherited an ancestral spirit. People believe that the spirit will make its medium ill and can cause death if the medium resists accepting the spirit (see also Bourdillon, 1987: 238 -241; Fry, 1976: 79-81). It is believed that a n’anga will always kupira her/his own spirits for protection and assistance. The spirit of a ‘dzinza n’anga’ is also called a holy spirit: mudzimu unoera. N’anga are both women (54.8%) and men (45.2%) (Chavunduka, 1994: 43).

Photo 7.1: Two n’anga from Manesa village

In 1996 in Manesa village, lived seven n’anga, four women and three men. They explained that they were assisted or possessed by various spirits. The three men were all possessed (kumuka; to wake up) with a shavi spirit called mandlozi or dzviti. Ndlozi is an Ndebele word for mudzimu or shavi. When the n’anga is possessed by this dzviti spirit, he speaks Mukondo (a South African language) and dresses like a Shangaan warrior (Mashangana) with spears and shields. One of the women n’anga explained by whom the different women n’anga were possessed. One of them was assisted by a dzviti spirit, the second one ‘woke’ with the shavi spirit of a nzuzu (mermaid) and also dressed like one. The third would ‘wake’ with a shavi spirit of a chipunha, meaning chimusikana (girl) and that is the spirit of a woman such as the vatete or ambuya of her own dzinza. She spoke in the Nyanga language from Malawi. The fourth woman n’anga woke with dzviti, chipunha and with the mbongo spirit. Like the nzuzu, the last spirit is also from water, but they dress differently.

Hence, when n’anga are possessed, they talk in a language not understood by the women and men consulting them. Therefore a muturikiri (translator) translates the explanations of the possessed n’anga to the clients. Translators are usually the husbands of women n’anga. When I went to one of the women n’anga with somebody who was not feeling well, she became possessed of the dzviti spirit and talked the Zulu language. Her husband translated the messages to us.
After possession, a n’anga is not supposed to know what the spirits have said. The husband tells the n’anga what the spirits said and the type of medicine recommended. N’anga rely on their spirits. For example a n’anga said:

‘I am a doctor. I do what my spirits tell me to do. When people come to me I must always nominate the real witch. My spirits tell me to talk chokwadi (the truth) otherwise the spirit will hit me. The spirits say I have a certificate because of them so I should tell the truth’.

When n’anga register by filling in an application form to become members of ZINATHA, the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association, they receive a certificate, a membership card and a batch (Chavunduka, 1994: 23). Chavunduka writes (1994:11) that the political party which won the first elections after the civil war, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU(PF)) had sympathetic attitudes towards traditional medicine. A few months after the election, the first national association of traditional healers was established, ZINATHA. Chavunduka became its president and his main aims have been to obtain legal recognition for traditional healers and acceptance of traditional medicine. He argues (1994:5) that colonial governments and early Christian missionaries tried to suppress traditional medicine for several reasons. First they did not know that such medicines were effective in curing many illnesses. Second, they felt that traditional healers encouraged beliefs in witchcraft. And they felt that traditional healers encouraged people to worship their ancestors instead of God.
Some in Manesa village are of the opinion that there are n’anga who fake possession and tell lies. In practice we see that people usually check with several n’anga because different n’anga usually have different explanations. For example, in a kurova guva case a n’anga told the relatives of a dead young married man, that he had been killed by his wife and mother-in-law. Many people believed it, because it coincided with existing beliefs that daughters-in-law are usually the ‘killers’. However, based on the accounts of another n’anga, the ‘killer’ appeared to be a male relative. It was said that the male relative paid the first n’anga to lie. People believe that n’anga will say and do anything when short of money. The opinion of both women and men is that n’anga can heal and they can do harm. I was told that a n’anga who had healed a sick child asked the mother for a large sum of money, but she did not have such a sum. The n’anga then asked the mother to buy a bag of 50 kg maize seed for him. The mother repeated that she had no money. Then the n’anga bewitched the child who died. A village chief was very outspoken about the practices of n’anga. He claimed that nowadays n’anga were controlled by bad spirits. For example, cases in court are mainly mabvuri cases. The court requests Z$5 for such cases, but the n’anga charges Z$100. N’anga in earlier days threw their hakata (divining bones), and told clients to go home and offer beer to ask their ancestors to protect them. But today n’anga tell people they have bvuri. Clients then visit one n’anga after another paying Z$100, Z$200 or Z$300. And then the patient dies. ‘These days’ the village chief said:

