

WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS IN NORTHERN GHANA:

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

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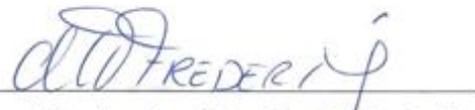
WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS IN NORTHERN GHANA:

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Abstract

The problem of witchcraft accusations is rife in societies, especially in the northern region of Ghana. These accusations have raised a lot of eyebrows with respect to their moral, theological, and even ethical considerations. This abstract takes a look into the nature of witchcraft beliefs and accusations and explores ways that are appropriate as a Christian response to such a problem that has disrupted human relations for a long time.

This thesis looked at the historical antecedents and current practice of witchcraft coupled with the heightened accusations, which have, in many cases, led to the death of the accused persons. It also discussed the biblical view, historical, and contemporary views of witchcraft accusations. Some major highlights of the thesis include outlining the difference between the biblical and the Dagomba notions of witchcraft. It looks at novel ways the church can play a role in providing leadership, showing Christ-like love and empathy, and supporting both the ones accused and the accusers with the ultimate goal of ending the accusations and the witch camp phenomenon.

Finally, some recommendations were made to the church, the Government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to confront, educate, inform, and mitigate the harmful beliefs that make for the continuous prevalence of accusations of individuals alleged to be witches. The response of the church, as will be seen, should be approached from a compassionate and loving approach that seeks justice and reconciliation for individuals and communities. The thesis also recommends further research and calls for collaborative support from well-meaning persons to support those currently in witch camps and nib future accusations.

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Introduction

The culture of branding people as witches is a prevalent phenomenon in Ghana. This practice is more intense in the Northern part of the country. When a series of deaths, misfortunes, sicknesses, or natural disasters occur in a community or a family, old women (in most cases) are usually/often accused of causing such calamities, even though on a few occasions, men are also accused of being wizards. These old women, who are branded as witches, face all kinds of brutalities from members of the communities. They either end up being lynched or excommunicated from the community. The only places they find refuge are places designated as “witch camps.” A media report from 2022 indicates that globally, Ghana is the only country that has designated places as “witch camps.”¹

Most women who live in this kind of environment, believed to be infested with the presence of witchcraft, are always in fear and uncertainty of what the future holds for them. There is always the fear of being accused of possessing witchcraft powers or being bewitched. The worst case is when people are approaching old age. This is because the majority of people who are labeled with this accusation are the elderly. When in fact old age is supposed to be a blessing of long life, and a time of ‘rest from their labor.’ Especially in the Dagomba culture. Growing up, I used to hear my grandmother make this statement “we give birth to children and take care of them in their childhood days, and they in turn grow up to take care of us in our old age.” This indicates the expectations of the elderly from their children and family members. It is a stage of life when they are envisaged to sit back and watch their children and

¹ Nicholas Bertrand, “Accused of Witchcraft, Hundreds of Women Banished to Camps,” France 24 English, January 20, 2023. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzmXXWPIAXU>.

grandchildren grow into adulthood and face the challenges of life while they offer wise counsel, encouragement, and guidance through the paths they have tread before. It is also a stage of life when people who were once strong and energetic become weak, sickly, and vulnerable. Unfortunately, instead of resting from their labor, some of these elderly women live with the trauma of being wrongfully accused of witchcraft, which comes with dreadful consequences of all kinds of brutalities, being completely alienated from society, and cut off from their source of identity.

Researcher's Personal Experience

Growing up as a child, I witnessed a countless number of such inhumane treatment meted out to old women who were accused of possessing supernatural powers which they were said to have used to cause all kinds of harm in the community. At the early age of ten, I was forcefully whisked out of the care of my parents to live with my maternal grandparents in a village called Gbungbaliga near the traditional capital of Dagbon, Yendi. Yendi is the capital town of one of the sixteen districts in Northern Ghana. It is known by the Dagomba people group as *Naa Ya* which means the King's city. This is because it is the seat of the king of the Dagomba people.

The reason I had to live with my grandparents against my will was to foster unity in the extended family relationship as tradition demanded. The Mole Dagomba culture holds in high esteem the practice of the extended family system. In this system members of the family comprise the father, mother, uncles, aunts, grandparents, etc. Also, in this family system, a child does not just belong to the biological parents, but he/she belongs to every member of the extended family. Therefore, children are often sent to live with other family relations to strengthen the family ties. In this case, the lot fell on me, and I was the sacrificial lamb among my siblings to be used to

strengthen family ties. Though it was against my will, and perhaps the will of my parents, the culture demanded it; as a child in the African context, I had no say in the decision-making of adults, so I had to go. Gbungbaliga is about five kilometers away from Yendi.

Living with my grandparents in those formative years of my life was a period of orientation about the existence of the supernatural powers of witches. I was made to believe that witches engage in all kinds of evil activities including the manipulation of people's destinies. It was a common subject of discussion in every age group. Stories were told by the fireside, on the way to the river to fetch water, and on the way to farms, with themes of witchcraft activities. I woke up every morning to a consistent reminder of the presence of evil caused by witchcraft. Whether someone died out of a snake bite, malaria, cholera, or measles, a witch was said to be behind the death.

Whether there was a motor accident, a fire outbreak, famine, or drought, a witch was said to be behind it. As far as I can remember, a natural cause of death or calamity was not considered. Everything was attributed to witchcraft. There were a couple of diviners or fortune tellers locally known as *baga*, who were consulted daily by family heads to figure out the people responsible for the particular misfortune. The victims were often beaten, tortured, stoned, and ultimately banished from the community. The only place they could find refuge was the nearest witch camp called *Daani* witch camp.

I lived with my grandparents for five years and returned to my biological parents in Kumbungu. Kumbungu is also a district capital located 12 kilometers away from Tamale, the capital of the northern region of Ghana. On my return, I felt relieved as I hoped that I was finally out of that witchcraft-infested environment where I used to live in perpetual fear of being bewitched. However, my hope was crushed. When I

was returning from school one day, walking through the market square with other school children, I witnessed a nasty scene of a mob attack on an old woman who was accused of using witchcraft powers to kill a twenty-seven-year-old young man who died through a car accident. The rest of my day was spent watching how they killed the woman perceived to be a witch. Fatima (the name of the accused witch), I believe, was in her late sixties, and had lost her husband through an unexplainable illness. The brothers of Fatima's late husband asked her to leave the house which she supported the husband to build with proceeds from her petty trading. Since Fatima could not bear a child for her late husband, I heard some of the people saying that she was not qualified to inherit any property from her late husband according to tradition. Fatima's younger brother was willing to take her to his polygamous home, though this was under protest of his two wives.

Nine months after Fatima had moved in to live with the brother's family, the first son of her brother, a student nurse who was traveling home on vacation in a vehicle, was involved in a fatal accident. This student, called Tanko, died with two other passengers. Fatima was accused of being responsible for the death of her nephew as well as of her late husband. All the youths of the Kumbungu community came out with sticks, stones, machetes, and cudgels chanting war songs, and forcefully got Fatima to the outskirts of the town and stoned her to death. This incident, and several others I witnessed, raised many questions about witchcraft accusations and violence against accused witches in my mind. Why were the victims mostly women? Why were they mostly the poor, widows, and the vulnerable? What is the "proof" of /evidence for these accusations? What can be done to stop the accusations that lead to the brutality against elderly women? It is my quest to find answers to these questions that motivated me to embark on this research.

The worldview towards witchcraft of the people of northern Ghana is reductionist. Everything is explained in terms of one cause. This notion inhibits most people from considering other causes of situations such as not observing safety rules, personal responsibility, not getting the appropriate medical intervention, and not seeking the right knowledge and skills among others. This mentality impedes development and has a negative effect on all aspects of life.² It is the hope of the researcher to “set free the captives.” These captives are in three categories: Those who live in perpetual fear of the possibility of being branded as “a witch,” Those who live with the dreadful fear of being bewitched, and societies that are bedeviled with deep-rooted beliefs in the power of witchcraft, constant witchcraft accusations, violence against the lives and properties of the accused, impeding the progress and development of such societies. Almost everyone in such environments is “a captive” of some sort.

Necessity and Purpose of the Research

It is commonly believed in Ghana that witches have demonic powers that they employ to wreak havoc on the lives of their victims. There is a wide range of perspectives held by Ghanaians about the belief in the practice of witchcraft. These perspectives stem from a variety of religious-cultural dimensions, experiences, and psychosomatic orientations, all of which have a direct negative impact on Ghanaian society. As a result, there is a pressing need to investigate the Ghanaians' perception of the role witchcraft plays in their daily lives.

² Harriet Hill, “Witchcraft and the Gospel: Witchcraft Mentality,” *Insights from Africa* 24, no. 3 (1996): 5, <https://hill.harriet-witchcraft-and-the-gospel-missiology.pdf>.

This research investigates the views held by some people who believe that there are witches who have the power to bring bad fortune to humans. These beliefs can be deduced from their daily conversations as well as in some folk stories. With this information in hand, the researcher intends to find ways to understand the beliefs that surround accusations of witchcraft in Northern Ghana, the factors that lead to the accusation of old women as witches, the living conditions at the witch camps. Then, I hope to recommend to the churches, the Government and NGOs in Northern Ghana how they can take up their mandate to alleviate the plight of the alleged witches by stopping or minimizing the accusations. For the churches in particular, I hope to suggest to them practical ways by which they can engage their congregants as well as people in the communities to alleviate the plight of the alleged witches and to restore their human dignity. The goal of this study therefore is for its outcome and recommendation to act as a wakeup call to the churches in Ghana to act as a voice and speak about the problems that are experienced by the vulnerable group of Ghanaians who are accused as witches and are suffering in the witch camps as a direct result of the belief most Ghanaians hold about witchcraft.

The research emphasizes the need for the implementation of the legislature and policy that prohibits witchcraft accusations leading to the abolishing of the idea of witch camps in the communities. This research equally has the potential of combatting outmoded practices that are detrimental to human lives, It can also help the future of the Dagomba society to live in a more peaceful environment where everybody feels the sense of worth and dignity.

Thesis Statement

The recurring witchcraft accusations in Northern Ghana and the subsequent violence against accused witches, leading to expulsion from their communities to

designated witch camps, remain a worrying phenomenon. Some churches, Government, and Non-Governmental organizations have made attempts to put a stop to the accusation of witches and the operation of the witches' camps. However, not much has been realized in minimizing the accusations.

The Church has a mission to care for the poor and oppressed and seek justice for the vulnerable. These include orphans, widows, and social outcasts such as accused witches and wizards in Northern Ghana who are left to suffer and die in the witch camps without any possibility of being saved.

Research Objectives

The general objectives of the study include the following:

1. To identify the beliefs that surround accusations of witchcraft in Northern Ghana.
2. To investigate and present a biblical and theological perspective of witchcraft and different causes of suffering in the Bible.
3. To recommend to the Baptist Church in Ghana the practical ways they can join in the fight against witchcraft accusations and the witch camp phenomenon.

Research Questions

The research seeks to address the following specific questions:

1. What are the social issues surrounding witchcraft accusations?
2. What are the beliefs that surround accusations of witchcraft in Northern Ghana?
3. What are the reasons for the accusations?
4. How are the alleged witches treated by the community?

5. What is the biblical perspective of witchcraft?

How should the church appropriately respond to the witchcraft accusation and their subsequent treatment?

Delimitation

This thesis is not intended to prove that the accused witches are innocent or guilty. Given the scope of this research, a survey has been conducted at two out of the six witch camps in the northern region of Ghana. *Daani* and *Kpatiŋa* witches camps will be used as a case study. *Daani* and *Kpatiŋa* are preferred because *Daani* is the only camp among the six that has both witches and wizards, and is less researched. However, a brief mention will be made in comparison with the other five camps located at *Kpatiŋa*, Gambaga, Kuku, Bonyase, and Nabuli.

Definitions of Terms

Witchcraft. The secret use of supernatural powers for evil, such as harming others or benefiting oneself at their expense.³

Suspected Witch. “A person who is believed to possess supernatural powers to perform mostly devious and insidious deeds.”⁴

Witch-hunt. “The unlawful and intentional hunting or searching for a human being who is believed or suspected to secretly use supernatural powers for nefarious purposes. Witch-hunting is the recurrence of punitive expeditions by

³ Nelson Tebbe, “Witchcraft and Statecraft: Liberal Democracy in Africa,” *Georgetown Law Journal* 96 (2007):183–190.

⁴ Emmanuel Sarpong Owusu, “The Witchcraft Imputations and the Tort of Defamation in Ghana,” *Common Law World Review* 52 (2023): 114, <https://owusu-2023-witchcraft-imputations-and-the-tort-of-defamation-in-ghana.pdf>.

vigilantes or self-appointed witch-finders, often leading to the murder of the accused and the confiscation of their properties.”⁵

Wizard. A male witch or magician.

Witch. A human being who possesses supernatural powers to do evil against others.⁶

Sog Yhibu (identifying a witch). This is the process of determining a witch in northern Ghana. Usually, a ritual is performed by traditional specialists to prove the guilt or innocence of an accused witch. There are different kinds of rituals. The type of ritual depends on the one adopted by the particular community and the witch camp.

Buglini / Tindana (Traditional shrine). This is the shrine where the accused witches are taken to swear and prove their innocence or *guilt before they are admitted into the witch camps*.

Dagbon. This is the appellation used to refer to the traditional area of the Dagomba people group of northern Ghana.

Ya- Naa. This is the Paramount Chief of the Dagbon Traditional area.

⁵ Leny Lagerwerf, *Witchcraft, Sorcery, and Spirit Possession: Pastoral Responses in Africa* (Zimbabwe, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987), 87.

⁶ Emmanuel Sarpong Owusu, ‘The Provocation by Witchcraft Defence in Anglophone Africa: Origins and Historical Development’ *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 11, no.2 (October 2022): 263. <https://academic.oup.com/ojlr/article/11/2-3/263/7205490>.

Yili-Yidana. This is an appellation used to refer to the head of every household in northern Ghana.

Baga. This refers to the soothsayers or diviners in the communities who are usually consulted to find out the causes of deaths and other misfortunes in families and communities.

Zaachi The *Zaachi* are the leaders of the youth groups in the various communities in northern Ghana. Usually, the title is conferred on them by the chiefs of the communities, and they present the grievances of the youth to the chief and elders of the community.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach to investigate the phenomenon of witchcraft accusations in northern Ghana. In this regard, it relied on interviews of accused witches and some community members, including traditional leaders at the *Daani* witches' camp, and two focused group discussions at *Daani* and *Kpatiŋa* communities as a case study. The research took place from the 10th to the 30th of June, 2023. The researcher used a purposive sampling technique to select 28 women and 2 men labelled as witches and wizards in the two camps. Only two of the 88 men at the *Daani* witch camp were willing to grant an interview.

The selection of the respondents took into consideration the ages of the respondents and the length of time they had spent in the camps. Aside from the accused witches, 74 other informants were interviewed. The categories of informants are captured in the data processing section. The researcher had to first contact two Assemblymen from the respective communities to assist in the selection of the informants for both one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions.

The information was gathered from the field, specifically the *Daani* and *Kpatiŋa* witch camps. The reason for the choice of *Daani* was that it has the highest population among the camps in Northern Ghana. It is also the only camp with male witches, known as wizards. At the time of the researcher's visit, the total number of inmates in the camp was 229, with 141 women and 88 men.

The decision to choose the *Kpatiŋa* witch camp as the second camp to visit was also influenced by the fact that it has been the least researched among the six witch camps in Northern Ghana that were considered. The population varies depending on how many victims have moved out or died and how many have moved in. For instance, a 2021 survey on alleged witches' camps in Ghana conducted by John Azumah, director of the Sanneh Institute, reported that the *Daani* camp had 196 inmates, of which 38 were males and 158 were females. *Kpatiŋa* camp had 27 women as accused witches.⁷

Data Processing

The respondents in the two witch camps originally hail from 16 communities, namely, Lamashegu, Mion, Gumbihini, Bincheraya, Lipuhi, Medoyili, Damankunyili, Nakpachee, Taali, Kpachehi, Tindang, Nyon, Sooga Kpamali, Zakpalsi, Kanvili, and Wantugu. These communities represent the diverse cultural backgrounds of the people. Fortunately, they could all speak the Dagbani language, and since the researcher could speak the language fluently, the women were willing to respond to the interview without any hesitation. The responses given by the informants show that they have lived in the witch camps for some time. The range of years spent at the

⁷ John Azumah, *Report on Alleged Witches' Camps in Ghana* (Ghana, Accra: Sanneh Institute, 2021):1. REPORT-ON-WITCH-CAMPS-4.pdf.

witch camps varied from one year to twenty-five years. The total number of alleged witches interviewed was 30. Aside from the alleged witches, with the help of two Assemblymen from both *Daani* and *Kpatiŋa* two focus group discussions were held in both communities respectively. Each group had 20 informants and represented accusers. Additionally, 20 religious informants, comprising two traditional religious specialists in charge of the witch camps, ten Pastors, and eight Imams. Also, four women who were accused but did not end up in the camp, four women who had been reintegrated into their communities, and six government officials were interviewed to ascertain the efforts the government has made so far as well as the plans to curb the witchcraft menace. making a total number of one hundred and four informants. With the help of the Assemblymen and the government representatives who live in the two communities with the people, the researcher was able to get the respondents with ease. All these people were willing to participate in the survey and they were made to either sign or thumbprint the concern form to confirm that they willingly agreed to give out the information to the researcher.

Background of Informants

In this research, I have grouped my informants into seven categories for clarity and easy identification. This also helps us see how each group contributes to my research questions. These are the participants in the witchcraft accusation. The categories are Alleged Witches, Accused but not camped, Accusers, Religious Persons, Reintegrated, Traditional Leaders, and Local Government Officials.

Age of Informants

The ages of the respondents varied from 20 to 99 years. Out of the 104 people who were interviewed, the majority of the respondents fell within the age bracket of 80–89, followed by 70–79, then 90–99. Again, the results indicate that all of the

alleged witches in the witch camps were between the ages of 60-90, constituting 30% of the population of all those who were interviewed. Under normal circumstances, people in this age bracket are usually weak and require a lot of support from family and people around them. The rest of the 40% of the respondents were the Accusers, Traditional Leaders, the Clergy, and Local Government Officials.

The age of the informants shows that most of the women accused women are in the older age brackets. Harriet Hill associates this with the fact that when women get older, their tendency to be accused as witches gets higher. The reason for this is that most old women suffer from age-related problems, including some form of mental retarding and depression. As a result, they tend to behave in awkward and some kind of abnormal ways, thereby lending themselves to be accused of many issues, including witchcraft. Hill confirms this by alluding that one of the causes of witchcraft beliefs and accusations is personality disorders exhibited by depressed people.⁸ Issah Wumbla, a human rights activist and a researcher, on the other hand, alludes that the reason why older women are accused of witchcraft is that old age, coupled with the status of widowhood and poverty, leads to the accusations.⁹ I will argue in agreement with Wumbla that at old age, these women become vulnerable and dependent on other family members who find it difficult to care for them. The easiest way to take off the burden of having to take care of an old woman is to accuse them of witchcraft and get rid of them.

⁸ Hill, "Witchcraft," 5.

⁹ Issah Wumbla, " Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered: A Study of Witchcraft Accusation in Northern Ghana," *ISS Blog Bliss*, January 14, 2019, <https://issblog.nl/2019/01/14/bewitched-bothered-and-bewildered-a-study-of-witchcraft-accusation-in-northern-ghana-by-issah-wumbla/>.

Educational Background of Informants

The educational backgrounds of the informants show that 58 of the informants have never been to school. Out of the 58 uneducated informants, 30 represented the alleged witches, 4 traditional leaders, and the other 24 were part of the accusers in the focus group. 20 persons had secondary education, 18 persons attained tertiary, and 8 had post-tertiary education. Out of the 40 informants who had not been to school, all the 30 Accused witches incidentally fall into this category. It is very rare to find educated women being accused of witchcraft.

Gender of Informants

The study revealed that the majority of the alleged witches are female. Out of the alleged witches who were interviewed, 28 were women, and two were men. Again, as of the time of the visit to Daani, the total population of the people living there was 229 with 141 women and 88 men. The Kpatiṅa camp had only women.

