



# Beliefs in the Activities of Witchcraft in Ghana

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## ABSTRACT

This study discusses how beliefs in the activities of witchcraft have been ingrained in the Ghanaian terrain and its adverse impact on Ghanaians. The methodology used in this qualitative study is the interpretive paradigm. The study also outlines the general belief in the activities of witches. The study findings suggest that the belief of the potency of witchcraft activities in Ghana is a major hinderance to personal and national development. The study argues that the emphasis placed on witchcraft activities promotes a dependency theory where individuals become irresponsible because every evil, mess and bigoted paradigm that suppresses the development of a person or the nation can be attributed to a remote cause elsewhere. The ideal belief system proposed for the development of Ghana and all individuals should neither be animistic nor secularist but Christ-centered and biblically premised. The study contributes to current research on witchcraft belief in Ghana.

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## INTRODUCTION

The African is believed to be generally religious and readily devoted to its auxiliary beliefs, of which Ghana situated in the West of Africa is not exceptional in this regard. Most aspects of the African life and actions trace their underpinnings to a religious belief embedded in a transcendental being outside ones reach either consciously or unconsciously. In Ghana, this can commonly be observed from the rites of passage i.e. birth, marriage and death.

Ghana attained her independence on 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1957 and was led by Kwame Nkrumah after it had become a British colony in 1874.<sup>2</sup> Kwame Nkrumah topped the BBC poll as the African of the millennium in December 1999 and was generally known for his views and prizefight for anti-colonialism, black pride and African personality, Pan-Africanism, African unity and Industrialization.<sup>3</sup> Despite the fight for independence in Ghana which occurred some sixty three years ago, Ghana still seems to be in a form of slavery: this time, is not by the colonial masters often termed the bully's, but the mindset and beliefs of the people.

Ghana has myriads of beliefs which often originate from its religio-cultural orientation. Witchcraft beliefs and their activities in Ghana is what the researcher intends to bring to the fore for discussion and to unravel how the beliefs has been entrenched and understood in the Ghanaian context. Witchcraft beliefs infiltrates the Ghanaian life and is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural set-up which Kirby reports as follows: "When I asked Simon Atunga, the leader of the Gambaga Outcasts Project in the Northern Region if he believed in witchcraft, he responded, 'Yes' here in Ghana, everyone believes in it. If someone tells you they don't, they are lying."<sup>4</sup> This work discusses some of the factors that might be the springboard for this Ghanaian belief system. It evaluates some of the Ghanaian beliefs in the activities of witches and their dire consequences on the indigenes and the nation at large. The study concludes that any nation or individual whose beliefs are animistic or secular will end up having challenges but the required beliefs should be holistically foundational on the Scriptures and premised on the truth in the person of Jesus Christ.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a globalising African Economy*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>4</sup> J.P. Kirby, "Toward a Christian response to witchcraft in Northern Ghana," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 39, no.1 (2015):19.

## METHODOLOGY

The theoretical and philosophical perspective that informed this study was the interpretive paradigm.<sup>5</sup> This qualitative study gathered primary data through semi-structured interviews and explored the views of fifty respondents from the Akan (the largest ethnic group in Ghana) context. The sampling strategy used was the purposive sampling. Other related literatures were used as secondary sources in the study.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses results from data gathered on witchcraft in Ghana. It also unravels Ghanaian acuties of the phenomenon, discussing its effects on various aspects of individual and national development.

### The Reality of Witchcraft in the Ghanaian Terrain

There is a need to understand the phenomenon from the context being studied and below is how some respondents during this Author's interview argue to the reality of witchcraft. According to one of the interviewees; "Witches are persons who possess powers to do evil and often turn to non-human forms when they intend to harm or are attending meetings."<sup>6</sup> Another respondent added that, "Witchcraft is red light, like a shining star which flies around in the night and I have seen one before."<sup>7</sup> The Ghanaian experience of the belief and activities of witches is not vague because some people claim to have observed the phenomenon while others claim to be victims of their activities: "they have changed my star, I should have been a nurse but they altered it and now I am suffering" an interviewee lamented.<sup>8</sup>

Dennis Opoku, when asked whether he believed witches are real, muttered with a bit of animosity to the question and retorted: "Yes!, with my mother, witches had wanted her to suffer till she dies without enjoying anything good in life and it took a Prophet of God to unravel the mystery and destroyed the spell over her life."<sup>9</sup> Most of the respondents interviewed had had an experience with witchcraft, either personally or through the experiences of persons related to them.