‘we have many bad spirits because n’anga want to earn money. N’anga want business and therefore also spread bad spirits in the country. They worship bad spirits to ensure many clients. Some n’anga blow a horn and so spread medicine to make people ill to earn money. A n’anga can heal and kill. They are good and bad and are thus also witches. If n’anga are asked to kill someone, they can do it. They can make lightening and if somebody steals cattle they can kill the thief should the owner ask them to do so. The Colonial government did not allow n’anga to practice, so there were only a few. This government allows n’anga to practice, but it was a mistake to give them certification. We have many n’anga and that is why we have many mabvuri. Being a n’anga is a business. They do not farm any more, but travel up and down to earn their money’.

Many people share his opinion that nowadays n’anga also make people ill in order to earn money. They believe that n’anga remove bad spirits but as soon as the patient leaves, the n’anga returns the spirit so the patient would come back. If the patient goes to a different n’anga the experience would be the same. Many people believe that n’anga are no longer serious about their work, and are only interested in money.

People complain when n’anga are unable to treat them adequately. The same complaints are made about doctors with private practices in towns. In the case of illness people can also turn to the church ‘prophets’. There are some differences between n’anga and prophets in Manesa. N’anga prescribe medicines and sometimes wear the clothes of the spirits that possess them. They often speak in other tongues when possessed and need a translator for which they also charge. Prophets are members of churches, wear their church clothes and do not talk in other language. They are believed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit when they preach. Bourdillon (1987: 292) writes that ‘Prophecy under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is a dominant feature in ‘spirit-type’ churches and the phenomenon of speaking in tongues is common’. Prophets also have a reputation as healers, as faith healers. Their assistance is usually for free. That is also one of the reasons why nowadays with illnesses which cannot be treated (e.g. HIV/Aids), the membership of those churches increases rapidly. To visit n’anga regularly with those illnesses would become too expensive. What people need in those desperate situations is faith. However, despite complaints about n’anga demanding money

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17 This could also refer to the difficult situation nowadays with the HIV/AIDS virus.
and despite the alternatives of doctors in town and prophets in churches, people continue to consult n’anga. Why they do so is explored below.

**Why people consult n’anga**

Chavunduka (1994:9) gives several reasons why people continue to use the services of traditional healers. 1) They are successful in curing a great many illnesses. 2) Many of those who consult traditional healers do not do so for medical reasons alone. Many have social, psychological and spiritual problems, which also need attention. Chavunduka says (p1) that in addition to being medical practitioners, traditional healers are religious consultants, legal and political advisors, marriage counsellors, police detectives and social workers. Although Chavunduka talks of the past, the n’anga in Manesa village are still carrying out all of these activities as we shall see below. 3) Chavunduka gives another reason why people continue to visit traditional healers, and that is the effectiveness of many traditional practices and the failure of modern medical science to get better results (1994: 10).

People combine treatments. They believe in bacterial and viral causes of infection and death and they go to hospitals and private doctors for treatment. But they will also consult n’anga as to the cause of illness or other misfortune. They consult them in the hope that n’anga can advise them on how to solve or prevent the problems they have, usually illness. From the different n’anga I visited, it emerged that n’anga usually associate illness with conflicts among the living. Indeed, conflicts and problems can make people ill and their profession resembles in this way that of psychotherapy. N’anga are effective in treating psychosomatic and other illnesses by using traditional treatments. They listed several causes for believed bewitching and illness, including inheritance of property, envy or jealousy concerning paid work or wealth, and bridewealth not paid in a proper way or being squandered by relatives. Conflicts and tensions about bridewealth were often associated by n’anga with illness. After the n’anga has consulted the spirits, then s/he will give people the medicine recommended by the spirit, and they will usually suggest to buy a cloth or brewing beer for the angry spirit. Another cause of illness is believed to be mabvuri. The n’anga removes the bvuri and transfers it on money to be thrown into the homestead from which it originates. Thus n’anga treat the sickness and address causes, often explained as the tensions associated with disputes about inheritance, bridewealth, envy and bad spirits.

N’anga are also consulted to tell the future. Often this concerns marriage. Families want to know that the family into which their offspring is marrying is a good family. Furthermore n’anga are consulted for an appropriate medicine to keep husbands at home, or in other words to prevent adultery. This is the so-called love potion (mupfu hwira). The medicine is put in food or smeared on the floor. It is believed that the husbands will then love their wives only. Sometimes n’anga are consulted when the husband and wife cannot conceive, and sometimes when pregnant women or girls want an abortion.

