

RELIGION AND HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN AT THE  
GAMBAGA WITCH CAMP IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF GHANA.

BY

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**DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work towards the Master of Philosophy in Religious Studies and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by another person nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of the university, except where the due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the Almighty God who gave me everything I have and my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Kumi Bekoe. I also dedicate this work to my siblings Emmanuel, Jemimah, and Frank.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I am grateful to God for His wisdom, strength, favor, protection, love and mercy that has encapsulated me unto completing this work successfully.

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I am indebted to Mr. Seidu Saibu, a teacher in Nareligu who served meticulously as our interpreter in our interactions with the indigenes, inmates and the members of the Gambaga traditional council. His in-depth interpretation of their language and analysis of field findings has made it easier to complete this write-up.

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## **ABSTRACT**

It is not an uncommon feature to see that women and children in different places of our world being subjected to all forms of abuses. Usually, their male counterparts do not face the same kind or level of abuses. One common area where such abuses are clearly seen is in the performance of cultural practices and customs. Apparently, belief in the existence and activities of witches is prevalent among Africans and this belief is usually accompanied with various accusations, physical abuses as well as emotional tortures. These abuses and maltreatments have human rights implications that is looked at critically. Many women who are unable to bear these accusations and abuses escape the punishment of community folks and flee to established witch camps that are meant to protect and sustain their lives. However, these camps are unable to ensure the protection of their human rights. For the most, it is religious groups and communities who successfully support them as they live at the camp. The study practically examines how various accusations, abuses as well as life at the witch camp have human rights implications, and attempt to suggest various ways through which the rights of these inmates may be protected. This study was conducted by employing methods of analysis such as questionnaire, interviews, photographs, on site seeing and note taking as well as literature from relevant sources. The study contributes to the pool of knowledge which reveals that religious institutions, rather than the government, have been instrumental in providing, promoting and preserving the rights of the accused witches at the Gambaga witch camp.

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## CHAPTER ONE (1)

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Among many people, religion has been viewed by secular institutions and scholars as being arguably, the problem in development of human rights.<sup>1</sup> Today, several philosophers and scholars have added their voice to the debate that religion may rather be a tool that would foster human rights development in our societies.<sup>2</sup> Now than ever, there is an increasing appreciation of the special contributions that religious beliefs, as well as religious institutions would bring to the forefront in developing human rights in our world.<sup>3</sup>

Human right abuses permeate all countries and continents of the world. That is, although the focus of this work is related to Northern Ghana, it is not only women and children who are in Ghana or Africa, for example, who have had their rights trampled upon.<sup>4</sup> In the Gambaga witchcamp of Northern Ghana, many women and children are camped there because they have been accused of witchcraft.<sup>5</sup> Before these women and children are brought to the camp, they are subjected to all kinds of maltreatment. Many of these victims are insulted, stoned or tortured. Sometimes, it is the fear of dying in the community that propels them to seek refuge at the witch

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<sup>1</sup> A. F. Dolphyne, *Emancipation of Women: An African Perspective* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1991) p. 4

<sup>2</sup>G. Ter Haar, *Rats, Cockroaches and People Like Us: Views of Humanity and Human Rights* (Holland: Hague Institute of Social Studies) p. 3

<sup>3</sup>A.O. Abamfo, *Religion and the Inculturation of Human Rights*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) p.15

<sup>4</sup> L. Nader, *The Subordination of Women in Comparative Perspective*, (Institute Inc.: Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development, 2000) p.380

<sup>5</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *supra* note 193, at Footnote 68.

camp. Such activities performed by members of the community have human right implications that need to be looked at critically.<sup>6</sup>

## **1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Religious traditions and customs in African societies have played a role in infringing the rights of women and children.<sup>7</sup> Such traditions include witchcraft accusations and the establishment of witchcamps. The numerous accusations and abuses these women go through have human right implications. These accused women suffer verbal abuse, physical torture and emotional pains. They are often humiliated and insulted. Unfortunately, many who could not make it to these established witch camps have been burned and strangled to death.<sup>8</sup> As stated, the Gambaga witch camp in the Northern Region of Ghana was established over hundred years ago for women who were accused of being witches. This witch camp was established to serve as refuge for these accused witches.

At the witch camp, these accused witches still suffer certain forms of discrimination. In the community, they are often stigmatized and relegated to the background. As a result, they cannot freely involve themselves and relate with the people of Gambaga. Such women and children often find it difficult to freely move,

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<sup>6</sup> G. Ter Haar, (ed). *Introduction: the Evil Called Witchcraft in Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa*, (Africa World Press, 2007) p.9.

<sup>7</sup> D. Lockton and R. Ward, *Domestic Violence* (London: Cavendish Publishing Ltd., 1997) p.28

<sup>8</sup> J. Schnoebelen, Witchcraft Accusations, Refugee protection and Human Rights: A Review of the Evidence: *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Vol. 169 (2009) pp.19-21 also available at [www.unhcr.com](http://www.unhcr.com)

freely associate with other people, or freely participate in the general activities of the community.<sup>9</sup>

Women and children who have lived all their lives at the camp are not given certain opportunities and privileges like the others. There are no adequate educational facilities such as schools and medical facilities like hospitals or clinics to cater for them. Victims have no available institution to seek redress when they receive maltreatment from people in the community. These situations often mar the human dignity, and rights of women and children at the camp.<sup>10</sup>

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

When a woman is accused of being a witch in a given community (especially Northern Ghana), she is threatened to be punished unless she confesses her misdeeds. Mostly, particular women are accused when unfortunate incidents begin to plague their families, friends or even neighborhood. Usually, these women will be subjected to beatings, torture, insults and other forms of abuse in the community. Being accused, these alleged witches ran away to the Gambaga witch camp quickly for fear of punishment and sudden death.

These alleged witches at the camp find it difficult to relate freely with other people in the community. They are often jeered at, mocked at and overly humiliated. Such stigma makes it difficult for these accused women and children to feel their worth

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<sup>9</sup> G. ter Haar,(ed). *Introduction: the Evil Called Witchcraft in Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa*, (Africa World Press, 2007) p.10

<sup>10</sup> J. Schnoebelen, *Witchcraft Accusations, Refugee protection and Human Rights: A Review of the Evidence: New Issues in Refugee Research*, Vol. 169 (2009) pp.18-22 also available at [www.unhcr.com](http://www.unhcr.com)

and dignity in the community. These women lack proper educational facilities for themselves and their children. The medical services and facilities at the camp are inadequate to cater for their health needs. The accused witches find it difficult to get effective platform to seek redress when they are maltreated.

Such actions and inactions of some members of the community towards the accused witches have human right implications. As a result of such abuses, their dignity and freedoms are not assured. The problem this thesis seeks to address is, how the human rights of women and children accused of witchcraft and have taken refuge in witch-camps in Ghana may be protected. The Gambaga witch camp is used as a case-study.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION**

The main question this thesis sought to answer has been:

To what extent can the accused witches in witch camps in Ghana have their human rights protected? In order to deal comprehensively with the issues involved, the following sub- question was also raised:

In which ways is the situation of the accused witches in the witch-camps in Ghana a human rights issue?

### **1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

The primary objective of this study is to establish how the confinement of women and children accused of witchcraft in witch-camps in Ghana may be regarded a

human rights issue. Related to this objective is to recommend ways in which the human rights of the inmates of these camps may be protected.

### **1.5 METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative method of researching was employed for this research work. By this, we conducted in- depth interviews with fifteen accused witches at the Gambaga camp. Key religious persons in the community such as the pastor of Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Gambaga and his Catechist were interviewed. The chief Imam of Gambaga community was also interviewed and the Gambag-rana (Chief of Gambaga) was as well interviewed. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources of data collection included various interviews and field findings. Secondary sources of collecting data included related information in books, internet sources, magazines, as well as journal articles.

Again, we employed descriptive analysis when we were interpreting various interviews. Some pictures were taken in order to give a comprehensive view of the Gambaga witch camp, the inmates who were interviewed, the leaders of the various religious groups as well as on-going projects that would help improve their lives and wellbeing.

### **1.6 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY**

In the discourse of religion and human rights, there is a need to have a newer look at the human rights issues prevailing at the Gambaga witch camp. This knowledge will help us find out what the current state of the accused witches are on one hand, and how their freedoms can be promoted on the other hand. Again, this work is

relevant because it can provide essential information for human rights activists, opinion leaders, religious leaders as well as government machinery in appreciating prevailing human rights issues in Gambaga area.

### **1.7 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

When people are accused of being witches in the community, they are often manhandled and subjected to various forms of brutalities. Many of these women have sustained fatal injuries on their bodies. Few have died as a result of the fatal beatings they received. Women and children who are accused have the right to life, and security. They must not undergo any physical harassment and torture because of these accusations. Alleged witches who survive or escape these painful practices move out (willingly or unwillingly) from their communities and flee to the Gambaga witch camp. This witchcamp has served as refuge for accused women who might have as well been dead if they hesitated on coming to the witch camp.

The accused witches who managed to seek refuge at the camp are not able to associate themselves freely with other people in the Gambaga community. They are often scandalized and stigmatized in the community. The social amenities and facilities that are available at the camp do not adequately promote their basic needs. Food, shelter, clothing, medical needs as well as educational needs are insufficient. All these situations are human rights issues. The Gambaga witch camp area is a typical example of an environment that have prevailing human rights issues against women and children.

## 1.8 RESEARCH UNIT AND LOCATION

Gambaga is a small town located 150km north of Tamale in (Northern Region of) Ghana.<sup>11</sup> The three northern regions of Ghana- Upper East, Upper West and Northern Region- are said to be the poorest regions of Ghana in terms of standard of living and economic development.<sup>12</sup> The economic activities of the men are stone quarrying, farming and trading. Most of the women engage in small scale farming and trading. Because of the high poverty levels, inadequate medical facilities as well as massive unemployment, hardships such as infant and maternal mortality, outbreak of sicknesses and sudden deaths are on the rise.<sup>13</sup>

The Gambaga witchcamp is an isolated community within the Gambaga Township in the Northern Region of Ghana. It is believed to have been established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in an attempt to provide shelter for women who were accused of being witches.<sup>14</sup> Thus, when an accused witch was banished from the community, she would have to go to the witchcamp as her only safe and available destination.<sup>15</sup> There are more than 100 alleged witches in the witchcamp.<sup>16</sup> Most of these women are widows. It is believed that they used their witchcraft powers to kill their husbands. Others are accused of bringing misfortunes such as diseases, loss of

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<sup>11</sup> Y. Badoe, What makes a woman a witch: *Feminist Africa*, Vol.5, p.38. Also available at [www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa\\_5\\_features\\_2.p](http://www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa_5_features_2.p)

<sup>12</sup> Y. Badoe, What makes a woman a witch: *Feminist Africa*, Vol.5, pp.38-39. Also available at [www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa\\_5\\_features\\_2.p](http://www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa_5_features_2.p)

<sup>13</sup> Y. Badoe, What makes a woman a witch: *Feminist Africa*, Vol.5, pp.38-39. Also available at [www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa\\_5\\_features\\_2.p](http://www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa_5_features_2.p)

<sup>14</sup> F. Npong, *Witch Camps of Ghana*". (*Utne Reader*, 2014) pp. 48-49.

<sup>15</sup> T. Sullivan, "*A Prison Sometimes a Haven: Ghana's Witch Villages Only Safe Place for Women Accused of Casting Spells*". (Denver: Associated Press, Rocky, 1998) p.1.

<sup>16</sup> F. Npong, *Witch Camps of Ghana*". (*Utne Reader*, 2014) p.50

property as well as accidents upon their relatives.<sup>17</sup> These women and children suffer many injustices from the hands of relatives and neighbors when they have been accused of witchcraft. Staying at the camp is 'safe' for them although little essential services are found there.

## **1.9 LIMITATION AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The indigenous language of the people posed a challenge in our research work. As a result, we needed the services of an interpreter. He served as a channel for us, and the accused witches in our interview. Again, he interpreted certain scenes we observed at the camp to our understanding. This thesis is under the interplay between religion and human rights. However, such an area is too broad to be covered. So the focus of this thesis is to identify how women and children who have been accused of witchcraft and have taken refuge in witchcamps may be protected.

### **1.9.0 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

Chapter One of the dissertation included the General Introduction, Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Research Question, Research Objective, Research Unit and Location as well as the Literature Review. Chapter Two discussed the belief and practice of witchcraft in African religions. Chapter Three discussed Gambaga witchcamp and its related human rights issues. In Chapter Four, we collected and analyzed relevant data that has been received through field

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<sup>17</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), *Ghana Witch Camps: Widows' in Exile* (2012), also available at [www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19437130](http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19437130)

research and interviews. Chapter Five closed the dissertation by providing the summary, recommendation, and conclusion of the whole work.

### **1.9.1 LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section reviews the works of scholars relevant to the subject as follows.

Awulolo asserts in *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* that among Africans, the belief in the existence of God as well as other spiritual beings cannot be questioned. That is, there is no African who can say he is an atheist (someone who believes there is no God).<sup>18</sup> Everyone born as an African believes in the existence of the Supreme Being or God. Apart from Him, Africans believe in other lesser gods who serve as intermediaries between man and the Supreme Being. They also believe in witchcraft, sorcery and magic among others. The belief that witches have powers to influence the lives of people in a negative way is prevalent in all African communities.<sup>19</sup>

What this means is that we cannot talk about the religion of the African and at the same time, neglect his belief in the existence of witches and wizards. Also, although it is difficult to prove this logically, witches are said to be possessing supernatural powers that can be used to destroy or harm human lives and property. Yet, he writes that others are also of the view that witchcraft powers can be used for doing good in our society today. For example, these special powers can be used in protecting

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<sup>18</sup>J.O. Awulolo, *Yoruba beliefs and sacrificial rites* (London: Longman, 1981) p.81

<sup>19</sup> J.O. Awulolo, *Yoruba beliefs and sacrificial rites* (London: Longman, 1981) p.82

one's marriage from divorce. It can also be used in protecting one's family from premature deaths and unexpected problems.<sup>20</sup>

Awulolo attempts to present the case that witchcraft powers are used for both good and bad motives. However, most Africans believe that these evil powers are rather used with negative reasons like sickness, madness and death.<sup>21</sup> Again, even when its use appears to be positive, it will have a negative effect on other families in a given community.

Evans-Pritchard, in his publication *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, makes some important distinctions between witchcraft and sorcery in the African understanding. Among many people, these two terms can be used interchangeably, and even mean the same thing. However, in African cosmology, this is not the case. Evans-Pritchard identifies that witches have innate powers that are inherited from their parents. It is these powers that they use in influencing the lives of people. He calls this "*inherent quality*". On the other hand, he distinguishes that the powers that sorcerers use in influencing people lie in medicine, rituals and spells.<sup>22</sup>

Again, he makes a further distinction that a witch usually acts unconsciously. That is, although she may be asleep physically, the evil powers can leave his or her body, go to the target's home, cause evil and return without being identified. However, a

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<sup>20</sup> J.O. Awulolo, *Yoruba beliefs and sacrificial rites* (London: Longman, 1981) p.81-82

<sup>21</sup> B.I. Musah, *Life in a Witchcamp: Experiences of Residents in the Gnani witchcamp in Ghana* (2013) p.2

<sup>22</sup> E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*, ( London: Oxford University Press, 1937) p.21

sorcerer cannot operate unconsciously. He or she can only operate consciously and deliberately.<sup>23</sup>

Evans-Pritchard makes a third distinction between witchcraft and sorcery. He writes that although both witches and sorcerers can cause sickness in the bodies of people, witches usually cause their victims to die slowly by producing a long and gradual wasting of the victim's bodies. On the contrary, a sorcerer will cause a sudden and violent sickness to attack her enemies. This will usually make the victim or target die in the shortest time period.<sup>24</sup>

However, these distinctions are not always seen. For example, a witch can go for spiritual powers in the form of medicine in order to kill another person. This usually happens when her innate powers are not powerful enough to destroy her target.<sup>25</sup> Again, it is believed that several witches can only operate deliberately and consciously. That is, evil powers in them cannot travel at night (when they sleep) to harm other people. These witches are usually known as "day-witches".<sup>26</sup>

In his work, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, Ikenga-Metuh elucidates that in African traditional religion, there are two dimensions of evil. Evil is said to have either a moral dimension or a physical dimension. The dimension

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<sup>23</sup> E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1937) pp.21-23

<sup>24</sup> E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1937) p.21

<sup>25</sup> S.T Kgatla, "Moloi ga a na mmala (A witch has no colour): A socio-religious study of witchcraft accusations in the Northern Province of South Africa". DLitt et Phil thesis, University of South Africa (2000) p.149.

<sup>26</sup> S.T Kgatla, *Moloi ga a na mmala (A witch has no colour): A socio-religious study of witchcraft accusations in the Northern Province of South Africa*. DLitt et Phil thesis, University of South Africa (2000) pp.149-150.

of physical evil are those misfortunes that befall whole communities or on some individuals. The dimension of moral evils are the various anti-social behaviors that break the smooth relationship between the worshippers and God, spirits and ancestors.<sup>27</sup> However, the distinctions between these dimensions can be misleading. For example, in African societies, disobedience to traditional authorities, and breaking of taboos may cause the displeasure of the Supreme Being and other lesser gods to punish a whole community with diseases. In such cases, the evil has both physical and moral dimensions at the same time.<sup>28</sup>

He writes further that in African communities, there are two categorizations of evil. One category is those who cause physical evil. The other category is those who incite to do evil. When evil happens, people are divided as to the cause of the evil. Some people believe that misfortunes are caused by evil spirits, sorcerers and witches. Others believe that many misfortunes are caused by an evil-eye, broken taboos or even by God.<sup>29</sup> We agree to this position because evils or problems that arise in our communities can be caused by human beings who have evil powers. There are also times where the Supreme Being or ancestors can bring evil into our communities in the form of punishment.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> E. Ikenga-Metuh , *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, (Nigeria: IMICO Publishers, 1987) p.161

<sup>28</sup> O. C. Omobola, An Overview of Taboo and Superstition among the Yoruba of Southwest of Nigeria: *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol.4, No. 2 (2013) p.223

<sup>29</sup> E. Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, ( Nigeria: IMICO Publishers, 1987) p.161

<sup>30</sup>M.A Oduyoye, The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology: *African Theology En Route* (1977) pp. 109-116.

Asamoah-Gyadu, in his work *Witchcraft Accusations and Christianity in Africa*, writes that there exists two causalities of evil. He explains that in African understanding, evil can be of natural or supernatural origin.<sup>31</sup> What this means is that certain evils come upon our society because of our failure to keep a good relationship among the different parts of our natural environment. Certain problems such as famine, flood and outbreak of certain sicknesses can have natural causes. If we fail to use proper farming methods, we can cause famine. If continue to build in water ways, we will continue to encounter floods. Such evils have may be considered to have natural causes. On the other hand, there are other diseases and disasters that are said to have supernatural origin.

