

Witchcraft in Ga-Rankuwa Township: An African Perspective



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ABSTRACT

This study explored the cultural and social significance of witchcraft beliefs and practices in Ga-Rankuwa Township, South Africa, through an African perspective. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research combined academic literature, ethnographic research, and community engagement to provide a comprehensive understanding of witchcraft as a complex phenomenon. The findings revealed that witchcraft operates at the intersection of traditional beliefs, social dynamics, and spiritual worldviews, significantly influencing community interactions and individual behaviours. Discussions highlight how these beliefs shape social relationships, conflict resolution, and coping mechanisms within the community. Based on the insights gained, the study recommends fostering open dialogues within the community to address misconceptions about witchcraft and promote understanding between traditional beliefs and modern perspectives. This research contributes to scholarship by offering a nuanced understanding of witchcraft in contemporary African contexts, emphasizing its relevance in social and cultural dynamics. It also highlights the importance of integrating traditional beliefs into broader discussions on mental health and community well-being, thereby enriching the discourse on spirituality and social cohesion in African societies.

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INTRODUCTION

Witchcraft beliefs and practices are deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of many African communities, serving as both a source of social cohesion and a means of addressing life's uncertainties. In Ga-Rankuwa Township, located in the Northwest province of South Africa, these practices, often referred to as "black African magic" or Baloyi, are perceived by residents as significant contributors to various misfortunes, including illness, death, miscarriages, divorces, unemployment, and school dropouts. Despite the prevalence of these beliefs, there remains a notable gap in scholarly research that examines the origins, impacts, and theological implications of witchcraft within this specific community context.

The objective of this study is to explore the essence and effects of witchcraft in Ga-Rankuwa through a narrative research approach, drawing on the lived experiences of community members. By investigating these narratives, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how witchcraft influences individual and communal well-being, particularly from an African theological perspective.

The study is organized around several key themes. First, it will present an overview of the cultural significance of witchcraft beliefs in Ga-Rankuwa, highlighting the community's historical context. Next, it will explore the social dynamics that shape perceptions of witchcraft and its associated practices. Following this, the research will delve into the theological implications of witchcraft beliefs, examining how they intersect with spiritual liberation and pastoral care. Finally, the study will conclude with

recommendations for empowering and supporting the traumatized and disillusioned community in coping with witchcraft-related challenges, utilizing a contextually sensitive practical theology methodology.

African Perspective on Witchcraft

Emmanuel Lartey an African practical theologian and pastoral care specialist, underscores the central focus of pastoral theology on the act of caring. He posits that the reflective and expressive practices within pastoral theology serve as avenues for interpreting both the caring actions of God and the interactions within human communities.¹ The challenges faced by the Ga-Rankuwa community, particularly concerning witchcraft, reveal a disconnect between prevailing theological frameworks and the specific needs of this community. Existing theologies have struggled to provide appropriate theological language and to pose relevant theological inquiries that could help in understanding the complex relationship between "witchcraft" and "those misfortunes."² The lived experiences of this phenomenon, which hold significant importance for the Ga-Rankuwa community and those providing pastoral care, are often overlooked by these theological perspectives and the caregiving practices within the community.³

In the traditional paradigm of pastoral theology in the South African context, conventional Western theological paradigms and approaches to existential issues have typically guided interpretations of divine and communal care.⁴ However, these frameworks have fallen short of offering a meaningful comprehension and interpretation of the specific needs of the Ga-Rankuwa community grappling with issues of witchcraft. They have failed to articulate appropriate theological discourse and to pose critical theological questions that could help in discerning the unique challenges faced by these African individuals. The historical and existential realities of witchcraft are often marginalized or inadequately addressed within these theological frameworks.

Classical Western theology, with its primary focus on salvation, viewed its evangelistic mission through a dualistic framework of spirit and matter.⁵ Historical existential concerns and needs were not central to its missionary endeavours. Subsequently, African Christian theology shifted its attention towards traditional cultural values and beliefs. In a new paradigm of African pastoral theology, African theology emerges as a crucial theological tool to interpret the challenges faced by South African townships plagued by witchcraft and demonic possession. This approach considers the cultural context of young individuals grappling with depression, aiming for their liberation from both socio-economic and spiritual constraints.⁶ Unlike classical Western theology, which often marginalized African culture by labelling it as "heathen" or "evil," African theology embraces and utilizes it as a significant foundation for expressing African spirituality and encounters with the divine.

African theology also portrays God in African terms, depicting God as an African deity who empathizes with the pain and suffering of African people. By applying the image of the suffering servant from Isaiah to Jesus, whose crucifixion involved ridicule, scorn, and rejection, young Africans experiencing suffering can relate to Jesus and perceive him as someone who understands their struggles. African individuals, akin to Jesus, have endured various forms of suffering and rejection. The daily realities of African people resonate with the suffering experienced by Jesus on the cross, particularly in the sense of abandonment and forsakenness.

This shared experience forms the essence of African consciousness and serves as the foundation of African Christology, shaping their religious understanding. In times of crisis, individuals within the

¹ Emmanuel Lartey, "Book Review: Pastoral Care, the Love That Heals: Explorations in Pastoral Care, Peacemaking for Churches: A Bible-Based Pastoral and Practical Guide, the Pastoral Nature of Theology: An Upholding Presence," *The Expository Times* 111, no. 8 (May 1, 2000): 285–285, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001452460011100835>.

² Kisilu Kombo, "Witchcraft: A Living Vice in Africa," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 22, no. 1 (2003): 73–86.