### Ancestries for the Ghanaian Beliefs in the Activities of Witchcraft.

Nothing happen accidentally and there is a cause for everything that transpires including the beliefs, aspirations and worldview of people thus the Akan adage; *wisie bi ni ɔsoro a egya enni aseɛ* translated into English as 'there is no smoke without fire'. The Ghanaian beliefs and activities of witchcraft might be premised on some peculiarities, experiences or worldview of the people of the land and some of which have been discussed below.

### Witchcraft beliefs vis-à-vis the family set up in Ghana

In the Ghanaian context, a man is closely linked to the extended family either through blood or spirit. In the context of the Akan of Ghana, it is believed that a person inherits the *mogya* (blood) from the mother while he inherits the *ntoro* (spirit) from the father.<sup>10</sup> The family setup postulates the dependency of one to another, of persons from the same family and their relatedness to each other, which to some extent make people from same family inseparable and connected. Traditionally, Africans see themselves as each other's keeper, and that is the main reason for the concern shown towards each other and the general wellbeing of all in society. Africans do not talk about individualism because it contradicts the traditional African understanding of family, traditional practices, beliefs and values that seek to create a society that will be free from the effect of evil.<sup>11</sup>

The Akan of Ghana shout "*agyaɛ*" (father) when they are hurt or frightened by something, implying an appeal to the *ntoro* received from the father that is believed to protect them spiritually. Some exorcists in the Ghanaian Christian context who intend to deal with the root cause of challenges of Ghanaians often trace evil and misfortune that befall people from the *mogya* they are connected with. The family set-up depicts the Ghanaian belief in oneness and dependency upon one another and how particular evil spirits can destroy a particular family because of their relatedness. In her interview, Mamunatu opined that witchcraft can only be acquired through a member of the family as an inheritance passed on from one to another within the same family.<sup>12</sup> There is an Akan maxim that *se obi benya woa na efiri fie* which can be

<sup>5</sup> M. Bessey, *Case Study Research in Educational Settings* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999),43. Quoted in Hinneh Kusi, *Doing Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers* (Accra: Emmpong Press, 2012),16.

<sup>6</sup> Personal interview conducted by the Author with Oteng Asamoah on October 20, 2018 at Nkawkaw.

<sup>7</sup> An interview conducted with Ama Asantewaa on October 24, 2018 at Nkawkaw.

<sup>8</sup> Excerpts of an interview conducted with Paul Gyamfi on February 14, 2020 at Nkawkaw.

<sup>9</sup> An interview conducted with Dennis Opoku on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2018 at Kumasi.

<sup>10</sup> Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana* (Blandford:Deo Publishing, 2012),26.

<sup>11</sup> Godfred Adjei Nyarko, "The Concept of Evil in African Communities : The Case of the Yoruba , Akan and Igbo People," *Journal Of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics And Theology (MOTBIT)* 2, no. 1 (2020): 21–27, <https://doi.org/10.32051/motbit.2020.043>.

<sup>12</sup> Interview conducted with Mamunatu Sulley on October 29, 2018 at Gnani witch camp.

interpreted as 'if an enemy will afflict you, then it should be from your family.' When misfortune strikes *abusua na wɔkɔ abisa*,<sup>13</sup> which means, 'it behooves on the family to search for the cause of evil that affect their people'. The notion above is reinforced by the belief that witches from one's own family are a major threat and more likely to destroy than a witch from outside one's family. The Akan of Ghana often say, *se aboa bi beka wo a, na efiri wo ntoma mu* which transliterates as, 'it is only an animal in your cloth, that can bite you'. This implies that witches often harm members from their own families. Thus the family orientation sets the stage for witchcraft beliefs and their perceived activities in Ghana.

### Witchcraft beliefs vis-à-vis the Chieftaincy Institution in Ghana

In Ghana as in most parts of Africa, chiefs in particular socio-cultural contexts are chosen from particular families and persons outside those family despite their affluence, intellect or leadership capabilities cannot be made chiefs since they are not part of the lineage of the family to the throne. Chiefs in Ghana are often referred to as the custodians of the land and the link between the ancestors and the living. The chieftaincy institution of Ghana in essence is built on their trust in dead relatives (ancestors) and the spirits that exercise control over the living. Forson argues that, no general account of the Akan people in Ghana will be adequate without recognizing the significant role of the sacred chieftaincy.<sup>14</sup> Its sacredness is embedded in that, the chief connects the living and the dead. The Chief is the commander-in-chief of the *atra nkonya* or sub-chiefs.<sup>15</sup>