N’anga are usually consulted in witchcraft cases and disputes about theft. Some chiefs may criticise n’anga for wanting to earn money, but in their village court this does not prevent them from referring the conflicting parties to a n’anga to help in solving the conflicts and quarrels among villagers. If these conflicting parties visit the n’anga, then the n’anga emerges as a negotiator and arbitrator between the parties, as for example in Batina’s case. I will now give a few examples from village head Manesa’s court books, on how the n’anga arbitrates in disputes.

Two brothers of the same father but different mothers, began to hate each other after the death of their father. They accused each other of being a muroyi (witch). Then they reported the case to the court. The chief of the court told them to visit a n’anga. The n’anga explained that the two brothers should look for another n’anga, because the bvuri present could tell who was the muroyi. They did not look for another n’anga and thus the case was not solved.
Another example of how chiefs rely on n’anga to arbitrate and negotiate in disputes is that of a man who had two wives when he passed away.

The son of the first wife accused the second wife of causing the death of his father (kupumha: to accuse somebody to be a witch). They went to a n’anga and the second wife appeared to be innocent. The court chief then ruled that the son should pay two head of cattle to clear the second wife’s name.

A last example, is the case of a woman who married, divorced and then married another man.

The first husband became sick and passed away. His spirit was believed to come to his previous wife who lived in the homestead of her second husband. The children of the second husband’s brother became sick, and he accused the brother and his wife. He reported the woman to the court. The accused and complainant went to a n’anga and the spirit of the first deceased husband requested a wife. Then the divorced wife of the deceased gave one of her children of her first marriage to the spirit.

The chief of the village court explained that the girl was not yet married but if she should marry then the whole bridewealth should be offered to the spirit. The chief explained that the spirit would instruct the family about the use of the money. In practice the money would be given to and would appease the first dead husband’s family. If they should fail to follow the instructions, then the chief believed that the spirit would rise again.

We have seen that in cases of death and kurova guva, n’anga are important. Social pressures exist in villages to consult n’anga. If a person should refuse to do so s/he is immediately suspected of being a witch. It is believed that sometimes n’anga are afraid to tell ‘the truth’ of what the spirits have conveyed and will then turn to their own spirits for guidance. For example, I was told that during a kurova guva, the relatives of the deceased, eight men and one vatete, went to a n’anga. The n’anga was told by his spirits that the deceased was ‘killed’ by his own relatives, so it was a ngozi in the family. But the n’anga did not inform his visitors that their own relatives were the cause. It was believed that he had consulted his own spirits to tell him the future before he had handled this case. His spirits seemed to have protected him by informing him not to tell who ‘killed’. In cases of illness some n’anga will not inform people where a bvuri comes from out of fear for their own lives. Thus n’anga, being good healers and using appropriate medicines, also need to act strategically, because their judgements as arbiters of disputes can also endanger their own lives. While this may be true, there are also other reasons for them to behave strategically. They use, reproduce and manipulate people’s beliefs in bad spirits and witchcraft because these consultations constitute the work from which they make a living. Such beliefs mean money. In addition their skill in such activities and consultations brings them a degree of authority and status and it allows them to wield power.

7.4 SPIRIT BELIEFS IN PRACTICE: A CONCLUSION

First we look into the classification and defining of spirits and then I explore ‘the craft of controlling’.

**Defining spirits**

Spirits are part of life in African culture. Ancestral spirits will be honoured by offering them beer (kupira). Spirits are consulted through mediums, who mediate, arbitrate, advise, and explain illness, death and other misfortune. Women and men in Manesa village could not imagine living without honouring and consulting their spirits. Of course such beliefs and practices are changing, because social actors transform beliefs in practice due to all kind of influences. One might expect with the influence of the churches, economic development, HIV/AIDS, and government interventions, that such change would be dramatic. However,
Defining Spirits and Controlling Women

Social actors also reproduce beliefs in practice. Culture is never static as people strategically combine new and old beliefs and at the same time shape and change practice. They often do that in a way that best suits their present needs and context. Beliefs in God and (ancestral) spirits are strategically combined, and it is not only older people who reproduce the spirit beliefs. People do not always struggle with new beliefs as is sometimes assumed (see Hove et al, 1996). Old and young take advantage of several beliefs by strategically combining them as they grapple to explain difficult situations such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, land scarcity and all the disputes which emerge from those problems.