³ Leemamol Mathew, "Coping with Shame of Poverty," *Psychology and Developing Societies* 22, no. 2 (September 5, 2010): 385–407, <https://doi.org/10.1177/097133361002200207>.

⁴ Isak Niehaus, "Witchcraft in the New South Africa: From Colonial Superstition to Postcolonial Reality? 1," in *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities* (Routledge, 2003), 184–205.

⁵ James Blando et al., "Assessment of Potassium Iodide (KI) Distribution Program Among Communities Within the Emergency Planning Zones (EPZ) of Two Nuclear Power Plants," *Health Physics* 92, no. Suppl 1 (February 2007): S18–26, <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.HP.0000252321.45718.25>.

⁶ Sasha Newell, "Pentecostal Witchcraft: Neoliberal Possession and Demonic Discourse in Ivoirian Pentecostal Churches," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 37, no. 4 (2007): 461–90.

Ga-Rankuwa community often seek solace and support from their religious leaders. African theology emerges as a valuable tool for evaluating the pastoral care requirements of African communities, enabling caregivers to contextualize the needs of care recipients within a broader framework. Key themes such as liberation and care are not viewed solely through clinical or spiritual lenses, but rather through a holistic consideration of the individual. African theology offers insights into the challenges faced by communities caught between conflicting paradigms and worldviews, providing a framework for posing pertinent questions regarding the impact of witchcraft on individuals' lives and choices, as well as the perceived presence of God in their circumstances. By envisioning God as an African deity who understands suffering and desolation, community members grappling with these phenomena can find empowerment and connection with the divine. African theology also offers interpretive guidelines, such as liberation and cultural identity, to inform pastoral care practices aimed at supporting those affected by such challenges in the Ga-Rankuwa context. Caregivers employing comparative approaches are encouraged to continually assess whether their interventions align with the overarching objective of promoting healing and well-being within the community. The liberation of the Ga-Rankuwa community from the forces that have held them captive, whether it be witchcraft or other spiritual forces, and their positive impact on fostering a sense of cultural identity and belonging within their environment.

Witchcraft from a Black African Worldview

In his examination of witchcraft within Limpopo communities, South African practical theologian Elijah Baloyi underscores the enduring presence of witchcraft, demonic possession, and exorcism in African traditions and spiritual beliefs, as noted by Kitshoff cited by Apostolides and Dreyer.⁷ According to Matsobane Manala, many African individuals firmly acknowledge the reality of witchcraft, viewing it as an existential certainty.⁸ A prevalent belief attributes illnesses, misfortunes, and disturbances to malevolent spirits, often identified as the root cause of adversity in an individual's life or within a family unit. This adversity is commonly attributed to the actions of a witch, wizard, or sorcerer.⁹ The prevailing belief is that through exorcisms, rituals, medicinal treatments, and ceremonies administered by witch doctors, prayer healers, or prophets, illnesses can be cured, misfortunes reversed, and disturbances alleviated. The restoration of equilibrium within the individual, family, or community is deemed essential and achievable through these practices.¹⁰ In African contexts, instances of depression are frequently linked to demonic possession, a hallmark of witchcraft. Following restoration, precautionary measures are advised for protection. Should the affected individual desire, witchcraft may be employed as a means of retaliating against the perceived sender of malevolent spirits. Consequently, in African societies, witchcraft serves both as a proactive measure and a response to malevolent influences.¹¹ Numerous individuals in Africa experience persistent apprehension regarding witches and witchcraft. According to Manala, "Witchcraft instills profound fear and abhorrence due to its capacity to dismantle human existence, disrupt communal bonds, and obliterate the aspirations and ideals of individuals and societies."¹² Additionally, many African Christians associate malevolence with witchcraft, as noted by Douglas.¹³ Ejizu elucidates the concept of malevolent forces in this context, stating, "These forces not only oppose the realization of a prosperous and fulfilling life on earth but also present the most formidable obstacle to achieving ancestral status, a cherished goal for the majority of traditional practitioners."¹⁴

⁷ Anastasia Apostolides and Yolanda Dreyer, "The Greek Evil Eye, African Witchcraft, and Western Ethnocentrism," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 64, no. 2 (January 23, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v64i2.39>.

⁸ Matsobane J. Manala, "Witchcraft and Its Impact on Black African Christians: A Lacuna in the Ministry of the Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 60, no. 4 (November 2, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v60i4.635>.

⁹ Kombo, "Witchcraft: A Living Vice in Africa."

¹⁰ Keith Ferdinando, *The Triumph of Christ in African Perspective: A Study of Demonology and Redemption in the African Context* (Cumbria: Paternoster Publishing, 1999).

¹¹ Manala, "Witchcraft and Its Impact on Black African Christians: A Lacuna in the Ministry of the Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika."

¹² Manala, "Witchcraft and Its Impact on Black African Christians: A Lacuna in the Ministry of the Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika." 150.

¹³ M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. (London: : ARK Paperbacks., 1984).

¹⁴ Christopher I Ejizu, "Cosmological Perspective on Exorcism and Prayer-Healing in Contemporary Nigeria," *Mission Studies* 8, no. 1 (1991): 173.