He goes further to make another distinction between diseases. He writes that there are natural diseases and spiritual diseases.<sup>32</sup> He writes that although certain diseases are natural in nature, they can be made worse by spiritual powers such as witchcraft.<sup>33</sup> We agree to this assertion because there are many times when patients are told by their doctors that the kind of disease they are affected with are not 'hospital sicknesses'. Usually, in African understanding this means that the disease is a spiritual one, and can only be taken care of through spiritual means.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> J.K Asamoah-Gyadu, "Witchcraft Accusations and Christianity in Africa", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, IBMR, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2015) p.23

<sup>32</sup> J.K Asamoah-Gyadu, "Witchcraft Accusations and Christianity in Africa", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, IBMR, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2015) p.23

<sup>33</sup> J.K Asamoah-Gyadu, "Witchcraft Accusations and Christianity in Africa", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, IBMR, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2015) p.23

<sup>34</sup>E. Obinna, Life is a Superior to wealth? Indigenous Healers in an African community, Amariri, Nigeria' in A. Afe, E. Chitando & B. Bateye (eds.), *African Traditions in the study of Religion in Africa* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2012) pp.137-139

Kgatla in his work *A Witch has no Color*, proposes the dual categorization of witches. According to him, all witches are not the same. There are those who are called 'day witches', and there are others who are known as 'night witches'. He explains that a 'day-witch' is an 'ordinary' individual who acquires the ability to operate witchcraft powers from some other experts. Thus, a 'day-witch' will buy the evil powers from other witches who are more powerful than herself. These ones ('day-witches') are not as dangerous as the 'night witches' although they (day witches) also kill and damage property.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, a 'night-witch' is one who is able to perform her activities without the help of any other person or potion. These are more powerful and more dangerous because they can enter closed huts. They can turn into other animal forms such as snakes, hyenas, dogs and birds to perform their diabolical assignments.<sup>36</sup> We concur to this assertion because in African societies, there are different levels or orders of spiritual powers. One person can be more powerful and dangerous than the other because all forms of witchcraft are not the same. We believe that in African communities, a witch can ask a more powerful witch to help the former cause havoc in the life of an individual or even a whole family.

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<sup>35</sup>S.T Kgatla, *Moloi ga a na mmala* (A witch has no Colour): A socio-religious study of witchcraft accusations in the Northern Province of South Africa. DLitt et Phil thesis, University of South Africa (2000) pp.149-150.

<sup>36</sup> S.T Kgatla, *Moloi ga a na mmala* (A witch has no Colour): A socio-religious study of witchcraft accusations in the Northern Province of South Africa. DLitt et Phil thesis, University of South Africa (2000) pp.149-150.

Donnelly, in *Human Rights as Natural Rights*, defines human rights as “rights and entitlements held simply by virtue of being a person (human being)”.<sup>37</sup> What this means is that every human being has rights that must be protected. This must be done for him because he is a human being. He is a person and must enjoy all of his rights without any form of suppression. Donnelly again explains that “rights are merely beneficial obligations. It is by imposing obligations, or by abstaining from imposing them, that rights are established or granted.”<sup>38</sup> In such an assumption, human rights become obligations that are imposed on people on one hand, and obligations that other people in the society must abstain from. Our position here is that human rights are rights that human beings must enjoy because they are human beings. At the same time, the state has the responsibility of ensuring that such rights are ensured and protected.

For example, The Constitution of Ghana demands in Chapter Five, that citizens must have their rights protected. In section 13 of Chapter Five, it is enshrined that no person shall be deprived of his life intentionally except in the exercise of the execution of a sentence of a court.<sup>39</sup> In Section 15, it is enshrined that the dignity of all persons shall be inviolable.<sup>40</sup> Again, no person shall be subjected to torture or other cruel inhuman degrading treatment or punishment. In section 18, it is enshrined that every person has the right to own property either alone or in association with others. No person shall be subjected to interference with the

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<sup>37</sup> Donnelly J., “Human Rights as Natural Rights” in *Human Rights Quarterly* published by John Hopkins Press (1982), p.391.

<sup>38</sup> Donnelly J., *The Concept of Human Rights* by St. Martin’s Press, New York (1985)

<sup>39</sup> 1992 Constitution of The Republic of Ghana

<sup>40</sup> 1992 Constitution of The Republic of Ghana

privacy of his home, property.<sup>41</sup> There is also the right to fair trial in Section 19. Every citizen has the right to work under safe conditions as enshrine under Section 24.

In section 25 of Chapter 5 every human person has the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities. In Section 28, children should not engage in work that constitutes a threat to health or education. Children, as the Constitution states, shall not be subjected to torture or other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states in Article 2 that discrimination against women in all forms shall be condemned by all states.<sup>42</sup> In Article 5, all cultural and social patterns of conduct that introduces prejudice and inferiority shall be modified.<sup>43</sup>

In Article 13(a) women and children must also not be deprived of medical or education benefit. In Article 14(b) every person has right to adequate health care facilities including information, counselling and services in family planning. Again in Article 14(h), everyone must enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communication.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> 1992 Constitution of The Republic of Ghana

<sup>42</sup> Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Report.

<sup>43</sup> Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Report.

<sup>44</sup> Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Report.

Federici argues in *Women, Witch-hunting and Enclosures in Africa today*, that although the belief in the existence of witchcraft has been prevalent in Africa since time immemorial, it is just recently that witchcraft killings have come to the attention of human rights organizations and the United Nations.<sup>45</sup> She argues that on the global level, it may be heard, but in local cultures, such attention has not been received at all.<sup>46</sup>

We agree to the argument raised by Federici. There are many laws and policies that have been formulated by national and international bodies to protect the rights of women and children accused of witchcraft. Although these laws, covenants and policies are available at those national levels, they are not felt in local cultures. As a result, many may consider these laws as ineffective and theoretical in nature. Again, accusations of women as witches are still common today. These harmful practices still prevail in our societies today. This proves that the human rights ideas have been unable to effectively penetrate our local cultures.

Federici identifies a dialectic relationship between witch-hunting then and now. She compares the historical witch-hunting that occurred in Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries to the current witchcraft accusations. The former was done by state authorities towards women in societies. However, the latter is perpetuated by ordinary masses in the community against accused women.<sup>47</sup> This observation is

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<sup>45</sup> Available at [www.iheu.org/witchcraft-united-nations] accessed 21/03/2016

<sup>46</sup> S. Federici, *Women, Witch-hunting and Enclosures in Africa today: Social Geschichte Online* (2010) p.10 also available at (<http://www.stiftung-sozialgeschichte.de>)

<sup>47</sup> S. Federici, *Women, Witch-hunting and Enclosures in Africa today: Social Geschichte Online* (2010) p.11 also available at (<http://www.stiftung-sozialgeschichte.de>)

remarkable because it shows how state authorities have changed their allegiance from backing such accusations to defending women who are being accused.

Federici continues to argue that the accusation of people as witches has nothing to do with specific class of people. It is no respecter of gender, age, social or economic status.<sup>48</sup> However, it has been argued that the accusation of witches is a ‘class phenomenon’. By a ‘class phenomenon’, we mean that only a specific class of people are accused of possessing and using witchcraft powers. Most of the accused are women, the aged and the poor in society.<sup>49</sup> It is very common to see young and vibrant people in our societies blaming the aged for the misfortunes they face in their very lives.<sup>50</sup>

In *Peasants, Traders and Wives. Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe*, Schmidt agrees that belief in witchcraft was prevalent in Africa. However, she argues that this belief had nothing to do with the various brutalities that have come to be associated with it today. She argues that possessing witchcraft in the past was a source of dignity and prestige for women. It often led to their respect and promotion among their peers.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> S. Federici, Women, Witch-hunting and Enclosures in Africa today: *Social Geschichte Online* (2010) p.10 also available at (<http://www.stiftung-sozialgeschichte.de>)

<sup>49</sup> Info Change India News, [<http://infochangeindia.org>] (accessed 21 March 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Saving the Elderly from Prejudice and Attacks: *African Agenda*, Vol. 2, No.2 (1999) p. 35.

<sup>51</sup> E. Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders and Wives. Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870–1939* (London, 1992), p.18

This position may be criticized because the traditions of the African has always frowned at practices that destroy the peace and harmony among members in the community. Such practices include witchcraft and sorcery.<sup>52</sup> Because witches are usually known to destroy lives, cause strange diseases and destroy property, their actions cannot be considered as sources of dignity and prestige. Apart from this, among the African, important traditions and customs are always passed on to the younger generation. If witchcraft was held as a source of prestige and dignity then, it should be the same today but that is not the case. This defies the position that witchcraft powers were seen as sources of dignity and prestige.

She goes further to state that the current trend of brutalities was only found after colonization. She argues that even the term ‘witchcraft’ is an European construct.<sup>53</sup> The term cannot be an European construct because since time immemorial, the African has believed in the existence of God, lesser gods, ancestors, benevolent and malevolent spirits such as witches and wizards. That is, even before the Europeans came to Africa, we had our own system of beliefs and practices. And these customs, practices and traditions included the belief in benevolent and malevolent spirits (such as witches and wizards).<sup>54</sup>

In *Witchcraft, Gender, Power and Intimate Relations in Mura Compounds in Dela, Northern Cameroun*, Lyons argues that men and women may be treated differently when witchcraft is found on both. He writes that men usually use witchcraft powers

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<sup>52</sup> O. C. Omobola, An Overview of Taboo and Superstition among the Yoruba of Southwest of Nigeria: *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol.4, No. 2 (2013) pp.222-223

<sup>53</sup> E. Schmidt, Peasants, Traders and Wives. Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870–1939 (London, 1992), pp. 18–19.

<sup>54</sup> E. B Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*. (London: SCM, 1973) pp. 175-176.

for good reasons. They may use them for gaining and maintaining political positions. For the sake of maintaining social order, some men may also obtain such spiritual powers. She continues to write that on the contrary, women often use these powers for evil purposes. They use powers for selfish and destructive purposes. She concludes by asserting that this explains why many women, rather than their male counterparts, will be accused of witchcraft and treated harshly in public.<sup>55</sup>

Such an argument cannot always be sustained because, there are places in Northern Ghana where alleged wizards are caught, beaten and sent out from their communities. These men, just like women, were accused of causing havoc in the society. They were equally accused of destroying life or property. Although it is common, women should not always be tagged as the ones who use witchcraft for evil purposes. On the contrary, it is even argued that the powers of a wizard is more dangerous than his counterpart female witch. In other words, if there are people who must receive severe insults, beatings, and excommunication from their communities, it must be wizards rather than witches. Both men and women have tendencies of using evil powers to destroy the lives of others. Using witchcraft for negative purposes is not a special attribute or quality of women as it is being presented here.

In his work *Towards a Christian Response to Witchcraft in Northern Region*, Kirby proposes that there are two main forms of relationships in African communities. He points out that in every African traditional community, these two interconnected

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<sup>55</sup> D. Lyons, *Witchcraft, Gender, Power and Intimate Relations in Mura Compounds in Dela, Northern Cameroun: World Archeology*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (1998) p.346

relationships do exist. He identifies them as horizontal and vertical relationships. The horizontal relationship, as he explains, is the relationship among the living (men, women and children) in the visible world or material world. The vertical relationship, he explains, exists between men and women in this world and the invisible world.<sup>56</sup> He points out that the invisible world is the world of spirits. These spirit beings include God (Creator), divinities as well as ancestors.

He further elucidates that there are activities that must be performed in order to maintain the two dimensions of relationships in a peaceful manner. He explains that in order to keep the vertical relationship well, we must relate well with God, lesser gods or spirits, and the ancestors. On the other hand, we need to check the activities of witches in order to have a good horizontal relationship with other people in the community. This is often done through specialists or priests who live at shrines.<sup>57</sup> We agree to the points raised by Kirby. In the African communities, we need to ensure that there is a working relationship among human beings on one hand, and between human beings and the spirit world on the other hand. And this is often maintained through the performance of rituals.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> J. P. Kirby, "Towards a Christian Response to Witchcraft in Northern Region"; *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2015) p.19

<sup>57</sup> J. P. Kirby, "Towards a Christian Response to Witchcraft in Northern Region"; *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2015) p.20

<sup>58</sup> A. Kamwaria and M. Katola, The Role of African Traditional Religion, Culture and Worldview in the Context of Post-War Healing among the Dinka Community of Southern Sudan: *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 2, No. 21 (2012) p. 53

## **1.9.2 CONCLUSION**

In Chapter (1) One, we have looked at the Background of Study, Statement of Problem, Research Question, Research Unit and Location, Research Objectives as well as Methodology. We also looked at scholarly works that are related to our topic: Religion and Human rights of women and children in the Gambaga witchcamp of Northern Ghana. We made a critique of the various literature that were used. In chapter two, we consider the belief and practice of witchcraft in African traditional communities. We find various definitions of witchcraft and how it is acquired. We also look at activities of witches, people who are predominantly accused of using witchcraft powers as well as ways people destroy witchcraft powers when they are found.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE BELIEF AND PRACTICE OF WITCHCRAFT IN AFRICAN RELIGIONS (With Special Reference to Northern Ghana)**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter One, we looked at the General Introduction, Background of Study, Statement of the Problem, Research Unit and Location, Research Objectives, Methodology, Justification of the Study, Limitation and Delimitation as well as the scholarly works of others in relation to this work. In this Chapter (2), we consider the belief and practice of witchcraft in African communities. Attention here is given to the phenomenon of witchcraft: definition, how it is acquired, activities of witches, people who are predominantly accused of witchcraft as well as how witchcraft powers are destroyed in the African communities.

#### **2.2. DEFINITION**

Witchcraft is said to be “the use of magic powers, especially evil ones”.<sup>59</sup> It is explained as “... the supposed power of a person to harm others by occult or supernatural means, without necessarily being aware of it ... The essence of witchcraft and sorcery is the causing of harm to persons or property by invisible means”<sup>60</sup> Witchcraft may also be defined as “a kind of penumbra of human wickedness, an inborn preternatural power to harm and kill, enjoyed for its own

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<sup>59</sup> Wehmeier et al., *The Church and the Witch in My Village* (2000) pp.4 -5

<sup>60</sup> S. Hayes, Christian responses to witchcraft and sorcery. *Missionalia* Vol. 23, No. 3 (1995) pp 339-354.

sake.”<sup>61</sup> This preternatural power is a spiritual power that is used in order to harm other people. A person is said to possess witchcraft powers when he/she has special powers that is used to manipulate the lives of others in a negative way. Usually, witchcraft substances are used for selfish reasons.<sup>62</sup> Witchcraft can also be defined as “harmful actions carried out by persons presumed to have access to supernatural powers”.<sup>63</sup> Thus commonly, witchcraft powers are used for harming and destroying people in the community. Witches are people, male and female, who are believed to possess inherent supernatural powers which they use to harm others or benefit themselves.<sup>64</sup>

### **2.3 THE EXISTENCE OF WITCHCRAFT**

In African religion, there is no sharp distinction between what is spiritual and physical. So it is believed that people who have spiritual powers can influence the lives of those living in the community.<sup>65</sup> Differently put, the same way God influences the lives of people because He wields supernatural powers, people who also possess witchcraft powers can affect others negatively.

In Africa, belief in witchcraft is not contested. No African can say he does not believe in the existence and activities of witches. It is no use pretending that

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<sup>61</sup> A. Shorter, *Jesus and the Witch Doctor: An Approach to healing and wholeness* ( London: Orbis Books, 1985) p.95

<sup>62</sup> World Development, Vol. 24, No.8 (1996) p.1347

<sup>63</sup> A. Ashforth, *Reflections on Spiritual Insecurity in a Modern African City (Soweto): African Studies Review* Vol. 39 (Dec. 1998), p.64.

<sup>64</sup> G.K. Nukunya, *Tradition and change in Ghana: An Introduction to Sociology*. (Accra :Ghana Universities Press, 2003) p.59

<sup>65</sup> M.A Oduyoye, “The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology” in *African Theology En Route* (1977) pp. 109-116.

witchcraft beliefs do not exist or seek for grounds of neutrality in African understanding.<sup>66</sup> The belief in witchcraft in Africa cuts across all forms of classes: rich and poor, old and young, educated and uneducated. Everyone, irrespective of status, believes in the existence of witchcraft powers that are able to control others in a negative way.<sup>67</sup> In the African cosmology, the belief and practice of witchcraft is fundamental.<sup>68</sup> Unlike other cultures, belief in witchcraft is very common among African people.

In Ghana, among The Ewes and several ethnic groups in the Northern part of Ghana such as the Mamprusi, Dagomba, and Gushegu, it is believed that a witch can use his or her power to influence people within and outside his or her own blood relations. On the other hand, the Akans (people such as the Fante, Akwapem and Asante) believe that a witch can only have influence or control over his or her blood relations.<sup>69</sup>

## **2.4 MOTIVES FOR ACQUIRING WITCHCRAFT POWERS**

There are basically two main motives that explains why many people in Africa acquire and use witchcraft powers. These are broadly good motives and evil motives. Among the people of Northern Ghana, those who acquire witchcraft for good motives argue that they use them as a source of protection from activities of

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<sup>66</sup> Behringer et al, *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History*, (Polity Press, 2004) p.24

<sup>67</sup> A. M. Javier, *The Invention of Child Witches in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Social cleansing, Religious commerce and the difficulties of being a parent in an urban culture*, Save the Children (2006) p.9.

<sup>68</sup> Ellis et al, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004) p.27.

<sup>69</sup> M. Adinkrah, *Witchcraft accusations and female homicide victimization in contemporary Ghana*. SAGE (2004) p.335

other witches. The evil powers may also be used in shielding one's family from several other forms of misfortunes.<sup>70</sup> It is also believed that witchcraft powers can be used positively as social control mechanism. What this means is that, because of the presence of witches in particular communities, many people would have their behaviors regulated so as to avoid their displeasure.<sup>71</sup>

On the other hand, many others in African communities believe that witchcraft powers are used with and for negative reasons. Witchcraft may be the cause of sudden diseases, rancor, protracted sicknesses, poverty, sterility, accidents, sudden deaths as well as destruction of property.<sup>72</sup> Although witchcraft powers may be acquired for both good and evil reasons, many people are of the view that the witchcraft substances are used predominantly for evil purposes rather than good.<sup>73</sup>

## **2.5 HOW WITCHCRAFT IS ACQUIRED**

In many African cultures, the evil spiritual powers are mostly given by older relatives to younger ones. For example, older women such as mothers may give the witchcraft powers to younger ones (their daughters). Fathers may also give the evil powers to their sons. Among the Mamprusi of Northern Ghana, witchcraft is an inherited property that must be treasured and protected for future generations.<sup>74</sup> In

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<sup>70</sup> B.I. Musah, *Life in a Witchcamp: Experiences of Residents in the Gnani witchcamp in Ghana* (2013) p.2

<sup>71</sup> P.J. Stewart, and A. Strathern, *Witchcraft, sorcery, rumours and gossip*. (Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.3

<sup>72</sup> K. Palmer, *Spellbound: Inside West Africa's witch camps*. (New York, Free Press, 2010) p.13

<sup>73</sup> K. Palmer, *Spellbound: Inside West Africa's witch camps*. (New York, Free Press, 2010) pp.13-14

<sup>74</sup> B.I. Musah, *Life in a Witchcamp: Experiences of Residents in the Gnani witchcamp in Ghana* (2013) p.33

this way, witchcraft is transferred from an older family member to a younger one. It usually transferred through food, gifts such as jewelry and clothes.