The prime minister of the second republic of Ghana postulates that "the chief was the axis of the political relations of different elders and their subjects".<sup>16</sup> The Kingship institution affirms the belief in spirits and the spirits role of protecting the land from enemies through the chief who acts as an intermediary between the living and the ancestors. The Asante of Ghana believe that, even the stool the chief sits on is preserved by the spirits of the ancestors.<sup>17</sup> When the ancestors are not pleased with the way of life of the people of the land and therefore bring judgment, the chief's duty is to lead and assign the traditional priests/priestess to appease the gods or ancestors concerned. This belief brings to light that chieftaincy in Ghana affirms the nation's belief in spirit control over the living and so is the belief of witchcraft. The supremacy of chiefs in Ghana to an extent is derived from the belief that, they can appease the ancestors or gods to rescind evil intentions from the people. Thus, Ghanaians revere any charismatic figure or religious leader that can curb evil promulgated against them by witches.

### Witchcraft vis-à-vis the economic conditions of Ghana

Africa, despite being the most endowed continent (material wealth and human potential) amongst the seven (7) continents of the world is the most materially impoverished continent on earth and her people are the poorest.<sup>18</sup> The desperation of Africans and its brokenness needs to be addressed holistically, but it seems Africans prefer to assume the role of victims as they blame some external factors beyond their reach (colonialism, the United Nations, inadequate foreign aid, witches, etc.). Miller and Allen opine that "before independence every African country was self-sufficient in food production: today, most depend on imports and others stand at the brink of famine. At independence the average growth rate of African countries was three percent. By 1980 it had declined to one percent and during the 1990s , a negative 2.8 percent".<sup>19</sup> Ghana situated in West Africa is not an exceptional case with regard to the ensuing economic plights of Africa. Gifford asserts that "since 1983 Ghana has been undergoing structural adjustment imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Ghanaians did not need convincing: Life was incredibly hard ..."<sup>20</sup> Sagas of corruption, exploitation, nepotism, leadership failures, poor governance and dependence on foreign grants continually worsen the plight of the nation. Ghana's economy should have been one of the best if a nation's wealth parallels her endowment of natural resources because Ghana has Gold, Timber, Cocoa, Bauxite, Manganese, Diamond, Oil, etc. Despite her endowment in most valuable mineral resources and plantation, she depends on less endowed countries for support. Ghana seems to see the solution beyond her reach and the search for greener pastures by many of the indigens from other developed countries also seems a mirage. In the Author's interviews, Ghana's economic plights seem to be explained that witches or evil spirits have gone on rampage against the Ghanaian economy. The Ghanaian economy fortifies the beliefs of some of the citizenry in the activities of witches as they are the prime suspects who are believed to

<sup>13</sup> Personal Interview conducted by author with Lucy Agyapong at Nkawkaw on May 15, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Mathias Kwasi Forson, "Split Level Christianity in Africa: A Study of the Persistence of Traditional Religious Beliefs and Practices among the Akans" (PhD. diss., E. Stanley Jones of world missions and evangelism, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1993), 66. Quoted in Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism*, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Kofi Abrefa Busia, *The position of the chief in modern Asante: A study of the influence of contemporary social changes on Ashanti political institutions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951),22. Quoted in Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Sarpong, *The Sacred Stools of the Akan*, (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1971), 39. Quoted in Samuel Ofori, "A Theological Analysis of Issues Arising from the Christian Asante Chief's Relationship with the Black Stool (Akonwa Tuntum)," *Journal Of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics And Theology (MOTBIT)* 2, no. 1 (2020): 50–57, <https://doi.org/10.38159/motbit.2020047>.

<sup>18</sup> Scott Allen Darrow L. Miller, *Against All Hope: Hope For Africa* (Nairobi: Samaritan Strategy Africa Working Group, 2005),18.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.,25.

<sup>20</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*,3.

have bewitched the nation so that she may not prosper. Ghanaian legendary musician, A.B. Crentsil sang to convey the Ghanaian belief in this regard, *Akwasi broni nanyan, anyan papa, wo de ahehye plen* which translates into English as, 'the witchcraft of the westerners is better because, they have used their witchcraft to manufacture an airplane'. The Musician further suggests that the witchcraft of the Ghanaian is for destruction which is directly opposite the witchcraft of the westerners who have used their witchcraft to develop their nations. The nation's plight as far as the economic condition is concerned implies that, witches are destroying the economy of Ghana.