Practices such as cannibalism, necrophagy, bestiality, and incest are believed to be carried out by witches either during their initiation or in pursuit of augmenting their mystical abilities.¹⁵

Apostolides and Dreyer highlight the prevalent belief among many African individuals that both mental and physical ailments can stem from personal transgressions, moral lapses, demonic influence, malevolent spirits (often dispatched by witches), witchcraft, or a displeased ancestor.¹⁶ Subsequently, a witch or traditional healer dispatches ancestral spirits to afflict the afflicted individual.¹⁷ These spirits are thought to have infiltrated the victims, causing sickness, misfortune, nightmares, and abnormal behaviour.¹⁸

The prevailing belief dictates that the demon or malevolent spirit must be expelled not only from the afflicted individual but also from the community at large.¹⁹ The traditional healer identifies and discerns the root cause of the ailment through the use of twigs or bones as divination tools²⁰ and extrasensory perception (when they are in communion with their ancestral spirits).²¹

Hammond emphasizes the significant role played by ancestral spirits in aiding the witch doctor in addressing the afflictions of the afflicted individual.²² Witchdoctors utilize the assistance of ancestors to facilitate healing and may concoct herbal remedies, known as muti, to expel malevolent spirits. On occasion, this muti is finely ground into a powder or snuff and administered to victims for inhalation, inducing sneezing to expel the demon or malevolent spirit. Phaswana underscores the necessity for pastoral counselling for individuals plagued by fear of ancestral spirits and witches.²³ Okeja asserts that even highly educated Africans are not immune to belief in witchcraft.²⁴ In response to a surge in such killings, particularly in the Northern Province during the early 1980s and 1990s, the Ralushai Commission was established in 1995, culminating in the publication of its final report in 1996.²⁵ While an exact figure remains elusive, an estimated 3000 to 5000 self-professed pagan witches were believed to be active in South Africa.

The Mpumalanga Witchcraft Suppression Bill defines witchcraft as the clandestine utilization of muti, zombies, spells, spirits, magical powders, water, concoctions, and similar elements by an individual with the intent of causing harm, injury, illness, or damage to others or their possessions.²⁶ Contrary to this definition, Trapido highlights that self-professed witches rejected it, arguing that it unfairly characterizes witchcraft as malevolent and depicts witches as threats to their communities.²⁷ An alternative perspective on witchcraft was presented by Ralushai during his testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in July 1999, defining a witch as someone possessing the ability to inflict sickness, misfortune, or death upon a targeted individual.²⁸ Some perceive witchcraft as the capability of

¹⁵ Keith Ferdinando, *The Triumph of Christ in African Perspective: A Study of Demonology and Redemption in the African Context* (Paternoster Publishing, 1999), 101.

¹⁶ Anastasia Apostolides and Yolanda Dreyer, *Western Ethnocentrism: A Comparison between African Witchcraft and the Greek Evil Eye from a Sociology of Religion Perspective*. (Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria., 2008).

¹⁷ Apostolides and Dreyer, *Western Ethnocentrism: A Comparison between African Witchcraft and the Greek Evil Eye from a Sociology of Religion Perspective*. .

¹⁸ J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

¹⁹ Jan Platvoet and Henk Van Rinsum, "Is Africa Incurably Religious? Confessing and Contesting an Invention," *Exchange* 32, no. 2 (2003): 123–53.

²⁰ D. Hammond-Tooke, *Rituals and Medicines* (Johannesburg: A Donker, 1989).

²¹ R. Blier, "Diviners as Alienists and Announciators among the Batammaliba of Togo.," in *African Divination System: Ways of Knowing*, Indianapolis, ed. P.M. Peek (Indiana University Press., 1991), 75–80.

²² Hammond-Tooke, *Rituals and Medicines*.

²³ D.R. Phaswana, *Communal Pastoral Counselling: Culturally Gifted Care-Giving in Times of Family Pain—A Vhavenda Perspective* (Pretoria: Unisa, 2008), 245.

²⁴ U.B Okeja, "Witchcraft and Magic in African Context. Inter-Diciplinary.Net," <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/okejapaper.pdf>, 2010.

²⁵ N. V. Ralushai et al., "Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft and Ritual Murders in the Northern Province of South Africa, To: His Excellency the Honourable Member of the Executive Council for Safety and Security," *Northern Province, South Africa*, 1996.

²⁶ Elijah Baloyi, "The Biblical Exegesis of Headship: A Challenge to Patriarchal Understanding That Impinges on Women's Rights in the Church and Society," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 29, no. 1 (2008): 1–13.

²⁷ M. Trapido, "Make Witchcraft a Criminal Offence," *Mail and Guardian* 13 (2010).

²⁸ Ralushai et al., "Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft and Ritual Murders in the Northern Province of South Africa, To: His Excellency the Honourable Member of the Executive Council for Safety and Security."

an individual to cause harm or manipulate natural forces through esoteric methods.²⁹ Olukoya regards a witch as an individual who employs magic for malicious purposes or engages in sorcery.³⁰ In the traditional African religious context, Maboea views sorcerers and witches as agents of chaos and devastation within the community.³¹ Despite variations in language and phrasing, these definitions share a common essence: that a witch is someone who deliberately employs *muti* or the magic of malevolent spirits to inflict harm or ill intentions upon others. The term "witchcraft" is referred to as *moloi* (Sepedi), *muloyi* (Tshivenda), and *noyi* (Xitsonga), with the term "moloi" originating from the term "verb *loya*," signifying "to bewitch," which is ascribed to individuals who, out of pure malevolence, consciously or unconsciously utilize magical methods to impose various forms of harm on their fellow human beings.³² As noted by Ralushai et al, these individuals engage in the destruction of property, the spread of disease or misfortune, and the causation of death, often without any apparent provocation.³³ Pauw and Olivier³⁴ contend that witchcraft originates from an intrinsic trait, with a prevalent belief that witches (predominantly female) inherit their witchcraft abilities and knowledge of the craft from their mothers.³⁵ This discussion prompts a consideration of the psychological impact of witchcraft on human lives.