In other African communities, it is believed that the witchcraft powers can also be traded in economic terms. People can go from place to place so in order to buy evil powers from other people. Those who are believed to have ‘spiritual eyes’ are able to locate places where these witchcraft powers are usually sold or bought. Women (who are usually traders) buy these powers from other powerful users.<sup>75</sup>

In several African communities, the witchcraft powers is sometimes said to be inborn. By ‘inborn’, we mean the spiritual powers was not given by a relative, friend or stranger. The baby that was born had the powers in himself or herself. Such a baby is said to be a victim in the sense that it never had the chance to choose whether to operate such powers or not. It may have been located in his or her liver, eye or any other organ of the body.<sup>76</sup>

## **2.6 THOSE WHO ARE PREDOMINANTLY ACCUSED**

There seems to be particular ‘kinds’ of people who are mostly accused of possessing witchcraft powers. Although any person can be accused of the substance, it seems there are particular ‘kinds’ of people who are easily pointed out or blamed as witches.

Although both men and women may be accused of possessing and using witchcraft powers, women are generally accused of such evil rather than men. Current news articles indicate that women in local African communities have been predominately

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<sup>75</sup>L. Nyirongo, *The gods of Africa or the God of the Bible? The snares of African traditional religion in Biblical Perspective.* (1997) p.184.

<sup>76</sup> International Bulletin of Missionary Research, IBMR, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2015) p.4

killed as accused witches. For example, in May 2008, 15 women were killed by a mob in a region called Kenya's 'sorcery belt' due to mob attacks on women suspected of witchcraft.<sup>77</sup>

In a situation where a woman decides to be independent from her husband's support, she can be accused of witchcraft. When a woman stays away from the control of her husband through divorce or separation, she may be accused easily especially when she is still productive economically and active in business. This is so because, women are seen to be traditionally dependent on men, and therefore any successful demonstration of independence is an indication of the fact that they may have spiritual powers in their possession. How else can an independent woman be successful in business? Except she possesses witchcraft powers.<sup>78</sup>

Poor people are usually blamed for being involved in witchcraft activities. When someone is very poor, he or she may be accused of possessing the witchcraft substance.<sup>79</sup> It is therefore not surprising that most of the witchcraft accusations are levelled at places where the poverty levels are escalating. For example in Ghana, witchcraft accusations and the establishments of witchcamps are heavily concentrated in the northern regions rather than in the south.<sup>80</sup>

The rich sometimes, are also accused of using possessing witchcraft powers. It is believed that some very rich people use their powers to extract money from others. Such powers may be placed at their shops or workplaces. They are able to make

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<sup>77</sup> AFP, *Kenya mob burns 15 women to death over witchcraft* (May 21, 2008), available at [http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=080521153625.1ijzzvn1&show\\_article=](http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=080521153625.1ijzzvn1&show_article=)

<sup>78</sup> Y. Badoe, What makes a woman a witch: *Feminist Africa*, Vol.5, pp.45-46. Also available at [www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa\\_5\\_features\\_2.p](http://www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa_5_features_2.p)

<sup>79</sup> S. Chakravarti, *Red Sun: Travels in Naxalite Country* (New Delhi, 2008) pp. 244–245.

<sup>80</sup> B.I. Musah, *Life in a Witchcamp: Experiences of Residents in the Gnani witchcamp in Ghana* (2013) p.34

those ones poor at the end.<sup>81</sup> However, these rich ones are never beaten or subjected to physical abuse the way and manner poor people are treated.

Witchcraft accusations can also be a hallmark of intra-gender struggles. Insubordinate wives, obstinate daughters-in-law, and elderly infertile women fall victim to these accusations. When a wife tends to challenge the authority and position of her husband, she may be accused of witchcraft. In many marriages, daughters-in-law who have continuous quarrels with their mothers-in-law may also be accused of possessing witchcraft. Again, women who are unable to give birth are said to have 'eaten' their children.<sup>82</sup>

Witchcraft accusations are common in patriarchal societies. Women are not supposed to inherit property in their own name in such societies. It is rather their male counterparts who are supposed to take control in political, legal, social, as well as economic terms (including the inheritance of property).<sup>83</sup> Most African societies are patriarchal in nature and as a result, women are not allowed to hold certain leadership positions or inherit family property. Women who may insist on holding on to land and farm property are usually accused of having witchcraft powers.<sup>84</sup>

Women who do not have elderly brothers in the family are eventually accused of witchcraft. When it is time for family property to be shared, adult women who do

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<sup>81</sup>J. Parish, From the Body To The Wallet: Conceptualizing Akan Witchcraft At Home And Abroad: *Journal of the Royal Anthropology Institute*, Vol.6, No. 3 (2000) pp. 487–501

<sup>82</sup> I. Niehaus, The ANC's Dilemma: The Symbolic Politics of Three Witch-Hunts in the South African Lowveld, 1990-1995: *African Studies Review Vol.41, No. 93* (Dec. 1998) p.294.

<sup>83</sup> A. A. Gordon, *Transforming Capitalism and Patriarchy: Gender and Development in Africa* (Line Reiner, 1996) p.18

<sup>84</sup> S. Federici, Women, Witch-hunting and Enclosures in Africa today: *Social Geschichte Online* (2010) p.11 also available at (<http://www.stiftung-sozialgeschichte.de>)

not have brothers from the same mother face the possibility of witchcraft accusation. In an attempt of such women to protect their property, they may become resistant, and oppose other people who want to take such property from them. Because such women are left without the 'masculine voice' to speak on their behalf, they are said to be greedy, difficult and stubborn just like witches.<sup>85</sup>

Women in polygamous marriages usually accuse one another of witchcraft. Rivals who have conflicting relationships with each other tend to direct witchcraft accusations on others. Polygamous marriages tend to create undue jealousies and competition among co-wives. In other circles, the distribution of the family's assets, especially land may result in conflicts, and later in witchcraft accusations.<sup>86</sup>

People who are likely to be maltreated are singled and widowed or divorced women. Mostly, young women who have toiled with their late husbands are usually accused of witchcraft. This usually happens when the widows decide to keep the property she acquired with her late husband. Usually relatives of the late husband may demand the property from her and her children. When she refuses to surrender the land and other property, she is then accused of witchcraft. It is believed that accusing women of being witches is an easy way to let them avoid attending to their land claims.<sup>87</sup>

Among those who are commonly accused of using witchcraft substances are those who curse with words. During exchanges of words in a conflict, the person who

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<sup>85</sup> Y. Badoe, What makes a woman a witch: *Feminist Africa*, Vol.5, pp.42-43. Also available at [www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa\\_5\\_features\\_2.p](http://www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa_5_features_2.p)

<sup>86</sup> S. Federici, Women, Witch-hunting and Enclosures in Africa today: *Social Geschichte Online* (2010) p.23 also available at (<http://www.stiftung-sozialgeschichte.de>)

<sup>87</sup> L. M. Wanyeki, *Women and Land in Africa: Culture, Religion and Realizing Women's Rights*, (London, 2003) pp. 96–132

threatens the other with words such as, “You will see!” is often accused of possessing evil powers when the other later finds himself in an unfortunate situation. For example, if a misfortune such as a motor accident or a serious illness occurs subsequently, the person who uttered the curse is usually held responsible.<sup>88</sup>

Older women are usually accused of witchcraft in African communities.

It is believed that old women usually ‘consume’ the remaining years of others so that they (old women) may advance in years. This explains why old women are usually accused for the death of younger ones in the family.<sup>89</sup> The report of Tanzania submitted by HelpAge to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) estimated 1,000 deaths annually with older women accounting for a high percentage of those killed.<sup>90</sup> By its figures, all but nine of the 444 ‘witches’ killed in their project areas between 1999 and 2004 were older women.<sup>91</sup>

People who have longstanding conflicts and misunderstandings may accuse one another of witchcraft. This may happen among members of a given family or between two families. Co-tenants as well as co-workers often accuse others who quarrel incessantly with them as witches. Feelings of envy, hatred, jealousy and

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<sup>88</sup> J. P. Kirby, Towards a Christian Response to Witchcraft in Northern Region; *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2015) p.20

<sup>89</sup> B.I. Musah, *Life in a Witchcamp: Experiences of Residents in the Gnani witchcamp in Ghana* (2013) p.41

<sup>90</sup> HelpAge International. *NGO Thematic Shadow Report on Older Women’s Rights in Tanzania, Submitted to the 41st Session of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women In relation to Tanzania’s Combined fourth, fifth, and sixth periodic report of States parties*, CEDAW/C/TZA/6 (April 2008) p.7.

<sup>91</sup> HelpAge *Facts and figures*, *supra* note 94.

fear frequently may also accompany witchcraft accusations.<sup>92</sup>When there are social fears, tensions and suspicions, witchcraft accusations may naturally follow suit.<sup>93</sup> Sometimes, people who stay at the outskirts of our local communities are accused as witches. Although Africans may accuse relatives and other close people as witches, many others target those who are from outside the community, or are thought to be at the margins of society. This may either be because of their ‘strange’ behavior or physical disabilities.<sup>94</sup>

In many African countries, children are often accused of witchcraft. In several African communities, children have been accused of having demons in them. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Eastern Nigeria and Angola are examples of countries where children are usually accused of witchcraft.<sup>95</sup> Usually, Christian exorcists ‘identify’ these witches and allegedly expel the evil spirits from their bodies. Thousands of children have undergone maltreatments and tortures. Parents have usually consented to these acts of torture and have in several cases participated in the acts or even killed their children.<sup>96</sup> Mostly, children who have strange sicknesses and difficulties are also accused of witchcraft. Stubborn children

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<sup>92</sup> J. Schnoebelen, Witchcraft Accusations, Refugee protection and Human Rights: A Review of the Evidence: *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Vol. 169 (2009) p.4 as available at [www.unhcr.com](http://www.unhcr.com)

<sup>93</sup> F. F. Cyprian, Containing Occult Practices: Witchcraft Trials in Cameroon, *African Studies Review* Vol. 41 (1998) p.158.

<sup>94</sup> J. Schnoebelen, Witchcraft Accusations, Refugee protection and Human Rights: A Review of the Evidence: *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Vol. 169 (2009) p.5 as available at [www.unhcr.com](http://www.unhcr.com)

<sup>95</sup> J. Vine, *Congo Witch-Hunt's Child Victims*, BBC Online, [<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/575178.stm>] (accessed 15 March 2016)

<sup>96</sup> Available at [<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/episode-guide/series-43/episode-1>] (accessed 15 March 2016).

are also usually accused.<sup>97</sup> It is however argued that when parents are unable to take responsibility and cater for their children, they resort to witchcraft accusations.<sup>98</sup>

In other African communities such as Kinshasa, children who have lost both parents are accused of possessing evil powers. Orphans are often beaten severely, tortured and killed because of the death of their parents. They are often held responsible for the deaths of their parents.<sup>99</sup>

The rapid witch-hunting in African communities can be associated with the rise of Pentecostalism. Among Pentecostal churches, there is always an emphasis on the devil and exorcism. Through books and open-air sermons in market centers and other public spaces, many evangelists tend to increase people's anxiety about their social environment. Messages that are preached usually relate Satan, illness and death into one whole. Spiritual warfare prayers are often observed among Pentecostals to fight and attack witches.<sup>100</sup> Children are kept in 'isolation' or 'hostage' by church leaders who claim to have the power to perform exorcism on them as and when it is their time.<sup>101</sup>

The upsurge of Indigenous churches in Africa have heightened the belief in witchcraft. Independent churches, Pentecostal churches and Charismatic churches have employed spiritual warfare prayers, prophecy, healing and deliverance in their

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<sup>97</sup> K. Crehan, *The Fractured Community: Landscapes of Power and Gender in Rural Zambia*, (University of California Press, 1997), available at <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft0779n6dt/>

<sup>98</sup> L. Sharon. Mean streets hold little magic for young African 'witches,: *International Herald Tribune* (Nov. 13, 2007), available at <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/11/13/africa/witches.php>, last visited (22/03/16)

<sup>99</sup> *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, IBMR, Vol. 39, No. 1, p.2

<sup>100</sup> J. M. Ogembo, *Contemporary Witch-Hunting in Gusii, Southwestern Kenya*. Lewinston 2006, pp. 111-116

<sup>101</sup> Sunday Times. *Torment of Africa's 'child witches'* (Feb. 5, 2006), also available at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article726977.ece> (20/03/16)

services. These activities are usually directed towards evil spirits or witchcraft powers.<sup>102</sup> As a result, accusations of witchcraft becomes quite popular among such people in the society.

Many people who have acquired mysterious sicknesses such as HIV/AIDS are accused of witchcraft. This is because there are no medical solutions to the menace. When such patients die too, their death is said to be caused by witches.<sup>103</sup> Sometimes, witch doctors accuse old women in communities that they are the cause of HIV/AIDS.<sup>104</sup> Other diseases such as sickle cell, epilepsy, and recently Ebola are all said to be caused by witchcraft powers.<sup>105</sup> Perhaps, because they are incurable in nature. In other circles, women who live independently from their husbands and relatives are said to be the causes of outbreak of diseases. The outbreak of Cerebro Spinal Meningitis (CSM), in particular local communities in Northern Ghana, led three independent women to be accused of witchcraft substance, and then banished from their own homes.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> J.K Asamoah-Gyadu, Witchcraft Accusations and Christianity in Africa, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, IBMR, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2015) p.23

<sup>103</sup> T. Allen, Witchcraft, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS among the Azande of Sudan, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* Vol. 1, No.359 (Nov. 2007) p.388.

<sup>104</sup> P. Harvey, *HIV/AIDS: What are the implications for humanitarian action?*, Overseas Development Institute (July 2003), available at <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900SID/LGEL-5PSCU4?OpenDocument> last visited (22/03/2016)

<sup>105</sup> J.K Asamoah-Gyadu, Witchcraft Accusations and Christianity in Africa, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, IBMR, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2015) p.24

<sup>106</sup> Y. Badoe, What makes a woman a witch: *Feminist Africa*, Vol.5, pp.44

## 2.7 WITCHCRAFT ACTIVITIES

It is believed that witches have certain medicines or concoctions. These concoctions may be found in pots or gourds. The concoctions may be made up of human hair, finger nails, blood and other food substances. They are usually hidden under beds, in farms.<sup>107</sup> Many people believe that witches possess invisible magic darts in their throats. By these darts, they are able to ‘shoot’ their targets. These targets are usually people who have offended them in words or actions. Over time, these darts will poison the bodies of the targets and eventually kill them.<sup>108</sup>

In other communities, witches are believed to eat from refuse dumps and human waste. They also search for vital human organs such as heart, kidney, and liver to eat them.<sup>109</sup> Witches may operate individually or group in a league with other witches with similar witchcraft orientations. When a witch attempts to destroy an individual, and she fails, she may then ‘ask’ for assistance from other witches who operate in a similar manner.<sup>110</sup>

Witches can turn into several animals. These animals usually include birds, owls, cats, flies or reptiles.<sup>111</sup> Witches are able to destroy the property of people. They also have the powers to kill people. During witches meetings, they present organs of someone and eat them in a pot. Such a person may fall sick eventually and die.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> P. Sarpong, *Ghana in retrospect: Some aspects of Ghanaian culture*. (Accra, Ghana Publishing Corporation, 2006) p.45

<sup>108</sup> *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, IBMR, Vol. 39, No. 1, p.4

<sup>109</sup> C. Damien, *The Myth of Kumo: Knowing the Truth about Sanguma in Simbu Province*, *Catalyst* 35, no. 2 (2005) p.128.

<sup>110</sup> J.K Asamoah-Gyadu, Witchcraft Accusations and Christianity in Africa, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, IBMR, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2015) p.23

<sup>111</sup> P. Sarpong, *Ghana in retrospect: Some aspects of Ghanaian culture*. (Accra, Ghana Publishing Corporation, 2006) p.46

<sup>112</sup> P. Sarpong, *Ghana in retrospect: Some aspects of Ghanaian culture*. (Accra, Ghana Publishing Corporation, 2006) p.46

Among Ghanaians, witchcraft powers can be used consciously or unconsciously. Thus, the use of the powers could be done knowingly or unknowingly.<sup>113</sup> What this means is that, as and when the possessed is asleep, the evil spirit can come out from her body, move into the community, and cause havoc to someone's life or property. After this, the evil spirit will come back and enter into the possessed. As a result, the witch may not have any knowledge about what the evil spirit in her had done during her sleeping hours.<sup>114</sup> Witches are said to operate at night or in darkness. This is because during those times, human beings are weak and defenseless. This is a common belief among people of Northern Ghana.<sup>115</sup>

Witches are believed to destroy agricultural produce on the farm. Children who possess witchcraft powers are believed to turn into animals, chew and destroy crops.<sup>116</sup> It is believed that witches attack people unceremoniously and unprovoked. Their activities, unlike those performed by God, ancestors and spirits, are often described as unjust.<sup>117</sup> Witchcraft is often accused to be the cause of hardships. Difficulties in marriage, job opportunities, as well as financial losses are said to be influenced by the activities of witches.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> G.K Nukunya, *Tradition and change in Ghana: An Introduction to Sociology*. (Accra :Ghana Universities Press, 2003) p.59

<sup>114</sup> P. Gibbs, Beyond the Fence: Controlling Witchcraft Accusations in the Papua New Guinea Highlands, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, IBMR, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2015) p.9

<sup>115</sup> B.I. Musah, *Life in a Witchcamp: Experiences of Residents in the Gnani witchcamp in Ghana* (2013) p.32

<sup>116</sup> J. Schnoebelen, Witchcraft Accusations, Refugee protection and Human Rights: A Review of the Evidence: *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Vol. 169 (2009) p.5 as available at [www.unhcr.com](http://www.unhcr.com)

<sup>117</sup> J. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Heinemann, London: 1969) p.202

<sup>118</sup> Behringer et al, *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History*, (Polity Press, 2004), p.23.

## 2.8 WHY PEOPLE USUALLY FAIL TO HELP THE ACCUSED

As surprising as it may sound, many people find it extremely difficult to assist women and children who have been accused of possessing and using witchcraft substance for several reasons. For example in the Northern regions of Ghana, accused witches are seen as outcasts, and helping an accused witch is itself an antisocial witchery.<sup>119</sup> That is, people who attempt to help accused witches are considered as witches too. Only witches will want to help witches. It is therefore a common practice that individuals and institutions that come together in an attempt to help these alleged witches are also accused of witchcraft.

Again, when someone decides to help an accused witch, he is also at the mercy of the people. Any man or woman who will try to mediate between the accused witch and the mob or accusers may face certain displeasures. The person may be stoned, beaten, or threatened severely. He could even be killed in the process.<sup>120</sup> Because of this reason, many people who are willing to help these women and children do not find it easy to do so.