Occupation of Informants

The occupation of respondents is key because it shows the level of financial power the respondents had and the freedom as well as access to basic necessities. The more resourced a person is, the more independent they are. The occupational distribution of the respondents shows that the most of respondents were not gainfully employed. Fifteen of them were employed.

Content of the Thesis

The first chapter of this thesis discusses the background of the study, the necessity and purpose of the research, the thesis statement, research objectives, research questions, the scope of the study, delimitation, terminology, methodology, and organization, and the history of witchcraft accusations both globally and locally,

and how it relates to the Northern regions of Ghana. The second chapter outlines the historical background of the people of Dagbon. It explores the background of beliefs surrounding witchcraft activities among the Dagombas and further shows the processes of determining who is presumed to be a witch (*sog yhibu*) and how the accused persons end up in the witch camp. The data of the survey was analyzed and outlined in the third chapter, and the findings and discussions of the study were presented in the fourth chapter. Chapter five summarises the results and makes a conclusion and recommendations.

Consent

Prior to conducting interviews and recordings, a thorough explanation of the research's purpose was provided to all participants. The voluntary nature of participation was emphasized, and those who declined were not included in the study. Additionally, participants were requested to grant permission for the use of data gathered in a written document, to which they consented. Participants were also offered the choice of being identified by name or remaining anonymous, and all participants granted permission to be identified. However, due to the sensitive nature of the research, pseudonyms were employed to protect the identity of certain participants. Therefore, apart from the religious leaders, all other names in this research are Pseudonyms.

Consent forms were signed or thumb-printed by all participants, granting permission for the information to be used for the intended purpose. A token of appreciation was also given, with all participants at the Daani camp receiving a cash gift (*guli*), and those at the Kpatina camp receiving various food items such as rice, oil, mackerel, and tomato puree.

The interviews with the alleged witches were conducted in the Dagbani language. The interviews were conducted in English for the government officials. These interviews were recorded and transcribed as my primary data, then supplemented with existing literature on witchcraft to arrive at my conclusion and recommendations.

Chapter 1 — Witchcraft: A Background

This chapter will give a brief background of witchcraft accusations and the treatment meted out to the accused witches in the past, both globally and in Africa. It will relate this to witchcraft accusations in Northern Ghana and among the Dagomba people. The religious identity of the Dagomba people and the engagement of the church in witchcraft accusations will also be discussed.

1.1 Witchcraft from a Global Perspective

The origin, history, and background of witchcraft, though not very easy to mark out, is a very crucial part of this research. Jeffery Burton Russell, an American historian of medieval European religions, in his book *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, sought to give not only the history of Witchcraft but also how witchcraft has evolved over the years. According to him, the history of witchcraft can be traced back to medieval times through folk traditions and source cultures (the culture of teachers and learners of the people of medieval times) of Western civilisation.¹⁰ He explains that Judaism and other cultures, such as the Greco-Romans, the early Christians, the Celts, and the Teutons, all held the notion of the reality of witchcraft.

Russell further explains that the idea of witchcraft was more directed towards women than men. This notion of witchcraft as it relates to women and the “outcasting” of women is relevant to the Dagomba situation, as we will see later. He explains that Teutonic tradition held the notion that witchcraft was a spiritual power

¹⁰ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1972), 46.

in which a procession of beings was led by a spirit to go around a village or a community, killing, destroying, and eating whatever they found on their way.¹¹

He explains that the spirit that always led this expedition was seen as a woman commonly known as Huldah or Perchta, translated in Latin as Diana. Diana was well known as a schizophrenic deity in charge of fertility as well as the goddess of the moon. In later years, according to the folk tradition, other beings and strange spirits appeared in the form of dwarves, fairies, elves, trolls, and kobolds. Every one of these creatures was frightening and mischievous.

Current anthropological and historical research has shown that the persecution of alleged witches is global. Mensah Adinkra, a Professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice at Central Michigan University, documented this in his book *Witchcraft, Witches, And Violence in Ghana*.¹² According to him, the most widely known cases are those that happened during the Middle Ages in Europe and in America between the 14th and 17th centuries, where thousands of people were accused of using witchcraft powers to wreak havoc and were subjected to severe persecution.

From the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, cruel actions were taken against witches in England, Finland, France, Holland, Germany, Hungary, Russia, Scotland, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland. According to him, they were accused of possessing supernatural powers, which they used to cause physical injuries, illness, bad weather, and even death. This resulted in public fear and prompted the clergy to take measures to purge the system of suspected witches, leading to the trial of many accused

¹¹ Russell, *Witchcraft*, 47.

¹² Mensah Adinkrah, *Witchcraft, Witches, And Violence in Ghana* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 13.

witches. They were subsequently tried, tortured, and brutally killed, according to him.¹³

Adinkra further gives an account of the persecutions of witches that occurred in the American colonies, namely in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Virginia. According to him, the peak of the trials occurred in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692, when nineteen alleged witches were executed and one hundred and fifty more persons were imprisoned. Moreover, both in Europe and America, the witches were brutally tortured until they confessed, after which they were burned to death. They were equally forced to name their accomplices, who were also tortured until they named additional witches. Mensah Adinkra estimates that between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, the number of people who were tortured and killed on the grounds of witchcraft or heresy in Europe was close to half a million. The vast majority of the victims of the European accused, persecuted, and executed witches were socially marginalized women who were either old, poor, unmarried, or widowed women.¹⁴

Carlo Ginzburg, an Italian historian, also offers some explanations as to the varying causes of the European and American witch hunts. According to him, the persecution of witches illustrates classic instances of “a search for scapegoats on which fears, hatred, and tension of all kinds could be discharged.”¹⁵ This is reminiscent of the witchcraft accusations of northern Ghana, where vulnerable women are excommunicated from their communities to live in the witch camps. These

¹³ Adinkrah, *Witchcraft*, 13.

¹⁴ Adinkrah, *Witchcraft*, 13.

¹⁵ Carlo Ginzburg, *Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 120–28.

women are used as ‘scapegoats’ for the cause of misfortunes in the communities. Hans Christian Erik Middleford a Professor of History and Religious Studies at the University of Virginia, on his part, believed that it was the marginalized old, infirm, widowed, childless, and other members of the society least likely to fight back—who bore the heaviest brunt of the witch hunts.¹⁶

Gentilcore in his work observed with respect to Italy that “many accused witches were weak and helpless, with no other means of power or influence.”¹⁷ Similarly, Adinkrah confirms this and adds that the violent accusation of predominantly female witches could be a result of the patriarchal nature of society which places men in a position of leadership and gives them the right to sit in judgment over people who they believe have hurt the collective morality of society.¹⁸ This is seen in the fact that the highest population of the accused persons living in the camps is women. Also, among the Dagombas, women are not in positions of power such that they can influence policy to their favor both in local and national governance issues hence they submit to the dictates of the men in society.

Contemporary anthropological literature and numerous media reports indicate that belief in witchcraft phenomena exists in many societies, although these beliefs remain more entrenched in some places than in others. This literature also shows that violent victimization and persecution of witches commonly occur in response to allegations of witchcraft. In addition to the cases in parts of Africa profiled above,

¹⁶ Midelfort, H.C. Erik, “Heartland of the Witchcraze,” in *Oldridge* (England: Routledge, 2019), 113–19.

¹⁷ David Gentilcore, “Witchcraft Narratives and Folklore Motifs in Southern Italy,” In *Oldridge, The Witchcraft Reader*,(2002): 97–108.
url={<https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:190597058>}

¹⁸ Adinkrah, *Witchcraft*, 74.

media reports are replete with documented cases of witchcraft persecution in India, Nepal, and Papua New Guinea.¹⁹

In Papua New Guinea, as in many other societies where belief in witchcraft persists, witchcraft is invoked to explain misfortune. Witches are believed to be endowed with extraordinary powers that they deploy to cause malefic acts and to bring adversity to their victims. Suspected witches are recurrently accused of afflicting victims with strange, inexplicable, and even fatal illnesses. Here, too, the majority of accused witches are elderly women, often destitute. Efforts by Papuans to rid local communities of reviled, malefic witches in their respective communities have fuelled violence against persons accused of practising witchcraft or harmful magic.²⁰ Consider the following case of virulent witch persecution in one Papua New Guinea village. Adinkra recounts:

Sometime in 1997, Jomani and fellow villagers hauled the women from their homes and questioned them about deaths in the village, including that of an 18-year-old youth whose brain the men believed had been replaced with water by a sanguma [sorcerer]. In villages where belief in witchcraft lingers, such interrogations are brutal: hot metal may be applied to genitals, flesh incised with machetes, or the accused strung up by an arm or leg. In the end, the Mondo One women were killed: three with homemade shotguns, the fourth with knives, because the men ran out of bullets.²¹

Jomani says the women had all confessed to being sangumas. Asked why they would do that, he replies coolly: “Because we stab them until they do.” And if they hadn’t admitted to sorcery? “We stab them anyway.” Jomani’s village is not unique. Yauwe Riyong, an M.P. from the nearby Chuave district in Simbu province, told

¹⁹ Palash R. Ghosh, Black Magic Woman: Young Mother Burned Alive for Practicing Sorcery in Papua New Guinea. *International Business Times*, February 7, 2013.

²⁰ Michael Ware, Season of the Witch, *Time Pacific*, May 7, 2001.

²¹ Adinkrah, *Witchcraft*, 14.

Parliament last December that as many as 15 women had been “chopped to pieces” as suspected sangumas.²²

To add to the above, brutal witch persecutions in India have also been widely reported in contemporary media. A CNN report in 2000 estimated that about 200 women are killed across the country annually on suspicion of witchcraft (“Witch Killings in India”, 2000).²³ According to the “Los Angeles Times” report, in the Indian state of Bihar, “Women accused of witchcraft are dragged into the forest and hacked, hanged or burned to death. Heads of children have been smashed on rocks. Even nonfatal cases are ghastly. Women suffer from smashed teeth, shaved heads, or chopped-off breasts. Others have been forced to eat excrement or to strip and walk naked through villages.”²⁴ Aside from these countries, Adinkra’s account of Behringer’s survey on witch killings revealed cases of victimization of suspected witches in Bolivia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Ecuador, Malaysia Mexico Peru, and France.²⁵

The peak of the rage against witches occurred in Europe at the time when Europe was going through the Dark Ages. The illiteracy rate of the people was high, and most families were peasant farmers. The birth rate was high and most/many children were malnourished. Diseases were rampant and plagues killed millions of people. As Karen Palmer reminds us, approximately two hundred years after the Dark

²² Adinkrah, *Witchcraft*, 14.

²³ Adinkrah, *Witchcraft*, 14.

²⁴ Misra Neelesh, Few Women Survive in India Villages after Being Branded as Witches. *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 2000.

²⁵ Adinkra, *Witchcraft*, 14.

Ages, there was a paradigm shift, Europe moved into the Age of Enlightenment.²⁶ With the emergence of the Protestant faith, there was a decline in the power of the Roman Catholic Church and the Inquisition. In this period, education became more accessible, and more discoveries were made especially with regard to health. Doctors learned to conduct Autopsies to determine the cause of death, they learned to read about signs of infections, and they could cut open human bodies to get rid of disease-causing agents. They also learned about brain function. Gradually, the treatment of disease began to be based on science and not superstition. Furthermore, Scholastic thought and philosophy brought about critical thinking and rationalisation. As a result, there was a great decline in the high belief in witchcraft, superstition, and the devil's power.²⁷

1.2 The Accusations

Throughout history, People who were suspected of being witches were accused and became the victims of violent treatment, such as lynching and being burnt at the stake. These assaults were frequently carried out by crowds who were under the impression that the accused had used alleged magical abilities to cause injury or misfortune to members of their community. Over the years, an enormous amount of research findings have revealed that this phenomenon traces back to before the Middle Ages.

In medieval times, any challenge to the authority of the church was tantamount to a challenge to society and to the majesty of God, and society naturally meted out

²⁶ Karen Palmer, *Spellbound: Inside West African Witch Camps* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 87.

²⁷ Palmer, *Spellbound*, 88–89.

cruel measures against heretics and witchcraft. The judges of the courts that belonged to the bishops, as well as the secular courts, saw themselves as God's defenders who made sure that they tortured and killed 'God opposers' by their ecclesiastical self-righteousness. This led to the death of hundreds of thousands of people over the years. Unfortunately, people (women) had to lose their lives in the hands of men who had the mandate to protect them. The church is a place where all manner of people can find solace and reform. The heads of churches at that time who superintended over such deaths had actually in my view denied their victims a great opportunity to repent.

1.3 Treatment of Accused Witches

Various forms of treatment were meted out to accused witches in the Middle Ages. In what follows, I will give a brief survey of how the Accused witches were treated during the witch trials.

According to Russell, in 1335, two trials for heresy, sorcery, and witchcraft took place in Toulouse and Carcassonne. Seventy - four persons were accused of magic and heresy, and then, fourteen were executed on account of witchcraft.²⁸ Subsequently, other trials were held on the instruction of the pope, and several others were convicted of sorcery and witchcraft.

As the fear of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft, increased, the inquisitors intensified their operations against these "enemies of Christ" and dealt ruthlessly with them through the secular and episcopal tribunals. Pope Eugenius IV ordered the inquisitors to impound all magicians, diviners, and witches who, he claimed defiled

²⁸ Russell, *Witchcraft*, 181.

the cross and went into agreements with the devil.²⁹ The publication of the infamous bull *Summis desiderantes affectibus* on December 5, 1484, by Innocent VIII also justified and indicated papal full support for the rage of the inquisitors against witches. With the full support of the Catholic Church, the Inquisitors hunted down thousands of women and hundreds of men causing all kinds of misfortunes in society ranging from killing children, shrinking men's genitals, and stealing women's wombs to stirring up bad weather.³⁰

Karen Palmer records in her book, *Spellbound*, that the estimated number of women who were tortured and killed during the European witch hunts ranged from forty thousand to one hundred thousand. It was a papal order that the countries in Europe conduct witch hunts. The Inquisitors used a guide handbook known as the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Some referred to this book as "The Hammer of Witches." The book spelled out modes of identifying, interrogating, torturing, and punishing witches.³¹ Women who were identified as witches, first of all, had their hair shaven. This was done to look for the marks of the devil on their bodies. Secondly, they were tortured with iron collars, thumb presses, and nails. Thirdly they were ordered to mention the names of other women in their covens. After going through all these dehumanizing stages, they were either strangled to death, burned, drowned, or beheaded publicly.³²

²⁹ Russell, *Witchcraft*, 228–229.

³⁰ Russell, *Witchcraft*, 228–229.

³¹ Palmer, *Spellbound*, 87.

³² Palmer, *Spellbound*, 87–89.

1.4 Witchcraft in Africa

In recent times, there has been a renewed interest in the study of African witchcraft and magic. Despite modernization, globalization, and urbanization, the belief in the witchcraft phenomenon in post-colonial Africa is on the ascendency. The worldview of Africans is saturated with the presence of witchcraft which is associated with the power of evil regardless of education, social class, or religion of the people. Mensa Adinkrah asserts that currently in Sub-Saharan Africa, there is no society without a track record of witchcraft activities and violent harassment of witches.³³

Although the belief in witchcraft is expressed differently according to religion or ethnicity, there are still vast commonalities in the general beliefs about witchcraft. This belief holds that witches have the power to cause harm, kill, and destroy lives and property. When misfortunes occur, either in a family or a community, it is generally believed that witches are the cause of such, and witch doctors are usually called upon to identify the persons behind such happenings.³⁴

Leo Igwe, a Nigerian human rights activist, in his PhD dissertation, recounts that in 2009, a synod of Bishops met at the Second Special Assembly for Africa. At that meeting, the Church's attention was drawn to the wicked activities of sorcery and its effects on families and communities. The synod directed the Bishops to take pastoral and punitive actions against those involved in witchcraft. This was intended to set Africans free from the witchcraft canker.³⁵

³³ Adinkrah, *Witchcraft*, 5.

³⁴ Leo Igwe, "The Witch is not a Witch: The Dynamics and Contestations of Witchcraft Accusations in Northern Ghana" (Doctoral Thesis, University of Bayreuth, 2017), 1. <https://epub.uni-bayreuth.de/id/eprint/3377/1/THESISfinaldraft.pdf>

³⁵ Igwe, "The Witch." 1

In the same vein, several complaints about the prevalence of witchcraft activities in Malawi and South Africa, necessitated the Malawi Law Commission to review the Witchcraft Act in 2009, and the Witchcraft Suppression Act in South Africa in 2016.³⁶ There, the Traditional Healers Organization in South Africa, in its submission to the review commission, admitted that magic and witchcraft were capable of causing illnesses, deaths, and destruction of life and property.³⁷

They, therefore, proposed that the Witchcraft Suppression Law be changed to a legislature that would empower the courts to control wrongful accusations and also punish perpetrators of witchcraft and magic. Similarly, Igwe recounts that the Lamba of Zambia has a slogan, “Spear the witch to death,” and the Akamba of Kenya executes witches with an arrow. In several other parts of Africa, accused witches face all kinds of violence ranging from beatings, strangling to death, or being burned to death. Igwe sums it up by quoting Van Beek:

Throughout the world, in Africa and elsewhere, witchcraft notions, accusations, and persecutions have wreaked havoc on social relations and caused suffering to untold numbers of people. It has robbed people of their dignity, separated them from their kin, and disowned them of rightful possessions. Harassment, torture, banishment, and death have been disguised as 'cleansing', with the individual accused standing no chance against the brutal force of the accuser.³⁸

Evans Pritchard, in his account of witchcraft and the Azande people of Southern Sudan, explains that witchcraft manifests in all aspects of the life of Azande.

³⁶ Igwe, “The Witch,” 1.

³⁷ Igwe, “The Witch,” 1.

³⁸ Igwe, “The Witch,” 2.

In fact, the interpretation of every life happening is linked to witchcraft; whether in agricultural, fishing, domestic, or community life, witchcraft has an influence on all. the belief in witchcraft regulates the life of the Azande. He is also of the view that the phenomenon is a binding principle that holds the Azande culture together, by trying to make sense of inexplicable misfortunes.³⁹ This explanation of Pritchard is quite similar to today's Dagomba context, where almost every form of misfortune is attributed to witchcraft as the cause.

Adinkrah confirms this in his comprehensive literature on the various African countries and their belief in witchcraft.⁴⁰ From their narratives, one can deduce the reason why witchcraft is generally perceived as an evil phenomenon and a threat to the existence of humans throughout Africa. Russell asserts that it is a common belief that witchcraft can be acquired through heredity. It is therefore possible for persons to possess witchcraft but unaware of the harm they cause. But whether the witches are conscious of possessing witchcraft powers or not, their victims and other members of the African societies view them as dangerous to human existence.⁴¹

³⁹ Evans Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 18.

⁴⁰ Adinkrah, *Witchcraft*, 14–19.

⁴¹ Russell J. Burton and Lewis Ioan M.. "Witchcraft." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 29, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/witchcraft>.

1.5 Witchcraft Accusations in Northern Ghana

Five distinct regions make up Northern Ghana: the Northern, Upper East, Upper West, North East, and Savanna regions. Most of these areas are classified as rural, and the agricultural sector is the prevalent economic activity.⁴²

The people who live in northern Ghana come from various backgrounds and each maintains its own distinctive culture and customs. The belief in the power of witchcraft is a long-held custom among the various ethnic groups. People tend to believe that witchcraft is an evil supernatural power that can be harmful to both individuals and the communities in which they live. Those who are suspected of practising witchcraft are sometimes persecuted, subjected to torture, or even put to death. Over the years, there have been several forms of accusations of witchcraft and violence against people suspected as witches in the Northern part of Ghana. The suspected witches are either banished from their communities, face mob attacks, or lynching.

Adinkra reports that in 1997, there was an outbreak of cerebral meningitis in northern Ghana, where many people lost their lives. This disease outbreak was attributed to the malevolent work of witches in the affected communities. On account of this, hundreds of women were accused of witchcraft, they were physically attacked, and 542 were lynched.⁴³ In that same year, three women were publicly lynched by an angry mob in the village of Yoggu, with the reason that they were spreading diseases through witchcraft. There was yet another incident in the village of Kumbungu, where

⁴² Adams Faizal and Kwasi Ohene Yankyera, "Socio-Economic Characteristics of Subsistent Small Ruminant Farmers in Three Regions of Northern Ghana," *Asian Journal of Applied Science and Engineering* 3, no 8, (2014): 93. <https://doi.org/10.15590/ajase/2014/v3i8/54489>.