The Spiritual Effect of Witchcraft in a Community

Witchcraft has long been a topic of fascination and fear in many societies around the world. While often portrayed in popular culture as a dark and malevolent force, the spiritual impact of witchcraft in a community is a complex and multifaceted issue that can have profound effects on individuals and social dynamics. This section aims to explore the spiritual implications of witchcraft practices within a community, examining how beliefs in witchcraft can shape perceptions, behaviours, and relationships among community members.

Belief Systems and Worldviews

The belief in witchcraft is often deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual traditions, shaping the way individuals perceive the world around them. In many communities, witchcraft is seen as a powerful force that can influence events and outcomes in people's lives.³⁶ This belief system can create a sense of vulnerability and fear among community members, as they may feel that they are at the mercy of unseen forces beyond their control. At the same time, the belief in witchcraft can also provide a framework for understanding and interpreting the challenges and hardships that individuals face, offering explanations for why certain events occur.³⁷

Social Dynamics and Power Structures

The belief in witchcraft can also have significant implications for social dynamics within a community. Accusations of witchcraft can be used as a means of exerting power and control over others, as individuals may be targeted and ostracized based on suspicions of witchcraft.³⁸ This can lead to the marginalization and stigmatization of certain individuals within the community, creating divisions and tensions among

²⁹ Makisto, "3rd Degree Casts Spotlight on Witchcraft," South Africa's TV Website, August 3, 2011, <https://www.tvsa.co.za/user/blogs/viewblogpost.aspx?blogpostid=29485>.

³⁰ Daniel K Olukoya, *Prayer Warfare against 70 Mad Spirits* (The Battle Cry Christian Ministries, 2016). 174.

³¹ Sello Isaiah Maboea, *The Influence of Life-Giving Power in the African Traditional Religion and the Zionist Churches in Soweto: A Comparative Study* (University of South Africa Press, 2002).

³² T.S. Petrus, "An Anthropological Study of Witchcraft-Related Crime in the Eastern Cape and Its Implications for Law Enforcement Policy and Practice" (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, 2009). 34-35.

³³ Ralushai et al., "Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft and Ritual Murders in the Northern Province of South Africa, To: His Excellency the Honourable Member of the Executive Council for Safety and Security."4.

³⁴ C.C. Olivier, *Die Religie van die Gcaleka*, (Pretoria: Universiteit van Suid- Afrika, 1981).

³⁵ B.A. Pauw, *Christianity and Xhosa Tradition: Belief and Ritual amongst Xhosa-Speaking Christians*. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press., 1975). 233.

³⁶ Kombo, "Witchcraft: A Living Vice in Africa."

³⁷ Arinze Agbanusi, "Witchcraft in West African Belief System – Medical And Social Dimensions," *Journal of African Studies* 5, no. 2 (2016): 116–22.

³⁸ Kwasi Atta Agyapong, *Witchcraft in Ghana: Belief, Practice and Consequences* (Noyam Publishers, 2021),

<https://doi.org/10.38159/npub.eb2021502>. The Gnani witch camp is the only camp that houses both witches and wizards. The rest are for witches only.

community members. Additionally, the fear of witchcraft can influence interpersonal relationships, as individuals may be hesitant to trust others for fear of being targeted themselves.

Healing and Protection

Despite its negative connotations, witchcraft is not always viewed as a malevolent force within communities. In some cultures, witchcraft practitioners are seen as healers and protectors, using their knowledge and abilities to help others in times of need. The practice of witchcraft can be a source of comfort and support for individuals facing illness, misfortune, or other challenges, providing a sense of hope and empowerment in difficult circumstances.³⁹ However, the line between benevolent and malevolent witchcraft practices can be blurred, leading to conflicting interpretations of the role of witchcraft in community life. The spiritual effect of witchcraft in a community is a complex and nuanced phenomenon that reflects the cultural, social, and psychological dynamics at play within a given society. Beliefs in witchcraft can shape individuals' worldviews, influence social interactions, and impact the way communities respond to challenges and adversity.⁴⁰ By examining the spiritual implications of witchcraft practices, we can gain a deeper understanding of the role that witchcraft plays in shaping community identity, relationships, and resilience in the face of uncertainty and change.

The Psychological Effect of Witchcraft on Human Lives

The psychological impact of witchcraft beliefs and practices on human lives is a complex and multifaceted issue that can have profound effects on individuals' mental health, well-being, and behaviour.⁴¹ This section aims to discuss the psychological implications of witchcraft on human lives, examining how beliefs in witchcraft can influence individuals' perceptions, emotions, and cognitive processes, as well as their relationships with others and their sense of self.

Cognitive Processes and Belief Systems

Beliefs in witchcraft can significantly influence individuals' cognitive processes, shaping the way they perceive and interpret the world around them. People who hold strong beliefs in witchcraft may be more likely to attribute negative events or outcomes to supernatural causes, leading to a heightened sense of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty.⁴² This cognitive bias can impact individuals' decision-making processes, as they may be more inclined to seek out supernatural explanations for events rather than relying on rational or evidence-based reasoning.

Emotional Responses and Stress

The fear of witchcraft and the perceived threat of malevolent forces can evoke strong emotional responses in individuals, including feelings of anxiety, helplessness, and paranoia. The constant fear of being targeted by witchcraft can create a chronic state of stress and hypervigilance, leading to negative impacts on individuals' mental health and well-being.⁴³ This heightened emotional arousal can also affect individuals' relationships with others, as they may struggle to trust or connect with those around them due to fears of betrayal or harm.