### Witchcraft beliefs on marriage and fertility in Ghana

Marriage is observed generally in Ghana as a rite of passage and analogous to birth and death and consequently, the expectation is that, each normal person must pass through these processes. The Ghanaian context expects all individuals to marry at some point and have children.<sup>21</sup> The Ghanaian may deem any thwart in the life of an individual in this regard to be against the norm and therefore needs to be probed into, to ascertain the reason for the deviation. Marriage in Ghana thus transforms the status of the couple. Fortes argue that "marriage is a necessary criterion in the definition of a total personhood among the Talensi of the Upper East Region of Ghana and the other regions and dialects in Ghana are not exempted."<sup>22</sup> There is a general impression that witches are responsible for marriage destruction, preventing one from getting married and causing infertility in marriage. "Witchcraft is a spirit that destroys things" said Mamunatu in a personal communication. There is a general impression amongst Ghanaians that, witches often prevent people from getting married, especially the women and when a woman escape that snare, she had better fight for her right to give birth because the witches might make her barren and hence an Akan adage that *Nimo antumi wo a, wo tete wo ntoma* with the English rendition, 'if someone is not capable of overpowering you, he tears your clothing'.

During the interviews for this research work, one person said that, after 16 years of marriage, there was no fruit of the womb and some prophet alleged that, witches were responsible for the barrenness, but after seeking medical attention and through doctors' advice, she has since been able to give birth. A religious leader also shared a 15 years' experience of sterility in his marriage which took the intervention of artificial insemination for he and his wife to have a child. The enigma here will be, how can a doctor's advice or artificial insemination put to an end the work of witches?

Dorcas asserts that, witches uproot the womb of their victims and dump it somewhere under rivers or on the top of trees and thereby causing barrenness for their victims.<sup>23</sup> The seeming general assumption in Ghana is that witches prevent people from marriage, cause marriage break downs and barrenness or infertility in marriages. Most often, Ghanaian couples facing sterility or bareness in marriage resort to prayer from Christian leaders, consult *Mallams* (Islam clerics), visit the shrines of *akomfo* (traditional priests), herbalists and also seek medical care from recognized health care centers.

Timmons, a missionary to African asserts that, 'witches can prevent pregnancies or replace babies in the womb with black stones, so that one may carry pregnancy for twenty five months without delivery and the only antidote, is to be delivered from the power of the witches who are behind it'.<sup>24</sup> It is imperative to understand the above issue from the Ghanaian perspective, but the question is, can all destroyed marriages and infertility be traced to the activities of witches? Could there be other reasons that might account for why people don't get married, why marriages are broken down or why there is sterility in marriage as in the above cases of those who gave birth after seeking medical attention? Can the disregard for pre-marital counseling account partly for the frequent marriage breakdown attributed to witches?

### The belief that witches fly at night

The data gathered from respondents, when the Author conducted the interviews postulate that, witches fly at night. "witchcraft is a spirit which possesses people and they fly to meetings at midnight"<sup>25</sup> Opoku Onyinah affirms the sentiment of some Ghanaians and writes that: "at the night, it is believed that their *akra* (souls) leave their physical bodies in sleep and fly into meetings"<sup>26</sup> Debrunner writes that the meeting places of witches are believed to be on big trees.<sup>27</sup> Ghanaians often recount stories where some witches fly to other continents of the world to go and cause havoc to their victims. There was a general consensus from the respondents of the interview that, witches fly at night. Timmons also asks, "how does a witch change into an owl and fly through the night?"<sup>28</sup>

Is it possible for witches to fly long distances, from Ghana to Europe or American or Asia, since it is often

<sup>21</sup> Oladele Kwaku Aribike, *Marriage Registration & Divorce in Ghana: Law and Procedure*(Accra: Aridola Consult, 2018), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Fortes Meyer, *Religion, Morality and the Person* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987), 271. Italics is mine for emphasis.

<sup>23</sup> Personal interview conducted by the author with Dorcas Mensah, November 1, 2018 at Kumasi.

<sup>24</sup> J.P Timmons, *Mysterious Secrets of the Dark Kingdom: The Battle for the Planet Earth* (Austin, Texas : CCI Publishing Comapany, 1984), 352.

<sup>25</sup> Personal interview conducted by author with David Amoateng on October 26, 2018 at Nkawkaw.

<sup>26</sup> Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism*, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Hans. W. Debrunner, *Witchcraft in Ghana: A study on the belief in destructive witches and its effects on the Akan Tribes* ( Accra: Presbyterian Book Depot Ltd. 1959),56-57.