In other circumstances, accused women are forced to confess that they are responsible for the death of the other. In such situations, people find it challenging rescuing them later on, because there is an impression that the earlier confession may be true. If the confession is true, why then should one help such a wicked

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<sup>119</sup> J. P. Kirby, Towards a Christian Response to Witchcraft in Northern Region; *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2015) p.19

<sup>120</sup> Amnesty International. *Papua New Guinea: Violence against women: Not inevitable, never acceptable*, ASA 34/002/2006 (Sept. 4, 2006), available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA34/002/2006> (last visited Dec. 14, 2008) p.2. (last visited 20/03/2016)

person?<sup>121</sup> However, such victims may succumb to the accusations levelled against them so that they will be relieved from the prolong pains and torture they may have to endure. They do so under duress.<sup>122</sup>

Other people, especially adherents to Christianity have admitted that although they are Christians at heart, they believe in the existence of witchcraft. Such a belief is somehow contradictory to the tenants of the Christian faith. As a result they find it very difficult to show any form of assistance towards the accused.<sup>123</sup>

## **2.9 HOW WITCHCRAFT POWERS ARE DESTROYED**

Witchcraft accusations and witch-hunting are believed to be practices of security. The fear of witches and the problems associated with their activities put greater fear in ordinary people. This leads them to find the witches out and harm them. Local communities are said to be safe and protected in the absence of witches. Therefore, witchcraft accusation and witch-hunting must be carried out every now and then to free society from evil. This is very evident in the Northern part of Ghana.<sup>124</sup>

In these communities, various mechanisms are taken to get rid of the witchcraft powers from the woman operating with it. One popular way is by destroying the vessel in which the evil powers are contained. As it has been said earlier, witchcraft substances are said to be put in pots, and usually placed under beds. When a person

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<sup>121</sup> P. Gibbs, Beyond the Fence: Controlling Witchcraft Accusations in the Papua New Guinea Highlands, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, IBMR, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2015) p.8

<sup>122</sup> Nick Schwartz, *Thinking Critically about Sorcery and Witchcraft* (Goroka, PNG: Melanesian Institute, 2011) p.51.

<sup>123</sup> P. Gibbs, Beyond the Fence: Controlling Witchcraft Accusations in the Papua New Guinea Highlands, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, IBMR, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2015) pp.8-9

<sup>124</sup> C.M Arnskov, *Camping with witches* (2012), also available at [doc.rct.dk/doc/mon2013.055.pdf](http://doc.rct.dk/doc/mon2013.055.pdf)

is caught, she is forced to bring that pot out and destroy all the things that are found in them. These may include hairs, nails, blood among others.<sup>125</sup>

Alternatively, women who are accused of witchcraft powers are made to go through exorcism or deliverance sessions as led by pastors of Charismatic churches.<sup>126</sup> Church leaders and pastors in Independent churches, Charismatic as well as Pentecostal churches are usually seen holding programs that are purposed to deal with witchcraft powers in people. Through programs such as ‘spiritual warfare’, and ‘healing and deliverance’, women and children who are accused may be sent there for exorcism.<sup>127</sup>

In Northern Ghana, many others send the accused witches to traditional priests who prepare concoctions for them to drink. It is believed that these concoctions contain higher spiritual powers that will automatically paralyze the witchcraft powers of the accused. Sometimes, the accused witches are forced to take these concoctions or drinks to prove their innocence or otherwise. If they are found to be guilty, they will be killed by the gods. If they are free, they will not be harmed by it at all.<sup>128</sup> It must however be added that sometimes, the very content of these concoctions are dangerous and harmful in nature. This implies that, even without the supposed

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<sup>125</sup> P. Sarpong, *Ghana in retrospect: Some aspects of Ghanaian culture*. (Accra, Ghana Publishing Corporation, 2006) p.45

<sup>126</sup> J. M. Ogembo, *Contemporary Witch-Hunting in Gusii, Southwestern Kenya*. (Lewinston, 2006) pp. 111-116

<sup>127</sup> J.K Asamoah-Gyadu, Witchcraft Accusations and Christianity in Africa, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, IBMR, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2015) p.23

<sup>128</sup> Action Aid, “*Condemned without trial: women and witchcraft in Ghana*” (2012). Also available at <http://www.actionaid.org.uk/.../ghana>

‘punishment’ from local gods, accused witches can equally die from taking poisonous substances.<sup>129</sup>

Sudden attacks and eventual deaths must lead to the death of others in the community. In local communities of Northern Ghana, when people die mysteriously through accidents, strange and intractable sicknesses, there is a ‘widespread’ attempt to find the witch who caused that. There is no sudden death that would not necessitate public ‘investigation’ for the witch who caused it.<sup>130</sup> As a result, others have employed other forms of doing away with witchcraft powers that are more injurious and devastating to the wellbeing of accused witches.<sup>131</sup> Most of the accused women are beaten, tortured, stoned and even killed.<sup>132</sup> It is quite a common site that women who are accused of witchcraft are beheaded, burnt alive or stabbed to death.<sup>133</sup>

### **2.9.1 CONCLUSION**

Chapter two (2) of the thesis has looked at the belief and existence of witchcraft among Africans. We have considered some definitions of witchcraft. Onwards, we looked at the kinds of people who are predominantly accused of witchcraft powers. We also discussed the two basic motives behind witchcraft acquisition. We also elaborated on the means or mode of acquiring witchcraft in African communities. We have also looked at some supposed activities of witches as well as reasons why

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<sup>129</sup> Action Aid, “*Condemned without trial: women and witchcraft in Ghana*” (2012). Also available at <http://www.actionaid.org.uk/.../ghana>

<sup>130</sup> *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, IBMR, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2015) p.4

<sup>131</sup> Available at [www.humanrights.or.tz/downloads/tanzania-human-rights-report-2009.pdf](http://www.humanrights.or.tz/downloads/tanzania-human-rights-report-2009.pdf).

<sup>132</sup> ter Haar, Gerrie (ed). *Introduction: the Evil Called Witchcraft in Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and*

*Accusations in Contemporary Africa*, (Africa World Press, 2007), p.18

<sup>133</sup> S. Bhaumik, Indian Athlete Debjani Bora Beaten in Witch Hunt, *BBC News India*, October 17, 2014, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-29655662](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-29655662).

people find it difficult in protecting the accused. The next chapter, discusses witchcraft accusations, the establishment of witchcamps and their related human rights issues in Ghana.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **LIFE AT THE WITCH CAMP: A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE**

#### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter (Chapter 2), we looked at belief and existence of witchcraft among African Religions (with special reference to Northern Region of Ghana). We have considered some definitions of witchcraft. Onwards, we looked at the kinds of people who are predominantly accused of witchcraft powers. We also discussed the two basic motives behind witchcraft acquisition. We elaborated on the means or mode of acquiring witchcraft in African communities. We have looked at some supposed activities of witches as well as reasons why people find it difficult in protecting the accused. In this chapter (Chapter 3), we discuss witch camps in Ghana. We discuss the history of Gambaga witch camp as well as rituals that are performed at the camp. We further discuss how living at the witch camp as an alleged witch is a human rights issue.

#### **3.1 WITHCAMPS IN GHANA**

A witch camp is a settlement where persons suspected of being witches can flee for safety, usually in order to avoid being lynched by neighbors. According to local beliefs, the camps are safe places where witchcraft cannot be carried out, which is why the alleged witches can live there safely.<sup>134</sup>

Several witch camps exist in the Northern part of Ghana. The popular ones among them include Kukuo Camp in Bimbila, Gnani Camp in Yendi, and Kpatinga Camp in Gushiegu, as well as the camp in Gambaga. Kukuo and Gnani camps

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<sup>134</sup>Action Aid, *“Condemned without trial: women and witchcraft in Ghana”* (2012). Also available at <http://www.actionaid.org.uk/.../ghana>

accommodate only women whiles the camps at Gushiegu and Gambaga accommodate both men and women.<sup>135</sup>

The Gnani Camp in the Yendi municipality of the Northern region is said to be the largest witchcamp in Ghana.<sup>136</sup> Other witchcamps in the Northern Region of Ghana include Bonyase and Naboli.<sup>137</sup> In Ghana, although the accusation of witchcraft is spread throughout all regions, it is profoundly evident in the Northern regions. This may be due to settlement reasons. That is, because of the witch camps there, it is easier for people to be accused and relocate there.<sup>138</sup> It is estimated that over 5000 women are found in the witchcamps in Northern Ghana.<sup>139</sup>

### **3.2 HISTORY OF THE GAMBAGA WITCHCAMP**

The Gambaga witch camp, now called the Gambaga Outcast Home, was established over hundred years ago. It is said to have been a place that witches would go to have their powers neutralized by the local gods.<sup>140</sup> The Gambaga Outcast Home, accommodates approximately 80 women between the ages of 40 and 70.<sup>141</sup>

It is believed that the witch camp at Gambaga was also founded as a refuge for the accused. According to one Imam, Alhaji Mesuhna Yahaya, women accused of witchcraft were executed over and over again. One time, after successfully

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<sup>135</sup> Y. Badoe, What makes a woman a witch: *Feminist Africa*, Vol.5, pp.40

<sup>136</sup> B.I. Musah, *Life in a Witchcamp: Experiences of Residents in the Gnani witchcamp in Ghana* (2013) p.4

<sup>137</sup> Witchcamp Report, *Women still Accused of witchcraft, lynched in Ghana* (2011). Also available at <http://www.whrin.org/.../witch-camp-report>

<sup>138</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Promotion and Protection of all Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural, including the Right to Development, Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Yakin Ertürk, Mission to Ghana, A/HRC/7/6/Add.3* (2008), pp.66.

<sup>139</sup> Available at [http://www.afrol.com/News2001/gha002\\_witchhunt.htm](http://www.afrol.com/News2001/gha002_witchhunt.htm) (last visited 01/03/2016).

<sup>140</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *supra* note 193, at Footnote 68.

<sup>141</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *supra* note 193, at Footnotes 67-68.

intervening to save the life of one Adissa of Simba, a woman accused of witchcraft, the mosque in Gambaga, under the supervision of then Imam, was made a place of refuge for her.<sup>142</sup>

Over time, many accusations were levelled against different women in their communities and they had to seek refuge at the camp. Subsequently, as large numbers turned in there, families of the accused built mud houses for them to live in. The Gambag-rana (chief of Gambaga) until now, acts as the head of the accused witches. It is believed that he has special powers to neutralize their evil powers.<sup>143</sup>

### **3.3 RITUALS PERFORMED AT THE CAMP**

When a woman arrives at the camp, she is subjected to different forms of rituals. One involves the slaughter of chickens. This is done to prove whether she is innocent or guilty of the crime of which she is being accused. This ceremony is performed by camp chiefs or male priests who are called “*tindanas*”. They are believed to possess supernatural powers and can find out the innocence or guilt of the accused. They are also thought to be able to exorcise the witchcraft spirit, and thus set the victim free.<sup>144</sup>

When traditional priests are performing this exorcism, the accused witches are said to be cleansed thoroughly from their witchcraft powers. In order for the accused to be free or surrender the powers, she must be made to confess that she is a witch.

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<sup>142</sup> Y. Badoe, What makes a woman a witch: *Feminist Africa*, Vol.5, p.40. Also available at [www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa\\_5\\_features\\_2.p](http://www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa_5_features_2.p)

<sup>143</sup> Y. Badoe, What makes a woman a witch: *Feminist Africa*, Vol.5, p. 40. Also available at [www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa\\_5\\_features\\_2.p](http://www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa_5_features_2.p)

<sup>144</sup> C. M. Arnskov, “*Camping with witches*” (2012), available at [doc.rct.dk/doc/mon2013.055](http://doc.rct.dk/doc/mon2013.055)

She must then reveal the source of her witchcraft powers and then surrender the evil powers to the exorcist (traditional priest) to destroy it completely.<sup>145</sup>

The chief priest of the shrine slaughters a white fowl and throws it into the air. If the accused is found innocent by the spirits of the shrine, the fowl falls on its back. But if the spirits of the shrine find the accused guilty, the fowl lands on its front. If the fowl lands with the beak in the ground and the accused witch is found guilty, a second fowl might be slaughtered. The second fowl is slaughtered to determine whether the attacks have been carried out in collaboration with the ancestors or if the witch has practised her powers through a physical object (such as a frog), which then needs to be found and destroyed.<sup>146</sup>

After the slaughtering of fowls the witch can drink a concoction that will cleanse her of the witchcraft. If a guilty witch has denied her aggression, the gods will kill her through the concoction. Following this cleansing ceremony, the accused witch may return home. But if the community does not want her back, she settles in the camp where the spirits of the shrine look after her.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup>K. Palmer, *Spellbound: Inside West Africa's witch camps*. (New York, Free Press, 2010) p.6

<sup>146</sup>.C. M. Arnskov, "Camping with witches" (2012), available at [doc.rct.dk/doc/mon2013.055](http://doc.rct.dk/doc/mon2013.055)

<sup>147</sup>C.M. Arnskov, "Camping with witches" (2012), available at [doc.rct.dk/doc/mon2013.055](http://doc.rct.dk/doc/mon2013.055)

### 3.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES CONCERNING WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS AND WITCHCAMPS

In Ghana, violence emanating from witchcraft beliefs permeates every aspect of our lives. Despite the presence of Christianity in northern Ghana for more than a century, witchcraft accusations persist there and, by all accounts, are increasing.<sup>148</sup>

Women who are subjected to detrimental accusations and beatings live in constant fear in their own homes. Living in a community with continuous nightmare of being beaten, stoned or even killed is a terrifying experience. The fear of abuse and death, psychological and emotional traumas push these accused women from their own homes and communities to witch camps.<sup>149</sup> These experiences are human rights issues because they infringe upon the rights of these accused women. The 1992 Constitution of Ghana clearly stipulates in Chapter 5, Section 15 (2a) that no person must be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment.<sup>150</sup>

Accusations may cause displacement of the accused from her own vicinity. Many women who have been accused of witchcraft are unable to bear the pain, burden and fear of staying among people in the community. Whether they are forcefully ejected from their community or willingly leave their homes, displacement is one of the major problems witchcraft accusations bring in African communities.<sup>151</sup>

Women and children who are accused are usually forced to leave their homes. Their

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<sup>148</sup> S. Drucker-Brown, Mamprusi Witchcraft: Subversion and Changing Gender Relations, *Africa* Vol.63, no. 4 (1993) pp.531–549.

<sup>149</sup> Y. Badoe, What makes a woman a witch: *Feminist Africa*, Vol.5, p.47. Also available at [www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa\\_5\\_features\\_2.p](http://www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa_5_features_2.p)

<sup>150</sup> 1992 Constitution of The Republic of Ghana

<sup>151</sup> Jill Schnoebelen, Witchcraft Accusations, Refugee protection and Human Rights: A Review of the Evidence: *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Vol. 169 (2009) p.2 as available at [www.unhcr.com](http://www.unhcr.com)

right to privacy, correspondence or communication is often curtailed. They cannot enjoy living in their own homes and are forced out by mob to the camps as it is enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana.<sup>152</sup>

Re-integration for the accused witches is almost impossible. There are some of these alleged witches who may be ‘guilty’ of the accusations. Such women find the camp a place of refuge. However, there are many others who are found out to be ‘innocent’ of their accusations. Yet, these ones too decide to stay at the camp, and not to return home. There are fears that they may not be accepted by their own families back at home. Accused women who have been at the camp for more than twenty years also find it difficult to be re-integrated into their families and homes. They find it more convenient to stay at the camp because on their return they are afraid they may be beaten, tortured or even killed.<sup>153</sup> This issue has human rights implications. Their right to freedom of movement is infringed upon. That is, although they desire to come back to their own homes and families, they are forced to stay, live and die at the camps.

On the one hand, the accused witches are afraid of coming back to their own homes and families. But, on the other hand, families, friends and people in the community are afraid of the accused witches. This fear is common because of the anticipation that witches are able to cause harm to both lives and property.<sup>154</sup> They are often ostracized by the town folk. Even at the camp, many in the wider community do

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<sup>152</sup> 1992 Constitution of The Republic of Ghana

<sup>153</sup> J. Schnoebelen, Witchcraft Accusations, Refugee protection and Human Rights: A Review of the Evidence: *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Vol. 169 (2009) p.21 also available at [www.unhcr.com](http://www.unhcr.com)

<sup>154</sup> P. Sarpong, *Ghana in retrospect: Some aspects of Ghanaian culture*. (Accra, Ghana Publishing Corporation, 2006) p.46

not have any form of interaction with them. People often shun their company and dissociate themselves. As a result, their lives lack human recognition, companionship, and love.<sup>155</sup>

The feeling of being called a ‘witch’ is a very dehumanizing one. Accused witches suffer stigma from others. Apart from the tag that is put on these people without any substantial evidence, many people in their communities decide to stay away from them as far as possible. These women are often ostracized and hated by their own neighbors and relatives. Many fear that these accused witches can have negative influence over their dear lives. Hence the need to shun their company for good.<sup>156</sup> This situation has human rights implications. The 1992 Constitution of Ghana, in Chapter 5 (15) b states that no human being shall be subjected to any condition that detracts his or her dignity and worth.<sup>157</sup>

The moment a woman is accused of witchcraft, she is condemned. Without any evidence to substantiate such hideous claims, she is made to confess her witchcraft accusations amidst torture and severe beatings. Ethically, the innocence or guilt of the accused must be ascertained before they are condemned. However, in these communities, the opposite is prevalent.<sup>158</sup> What is more, those who commit such atrocities to the alleged witches are rarely punished by the traditional authorities. Although their activities are injurious to the lives of the accused, there is little

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<sup>155</sup> J. P. Kirby, “Ghana’s Witches: Scratching Where It Itches,” in *Mission and Culture: The Louis J. Luzbetak*

*Lectures*, ed. Stephen B. Bevans (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2012), 189–223.

<sup>156</sup> G. ter Haar, (ed). *Introduction: the Evil Called Witchcraft in Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa*, (Africa World Press, 2007) p.10

<sup>157</sup> 1992 Constitution of The Republic of Ghana

<sup>158</sup> Action Aid, “*Condemned without trial: women and witchcraft in Ghana*” (2012). Also available at <http://www.actionaid.org.uk/.../ghana>

attempt by the traditional authorities to bring such culprits to book.<sup>159</sup> This is an infringement of the right of the accused because she is not given fair trial which is enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. This provision is in Chapter 5 (19) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana.<sup>160</sup>

The possessions of accused witches are usually destroyed after they have been banished from their own communities. After these women are brutally abused and accused without any evidence, they are made to run from the community to a witchcamp. Their goods and property which they acquired by working so hard are utterly destroyed. When the accused is wealthy, she will then suffer great property loss. Usually, it is almost impossible for relatives to retrieve even few of her former belongings.<sup>161</sup> This is an abuse of the rights of the person. In the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, every person has the right to own or possess property either alone or with others.