Social Isolation and Stigmatization

Beliefs in witchcraft can contribute to social isolation and stigmatization of individuals within a community. Those who are accused of practising witchcraft or being under the influence of witchcraft may face ostracism, discrimination, and violence from others in the community.⁴⁴ This social exclusion can have detrimental effects on individuals' mental health and self-esteem, leading to feelings of shame, guilt, and worthlessness. The fear of being labelled as a witch or being associated with witchcraft

³⁹ Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana*, vol. 34 (Brill, 2019).

⁴⁰ Opoku Onyinah, "Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost" (University of Birmingham, 2002).

⁴¹ Noel D. Osborn and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Exodus* (New York: UBS Handbook Series, 1999).

⁴² Niehaus, "Witchcraft in the New South Africa: From Colonial Superstition to Postcolonial Reality? 1."

⁴³ Kombo, "Witchcraft: A Living Vice in Africa."

⁴⁴ Agyapong, *Witchcraft in Ghana: Belief, Practice and Consequences*.

practices can also create barriers to seeking help or support from others, further exacerbating feelings of isolation and distress.

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Despite the negative psychological effects of witchcraft beliefs, individuals may also develop coping mechanisms and resilience strategies to navigate the challenges posed by these beliefs. Some individuals may turn to religious or spiritual practices for comfort and protection, seeking solace in their faith in the face of uncertainty and fear.⁴⁵ Others may seek out social support networks or mental health services to address the psychological distress caused by beliefs in witchcraft. By developing adaptive coping strategies and building resilience, individuals can better navigate the psychological impact of witchcraft on their lives and work towards healing and recovery.

The psychological effect of witchcraft on human lives is a complex and nuanced phenomenon that reflects the interplay of cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural factors. Beliefs in witchcraft can shape individuals' perceptions, emotions, and behaviours in profound ways, influencing their mental health, relationships, and sense of self.⁴⁶ By examining the psychological implications of witchcraft beliefs, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities for individuals to cope with and overcome the psychological impact of witchcraft on their lives.

The Impact of Witchcraft on the Psychological Well-Being of Individuals

Addressing and delving into the fears, anxieties, and apprehensions of individuals affected by perceived witchcraft can alleviate their suffering.⁴⁷ Typically, pastoral caregivers tend to overlook the physical and psychological dimensions of witchcraft. The act of human touch, whether through prayer (laying hands on someone) or traditional African healing practices, instils hope in people. Christian adherents believe that the touch of a pastor can shield them from malevolent spirits. Consequently, many black Christians gravitate towards African Independent Churches and Pentecostal congregations where pastors lay hands on them and offer prayers for the protection of both them and their possessions. In the African context, the Christian pastor or pastoral counsellor is viewed as taking on the role previously held by traditional healers. The pastor now serves as their advisor and healer.⁴⁸ LeClaire contends that due to the pervasive fear of witchcraft, individuals remain fixated on the subject, thereby hindering their ability to worship God peacefully and joyfully.⁴⁹ Oftentimes, individuals join churches not solely out of a genuine embrace of the Christian faith, but rather as a means of seeking refuge from the perceived threats of witchcraft. Another issue arises when individuals attribute every negative event in their lives to witchcraft. According to Ally, witchcraft serves as a framework for interpreting misfortune and shaping interpersonal dynamics.⁵⁰ It offers supernatural explanations for nearly all adversities, allowing individuals to shift blame away from themselves. Consequently, a climate of fear pervades their lives. Ally affirms that among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, as well as in various other African cultures, witchcraft is viewed as a significant factor contributing to mortality.⁵¹ These beliefs contradict the teachings of Jesus Christ, who, having experienced suffering alongside humanity, is believed to remain present during times of distress.

The concluding clause of criterion A validates the acknowledgement of symptoms reported by individuals undergoing transitions. It specifies: "These signs and symptoms may be observed by others or reported by the individual."⁵² The focus on the manifestation of possession, the underlying belief systems, and self-disclosure underscore the necessity for a clearer understanding of how individuals interpret possession experiences across cognitive, behavioural, emotional, perceptual, and cultural

⁴⁵ Onyinah, "Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost."75.

⁴⁶ Arinze Agbanusi, "'Witchcraft in West African Belief System – Medical And Social Dimensions.'"119.

⁴⁷ Phaswana, *Communal Pastoral Counselling: Culturally Gifted Care-Giving in Times of Family Pain—A Vhavenda Perspective*.81.

⁴⁸ W Waruta Douglas and Hannah W Kinoti, "Pastoral Care in African Christianity" (Acton Publishers Nairobi Kenya, 2000). 93.

⁴⁹ Bertrand Leclair, "Point d'achoppement," *Les Temps Modernes* 672, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 232–41, <https://doi.org/10.3917/ltm.672.0232>.

⁵⁰ Yaseen Ally, "'Burn the Witch': The Impact of the Fear of Witchcraft on Social Cohesion in South Africa," *Psychology in Society* 49 (2015): 25–45, <https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-8708/2015/n49a3>.

⁵¹ Ally, "'Burn the Witch': The Impact of the Fear of Witchcraft on Social Cohesion in South Africa."