Bourdillon (1987: 247) believes that despite changes, families believe and practice traditional religion much as they have always done. He argues (285-9) that traditional religion is concerned primarily with respect for ancestral spirits, personal problems of individuals and witchcraft. Christian mission churches provide a religion that stretches beyond the limiting boundaries of kinship or chiefdom, and directly approach a God that is concerned with universal ethical norms. I would argue that people combine beliefs, or think, as Bourdillon puts it (1987: 289) ‘it is best to believe it all’. From combining beliefs, the ‘spirit-type’ churches emerged, which Bourdillon calls ‘new independent churches’. They usually practice faith healing, like the Zionist church of which Janet was a member (Chapter 3). Bourdillon (1987: 247-249) mentions two strong forces that compel people to continue practising traditional religion: 1) Fear in any danger or crisis, maybe they have neglected ancestral spirits, and people fear their powers. Traditional religion may thus be some kind of insurance against insecurity. The influence of family spirits is more often felt in times of trouble and illness and poorer people are therefore more likely to have a stronger faith in traditional religion. 2) Family ties. A person who refuses to take part in traditional rituals may find himself excluded by his kin. Since few Shona can afford adequate insurance against unemployment, sickness and old age, most must rely on their kin for sustenance in times of hardship. A person who is excluded by his kin is thus deprived of his principal form of social security.

The argument of this chapter was that people not only believe in spirits for insurance purposes and to explain and prevent misfortune (see also Bourdillon (1993: 115) and Evans-Pritchard (1937)), but they manipulate such beliefs to control others in the case of disputes and power struggles. Accusations of witchcraft and the subsequent paying of fines emerge from these power struggles and can be perceived as control measures to maintain unity in the village, family or homestead. Such control measures must have been important before government laws, and are still important measures of control even with such laws. The ways in which spirit beliefs are used and manipulated have deliberate consequences for women. Illnesses in a homestead can more easily be attributed to a daughter-in-law since she comes from outside the complex social relationships of the patrikin, and it is easier therefore to accuse her of the bad spirit. Having a bad spirit, she can be sent back to the parents if she does not fit in the husband’s dzinza because they find her too independent, not kind enough, or lazy, in other words if they do not like her character. The bad spirit construction is also reproduced in another situation, as we saw in Chapter 2. These days, when a young husband dies, people hesitate to inherit his wife (kugarwa nhaka) because of the HIV/AIDS virus. People will not verbally express their thoughts about the suspected cause of death, but they will say that the wife has a bad spirit, which means she will not be inherited or her care taken on. The wife in the kurova guva case in this chapter was not inherited because of such thinking. The kurova guva ceremony took place without the inheritance of the wife.

I have argued that accusations of witchcraft can take place in all relationships where a bond exists. However, some relationships are more likely to be the focus than others in attempts to explain and understand misfortune and witchcraft. The daughter-in-law, as a woman, a wife and sister-in-law is often the most vulnerable to such accusations by husband, his sister (vatete to the daughter-in-law) and the co-wives of a man. The new daughter-in-law has to establish a place in the husband’s dzinza, and that is extremely difficult. She must fit into the existing historical relations in that dzinza. The daughter- or sister-in-law is expected
to perform in a particular way. The husband’s sister (her vatete) may closely watch her because she could immediately influence relations with her brother. Thus women become ‘patients, that is the recipients of the acts of others’ (Villarreal, 1994: 218). However not all women. Women such as paternal aunts are less often the victims of witchcraft. Sometimes men have bad spirits too, but to a much lesser extent.

As I have said, the bvuri (bad spirit) became a mechanism to control women. Mabvuri spirits give women no status as other spirits do, such as healing spirit, shavi, and ancestral spirit (mudzimu). Family ancestors often choose a woman as their medium. The zvipunha spirits are believed to awake mainly through girls and women are therefore most involved in these rain and crop ceremonies.

