

Gender Apartheid, Crime or Custom?

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Abstract: - The purpose of this study was to ascertain why majority of those who are accused of witchcraft happen to be women, a very disturbing situation. Thus, the research was to establish whether witchcraft was a purely women's affair, why is it that their male counterparts are normally treated as wise people who wield respect in the society? An appropriate methodology was used. Some of the techniques included focus group discussions, interviews, questionnaire and personal observation. The evidence gathered pointed to the fact that the phenomenon of witchcraft is a social rather than a natural phenomenon.

Key words: Gender, apartheid, crime and custom.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Ghana, literature on women indicates the distressed circumstances in which some women and children live (Van Den berg, 1999). Violence against women in Ghana often occurs in the context of patriarchal relations, which perpetuates a system of female subordination and male domination (Tsikata, 2001). Also, sexual harassment is believed to occur widely in Ghana, but not widely acknowledged or reported, partly because of problems of its definition and problems associated with tradition and difficulty of proof (Tsikata, 2001).

In recent times, attention has been focused on witch camps by the media, non-governmental organizations and some orthodox churches. Discrimination against women is not only limited to the physical world but also in the spiritual realm. Whilst witchcraft powers of men are believed to be a skill and a protective one that of their female counterparts are believed to be highly destructive. As a result women identified with witchcraft in Northern Ghana are banished to witch camps.

Men, when aged are regarded wise men and elders of their communities, their female counterparts for that matter old women stand a higher risk of being branded witches and consequently seem to cause disasters and misfortunes in their communities. Witchcraft is so associated with women in the Ghanaian society that it does not only demean the dignity of these women, but it is also a stigma on them and their families.

Could witchcraft then be described in the words of one reporter as "The African Women's antidote, defense and response to years of male domination and high level of abuse and violence against them at the rural level?"

From the perspective of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, witches camps can be conceived as a breach of the Universal Declaration of Human Right (Tsikata,

2001). The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women held in Beijing 1995 sets out steps for governments and the non-state actors to take in order to eliminate violence against women. Confining accused witches in a camp is a violation of their human rights. Treatment meted out to accused witches is also dehumanizing (Waibel, 2000).

The consequences of witchcraft accusation to the individual and society are manifold. Socially, there is a dislocation in the community in the sense that the accused and their relatives are hurt. This results in a perpetual hostility between the accused family and those who were involved in the accusation. The whole of belief in witchcraft centers on conceptualization as well as power structure. Witchcraft belief provides an explanation and a scapegoat for misfortunes, illness and death, one's failure and the success of others; it can also allow people to resign to their fate.

The most striking problem about women and witchcraft is that, it is a global issue. The situation is even worse off in Ghana as witch camps record high figures. This is illustrated below by a survey conducted by Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) 2017.

Table 1: (A) Record of Witch Camps in Northern Region

Name of Camp	Inmates	Females	Males	Age Group
Gambaga	130	130	-	35 – 70
Kukuo	450	450	-	37 – 70
Kpatinga/Gnani	42	42	-	48 – 48
Tindam	192	180	13	40
Total	815	802	13	

Source: CHRAJ, 2017

This table supports the fact that witchcraft is not only associated with women but are also female dominated. Judging the ages of witches according to the table above, it can be deduced that some of the women are old and weak. They are thus physically not strong to defend themselves from being attacked.

The problem therefore is that, why is witchcraft so much associated with women?

II. A BRIEF REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

In his article titled "Gender apartheid, crime or custom" published in the weekend mirror, Azumah (2001), presents the general problems faced by women with particular emphasis on rape, the "trokosi" system and the confinement of suspected witches in camps. According to Azumah women

have basically been regarded as the bearers of tradition from one generation to another. The transformation of their role in society is therefore seen as an erosion of the foundation of traditional cultures. He expresses his disappointment in some of the learned people of the country who should know that culture is dynamic, support and even finance these practices.

Although Azumah's script is not specifically on witchcraft, but on general cultural practices faced by women in Ghana, his work stands to benefit this study. This is because the article is centered on women and culture. Women are central to development and should not be sabotaged by cultural practices.

Writing on witchcraft in the Mirror, Safo (2001), looks at what happens to witches in Ghana. She is concerned about treatment meted out to accused witches. She cites instances where parents look unconcerned simply because some spiritualist has declared their child or a member of the family a witch. Phenomenon such as poor harvest, strange disease, and deportation of people not meeting emigration requirement documents are all attributed to witchcraft activities. She also dismisses methods such as dreams, visions and divinations used to determine witchcraft as unscientific. Witchcraft according to Safo (2001), is a spiritual issue and should be addressed spiritually to prevent children and other innocent people from being maltreated.