⁵² Ally, "'Burn the Witch': The Impact of the Fear of Witchcraft on Social Cohesion in South Africa."

dimensions. The focus lies on comprehending the essence of the phenomenon within the context of the belief system in which it is practised. The community that perceives it as a reality establishes the principles of that reality. The religious and/or cultural group that views the phenomenon as real not only shapes its manifestation but also influences how evidence of it is formulated, shared, debated, illustrated, and acknowledged. Participants need to grasp the foundation of the phenomenon to partake in its manifestation.⁵³ They must also acquire a "cultural proficiency" to navigate the culturally embedded mechanisms for engaging with the phenomenon.⁵⁴

Witchcraft and Psychotic Disorders

Witchcraft and psychotic disorders are two phenomena that have been studied and analysed from both cultural and clinical perspectives. While witchcraft is often considered a spiritual experience in many cultures, psychotic disorders are recognized as mental health conditions characterized by a loss of touch with reality.⁵⁵ This section will explore the intersections, differences, and potential overlaps between witchcraft and psychotic disorders.

Witchcraft is a cultural phenomenon found in various societies around the world, where individuals are believed to be inhabited or controlled by spirits, deities, or supernatural entities.⁵⁶ This experience is often accompanied by altered states of consciousness, trance-like states, and behaviours that are perceived as abnormal within the cultural context. In contrast, psychotic disorders, such as schizophrenia, involve disturbances in thinking, perception, emotions, and behaviour that significantly impair an individual's ability to function in daily life.⁵⁷ One area of overlap between witchcraft and psychotic disorders is the presence of altered states of consciousness and unusual experiences. Individuals experiencing spirit possession may report hearing voices, seeing visions, or feeling the presence of external entities, which are also common symptoms of psychotic disorders. However, the interpretation and meaning of these experiences differ significantly between cultural contexts. In some cultures, spirit possession is viewed as a positive or neutral phenomenon that can be managed through rituals, ceremonies, and spiritual practices, while in Western psychiatric frameworks, these experiences are often pathologized and treated as symptoms of a mental illness. Another point of comparison is the social and cultural factors that influence the manifestation and interpretation of witchcraft and psychotic disorders. Cultural beliefs, social norms, family dynamics, and community support play a significant role in shaping individuals' experiences of spirit possession and their responses to psychotic symptoms. In some cultures, spirit possession is considered a legitimate and accepted form of spiritual expression, whereas, in Western societies, psychotic symptoms are often stigmatized and associated with shame, fear, and isolation. It is essential to approach the study of witchcraft and psychotic disorders with cultural sensitivity, humility, and an awareness of the diverse ways in which individuals experience and interpret these phenomena.⁵⁸ Clinicians and researchers must consider the cultural context, beliefs, and practices of the individuals they are working with to provide effective and culturally responsive care. By recognizing the complexities and nuances of spirit possession and psychotic disorders, we can develop more holistic and inclusive approaches to mental health that honour the diversity of human experiences and beliefs

African Theology on Witchcraft

African theology on witchcraft is a rich and complex field of study that reflects the diverse cultural, spiritual, and philosophical traditions of the African continent. Witchcraft beliefs and practices have long been a central aspect of African societies, shaping individuals' worldviews, social dynamics, and religious

⁵³ E. Bourguignon, "Religion Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change.," in 2006. (Columbus, OH: : The Ohio State University Press, n.d.).

⁵⁴ Arnaud Halloy and Vlad Naumescu, "Learning Spirit Possession: An Introduction," *Ethnos* 77, no. 2 (June 2012): 155–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2011.618271>.

⁵⁵ Agyapong, *Witchcraft in Ghana: Belief, Practice and Consequences*.19

⁵⁶ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest: Prayers and Praises*, Translated by Jon Kirby (Accra: Asempra Publishers, 2011).

⁵⁷ George Parrinder, *Witchcraft: A Critical Study of the Belief in Witchcraft from the Records of Witch Hunting in Europe Yesterday and Africa Today*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958).

⁵⁸ Andrew Akwasi Oppong, "Comparative Study of The Concept of The Divine in African Tradition Religions in Ghana and Losotho." (University of South Africa, 2002).

practices.⁵⁹ This section aims to explore African theology on witchcraft, examining the ways in which African theologians and scholars have interpreted and engaged with the phenomenon of witchcraft within the context of African spirituality and religious traditions.

Historical and Cultural Context

Witchcraft beliefs in Africa are deeply rooted in the continent's history, culture, and spiritual practices. Throughout Africa, witchcraft has been seen as a powerful and often ambiguous force that can be used for both good and evil purposes. In many African societies, witchcraft is believed to be a natural and inherent aspect of the spiritual world, with practitioners wielding supernatural abilities to influence events and outcomes in people's lives. These beliefs have been shaped by a complex interplay of indigenous African religions, Christianity, Islam, and colonial influences, leading to a diverse and multifaceted understanding of witchcraft within African theology.

Interpretations and Perspectives

African theologians and scholars have offered a variety of interpretations and perspectives on witchcraft within the context of African theology. Some theologians view witchcraft as a form of spiritual power that can be harnessed for healing, protection, and social justice, emphasizing the positive aspects of witchcraft practices within traditional African religions. Others approach witchcraft from a more critical perspective, highlighting the harmful effects of witchcraft accusations, stigmatization, and violence on individuals and communities. These theologians often seek to challenge and deconstruct harmful beliefs and practices associated with witchcraft, promoting a more nuanced and ethical understanding of the phenomenon.

Ethical and Moral Considerations

African theology on witchcraft also grapples with ethical and moral considerations related to the practice and belief in witchcraft. Questions of justice, accountability, and reconciliation are central to discussions on witchcraft accusations, as theologians seek to address the social and spiritual implications of witchcraft practices within African communities.⁶⁰ The ethical dimensions of witchcraft accusations, trials, and punishments are particularly complex, as theologians navigate the tensions between cultural traditions, human rights, and religious values in addressing issues of witchcraft-related harm and violence.