<sup>28</sup> Timmons, *Mysterious Secrets of the Dark Kingdom*, 30.

assumed they fly in the night only? Timmons suggests that, spirit beings operate at a much higher speed and frequency than human beings in the physical world.<sup>29</sup> Timmons recounts various experiences in Africa when witches flew from wherever they were sent from and entered his room at 2 a.m.<sup>30</sup> There is a general belief that witches fly at night to have meetings and also to cause havoc to their victims. In psychology, there are persons who suffer from hallucinations and depressions that attest to seeing themselves flying. Thus, can those psychosomatic challenges have a bearing on this experience of witches who are believed to fly in the night? Do all flying experiences suggest witchcraft possession?

### **The belief that witches drink human blood and eat human flesh**

“Witches operate spiritually and have groups and different camps; at times they change the human flesh into any kind of meat they prefer.”<sup>31</sup> From the interviews it came to light that, witches have great feast days during Christmas periods: “At the end of the year, witches turn human beings into animals, kill them and eat their flesh and drink their blood.”<sup>32</sup> Some of the respondents argued that, there were instances when those turned to animals like goats and sheep by witches were set free through prayers held on their behalf. Some interviewees also claimed that, in churches there are often revelations that explain how some human beings have been turned into animals by witches awaiting slaughter. If the above view is correct, could that mean that, witches eat the real flesh of their prey physically or spiritually? Onyinah’s work posits that witchcraft is believed to be spiritual and complex.<sup>33</sup> Is it possible for a spiritual entity that lacks physical or scientific explanation to operate in the flesh by eating human flesh and drink human blood? There seems to be an inconsistency here, as to how a spiritual phenomenon is interpreted in the flesh as eating the flesh of human beings and drinking their blood which is physical. The question that pops up here is, when witches eat someone’s flesh and drink their blood, what then becomes of that person? Some of the respondents to the interviews said when the flesh of the victim is eaten and their blood drunk by witches, the victim dies.<sup>34</sup> The question then becomes, will the dead person still possess flesh and have blood after the witches have eaten their flesh and drank their blood? The vivid answer is ‘yes’.

Then which flesh did the witches eat and which blood did they drink? Olukoya in his book, *Praying to dismantle witchcraft* defines witchcraft as “the enemy that drinks human blood and eat their flesh.”<sup>35</sup> Supposing the eating of the human flesh and the drinking of their blood by witches is spiritual, then the interpretation then becomes that witches do not eat human flesh and drink human blood, because human flesh and blood is physical. Jesus told Peter after his confession of His Messiahship in Matthew 16:17 that, “flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my father who is in Heaven”. Paul also says in Ephesians 6:12 that “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against spirits”. What then does the flesh means? The flesh as used by Jesus and Paul in this context is from a Greek rendering *sarx* which means the soft substance of the human body which covers the bones or by implication the human nature. The text implies that spiritual activities are opposite to fleshly activities, and the conflict is how spiritual entities can feed on flesh and blood which is physical.

### **Witchcraft beliefs on poverty, sickness and social vices**

In Ghana witches are believed to be the forces behind poverty, sicknesses, stealing and other vices. In her interview, Hilda explained that, “witches buy sicknesses, poverty and immorality for their prey with the help of witches from one’s own family.”<sup>36</sup> In the 1960s in Ghana, measles was known as a disease brought about by spirits of which, appeasement with the performance of some rituals was the right and prescribed antidote in most Akan lands to hold or avert the wrath of the spirits against the people, *till the introduction of a vaccine*.<sup>37</sup> In 1974 and 1975 at the Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital in Kumasi, 15.3% of total pediatric deaths were due to measles.<sup>38</sup> This is a common phraseology in Ghana, I am poor or sick because they bewitched me. “Sick neighbors and family members readily voice suspicion that someone has harmed or bewitched them.”<sup>39</sup> There is this notion in Ghana, that poverty and sickness often emanate from spirit forces especially witches. Matilda Boateng in her interview argues that, “witches can possess people to tell lies or steal.”<sup>40</sup> The above assertion seems to suggest that, telling lies or stealing can be instigated by witches on their victims and if that be

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 341

<sup>31</sup> Personal interview conducted by the author with J.M. Krampah on November 4, 2018 at Nkawkaw.

<sup>32</sup> Interview conducted with David Amoateng on October 26, 2018 at Nkawkaw.

<sup>33</sup> Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism*, 51.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Dennis Opoku on October 28, 2018 at Kumasi.