⁴³ Adinkrah, *Witchcraft*, 4.

two elderly women were stoned to death on the suspicion that the two teamed up to kill a young man in the village.⁴⁴

In 2020, a ninety-year-old woman by the name of Akua Denteh in Kafaba, a village in the East Gonja District of the Savannah region of Northern Ghana, was accused of witchcraft, she was subjected to severe beatings and torture in order to get her to confess, she died in the process. Many other old women, like Madam Akua Denteh, in the region, have suffered such barbaric acts of lynching on account of witchcraft accusations. In the same year, three women were lynched in one night in another community on account of witchcraft.⁴⁵

The most recent witch killing happened on May 7, 2023, in a village called Zakpalsi in the Mion district of the Northern region of Ghana. Issah Murtala reporting for Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) online.⁴⁶ writes that a seventy-year-old man named Sharu Mohammed was attacked with clubs, sticks, and machetes and lynched by an angry mob. After killing Sharu, the mob proceeded to launch an attack on forty-year-old Safura Ibrahim. As Safura ran to the chief's palace to seek asylum, the angry mob pursued her, dragged her out of the chief's palace, and killed her in cold blood. The two deceased were accused of teaming up to bewitch one Asana Abdallah who died after a short illness. The circumstances surrounding Asana's death called for an investigation by the family to ascertain the cause of death. A soothsayer

⁴⁴ Adinkrah, *Witchcraft*, 18.

⁴⁵ Ibrahim Mahama. "Lynching of Akua Denteh: Criminalise Witch Name Calling." Graphic Online, Accessed September 2, 2020. 1 <https://www.graphic.com.gh/features/features/lynching-of-akua-denteh-criminalise-witch-name-calling.html>

⁴⁶ Issah Murtala, "Two Persons Accused of Witchcraft Lynched at Mion in Northern Region," GBC News, Accessed May 9, 2023. <https://www.gbcghanaonline.com/news/lynched-witchcraft-mion-district/2023/>.

who was consulted revealed that Sharu and Safura conspired and killed Asana through witchcraft. This infuriated the youth of the village, and the result was the barbaric killing of the two accused persons.⁴⁷

1.6. The Dagomba People

Dagbon is the physical and geographical location of the Dagomba people group. According to Abdul-Rahman Yakubu, they occupy the central part of Northern Ghana but their territory stretches close to the borders of the Republic of Togo.⁴⁸ Yakubu goes on to say that though the official language of the country is English, several other Ghanaian languages are spoken and taught in schools, depending on the regions in which the schools are located.

In terms of religion, Christianity is dominant in the southern part of the country while Islam is stronger in the north. In terms of education, Peter Clarke, a South African poet and writer, indicates that the majority of the people living in the North are illiterate. He attributes the high illiteracy rate to the fact that education was first started in the south of the country by the colonial masters and the Christian missionaries. He also alludes that the Christian missionaries were not allowed to work in the North of Ghana where Islam was the dominant religion for fear of destabilizing the political climate. This accounts for the reason why the southern part of Ghana is more developed than the North.⁴⁹ The Dagomba tribe is one of over 75 tribes found in Ghana. They fall under the Mole Dagbani ethnic group, and they are believed to be

⁴⁷ Murtala, *Witchcraft*, 2.

⁴⁸ Abdul-Rahman Yakubu, *The Gods are not Jealous: Lived Contextualization of Religious Identity and Dialogue through Dagomba Rites of Passage* (Evangelische Verlagsanstalt: Leipzig, 2022), 71.

⁴⁹ Peter Clarke, *West Africa and Islam: A Study of Religious Development from the 18th to the 20th Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), 191.

the most dominant tribe in the region. Dagbon is popularly used to refer to the traditional kingdom of the Dagomba people, which speak Dagbanli. The paramountcy is ruled by the *Ya-Naa*, whose seat is located in *Naya*, popularly known by non-Dagomba people as *Yendi*. It has been in existence for over four hundred years. In terms of economic activity, the people mainly engage in agricultural activities and trading of their farm produce and animals.⁵⁰

The history of the Dagombas is difficult to trace because there are few written sources since most of the history was transmitted from one generation to another through their oral tradition. This makes the history of the Dagombas difficult to trace and affirm. However, Some recent investigations into the history of the Dagombas by Rahman Yakubu, a scholar of religion in Dagbon. In his book, *The Gods are not Jealous: Lived Contextualization of Religious Identity and Dialogue through Dagomba Rites of Passage* (2022) states that two categories of origins of the Dagomba people are available, namely the *tarimba* (the original settlers) and the *nabihi* (the ones who conquered the *nabihi*) who are alleged to have supplanted the *tarimba* and fused cultures due to intermarriage.

Another proposition by Allan Wolsey Cardinal indicates that three descendants of Tohazie, the great ancestor of the Mole Dagomba, Mamprusi, and Nanumba people were the ones who founded Dagbon, Mamprugu, and Nanung. Their father was called Naa Gbewaa and had earlier ruled over the combined dynasties of

⁵⁰ Yakubu, *The Gods are not Jealous*, 71–72.

Mamprugu, Dagbon, and Nanung and when he died, his sons split into these three ethnic groups. Their language attests to this.⁵¹

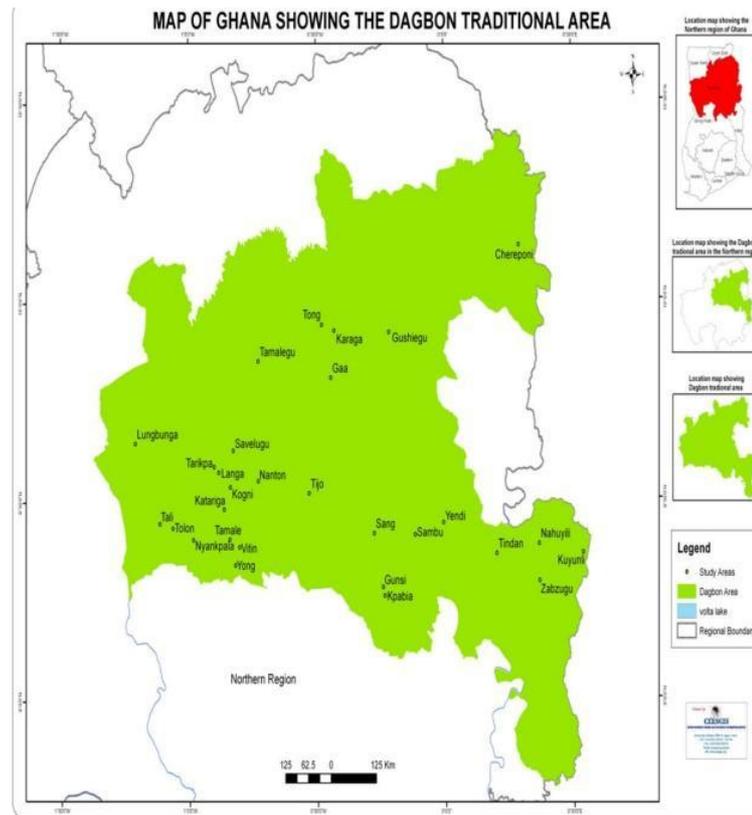


Figure 1.2: The Dagbon Traditional Area. Source: Centre for Remote Sensing and Geographic

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⁵¹ A. W. Cardinal, *The Natives of the Northern Territories of Gold Coast* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1920), 3.

⁵² Igwe, *The Witch*, 9.



Drumming and dancing at the Ya-Naa's palace.

1.6.1 The Religious Identity of the Dagomba People

The Dagomba people's religious identity is reflected in their daily lives. John Mbiti, a Kenyan-born theologian and Anglican priest, stated in his book *African Religion and Philosophy* that “Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices.”⁵³ This means that religion forms part of the African culture, and you cannot talk about the Africans without talking about their religions. Yakubu describes Ghanaian society as pluralistic. He arrived at this conclusion after a careful study of Ghanaian culture and religious identity, particularly the culture and religious identity of the Dagombas.

I would argue that this co-existence among the people also makes the majority of them accept and practice multiple religions. It is, therefore, not uncommon to see a

⁵³ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd. 1974), 1.

Muslim or Christian also holding certain beliefs associated with the African traditional religion.

For the sake of this research, I will limit the discussion to the religious identity of the Dagombas of Northern Ghana. The pluralistic nature of Ghanaian societies can also be seen among the Dagombas. According to Yakubu, the religious identity of a people should not be explained in terms of ‘religion by the book’, rather, it should be viewed in terms of the lived experiences of the daily lives of the people.⁵⁴ In this regard, three main religions can be identified with the people of Dagbon. These are, African traditional religion(ATR), which Rahman terms as Dagomba Traditional religion (DTR), Islam, and Christianity.

1.6.2 The Dagomba Traditional Religion

Among these three religions, the DTR is the oldest; as Yakubu notes, “The DTR is as old as the Dagombas themselves.” He describes it as a hierarchical religious belief system that consists of a supreme God at the top, followed by divinities or gods, ancestors, and amulets or charms in that order. The Supreme God is called Naawuni (chief of the gods). Although he is known by the adherents of this religion as the Creator of all things, the Dagombas see him as a distant God who can only be reached through divinities (*Wuna*). Yakubu further explains that the divinities are the spirits who serve as agents of *Naawuni*. These deities dwell in objects, trees, rivers, and animals.⁵⁵ This explains why we observe that the adherents of this religion usually perform sacrifices to these deities in order to get them to take their petitions to

⁵⁴ Yakubu, *The Gods*, 85.

⁵⁵ Clarke, *West Africa*, 283.

Naawuni. Next on the ladder is the ancestral spirits (*yaanima*), whom Yakubu refers to as the dead relatives of people who are believed to be spiritually alive and present with their living relatives. Among other things, they are also believed to bring blessings upon their relatives as well as punish those who do wrong.

1.6.3 Islam

The Northern part of Ghana is noted for its large population of Muslims. When you take a geographical view of the capital city of the Northern region of Ghana, you see a number of mosques all over the town, indicating the heavy presence of Islam. Peter B. Clarke, traces the history back to the 14th century when the Wangara trading Muslims first came into Ghana through the north, Later, in the 16th century, the Hausa traders also came into the country, and it is believed that the Hausa had direct contact with the Dagombas. Though they later spread to other parts of the country, the heavy presence of Islam can still be seen in the north. According to Rahman, there Muslims are three different major factions among the Dagombas: The Ahmadiya, Sunni, and Shia Muslims. Even within these major divisions, there are further differences. These differences sometimes breed internal tensions among them, especially with regard to their doctrine.⁵⁶

1.6.4 Christianity

Christianity was first brought to Ghana by Portuguese merchants around 1482, but it was not until the arrival of the Basel Missionaries in the 1800s that it gained ground. Unlike Islam which entered the country through the north, Christianity entered the coastal regions and slowly spread to the north. According to Yakubu, this

⁵⁶ Yakubu, *The Gods*, 90 –94.

was due to the Colonial policy of the British to protect the Muslim area by indirect rule. As they settled in the south of Ghana, they established various educational institutions. This could be the reason why till date the Northern part of Ghana records the highest population of Muslims, and also less developed than the southern part of the country.

The North first had contact with Christianity when the Roman Catholics came in from Burkina Faso through Navrongo. Later, the Assemblies of God Missionaries from America also came to Dagbon via Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. Other denominations followed in later years, and many of them established educational institutions.⁵⁷

I would argue that the success of the Christian missionaries in the north could largely be traced to their humanitarian work in building hospitals, and schools, supporting and training farmers, and other social interventions that were meant to ease the suffering of the people.

1.7 Witchcraft Among the Dagomba People

In Ghana, there are various beliefs concerning witchcraft that have been there for many years. Kwasi Atta Agyapong, a researcher at the Pentecost University in Ghana, asserts that witchcraft beliefs in Ghana date back to before the advent of Islam and later Christianity.⁵⁸ According to Agyapong, the witchcraft mentality is expressed in the African adage that "nothing happens by accident". The belief is that spirits are the influence behind every occurrence, whether good or bad. In this, Dagombas have

⁵⁷Alexis B. Tengan, *Christianity and Cultural History in Northern Ghana: A Portrait of Cardinal Peter Poreku Dery* (Brussels: P. I. E. Peter Lang, 2013), 9.

⁵⁸Kwasi Atta Agyepong, *Witchcraft in Ghana: Beliefs, Practices, and Consequences* (Accra, Ghana: Noyam Publishers, 2021), 1.

a very high view of witchcraft. Their general belief is that witches are evil, possess evil spiritual powers, and use their evil powers to cause harm to people.

Therefore, in the event of any misfortune, sickness, social instability, accident, or plague in society, witches are believed to be the cause. This has led many Ghanaians to allegedly shirk their responsibilities of... and shift the blame to witches when they suffer the consequences of their irresponsibility. It has also subjected many Ghanaians to a state of fear and helplessness because they feel their affairs are controlled by evil powers beyond their reach.⁵⁹

Karen Palmer agrees with Agyapong and adds that the belief in witchcraft is embedded in the culture of the Dagomba people of northern Ghana. She says that generally African people believe in the existence of two different worlds, the physical and the spiritual.⁶⁰ The spiritual realm is populated by spirit energies that can be appeased and directed by humans through a link between the two worlds.

It is a common belief that the two worlds spill into each other, therefore, disharmony between the two can cause life in one to end in the other. Because these spiritual energies do not have physical bodies, they move through objects. A spirit may take up residence in a person, a tree, a river, an animal, or a stone. These spirits are believed to be deities who possess powers that can protect and bless people; hence sacrifices are offered to them for their blessing. For instance, the Gambaga village,

⁵⁹ Agyapong, *Witchcraft in Ghana*, 1.

⁶⁰ Karen Palmer, *Spellbound: Inside West African Witch Camps* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 43.

one of the witch camps in the northeast region of Ghana, has a crocodile-shaped stone believed to be the spirit that protects the village.⁶¹

Palmer also explains that those who believe in these spirits erect shrines and perform sacrifices to solicit their protection and blessings of prosperity, good health, and good fortune. They also believe that some people are blessed with the ability to see, and travel into, the spiritual realm. Such people are said to be born leaders who, by their gifts, acquire wisdom from the gods to rule their people.⁶²

Palmer further asserts that witchcraft is directly linked to social causes such as social upheaval, scarcity of houses, food, work, etc., due to overpopulation. Consequently, people resorted to using mystical powers to survive. The struggle for survival became the reason for people to use such mystical powers to eliminate their competitors. Resultantly, the beliefs in mystical and witchcraft powers intensified.

Daani Tindan is one of the six places designated as witch camps in northern Ghana. It is the only known camp that houses both accused witches and accused wizards. The camp is located approximately one hour away from Yendi, the district capital of Dagbon and the home of the Dagomba paramountcy. The camp has been in existence for about 380 years. According to the folk story that is often narrated by Shei Alhassan, the chief priest of the camp. According to him a hunter discovered the shrine over 380 years ago and decided to stay there. Later, the sister of the hunter was accused of witchcraft and, after denying it, was sent to that shrine for the gods to

⁶¹ Palmer, *Spellbound*, 43.

⁶² Palmer, *Spellbound*, 43–44.

prove her innocence or guilt. She eventually settled there and from that time it became a place of refuge for the accused witches.⁶³



Researcher interacting with accused witches at the Daani witch camp.

⁶³ This picture is an interview that was conducted on June 14 2023 at Gnani in the Northern region of Ghana.



Researcher with some alleged at the Daani witch camp.

The alleged witches live in round mud houses with thatched roofs. They live under very horrible conditions, and they lack the basic human needs for survival.

Their only consolation is that they escaped lynching from their accusers.⁶⁴ They confirmed Agyepong's statement during the interviews by saying that they were lucky to have escaped to the witch camps because others had been killed. These accused witches live in very run-down buildings that were built for them by the chief of the community several years ago. Most of the rooms leak badly when it rains, the floors are ripped off, and some portions of it have bare sand on it. Most of them have difficulty fending for themselves because they are old and weak and can no longer do any strenuous work to earn any income for themselves. They have no source of potable water but depend on dugouts during the rainy seasons. However, in the dry season, they have to travel long distances to access potable water.

Healthwise, they depend on the traditional priest who oversees the camps for herbs for all kinds of medical conditions since they sometimes do not get the means to travel to the nearest health centres for treatment. Most of them have very old and torn dresses and have very little money to buy personal effects for personal hygiene and other very basic needs as compared to the other people in the community in which they live.

1.8 Engagement of the Ghanaian Church with Witchcraft

Before the introduction of the Christian religion, the people of Ghana already had their cultural sets of beliefs and practices. One major belief that was central to the life and existence of the indigenous Ghanaians, including the Dagomba people, was the belief in the existence of a Supreme Being, the Creator of all things, including good and evil spirits. This Supreme Being manifests his power through the good and

⁶⁴ Agyepong, *Witchcraft in Ghana*, 20.

evil spirits known as smaller gods. Opoku Onyinah, a Ghanaian theologian, has indicated in his Ph.D. dissertation on “Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost” that in Ghana, every kind of evil is attributed to witchcraft.⁶⁵ He explains this by saying that witchcraft is the major medium through which all kinds of evil spirits carry out their activities. These evil spirits often possess individuals known as witches and endow them with supernatural powers to cause evil. Therefore, to achieve a successful life, people have to consult spiritually powerful persons such as traditional priests and sorcerers to identify the evil powers behind their challenges.

Onyinah goes further to explain that when the Christian religion was introduced in Ghana in the 1800s by the early missionaries, Ghanaians were taught that their belief in the smaller gods and the power of witchcraft was a mere superstition that should be abandoned. By their Western worldview, the missionaries informed Ghanaians that their beliefs and practices were heathen, pagan, primitive and unscientific. At the same time, they also stressed that it was the devil and his demons who used their power to influence them to believe in such things. However, they failed to provide a solution to the people’s need for protection, healing, and living a problem-free life. By this teaching, the missionaries unknowingly strengthened the belief of the people in the smaller gods and witchcraft powers.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Opoku Onyinah, “Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost,” (PhD, diss. The University of Birmingham, 2002), 1.

⁶⁶ Onyinah, “Exorcism,” 1.

Consequently, they tried as much as they could to suppress the issues of witchcraft, but the more they tried, the more the issues resurfaced.⁶⁷ As the missionaries condemned the beliefs and practices of the Ghanaian people, they introduced the Christian religion to them and succeeded in converting some of the people. These converts were expected to start living a changed life. Meanwhile, when presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the natives, they failed to build it on the African Traditional religious thought. In the end, the natives were presented with a God who was ‘alien’ to them.⁶⁸

From this background, we can understand why some people in Ghana who claim to be Christians resort to syncretism. It is also very common to see other Christians in the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches consulting pastors and prophets who are understood to possess higher anointing of supernatural power to pray for their protection, healing, and deliverance from the attack of witches.

Some examples of the older Pentecostal churches that arrived in the Ghanaian religious scene in the 1920s are the Church of Pentecost, the Christ Apostolic Church International, and the Assemblies of God Church, among others. In the same year, the Assemblies of God Missionaries came to Ghana from Burkina Faso and first settled in Dagbon, precisely Yendi, and later spread to other parts of the country.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Onyinah, “Exorcism,” 1.

⁶⁸ Onyinah, “Exorcism,” 1.

⁶⁹ Peter White, “Pentecostal Mission Spirituality: A Case Study of the Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana,” 44, no. 3 (2016): 251–59, https://www.academia.edu/32028336/Pentecostal_mission_spirituality_A_study_of_the_classical_pentecostal_churches_in_Ghana

Over the years, both the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches have handled the issues of witchcraft accusations in various ways. The next section discusses how they have engaged the subject.

The Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions describes Pentecostalism as a twentieth-century Christian movement that emphasizes the Holy Spirit baptism, which manifests in the form of miraculous signs, Spiritual gifts, and wonders, and speaking in tongues is as sign of the Holy Spirit's baptism. The name is derived from the New Testament event of “Pentecost” recorded in the book of Acts. The popular Azusa Street Revival in January 1906, marked the beginning of Pentecostalism in Los Angeles, California, led by William J. Seymour. Pentecostalism later spread to other parts of the world.⁷⁰

Neo-Pentecostals, also known as the Charismatic Movement are second-wave evangelicals who surfaced in the mid-20th century. Similar to the Pentecostals, they believe in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but they also emphasize that signs and wonders as necessary for a successful Christian life. The notable difference between them and Pentecostals is concerning their theology, worship style, and organizational structure.⁷¹

Dealing with the accusations of witchcraft in Ghana within the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches can vary depending on the theology and practice of a particular church. Some of the Churches in these circles resort to prayer and Spiritual warfare against the devil, demonic forces, and witchcraft powers. Others form special deliverance ministries, with the focus of setting free two groups of people: Those who

⁷⁰ Gary B. McGee, “Pentecostal Missions,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 738–739.

⁷¹ McGee, “Pentecostal Missions,” 740.

are under the attack of demonic forces including witchcraft, and those who have been identified as possessing witchcraft powers which they use to cause harm to their fellow human beings. In both cases, the leader of either the prayers or deliverance sessions instructs the congregation on how to pray. The instructions are usually accompanied by musical instruments and clapping. The leaders would ask the people to repeat certain words and phrases like “Die by fire” “break”, “bomb,” and “Fire!” To the extent that in some churches, members are instructed to come to church with canes, manchettes, or axes which they use in the course of the prayers to symbolically cane demons and witches. Onyina further states that some leaders even sell special canes for members to buy and spiritually cane the witches.⁷² This practice in most of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches has made many who profess to be Christians relegate the Christian faith to “praying to kill witches and demonic forces.” In my interview with Rev. Dr. Isaac Issah Wuni during my research, he lamented that this practice has also affected the mainline churches which dwell much on teaching and preaching the right doctrine of Scripture. The extent that attendance to Bible study meetings is always low, while prayer and deliverance meetings usually receive very high attendance.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the historical and global perspectives on the incidences of witchcraft and witchcraft accusations. It has been noted that, much like the setting of this research, the responses to alleged witchcraft accusations have almost been the same over the ages. Throughout history, witchcraft has been deeply ingrained in the fabric of Ghanaian society, with beliefs dating back centuries before the introduction

⁷² Onyinah, “Exorcism,” 285.

of Islam and Christianity. The Dagomba people, like many others in Ghana, hold a high regard for witchcraft, attributing both good and bad occurrences to spiritual forces. The research reveals how witchcraft beliefs have permeated various aspects of life, influencing perceptions of misfortune, social instability, and even natural phenomena. The fear and helplessness experienced by many Ghanaians stem from the belief that their lives are subject to the whims of unseen spiritual powers.

Moreover, the existence of witch camps such as *Daani Tindan* underscores the real-world consequences of witchcraft accusations. Accused witches and wizards find refuge in these camps, albeit under dire living conditions, escaping the threat of violence from their accusers. Their plight highlights the societal divisions and injustices perpetuated by deeply entrenched beliefs in witchcraft. The response of Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches to witchcraft accusations varies, ranging from spiritual warfare to deliverance ministries. However, the emphasis on prayer and symbolic rituals risks overshadowing the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith, leading to a distortion of religious practice.

In essence, the persistence of witchcraft beliefs in Ghana calls for a holistic approach that acknowledges the cultural, social, and religious dimensions of the phenomenon. Addressing the root causes of witchcraft accusations requires concerted efforts to promote education, foster dialogue, and combat superstition. Only through a nuanced understanding and collective action can Ghanaian society move towards greater social justice and inclusivity, free from the shadow of witchcraft accusations.



Mother of Seven and Elderly Man Lynched on Witchcraft Suspicion in Zakpalsi.⁷³



This 90-year-old woman was lynched at Kafaba.⁷⁴

⁷³ Managing GH Blog, “Mother of Seven and Elderly Man Lynched on Witchcraft Suspicion in Zakpalsi,” May 8, 202, Accessed June 11, 2023, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/region/managinggh/Mother-of-Seven-and-elderly-man-lynched-on-witchcraft-suspicion-in-zakpalsi-94337>.

⁷⁴ Mahama, “Lynching,” 1.

Chapter 2 — The “Witches” of *DAANI and KPATIDA*: A Case Study

As the case study of my research, this chapter discusses the various players involved in the witchcraft accusation process and the subsequent treatment of the alleged witches. These players, not only help determine who is which is, but they legitimize the process, safeguard the well-being of the community against the alleged witches, and also facilitate the process of sending the alleged witches to the witch camp. The stories of the alleged witches will be presented as they were told to the researcher, and analysis of these stories will help us understand the reasons for the beliefs, the accusations, and the impact of the accusations on the alleged witches.

2.1 The Players in Witchcraft Accusation: (*Soꝝu Yihibu*)

In order to meet the research goals, respondents had to be carefully selected and categorized as shown above. This helps ascertain the different beliefs of the players concerning witchcraft, their take on the accusations, and their views on how these alleged witches are treated after being accused. In this section, the researcher will introduce players involved in determining the witch and categories of informants and their stories.

2.1 Landlord (*Yili-Yidana*)

Witchcraft occurrences in families are restricted only to such families. For a witch to harm another person, they will need help from an insider who is a family member to pave the way for the attack to happen. And so, when there is an allegation within the family, the *Yili-Yidana* (the owner of the household) is informed. The *Yili-Yidana* is usually the head of both nuclear and extended families. In most cases, the eldest male is the breadwinner of the family. The duty of the *Yili-Yidana* is to see to the general well-being of his family members, as well as ensure peace and

tranquillity. The *Yili-Yidana* then calls the alleged witch for interrogation. If she admits to the allegation, she is warned to stop the attacks or face the consequences; but if she denies it, the *Yili-Yidana* goes a step further by consulting a *baga* (diviner) for confirmation of the innocence of the allegation. The outcome of the divination determines whether the accused person will continue to live with the family or be asked to leave the family house.⁷⁵

2.2 *Zaachi* (Youth leader)

In situations where the accuser is a community member, the *Zaachi* is informed about the allegation. The *Zaachi*, are appointed by the community chiefs to coordinate the youth's activities. They are also given the mandate to ensure discipline among the youth. If the youth of the communities have grievances, they report them or complain to the *Zaachi*. The *Zaachi* would then either resolve the issue or report to the chief for further action. However, sometimes, when there is a witchcraft accusation, and the chief's verdict seems to favour the accused witch, the youth can go against the verdict of the chief and the *Zaachi* and attack the suspected witch. So when the *Zaachi* suspects the imminence of a mob attack from the youth, he would demand that the accused witch be banished from the community to save her life.⁷⁶

2.3 *Chiefs*

The chiefs are people from the royal families who are appointed and enskinned as leaders to rule the people in various traditional areas. They are in charge of settling disputes as well as maintaining peace and order in their communities.

⁷⁵ Igwe, "The Witch," 70.

⁷⁶ Igwe, "The Witch," 70.

Sometimes, depending on the pressure mounted by the youth, the chiefs may yield to an ultimatum and ask the alleged witch to leave his village immediately or face a mob attack and lynching. Other times, the chief may decline to banish the accused witch but rather ask her family to take her to the shrine for her guilt or innocence to be proven.⁷⁷

2.4 Soothsayer (*Baga*)

The *Baga* are people known to possess spiritual powers in the form of eyes that can see what ordinary eyes cannot see. Usually, male children born into a *Baga* family (that is, a family known to have such powers) are subsequently initiated and recognised as having the ability to practice divination. When someone dies, or there is a misfortune, the *Baga* is consulted to determine the cause of death or to determine who is behind the misfortune. The *Baga* uses a number of tools to find out who a witch is. He may use his *bagjaagbee*, the *bugudugu*, or the calabash and cowries. The *Baga*, using his calabash and cowries, calls on the gods and ancestors to come and help him in the divination. While speaking, his eyes are fixed on the calabash. At the end of the divination, he is believed to be able to identify the person responsible for the death, sickness, or misfortune. From there, the chief is informed about the outcome of the divination, and the person identified is subsequently expelled from the community. The accused witch then moves to the witch camp to seek refuge.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Igwe, "The Witch," 71.

⁷⁸ Igwe, "The Witch," 73.

2.5 Community Priest (*Buglini* / *Tindana*)

Another method of determining a witch is by going to a *Buglini*. The *Buglini* are the shrines located near the witch camps. When there is an accusation, the chief may ask both the accuser and the accused to go to the *Bugli* so that the *Tindana* (the shrine priest) will perform a ritual to determine whether the accused person is guilty or innocent of the accusation. Upon their arrival at the camp, the *Tindana* asks both the accuser and the accused to present live fowls to be used by the priest for rituals. The *Tindana* then performs the ritual, slaughtering the chicken and throwing it on the ground. The posture of the dying chicken determines whether the accused is guilty of the allegation or not. If the slaughtered fowl finally lies on its breast, then the accused person is guilty, if it lies back with the wings spread upwards, the accusation is false.⁷⁹ Upon confirmation that the accused is guilty, the traditional specialist performs another ritual to disarm the person from their powers. First of all, he sacrifices an animal to the gods. Then he pours libation, shaves the hair of the witch, and prepares a concoction for her to drink before she is allowed to settle in the camp.⁸⁰ However, more often than not, when the accusations prove false, the community members still maintain that they do not want to live with them anymore. Also, the accused witches themselves usually are afraid to go back. When I asked Laabi why she did not go back after being declared innocent by the dead chicken, she

⁷⁹ Issah Wumbla, "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered: A Study of Witchcraft Accusations in Northern Ghana," Bliss, January 2019, Accessed June 20, 2023, <https://www.iss.nl/en/news/bewitched-bothered-and-bewildered-study-witchcraft-accusation-northern-ghana>.

⁸⁰ Baron Y. Amofo, "Witchcraft and Human Rights in Ghana: Case Study of Witches Villages in Northern Ghana" (September 2010): 35.

recounted that her accusers warned her never to return to the village, so she was afraid that if she went back, she could be killed.

2.6 *The One Who Sees Witches (Jinwara)*

A *Jinwara* is a person who is believed to have “four eyes,” allowing sight beyond what people with ordinary eyes can see. The *Jinwara* performs a special spiritual dance, a *Jina*, to identify witches and wizards. Although *Jinwara* are mostly women called *Jinwaripaga*, there are also males who are addressed as *Jinwaridoo*. When there are recurrent misfortunes like deaths, sicknesses, drought, and other calamities in a community, a *Jinwara* is usually invited to the community to spiritually cleanse the community and expose the cause of such mishaps. During the dance, the *Jinwara* is seen with a white bead on the wrist, holding a walking stick popularly known as *Jinjanbgee*, and a calabash, symbolising their office and power. The *Jina* dance is always performed in an open space. The *Jinwara* sets a fire and dances around and through it. In the course of the dance, they go into a trance and name the witches and wizards who are behind such incidents.⁸¹

2.2 Categories of Informants

2.2.1. *Alleged Witches*

The Alleged Witches are those who have been accused, passed through the process of determination, and are camped. The study settings were two out of the six witch camps in the Northern part of Ghana. There were a total number of 229 alleged witches in the camp in Daani and 30 in the *Kpatiŋa* camp. All camp inhabitants were

⁸¹ Igwe, “The Witch,” 73.

either excommunicated from their communities because of witchcraft accusations or escaped mob attacks and sought refuge in the witch camps. Their individual stories will be narrated as they were told to the researcher. From their stories, the researcher hopes to tease out various beliefs about witchcraft, the reason for and details about individual accusation experiences, how alleged witches ended up living in camps, and their current living conditions in the witch camps.

2.2.2 Accusers

The Accusers are people who believe they have either been bewitched, believe they have had family members bewitched, or know people in the communities who are believed to have been bewitched. The accusers were interviewed to understand the various reasons for accusations and learn about their actions against alleged witches. Two focus group discussions were organized in the two communities with the help of the District Assemblymen where participants freely expressed their beliefs and reasons why they show no mercy on alleged witches.

2.2.3 Religious Persons/leaders

The religious persons are the leaders of the three main religions in the context area, namely Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions. They are significant in this research because of the role religion plays in the lives of the alleged witches, the accused, and the accusers. Additionally, determination of whether a person is a witch or not, is also a religious matter making the role of the religious persons central in the study. The informants in this research are adherents of one of these religions and what their leaders say has a great influence on their worldviews.

2.2.4. *Local Government Authority (LGA)*

Local government authorities are comprised of the District Coordinating Directors or their Representatives, the Social Welfare Officers, and the Assemblymen Or Opinion Leaders. This category of informants is significant to this research because they serve as a link between the people of their communities and the national government. When it comes to decision-making, local government authorities are able to influence whether the laws of the country are enforced in their respective communities.

2.3 Field Work: From Their Own Mouths

Having defined and given the background to the key players in the witchcraft accusation, the researcher will narrate the players' stories as recounted to her. This researcher believes that these narratives will help us better understand what the people of the communities believe about witchcraft and the accusations themselves. Their stories will help us understand the witchcraft accusation process and the experiences of these alleged witches. The following are their stories.

2.3.1 *Accused but not Camped*

My Son Saved Me

This is the story of Mma Ashetu, a 72-year-old woman who was once accused of being a witch and still lives freely. She hails from Gumbihini, a suburb of Tamale, the capital of the Northern region. **Mma Ashetu** narrates her story,

I was once accused of being a witch by my co-wife and her son. They accused me of being responsible for my rival's ill health which got worse by the day. Even though I was completely innocent of the accusation, my rival's son insisted that I must visit the shrine to prove my innocence, claiming that's the only means to vindicate myself of those allegations. Fortunately, on my part, my sons - notably a Pastor Tanko among them - intervened and vehemently opposed the idea of ever going to the shrine. He threatened to take serious action including legal means against my rival and her son if they failed to drop those baseless denunciations.

She yelled, “My daughter, if I had no strong child among my children to fight for me, I believe I would have been sent to the shrine and subsequently become an inmate of a witch camp somewhere.” Mma Sana lamented by saying, “Even though I was not sent away from my people following witchcraft accusation, it affected me psychologically. I could not reason well anymore. I could not give food or any gift to anyone in the community, hmm!”⁸² she sighed. She also said her rival later apologized and confessed that it was the pain of the sickness that made her accuse Mma Sana of witchcraft. Mma Ashetu concluded by saying that her rival is currently sick and has again accused a different woman of being responsible for her sickness.

No One Could Send Me to the Witch Camp!

Mma Azumi, an 85-year-old woman who hails from Yendi, was once accused of using her witchcraft powers to divert people’s fortunes to her children. She narrates her story,

I have five children who all did well in their education and are gainfully employed. One day, my grandson came and told me that the young men in my community accused me of using my witchcraft powers to collect their fortunes for my children to succeed in life. The rumour spread like a bushfire in the community, but no one was bold enough to confront me. No one cast a stone at me or asked me to leave the community. I only realised that most people avoided me. I believe they could not attack me because they were afraid that my sons would take them to court to provide evidence of the allegation.⁸³

2.3.2 *Alleged Witches*

These are the stories of the alleged witches from the *Daani* and *Kpatiṅa* camps. Each of these stories includes details about the perceived power of a witch, the

⁸² Mma Ashetu, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Tamale, June 30, 2023.

⁸³ Laaba Abukari, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Tamale, June 30, Yendi, 2023.

accusation, the determination of a witch, the condition under which the alleged witches are kept, and generally, what constitutes witchcraft in the eyes of the communities.

I ate up my six children!

Bintu, 85, came to live in the camp after she was accused of eating up her six biological children. She narrates,

I had six biological girl children who died one after the other over a period of time. The situation was devastating and terrible for me. I was in serious trauma over the death of my children. My husband's sister, who lived in the same house with us, cooked up a story that I had eaten up my children. I know she did it out of hatred for me, but the community believed her and said I was a witch. I could not explain myself out of this predicament, so I decided to leave my village and go to the witch camp on my own for safety. Since the community had decided against me, there was nothing I could do to prove my innocence. No one trusted me enough to stand for me; after all, my children died one after the other like that. I have lived in this camp for 13 years.⁸⁴

I Used My Witchcraft to Destroy People's Fortunes

Mma Faati, 75, one of the accused, narrated her story,

I was accused of witchcraft by my brother's sons (my nephews). They said I used witchcraft to destroy the fortunes of their mother the reason why their mother's business failed while my business prospered. They even further asserted that because of my witchcraft powers, any business I engaged in succeeded but their mother failed in every business venture. As if that was not enough, my brother came up with the allegation that I turn them into horses and ride them on my night expeditions to hunt human lives. This was the reason why they always woke up in the morning feeling very tired and weak. As a result, I was summoned to the chief's palace for questioning. Upon the chief's instruction, I was sent to a shrine to prove my innocence or otherwise. At the shrine, after all the rituals were performed, I was declared innocent, but the community members said they did not want me to stay with them because if I did, I would be doing that at the peril of my life. I had to move to the camp of my own volition since no family member wanted to house me. I am bound

⁸⁴ Akosua Baako, Interview by Sarah Azeka, *Daani*, 2023.

to spend the rest of my life in this camp because there is no one to defend me. Those who have strong sons and brothers always get defended.⁸⁵

My Neighbors Could not Sleep in the Night because of me

Marthabla, a ninety-year-old from Bincheraya, was accused by a man and his wife, claiming she attacked them in their dreams. As a result, they were not at peace in the night.

This caused the chief of the community to send me to the shrine to prove my innocence or otherwise. At the shrine, the priest performed the required rituals and made me drink some concoctions he prepared for the purpose but contrary to the allegation, I was innocent. My plight was worsened when my brother said he was not ready to accommodate me, hence the community members said they would not have me stay with them anymore, so I was banished. Since I could not stay anywhere without being attacked, I moved to the witch camp for safety. I did not bear any children as of the time of the death of my husband, so I had no one to fight for me like some other women. I know those whose families stood for their defense and they were not banished. There is too much suffering here. I depend on charity which rarely happens so most times, I go without food.⁸⁶

Amofo confirms Marthabla's situation in his list of common beliefs in Ghana. He explains that when one dreams and sees another person attempting to attack or pursue oneself, the sure interpretation is that the pursuer is trying to harm the pursued through witchcraft. Another instance is when the witch is seen giving food or drink to the victim in a dream. That food is considered an evil food that can cause physical illness to the targeted person.⁸⁷

I turned into a Goat

Tani said,

⁸⁵ Mma Faati, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Tamale, June 25, *Daani*, 2023.

⁸⁶ Manjomi Adu, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Tamale, June 30, *Kpatiηa*, 2023

⁸⁷ Amofo, "Witchcraft," 74.

Two boys had an accident on their way back from the city. One of them died but the other survived. Some community members said I turned into a goat and crossed the riders to push them down. I was sent to the witch camp for the priest to perform rituals. After the rituals, I was declared innocent, but the people said they did not want to see me in the village anymore. So I had to remain at the camp knowing that should I dare go back, I could be killed.⁸⁸

She reports that she knew someone who was accused of witchcraft but not banished.

She does not know why that accused woman was not sent to the witch camp.

Transferred my Death to a Young Man

Laagando, an 83-year-old, said she was sick and her brother took her to live with him in another village while he sought treatment for her. While there, a young man died in the community, and she reports, “I was accused of transferring my death to him. I was shocked because I was sick myself and so how could I do such a thing? I tried to prove my innocence, but all my pleas fell flat in the face of my accusers. Thus, I was banished and came to the witch camp to seek shelter and security.”⁸⁹

Witchcraft in Bean Cakes

Seventy-five-year-old **Nlanbon** said,

I went to a funeral with my rivals, but I had to return earlier than them. On my way home I bought some bean cakes for all the children in the house. The children ate the cake, and not long after, they all started vomiting. I was then accused of trying to kill my rival’s children even though none of the children died. I was sent away due to this accusation, though I was very innocent.⁹⁰

I Killed My Beloved Husband

Rukaya, a 53-year-old, said,

⁸⁸ Nyinju Baako, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Tamale, June 25, *Daani*, 2023.

⁸⁹ Laagando Sayibu, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Tamale, June 24, *Daani*, 2023.

⁹⁰ Nlanbon Ogyiri, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Tamale, June 24, *Daani*, 2023.

My husband fell sick and died, and I was accused of killing him. I do not know how I could have killed my own husband, who loved me so much. I know that I became the envy of most women in the community because my husband loved me. My brothers and sisters-in-law were not happy with the loving relationship I had with my husband. I also believe they did not want me to enjoy the property my husband left behind, so they came up with this evil allegation against me.⁹¹

She said that even though she was not the cause of her loving husband's death, she was driven out of the community to the witch camp.