Integration with Christian Theology

Many African theologians have sought to integrate the study of witchcraft within the broader framework of Christian theology, exploring the intersections between traditional African religions and Christianity in understanding and addressing witchcraft beliefs. This integration often involves a dialogue between indigenous African spiritual practices and Christian teachings, seeking to reconcile and synthesize diverse theological perspectives on witchcraft within the African context.⁶¹ By engaging with the complexities of witchcraft beliefs and practices through a theological lens, African theologians contribute to a deeper and more holistic understanding of the spiritual, cultural, and ethical dimensions of witchcraft in African societies. African theology on witchcraft offers a unique and insightful perspective on the complex interplay of spirituality, culture, and ethics within African societies. By examining the historical, cultural, and theological dimensions of witchcraft beliefs, African theologians shed light on the diverse ways in which witchcraft is understood, interpreted, and practised across the continent.⁶² Through critical reflection, ethical engagement, and theological dialogue, African theologians contribute to a deeper understanding of the spiritual significance of witchcraft within African theology and the broader discourse on religion, culture, and society in Africa.

⁵⁹ Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana*, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series*, vol. 34 (Blandford Forum: Deo Publication, 2012).

⁶⁰ Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Zondervan, 2008).

⁶¹ Onyinah, "Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost."

⁶² Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana*.

Practical Theology Method

In the traditional framework of pastoral theology and care, the practical theology method involved the application of theological insights and knowledge primarily sourced from Scripture, systematic theology, and other theological traditions to address pastoral care scenarios. Subsequently, there was a shift towards emphasizing the theoretical knowledge of psychology and the methodologies of psychotherapy in (American) pastoral care, with less emphasis on utilizing theological resources to develop theoretical frameworks for pastoral care practices. In contrast to these earlier paradigms, the African pastoral theological method is rooted in a communal contextual framework of pastoral theology and care.⁶³ This approach places a central focus on social and cultural contexts. Concrete experiences serve as the starting point for reflective pastoral theological analysis, proving to be a crucial and pertinent resource for pastoral care. This approach involves a critical examination of theological and psychological knowledge sources, along with their respective theoretical perspectives and interpretations. Through this process of reflection on pastoral care practices, novel insights are generated, enabling the revision of theological, psychological, and cultural interpretations of African experiences. Consequently, more effective pastoral care strategies can be developed to address the contextual issues and challenges faced by the Ngora Community. This iterative process embodies a cycle of pastoral praxis.⁶⁴

In the development of an African pastoral theological methodology, insights from African theology, psychology, liberation theology, and African cultural studies can be integrated. The primary objective is to gain a deeper comprehension of issues rooted in the context and culture. Any pastoral care initiative that overlooks the prevailing ideologies and systemic expressions within the environment lacks comprehensive insight into the needs of suffering individuals within an African setting. These theoretical frameworks serve as guiding principles that shape pastoral care practices. The inclination to universalize and standardize one's own cultural norms and impose them on non-dominant cultures has been prominently observed in the "Eurocentric enterprise that has driven centuries of modernity. These hegemonic endeavours were overtly pursued during the era of Western expansion and persist in more subtle forms even today."⁶⁵ African cultures have often been stigmatized as primitive, unsophisticated, pagan, and therefore incompatible with Christianity. The deities, priests, myths, and ritual practices of Africa were assimilated and subordinated in a hierarchical manner as part of a process of cultural domination and degradation.⁶⁶ The Christian symbolic framework was equated with God, while the African symbolic system was viewed with suspicion. In order to introduce the God of life, the forces of death had to be eradicated, erasing any remnants of the old religious and cultural symbols of African spirituality.⁶⁷

In developing a practical pastoral theological method related to witchcraft in Ga-Rankuwa, it is important to consider the specific cultural context, beliefs, and practices of the community. Ga-Rankuwa is a township in South Africa with a rich cultural heritage and a diverse population. Witchcraft beliefs and practices are often deeply ingrained in the social fabric of the community, influencing relationships, social dynamics, and spiritual beliefs. A pastoral theological approach to addressing witchcraft in Ga-Rankuwa should be sensitive to these cultural nuances and grounded in a deep understanding of the community's worldview.

One practical pastoral theological method related to witchcraft in Ga-Rankuwa could involve a combination of education, dialogue, and spiritual support. Here are some key components of this approach:

1. *Cultural Sensitivity and Understanding*: Pastoral caregivers should take the time to learn about the cultural beliefs and practices surrounding witchcraft in Ga-Rankuwa. This includes understanding the role of witchcraft in shaping social relationships, addressing conflicts, and providing explanations for illness or misfortune.

⁶³ Sara E Schwarzbaum and Anita Jones Thomas, *Dimensions of Multicultural Counseling: A Life Story Approach* (Sage Publications, 2008), 21.

⁶⁴ Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana*.

⁶⁵ D. M. Clark, "A Cognitive Perspective on Social Phobia," in *International Handbook of Social Anxiety: Concepts, Research and Interventions Relating to the Self and Shyness*, ed. W. R. Crozier and L. E. Alden (John Wiley & Sons, 2001), 405–30.

⁶⁶ Abraham A.M. Ayrookuzhiel, "The Dalits, Religions and Interfaith Dialogue," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 1994), <https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1094>.

⁶⁷ Clark, "A Cognitive Perspective on Social Phobia."