<sup>35</sup> Daniel K.. Olukoya, *Praying to dismantle witchcraft* (Lagos: The Battle Cry Ministries Publishers, 2002), 12.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Hilda Boateng on October 24, 2018 at Nkawkaw.

<sup>37</sup> Kofi Sempah, Personal interview conducted on July 1, 2020. Italics are mine for emphasis

<sup>38</sup> Peter Strebel, William Bosu, Mercy Essel-Ahun and Sam Adjei, “Progress in the Control of Measles in Ghana, 1980-2000,” *The Journal of Infectious Diseases* 187 (2003): 44–50, <https://doi.org/10.1086/368056>.

<sup>39</sup> Steven D. H. Rasmussen & Hannah Rasmussen, “Healing Communities: Contextualizing Responses to Witch Accusations”, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 39, No. 1(2015):12.

<sup>40</sup> Personal interview with Matilda Boateng on October 25, 2018 at Nkawkaw.

the case, how fair will it be to hold the victims responsible for an act which might be beyond their control? This seems to be a challenge in Ghana as people blame their ruthlessness to being incited by witches and as a result not claiming responsibility. If vices are blamed on witches which has generally been the case in Ghana, then people will continue to be reckless and that has the tendency to promote waywardness and chaos in the nation.

### Witchcraft beliefs on evil and misfortune

Witchcraft activities in contemporary Ghanaian society can be described as a theory of evil that allows Ghanaians to concretize evil by making it specific and identifiable with an external agent mostly referred to as a witch.<sup>41</sup> Life is interpreted as permanently overrun by witches at all points who inflict them with all kinds of misfortunes. The belief in the presence of mystical powers that work against the progress of others has prejudiced the cultural, religious and daily lives of the people of Ghana.<sup>42</sup> Witches are believed to be the causal agents of famine, illnesses, accidents, etc. Witchcraft provides the thinking by which the relations between men and unfortunate events are explained. Witchcraft accusation is a ready answer to all misfortunes and evil so as to relieve individuals from responsibility and accountability.<sup>43</sup> Kirby asserts that in the Northern Region of Ghana, “Life’s evils are thus understood in terms of personalized antilife forces from which one must seek protection from persons *who are primarily the witches.*”<sup>44</sup> Witchcraft parallels evil in the ambiance of most Ghanaian conviction and scarcely will an evil act be analyzed holistically to determine the source because the witches are the prime suspects. One of the manifestations of evil is witchcraft, which is a form of evil recognized by the Akan to be employed as a mystical force to harm one’s neighbor.<sup>45</sup>

### Witchcraft beliefs on the economy, governance and political life in Ghana

There is a belief that witches are often responsible for Ghana’s economic plight, bad governance and the political life of Ghana. The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) coined a German term *Weltanschauung* (*Welt* means world whiles *Anschauung* means view)<sup>46</sup> to explain the dynamics and impact of how people relate with their environment. The German social Economist, Max Weber also used this word in his analysis of the relationship between a person’s belief and their prosperity or poverty.<sup>47</sup> Weber asserts that, the prosperity or poverty of an individual or a nation is relational to their beliefs.

In 2004, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) launched a package, aimed at relieving the financial burdens and constrains of poor and indebted countries termed as enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Forty two countries were eligible for HIPC designation out of which thirty representing (81%) were from Africa and Ghana was part of the HIPC countries during the era of President John Agyekum Kuffour.<sup>48</sup> “Since 1983, Ghana has been undergoing structural adjustment imposed by the IMF”.<sup>49</sup> There are still countless number of towns and villages in Ghana without the basic amenities for human beings like electricity, clean water, road network, health facilities, internet access and school

**Table 1.** The WHO country Statistics compares the Economy of Ghana to U.K., Tunisia and Singapore as at 2016 <sup>50</sup>

Country	Ghana	United Kingdom	Tunisia	Singapore
Population (million)	27.41	64.72	11.25	5.6
Life expectancy at birth (male/female)	61/64	79/83	73/78	80/86
Probability of dying between 15 and 60 years per 1000 population (male/female)	261/222	88/55	130/69	69/38
Total expenditure on health per capital (USD)	145	3,377	785	4,047
<b>Total expenditure on health as % of GDP</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>4.9</b>

The table above indicates the high death rate prevalent in Ghana as a result of unfavorable economic situations, poverty and the inability to secure better health care. Ghana’s economic predicament depicts that of a place where the indigenes are in plights that need remedy and as such most people attribute their predicament to the witches, colonial masters,

<sup>41</sup> Abraham Akrong, “Neo-Witchcraft Mentality In Popular Christianity” *Research Review New Series* 16.1 (2000) 1

<sup>42</sup> Godfred Adjei Nyarko, “The Concept of Evil in African Communities : The Case of the Yoruba , Akan and Igbo People.” Italics is mine for emphasis

<sup>43</sup> E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Clarendon: Oxford, 1937),18.

