From various parts of Sub-Saharan Africa today come unsettling tales of vampires and zombies and of extraordinary intercourse between the living and the dead. A whole slew of folktales, spanning oral culture, videos and pulp-fiction, depicts processes of magical accumulation that traverse the world of the occult. In Nigeria, newspapers carry reports of passengers on motorcycle-taxis, who, once helmets are placed on their heads, transform into zombies and begin to spew money from their mouths, as if they had become human ATMs.¹ In Cameroon, rumours abound of zombie-labourers toiling on invisible plantations in an obscure night-time economy. Similar stories of possessed workforces emanate from South Africa and Tanzania, including tales of part-time zombies, captured during their sleeping hours, only to wake up exhausted after their nocturnal exploitation.² While labour is seen as possessed, money too is said to be enchanted. Congolese stories, for instance, tell of ‘bitter’ dollars, secreted within their possessors’ homes, whose sudden and uncontrolled growth crushes their entrapped owner. Commodities too partake in these bizarre powers of

¹. Drohan 2000. The comparison of these zombies with ATMs is made in this article by Professor Misty Bastian, whose work is frequently cited below.
expansion; tales flourish in southwestern Congo, for instance, of people being possessed and devoured by diamonds. Similar accounts of extraordinary transactions between money and human bodies thrive in film and video. In Ghana, a popular 1990s video-film called *Diablo* depicts a man who transforms himself into a python, enters a prostitute’s vagina and, after metamorphosing back into human form, collects the banknotes she vomits forth – thereby harnessing female reproductive powers for purposes of economic accumulation. More recently, a widely popular Nigerian video-film, *Living in Bondage* (1992–3) – which launched ‘Nollywood’, today the world’s third largest film-industry – portrayed a man who acquires riches after sacrificing his wife and drinking her blood. Literally hundreds of video-films have followed its path, expanding the immensely popular genre of ‘voodoo-horror’. All of these examples merely scratch the surface of a rich and expansive popular genre.

As much as Nigerian mass-culture is a focal point for the dissemination of these images, such folktalesemanate, with unique local inflections, from one part of the African subcontinent to another, telling of credit-cards that provide instant commodities without registering debt, of magical coins that turn people into zombies, and of enchanted currencies that leave cash-registers and return to their owners after every purchase. Most striking perhaps is the epidemic of stories of dismemberment and murder for the harvesting of body parts that bring riches, either as commodities for sale or as ingredients in magic-potions. In Tanzania, for instance, legends proliferate concerning the murder of children whose skins are sold (at prices of around $5,000) for occult purposes. And among miners involved in the illicit diamond-trade between Angola and Congo, workers maintain that, when digging is unsuccessful, it is

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3. De Boeck 1999, pp. 198, 187, 188. Since 1997, the former Zaire has been known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Like many commentators, I will denote it as Congo, distinguishing it from the small state of Congo-Brazzaville.