2. *Education and Awareness:* Organize workshops, seminars, and community discussions to educate community members about the complexities of witchcraft beliefs and practices. Provide accurate information about the causes of illness, misfortune, and social problems, emphasizing the importance of seeking medical and psychological help when needed.
3. *Pastoral Counselling and Support:* Offer pastoral counselling and support to individuals and families affected by witchcraft accusations or beliefs. Provide a safe space for individuals to express their fears, concerns, and experiences related to witchcraft, and offer spiritual guidance and comfort based on Christian teachings of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
4. *Community Empowerment:* Empower community members to address witchcraft-related issues through community-based initiatives, support groups, and advocacy efforts. Encourage community members to work together to challenge harmful practices, promote social cohesion, and foster a culture of understanding and acceptance.
5. *Collaboration with Traditional Healers and Leaders:* Build relationships with traditional healers, community leaders, and elders to promote dialogue, mutual respect, and collaboration in addressing witchcraft-related challenges. Recognize the valuable role that traditional healers play in providing spiritual and emotional support to community members and seek ways to work together towards common goals.

By implementing a practical pastoral theological method that is culturally sensitive, education-focused, and community-driven, pastoral caregivers can play a vital role in addressing witchcraft-related issues in Ga-Rankuwa. This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding, dialogue, and collaboration in promoting healing, reconciliation, and social transformation within the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and insights from the study on the cultural and social significance of witchcraft beliefs and practices in Ga-Rankuwa Township, South Africa, the following practical and structured recommendations are proposed:

Foster Open Dialogues and Community Workshops

Objective: Create safe spaces for community members to discuss witchcraft beliefs and practices openly.

Action Steps:

- Organize regular community workshops and forums that include diverse voices, such as traditional healers, community leaders, and mental health professionals.
- Facilitate discussions that address misconceptions about witchcraft, allowing participants to share personal experiences and perspectives.
- Use these dialogues to bridge the gap between traditional beliefs and modern perspectives, promoting mutual respect and understanding.

Integrate Traditional Beliefs into Mental Health Frameworks

Objective: Acknowledge and incorporate traditional beliefs in mental health discussions and interventions.

Action Steps:

- Collaborate with mental health professionals to develop culturally sensitive mental health programs that respect and integrate traditional beliefs about witchcraft and spirituality.
- Train mental health practitioners in understanding local cultural contexts, enabling them to provide more effective support to individuals who may attribute their challenges to witchcraft.
- Promote awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of mental health while respecting cultural beliefs, reducing stigma associated with seeking help.

Develop Educational Programs on Witchcraft and Social Dynamics

Objective: Educate community members, especially the youth, about the complexities of witchcraft beliefs and their social implications.

Action Steps:

- Create educational materials that explain the historical and cultural contexts of witchcraft beliefs in Ga-Rankuwa, emphasizing their role in social dynamics and conflict resolution.
- Implement school-based programs that encourage critical thinking and discussions about cultural beliefs, fostering a more nuanced understanding among young people.
- Partner with local educational institutions to incorporate these topics into the curriculum, promoting cultural awareness and social cohesion.

Encourage Research and Documentation of Local Practices

Objective: Build a repository of knowledge on witchcraft beliefs and practices to inform future studies and community initiatives.

Action Steps:

- Establish a community research group that includes local scholars, practitioners, and community members to document and analyse witchcraft practices and their social significance.
- Encourage the use of mixed-methods research approaches to capture the complexity of these beliefs, ensuring that both qualitative and quantitative data are considered.
- Share findings with the community and stakeholders to inform policy and practice, ensuring that local knowledge is valued and utilized.

Promote Interfaith and Interdisciplinary Collaborations

Objective: Create a holistic approach to understanding and addressing the implications of witchcraft beliefs.

Action Steps:

- Facilitate partnerships between traditional healers, religious leaders, and mental health professionals to address community issues collaboratively.
- Organize interfaith dialogues that explore the intersections of spirituality, witchcraft, and mental health, fostering a comprehensive understanding of these topics.
- Encourage interdisciplinary research that includes anthropology, psychology, and sociology to provide a well-rounded perspective on witchcraft beliefs and practices. By implementing these recommendations, the community of Ga-Rankuwa can foster a more inclusive and understanding environment regarding witchcraft beliefs and practices. This approach not only respects traditional cultural perspectives but also promotes mental health and social cohesion, ultimately enriching the community's overall well-being.

CONCLUSION

Witchcraft in Ga-Rankuwa offers a fascinating glimpse into the complex interplay of tradition, spirituality, and social dynamics in South Africa. While the practice of witchcraft continues to be a source of cultural pride and spiritual guidance for many in the community, it also poses challenges in terms of human rights and social cohesion. By understanding the cultural significance of witchcraft in Ga-Rankuwa, a rich insight has been gained into the rich tapestry of beliefs and practices that shape the lives of its inhabitants. In conclusion, this paper has illustrated that the intercultural approach to pastoral care involves providing a platform for individuals marginalized by history to validate their culture, experiences, and identities. This is achieved through the deconstruction of prevailing ideologies and narratives surrounding witchcraft, which have assumed a normative and hegemonic role in the multicultural context of South Africa, exemplified by the Ga-Rankuwa community. This community, lacking in dignity and confidence, grapples with this spiritual phenomenon perceived as a scourge to be eliminated, yet also requires understanding from caregivers for appropriate discernment in providing relevant care to the affected individuals. Furthermore, the study has shown that witchcraft poses challenges to both the community and pastoral caregivers in Ga-Rankuwa, where this supernatural reality is prevalent. Encouragement is extended for further research on this phenomenon from various perspectives to deepen understanding and inform effective interventions.

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