<sup>44</sup> Kirby, “Toward a Christian Response to Witchcraft in Northern Ghana,”2. Italics is mine for emphasis

<sup>45</sup> Godfred Adjei Nyarko, “The Concept of Evil in African Communities : The Case of the Yoruba , Akan and Igbo People,” 24.

<sup>46</sup> Paul A. Marshall, *Worldviews and Social Science* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989),8.

<sup>47</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1958).

<sup>48</sup> Darrow, *Against All Hope*, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Gifford, Ghana’s New Christianity, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Kofi Mante, *Foundation For Financial Independence* (Accra: Network For Change, 2017), 15.

IMF and others. 41 respondents representing 82%, in the interview said witches can influence the Economy of Ghana while 9 representing 18% said, they cannot influence the economy or they are not sure. Oteng in an interview answers to whether witches can influence Ghana's economy as follows: "Yes!, Witches can influence the economy, governance and the political life of Ghana, because they have powers that can easily affect the mindset and behavior of people"<sup>51</sup> Gifford asserts that, some people attribute Ghana's economic woes to external forces: colonialism, unfair terms of trade by the IMF and others.<sup>52</sup> That notwithstanding, Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General to the United Nations said at an OAU summit in Togo in July 2000, "This plight of Africa is not something others have done for us. It is something we have done to ourselves. If Africa is bypassed, it is because not enough of us are investing in policies which would promote development and preserve peace. We have mismanaged our affairs for decades and we are suffering the accumulated effects."<sup>53</sup>

Kofi Annan hit the nail right on the head and the case of Ghana is not different from what has transpired in most African countries and as a result Ghanaians are experiencing the mess of their own fabrication. It seems Ghanaians are interested in blaming their plights on others rather than taking the bull by the horn and solving their own challenges by initiating and adhering to the right policies and paradigms. The Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, K. Y. Amoako, argues that "underpinning of all African problems is the crises of governance; and the sooner we recognize this, the sooner we will be prompted to take corrective action."<sup>54</sup> Ghana's economic woes can be attributed to the style of governance and political culture which seems to favor "party faithfuls" than the interest of the entire nation.<sup>55</sup> Ghana's state institutions, structures and the judiciary serves the interest of the sitting governments.<sup>56</sup> National grants and contracts are given to family members, friends and party loyalist (nepotism). Ghana has been hit by so many scandals, with regards to this form or style of governance but it seems Ghanaians continue to blame external agents (IMF, witches, etc.) for the nation's plights.

Gifford quotes from the Ghanaian Newspapers; Chronicle dated 4-5 September, 2000 and the Daily Graphic on April 28, 2001 of the Quality grain rice scandal where a young African American woman was given 27 million USD to cultivate rice on 10,000 acres of land in the Volta Region but in reality only 575 acres were ever cultivated and no rice was produced. This scandal sheds light on the form of governance prevalent in the nation.<sup>57</sup> The Daily Graphic reported this incidence to depict a kind of erotic string attached to the leadership at that time and the lady as follows "....with her ample hips, powerful presence, voluptuous lips and great looks"<sup>58</sup>

That notwithstanding, about 82% of the respondents to the interviews conducted, argued that witches can influence the governance and the political life of the nation. If the above argument is true, then none is treated fairly when blamed for the mismanagement of the governance and political life of Ghana, Also, could that account for the rampant and incessant dubious scandals recorded in the political history of Ghana and more so the voluminous scandals in the religious terrain and other spheres in Ghana?

Ghana can thrive on visionary leadership who have a burden to change the status quo rather than the blame game. "In leadership, vision is the fuel that leaders run on. It is the energy that creates action; it's the fire that ignites the passion of followers."<sup>59</sup>

### **Witchcraft beliefs and unemployment in Ghana**

The gloomy and unfavorable economy is enough reason to substantiate the mass unemployment trend in Ghana. There once existed a union in Ghana dubbed Unemployed Graduates Association which had a large following. The IMF ordered the Government of Ghana to halt the employment of people into the government sector in the country for a period during the regime of the former President, John Dramani Mahama which rendered most trained teachers, nurses and other graduates who completed their education jobless. This trend projects the laxity of Ghana's perspicacity as far as the administration within governance and the political life is concerned. That notwithstanding, unemployment in Ghana was attributed to witches by 60% of the respondents. The current government led by Nana Akufo Addo gave the unemployed masses of Ghana so much hope, when he was voted to lead the nation, but it seems unemployment in Ghana has not been dealt with in its entirety and Ghanaians are still grappling with the challenge of unemployment.