I am a Ghost

Salifu Aduna, 70, one of the males accused of wizardry who agreed to grant an interview, recounted his ordeal after the accusation.

I was accused of causing a series of deaths in my village. Because of that, I was dragged to the outskirts of the village one evening and severely beaten by the community youth. While some people were hitting me with sticks, others threw stones at me until I fainted. When they thought that I was dead, they covered me with leaves and went away, hoping to come back in the morning and bury my dead body. I later became conscious and moved to the next village. Then I continued my journey to this camp on foot. I cannot go back to my village because they believe I am dead, and if they see me today, they would think I am a ghost. I am safer here than being among my own people.⁹²

When asked about his relationship with his accusers, he said they lived very well with each other, so the accusation came as a surprise to him. He reported that he did not know of any persons who had been accused and not banished.

I Became a Victim because of Divorce

Laabi Abukari, a 75-year-old woman from a polygamous marriage, was accused by her half-brother and his son of witchcraft. Their mothers were rivals, but her mother got divorced when she was two years old.

⁹¹ Rukaya Abibu, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Tamale, June 24, *Daani*, 2023.

⁹² Salifu Aduna, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Tamale, June 23, Yilonayili, 2023.

The boy said he saw three women attacking him in his dream and that I was the one he recognized. They reported me to the chief and his elders, who summoned me to answer the allegations. I told them at a meeting that I was innocent but the pressure from my half-brother and his family was too much, so I was referred to the shrine priest to take an oath. After some rituals, I was proven innocent. I was, however, told I could not return to the village because I was a witch. I pleaded with them, but they would not listen. On the contrary, the youth told me there would be dire consequences should I persist in staying at the village. Because of their threats, I left the village and came to the camp for my safety. But I would not have ended up here if I had someone to fight for me. I know some who did not suffer my fate because they had people to fight for them. Coming here has really hurt me and made me miserable.

“All my children dropped out of school because of this,” she lamented.⁹³

The Evil Broom at Daani Determined my Fate.

Abibata, a 70-year-old woman shared her ordeal.

I was accused of using evil power to bewitch my rival’s daughter who could not give birth. I denied the allegation, but no one believed me, so I had to come to the camp to swear. When I finally got to the camp, the Traditional Specialists made me undergo a ritual. He had me sit on a stool in an open space where many people had gathered to witness the event. Then he dipped a broom that is believed to be capable of detecting witchcraft powers into a concoction and coiled it around my neck. The evil broom strangled me so hard to the point of death, that I had to confess that I was guilty before I got relief. All the people threw insults at me. I could not go back to my home anymore. I am confused. I do not know whether I am a witch.⁹⁴

The Position of a Dead Chicken Determined My Fate.

Amina, 67, shared her experience.

I was declared a witch by my daughter-in-law. She claimed I was the cause of her husband’s (my son’s) loss of job. My son had gone through a series of crises, including sickness, which finally led to his job loss. I had to come to the camp to prove my innocence. When I arrived here, I was asked to provide a fowl to undergo a ritual to prove my innocence. During the ritual, I held the fowl and made a declaration that if I was guilty of this allegation, when the fowl is slaughtered and thrown on the ground, let it fall with the face downward. But if I am not guilty it should face upward. The priest then took

⁹³ Laabi Abukari, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Tamale, June 25, *Daani*, 2023.

⁹⁴ Abibata Abu, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Tamale, June 25, *Daani*, 2023.

the fowl, slaughtered it, and threw it on the ground. The half-dead chick struggled on the ground and finally laid with its face downward. I believe my daughter-in-law hatched this lie against me because I was a burden to them, and she wanted to get rid of me to lessen their financial troubles. But I know I don't have any power to kill. I am confused; I do not know who I am anymore.⁹⁵

Amina's predicament is similar to that of the National Geographic report about Saaka, an accused witch who was also declared guilty of witchcraft by the position of a dead chicken at *Daani*.⁹⁶

2.3.3 Accusers

Generally, community members within the research area hold a firm belief in the existence of witches and witchcraft. Interestingly, the accusers of witchcraft hail from the same communities as the accused. A witch, according to those interviewed, is someone who inflicts troubles and misery in the lives of their victims. It was widely alluded that witches cast spells on people and perpetrated all kinds of sicknesses, which ultimately resulted in the death of the victim. According to the accusers, the easiest way to identify a witch is through dreams, they are able to see them either chasing them or causing harm. "Once we see someone in the dream attempting to harm us, we out rightly expose them to avert calamity." Some community members also believe that witches are responsible for famine, unemployment, accidents, and sudden deaths that occur in the community. They also alluded that most witches are very generous, and through their generous giving they distribute illness and misfortunes to unsuspecting victims. Again, if a woman is very bold enough to

⁹⁵ Amina Alhassan, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Tamale, June 30, *Kpatiŋa*, 2023.

⁹⁶ National Geography, "Ghanaian Witches: A Woman Condemned of Witchcraft is Exiled to a Village of Condemned Witches," July 2011, video, 4:04, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woZCA12zdmc>.

challenge men without fear, it is very likely that she is a witch. They also indicated that some men also have witchcraft powers but mostly they use those powers to protect their families and communities, therefore, such powers are seen as “good witchcraft.”⁹⁷

They further speculated that witches often transform themselves into insects such as a housefly, a cockroach, or an ant and “fall into our food” when eaten, the victim dies. Other times, witches turn into cats, dogs, lions, and even flying birds like owls or crows and attack their victims spiritually. The informants also revealed that the witches obtained their magical powers through inheritance while others simply acquired them through acts of begging from neighbours, especially food items, including ingredients like salt and pepper, among others.

They claim that some deliberately search for witchcraft power to buy with money. Women between the ages of 50 and 90 years are largely accused of witchcraft activities in the research area. A common belief held and aptly expressed by respondents is that because women are mostly caregivers among families, they tend to spread witchcraft spirit among their female counterparts through petty food offers, including ingredients such as salt, pepper, and other spices.⁹⁸

The researcher probed further to learn from the accusers how to prove that someone they saw in their dreams was a witch or wizard. They indicated that whenever you have a series of bad dreams and see a particular person, you must report the person to the family head as a suspected witch. “You need to expose the

⁹⁷ Focus Group Discussion, *Kpatiŋa*, 2023.

⁹⁸ Focus Group Discussion, *Daani*, 2023.

witch to save your life!” Hassan yelled from the back. Apparently, Hassan, a native of Tamale, revealed that he was currently suffering from sickness because he failed to expose his stepmother, whom he encountered in his dreams three consecutive times, giving him food.

According to Hassan, he did not want to be the reason for conflict in the family, which is why he ignored those dreams. Three weeks afterwards, he noticed his stomach bloating and swelling in his feet. He decided to consult a diviner to ascertain the cause of his bloated body. The divination revealed that Hassan’s stepmother was behind his predicament. The woman was banished from the family and the community, and Hassan moved from one herbalist to the other, seeking healing. He ended his story by saying, “If I had exposed that evil woman early enough, I would not be in this pain.” When an accusation is made, the alleged witch is usually invited and given a stern warning. When this is done, and bad dreams still occur involving that person, it is clear the person is evil and should be exposed. Community members at this point are informed and incited to mobilise and attack the accused person instantly, resulting in the accused being banished from the community or, in a worst-case scenario, the alleged witch is lynched by their attackers.

In conclusion, the accusers of witchcraft intimated that there are instances in the community where some women have been accused of witchcraft and yet were not brutalised and/or sent to live in witch camps, as in the case of other women. This happens to women who have close family ties with the community's chief or are connected to an influential person. Admittedly, the respondents asserted that the issue of witchcraft accusations is shrouded in ambivalence as poverty seems to play a significant role.

2.3.4 *Reintegrated Accused*

These informants were once accused and sent to live in the camps but have now been reintegrated into their original communities or relocated to new settlements. This category helps us understand the conditions under which the accused witches could be reintegrated into the communities.

Memunatu, an 85-year-old, was the luckiest among the accused witches because she was accepted back to be reintegrated into the community. She lost her husband after a short illness and had to move in with her nephew and his family. After some time, her nephew began behaving in a funny way, but she did not bother to ask why until he accused her of trying to kill his son.

He reported me to the village elders, and I was driven out of the village. I suspected he was fed up with me staying with him and depending on him, so he decided to use a witchcraft accusation to get me out of his life. After fifteen years, my son was able to make some sales from his farm produce to pay my ransom and also put up these two rooms in the *Kpatiŋa* community for me to move in. So, I was released from my servitude. Unfortunately for me, just two years after my release and reintegration into the community, my son died. The community believes I have no power to harm anyone because I drank the concoction prepared by the chief priest to neutralise my powers. I live peacefully with all of them.⁹⁹

If a community decides to reintegrate an ex-witch, she must go through this ritual to neutralise her powers before she is accepted back.

2.3.5 *Religious Persons*

The next part of the analysis will look at the responses of some clergy, Imams, and African traditional religious specialists to some of the questions asked during the interviews. The informants in this category comprised ten pastors, six imams, and four African traditional specialists. This category of informants will help us deduce

⁹⁹ Memunatu, Interview by Sarah Azeka, June 30, *Kpatiŋa*, 2023.

whether beliefs in and accusations of witchcraft could be influenced by people's religious affiliation.

There was also the question of determining who a witch is or how to prove who a witch is. The respondents gave several answers. The pastors and church leaders explained that it is difficult to determine who a witch is and also prove that someone is a witch physically.

However, the Bible says that "by their fruit, you shall know them," said Rev. Dr Isaac Issah Wuni, a minister at Baptist Church in Tamale. The devil cannot manufacture the fruit of the Holy Spirit, he emphasised.¹⁰⁰ therefore, it is by discernment and revelation that one can determine who a witch is and the activities perpetrated by them. Similarly, Rev. Philip Dugan of the Church of Pentecost said that it is difficult to physically prove with evidence that someone is a witch. The only thing that can help Christians identify witches is their activities, attitudes, and behaviour. For example, the way they talk, how they behave, and the strange things happening around the person. "When we pray as Christians, God reveals and affirms our belief through exorcism." Some other times, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, witches testify and confess by their mouth that they have witchcraft and are responsible for some misfortunes in their victim's lives.

The traditional specialist in charge of the *Daani* witch camp maintained that witchcraft cannot be physically substantiated, but one can infer that someone is a witch or wizard through their attitude of wickedness, evil manifestations, attacks, consultation of mediums and shrines, or when a lady fearlessly identifies herself as a witch. He, however, noted that for a witch to be bold enough to announce herself, she

¹⁰⁰ Rev. Dr Isaac Issah Wuni, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Tamale, 2023.

is likely the wife, sister, daughter, or aunt of the chief of the village, or she must have lured all the power brokers into her lair and made them useless so that they will have no moral right to accuse her or say anything should she be the subject of talk in the community.

African Traditional religious specialists use rituals involving fowls to enable them to either confirm or deny someone as a witch. In a similar vein, Imam Mubarak at the *Kpatiṇa* community explained that spiritual things are not physically discerned, so it is through their manifestations that one gets to know them. He, however, admitted that these things cannot be scientifically proven. The traditional specialist in charge of the *Kpatiṇa* camp also admitted that he could not prove that someone was a witch. He said, “I have no means of proving. What I only know is that when someone is accused and brought to this camp, I prepare a concoction for the accused to drink; that concoction (he was not willing to disclose the content) has the potency to neutralise their evil powers before I accept them into this camp.”

The respondents said that women are more likely to be accused of witchcraft than men and the older women are the ones mostly accused. It has thus left many well-meaning women in society wondering as well as fearing in such societies that when they are old, they too may be accused of being witches. The contradictory fact is that powerful, educated, rich, and influential women do not get accused of witchcraft, but the very poor and vulnerable ones do. This makes most people conclude that witchcraft is a function of poverty and misery.

The continued existence of witch camps in some areas of the country is said to be for safety. These camps are safe havens for accused women to run to for security. The central government has been grappling with the menace of witchcraft accusations and the debilitating effect it has on lives. Many innocent women have been lynched

just on suspicion even before they get to the camps to prove their innocence, and yet their killers are walking free. Local government authorities are putting in place structures to help stop the surge of people taking the law into their own hands and meting out heinous punishments on the accused.

The interpretation of Exodus 22:18, Leviticus 20:7, and Deuteronomy 18:10-11 varied among pastors and church leaders. Most of them understood these scriptures in the context of Old and New Testament dispensations. They explained that the Old Testament was governed by The Law, which prescribed physical punishment for certain crimes. Witchcraft and witches were considered forbidden, and anyone practicing them was subject to being killed. However, in the New Testament, Jesus introduced grace and forgiveness as the guiding principles, and physical retribution was no longer acceptable. As Rev Philip Dugan of the Church of Pentecost in *Kpatiŋa* pointed out, "We can no longer practice an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth in this era." He emphasized that God is merciful and allows sinners to repent. Killing humans is not in line with God's will, as humans are being used by demons. If a human is killed, the demon will find another vessel to occupy. Powers and principalities in the spiritual realm are responsible for evil activities, as outlined in Ephesians 6:10.

The New Testament further exhorts that, God desires that everyone should be saved but maintains that even though God loves sinners, he hates sin, and so we should pray for sinners until they repent. On the contrary, some other pastors understand the text to mean that anyone suspected of witchcraft in the church and community should not be allowed to live. They should not be physically eliminated but this can be done spiritually by offering "dangerous prayers" (praying to destroy

powers of darkness) to exorcise the witchcraft spirit so that the person may live. They add that if the person proves difficult, you can pray and kill the witch.

On the question of what they think about witchcraft accusations and excommunicating the accused, the pastors and church leaders were of the view that the accusations of witchcraft and excommunicating them from their communities are barbaric, outmoded, and amount to human rights violations. They, however, say that the existence of the witches camps serves as safe grounds for the protection of those who are accused as witches and forced to leave their communities. They purport witch camps should stay but under state protection.

When asked what the role of the church is in curbing this menace of witchcraft accusations and excommunication of victims, the common response was that it is the responsibility of the church to rise in prayer, provide concerted bible teaching and vocational training for women in income-generating activities, and adapt scripture to the cultures of the people among others. They added that "As ministers of the Gospel, we can only preach, admonish our congregation against witchcraft accusations, promote good church-community relationship, give sound biblical teachings about the issue of witchcraft and witches as Christ would do (love and forgiveness), educate our members on the consequences and dangers of witchcraft accusations, and provide food, clothing, and shelter among others. But we cannot guarantee the safety of those who fall victim to witchcraft accusations and associated brutalities." The Imams and the traditional leaders were of the view that the idea of the witch camps was the best because they were safety grounds for the accused witches.

From their standpoint during the research, all the clergy, Traditional Religious specialists, and imams held the view that witchcraft accusations are unfair, inhumane, and an affront to social justice for all, particularly for poor elderly women. They

believe if governments, non-governmental organizations, and churches team up with Traditional Leaders to strategize for the implementation of sustainable livelihood programs to reduce poverty levels in their communities, the issue of witchcraft accusations will be greatly minimized.

2.3.6 Government Officials

Local Government Authorities (LGA) play a key role in the fight against witchcraft accusations in the Northern Region of Ghana. During the research, it came to light that Local Government Authorities admitted that there was witchcraft, and they strongly believed in the existence of witches and witchcraft activities in their operational areas. They affirmed the existence of some designated witch camps in their jurisdictions, which, according to them, should be protected by the government since the camps offer safety and protection for lots of persons, especially elderly women, most of whom are branded as witches. They indicated that some alleged witches voluntarily moved to the camps to avoid being attacked and lynched by members of the community, while others went there when they were banished from their communities following witchcraft accusations.

According to the LGA, the fight against witchcraft accusations and brutalities meted out to victims remains a nightmare to the District Assemblies. The menace requires a concerted effort by all stakeholders, including the government, traditional authorities, non-governmental organizations, and faith-based organisations. Rampant indiscipline and lawlessness in these communities account for many of the social injustices that vulnerable women, especially the elderly, run into.

The youth in the affected communities are often the key perpetrators of witchcraft accusations and abuses. They are quick to report any elderly woman seen in their dream as a potential threat to their lives and fortunes, in order that the alleged

witch may be exposed and dealt with. The youth take the law into their own hands by accusing their suspects of being witches and claiming that the accused should not live to avert the fulfilment of their destinies. To this point, the youth will harass, attack, and in some instances lynch the accused witch without regard for due process. “As local government authorities, we are mandated to ensure that accused witches are adequately protected and accorded social justice,” said Mr. Iddrisu Ibrahim, the Social Welfare Officer at the Gushegu Municipal Assembly. It is quite a difficult task for the Assemblies alone to handle, so other development partners such as NGOs, Faith-based Organizations, and some traditional authorities have been identified to work toward minimization of the witchcraft accusations and their associated injustices. They do this by community education.

The Social Welfare Officer explained the efforts made by the Municipal Assembly towards stopping the violence against alleged witches. According to him, “Lots of community education and sensitizations have been carried out in almost every community within the affected Districts. The Assemblies have also initiated and supported legislative actions including a bill laid in parliament for passage into law against witchcraft accusations and associated injustice meted out to alleged witches and related witchcraft activities in the country.” However, he noted that it would be difficult to completely stop allegations of witchcraft until we are able to stop envy, jealousy, and hatred among the people.

2.4 Analysis: What the Stories Tell Us

These stories from the different players revealed the various factors that persist concerning beliefs in witchcraft powers, the consequential accusations, and the resultant violence against alleged witches. The following section, highlights the deductions from these stories, namely the social issues in witchcraft accusations, the

beliefs about witchcraft, the reasons for accusations, and how the alleged witches are treated.

2.4.1. The Social Issues in Witchcraft Accusations

Five social issues are significant to the understanding of witchcraft accusations and the treatment of the alleged witches, namely, Gender victimisation, illiteracy, poverty, power distance, and polygamy.

Gender Victimization

The collected data above regarding witchcraft accusations and the subsequent violence meted out to alleged witches, indicates that there are more accused women than men. This can clearly be seen in the number of alleged witches in the witch camps in contrast to the number of wizards. During the interviews, informants from every category attested that more women are accused than men. Some of the reasons the majority of the informants gave for the higher number of alleged witches were that women are naturally jealous of other people's progress so they seek out witchcraft powers to harm their victims out of jealousy and envy.

In the case of witches' male counterparts, informants acknowledged the prevalence of male witches known as wizards, but claimed that the wizards only use their witchcraft powers to protect their families. They also admitted that when a wizard harms somebody it is either because the victim has shown gross disrespect to him or challenged his powers. When this happens, the wizard is not blamed for his actions. The traditional leader of the Daani community reported that he believes more women are accused as witches because they are intrinsically more emotionally expressive than men. He pointed out that most women in their emotional outbursts

issue threats and curses, so in most cases, it is their own words that are used to judge them and declare them witches.

Illiteracy

The issue of high illiteracy rates in Northern Ghana constitutes a significant challenge. As per the findings of the investigation, a majority of the interviewees had never attended school or had dropped out of school during the early stages of education. For instance, all thirty accused witches had no formal education, and the four traditional leaders were uneducated. Furthermore, some members of the two focus groups were school dropouts. The lack of education has resulted in several misconceptions and a limited understanding of natural phenomena. Additionally, it has led to the prevalence of supernatural explanations for their predicaments, contrary to scientific knowledge. This, in turn, hinders critical thinking and accountability for negative actions that result in undesirable outcomes. Notably, all the accused are illiterate, but it is imperative to recognize that accusers can be both literate and illiterate.

Poverty

Another significant discovery deduced from the responses of the informants was the fact that the majority of the people in the North of Ghana live in abject poverty with little opportunity to change their fate... Due to the economic hardships of some families, individuals who become dependent on others for survival are easily labelled as witches and sent to the camps to lessen the financial burden of such families. This is seen in the case of Amina above. Adinkra refers to this as the

“Family Stress Theory and Care Giver Burden.”¹⁰¹ This theory explains that providing care for an elderly person can become a challenge, especially amid financial struggles. This usually breeds tension in the family, sometimes leading to the victimization of the elderly person. Moreover, this poverty-induced desperation causes people to accuse women who lose their husbands in order to get rid of them so that accusers may share in whatever property these late husbands have left behind for their widows. This was the case of Rukaya as narrated above.