The living conditions at these witch camps are usually sub-standard. They do not have any proper housing system. The accused women live in thatches and mud houses. Both women and children are made to sleep on the bare floor in the cold weather.<sup>162</sup> These accused witches only live by what will be given them by the local authorities, churches and Muslim communities. Sometimes, their relatives and

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<sup>159</sup> Amnesty International. *Papua New Guinea, Women Human Rights Defender Anna Benny Appeal Case*, ASA 34/005/2006 (Sept. 4, 2006), available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA34/005/2006/en/dom-ASA340052006en.pdf> (last visited 21/03/2016)

<sup>160</sup> 1992 Constitution of The Republic of Ghana

<sup>161</sup> Y. Badoe, What makes a woman a witch: *Feminist Africa*, Vol.5, pp.47-48. Also available at [www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa\\_5\\_features\\_2.p](http://www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa_5_features_2.p)

<sup>162</sup> Y. Badoe, What makes a woman a witch: *Feminist Africa*, Vol.5, pp.48. Also available at [www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa\\_5\\_features\\_2.p](http://www.agi.ac.za/...ac.../fa_5_features_2.p)

friends also provide them with food. These donations and gifts are not even regular. Neither do they come in sufficient quantities.<sup>163</sup> Usually, they are only given food after they have worked on the farmlands of the chief. During the harvest season, they are given food for their labor.<sup>164</sup>

The witch camps usually have inadequate social amenities. Facilities that support their lives are not enough. There are no adequate medical facilities to cure and control the diseases of the accused. These facilities are important and in dire need because, the nature of their accommodation facilities, nutrition, as well as the physical and emotional abuse call for proper medical services for them. Unfortunately, these services and facilities are not present.<sup>165</sup>

Other facilities such as portable drinking water are lacking in these camps. Sometimes, these elderly women are made to walk almost 3 kilometers from the camps in order to fetch water with heavy pots from River Oti. There is also no access to electricity in these camps. Many of their thatches and mud houses have leaking roofs that are prone to heavy rainfall and storms.<sup>166</sup> The lack of adequate social amenities is an infringement on their fundamental human rights. The Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in Article 14(h) states that every human being shall enjoy adequate

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<sup>163</sup> K. Palmer, *Spellbound: Inside West Africa's witch camps*. (New York, Free Press, 2010) p.6

<sup>164</sup> Witch camp Report, *Women still accused of witchcraft, lynched in Ghana* (2011). Also available at <http://www.whrin.org/.../witch-camp-report>

<sup>165</sup> J. Schnoebelen, *Witchcraft Accusations, Refugee protection and Human Rights: A Review of the Evidence: New Issues in Refugee Research*, Vol. 169 (2009) pp.18-22 also available at [www.unhcr.com](http://www.unhcr.com)

<sup>166</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), *Ghana Witch Camps: Widows' in Exile* (2012), also available at [www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19437130](http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19437130)

living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communication.

When someone is accused of witchcraft, she can as well be preparing for her death because of the atrocities she may have to endure.<sup>167</sup> Most of the women who are accused of using witchcraft powers are beheaded, burnt alive or stabbed to death.<sup>168</sup>

Exact figures of such brutalities in African communities are lacking because many killings are officially not reported. But it is generally agreed that the number of people, mostly elderly women, who have been murdered on charges of witchcraft during the last three decades is in the tens of thousands in Africa alone. The popular places of such abuse in Northern Ghana includes Gambaga.<sup>169</sup> In these communities, it is believed that people who have witchcraft powers must be dealt with severely. It is usually believed that killing the accused witches will eventually cause the witchcraft powers to cease.<sup>170</sup> Such killings is an infringement on the rights of these accused women. For example, in Chapter 5(13) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, it is enshrined that no person shall be deprived of his life intentionally except in the exercise of the execution of a sentence of a court.

Children who live their lives at the camp also face human rights abuses. Most of them are tagged as ‘witches’. This stigma infringes on their dignity as human beings. This is because the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, in Chapter 5 (15) states

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<sup>167</sup> ter Haar, Gerrie (ed). *Introduction: the Evil Called Witchcraft in Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and*

*Accusations in Contemporary Africa*, (Africa World Press, 2007), p.18

<sup>168</sup> S. Bhaumik, Indian Athlete Debjani Bora Beaten in Witch Hunt, *BBC News India*, October 17, 2014, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-29655662](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-29655662).

<sup>169</sup> E. Dovlo, Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana, in: Gerrie Ter Haar (ed.), *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa*, (Trenton, 2007) pp. 67–112.

<sup>170</sup> E. Dovlo, Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana, in: Gerrie Ter Haar (ed.), *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa*, (Trenton, 2007) pp. 67–112.

that every citizen must have his or her dignity ensured. They do not have access to quality educational facilities at the camp. Children at the camp do not have access to hospital or medical facilities. All these issues are human rights issues. In the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Report, article 14(b) states that every person has right to adequate health care facilities including information, counselling and services in family planning. Again in Article 14(h), everyone – including children- must enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communication.<sup>171</sup>

### **3.5 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter (Chapter 3), we discussed witch camps in Ghana. We also discussed the history of Gambaga witch camp as well as rituals that are performed at the camp. We furthered our discussion on how living at the witch camp as an alleged witch is a human rights issue. In Chapter 4, we conduct field interviews with 15 women who are staying at the Gambaga witchcamp in Northern Ghana. Apart from these women, we also analyze and discuss the interview findings with leaders of the Christian, Islamic and Africa traditional authorities in Gambaga.

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<sup>171</sup> Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Report.

## **CHAPTER FOUR (4)**

### **ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FIELD FINDINGS AND INTERVIEWS**

#### **4.0 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 3, we discussed witch camps in Ghana. We also discussed the history of the Gambaga witch camp as well as rituals that are performed before an accused witch is accommodated at the camp. We furthered our discussion on how living at the witch camp as an alleged witch is a human rights issue. In this Chapter (4), we conducted field interviews with 15 women who are staying at the Gambaga witchcamp in Northern Ghana. Apart from these women, we also analyzed and discussed the interview findings with one leader each of the Christian, Islamic and Africa traditional religious community in Gambaga.

#### **4.1 INTERVIEW WITH THE GAMBAG-RANA**

The title, ‘Gambag-rana’ means ‘Chief of Gambaga’. His name is called Gambag-rana Yahaya Wuni. He became the chief of Gambaga over 30 years ago. He was born and bred in Gambaga traditional area. He is a little over seventy (70) years and has five wives. He has more than thirteen (13) children who are all staying with him in the palace. The palace is positioned in front of the witch camp. Symbolically, before someone gets to them, the chief and his elders must be made aware first. He gave us an overview of the hierarchical order of Gambaga traditional area.

As a Gambag-rana, he is supported by his ‘*wudama*’ that is cabinet. His cabinet include the ‘*Lunaba*’ (in charge of drums), ‘*Mossinaba*’ (chief of Mossi people), ‘*Bimobanaba*’ (chief of Bimoba people), ‘*Frafranaba*’ ( chief of Frafra people),

*'Kussanaba'* ( chief of Kussa people), as well as *'Grunsinaba'* ( chief of Grunsi or Kasena people). At the witchcamp, the Gambag-rana is assisted by the *'Magazia'* (queen of the accused witches).

The *Magazia*, Poa Tachira is also assisted by two women: Zenabu Booge (first assistant) and Zenabu Sugri (second assistant). There are also various women acting as leaders of each of the tribal people. The Bimobas have their leader. The Kasena, The Frafra, The Mossi and all the other groups also have their leaders who send their grievances to the *Magazia* through her assistants.

According to him, his great grandfather was the first chief to have become chief and protector of the camp. In the time of Baba, his great grandfather, witchcraft accusations in the community was very common.

Various forms of brutalities were meted out to those who were accused. He began to intervene by securing the lives of the victims who ran to him. As a form of refuge, he began to make them live with him as long as they wanted to. Although some returned home, many others stayed with him for the rest of their lives. And as the number increased, it was necessary to put up thatches and mud houses for them to live in. Any other person who came to be protected will then have to come to the camp, seek assistance and protection from the Gambag-rana and stay over time.

In order to test whether the accusations leveled against a victim is true, this *'Nokpohaga'* ritual was performed. The two parties were made to buy a white fowl each. Both were presented on the day of the ritual. It is the Gambag-rana who led the performance of this ritual. The accusers rehearsed some words after the chief and throw the fowl into the air. One of the accusers will say (in essence), "I know

it is this (other) woman who has caused this problem in my house. Let the gods vindicate me, and punish this woman for destroying me”. After this, the accused will also throw her fowl into the air after repeating similar words after the Gambag-rana.

The posture that the dead fowl assumed when it landed on the ground determined the truth or falsity of the accusations. When the fowl faces the sky upwards, the victim is said to be innocent. It is as if she is saying, “I leave everything to God”. On the other hand, when the fowl falls with its face into the ground, the victim is said to be guilty of the accusations. It is as if, she is saying, “I am ashamed, I am covering my face from the gods and my people”

We should not be fooled that there has not been attempts to bring men to stay at the camp. He said there are many instances where men were brought there but he refused to give them accommodation. He said that just the previous week, five (5) men were brought from Burkina Faso for protection, which he refused. He defended that men should not be allowed there because, “A fish cannot give birth to a fowl”. Thus, wizards, when they are allowed to stay there, will impregnate the women, and produce many other witches.

However, he said that women were more susceptible to witchcraft than men because anger and impatience are tools through which witchcraft powers work effectively. According to Alhaji Wuni, women always respond to provocations, and usually react in negative ways. Such extreme reactions lead them to use witchcraft powers to destroy other people in the community.

He continued by saying women are overly jealous. This jealousy will cause them to find ways and means to destroy other people in the society. When a woman does not have certain things and she sees others with them, she immediately begins to find ways she can get these things, or make the others lose theirs. This will eventually end by consulting other evil women who have witchcraft powers. He ended by saying that polygamous marriages give room for greed, envy and unhealthy competitions which will result into evil manipulation of other rivals, and their children. Although these experiences may hold some water, we cannot generalize nor conclude that women are jealous and envious than men. Men and women are equally jealous and greedy in our natural state.

The Gambag-rana boasted of several contributions they have made for the accused witches at the camp. He is the one who has provided accommodation for the accused. All the mud houses, thatches and roofs at the camp were given to them by the traditional council.

They provide them with roofing sheets when the old ones gets torn apart or rusted. The traditional council provides money for their daily upkeep.

He is in charge of their general welfare such as food, good drinking water, drugs as well as clothes and sandals. They provide peace and security for the alleged witches. Because some members of the community see them as criminals, it is important that their lives will be protected. They make sure there are no brutalities at the camp.

It is also their responsibility to mediate between the families. All the accusations of witchcraft, according to him, happen between two families. And it is the duty of

the Gambag-rana and his council to find ways to arbitrate cases between these families. They usually sit them down, deliberate on issues and end by making peaceful agreements. This may pave the way for the accused witch to go back to her family or matrimonial home in peace.

Because of the traditional council, the accused witches are not ostracized by the wider community. When people try to shun their company, the Gambag-rana quickly makes sure that those people are brought to book and punished. This serves as deterrent to others in the community. The Gambag-rana serves as the only viable link through which churches, Muslim leaders, NGOs and government bodies get in touch with the accused witches. It is the proper procedure that he would be consulted before any person gets in touch with the accused witches.

He added that some of the churches in Gambaga provide the accused witches with old clothes, money, corn, millet, rice as well as sorghum after harvest. Muslims help by practicing *Zakat* and by sending them food after their fasting (*Eid-ul-Adha*) period. Although government has promised them a lot of things, little has actually been realized. He was rather thankful to the religious communities and the NGOs. Through the latter, he has increased in knowledge about what human rights issues are, and why the rights of the women must be protected.

He ended by enumerating several challenges the alleged witches face at the camp. According to him, the greatest challenge of the accused witches was their inability to go back to their families. Their own families brought them here and said they would come for them over time. However, they do not come for them. They reject

them until traditional council members and Church leaders get back to them in their very communities. These women feel they are not needed by their own relations.

He said that the shelter for the women are not good enough. Their huts are very small and very old. Some have no access to electricity where as others have no gates to their rooms. Amidst all these, many of the rooms are heavily congested. Although government institutions and individuals in the public sector have promised ‘millions of things’, they have not realized even ‘two’ of them. As a result, the increase in number of inmates causes an increase on the pressure of the existing facilities.

Whether the witchcamp should be destroyed or not, he defended that the witch camp in Gambaga must not be destroyed because there are rumors that they will be destroyed soon. He continued his defense by saying that witchcraft and the establishment of witch camp is part of their tradition. It has become an institution in Gambaga. Thus, any attempt to destroy the witchcamp is synonymous to destroying their beliefs and practices. He said, “The crops of natives must not be washed away by foreign rains”. What he means is that their indigenous beliefs cannot be washed away by ‘foreign ideas’ such as human rights.

The Gambag-rana said that the witch camp has protected the lives of the accused witches. Because they are now staying at the camp, their enemies neither are unable to attack nor destroy them. So, arguing that these women go back to their homes is arguing that their lives should be cut off since numerous brutalities await them.

#### 4.2.1 INTERVIEW WITH ZENABU BOOGE

Zenabu Booge is the second-in-command at the camp. She is the authority after Poa Tachira- the *Magazia*- at the camp. Zenabu hails from Nasoane in the Konkomba community. She is a little over 60 years. She has lived at the camp for more than two decades. She is a member of Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Gambaga. When she was at Nasoane, she was a pito brewer and a farmer. She used to rear 'kuruchu' (pigs) for her father, and later started one for herself. She was therefore financially sound. Her husband, who was the '*Nangomba-rana*' (chief of Nangomba people) had three wives and she was the second one. She had six children and three of them are dead.

She recounted, "One early morning, the younger brother of my husband came to our house. He was very angry. He accused me of bewitching his little daughter". According to the man, Zenabu had cast a spell on his daughter. His daughter has been attacked by some strange sickness for a long time. Although the child was crying, and telling her father to stop insulting and beating Zenabu, he refused and continued to beat her. He was later joined by his relatives, members of the community, and her own people.

She had to flee from her house to her father's compound for her life. Although her father disagreed whether she should come to Gambaga, she decided to come so that her father will have his peace of mind. She had no child to defend her, and thought it wise to come to the camp. She was then brought by her eldest brother to the Gambag-rana after the incident. The '*Nokpohaga*' ritual was performed for her, and although she was innocent, she decided to stay.

According to Zenabu, the District Assembly helps them by providing monthly allowance for them. She stated that the meagre allowance was not even regular. They were given some clothes some 6 months ago. They are given drugs too when they are sick. Rice, mat, blankets, mosquito nets are sometimes given to them. They give them money for 'dawadawa' and other local delicacies. The churches around help them. One Pastor Kyekye offered them some bags of corn. Two people were given one bag each. He gave them many blankets too. The overseer of one church at Bolga too gave them rice and corn. Sometimes, people in the community buy from them, and others give them dresses and money.

Through the *Zakat*, Muslims too show their love and care for them. Some Muslims provide dresses for them. NGOs help them in the manufacturing of 'alata samina'. Some 'white people' (foreigners) came to teach them how to make beads, bracelets, ear rings as well as necklaces. NGOs sometimes provide them with firewood for charcoal. She continued by saying that at the camp, no one is allowed to practice witchcraft because if anyone tries to, she will be killed by the gods at the shrine.

Human rights institutions have taught them to live in peace with other people in the wider community. However, because of language barrier, she is unable to understand most of what is being communicated by NGOs. They usually speak English when they come to their premises. Many a times, these workers from the NGOs do not make use of interpreters.

Zenabu said she does not want to go back to her family nor her husband. At the camp, she is now married to one relative of the Gambag-rana. She has given birth to two children now- Somaila who is currently at Bawku Nursing Training College,

and Hannah; a JHS 3 and BECE candidate. According to Zenabu, the people in the Gambaga community do not isolate themselves from them as they were doing initially. The stigma of being called '*sooba*' (a witch) is gradually dying out. The Gambag-rana and local authorities have helped curb the situation.

Zenabu listed her challenges at the camp. She said school fees and exams fees give her a lot of headache. Again, delays in the supply of aid by NGOs and government bodies make her uncomfortable. This is because there is no work for her to do at the camp in order to get money. She must work extremely hard before she can get food to eat. She has accommodation problems. Sometimes, her room gets flooded. She has to lie on the bare ground outside her hut. She sometimes does not sleep at all. Her hut has no door. She is therefore prone to attacks from scorpions and snakes as well as mosquitoes.

#### **4.2.2 INTERVIEW WITH ZENABU SUGRI**

Zenabu Sugri is the third highest authority at the camp. In hierarchy, she comes after Poa Tachira and Zenabu Booge. She is a woman from Bumprugu Yinyoo in the East Mamprusi District. She has stayed in the camp for more than twelve (12) years. She has eight children. Five of them are girls and three are boys. Due to severe beatings, molestations she was subjected to before she arrived at the camp, she is almost crippled and cannot walk well. At the camp, she has been engaged in farming and petty trading which has deteriorated her health. She is over seventy (70) years old.

Before running to the camp, she was a trader- buying and selling food items such as yam, rice, wheat and millet. Her husband, just like her father, was a farmer. She was the first wife of two co-wives. She claims there was reasonable amount of peace between the rivals. Now, she professes to be a Christian and attends the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, at Gambaga.

In narrating the various activities that led her to the camp, she sadly said, “A young male child was sick one afternoon. As I was sleeping in my room, I heard a lot of shouts ‘Come out!’ ‘Come out!’ . Dalabri, the young boy who was not even five years pointed fingers at her, and said, “This is the one I have been seeing in my dreams lately”. By this, they meant she was responsible for the child’s sickness. When she denied the allegation and probed the child sternly, Dalabri later said, ‘My father Nkogbaa said I should say you are responsible’. However, the men claimed that they had made their ‘spiritual investigations’ from soothsayers and priests and have found out that she was the cause. When she asked them, ‘Do I have a history of such things?’ they refused to answer and started beating her mercilessly.

As the brutalities and violence continued for days, the chief of Yinyora called ‘Inyorana’ called both parties to the palace. The chief advised that they go to Gambaga to find the truth behind her accusations. She came with one Innusah to Gambaga. Although she was innocent, it was wise for her to leave the community because of the threats, rumors and suspicions that will be levelled against her regularly. She continued, ‘my father and brothers came for me, and brought me to Gambaga’. At the camp, the ‘Nokpohaga’ ritual was performed and she was

declared guilty. After giving her concoctions, it was said that her powers were neutralized and will therefore be given a place to stay at the camp.

According to Zenabu, the government helps them with monthly allowance and help them organize co-operative farming societies. The church helps them through the 'GO HOME Project'. Through the 'Zakat', Muslims leaders and members alike help them. The Gambag-rana gives them half of the profit they accrue from harvests. When they receive 6 bags of rice, they are given 3. When they receive 4 bags of corn as profit, they are given 2. NGOs such as Agambire, Action Aid and the recent SADA project have somehow contributed to their wellbeing.

Zenabu complained that there is inadequate amount of *d(z)ibu* (food). They have never had food in abundance. There are even days that they strive hard before they get something to eat. She continued that the standard of living at the camp is too low. The nature of their rooms, surroundings and the quality of water are low as compared to Bumprugu (where she came from). She also has four grandchildren to take care of currently when she has no work to do.

Whether Zenabu wants to go home or not, she said, "there is a process that must be completed before I can successfully be welcomed back home. When my family now confesses I am harmless, they will come to the Gambag-rana and perform some rites after which I can successfully join them". Although she knows of this process, she is equally aware that it will never be completed for her to go back because her family does not want her.