Thus Ndau women and men strategically define spirits in relations to particular situations. Therefore it becomes less appropriate to classify spirits according to certain fixed characteristics, as do Lan (1985:38) and Fry (1976: 29). Lan classifies certain spirits according to whether they are benign or hostile, or are from within or outside of the lineage (dzinza):

Table 7.2: Classification of spirits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside</th>
<th>Hostile</th>
<th>Benign</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muroyi</td>
<td>Mudzimu</td>
<td>Shavi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngozi</td>
<td></td>
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I have already indicated a muroyi (witch) is not a spirit, but a person who can be assisted by a bad shavi spirit. This also implies that a shavi (wandering spirit) is not only benign (e.g. a healing shavi) as is indicated by Lan, but can also be a hostile spirit (e.g. killing shavi). Of the ngozi (revenging spirit of the dead) Bourdillon (1987b: 268) states that ‘ngozi is usually an outsider and in some areas a ngozi never attacks its own family, but that it is not universally the case’. According to Ndau women and men a ngozi is usually a family spirit, and called ngozi if the family were ever involved in harming someone, related or otherwise. The family will call it a bvuri (bad spirit) when it is an unknown spirit to them, which means the killing was done by others and the spirit is sent (cast) on to them by the ‘killer’. Lan (1985) and Bourdillon (1987) do not distinguish among bvuri. Lan states that a mudzimu (ancestral spirit) is benign. Ndau women and men said that a mudzimu is always kind, but can be made hostile by women and men who neglect to honour it by offering beer and other things. If vadzimu (ancestral spirits) are not honoured they are believed to cause death and then they resemble ngozi. Lan, but also Fry (1976:28-29), states that a shavi is outside the lineage. However, a shavi is usually perceived as inherited and can therefore also be inside the lineage. And we have seen that a shavi can also be very unfriendly.

All these comments regarding the categorisation of spirits show that the contexts and specific situations as reconstructed by people must be taken into account before it can be stated that a spirit is kind or not or whether is inside or outside the lineage. Social actors use spirit beliefs and thereby shape practice in their attempts to explain and prevent death, illnesses or other difficult issues. From the cases presented, I argue that the spirit can thus be perceived as constructions used by social actors to explain difficult issues and in their disputes over wives, husbands and resources (land and money). The multiple realities, manipulations, constructions and labelling of social actors need to be considered. They use and manipulate spirit beliefs in various ways to devise strategies from which power emerges. That means that they try to control each other and resources, look for suitable explanations, and establish unity. Gluckman (1965) associates the control of spirits with the protection of good ancestral spirits, as does Bourdillon (1987). In this and previous chapters I have shown how people strategically use and reproduce beliefs in good and bad spirits in practice and thereby shape practice. People explain death through beliefs about bad-spirits, ngozi (angry revenging spirit), bvuri (bad spirit which is sent) and then put things to rights by kupira...
(offering beer), *kuripa* (compensating). By doing so, they also reproduce witchcraft beliefs and accuse each other. The *n'anga* then emerges as the arbitrator and controller. Let us now explore these two aspects of witchcraft and the *n'anga* profession.

**The craft of controlling**

I made no distinction between witchcraft and sorcery in this chapter because Ndau women and men do not make such a distinction. They believe in witchcraft, and they label everything associated with bad practice that violates, threatens and kills, whether it can be seen or not, as witchcraft (*uroyi*). Therefore I defined witchcraft as any harmful threat emerging from disputes in relations, that aims to control others or problems. One may reply that such a definition disposes of the occult. However, a harmful threat is also a way of letting someone believe that bad spirits are being sent to them. Envy and jealousy appear to be the driving forces of witchcraft beliefs and practices. Women's and men's emotions and intentions appear to be similar, they concern their health, love and wealth. Witchcraft beliefs and practices emerge from power struggles related to wealth, health and love and is thus a power issue. Thus as Gluckman (1944) argues, ‘witch-beliefs throw light on other problems’. Marwick (1970, 1964) perceives witchcraft as a gauge of social stress. I perceive witchcraft as the 'craft of controlling'. Those who believe a person to be a witch and label him or her accordingly, have their reasons for doing so. They also have reasons for wanting that person controlled. In reality such beliefs and practices emerge from disputes over wives, husbands and resources (money, cattle and land). With such matters at stake, people will threaten, harm and kill each other, both women and men. Men are believed to threaten more severely and women are often the accused witches in cases of illness and death.

