

**THE ROLE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN GO-HOME PROJECT IN
ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF THE GAMBAGA WITCH
CAMP**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, apart from the materials quoted from other scholarly works which have been duly acknowledged, this thesis is the original work of the researcher under the supervision of Rev. Dr. Abamfo Ofori Atiemo and Prof. Elizabeth Amoah towards the award of Mphil Religions in the Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana-Legon.

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DEDICATION

With deep love and appreciation, I dedicate this work to my dear wife Matilda Abibatu Naboo and our children David, Blessing, Francis and Francisca for the love, encouragement, sacrifices and support they gave me during my studies at the University of Ghana- Legon.



ABSTRACT

The thesis basically investigated the role of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project in trying to address the challenges of the Gambaga Witch Camp in the Northern Region of Ghana. The belief in witchcraft is widespread in the Northern part of Ghana, and for that matter in the Mamprugu traditional area. It is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural and indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the people to the extent that the belief is “institutionalized” in some parts of Northern Ghana. This is manifested in the existence of about six witch camps in different parts of the Northern Region of Ghana. Women and men accused of witchcraft are either maltreated or banished from their communities to go on self-imposed exile to the witch camps for fear of being lynched.

The Gambaga Witch Camp, which is the first of its kind in Ghana, is attached to a traditional shrine which presumably, provides protection for the alleged witches and thereby believed to neutralize their powers to cause harm to others. Currently, conditions in the Gambaga Witch Camp are very deplorable and the women and their children are wallowing in misery, poverty, and indignity, which is against their human rights. It is against these challenges that the Presbyterian Church of Ghana expressed reservations about keeping the accused women at the witch camp. The church saw it as a developmental issue and as part of her social responsibility, started giving support in the form of food items, clothing, shelter and healthcare to the inmates of the camp. They also initiated a program known as the Presbyterian Go-Home Project, to facilitate their reintegration into their original communities and families.

The qualitative method was used to collect the data. On the research field, the researcher employed interviews, and participant observation to gather the required data. Data was also obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The findings of the research show that,

the Presbyterian Go-Home project is faced with three major challenges. First, how to address the issue of witchcraft accusation and the inhuman treatment meted out to alleged witches. Second, how to address their immediate needs in the witch camp, and third, how to reintegrate the alleged witches back to their families.

The outcome of the study would help policy makers, Civil Society Organizations, religious bodies and other benevolent organizations to focus their attention on addressing the challenges of the alleged witches in the camps. The work also aims at contributing to academic knowledge on witchcraft and witch camps by documenting facts which could otherwise be lost in oral tradition.



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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Belief in witchcraft has been present and persist in most societies in the world; thus continually attracting scholarly interest. The topic witchcraft, when raised among Africans, evokes fear, hatred and anger, because witches are regarded as evil and harmful to human beings and the society. The belief in witchcraft continues to be widespread in Africa and for that matter, Ghana. It is prevalent in many societies in Africa¹

In the Northern Region of Ghana, witchcraft accusations are not only rampant but carry serious consequences for those accused. Accused witches are often banished, tortured or lynched. The phenomenon of witchcraft accusations cannot easily be traced to a particular period in the history of any Ghanaian society, culture or tradition. However, it can be said to stem from the traditional religious and cultural beliefs of several societies in Ghana. Among the people of Mamprugu in Northern Ghana, belief in witchcraft and its accusations can be said to be a long-standing belief which existed and survived till today.

The phenomenon of witchcraft involves the belief that a witch or a wizard possesses some kind of supernatural power. It is believed that this power is used to cause evil. The evil caused by witches ranges from all kinds of misfortunes; from mild headaches, to serious conditions such as sicknesses, barrenness, accidents, loss or destruction of property, failure in life, to death.

The belief is manifested in the existence of 'witch camps' in some parts of the Northern Region of Ghana. Witchcraft beliefs and accusations have proven to be very resilient in

¹ Simon Ngota, 'Paper presented on the Presbyterian Go-Home Project, 'Conference on Culture and Witchcraft' Kumasi, June 20-22,2009, 26.