The article provides the means employed in determining a witch and some incidence that calls for witchcraft accusation. Although the article is not targeted at any witch camp it gives a broad view on witchcraft issues and allegations in Ghana as a whole.

Reporting in Womanews (Chicago Tribune), a foreign newspaper, Agyekwena (1996), looks at the issue of witchcraft amongst Ghanaian women. According to her, belief in witchcraft is so strong and violence against suspected practitioners so common that villages have been established in Northern Ghana as refuge for women accused as witches, places where the women are supposedly exorcised and rendered harmless to society. The reporter writes on interviews conducted with the Gambarana Yahaya Wuni, who dismisses the argument that, accusation of witchcraft is a ploy by men to suppress women. He says "no one can convince me that witchcraft does not exist" ...the fact that women accused of being witches are now using the law courts to defend themselves does not necessarily mean that they are innocent".... "Witchcraft is a spiritual problem and answers must be sought in the spiritual realm. You only need to hear these women confess their crimes when you will realize how serious the issue is".

Agyekwena gives a general view on witchcraft situations in Northern Ghana, including interviews conducted to determine the reality of witchcraft. She however does not mention what witchcraft entails and how it is operated and acquired. The work therefore does not give a clue as to whether witchcraft is

a social or natural construct. The objectives of this study include tackling issues ignored in Agyekwena's work.

III. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The East Mamprusi District is located in the North Eastern Part of Northern Ghana. To the north it shares boundaries with the republic of Togo. It is bounded to the west by West Mamprusi District and to the south by Gushegu, Karaga and Saboba districts. The District covers an area of 3060km², which is about 4.4% of the total land area of Northern Region.

Several methods were employed to gather information for this work. A combination of various techniques was used to achieve stated objectives. Both primary and secondary data used. This primary data gathering techniques include semi-structured interviews and questionnaire administration. The semi-structured interviews facilitate in-depth probing. The questionnaire contained both pre-coded and open-ended questions. This combination allowed for gathering of adequate and statistically quantifiable data (Twumasi, 1996).

Two main techniques were employed to aid data gathering. These techniques include simple random sampling and systematic sampling.

Out of the four witches camps that is, Gambaga, Kukuo, Kpatinga/Gnani and Tindam, Gambaga was randomly selected for the study. The random technique was employed because it gave each of the four witch camps equal chances of being selected. Numbers were written on pieces of paper and securely folded, starting from 01 to 04. The folded pieces of paper were adequately shuffled and Gambaga was randomly selected. The selection of a single witch camp was necessitated by both time and financial constraints.

Systematic sampling was adopted to select compounds to be included in the study. Every third compound starting from the lodging place of the researchers was selected. A total of fifty accused witches were randomly selected for the purpose of questionnaire administration. This therefore makes the sample size representative.

This was employed by the researchers on targeted groups. These included elders of the community, accused witches, the Presbyterian Church and women groups. This helped in gathering variety of information on the same subject. It also helped the researcher cross check information gathered.

This was used to confirm or deny whether information gathered before entering the community and during the survey.

In-depth interviews were held with some key members of the community. This was to solicit information, which under normal situation, would not be provided by the people, and also to confirm certain information.

Secondary literature on the subject matter was consulted for information to augment primary facts. Review of secondary information enhanced the researchers' comprehension of

issues related to the subject matter. This includes Books, Journals, Newspaper reports and Research work from government and non-governmental institutions.

Qualitative and quantitative techniques were adopted in the analysis of data. The quantitative techniques comprise of the use of statistical tables, charts and graphs. The qualitative techniques involved descriptive analysis of situations and information.

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section of the paper examines the phenomenon of witchcraft. Data collected was interpreted to determine the gendered dimension of witchcraft.

These include:

- i. The socio-demographic characteristics of respondents
- ii. Gender
- iii. Prevalence of witchcraft belief and activities of witches

The Socio-Demographic Characteristics Of Respondents

One key socio-demographic factor examined during the study is age distribution. Forty respondents were selected for questionnaire administration. The sampled population was randomly selected for the witch camp. The table depicts the age distribution of respondents.