### 4.2.3 INTERVIEW WITH ADISSA DAKRUGU

Adissa Dakrugu has lived half of her entire life at the camp. She is 60 years and came to the camp when she was 30 years. She is from Tuni in the East Mamprusi District. She is a Dagomba and has five children. Two of them are boys and the rest are girls. She was the second wife of her husband. There were three rivals in the house. Adissa is the head and representative of the Kukumbu people at the camp. She was a farmer back at Tuni. She used to pick shea nuts in their season, and would make shea butter afterwards. She is a Christian and attends the Presbyterian Church of Ghana at Gambaga.

She described the sad events that led her to the camp. She said one sunny afternoon, the unexpected happened. One of her rivals called Wunagi was very sick. According to Wunagi, anytime she closes her eyes, she 'sees' Adissa trying to kill her. Wunagi complained about her bitterly to their husband. On hearing the news, Adissa came to her elder brother for advice- whether to stay in the house, or pack her belongings to her father's house. Because her brother wanted peace, he advised her to come to the camp at Gambaga. She came along with her father and her elder brother. After the 'nokpohaga' ritual was performed, she was confirmed a witch and the cause of Wunagi's sickness. She has ever since come to live there in 'peace'. The church supports them by leading them to establish small co-operative groups among themselves. These groups are called '*Asongtaba*' which means, 'let us come together and help ourselves'.

Adissa elaborated her challenges at the camp. She said, "It is my dream, although it may never be a reality, that I go back home to meet my children". As and when I

was coming to Gambaga, they were only teenagers”. With tears in her eyes, she asked us, “Will they even recognize me?” She said, “If I can only re-unite with my children, my joy will be made full”.

#### **4.2.4 INTERVIEW WITH BUGRI ANATO**

Bugri Anato, a woman of about 55 years, is from Suminiboma No.1. She is a committed Muslim at the camp. She was living at Nalerigu- a town next to Gambaga. She is a Mamprusi by ethnicity. Her father was a settler in an area called Atabia. She married her husband and moved to Sakogu. She was the third wife of her husband. Bugri has lived in the camp for almost three years.

Bugri reluctantly described the activities that led to her departure from Nalerigu to Sakogu. She said, “My son asked me to come and stay with him at Nalerigu. I then asked my husband for permission and left with him. Then, three years ago in the month of ‘Larya’ (month of fasting for Muslims), my son Abdullai Mahammadu fell seriously sick”. She continued “His sickness was sudden and almost finished him in a short time”. Her son then consulted various spiritualists and powers from other places without the knowledge of his mother.

According to Abdullai, all ‘indications’ attest to the fact that his own mother, Bugri, was the cause of his sickness. She was then accused of possessing and using witchcraft powers against her own son. She asked her son, “My son, I kept you for nine months in my womb. I gave birth to you. I gave life to you. Are you now accusing me of bewitching you?” Her son did not answer this question, but went ahead and reported the case to his uncles and brothers.

Her family then came for her from Abdullai within seven days. Her son Abdullai still came back to Sakogu and asked her to return his soul to him. (It is believed that when a witch wants to kill a person, she will take his soul and hide it somewhere). Because of how the issue was developing, Bugri's father and brothers brought her to Gambaga to 'clarify' the matter. The Gambag-rana led the performance of the '*nokpohaga*' or '*noamaa*' ritual. She was found to be guilty of the accusations. After being confirmed to have '*soo*' in possession, she was then made to stay at the camp.

Later on, her son came back and begged the Gambag-rana to send his mother back to Nalerigu but she refused to go. Bugri refused because as she said, "I do not know how I will be able to deal with the humiliation and embarrassment. Again, my own brothers are divided over the issue. Some want me back. Others do not want to see me alive."

Bugri's challenges at the camp are threefold. Number one, she is hoping and praying that her father and brothers will come for her so that she will have a normal life. Without the father's approval, she cannot go back. She has no access to electricity in her hut. Although some people have access to electricity, she is one of the deprived ones. Her room is also congested. A lot of food items for the inmates are packed in her hut. She feels very uncomfortable as she has been sleeping in the congested room.

According to Bugri Anato, there has been no support or help from the government for all the 3 years she has been at the camp. Other benevolent individuals and NGOs bring them old clothes and slippers. The pastors and church leaders help by giving

them food and clothes. Muslims give them food after the fasting period. Again, after ‘*bonzana*’ – harvest of crops, folks in town come around and give them some fruits, vegetables and corn.

#### **4.2.5 INTERVIEW WITH KUANDUR KWANLAM**

Kuandur Kwanlam is about 65 years of age. She came from Nankpanduri to Gambaga. She is the leader and representative of the Bimoba people at the camp. Kuandur was married and had only one rival. Her rival died some few years after her marriage ceremony. She has been at the camp for more than thirty years (30). She seems to be one of the weakest (health wise) inmates at the camp. Kuandur was a pito brewer and was engaged in the buying and selling of groundnut seasonally. She had three children. Unfortunately, two have passed on. She professes to be a Christian- a member of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Gambaga.

Her fate was determined after a series of some unfortunate events. Her co-wife had a son called Bisup. This boy became seriously sick- the type of sickness the people believe cannot be healed by using hospital medication. When Bisup was admitted at the Nalerigu Baptist Medical Centre (BMC), she went there three days later to find out how the young boy was faring. A day or two after her visit, the boy passed on. She was not accused immediately until after his funeral. Her husband and the co-wife Suuk started to ‘investigate properly’ into the death of their son. After several consultations, it was ‘clear’ that Kuandur was responsible for the death of Bisup.

She protested over and over again that the allegations were not true. Her own siblings and parents came along with her to Gambag-rana for the 'Nokpohaga'. On reaching the camp, she decided not to go through the process because she decided not to even go back again whether she is found to be innocent or guilty. The Gambag-rana then gave her a place to stay at the camp in peace. She agreed that there were insults here and there between her family and the family of Suuk but there were no 'serious' forms of violence such as beatings, torture or even death.

According to Kwandur, the Local government helps them by providing food, clothes and *ligri* (money) for them. The Presby church at Gambaga gives them used clothes as well as '*d(z)ibu*' every five months. Muslims provide them with '*kawana*' (corn) as well as *chinchina* (clothes). The Gambag-rana gives them accommodation, security and food. NGOs help them by giving them money in groups, and by teaching them how '*alata samina*' is manufactured in the local way.

Kwandur's greatest challenge is her inability to go back to her own people. She made the impression that staying at the camp is like staying in a prison. Another challenge she faces at the camp is congestion. The rooms in which they live are very small in size. She has also packed a lot of food, bags and other things there. These food items are used to prepare food for all the inmates at the camp. These women live in mud houses and because of the hot weather, the place becomes very hot. She had to share her hut with Kwandut-an inmate who came to the camp one month ago.

In relation to human rights issues, she knows that there are institutions that are defending their lives and protecting them from other people who may want to hurt

them. She also knows that there are individuals who are fighting for their welfare and development. However, she could not give any accurate information about their names and specific roles. Sometimes they receive instructions from these people. They are also educated on how to relate with other people in the wider community.

#### **4.2.6 INTERVIEW WITH WUNI GOMA**

Wuni Goma hails from Boaguri in the East Mamprusi District. She is a Muslim and has been at the camp for more than 10 years. She is a little over 60 years of age. She got married in Boagruri to Mongyea Nzangani. Nzangani married to other wives but she was the eldest. She was a farmer and a trader by occupation. Wuni gave birth to 10 children, but only six of them are still alive.

Wuni reluctantly narrated the painful events that brought her to the witchcamp. She began by saying in a whisper to my interpreter, “My life has broken down. Everything breaks down here”. She said, “One night, I was sleeping when Nzangani, my husband came into my room with a suspicious look on his face”. Her husband asked her, “Why is your colleague (rival) having a severe headache? Why are you silent on the matter?” What Nzangani meant was that the severe headache was caused by Wuni, and that she must not pretend she does not know about it. The same night, she moved through the darkness to her father’s house because she understood what Nzangani meant.

When Nzangani became aware that Wuni had moved back to her father, he came to them and made a formal complain to her family. On hearing the case, her father and elder brothers decided to bring the case to the Gambag-rana for clarification

since he has the powers to decipher the truth behind the mystery. She said, “Although I did not want to go, my elder brother made me understand that it was my only safe place for that mean time” She left in 30 days to Gambaga. At Gambaga, the *‘Nokpohaga’* ritual was not performed because she had decided to stay whether she was innocent or guilty. She said she has peace and there are no rumors or threats over her life at Gambaga.

According to Wuni Goma, the inmates receive help from different people and individuals. The inmates work on the farms of the Gambag-rana. During harvests, he gives them bags of corn and rice so that they share. When they make 4 ‘trips’, they are given 2. And when they make 6 trips, they are given 3 bags. He also provides accommodation for them. The community share their farm produce with them when the harvest time is due. The Gambag-rana makes sure that their lives are protected from people (especially men) who would want to revenge their loss. The government helps them by providing water containers, *‘sonewa’* (mats) and funds. The church provides them *d(z)ibu-* food, drinks, old dresses as well as slippers. The Muslim community provides them with veils, mats and food during celebration of festivals. The community has provided a sense of belongingness and safety for her. She enjoys the peace and stability in the community.

Wuni Goma enumerated several problems she faces at the camp. She needs skills so that she can begin her own trade. There is also over-dependence on government and other private institutions. If she has certain skills, she could reduce her dependence on these authorities. Currently, her grandchildren are in school and she needs money to pay their school fees. She needs clothes, shelter and little funds for

herself too. She wants to go back to her home. She said, “There is nowhere like home”.

About her desire for re-integration, Wuni said, “Even as we speak now, if my people come here, I will leave this interview for you people, and go with them”. She demonstrates little knowledge about human rights issues at the camp. What she knows is that various individuals and institutions in Ghana and overseas come around to visit them from time to time. Some of those individuals and groups educate them about their rights and freedoms as citizens of the country. Usually, these individuals give them the assurance that their lives are safeguarded, and that many people are fighting for their freedom. This knowledge makes her very happy and quiet surprised. She knows there are people who have become her family even though her real family has abandoned her.

#### **4.2.7 INTERVIEW WITH AZARA NAABU**

Azara Naabu hails from ‘Maane’. She was the only wife to the ‘*Naachimanaba*’ at Gushegu. She told us that she is a Christian, and a staunch member of Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Gambaga. When Azara was living in Gushegu, she was trading in locally manufactured pots. She could make some herself overtime. She has four children now- 2 boys and 2 girls.

She said, as a single wife, she never thought an accusation of witchcraft could be directed to her because she knew it was only co-wives who accused each other in their matrimonial homes. However, the unexpected happened one day at her work place. She said, “One day at work, I saw the relatives of my husband coming

towards my place. I did not know it would be the day my life will change completely”. When they reached her place, they began to shout at her and accused her of bewitching a certain young girl in their home.

She kept quiet although they profusely abused her with words. Another lady, Adissa, too began to accuse her few days later that she is responsible for the deaths of some people in Gushegu. According to Adissa, she had several dreams which indicated that Azara was responsible. Her brothers came for her and brought her to Gambaga to confirm the allegations. She was forced to accept the allegations even before they got to the camp. As a result, the ‘*Nokpohaga*’ ritual was not performed. She has stayed at the camp for four years, but her husband has never stepped there.

According to Azara, she has received different assistance from different quarters. The government, through the local authorities, provides them with ‘*chinchina*’ (clothes), ‘*d(z)ibu*’ (food), water containers as well as ‘*sonewa*’ (mats). The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Gambaga provides them with ‘*kawana*’ (corn) after the harvest, and ‘*suma*’ (groundnuts) quite frequently. Generally, the Church gives them food. The Muslim community provides food and help them fix their roofs when they get in bad conditions. According to Azara, the pastor and church leaders advise them to forget about the past and move on with their lives. Through NGOs, they receive food and (*neymah*) old clothes. Azara surprisingly seems to have no difficulties or challenges. She said, “So far as I am alive, I am happy. I will be eating and eating till the day I die”. This shows that she has little knowledge about her freedoms and rights as a Ghanaian because she thinks it is only food she needs

in order to survive. Later on, she confirmed that she has never been taught anything about her rights, freedoms and privileges as a Ghanaian citizen.

#### **4.2.8 INTERVIEW WITH MABIAN ASANA**

Mabian Asana is the youngest inmate we met at the camp. She is 40 years old. She comes from Majia in the East Mamprusi district. He was married to Bukari. She was the second wife of two. She said the relationship between both rivals was not very bad. At Majia, she was a business woman who was trading in clothes. Mabian has three sons and a girl. She is a member of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Gambaga. She has stayed at the camp for more than three years.

She looked very angry, and was reserved from the others. Before we asked her anything, she started by saying, “I have every cause to worry. When I look at where I was 3 years ago and where I am now, I get very angry”. She continued without hesitation, “The younger brother of my husband had a son called Matop who attended secondary school in Kumasi (‘Kumasi’ is the general name given to the entire southern part of Ghana). He came home very sick and I was accused of his situation”. When all fingers were pointed at her, she asked the young man, “Did you not leave here many years ago? How am I responsible for your sickness? Later that night, when she was sleeping, Matop suddenly entered her hut and started beating her mercilessly.

As she continued to talk, she paused, and looked at the sky, and said, “I nearly died. I thought I would die”. She then took to her heels towards her father’s house for

safety. Matop traced her and demanded that his soul should be given back to him. (Witches are believed to have possession of the souls of their victims).

That same year, her father passed on. After the funeral, Joseph, her elder brother convinced her and brought her to Gambaga for safety. This was because there was no one to protect her again from Matop. Asana said she was 4 months pregnant when she was being beaten but she did not lose her child. Her son Elisha was born 2 years ago and bred at the witchcamp. Her husband has never come to visit them because he is afraid he may be lynched by his own family members.

She receives assistance from the government through the local assembly during Christmas. She is usually given rice and clothes. The church, since her arrival, has provided her with cooking oil and rice. When Muslims are celebrating the *Eud-ul-Fitr* festival, they give her food, clothes and fruits. In the observance of *Zakat* (giving of alms to the needy and poor), she usually receives food items. The NGOs help her with sandals, food and cloths. Asana has knowledge about human rights. She knows that the government and other higher authorities are taking care of their needs. They are governed and protected by higher authorities, and cannot be harmed by their families. She said sometimes, programs are organized by private institutions to teach them about their rights.

Her greatest challenge is her inability to effectively interact with her family. She is praying that one day, she will leave the camp and stay with her family so that she can interact with them. She wants to see her children who are 17, 15 and 6 years old respectively. She continued by saying, “It seems I am complaining too much

but I am not. Here, I must carry load like *'bunga'* (donkey) before I can eat. If I cannot carry load, then I cannot survive”.

#### **4.2.9 INTERVIEW WITH SOOYINE WONPOA**

Sooyine Wonpoa is an old woman of about 70 years. She comes from Bindu near Bumprugu. When she got married, she moved to a town in Bumprugu called Yinyoo. She was trading in shea butter. According to Wonpao, she was very popular in trading in Bumprugu and Jimbale. She has been at the camp for more than 6 years. She had another co-wife and had a considerably good relationship with her. They were married to the *'Wonaba'*. She has five children- 4 girls and a boy. Wonpoa told us that she is a Christian and that she attends the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, at Gambaga.

She explained to us the various events that brought her to Gambaga. She said, “My husband had an elder brother. His son Zaan came from Kumasi (that is, southern Ghana) suffering from mental sickness. Zaan told his father that when he sleeps, he frequently sees Wonpoa in his dreams. There are even times that he sees her image when he is eating. As a result of these allegations, Wonpoa and her elder brother, the husband and Zaan came to Gambaga to find out the truth.

What actually made her move out faster from Bumprugua was the rumours in town. She heard that the relatives of Zaan had planned to paralyze her and kill her afterwards. The same day she heard these rumours from a reliable source, she packed few of her belongings and ran to Gambaga. Her husband Maasu brought her to the camp that same night. She said, “Although my husband did not agree

with them, his very life was threatened. He could not do anything about it”. Some years ago, her husband came to visit her at the camp with her children.

According to Wonpoa, she has been surviving at the camp because individuals and institutions come there to help them. According to her, the Gambag-rana feeds them until government grants and aids come in to assist. He has provided a place for her to stay and sleep. According to Wonpoa, Gambag-rana’s presence at the camp deters bad people from beating them. The government supplies them with food, clothes, water containers, mats, as well as portable drinking water. She also said that a recreational facility for relaxation has been constructed for them. The Church also provides them corn regularly as well as used clothes. The church teaches them to forgive people who have hurt them and make peace with them. During *Zakat*, Muslims give them rice. Certain NGOs give them food, cloth, and poultry beds. The poultry beds at the camp were donated by Louis Drefus Foundation.

Wonpoa said her main challenges are twofold. She said, “If I go back, I know I will die. If I stay here too, I will lose my health and die”. Thus, she knows sooner or later, if these same conditions persist, she may die. Again, her room was congested and had roofing problems too. She does not have access to electricity. According to Wonpoa, she knows about human rights. She knows there are individuals and groups of people who come around to educate them about their rights and safety.

#### **4.3.0 INTERVIEW WITH BUKARI ALIMA**

Bukari Alima is an old woman who will be a little over 80 years of age. She comes from Bariloni and married there. She was the younger of two wives. She has five children. According to her, 3 of her children are girls and rest are boys. She has been living at the camp for more than 7 years. She is a committed member of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana at Gambaga.

When we asked her to recount the incidents that brought her to the camp, Alima hesitated to tell us her story. Her husband had an elder brother. His name was Namyara. Namyara had only one child in his matrimonial home. His son was called Danlabre. Some few years after he was born, Danlabre got sick seriously and died mysteriously. Although she was aware of his demise, she never knew fingers will be pointed at her later on. She said Namyara came with other men to beat her in order for her to confess that she was responsible for the death of Danlabre. Although she was severely beaten, she denied the allegations. As a result, these people continued to abuse her verbally and physically. It was her brother's intervention that saved her life that day. She was brought to Gambaga the same day because if they had waited, she would have died. When she came to the camp, the '*Nokpohaga*' ritual was not performed. This was because she had agreed to stay there whether she was found innocent or guilty.

With regards to institutions and groups that support her, Alima said she receives support mainly from the Muslim community. Sometimes, they bring her food, clothes and mats. She said the Presby church at Gambaga sometimes provide them food. The government has helped them register and access the National Health

Insurance Scheme (NHIS) few months ago. The Gambaga community also support them by protecting them with food and clothes. Some of the people in the community make them feel 'at home'.

Alima complained bitterly about her inability to return home. She said, "I was not born here. I do not have family members here. I really need to go back to my home. I cannot go home because my family is divided over the issue. Until they all agree that I should come back, I cannot go back home." She complained about the nature of her room. Her hut has no gate and gets flooded when heavy rains fall. She has no access to electricity in her room. Unfortunately, Alima said she does not know anything about human rights policies or discussions at the camp. According to her, she has not seen nor hear of any person or group of persons who came to the camp to talk to them about their human rights and freedoms

#### **4.3.1 INTERVIEW WITH ABUBAKARI ZUWERA**

Abubakari Zuwera is more than 63 years old. She was living in Bawku in the Upper East region before she came to the Gambaga camp. She is a Muslim and has stayed at the camp for more than 4 years. She is a Dagomba by ethnicity. She was the only wife of Abubakar. She gave birth to five children but lost two during the Bawku conflicts. She narrated the events that brought her to the Gambaga camp.