Northern Ghana. In spite of the influence of education on human rights and freedom of citizens as enshrined in the constitution of Ghana, witchcraft accusations and banishment of alleged witches still exist in several societies in Mamprugu traditional area. Northern Region alone has six established witch camps located at *Gnani* in the Eastern part of *Yendi, Kpatinga* also in *Yendi* municipality, *Kukuo* in *Nanumba* south, *Tindanzie* at *Gushegu* District, *Nabuli* also in the *Gushegu* District, and *Gambaga* in East *Mamprusi* District².

It is estimated that there are about 800-1,000 women and 500-700 children who live in the six different witch camps³. ‘Witch camps’ were established as traditional sanctuaries aimed at offering security to the alleged witches by protecting them from the community’s angry threats of lynching the victims. However, due to increased national interest in human rights issues today, the dilapidated structures at the camps have become topics of intense debate both locally and internationally. Such debates have led to calls for the closing down of these camps. Indeed, attempts have been made in that direction and at least, one camp (*Bonyase*) has been “closed” down.

It is important to emphasize that, all the witch camps in the Northern Region of Ghana are attached to traditional shrines which provide protection for the alleged witches and thereby controlling their powers. According to Schauber, “witch camps were originally founded as places of refuge for individuals accused of witchcraft not only from within Ghana but also from the neighbouring countries of Togo and Burkina Faso”⁴. Before the camps were established, individuals accused of witchcraft were ostracized, tortured or lynched by

²Anjali Kwatra, ‘Condemned without trial: Women and Witchcraft in Ghana’ Action Aid Report, (September 2012), 1

³National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), “Report on research on witchcraft and Human Rights of Women in Ghana: Case Study of “Witches” Villages in Northern Ghana” (September 2010), 1.

⁴Almuth Schauber, “Women and Witchcraft Allegations in Northern Ghana: Human Rights Education between Conflict and Consensus”, in Steve Tonah ed. *Ethnicity, Conflicts, and Consensus in Ghana*, (Accra: Woeli pub services, 2007), 121.

community members for alleged offenses. Even some of the individuals who currently live at the camps were physically abused before their escape.

Although there are men in the various camps, their number is negligible. For instance, at the Gambaga witch camp now, there is only one man who followed his wife to the camp after she was accused of witchcraft and subsequently banished from her community. Apart from that, all the “inmates” are women. The women usually take along their children. These children came with the alleged witches to help take care of them by doing daily chores, such as fetching water, and collecting firewood. Others found themselves in the camps because they were too young to be left behind after their mothers were banished from the communities, while others were banished alongside their mothers because they were also accused of witchcraft.

Tawiah has observed that, witch camps, which are ‘informal institutions’ served as safe havens for women accused of witchcraft. These camps are a constant reminder of the vulnerability of the accused women. The alleged witches at the camps, usually old and weak women, have suffered the indignity of living in very miserable conditions where basic needs such as water, food and clothing are unaffordable luxuries. He noted that, with no income or any reliable source of livelihood, they scavenge on left over resources in their communities for survival. The women and their children, most of whom are of school going age, do not live in the camps as free and respectable community members; they have been made to confess to witchcraft, usually under trial by ordeal to pacify community and family anger. Facing discrimination and stigmatization, the education of their children have been difficult,

while conditions in the camps continue to deteriorate, making daily life an unbearable struggle for the economically marginalized women⁵.

Majority of the individuals within the 'Witch Camps' are women over the ages of 50 and above. Most especially women that are widows, barren or unable to have children can be particularly vulnerable to accusations because they do not fill traditional gender role⁶. Most of the individuals banished to the camps are mostly non-educated, and they are usually from rural communities than urban ones. Both poverty or excessive wealth and prosperity can be linkable factors to accusations of witchcraft. The most common reasons behind witchcraft accusations are incidents that are considered unnatural or unusual, like the sickness of a child, vehicle accidents, sudden illness or death, crop failures, infertility, epidemics, among others.

Therefore, some civil society organizations such as Action Aid Ghana and religious bodies like the Presbyterian Church of Ghana have made relentless efforts to 'free' these alleged witches and to reunite them with their families. For instance, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana has adopted the Gambaga Witch Camp since 1960 and has been supporting the alleged witches with basic needs such as food items, clothing, shelter, and health care supplies.