Power Distance

The stories of the informants also bring out the issue of power distance in these societies with the prevalence of beliefs and accusations of witchcraft. The researcher deduced that men are the decision-makers in these communities. They are economically independent and leaders in control of their families, clans, and communities. The women, on the other hand, do not have much say when it comes to decision-making. They are mostly dependent on the men for their financial upkeep and are expected to be submissive to men. When Baatido, 95, was asked to say what she thinks should be done to reduce the prevalence of accusations and violence against alleged witches as recounted in her story above, her response, just like her fellow accused witches was, “I have no voice! So, whatever I say will not make any difference.”¹⁰² This clearly shows the place of women in the social structure of these communities, where men occupy leadership positions in society and enjoy certain

¹⁰¹ Adinkrah, *Witchcraft*, 278.

¹⁰² Baatdo, Interview by Sarah Azeka, *Daani*, June 24, 2023.

privileges that women are denied. Adinkra attributes this to sheer prejudice against women which is embedded in patriarchal cultures.¹⁰³

Polygamous Homes

The study revealed that most of the people who are affected by accusations in families and communities are people from polygamous homes. The accusations usually stem from either co-wives, children of rivals, or relatives of rivals. The study also revealed that apart from Christianity which promotes monogamy, adherents of Islam and African Traditional religions are not bound to monogamous marriages. While the teachings of Islam permit a man to marry up to four wives, the African Traditional Religion allows a man to marry as many wives as he wants. Therefore, it is not uncommon for members of such families to accuse each other of witchcraft and evil intentions because of the rivalry that often exists between co-wives and their children. As can be seen among other cases Mma Ashetu, whose rival's children accused her of being responsible for their mother's sickness.

2.4.2 Beliefs in Witchcraft

In this section, the researcher synthesized the stories above to understand what witchcraft is about, the reasons behind witchcraft accusations, and how the alleged witches are treated.

All informants provided similar responses when asked what witches do. These are some of their responses: they cause fear and panic in society; they cast spells on people; they destroy the destinies of people; they cause miscarriages in pregnant

¹⁰³ Adinkrah, *Witchcraft*, 282.

women and barrenness; they cause crop failure, drought, as well as other natural disasters; they cause accidents; they cause the outbreak of diseases and sicknesses; they use magic to kill their victims; they cause disorder in families; they prevent young ladies from getting married; they cause unemployment; and they cause all other unthinkable wickedness to mankind. One pastor remarked that witches fight against God's agenda and the glory of people.

The informants were unanimous in their understanding about the activities of witches. In addition to the accusations listed above, informants reported a common belief that most witch activities take place nocturnally. Informants purport that witches fly at night to travel to their meetings, they drink the blood and feast on the flesh of their victims, they attack their victims in dreams, and they have the ability to transform into other creatures such as dogs, lions, owls, or flies in order to carry out their evil agendas. The researcher found commonalities in the beliefs of the religious leaders? informants. All of them alluded that it is only people with spiritual eyes who are able to identify the nocturnal activities of witches.

It is a pervasive belief that individuals who are known as witches possess the power to inflict harm and spread chaos. This belief has resulted in the social exclusion of those accused of causing harm, particularly when it leads to a person's death. Given the widespread prevalence of these beliefs in small groups, it can be inferred that they are also held by the larger society. In general, witches are considered malevolent and more likely to cause harm than to benefit others, according to popular sentiment.

2.4.3 Reasons for Accusations

The information gathered from the study revealed that the reasons for accusations basically stem from the beliefs the people hold concerning witchcraft. These beliefs are held to such an extent that when accusers perceive any of the signs

of possible witchcraft, they do not hesitate to raise an alarm. From the focus group discussion, the youth of the *Kpataŋa* community established that when someone is reported to have appeared in another's dream a couple of times trying to harm the dreamer, the person is immediately confronted to either reverse whatever evil they have done to harm the dreamer or face the consequences. This is because of the belief that the harmful act is usually carried out in the spiritual realm before it manifests in the physical realm.

According to the Social Welfare Officer at the Gushegu Municipal Assembly, the fight against witchcraft accusations and brutalities meted out to victims remains a nightmare to District Assemblies. He stated the social injustice these vulnerable women suffer in the communities is a result of indiscipline and lawlessness. The youth in the affected communities are often the key perpetrators of witchcraft accusations and abuses. They are quick to report any elderly woman seen in their dream as a potential threat to their lives and fortunes and so believe these women must be exposed and dealt with. Taking the law into their own hands, these youth accuse their suspects of being witches, who they claim should not live to avert the fulfillment of their destinies. In some of the communities, the chiefs have to yield to the demands of the youth for fear they would be attacked by the youth.

To this point, the youth will harass, attack, and in some instances lynch the accused witch without regard for due process. "As local government authorities, we are mandated to ensure that accused witches are adequately protected and accorded social justice," said Mr. Iddrisu Ibrahim, the Social Welfare Officer at the Gushegu Municipal Assembly. It is quite a difficult task for the Assemblies alone to handle, so other development partners such as NGOs, Faith-based Organizations, and some

traditional authorities have been identified to work towards minimization of the witchcraft accusations and their associated injustices.

Traditional religious specialists maintain that women are more likely than men to fall victim to witchcraft accusations in the communities since time immemorial. They argue that women are considered more emotionally jealous and envious of individual successes to the point they are sometimes unable to appreciate other people's fortunes easily. The inability to manage their emotions, jealousies, and envy proposedly causes accused women to react in a manner that suggests that they are not happy about other people's progress in life. These attitudes give them up as suspects of "enemies of progress."¹⁰⁴ Hence they can be labeled and accused as witches when in fact, they are not. Allison Howell alludes to this by stating that the apostle Paul categorized acts of jealousy, envy, and hatred under witchcraft behaviors.¹⁰⁵ In other words, every act that is borne from envy or jealousy leads to hatred, and hatred for another can cause one to harm or kill another person. When I asked the youth during the focus group meeting why they always feel threatened by alleged witches they indicated that witches always destroy the children of their rivals in order to punish the rivals, so once a woman is suspected of witchcraft, they, the youth will kill her before she kills them. To this end, TRSs believe strongly that witchcraft accusations can never be stopped until human life ceases.

¹⁰⁴ Traditional Religious Specialist, Interview by Sarah Azeka, *Daani*, June 24, 2023., *Daani*, 2023.

¹⁰⁵ Alison M. Howell, Ed. Jon P. Kirby "The Afflicted, the Accused, and the Accusers: Applying the Mind of Christ to Witch Accusations and to the Fear of Witchcraft," in *The Witchcraft Mentality Seminars: Applications to Ministry and Development* (Tamale: TICCS, 2004), 29.

2.4.4. *Impact of Allegations on Accused Witches*

Witchcraft accusations and the subsequent violence against alleged witches have severe physical, psychological, as well as emotional effects on the victims.

Physical Impact

From the stories of the alleged witches, it is clear that most of the accused were subjected to dangerous threats and physical violence such as beating, stoning, and even lynching in the worst-case scenarios. When they finally get to the camps, the living conditions are deplorable. The inmates lack the basic needs of life (food, shelter, clothing, healthcare). They continue to suffer some form of physical abuse in the form of being used as cheap labor on people's farms for very little pay. Some of the women also disclosed to me during the interview that those of them who are still strong usually suffer sexual abuse from either the Traditional specialists in charge of the camps or by people from the community.

Moreover, expelling them from their communities and families leads to the loss of property and livelihood. Some of the alleged witches lamented how they lost their properties and the small-scale businesses they ran before their accusation. Apparently, they had to abandon everything and flee to live in the camps. Rukaya's story above indicated how she had to abandon her business when she was excommunicated from her community, and how all her children dropped out of school because of that.

Psychological/ Emotional Impact

In Africa, there is always a reversal of responsibility from parents taking care of their children to adult children taking care of their aged parents in their old age. However, this is not an absolute case in the Northern region of Ghana. Approaching old age in this part of the country is somehow scary for old women, especially, as they

live in constant fear of being accused of witchcraft at any time. When this happens and they are banished to the camp, they suffer loneliness, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.

Life in these camps is also psychologically traumatizing. Alleged witches are declared social outcasts. They experience a loss of human dignity and self-worth. They have no taste/feel of love. They have no hope of a better life. When Nnyinju (from the Daani witch camp) was asked whether she knew someone who loved her, her response was, “What is love? “There is nothing like love”.¹⁰⁶ The world is full of wickedness, hatred, and injustice.” This is the perception, not only conveyed by Nnyinju, most of the alleged witches have about life.

Another significant effect the researcher inferred from interacting with alleged witches was that they have lost their sense of self-worth, dignity, and self-identity. They lived in constant fear of being killed until they got to the camps, unlike the cases of those who were not fortunate enough to escape and reach the witch camps. They are banished for life from their home communities. The only places they can go to seek refuge are the witch camps. As Abibata's story above infers.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, five categories of informants were interviewed. The stories of the informants were highlighted as told from their own mouths. These stories were then analyzed to identify the reasons why there are prevalent witchcraft beliefs and accusations in the research setting. The analysis delves into the intricate dynamics

¹⁰⁶ Nnyinju Baako, Interview by Sarah Azeka, *Daani*, June 24, 2023.

surrounding witchcraft accusations in Northern Ghana, drawing insights from interviews and stories of various stakeholders. It identifies five key social issues contributing to these accusations: gender victimization, illiteracy, poverty, power distance, and polygamy.

Gender victimization emerges as a prominent factor, with women disproportionately accused of witchcraft due to perceived emotional expressions and jealousy. Illiteracy exacerbates misconceptions and reliance on supernatural explanations. Poverty drives accusations, as vulnerable individuals are labeled witches to alleviate financial burdens or gain access to inheritance.

Power distance underscores gender disparities, with men dominating decision-making and women's voices marginalised. Polygamous homes foster rivalries, leading to accusations within families.

Beliefs in witchcraft portray witches as malevolent beings causing harm through spells, accidents, and diseases. Accusations stem from entrenched beliefs and perceived signs of witchcraft, often fuelled by youth seeking to protect their lives and fortunes.

Accused witches face severe physical, psychological, and emotional impacts, including violence, expulsion from communities, loss of livelihood, and social ostracization. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the complexity of the issue and the need for broader societal awareness and intervention to address witchcraft accusations and their harmful consequences.

Chapter 3 — Biblical Perspectives on Witchcraft

In this chapter, I intend to examine what the Bible says about witches and witchcraft and compare it with the Dagomba understanding. This comparison will be made in the light of three aspects: what both perspectives hold about the meaning of witchcraft, the reasons for witchcraft accusations, and how the witches are treated. This will help us unravel the underlying factors that have shaped the accusers' beliefs in the concept of witchcraft and how those eventually result in accusations and subsequent violence against alleged witches. I will also introduce a biblical understanding of the causes of suffering since suffering seems partly the reason why accusation normally happens, particularly when people cannot explain why calamities happen to them.

3.1 Old Testament (OT) Perspectives of Witchcraft

The issue of witchcraft was not new in the OT. Obiwuru Chidera Rex, a Nigerian historian, has noted that the reality of witchcraft was embedded in the belief system of ancient Israel.¹⁰⁷ Chidera explains that witchcraft was used alongside other practices, such as sorcery and magic, to enquire about information from the spiritual world. Merrill F. Unger, an American Theologian and bible commentator, explains that the Hebrew word for “witch” in the King James Version is “*mekashesepah*.” However, in the American Standard Version, the word is rendered as “sorcerer,” and

¹⁰⁷ Obiwuru Chidera Rex, “Witchcraft in Africa: A Bipartite Phenomenon,” *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science: Insights & Transformations* 4, no.1 (2019): 5–16. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338229793>

in the Good News Bible, it is translated as “magic.”¹⁰⁸ Unger further explains that a sorcerer is “one who practices magic by using occult formulas, incantations, and mystic mutterings.”¹⁰⁹ He then argues that “*mekasheshepah*” may just refer to one of a class or a collection of units rather than the strictly feminine connotation of the sorceress.

Other scholars such as Noel D. Osborn and Howard A. Hatton explain “*mekasheshepah*” to mean “one who performs supernatural deeds or discovers hidden knowledge by calling on the power of evil spirits.”¹¹⁰ Osborn and Hatton believe that the modern understanding of the term “witchcraft” covers the activities of witches, sorcerers, and magicians. That is the reason why “*mekasheshepah*” may be rendered correctly as “witch”, sorcery” or “magic.”

The OT dealt with the issue of witchcraft, and it was seen as one of the degrading behaviours that should not be tolerated. Isaac Boateng, a biblical scholar and lecturer in Christian theology and Ethics, comprehensively explains what witchcraft meant in the OT. According to Boateng, “witchcraft” or “divination” was used by the pagan nations to extract information from the spiritual realm. An instance is when the magicians of Egypt saw Moses perform the miracles that God had assigned him to carry out in the presence of the king: The magicians of Pharaoh challenged Moses by performing similar miracles (Exodus 7:11,22: 8:7, 18, 19). The term “divination” was used to describe both Balaam’s activity when he was hired to

¹⁰⁸ Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study of Spiritual Forces at Work Today*, 53608th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1994), 153.

¹⁰⁹ Unger, *Biblical Demonology*, 153.

¹¹⁰ Noel D. Osborn and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Exodus* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1999), 56.

place a curse on Israel (Num. 22:7, 23:23, Josh. 13:22) and that of the witch of Endor when she summoned the spirit of Samuel to speak to Saul (1 Sam. 28).¹¹¹

In his commentary on the OT, J. G. McConville, a professor of Old Testament Theology, indicates that Deuteronomy 18:9-13 is about a list of occult practices the Lord forbade his people Israel from practising. The main idea of the passage is centred on the fact that because the Lord has delivered his people from bondage and is leading them into the promised land, they (God's people/Israel) are expected/called to live a holy and blameless life before the Lord their God and be different from the other nations/unbelievers. A close look at the passage shows that it centers around the gift of the land that Yahweh had promised to give to his people Israel, the land into which Yahweh was leading them. More specifically, Yahweh's instruction to Israel was on how they are expected to conduct themselves when they get into the land. He calls their attention to the current occupants of the land (the Canaanites), both how they lived and related to their deities and how they used all kinds of spiritual means/arts to communicate with their gods. Israel being God's people, a people who serve a holy and righteous God, were expected to live differently when they reached the land (vv. 9-14). Yahweh expected them to relate to him through the offices/ministry of the priests and prophets (vs.1-8; 15-22). He, therefore, warned Israel not to engage in the 'abominable practices' but to live a blameless life before him.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Isaac Boaheng, "A Theological Reflection on Witchcraft from a Ghanaian Christian Perspective," 4, no. 3 (March 2023): 222, <https://noyam.org/wpcontent/uploads/2023/03/EHASS2023435.pdf>.

¹¹² J. G. McConville, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 299–300.

Again, in the Moody Bible Commentary, James Coakley comments that Israel was forbidden from getting involved in these practices because they are detestable to the Lord their God and involvement in them did not demonstrate faith in the Lord and his sovereign power. Those other nations used these different forms of divination/magical practices to determine the will of their gods and to communicate with them reasons why the Lord was going to drive them out of the land. Israel being a people belonging to the One Holy and True God, were not to practice such things that were abominable in the sight of their God.¹¹³

By and large, the thrust of the Deuteronomy 18:19-13 passage is centered on the fact that because the Lord has delivered his people from bondage and is leading them into the promised land they (God's people/Israel) are expected/called upon to live a holy and blameless life before the Lord their God and be different from the other nations/unbelievers. God's gift of land to his people Israel calls for a life of wholehearted devotion and loyalty to God, and practicing these abominable things will be an act of gross disloyalty to the Lord. Just as the bible says, "You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine" (Lev. 20:26). God expects his people to be holy and blameless as he is. From the above scripture, we see that God does not only hate witchcraft/sorcery and all forms of magical powers, but he punishes those who practice them.

In Exodus 22:18, "You shall not suffer a witch to live," God's prescription was that the witches were not allowed to live among God's people, suggesting the

¹¹³ James Coakley, *Moody Bible Commentary*, ed. Michael A. Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 571.

idea of stoning or ex-communication of witches. In Leviticus 20:27, God instructed the Israelites to put to death any man or woman who was a “medium or spiritist.”

From the above scripture, it is clear that the LORD detested witchcraft, along with other practices such as sorcery, divination, the use of spells, magic, and necromancy. The consequence of such practices was always death.

3.2 New Testament (NT) Perspectives of Witchcraft

In the NT, the Greek word for witchcraft is “*pharmakeia*.”¹¹⁴ Boaheng asserts that even though the word “witch” is not recorded in the gospels, it is certain that the gospels does not support the practice of witchcraft. Throughout Jesus’ ministry, he set people free from demonic oppression and possession (Matt. 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 4:19-20,9:37-43). Also, the word ‘bewitch’ appears in Acts 8:9 and 8:11. Simon Magus, the sorcerer, was seen to have the power that he used to bewitch the people. But when Philip preached the Good News, Simon believed. Later, as he (Simon) saw the apostles perform miracles, he sought to buy the power of God that the apostles used to perform miracles so that he could also transmit the same power by the laying on of hands. The apostles knew that Simon’s heart was not right with God, so they rebuked him and commanded him to repent. Boaheng emphasizes that in Ephesus, the practice of witchcraft was very common, and when people who had been engaged in witchcraft received the gospel, they would bring their witchcraft elements and magical books to be burned.¹¹⁵

In the same light, Esther Kibor, lecturer at Scott Theological College explains that when Elymas the magician sought to turn away the proconsul from the faith,

¹¹⁴ Boaheng, “Christian Perspective,” 223.

¹¹⁵ Boaheng, “Christian Perspective,” 223.

Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit looked intently at him and addressed him “You son of the devil” and “enemy of all righteousness” (Acts 8:9-24). In a similar vein, Paul, in addressing the Galatians stated: “O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?” (Gal. 3:1). The verb used here in the original Greek text is ἐβόσκανεν, which is an occult reference meaning to have a blinding effect of the evil eye.¹¹⁶

When the apostles preached the gospel in Ephesus, those who engaged in sorcery received the gospel and brought together all their magical charms to be burned. Richard Gehman emphasizes that sorcerers are among those who are excluded from the holy city, the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21:8 and 22:15. He further states that the practice of divination such as shaking of arrows, consultation of idols, and examination of the liver (Ezekiel 21:21) were all condemned by God.¹¹⁷

In Galatians 5:20, Paul admonishes those who partake in deeds of the flesh, including witchcraft, declaring that they will not inherit the kingdom of God. This passage, along with others, underscores the Old and New Testaments' recognition of the existence of witchcraft, sorcery, and magic, condemning them as abhorrent to God. While the Old Testament prescribed isolation for practitioners of such arts, the New Testament calls for repentance. Jesus' ministry exemplified this, offering forgiveness and redemption to all, including those involved in such practices. As followers of Christ, Christians are tasked with emulating his mission by urging repentance and salvation for those ensnared in such activities, akin to the apostles' teachings. Therefore, Christians are called to engage in spiritual warfare against

¹¹⁶ Esther. J. Kibor, “Witchcraft and Sorcery: A Biblical Perspective with Implications for the Church Ministry,” *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 25, no 2 (2006): 157.

¹¹⁷ Gehman, *Biblical Perspective*, 111.

malevolent forces by donning the full armor of God. Ephesians 6:11-12 elucidates that this battle is not against mere mortals but against spiritual adversaries. It emphasizes that victory in this struggle requires equipping oneself with the spiritual weapons, notably the sword of the spirit, as emphasized in Ephesians 6:17. Thus, the fight against witchcraft is depicted as a spiritual endeavor, underscoring the importance of spiritual readiness and reliance on divine strength.

Moreover, I would argue that the scriptures in the New Testament do not condone the killing or torturing of witches. The term "witch" is not even present in the synoptic gospels, and Jesus Christ himself made no reference to witchcraft in the scriptures, thus no punishment or sanction was prescribed for so-called witches. Even the Apostle Paul only mentioned witchcraft as one of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19, but no description or punishment was prescribed for it.