Not all death is seen as witchcraft. For example a clear case of murder, ‘Mrs X stabbed Mr Y with a knife’, is not seen as having anything to do with witchcraft. In the case of the house for a spirit there were no witches, because it was not perceived as witchcraft. Those involved argued that everybody could have seen that the woman had been ill-treated, not given food and had therefore died. If there is enough evidence, such as guns, bullets, knives, or other overt bad practices, people will say it is murder without witchcraft. But when people do not understand how a person has died, and nobody can find evidence, then they say and believe that witchcraft is involved. Then there must be a witch and a *n'anga* must be consulted.

The Zimbabwe National Healers’ Association (ZINATHA) proposed reforms to the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899. The proposed amendments, discussed in the Herald newspaper July 1996, defined a witch as a person who uses poisons, harmful charms and other means or devices to cause disease, injury or death to any person or animal or property (Mafuba, 1996). ZINATHA does not use sorcerer and defines everyone who practices witchcraft as a witch, meaning those who poison or use other means to cause disease, injury or death. Chavunduka (1994: 98) says that the people who confess to witchcraft are sane. He says (1994: 93) that anyone can be made a witch by another witch. From this chapter it also emerges that any body can be a witch, meaning any person who threatens and violates by accusing others or otherwise. That also means that those who are not a continuous threat can also be witches, because they are capable at one moment of good and at another of doing harm by violating. Thus the distinction Bourdillon (1987) made between permanent danger (witchcraft) and momentary danger (sorcery) may not be adequate. And thus taking this situation/time aspect into account, of doing good at one moment and bad the next, also applies to the *n'anga*. Thus it seems to me that the main point concerning witchcraft is not who is the witch, but when somebody is a witch. We have seen that it is often difficult because of the strategic use and manipulation of beliefs and because of different interpretations in practice, to state when somebody is a witch. In earlier days, before government intervention, judgements about witches were left to chiefs who took severe actions against them, even sentencing them to death. That is no longer allowed, but chiefs are
still expected to solve witchcraft cases in their village courts. Then they also strategically rely on *n’anga*. *N’anga* usually take into consideration old as well as recent conflicts. Therefore people prefer *n’anga* who live far away from their home. Thus *n’anga* and prophets emerge as arbiters in and controllers (*vapingi*) of conflicts. The chiefs in their courts arbitrate, but usually send conflicting parties to the *n’anga*.

*N’anga*, like chiefs (Chapter 6), but also wives and husbands (Chapter 3), must safeguard the domains of activities from which they derive their authority, identity and can wield power. Thus, in addition to being good doctors, negotiators and arbiters, they must also reproduce beliefs about witches and angry spirits to maintain their positions in the village. They will arbitrate when different parties consult them, but they will not tell them that there is no angry spirit and therefore to build it a house is not necessary, nor for a woman to marry it. No, that is not the way they advise. In Batina’s witchcraft case, they will not tell the disputing parties that Batina is not a witch and subsequently send the parties home and tell them to stop troubling each other. No. It is *n’angas’* work, their profession, to reproduce and manipulate witchcraft and spirit beliefs. In addition to arbitrating between the parties in conflict, they can also contribute to troubles by perpetrating evil. For example they can give those who consult them, poison to kill somebody else. Then *n’anga* become witches themselves. Perhaps they do such things to be feared and/or in order to maintain their positions. They will assist those who consult them in different good and bad ways to earn money and make a living. They will reproduce beliefs in practice and thereby shape and change practice and thereby control people. The point is that *n’anga*, who are both women and men, help to reproduce the beliefs that women are witches and they often accuse women in the case of illness or trouble. I might also say that *n’anga* are not that gender sensitive.

Considering the cases and analysis in this chapter, we could also say that social actors live in a ‘culture of fear’. They fear angry and bad spirits, and *n’anga* in particular use and reproduce those beliefs in practice. Thus villagers are captured and controlled to a certain extent by *n’anga*, but also by their own practices and beliefs produced and reproduced in practice. They visit *n’anga* in sickness and disputes to control others, but at the same time are themselves controlled. It is a vicious cycle and therefore the ‘culture of fear’ is difficult to escape. People try to escape it by also becoming members of churches. But bad spirit beliefs are usually reproduced in these churches and even when they are not, they cannot escape those outside the church who reproduce spirit beliefs in practice and shape practice.

Control is necessary to survival. Not only survival in food terms, but also survival of activities, identities and authorities. In the retrospect of the following chapter, I will explore this issue of survival by linking all the different chapters. We will see that livelihood, that is, making a living, implies more than food and shelter.