<sup>51</sup> Personal interview conducted by author with Oteng Asamoah on October 20, 2018 at Nkawkaw.

<sup>52</sup> Gifford, Ghana's New Christianity, 6.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>56</sup> The world bank Ghana governance and corruption Survey, "Labels Ghana's Judiciary as Highly Corrupt," January 2001. Quoted in Gifford, Ghana's New Christianity, 8.

<sup>57</sup> Gifford, Ghana New Christianity, 9.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>59</sup> Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002), 31. Quoted in John Abedu Quashie & Mark S. Aidoo, "Commit To Faithful Brethren Who Are Able To Teach ' ( 2 Timothy 2 : 2): The Pastor / Preacher As A Leader In Disciple Making," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* 6, no. 3 (2020): 169–80, <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.2020063>.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Almost everything in Ghana is attached to clientalism, nepotism and schemings. Attributing the nations challenges to witches and other external factors have to some extent blinded most Ghanaians from diagnosing properly what the real challenge is and as a result the citizenry keeps compounding the challenge through continuous bad governance, corrupt political/religious leaders and other miscreants 'established' in most of the nation's institutions. This study recommends that, there is a need to adjust the beliefs accordingly to reflect on realities other than being animistic (a belief that spirits control nature) that the government needs to review the educational structure and thereby infuse innovation and creativity in the schools curricula, so that graduates will not remain idle whilst waiting for the government to employ them before they work. Also the government ought to motivate and promote private businesses and entrepreneurship as that can curb the unemployment trend in Ghana instead of attributing unemployment to witches. The government ought to devise strategic and pragmatic initiatives to sustain and promote private organizations. The government must also make the citizens aware that, there is a limit to what it can do, than to give false hopes which often do not materialize and as a result people end up accusing the witches as the enemies of society's progress. Lastly, the individual Ghanaian attitude to work must reflect the ideology of 'we live to work'<sup>60</sup> and "work is part of dignity"<sup>61</sup> rather than expecting the government to do everything for them, whiles they sit aloof and wait for assistance.

Any nation that relies on beliefs and assumptions of this genus will always have challenges because ideas have consequences as asserted by Max Weber. The beliefs, conjectures and worldview of a nation or a person have a way of determining the results they achieve. All people and cultures have certain beliefs that shape their paradigm of the universe and how they are to relate with the universe which inadvertently determines the prosperity, poverty and the development of the people. Therefore all beliefs must be brought captive to Christ and the mind or beliefs of Christ Jesus must be in all people and nations.<sup>62</sup> Christ in man is the hope of glory and any belief system that envisages evil as always from external sources may eventually be frustrated or disappointed. A worldview or beliefs system that can bring development in Ghana should neither be animistic (belief that spirits control nature) nor secularist (belief that man controls nature) but Christian, with roots from the Bible and centered on Christ. Let this mind (beliefs) be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.<sup>63</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This discourse has brought to light the activities of witches from the Ghanaian perspective and the challenges associated with the beliefs. The Ghanaian perspective posits that one's plight is concocted by another and evil is mostly caused by witches or external agents. The ancestries that inform the Ghanaian witchcraft psychology are the family set-up, chieftaincy institutions in Ghana and the economic conditions of Ghana. The study revealed witchcraft theories in the Ghanaian context are: destruction of marriages, causing of barrenness, flying in the night, drinking human blood and eating their flesh, afflicting people with poverty, sickness, stealing, lying and causing misfortune to befall people and unemployment. The study concludes that, some of the beliefs of the activities of witches are human induced and not caused by witches. It is suggested that further research is conducted on this discourse with regards to developing holistic pastoral and theological responses to the beliefs that hinders development in Ghana.

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<sup>60</sup> Genesis 2:15 , (And Jehovah God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it, And Jehovah God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it, ASV).

<sup>61</sup> Darrow L. Miller, *Against All Hope: Hope For Africa*, 33.

<sup>62</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:5 (casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, ISV), **Philippians 2:5** (Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, ISV).

<sup>63</sup> Philippians 2:5 (KJV).



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