If the Bible should be interpreted holistically, then how should we treat supposed witches in Ghana in the light of scripture? The stigmatization and confinement of accused witches to witch camps is a violation of the love that God demands his followers to express towards each other. Jesus taught that the greatest commandment is love, which supersedes all other laws in the Scriptures (Mark 12:28-31). Therefore, any belief or practice that inflicts harm on others and deprives them of the love of God goes against the central theme of the Scriptures.

It's time to end the discrimination against accused witches and treat them with love and compassion. Let us not forget that we are all human beings, and as such, we should treat each other with kindness and respect. As followers of God, we have a duty to promote love and kindness towards all, regardless of their supposed beliefs or practices.

3.3 Theology of Suffering

One of the things I have observed during this research is the problem of suffering. From the interviews, I observed that the people in these communities where the accusations are rampant have not been able to accept the idea of suffering as part of human existence. To them, almost every kind of suffering must have been caused by an evil entity. These evil spirits operate through human beings to cause harm to their fellow humans. They are the witches. This is the reason why the accusations continue to persist despite efforts to combat the witchcraft phenomenon.

It is worth noting that suffering is a reality of human existence. It is a fact of life for all of creation, and all creatures experience suffering in one way or another followed by death in the end. Every day we see, hear, or experience hurtful things such as illnesses, accidents, murder, famine, disease outbreaks, and other events of life that are out of our control. When we encounter any of these, the result is pain and suffering. In trying to find solutions to the suffering that people go through in life, many have tried to assign different causative factors to it, and that has brought further forms of suffering to other groups of people. One such case is the plight of the alleged witches of northern Ghana. These people have been accused of using evil powers to cause every kind of misfortune in their families or communities. In this section, I intend to look at the causes of suffering in light of the Bible.

Michael Peterson, a professor of philosophy at Asbury College, relates suffering to evil and evil to sin. According to Peterson, suffering or evil is caused by two factors: moral evil or suffering and natural evil or suffering.¹¹⁸ Alvin Plantinga, an American philosopher, makes the distinction by explaining moral evil as those

¹¹⁸ Michael L. Peterson, *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1989), 11.

activities human beings precipitate through their perverse thoughts and deeds and natural evil as suffering that is independent of human action.¹¹⁹ Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Bundy, in their book “Beyond Suffering: A Christian View on Disability Ministry,” have categorized the causes of suffering/evil into three traditional theodicies.

First, the free-will defense which says that evil is the absence of good. They explain that God has given man the ability to choose between good and evil, and when Man chooses to do evil, he ends up suffering the consequences of his choice.¹²⁰ Allison supports this by highlighting that a person’s choice to engage in a sinful act can bring about suffering or even death. She explains how Achan (Joshua 6:17, 18 and 7:1-26) chose to steal the things that God forbade his people to take resulting in his death.¹²¹

Relating this to Scripture, I would argue that there are many examples of how human choices and actions are portrayed as significant contributors to suffering. Proverbs 13:15 emphasizes the impact of individual decisions, noting that good judgment brings favor while unfaithfulness leads to destruction. This theme is recurrent in biblical stories, where characters face consequences for their actions, illustrating the principle that choices have enduring effects on one's life and the lives of others. Also, in everyday life, there are rules and regulations that govern our human existence. If people choose to disobey such rules they are bound to suffer the consequences. For instance, people who choose to drive carelessly, drink

¹¹⁹ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 30.

¹²⁰ Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Bundy, *Beyond Suffering: A Christian View on Disability Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2011), 94–95.

¹²¹ Howell, “Witchcraft,” 29.

irresponsibly, or engage in illicit behaviors are more likely to bring suffering on themselves, and such should not be related to the attacks of witches.

The second view is the Natural Order Defense, which states that suffering is a outcome of natural events that occur as a result of the fall of man and that God simply allows events to follow their natural course without his interference.¹²² Allison relates this view to human sinfulness in general. She gives the Biblical account of Adam and Eve’s choice to sin against God by disobeying him in Genesis 3:16, and how that disobedience consequently severed their relationship with God and brought suffering upon them and all humanity, as stated in Romans 5:12 “Therefore, just as sin entered the world, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people because all sinned.”¹²³

The separation from God is identified as the third fundamental cause of suffering. Again, Adam’s sin attracted a curse from God not only on humanity but on all creation. The biblical portrayal of a fallen world, marred by sin and corruption, introduces another layer to the causes of suffering. Romans 8:20–21 elucidates the idea that creation itself was subjected to frustration and decay due to sin. This fallen state contributes to the existence of natural disasters, illnesses, and various forms of adversity, amplifying the complexity of human suffering within the broader context of a world in need of redemption.

Lastly, the Greater Good Defence indicates that though God does not like evil, he allows it because, in the end, it brings more good to man than harm. This also leads

¹²² Tada and Bundy, *Beyond Suffering*, 95.

¹²³ Howell, “Witchcraft,” 28.

to bringing glory to himself and drawing man to him.¹²⁴ We can relate this to the sovereignty of God, which is seen in the story of Job. The story demonstrates God's sovereign ability to bring about restoration and blessing. After Job endures the testing of his faith, God restores his fortunes, blessing him with twice as much as he had before (Job 42:10-17). This act of restoration highlights God's authority over both suffering and redemption.

In the context of Job's suffering, the sovereignty of God is portrayed as a central theme that emphasizes God's control over the circumstances surrounding human experiences. It challenges Job, and by extension, readers, to trust in the wisdom and goodness of a sovereign God even when faced with the mystery of suffering. The story of Job serves as a profound exploration of the tension between human suffering and the sovereignty of a God whose ways are beyond human understanding.¹²⁵

3.4 The Bible and the Vulnerable

The Bible provides clear guidance on how we should treat the vulnerable, weak, and poor in society. Throughout its pages, God's heart for the marginalized is evident, calling His people to compassion, justice, and mercy. In this section, I will explore key Scriptures that outline principles for caring for those in need, guiding us in our responsibility to love and serve others.

Jaime L. Waters, an Old Testament Professor at Boston College School of Theology, emphasizes the importance of standing for and with the vulnerable as a fundamental aspect of living out the gospel. She defines the vulnerable as individuals

¹²⁴ Tada and Bundy, *Beyond Suffering*, 95.

¹²⁵ Tada and Bundy, *Beyond Suffering*, 95.

facing financial, physical, emotional, or legal challenges, including orphans, widows, the poor, outcasts, and the physically challenged.¹²⁶

Waters suggests that the Letter of James provides guidance for Christian communities, emphasizing the significance of acts of generosity as expressions of divine intervention in the world. According to James, such acts reflect God's benevolence, highlighting the responsibility of believers to extend care and compassion to others.

Furthermore, Waters highlights James' emphasis on caring for orphans and widows, who are consistently portrayed in scripture as deserving of special attention due to their vulnerable status. She encourages contemporary reflection on who represents these vulnerable groups today and advocates for active engagement and support in their struggles. In addition, Waters draws parallels to the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus critiques religious leaders for prioritizing ritual observance over genuine concern for human welfare. Jesus condemns behaviors that degrade individuals and communities, underscoring the importance of ethical conduct that upholds human dignity and fosters communal harmony.

Additionally, Adrian Henkel, a scholar in hermeneutics and biblical theology, highlights that Israel is entrusted with the duty of providing for those experiencing poverty. They receive explicit instructions not to pass judgment but to allocate a portion of their harvest to feed the impoverished, extend assistance, and advocate on their behalf. This directive stems from Israel's own history as oppressed strangers in the land, prompting them to care for the marginalized: the poor, afflicted, orphaned,

¹²⁶ Jaime L. Waters, "To Live the Gospel, Stand for (and with) the Vulnerable," *America Jesuit Review*, July 15, 2021, 2. <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/07/15/word-lectionary-scripturer-241046>

widowed, and strangers (Deut. 15:7, 11). According to Henkel, the emphasis on remembering the oppressed recurs throughout biblical texts, underscoring the mission of God. Israel's blessings are intended to facilitate the spread of God's mission, inviting others to serve their God through their example. As conduits of divine blessings, Israel embodies the *missio dei*,¹²⁷ ensuring that others may come to know God through their actions. Israel bears the responsibility of preventing destitution among the poor, particularly those without land. They are urged to show generosity and protect the landless by sharing their abundance.¹²⁸

Henkle further argues that in biblical narratives, the "other" represents the marginalized and outcast, unseen and unheard by society but recognized by the God of Israel. God's plan of salvation and restoration challenges social norms, elevating individuals regardless of their social status, gender, or ethnicity, empowering them as agents of God's divine purpose through the Holy Spirit.¹²⁹

In addition to the above, I would argue that Jesus' teaching in Matt. 25:35-40 about his return and final judgment challenges all believers to show compassion and mercy to the poor and needy in society. In this passage, Jesus refers to the righteous as the sheep, and the unrighteous as the goats. The righteous will be rewarded for feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, and visiting the imprisoned. "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited me in; I needed

¹²⁷ *Missio Dei* is a Latin term meaning mission of God or sending of God.

¹²⁸ Christopher Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 176.

¹²⁹ Adrian Henkle, "Advocating for the Poor & Vulnerable," (June 16, 2021): <https://www.nae.org/advocating-poor-biblical-foundation-engagement/>. National Association of Evangelicals, 2.

clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." (Matt. 25:35-40). By this, Jesus equated the various acts of kindness and compassion to the needy and vulnerable as acts done in service to him.

Furthermore, In Proverbs 31:8-9 God calls His people to advocate for justice on behalf of the vulnerable, ensuring fair treatment and defending their rights. "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:8-9).

Similarly, in Acts 20:35, The early Christians modelled a spirit of generosity and sharing, recognizing the blessings that come from giving to those in need. The apostle Paul, in addressing the Ephesian elders, demonstrated that his heart was drawn toward helping the weak in everything he did: "In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work, we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35).

Lastly, in Psalm 82:3-4, God's people are called upon to defend, uphold, and rescue the weak, poor and oppressed: "Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." (Psalm 82:3-4).

All the above Scriptural verses are enough proof that care and kindness toward the poor and vulnerable is a central theme in the Bible, and as believers, we are expected to emulate Jesus's actions toward these groups of people.

3.5 Biblical and Dagomba Perspectives of Witchcraft

In this section, I will examine the similarities and differences that exist between the biblical perspective and the Dagomba notion of witchcraft. This will be examined in relation to what the two perspectives perceive witchcraft to mean, why they label the accused as witches, and how the accused are treated.

3.5.1 *The Meaning of Witchcraft*

Witchcraft, as can be seen in both the biblical and Dagomba viewpoints is believed to be associated with magical practices and the possession of supernatural powers. In the Biblical sense, the word “witches” and “sorcerers” was used interchangeably to mean people who used magical powers to challenge the power of God. Some of their activities of sorcery were associated with divination,¹³⁰ necromancy (1 Samuel 28:7-9), spiritism (2 Kings 23:24), idolatry (Micah 5:12), and harlotry (Nahum 3:4), and Scripture admonishes us that Satan engages all these diviners, witchdoctors, and sorcerers in self-deception.¹³¹

On the other hand, the Dagomba understanding of witchcraft is that it is the use of evil powers to cause harm to people and communities. This notion holds that the activities of witches include eating human flesh and drinking human blood, casting all kinds of illnesses on their victims, flying in the night to hunt for human souls, transforming into animals and insects, and causing all kinds of misfortunes. We can see at this point that the notion of witchcraft, according to the Bible, is not the same as the Dagomba perspective of witchcraft. In the biblical sense, witches use their powers to challenge the power of God, while the Dagomba notion of witches is people who use their powers to kill people, fly at night, drink human blood and eat human flesh. Therefore, the actions mentioned in the bible do not pertain to the alleged witches in Dagbon.

¹³⁰ Richard Gehman, *Africa Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective* (Nairobi: East African Publishers, 1989), 90.

¹³¹ Gehman, *Biblical Perspective*, 112.

3.5.2 *Why They Were Called Witches*

From a cultural perspective, there are a couple of ways the Dagombas determine who a witch is. Firstly, when someone dreams and sees an old woman trying to harm/kill them or giving them food, people feel that a conclusion can be drawn from that, and a warning is issued to the victim in question. If the dream occurs repeatedly, then the person is publicly accused of witchcraft.

Secondly, from the focussed group discussion at *Daani*, it was alleged that when an old woman is extremely generous, she can easily be thought of as a witch who is either generously distributing her witchcraft to gain promotion in the evil coven or exchanging people's destinies with her gifts. If also the woman is extremely prosperous, it is concluded that she has used witchcraft powers to get rich. This was the case of the 75-year-old Mma Faati, who was accused of using her witchcraft powers to charm the fortunes of her rival so that her rival's business did not do well and to make her business prosper. Again, if an old woman is extremely poor, her witchcraft power has impoverished her.

Thirdly, during the focus group meeting with the youth of the *Kpatiŋa* community, one of the methods they claimed they use to know if a woman is a witch is whether the woman speaks her mind freely and challenges men without fear. They conclude that a woman is only bold enough to challenge men if she trusts in the power of her witchcraft. Fourthly, a woman who loses her children to death is accused of eating up her children. This was the case of 85-year-old Akosua at the *Daani* witch camp who lost six of her children and was accused of eating up her own children.

The above reasons for witchcraft accusations from the cultural perspective are completely different from the reasons that were used to identify witches or sorcerers in the Bible. Contrary to the cultural perspective of witchcraft, the Bible portrays

witches or sorcerers as people who consult spirits and engage in divination, idolatry, harlotry, and necromancing as enumerated above. They also serve as mediums between the physical and the spiritual worlds. They were mostly engaged in using magical powers to challenge the power of God.

3.5.3 How They Were Treated

Although the Bible prescribes the death penalty for witches, as Exodus 22:18 states, and Leviticus 20:27 commands that mediums, diviners, and sorcerers be stoned to death with their blood on their own heads, it is important to note that this is a religious perspective. Similarly, in some cultural contexts, such as in the north of Ghana, individuals accused of witchcraft may face banishment, beatings, or even stoning to death. However, it is important to recognize that these two perspectives are dealing with completely different groups of people.

In the New Testament, throughout Jesus' ministry, there was no instance he commanded sorcerers and witches to be killed. Jesus simply healed those who were afflicted with various illnesses, cast out demons, and set people free. When Jesus handed over the ministry to the apostles and went back to heaven, there were a few instances where the issue of sorcery surfaced, and in those instances, the practitioners were rebuked by the apostles and asked to repent for salvation. They repented and brought out their scrolls and magical elements to be burnt.

Similarly, both perspectives condemn the practice of witchcraft. The Bible unequivocally condemns sorcery and all magical practices as a rebellion against God and his divine commandment. In the Old Testament, particularly in Deut. 18:9-13, God classified it as one of those practices that was detestable to him. For this reason, witches were not supposed to live among the community of God's people as one can see in the command in Exodus 22:18. This conception was the motivation behind the

persecution of witches in the Middle Ages as well as the famous Salem witch hunts. This could also be the motivation behind the excommunication and violence against alleged witches in northern Ghana.

However, although witchcraft is condemned culturally to some extent, the people in these communities where the accusation and violence against alleged witches are prevalent equally hold to the notion that there is “good witchcraft.” For example, at the focus group meeting, the informants revealed that the reason why there are higher numbers of females in the witch camps than their male counterparts is that women use their malevolent powers to cause harm to their victims while, in most cases, men are believed to use the same powers to protect their families and communities.

Two other striking differences between the two perspectives arise in the power of witches and their determination. The methods of determination of a witch significantly differ in the two perspectives. The cultural concept of identifying a witch through dreams and rituals like “the evil broom at *Daani*” and the “position of a dead chick” has no parallel in the Bible.

I would argue that even though the OT prescribed banishment or death for this group of people, there is no instance in Scripture where a witch was stoned to death to which we can refer. Secondly, the group of people considered to be witches in the Bible is not the same group understood to be witches in the north of Ghana.

Therefore, the bible does not address witchcraft as understood in Northern Ghana. However, the bible has a lot to say about caring for the poor, widows, and the elderly.

As we can see from the above, the majority of those accused of witchcraft in the communities of the northern part of Ghana are old women who are either widows, childless, or very poor. These people are vulnerable and do not have anyone to fight

for them, so the only way they could escape the wrath of the community members is to seek refuge at the witch camps. We can also see from the research that accused witches who had people to fight for their rights disproportionately did not end up in the camps. This is an injustice.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at what witchcraft means according to Scripture. It also examined both the Biblical and Dagomba perspectives on witchcraft, the similarities and differences between both perspectives in the light of the meaning of witchcraft, the reasons they are labeled as witches, and how they are treated. Some key passages of Scripture were also expounded to clarify the stance of Scripture on the subject, and then, the prescriptive texts in the NT were also looked at, to serve as a guide to handling issues of witchcraft accusations in contemporary times. We could see from the chapter that although both the Biblical and Dagomba perspective are against the practice of witchcraft, the notions they about who a witch is are completely different. Secondly, How witches are treated in both perspectives is not the same. There is no record of witches being stoned to death in the Bible, even though Exodus 22:18 alludes to that, though in a different understanding of what witchcraft is, but in the case of Northern Ghana, accused witches are either stoned, beaten, lynched or outcasted from their families and communities.

Chapter 4 — Some Interventions to Combat Witchcraft in Northern Ghana

In this Chapter, I will present some activities undertaken by some churches, parachurch organizations and civil society organizations to alleviate the suffering of the alleged witches and combat witchcraft beliefs and accusations. Below are some of the organizations that work on the issues.

4.1 Churches

The churches that have been actively involved in offering support to the alleged witches in some of the camps are listed below.

Presbyterian Outreach in Ghana

The Presbyterian Church in Ghana has been involved in providing various interventions and reaching out to the alleged women in the camps. Through the Presbyterian Disaster and Relief Agency, farmers in the *Daani* community are supported with farming resources under an agreement that they will donate a certain percentage of their harvest to the alleged witches. Furthermore, the Presbyterian church's "Gambaga Go Home Project," which was introduced in 1993 and is led by Simon Ngota and Gladys Lariba, has made various efforts to reintegrate the alleged witches into their communities and offered counseling to the alleged witches among other things.¹³² Despite these efforts, more women flee to the camps regularly, and the killings of accused witches have not stopped, either.

¹³² Ruth Brown, "A Letter from Ruth Brown: Serving in Ghana," Presbyterian Outreach in Ghana, July 2019. Accessed June 15, 2023. <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/missionconnections/letter/presbyterian-outreach-in-ghana/>.

Catholic Church

According to Felix Riedel, an Anthropologist, who wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on the Maltreatment of Witch-Hunt Victims in Northern Ghana, the Catholic Relief Service, a Christian non-governmental organization (NGO) supported the witch camps by providing foodstuffs and clothing to the accused witches in the camps from time to time. The Catholic Church also provided a borehole to the Gushegu witch camp to enable them to have access to portable drinking water. However, since 2005, the Catholic Relief Services stopped the donation of food and clothing because the project folded up and they were no longer financially capable to continuing the support. Consequently, the situation at the camp has been bad. Other NGOs such as Action Aid, Witch-hunt Victims Empowerment Project (WHVEP), the GO-Home-Project, and Songtaaba, among others, have also donated items to the camps from time to time, but these donations have been sporadic and unreliable.¹³³

Church of Christ

In 2016, the Church of Christ, in collaboration with Ghana West Africa Missions, partnered with Ghana Health to conduct two-day mobile medical screenings of the alleged witches, and various medications were administered to them. Through this intervention, Christ was made known to many of them and some of them gave their lives to Christ.¹³⁴

¹³³ Felix Riedel, *Closure, Fraud and Trauma: The Maltreatment of Witch-Hunt Victims in Northern Ghana*, (2017). Accessed June 20, https://www.whrin.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Report_Government_Ghana_Witch-hunts.pdf

¹³⁴ Ghana West Africa Missions, “*Daani* Witch Camp.” (2016). Accessed May 29 <https://www.gwam.org/singlepost/2016/07/27/ Daani-witch-camp>

4.2. Non-Governmental Organizations

Some of the NGOs that have supported the witches in the camps over the years are listed below. Although some have withdrawn their support for various reasons including lack of funds, they are still worth mentioning.