She said over four years ago, when there was continuous conflict in Bawku, she was accused by two young men around her vicinity. These young men said Zuwera was the cause of the conflict that happened in their area. They claim to have had dreams where Zuwera was after them although they never got sick physically. This

accusation brought further conflicts between her family and the families of her accusers. Abubakar, her husband, brought her and the other children to Savelugu for safety and peace. Later, her elder brother and other family members decided to bring her to Gambaga because they reasoned that the family of the accusers would come to Savelugu and attack her. When she came to the camp, the '*Nokpohaga*' ritual was not performed. She had come to stay.

According to Zuwera, it is the responsibility of Gambag-rana to take care of them. He provides them with food, clothes, sandals and sometimes seeds to plant. He is the one who provided them with security when her family brought here to Gambaga. She said, although the place she is living is not very comfortable, it is better than sleeping at the market square. She continued by saying that the Muslim and Christian community sometimes provide food and mats for them. As for NGOs, she has not benefited from them yet. The government institutions have done little to help her situation at the camp.

Zuwera said life at the camp was very difficult and unbearable for her. She pointed to her hut and said, "This is where I live. This is where I sleep and do everything. Can't you see the place is too small and too congested? Have you seen any house like this before?" She continued, "I know there is a process here that must be observed by my father and brothers can come back for me. But I do not know when that process will be completed". Although Zuwera has stayed at the camp for four years, she has never seen anybody or group of people who have been at the camp with the aim of teaching them about their freedoms and rights as Ghanaian citizens.

#### **4.3.2 INTERVIEW WITH TAMPURI DAHAMATU**

Dahamatu is an old woman who is over 70 years old. She was staying at Kparawaka and was the only wife of Seidu Shaibu. She claims to be a Christian and a member of Presbyterian Church of Ghana, at Gambaga. She had eight children, but only five are alive now. She was a business woman who was supplying pito (locally brewed wine) to many communities. Dahamatu has stayed at the camp for more than 15 years.

She narrated the unfortunate incidents that led her to the Gambaga witch camp. She said. “My husband Seidu had a younger brother. This younger brother lost his wife because she was attacked with some strange sickness. This man then came over to Seidu’s house claiming that Dahamatu was the cause of his wife’s death. After deep reflection and assessment, Dahamatu decided to come to Gambaga witchcamp herself. She came without the knowledge of her husband. When her husband’s family realized she had come to Gambaga, they came to the Gambag-rana and asked that Dahamatu be taken back home with them. She decided not to go back with them because she knew they had planned to lynch her on the way and damp her body in the bush. She said this was evident in their later actions when she refused to go with them. They protested bitterly and even applied force to take her away but she still refused.

According to Dahamatu, the local authorities helps them with food, clothes and portable drinking water. The Presbyterian Church at Gambaga plays enormous role in helping them to feel ‘special’. This is important for her because even her own friends and family have completely rejected her. Again, they have been taught to

protect their worth and dignity, and not to be ashamed of themselves. The Muslim community helps them by giving them food after during their harvests. When they practice '*Zakat*', they extend it to the inmates at the camp. She said several NGOs have made several promises but to no avail. However, few have been able to give them corn, millet and rice.

Dahamatu lamented about her challenges at the camp. Her greatest challenge is her inability to re-unite with her family. She wants to live with her children and cater for them daily. Her family is divided on the matter. Although many of her children wants her back, others do not want to her again. She said in order to survive at the camp, she must work so hard. And because she is ageing, she is losing her health but cannot stay without working too. Dahamatu is aware that different groups of people and individuals come to the camp and speak to them about their rights and freedoms. However, she has not met any of them personally or directly.

#### **4.3.3 INTERVIEW WITH TALANJON MAGRI**

Talajon Magri is an old woman at about the age of 65. She is a Bimoba by ethnicity. She stayed and married at Mangor. Her husband had two other wives who stayed in the same compound. She gave birth to ten children, but six (6) of them are dead. She engaged in farming corn, millet and rearing pigs before she came to Gambaga. She is a Christian and a member of Presbyterian Church of Ghana, at Gambaga. She has stayed at the camp for more than 10 years.

Magri unwillingly told us about the painful incidents that led her to the camp. She said, “As I have said to you, I have lost six of my children. When the sixth child died, I was accused of killing her and all the others”.

As the accusations grew wilder, she later heard rumors that her own family wanted to put her to death. They planned of excommunicating her from the village and later put her to death outside the village. She informed her son who hurriedly brought her to the camp that same night. She said, “My son rode me to Gambaga on his motorbike through the darkness. Anything could have happened to us but we needed to come because I knew I would be killed the next day”. When they arrived at the camp, they were received by the Gambag-rana. Because she had decided to stay there, there was no need for her to go through the ‘*Nokpohaga*’ ritual.

In relation to contributions and support, Magri said they receive help from different institutions and individuals. Notably, she made mention of the religious communities in Gambaga. The Presbyterian Church provides food, clothes and bring them water (in gallons) when there is immense pressure on the only two boreholes at the camp. The Muslim community provide her with food, clothes as well as sleeping mats. She said the Gambag-rana provides them with place of accommodation. He also solves disputes that ensue between families. She said various NGOs assist them in their daily activities by giving them food and clothes.

Magri complained that usually, there is shortage of food at the camp. They are not given food regularly at the camp. There are many times when she must work for many hours on Gambag-rana’s farms before they are given food to eat. Her hut is very small and because there are other foodstuffs under her roof, she finds her room

very congested. She complained that her room gets too hot to an extent that she sometimes sleeps outside on the bare ground. Magri does not have any knowledge of human rights at all. She said although many people come there and speak to them, they usually speak in English – a foreign language they hardly understand.

#### **4.3.4 INTERVIEW WITH WOAKUR POMBIR**

Woakur Pombir is perhaps the oldest person we interviewed at the camp. She is more than 85 years old. She was born at Tunna. She got married in the same village. Her husband had another wife on the same compound. She is a member of the Presbyterian Church at Gambaga. She has nine (9) children. Pombir was a housewife. She married again when her husband died. She has stayed at the camp for more than twenty-five (25) years.

She recounted the events that led her to the camp. She narrated, “My husband died and I remarried his direct younger brother. Another brother of my (new) husband came to our house and accused me of witchcraft. According to him, his wife has been seeing me in her dreams”. She added “All my children are males and all of her children are females. She said I am the reason why she has never given birth to a male child”. Later, Pombir was accused of killing her first husband too. There were insults and physical assaults between her own family and the family of her husband. As a result of these accusations, she decided to leave to Gambaga for the sake of her life. When she came to the camp, she did not undergo the ‘*Nokpohaga*’ ritual because she had accepted to live there.

Pombir lamented on the challenges she faces at the camp. She said a recent storm that had blown her roof off from her mud house. Afterwards, she sleeps outside on the bare floor. As she said, “Sleeping here or there is the same thing! The rain will beat me! The sun will scorch me”. One person bought one sheet for her (C12.00) but she needs another one before she can roof her mud house. She complained that food was usually inadequate at the camp. According to Pombir, she is aware that her rights must be protected by the government through the Police Service. She is aware of other NGOs that carry similar assignments. The NGOs make them have a sense of belongingness and protect them from their own family members who would want to hurt them.

#### **4.3.5 INTERVIEW WITH KOANDUT LAAR**

Koandut Laar is an old woman in her late 50s. She was a pito brewer and a business woman. She was the second of two wives. She comes from Kpamale which is close to Nankpanduri. God blessed her with fourteen (14) children. Unfortunately, she has lost seven of them. She is a member of Presbyterian Church of Ghana-Gambaga and has stayed at the camp for more than 8 years.

She narrated various events that brought her to the camp. She said, “One day, my husband came home with his younger brother. As I welcomed them home with water and greetings, his younger brother did not respond at all”. She continued, “My husband’s younger brother had a male son. One day, he climbed a mango tree and fell down. I went to visit him at the hospital later on”. She said she was later accused as the one who pushed him from the mango tree to the ground. She denied

the allegations but they began to assault her brutally because they claimed she was telling lies.

Koandut continued, “I said to them, ‘if I am responsible for these accusations, let my late mother kill me this night as I sleep. And if I am innocent, you will not see my death!’” After that, they left her alone for her to die the same night. After few days, she decided to come all the way to Gambaga with her accusers to test whether she was innocent or otherwise. She said the ‘*Nokpohaga*’ ritual was performed. She said the position of the fowl did not give a clear answer. The fowl did not lie on its back fully upwards. Neither did it lie with its face to the ground. It rather lied sideways. As a result, she was not said to be guilty or innocent. However, her children lost trust in her because she was not ‘fully’ innocent. She then decided to stay at the camp because her own family rejected her.

According to Koandut, the local assembly provides them with clothes and *d(z)ibu* (food). Many NGOs have contributed to their development and wellbeing. She made mention of Action Aid. Action Aid, according to Koandut, has been instrumental in providing them monies in groups of five or six. She uses these monies to pay fees of her grandchildren who stay with her at the camp. She added that Muslims and Christians- especially the Presbyterian Church at Gambaga- have helped them regain confidence that their lives have not been shattered. Without these people, they would have dwelt on the accusations, and would have broken down completely. Muslim leaders welcome them and even eat with them.

Koandut lamented on several challenges she was facing at the camp. Her greatest challenge is her inability to re-unite with her family. As she said, “tradition

demands that as a good mother, I must stay with my children and bring them up successfully. But here I am all these years being unable to take care of their needs”. She said although some of her children were teachers by profession, they believe she is a witch and would therefore not come and assist her in any way.

As she pointed her finger at the mud houses at the camp, she said, “Are these houses? Are they not hen coops for birds and animals?” She complained bitterly about the accommodation facilities at the camp. Although there are two boreholes at the camp, there is constant pressure on them because they are being used by the whole community. She added that she needs a form of trade or vocation that will make her acquire some money for her upkeep and for her grandchildren. She has no access to electricity at the camp. Again, there are times when the food given them are inadequate.

Koandut is aware that there are institutions and individuals who protecting them from people who may want to punish them. She is also aware that any hideous attempt to end her life is against the laws of Ghana. She said, “Human rights activists told us we have the right to live, and no one can chop our bodies”. By this she meant, our lives cannot be taken away by others.

#### **4.4 INTERVIEW WITH ALHAJI ADAM YAKUBU NASAMU (CHIEF IMAM)**

Alhaji Adam Yakubu Nasamu is the Chief Imam of the Mamprugu traditional area. He was born at Gambaga and has stayed there all of his life. We consulted the Imam because Gambaga is predominantly an Islamic community. As a result, there cannot be any proper discussion about the witch camp when we attempt to ignore very important institutions such as this.

The Chief Imam gave us details about how the Gambaga witch camp came about. He started by saying that the belief in witchcraft is not a questionable one then and now. Many people accused of witchcraft substance were killed during the time of his great grandfather Imam Baba. Imam Baba pleaded with the people of Gambaga not to kill these old women as they usually did. He decided that the mosque will become a place of refuge for the accused witches. Imam Baba devised a means of neutralizing the powers of the accused witches. He made a concoction by soaking the leather bag of the Qur'an in water. The witches were made to drink the water and were instantly 'cured' of their witchcraft powers.

Over time, the number of people who were coming to stay at the mosque was increasing. In those days, the Gambaga community had no chief. Therefore, in consultation with the Nayiri at Nalerigu, Imam Baba agreed that a chief should be enskinned for the people of Gambaga. When the first chief was enskinned, Imam Baba then sent word to the Gambag-rana. Because the Imam was a respectable authority in Gambaga, he spoke with the Gambag-rana and decided to relocate the accused witches from the mosque to somewhere closer to the Gambag-rana.

Besides, Imam Baba did not want his religious duties to interfere with traditional ones. However, Imam Baba demanded that Gambag-rana gives regular update to him about the welfare the accused witches.

Another reason why Imam Baba decided to welcome the accused witches to the mosque was because of a dream Aburu (his brother) had. Aburu had a dream that one old woman was running towards the mosque one evening. Aburu advised Imam Baba that when this old woman comes, she should not allow for her to be killed. Rather, he must marry her because she is going to give birth to three (3) great people. It happened accordingly and the names of these children were Muhammad, Ziblim and Sheitu (the only girl).

Over the years, Imams had been taken from among her children. Baba was succeeded by Aburu who was succeeded by Adambira. Over time, Adambira was succeeded by Naasam, who was also succeeded by Azangyina. After Azangyina, Sheidu became the Imam. Imam Sheidu was also succeeded by Masuna who passed away recently for Imam Yakubu to be installed as Imam over the traditional area.

Imam Yakubu explained that witchcraft powers were not only possessed by women. However, the number of women who have the powers are more than their male counterparts. According to him, witchcraft powers are often displayed in polygamous marriages. In such homes, wives compete with one another for the attention of the husband. As a result, envy, jealousy and unnecessary competition are the order of the day.

In order for one wife to surpass the others, she must then go the extra mile of possessing supernatural powers that would destroy her rivals. At the same time, she will gain favor in the sight of her husband. Her children too will be loved more than the children of the other rivals. The Imam went further to explain that although men can control themselves and keep secrets, women cannot do that. As a result, they react and respond to situations quickly and often negatively.

Imam Yakubu enlisted several things the Islamic community at Gambaga does for the wellbeing of the alleged witches. They provide *d(z)ibu* (food) for them regularly. These are usually corn, millet and rice. During weddings and naming ceremonies, these women are also invited to join in the celebration. At such functions, they are given drinks and food. The Imam stated that on every Friday, special (cooked) foods are sent to the alleged witches at the camp. In order to make these women feel at home, they are allowed to partake in the daily cleaning exercise at the mosque.

These women are given the privilege of sweeping the mosque before and after use. Apart from the assistance that are provided for them by the Imam and his council, the whole Islamic community performs certain roles for them. They allow these alleged witches to farm with them on their lands. At the end of the year when the returns are in, they give half of the returns to them. The Imam said, in recent weeks, hundred (100) bags of corn were given to the alleged witches.

Imam Yakubu said the greatest challenge of the accused witches is their inability to go back home to their families. He said that when families leave their members at the camp, they do it with the intention of coming back for them after four to five

years. However, many people do not come back for their loved ones. This situation is common among the Konkombas and Bimobas because it is believed that they kill people habitually. Notwithstanding that, he said that through collaborative efforts, Churches, the Islamic community and the Gambag-rana have been able to re-integrate some few people back into their families in a peaceful manner.

Imam Yakubu requested that a medical facility such as a clinic should be constructed at the camp. He complained that there are times where people have died because they were not attended to properly. He again stated that because there are only two boreholes for the whole camp, there is always pressure and inadequate supply of water. Lastly, he explained that the mud houses these old women live in are not good enough. He said these women should be respected because they are older and must be taken care of in a proper way.

#### **4.5 INTERVIEW WITH REV. JACOB .K. WANDUSIM AND MR. CHARLES ADONGO (PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF GHANA, GAMBAGA)**

Rev. Jacob K. Wandusim is the head pastor at the Prince of Peace Congregation of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Gambaga. He was assisted by Mr. Charles Adongo- the Caretaker of the Church. According to Mr. Atongo, the witchcamp at Gambaga started around the year 1900. However, the Presbyterian Church at Gambaga started involving herself in the welfare of inmates around 1960. Since then, many of the inmates have become members of the Church. Currently, over 90% of the inmates are members of the Presbyterian Church. Although the Church

had been at the camp in the early 1900s, it was during the time of Rev. Anane in the 1960s that the church shifted attention to the needs of these old women.

Mr. Adongo explained to us the important role the Presbyterian Church plays in the wellbeing of the inmates at the camp. He explained them under these three (3) main headings: Physical wellbeing, Social wellbeing and Spiritual wellbeing. With respect to “Physical wellbeing”, he said, “Over the years the church has become very concerned about the physical growth and development of these old women. We often provide them with food, shelter and clothes. It was the Church that helped them to get their National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) cards for effective healthcare delivery. Usually, it is the Church that pays the fees of their children and grandchildren. We make sure they do not lack any form of physical need”.

He further explained that many of these women send their requests to them during their weekly meetings at the camp. Their requests are usually about inadequate food and clothes which are provided for them as soon as possible. There are times when the Christian leaders have stopped individuals and groups from executing wicked plans against these old women. Many women who have sustained severe injuries run to them for protection.

He explained that in relation to “Social wellbeing”, many inmates have difficulties in relating to others in the camp, and those outside the camp. The role played by the Church in this area is to help reconcile differences among the inmates. Since these inmates are from different cultural background, the Christian leaders make it their work to ensure peaceful relationship among them. Due to the hurts and bitterness they have experienced in the past, it is important that their hearts

experience total healing so that they can stay with other people at the camp in peace. The Church leaders usually oversee their relationship with the outer community. Without their help, town folks would treat them in a bad way. They would abuse them emotionally and physically. They make sure these inmates feel a sense of belongingness. Their worth and dignity are protected from abuse.

With respect to “Spiritual wellbeing”, the Church teaches the inmates the word of God (Bible). During church meetings at the camp, the leader would speak to them the word of God. The messages are usually streamlined to their specific needs and conditions. Initially, the church meetings were at the church premise, but for some four (4) years now, their Sunday meetings have been shifted to the witchcamp. Most of these women have become Christians when leaders preached repentance and forgiveness to them. The leaders often have counselling sessions with the old women who have special needs and concerns. The Church leaders often pray for them when they are sick and bury those who eventually die.

#### **4.6 GO-HOME PROJECT**

The Presbyterian Church at Gambaga runs a project for the accused witches. The Project Officer is called Mr. Samson Larry, and he is assisted by Mrs. Ruth Loriwe. It is usually called ‘GO-HOME’ Project. ‘GO-HOME’ means “Gambaga Outcast HOME” Project. Thus, it is a project that is run basically for these old women who have been rejected by their families and communities and brought to the Gambaga witch camp. The name ‘GO-HOME’ also explains the vision of the project. At the end of the day, the church attempts to send these women back to their families. They are to go back to their homes.

The idea of re-integration is the greatest objective of the church leaders. It is their singular objective that each of these old women at the camp will leave the camp and re-unite with their respective families. They explained that re-integration is quite a hectic process. They have to find the communities they came from and go there. When they find their homes, it is then that they can begin the negotiation with the chief of the village. Mostly, 'deals' are struck between the chief and church leaders. It may be accompanied with items such as wine, animals for sacrifice and monies. It is only after this that they come back for the alleged witch and accompany her back to the community where she once lived.

In an attempt to help these old women, the church faces certain challenges. According to Mr. Adongo, most of the villages where these women come from are not accessible. There are situations where the team must pack their car and walk for miles. There are other times where they are unable to locate the villages at all. The nature of these roads too pose a threat to their movement. There have been several times when the vehicles have broken down as they journeyed along.