Table 1(a): Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
30 – 35	0	0
36 – 40	1	2.5
41 – 45	6	15
46 – 50	3	7.5
51 – 55	6	15
56 – 60	12	30
61 – 65	10	25
66 – 70	1	2.5
71 – 75	1	2.5
76 – 80	0	0
Total	40	100

Source: Field work. 2019

It can be deduced from the table that the model class fall within ages 56 – 60, followed closely by ages 61 – 65. The probing question therefore is why women are accused of witchcraft when they ageing. Can the occurrence of a natural phenomenon be limited or prominent in a particular age group? The reason might be that women within this age category experience menopausal symptoms or depression and exhibit a behavioural change. This is thus a contributing factor as to why women within the age category fall prone to witchcraft accusation. The occurrence of a natural phenomenon is random and cuts across all manner of persons and age group. From the data provided it is determined that witchcraft occurrence is more pronounced in certain age group. Women because of their social position suffer the

wrath of poverty in their lifetime more than their male counterparts. As a result they appear senile, very unattractive and horrible when aged. Majority of the aged physical appearance qualify them by social standards to be accused as witches.

With regards to marital status of women in the camp, the following information was obtained.

Table 1(b): Marital Status of Respondents

Marital Status	Number of Respondents	
	Absolute	Percentage (%)
Married	8	20
Single	13	32.5
Widowed	19	47.5
Total	40	100

Source: Field work, 2019

It is clear from the table that most of the women in the camp are widows and represent 48 percent of the total, followed by single women with about 33 percent representation. Some reasons gathered by the researchers for the dominance of widows and singles include both demographic and social explanations. Demographically, women have a longer life expectancy than their male counterparts. So considering the ages of these women, it is most likely that most have lost their husbands. Also, as regards the high records of single women in the camp, some reasons gathered include the stigma associated with witchcraft. Because of this reason, most men divorce their wives once they are accused of witchcraft. Widows are also likely to be accused of witchcraft because they remain vulnerable. Society most often blames women for the death of their husbands such that being a widow is one characteristic of a witch. No wonder majority of the respondents are widows.

Gender

This section of the paper looks at why witchcraft has gender dimensions. It provides answers to the issue of gender violence or discrimination against women, when it comes to the phenomenon of witchcraft. Society has preconditioned the attitude and position of women right from the initial stages of socialization process. This has found roots in practices that deepen women's low self-esteem and their capacity to take control of their lives. The Gambaga witch camp is one such place where women accused are confined. There are no male inmates in the camp. Information gathered from the chief and the accused witches show that although men are brought, they are sent home immediately after treatment. Information gathered from the Presbyterian Outcast Home Project however revealed that there was one male in the courtyard of the chief. This man was not sent home after treatment and has been there for years. Various reasons were gathered for the absence of males in the camp.

Table 1 (c): Reasons for Absence of Male Inmates in the Camp

Response	Number of respondents	
	Absolute	Percentage (%)
Return home after treatment	36	30
Copulation between witches and wizards produce witch children	21	17.5
They are landlords and cannot be confined in camps	1	0.83
Easily accepted back into their communities	20	16.67
They are strong to defend themselves	27	22.5
Their powers are productive	15	12.5
Total	120	100

Source: Fieldwork 2019

From the foregoing discussion, it can be deduced that witchcraft accusation is limited to the weak and the marginalized in the society. It is clear that women, as a result of their disadvantaged position in society, easily become targets of witchcraft accusation and subsequent banishing. The fact that men accused of witchcraft are not banished reveals some level of social discrimination. The discriminatory treatment associated with witchcraft reveals the phenomenon as a social rather than a natural phenomenon.

Prevalence of Witchcraft Belief and Activities of Witches

Women for a long time have not been able to say no to cultural practices, which affect them. Women sense of unworthiness makes them say yes very often. This is evident amongst the accused respondents who could not express an opinion about their situation, but constantly referred to what the chief said to be what actually prevailed. All forty respondents affirmed the reality of the belief in witchcraft and revealed some activities of witches in their communities. All the respondents revealed that their presence in the camp had to do with witchcraft. It is worth noting that the socialization process of women is a deterrent to their self-actualisation. Out

of the forty respondents it is just one who did not accept she was a witch even though all rituals declared her guilty.

V. CONCLUSION

Witchcraft and the accompanying phenomenon of women accused of witchcraft produces dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion. These dynamics display obvious gender dimensions. The accused are more elderly or young, more physically deformed than healthy, more poor than well to do, more non-educated than educated, more widowed than married, more barren than fertile, more rural than urban and more outspoken than silent. Most accused do not perfectly conform to the traditional role mode of women in the conservative traditional settings of Northern Ghana thus they are tagged as social deviants.

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