World Vision (WV)

World Vision, a Christian Non-Governmental Organisation in Ghana also extended its support to the *Kpatiŋa* witch camp through some interventions. This intervention of World Vision however was towards alleviating the fate of the alleged witches in the camp, but not to address the beliefs. In an interview with a former Programs Officer of the Gushegu Area Development Programme (ADP) of World Vision,¹³⁵ Mr. Joseph Elijah Abdulai recounted the various forms of support the Organisation gave to the *Kpatiŋa* witch camp. According to him, WV first of all decided to restore their human dignity by providing them with decent accommodations. A number of huts were built and some bedding and cooking utensils were provided to these women to start their new lives of seclusion and solitude. They were housed there free of charge, keeping them safe from an irate community that sought to harm them because of the witchcraft allegations.

In addition, a borehole was drilled to ease the women's' burden of scouting for water. It was important for them to have their source of water because they were far from town and not even allowed to return to the community. A borehole was drilled right at the entrance of the camp for the women to draw water. This was a huge relief to them because they were old ladies who could not go to far distances to find water. Having the water at their doorstep was an answered prayer for them.

¹³⁵ Joseph Elijah Abdulai, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Netherlands, October 22, 2023.

A grinding machine (mill) was also provided for them, and a number of the women were trained to operate it. This grinding machine was meant to generate income to supplement their little resources, making their lives a bit more comfortable in the secluded camp, and milling their maize and other food items.

They were also provided a building where they processed shea butter for sale and consumption. They milled nuts, extracted the oil for sale, and used parts of it for consumption.

Periodically, WV also provided some food supplies to help them. Healthcare was also provided by health professionals who were sent periodically to check the health status of the inmates and give them medications.

World Vision, through its gift-in-kind program, used to give clothing, bedding, cups, bowls, and other household materials whenever it received them. The organization subsequently cared for the camp.

However, according to Joseph, at some point, WV support ceased because the particular project that gave funding for the support of the witch camps phased out and there was no longer funding for it. So the women became very vulnerable again. The camp was now left at the mercy of the weather and the poor old ladies started feeling the pain of lacking the basic needs of life. “They are now on their own,” he said.¹³⁶ Now, most of the women survive by hiring themselves up for back-breaking labor for peanuts. They fend for themselves and take care of everything they previously used to get from WV. Once in a blue moon, some organization might hear of their plight and come to their aid. But as of now, they need serious support to be able to subsist and

¹³⁶ Joseph Elijah Abdulai, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Netherlands, October 22, 2023.

live somewhat meaningful lives. They deserve the support of all well-meaning people who can stand with them in their difficulties.

Project Share Ghana

Another organisation that significantly contributed to the welfare of the alleged witches in the *Kpatiŋa* camp and Gushegu is Project Share Ghana (PSGhana). According to the founders and first directors of PSGhana, Dr Rahman Yakubu and Nelleke Yakubu, PSGhana, in collaboration with the Good News Bible Church, provided pastoral care for the *Kpatiŋa* camp by holding weekly church services for the women in the camp as well as providing counselling for them. Regular health checks and basic medical care were also provided by the health department of PSGhana between 2006-2017.¹³⁷

At the Gushegu camp, similar services were provided in collaboration with the Roman Catholic church. A notable activity in this regard was the annual supply of mosquito nets during the rainy season to help with malaria prevention. Additionally, the Project played an advocacy role in helping register the alleged witches with the Government health insurance scheme. This support.

Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC)

Following the lynching of a 90-year-old woman in July 2020, the GPCC, a Non - governmental organization run by the Church of Pentecost and Charismatic churches in Ghana, condemned the gruesome murder of the woman and others who have fallen victim to such violence in the past. They further appealed to the government to enact laws against witch identification and witch hunts. They also

¹³⁷ Nelleke Yakubu, Interview by Sarah Azeka, Netherlands, October 12, 2023.

called on the government to protect and provide for the needs of those vulnerable women who were accused and exiled to the witch camps. Furthermore, they called for the closure of the witch camps. However, some factions within the GPCC held a contrary view about the advocacy for closing the camps. They argued that the camps rather served as places of safety for the accused witches, without which they were prone to more danger of being attacked and killed.¹³⁸

The Sanneh Institute

The Sanneh Institute is one of the leading organizations that has made tremendous efforts in advocating for the closure of the witch camps. It is led by John Azumah, a scholar of religion who has been involved in the Coalition Against Witchcraft Accusations (CAWA), which campaigned for the passage of the law to criminalize witchcraft accusations and the abolition of the witch camps. Azumah's passion to see this vision come to reality was inflamed by both a 90-year-old woman's lynching in 2020 after a witchcraft accusation and his own cousin's excommunication to a witch camp. He also discovered the cruelty inflicted on the women when they are accused, the exploitation of these alleged witches for cheap labor on people's farms, and the suffering they through from hunger and lack of care. On July 27, the bill that was proposed by the Sanneh Institute to criminalize witchcraft accusations and the abolition of the witch camps received unanimous support in Ghana's Parliament.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Daniel Saliman and Griffin Paul Jackson, "Ghana Pentecostals Come to the Defence of Accused Witches," *Christianity Today*, November 23, 2020. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/december/ghana-pentecostals-come-to-defense-of-accused-witches.html>

¹³⁹ Katherine Marshall, "Combating Accusations of Witches in Ghana," *Berkley Center*, August 22, 2023, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/combating-accusations-of-witches-in-ghana>

However, the president of Ghana declined to sign the bill into law arguing that it did not follow the constitutional process of the country. He, however, promised to reintroduce the bill in due course.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Isaac Kaledzi, “ Why Ghana’s President Refuses to Sign Laws on Witchcraft, Death Penalty and Suicide,” *Africa Feeds* (Accra), December 5, 2023, <https://africafeeds.com/2023/12/05/why-ghanas-president-refuses-to-sign-laws-on-witchcraft-death-penalty-and-suicide/>

Chapter 5 — Conclusion and Recommendations

In this chapter, I intend to draw a conclusion and make recommendations to relevant stakeholders to rise and fight for justice for these vulnerable and marginalized women in the communities where the outmoded practice of branding people as witches, lynching and ostracizing them away from their families and loved ones to suffer in the witch camps is ongoing. These recommendations are not necessarily drawn from my findings but are things that I perceived to be lacking in the fight against witchcraft accusations treating of so-called witches. In what follows, I will summarise my findings and offer my recommendation as a contribution to helping solve the problem.

5.1. Conclusion

Witchcraft accusation is found in most cultures of the world. In some cultures, there has been a reduction because of the level of enlightenment and education that has swept across such cultures. The accusations have led to the needless loss of some innocent lives because from my interview with all the Pastors and Imams about how to prove that someone is a witch, they all asserted that there is no physical proof, it is only in the spirit or by discernment witchcraft can be proven. Accusations have therefore been used as a tool of oppression in some cultures, especially against the vulnerable, weak, voiceless, and the marginalized. It has created a social system where some people are seen to hold the privilege of being the implementers of customary and cultural laws to the disadvantage of the larger vulnerable majority.

The following findings and conclusions have thus been drawn from this study and are worth highlighting for the attention of the church, policymakers, and society at large. In the first place, this study has found out that, there is widespread

knowledge of witchcraft in the communities where the interviews were conducted.

The issue is so serious that even the word *witch* puts to flight anyone, including children. If anyone is ever said to be a witch, there is a complete disregard and fear of that person. These persons are secluded and lonely despite living among their own people. In the two communities surveyed, the thought of the presence of witchcraft is enough to push people to fortify themselves against the witches.

In addition, this study also showed the belief in the practice of witchcraft. The harm it causes in society sometimes has a devastating effect on families and the community at large. According to the research, former cordial relationships have been damaged beyond repair. We can see this in Chapter 3, where some of the accused witches recounted how they had been in good relationships with their accusers in the past.

It is also believed that men are vested with the power to help curb the incidence of witchcraft. This has been falsely corroborated to some extent, especially among the Dagombas, where only male priests have the power to cure and exorcise witchcraft. The role of the *Jinwaripaga* (fetish priestess) normally is to identify witches, who are subsequently sent to the witch camps to be cured.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the treatment of alleged witches is punitive, not vindictive, and skewed sometimes in favor of those who have people to fight for them. As long as someone is accused of witchcraft, a dead chicken's position has to be the determinant of the fate of the person. When they are proven guilty, they are normally given just one option, or in some cases two, which are even more deadly: Either be banished or stay and be killed. In such cases, the women so accused will choose to leave the community and find a safe haven in the witch camps. They

are treated as murderers who should not be allowed to stay with the larger community, even if they are not found guilty.

Another sad finding is that most of the women accused of witchcraft have had some unpleasant situations, issues of malice, envy, jealousy, and hatred placed on them by their accusers. To get even with such women, they are often accused of witchcraft, a label the whole community will fight to their last strength. Witchcraft is seen as a very wicked thing, and so people fight against it with all their strength. Some of the women surveyed spoke about being envied, either because they were doing better in business than their rivals, or their children were bright in school and received a lot of favors, or they were doing better in life than their accusers, and they were in the limelight. Those who envied them sought to bring them down by accusing them of possessing and using witchcraft powers to obtain their favorable circumstances.

This study also discovered that most of the people accused of witchcraft were women from the 60-and-above age bracket. The women who were surveyed fell within this age bracket. Some of the accused were as old as 95 years with only one in the 50-59 age brackets. These women are very old and weak, without strength or any sort of resources to take care of themselves. In many cases, they may be dependent on people for their daily bread and sustenance, which is another reason they may have been accused of witchcraft. This is the fate of most women who are vulnerable and without any form of education. There are women in these same age brackets who have not been accused of witchcraft because they are self-sufficient or have children who have the resources to take care of them.

It is worth noting again that there have been needless deaths caused by these witchcraft accusations of innocent women and some men. A case in point was the

death of Akua Denteh in the Savannah region of Ghana in 2020, who was seen being flogged publicly till she died. This violation of her human dignity was not only approved by society but also received an endorsement from the chief and community leaders. It's unknown if justice has since been served on the perpetrators of her murder. The emotional trauma her children experienced can never be forgotten, and this is likely to create enmity between the killers and her family. The silence of the godly in the society where there is so much injustice leaves much to be desired. The Bible notes that Christians are the light of the world, but the light seems not to have any impact. At best, it appears to be gradually losing its impact and relevance in society.

Finally, those who sit in judgment over alleged witches are mostly men. There have been instances of accusations of wizards, but there has been very little information on banishing these wizards from the community, perhaps for fear of their perceived power. The next section will look at some recommendations to help stem the tide of these accusations.

5.2 Some Recommendations

This study has identified some issues that are very critical for redress. If these recommendations are fully implemented, I believe the beliefs, accusations, and violence against these vulnerable groups of people will be alleviated or even come to an end. My recommendations will, therefore, be to the church (Christians), the government of Ghana, and all other stakeholders and individuals To join the fight for justice to restore the dignity, identity, and self-worth of the thousands of old women who live as social outcasts in the witch camps in abject poverty and suffering.

5.2.1. To the Church

In Matthew 5:14, Jesus likened his followers to light in the world. He, therefore, commanded that they should let their light shine before others so that they will see their good works and give glory to God who is in heaven. It is obvious that the works of sin and darkness have engulfed the minds of people in the communities where this witchcraft menace is predominant. They are helplessly in bondage and in need of help. I, therefore, recommended that the church of Jesus Christ should arise and shine light into these dark communities, both for the liberation of the oppressed and for the glory of God. This can be done in the following ways.

Teaching

The church needs to use the word of God to teach their congregations to believe in the authority of Jesus over the works of the evil one (Satan). Also, through teaching, the church should be able to dismiss the fear of witchcraft attacks for church members first and then for unbelieving communities using the assurance that Jesus has the power to save them from the power of witchcraft. The fear of witchcraft has so much engulfed the minds of most people that they are scared of living decent lives for the fear that the witches in the families and the communities will terminate their lives out of envy. Growing up in my community, people were afraid to build decent houses in the village because it was believed that anyone who attempted to put up a decent house died before completing the building because of witchcraft attacks. Most youth who succeeded in their education or business had to relocate to urban cities to avoid being bewitched. This kind of fear relegates people to living in deplorable conditions when, in fact, they can afford to live more decent lives. When the church succeeds in dismissing the fear of witchcraft powers, it can serve as a powerful

evangelistic tool for the church in the unbelieving communities. As the church members live without fear of witches and interact with their unbelieving neighbours, those who dread the attacks of witches and want to be free from those evil attacks may run to the church for safety, possibly leading to their salvation and liberation.

Community Education

Secondly, the church should engage in community education to let people know that not all bad things and sufferings are caused by witches. Other factors, such as individual irresponsibility, bad habits, sin, and God's sovereign will, could cause suffering, not witchcraft.

Love and Forgiveness

The church should teach, preach, and demonstrate acts of love and forgiveness both in and outside of the church as one of the ways of communicating the gospel to the unbelieving community. The gospel of Luke presents Christ's ministry as one to the vulnerable and the outcast. In fact, Luke calls him "a friend to outcasts and sinners."¹⁴¹ This is because Jesus cared about all people, and he died and rose for all people, both Jews and Gentiles alike. He is the compassionate Savior who came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), and his forgiveness extends to all sinners and the outcasts. This is a perfect model that the Church of God should adopt by emulating Jesus' example in preaching forgiveness for all people and love for the outcasts.

¹⁴¹ Kathy McReynolds, "The Gospel of Luke: A Framework For A Theology of Disability," n 13 no. 1 (2016), 169–178.

Giving

Giving is a key theme in the Bible, and Christians are encouraged to give to the poor and needy, especially widows and orphans (James 1:27). According to the words of Jesus in Matt. 25:35–40, those who will inherit the kingdom of God are those who feed the hungry, give water to those who are thirsty, visit the sick, and clothe the naked. There is no doubt that the alleged witches abandoned in the camps fall in the category of people Jesus was talking about. I, therefore appeal to all Christians to join the few churches who have already taken the initiative in obeying the command of Jesus: Provide food, water, clothing, and healthcare to these marginalized individuals who are also the image bearers of the God we serve. As part of showing love to them, I recommend that Christians should be intentional in visiting and interacting with the alleged witches. If this is done continuously, I believe the alleged witches will feel loved; and through that, we can talk to them about the love of God for them and let them know that although they have been rejected by man God has not rejected them. This, in the end, will lead to their salvation and liberation from their bondage.

Dialogue

Dialogue is an effective tool that the clergy and the leaders of the church can use to engage with all the chiefs and traditional leaders, opinion leaders in the communities, government officials, and all other stakeholders to find lasting solutions to the problem of witchcraft beliefs, accusations, and banishing of alleged witches. The church's leadership should, first of all, build good interpersonal relationships with the chiefs and traditional and opinion leaders in the communities; they should encourage church members to do the same with non-Christian members in their

communities. This conscious effort will create a platform for interaction, where Christians can discuss the negative effects of the witchcraft phenomenon. Churches can also organise seminars and workshops for various community target groups to educate them on this subject.

Counselling and Pastoral Care

The pastors and leaders of churches should take up the responsibility of visiting the witch camps and offering counselling services to the alleged witches. Listening to and interacting with them gives them a sense of self-worth and dignity. Besides, almost all the alleged witches in the camps have gone through traumatic experiences that have affected their psychological, emotional, and mental well-being. The majority of them have lost their true identity and self-worth. “I do not know who I am anymore, I am confused.” These were the words of 67-year-old Amina in the Kpatiŋa camp. Similarly, the 70-year-old Abibata at Daani witch camp recounted her ordeal ended by saying, “The evil broom strangled me so hard to the point of death that I had to confess that I was guilty before I got relief. All the people threw insults at me. I could not go back to my home anymore. I am confused. I do not know whether I am a witch.” The fact that these women revealed that they are confused about their true identity is an indication of the psychological and emotional trauma that they have experienced and continue to experience. Counselling services are therefore needed from pastors as well as psychologists to help these stigmatised outcasts heal and rediscover their identity, self-worth, and dignity.

5.2.2. To the Government

In support of the position of the Sanneh Institute, I entreat the President of Ghana to sign the bill regulating or banning the practice and accusations of witchcraft.

It is worth noting that the parliament of Ghana supported an act presented to Parliament by CAWA, which advocates for criminalising witchcraft accusations and the abolition of the witch camps (the anti-witchcraft bill). The Speaker of Ghana's Parliament, Speaker Alban Bagbin, announced that the Criminal Offences Amendment Bill 2022 had been read for the third time and passed, explained that it had amended the Criminal Offences Act 1960, Act 29, "to prohibit the practice by any person as a witch doctor or a witchfinder, to proscribe the declaration, accusation, naming or labelling of another person as a witch and for related matters."¹⁴² In an interview with JoyNews on the passing of the bill, one of the sponsors of the bill, a Member of Parliament (MP) for Wa East, Dr Godfred Seidu Jassaw, said that he expects the president to sign the bill into law immediately. In addition, the MP for Madina and co-sponsor of the bill, Francis Xavier Sosu, said that following the passage of the bill, witch camps across the country will be disbanded. Unfortunately, the President of Ghana has thus far refused to sign the bill. It must be noted that the passing of the bill is in the right direction as long as stringent measures are implemented to enforce the ban on the accusation of alleged witches. Perhaps by-partisan pressure should be mounted on the president to compel him to sign the bill. The problem this ban would likely face is that most accusations may be secretive or go unnoticed rather than being done in the public space, as is traditionally the case. It, therefore, behoves the legislature to put monitoring mechanisms in the communities to help make this law a reality.

Open Discussions/ Public Education

¹⁴² MyJoyOnline.com Thursday, July 27 2023.

Another recommendation is that there should be open discussion and public education by the government, Human Rights Commission, the security forces, NGOs, and all other well-meaning Ghanaians to help communicate the pertinent issues. If these perspectives are understood and accepted, the needed change will occur. Pastors, imams, and leaders of traditional religious practice should use their pulpits and areas of worship and influence to speak to their followers about this. They should be open to accepting divergent views and help address lingering doubts.

Curriculum

Another important recommendation is for the Ghana Education Service to design a curriculum that will help address this issue. This can be taught as part of civic education to give first-hand information to the children they are responsible for. Knowledge of this kind can affect all the facets of society because, when they grasp what they are taught well, they will become ambassadors for the future.

Law Enforcement

Finally, law enforcement agencies should collaborate with community leaders, youth groups, local NGOs, Community Organizations, and all stakeholders to ensure that everyone is given the basic information they need to know about the new law on witchcraft (once finally enacted) and the devastating effects of wrongful accusations.

However, this research study was not able to establish any cure for witchcraft apart from the role of the priests and supernatural powers exercised by some pastors. Due to limited time and resources, it was also impossible to cover a wide range of areas in the country or even the entire region. In most of the communities visited, the researcher had to carry some food items, other provisions, and clothing for the inmates to assuage their pain. Hopefully, if the law is finally passed, it will enable these women to be reintegrated into their former communities. Therefore, any further

study into the incidence of witchcraft accusations and treatment could look at the implications of the passing of the bill into law and the relief it would likely bring to those who have been affected. If possible, the central government should compensate those who have suffered some injustices in its bid to show goodwill, faith, and restoration.

5.2.3. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Over the years, several NGOs in Ghana have engaged in various social interventions to ensure human well-being and social welfare. There is, therefore, a critical need for NGOs to come to the aid of these vulnerable groups whose lives have been reduced to subhuman because of witchcraft allegations. I now list some suggested approaches that could be used to break the cycle of witchcraft beliefs, incessant witchcraft accusations, and inhumane treatment of accused witches.

Creating Awareness

This can be done by conducting awareness campaigns and community education to dismiss the myths surrounding witchcraft. Education is a key tool for changing attitudes. They could also organise seminars and workshops for the various categories of people in the communities, such as Traditional leaders, men, women, and the youth, to enlighten the harmful beliefs and practices in the communities.

Providing Legal Aid

NGOs should be able to fight for justice for the accused witches by encouraging and providing assistance to individuals who are falsely accused to take legal action against their accusers. This will ensure that people's rights are protected in the communities.

Capacity Building

Given that a significant number of the alleged witches are old women, NGOs should be able to design programs that will empower them economically and socially. They can engage in income-generating activities such as body lotion and soap making, beading, sewing, and rearing of animals to make them relevant and independent. Women groups like Women's Aglow, World Woman Banking (which helps advance interest-free or low-interest credit to women), The Ark Foundation, the Women's wing of the Christian Council of Ghana, and other organizations should add their voices to curb these witchcraft accusations. They should also design training programs that are suited to women of all ages to help them with self-financing.

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