Another challenge they face has to do with inadequate funds. In order for the project to be done successfully, much money must be used. However, these monies are not readily available. The provision of food, shelter, clothing and drugs are expensive. They also spend a lot of money before one person can be taken back to her family. They explained that people in the wider community still ignore them in their daily activities. Because the belief in witchcraft is pervasive, when a woman is said to be a witch, people will stay away from them in every way. They are actually seen as dangerous people.

People in the community often tag these church leaders as witches too. The explanation given often is that it is only witches who will attempt to help their fellow witches. Mr. Adongo continued, “Our society abhors witchcraft practices. So, any attempt by an individual or group to assist these alleged witches are often seen as evil”. They are portrayed as people who want to perpetuate evil in the communities. As a result, they find it difficult to confront people in the society about the fact that these old women too- although are being accused as witches- have dignity and worth as any other person in the community.

Again, because people in the community find it difficult to tolerate these old women, any attempt to help them may trigger their displeasure. People sometimes inflict all kinds of pain on the Church leaders. These may include insults, beatings and even murder threats. They find it very difficult to move freely in the whole community because they do not know who may be trying to track them and attack them. He explained that such threats have caused them to be quiet suspicious of the people in the wider community, and have attempted to stay clear of their lines except when their roles demand otherwise.

#### **4.7 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The belief in witchcraft is pervasive among these communities. Irrespective of educational status, age, gender or social status, witchcraft cannot be neglected. There is little knowledge about human rights. Many of the inmates at the camp know very little about their rights, privileges and freedoms that they must enjoy as human beings.

It is evident from the field works and interview that almost all of the accused witches are old people. These people are usually between the ages of forty (40) and eighty-five (85). It is apparent that only old women are accused of possessing and using witchcraft powers for evil purposes. These old women may bring their children along for assistance. From both literature and interview, we have seen that many more women are accused of using witchcraft powers than men. Currently, there are more than eighty (80) old women who are living at the camp. However, there is not even one man at the witch camp.

Accusations of witchcraft are easily found in patriarchal societies. The whole of Northern Ghana practices patriarchal system of inheritance. What this means is that it is only men who can inherit property. As a result, men are given higher recognition and status than women. Often, adorable qualities are associated with men, and detestable qualities such as witchcraft are associated with women in patriarchal societies such as Northern Ghana. In these societies, women who are financially stable without the support of husband or family are said to possess evil powers.

In polygamous marriages, one wife may suspect that her rival is making use of witchcraft powers. It is believed that these powers are used in order to influence the decisions of their husbands for themselves and for their children. As a result, co-wives usually accuse one another when decisions do not favor them. When the child of a rival gets sick seriously, she suspects foul play in the air. She suspects that her co-wife has a hand in the sickness of her son. This situation may cause her to point fingers at the co-wife and accuse her of using witchcraft powers.

Outbreak of sicknesses, strange illness and deaths are usually associated with witchcraft activities. In these communities, any situation which looks quiet abnormal is often seen to be caused by evil powers. Most of the accusations levelled against these women were related to sickness, strange illness and sudden deaths. As we have seen from the above, when people dream about others, they later accuse them of bewitching them. This is a difficult thing to bear because apart from the dreamer, who else can know whether he dreamt or whether the dream implies that the accused is a witch. There are even times when the '*Nokpohaga*' ritual has not proven to be overly reliable. For example, in the case of Koandut Laar, the slaughtered fowl did not fall bare to the ground nor did it land completely on its face.

It is very evident from both literature and interviews with the alleged witches that most of these women who are tagged witches are not witches. This is because, in order for someone to be pronounced a witch, she must undergo the '*Nokpohaga*' ritual at the camp. Even if this ritual is considered as authentic, there are many women (at least from those interviewed) who were innocent of the charges but

decided to stay at the camp for safety reasons. Such women cannot be called ‘witches’ because according to their rituals or gods, they were not the causes of the charges that were levelled against them.

As we have seen, it is religious institutions and groups who have contributed positively to the protection and preservation of the freedoms of these accused women who stay at the camp. We have seen from the history of the camp that it is the Chief Imam (the religious leader of the Muslim community) in Gambaga who decided to secure the lives of these accused witches. He actually found a place for them to live and be free from all sorts of abuses in the community. Even currently, Christian leaders, Muslim as well as the traditional leaders of Gambaga have been helping these women by making life more comfortable for them. They provide food, shelter, clothing as well as emotional support. They have also created a sense of belongingness and warmth for them even when their own families rejected them. Unanimously, all the interviewed women said these religious groups are helping them more than government and private institutions.

Women and children who are accused of witchcraft are usually abused by people in the community. Most of these women who are accused are subjected to fierce torture. Others are beaten severely and strangled. Through these incidents, some of the accused persons lose their lives. Such women had had their rights infringed upon. The right to life has been trampled upon. These women who are severely beaten are not given any form of fair hearing and trial. Immediately they are accused, the beatings and torture begin. For those who flee to the witch camp, many other challenges await them. They do not have access to adequate portable drinking

water, electricity, and medical facilities. They also face housing problems. Such situations at the camp is an infringement on their rights to social amenities and facilities.

It is striking that the greatest challenge of most of these accused witches is their inability to go back and reunite with their own families. Some of these women were brought to the camp ten years ago. There are old women who have stayed at the camp for more than two decades. Yet, their families have not come to perform the necessary rituals in order to take them back home. They want to go back to their homes and enjoy normal life with their families and friends. However, this is not possible. Their right to freedom of movement has been infringed upon. They are forced to stay at the camp although they do not enjoy to do so.

The stigma of being called a witch is very painful to bear. These women and children are usually ridiculed in the community. Many others point fingers at them, and even laugh at them the moment they see them around their huts. Tags are placed on them. They are referred to as 'witches'. Such a tag is very difficult and painful to bear in the community. The worth of their lives are been downplayed as they are called names in the community. Children of accused mothers are also called 'witches'. Such names and descriptions make them feel inferior. As a result, they lose a sense of dignity and worth which is given for every man to enjoy. This situation too has human rights implications that must be addressed.

Most of these accused women do not engage in any form of economic activity. They do not have any vocation that will provide them with regular income. As a result of this, there is an overdependence on the little funds provided by the

government through the district assembly. Because they do not engage in any form of economic activity, they do not have enough money to take care of themselves and their children. Some of them pay school fees and exams fees. This situation is a human right issue. Everyone, including those who are accused of witchcraft, has the right to work. Every person must be able to engage in one form of productive economic activity or another.

#### **4.8 CONCLUSION**

In Chapter four (4), we have discussed interviews that were conducted in Gambaga witch camp. These interviews were conducted on religious leaders of the three (3) main religions in Ghana: African Traditional Religion, Islamic religion and Christianity. As a result, we interviewed the Gambag-rana (head of the traditional religion in Gambaga), Chief Imam (head of Islamic community) of Gambaga and the head pastor of Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Prince of Peace Congregation-Gambaga. We also interviewed fifteen (15) accused witches who were living at the witchcamp. In the next chapter (5), we conclude this thesis with summary, recommendations and conclusion.

## **CHAPTER FIVE (5)**

### **SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.0 INTRODUCTION**

We conclude our thesis with this chapter. In Chapter four (4), we discussed interviews that were conducted in Gambaga witch camp. These interviews were conducted on religious leaders of the three (3) main religions in Ghana: African Traditional Religion, Islamic religion and Christianity. As a result, we interviewed the Gambag-rana (head of the traditional religion in Gambaga), Chief Imam (head of Islamic community) of Gambaga and the head pastor of Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Prince of Peace Congregation- Gambaga. This local church was chosen because it has played a huge role in bringing value, worth, dignity and comfort in the lives of the inmates. We also interviewed fifteen (15) accused witches who were living at the witchcamp. In this chapter (5), we conclude this thesis with summary, recommendations and conclusion.

#### **5.1 SUMMARY**

In several African communities, women and children are often abused. We have seen that certain religious beliefs and practices usually cause abuse to the lives of women and children. One of the areas that have made this assertion very true is the belief in witchcraft. In communities where belief in witchcraft is not contested, witchcraft accusations are quiet common too. Women are often accused of possessing witchcraft powers which they can use to destroy other people in the community. As a result, people in African communities have devised various means

of protecting themselves from the influence of witchcraft powers. Although some of these methods do not pose any serious threat to the wellbeing of the accused, others have usually destroyed their lives.

Many human rights issues are involved here. The physical beatings, torture, insults, stigma and banishment from their communities are human rights issues. Even at the camp - their supposed place of safety - there are problems with food, shelter, accommodation and work that would enhance their lives there. In this work, we have attempted to demonstrate how religion has played the role of protecting the rights and freedoms of these old women and children.

## **5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that, persons who accuse and harm others of witchcraft, must be prosecuted. Courts must make sure such persons are tried and punished to deter others. As it stands now, authorities do not usually punish witch hunters and accusers. It is realized that most people who accuse women, especially widows, of witchcraft do so because of their property or inheritance. In view of this, inheritance and property laws must also be enforced.

Government should give old age allowances and pension schemes should be put in place to take care of the aged. With this, the old will be seen as assets rather than liabilities and it will reduce the prevalence of accusations. Government should intervene and provide better living conditions for residents of the camp. Under the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, individuals' right to live with their family is guaranteed, so residents who feel lonely and wish to go back to their families must

not be stopped. Monitoring teams may be set up to protect residents who leave the camp back to their communities from further attacks and accusations and also to ensure their wellbeing.

Women's groups must also be strengthened. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection must support women's groups in cash, and in providing resource-personnel who will encourage and empower women. This is because, unequal gender relations is one main causes of witchcraft accusations and abuse. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection must deploy people to places such as the Gambaga witch camp to advise women and young girls to take their education serious. Those who want to learn different kinds of trade should also be committed to their vocation. As a result, they will not become burdens on their families financially. This is important because it is realized that most of the people accused and harmed are mostly poor women. The poor, naturally cannot defend themselves and do not have support in any way from their neighbors as compared to the rich.

Education on rights and responsibilities of citizens must be intensified in these affected regions. Right from the basic level of education to the higher levels, rights and privileges of citizens must be taught to school children. This education module must be intensified in our schools. Students should not just have a superficial understanding of their rights and freedoms, but have a relatively deeper understanding of these important issues. Several educational programs, campaigns as well as seminars can be organized to heighten the level of awareness of students. Our young girls in schools must be at the heart of this assignment. More than their

fellow boys, these girls must be educated properly about their rights because they are usually the victims of human rights abuses.

Since it is mostly women who find themselves being accused, education of the girl child should be made compulsory in these areas. Some resident women in the camp said they were accused because they are not educated. Since it is the girl child who will grow into a woman, she must be made to attain formal education. In educating the girl child, she would know that she also has the same rights and privileges as a man and will also empower them to empower other women.

Most of the youth who engage themselves in witch hunting or form vigilante groups are usually uneducated and know little or nothing about rights and the laws of Ghana. All they know is that it is their cultural or societal duty to harm alleged witches. Basic education should be made compulsory, where rights and privileges, constitutional rights are taught. Ethics and etiquettes must also be taught to teach boys not to be violent but rather be gentle and also seek to solve problems amicably with people. Critical thinking courses must be taught in our schools and colleges.

This will reduce various forms of irrationalism and wild beliefs. It is normally reported that the youth who engage in witch hunting – also called vigilantes - do not have any source of income and so are available and ready to be employed into these vigilante groups. Employment agencies should shift much attention to these deprived areas and create employment opportunities for such people. More jobs should be created in these areas to help improve their financial situations. This will reduce the number of people who will be available and willing to injure displeasure

to other people. Again, these youth will not find grounds of accusation when they are gainfully employed.

Training sessions must be organized to give the residents of these camps several kinds of entrepreneurial skills. As a result, they will find something productive to do with their lives. The training sessions will help them have skills to initiate their own businesses. For example, the skill of manufacturing ‘Alata samina’ in a local way, baking of meat pies, or making tie-and-dye cloths can be encouraged and learnt. When this happens, the accused witches will not overly depend on the government or on the religious communities around. For those who will successfully re-unite with their families, they will have vocations on their hands that will serve as a source of livelihood.

After gaining these skills, financial institutions must readily give loans to these women. The NGOs could even put measures in place and give them the initial capital they need to start small scale businesses. Even at the camps, they can engage in small-scale businesses in order to be able to provide or support themselves. It is reported that they go hungry a lot of times but if they have a source of income, they can afford three-square meals daily.

A health center must be built which will see to the health needs of the residents. Many of the accused witches were subjected to severe physical torture. Others also endured very painful emotional displeasures. These women need healing in these areas. Even at the camp, these residents feel the wider community ostracizes them. The stigma of being tagged as a witch needs healing. Because of this stigma, it will

be better for authorities to build a health center close to them than outside the confines of the camp.

Public as well as private health institutions can also provide free medical services for residents in the camp since most of them do not have the money or resources to access the expensive health care. Due to this challenge, most of them usually resort to herbal medicine and self-medication. Although herbal medication is equally potent as medical drugs, that cannot be said about their frequent practice of self-medication. That said, the living conditions of these inmates make them prone to various forms of diseases.

The extreme weather conditions are hazardous to their health. Their congested huts are also without doors. There are even times when scorpions and snakes have entered into their huts. Mosquitoes and other insects that transmit diseases enter their bodies. These women, who are already struggling with aging problems, must not be allowed to break down faster than it is required. Building a health center is crucial to their wellbeing.

The various religious bodies in Gambaga and beyond like the churches and Muslim communities should be encouraged to continue in offering support to the alleged witches who live at the camp. Since the Bible and Qur'an instruct respective Christians and Muslims to give to the poor and needy, it will not only be a demonstration of their faiths but will encourage many reluctant fellows to do same. Pastors, Imams and their leaders can organize their members to go and visit the residents as often as possible. This is important because these inmates will feel the sense of belongingness and association they so need. Thus, even if their own

families have rejected them, the religious groups can replace their families and freely associated with them. This is so vital because neglected or not, these inmates are part of our society.

The care takers or the administrators of the camps should contact some of these churches and mosques to come to their aid. They can improve upon their assistance in the area of food, clothing and even shelter. They can support them financially to improve upon their living conditions. In the area of re-integration, these religious groups must continue to find ways of locating the families of the accused witches. Apart from this, they must endeavor to facilitate the procedures that will bring these old women back into their families.

### **5.3 CONCLUSIONS**

We have realized that certain religious beliefs and practices pose threat to the lives of women and children in our community today. These practices tend to tamper with human rights of women and children in our communities. One of these is the belief in witchcraft. This belief in witchcraft in African communities are usually followed with witchcraft accusations especially when calamity strikes. These accusations are accompanied with insults, physical assaults and emotional tortures. Those who succeed in running to the witch camp face other difficulties.

Although they were running to a better place for peace and safety, they are met with many challenges. Most of these women sleep on the bare floor because their rooms are congested. They have no doors to protect them from harmful reptiles and insects. The wider community still ostracize them and shun their company.

However, religious groups like Muslims, Christians and African religious people find ways of making their lives better. They endeavor to provide food, shelter, clothing, emotional care and financial assistance for them.

As a society, we expect that our women and children should be protected. Their dignity and worth must be protected and their freedoms must also be ensured. Religious bodies, government authorities as well as private companies and individuals should come together and find practical ways of solving the many challenges of these women and children who live their lives at the witch camp of Gambaga.

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## 5.5 APPENDIX (1)

### DEFINITION OF LOCAL WORDS

- Alata Samina - A locally manufactured soap
- Asongtaba - It literally means “Let us come together and help ourselves”.  
At the camp, smaller groups are formed by the inmates  
to raise money for one another in the camp.
- Bonzana - Time of harvest
- Bunga - Donkey
- Dawadawa - A locally manufactured spice that is used in the preparation  
of food. It also makes food tasty. It serves as a preservative  
as well.
- D(z)ibu - food
- Gambag-rana - The chieftaincy title for the traditional head of Gambaga
- GO-HOME - A project that is being organized by the Presbyterian Church  
of Ghana, Prince of Peace Congregation (Gambaga)  
to facilitate the re-integration of accused witches back into  
their homes.
- Kawana - Corn

- Kuruchu - Pigs
- Magazia - The title for the head of inmates at the witchcamp
- Nayiri - The traditional head of the whole Mamprusi traditional area  
Including Gambaga.
- Nokpohaga - A ritual performed by the Gambag-rana to determine the innocence  
of an accused witch. It usually involves slaughtering a white  
fowl and throwing it into the air. At the end, the position of the  
fowl determines whether the person is innocent or not.
- Noamaa - Another name for 'Nokpohaga' ritual
- Soo - Witchcraft
- Sooba - A witch or wizard
- Sowena - Sleeping mats
- Trokosi - A cultural practice in which young girls (usually virgins) are  
Given out to stay at local shrines and serve there. In Ghana, it is  
Prevalent in Volta region.
- Zakat - The practice where Muslims give alms to needy and poor people

## **APPENDIX 2**

These questions were used in conducting our research and interview with fifteen accused witches at the Gambaga witchcamp.

1. What is your name?
2. Where do you come from?
3. Were you married?
4. How many co-wives did you have?
5. What religion do you belong to here?
6. What economic activity were you engaged in before you came here?
7. For how long have you stayed at this camp?
8. Which activities led you to this place?
9. Do you receive any assistance from government?
10. Do you receive any help from religious groups?
11. Do you receive any help from NGOs
12. Do you receive any help from Gambaga-rana?
13. What challenges do you face at the camp?
14. What do you know about human rights?

### **APPENDIX 3**

The questions below were guidelines that helped us in conducting our interview with religious leaders at Gambaga. Notably among these were the Gambag-rana (traditional head of Gambaga), Chief Imam (Head of Muslims in Gambaga traditional area), and Pastor of PCG (a church that plays an enormous role in helping these old women).

1. What is your name?
2. What is the history of the witchcamp at Gambaga?
3. Why are there many women in the camp than men?
4. What specific roles do you play in helping protect the rights of these accused witches?
5. What challenges do these women face at the camp?
6. What suggestions will you make in order to better the lives of these old women at the camp?

#### APPENDIX 4

These photographs represent the current nature of the Gambaga witch camp. They include inmates, their children or grandchildren, social amenities at the camp. The research team also took pictures of particular government interventions, religious contributions as well as NGO contributions that are present at the place for the welfare of these women and children.



GO-HOME PROJECT BY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF GHANA-  
GAMBAGA.

ALLEGED WITCHES AT THE GAMBAGA WITCHES CAMP







A TYPICAL CONDITION OF THE ROOMS OF THESE INMATES. THEY ARE MOSTLY CONGESTED.





A TYPICAL EXAMPLE OF A HUT WHERE INMATES LIVE



PIPE-BORNE WATER, FIREWOOD, AND ELECTRICITY POLES AT THE  
CAMP





A PICTURE WITH THE GAMBAG-RANA OF THE GAMBAGA TRADITIONAL AREA.

CHILDREN WHO LIVE AT THE WITCHCAMP IN GAMBAGA





THE RESEARCH TEAM: - MR SEIDU SAIBU (INTERPRETER), ME AND ANOTHER CO-RESEARCHER. (FROM RIGHT TO LEFT)