In 1994, the church again initiated a project known as "Presbyterian Go-Home Project" aimed at sensitizing the communities and reintegrating the alleged witches with their families. The project's ultimate aim is to lead to the closure of the Gambaga Witch Camp. ActionAid Ghana has equally worked hard in an attempt to disband the witch camps and to reunite the alleged witches with their communities, especially those at *Gnani*, *Kpatinga*, *Kukuo*, *Nabuli* and *Bonyase*. However, the situation is like the proverbial *Akan* saying that,

⁵ Benjamin Tawiah, 'Re: Witchcraft Accusation: Is disbanding 'Witch Camps' the Solution? Action Aid Report, (September 2012), 1.

⁶ Sampson Laar, 'Presbyterian Go-Home Project, Annual Report presented to Upper presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana' (November 2015), 5.

kum apem a apembeba- “kill thousand and thousand will come”. In the case of the alleged witches at the Gambaga Witch Camp, the more ‘witches’ are sent back home, many more ‘witches’ are banished from their communities.

The incarceration of the alleged witches in the witch camps and the human rights abuses meted out to the alleged witches have eluded the state, the law enforcement agencies, civil society organizations, and all well-meaning human rights activists. The human rights violation and abuse of these alleged witches in the camps call for concerted efforts from the government of Ghana, NGOs, civil society organizations and churches to see the plight of the alleged witches and the existence of ‘witch camps’ as an affront to human dignity.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Witch camps in Northern Ghana predate colonialism. They were established as sanctuaries for alleged witches and wizards who were banished from their communities or were being threatened with death for atrocities they were alleged to have committed. Though, those who made it to the camps were saved from being lynched, they were treated with little or no dignity, because they were considered by their original communities as outcasts who do not deserve to live. Currently, conditions in the camps are very deplorable and the women and their children are wallowing in misery, poverty and indignity. Again, none of the camps has educational facilities for the children.

It is against these challenges that the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, civil society organizations such as Actionaid Ghana, human rights activists, among others express reservations about keeping the accused women at the witch camps. They consider the existence of the camps as an affront to human dignity. To solve these problems, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana since 1994 initiated a project known as ‘Go-Home project’ whose objectives are not only to provide basic needs to the alleged witches, but also to

facilitate their return home and reunite them with their families. This thesis therefore investigates and examines the strategies put in place by the Presbyterian Go-Home Project to address the challenges facing the Gambaga Witch Camp in the Northern Region of Ghana.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of this study is to examine the Presbyterian Go-Home Project at the Gambaga Witch Camp in the Northern Region of Ghana in order to draw lessons that might guide other bodies interested in understanding and addressing the challenges associated with the phenomenon of witch camps in this part of the country.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- i. To find out how witchcraft is perceived in Mamprugu traditional area.
- ii. To identify the challenges and the living conditions of the Gambaga witch camp in the Northern Region of Ghana.
- iii. To examine the strategies put in place by the Presbyterian Go-Home project in addressing the challenges of the Gambaga witch camp.

1.4 Research Questions

The main research question is:

What role does the Presbyterian Go-Home Project play in supporting and sending the alleged witches back home and what are the challenges involved?

The study will also explore the following research questions:

- i. How is witchcraft perceived in Mamprugu traditional area?
- ii. Under what challenges and living conditions are the alleged witches faced in the Gambaga witch camp?

- iii. What strategies are put in place by the Presbyterian Go-Home project in trying to address the challenges of the Gambaga witch camp?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is significant because, it is among the first detailed work on the phenomenon of the Gambaga witch camp; thus, it contributes to academic knowledge on witchcraft accusations and witch camps by documenting facts which could otherwise be lost in oral tradition. The research also unearthed and gave explanations and reasons behind some beliefs and practices among the people of Mamprugu traditional area with respect to witchcraft accusations and witch camps. The study also draws attention of researchers to further explore other areas with peculiar beliefs towards witchcraft accusations, not only from religious or traditional perspectives, but from other disciplines such as sociology, psychology and anthropology.

The outcome of the study does not only serve as a reference material, but also helps policy makers, civil society organizations, religious bodies and other likeminded organizations to redirect their attention to supporting the alleged witches in the camps. And more importantly, it might provide and lead to the discovery of appropriate approaches to addressing the challenges associated with the efforts to ensure proper reintegration of the inmates of the witch camps into their families, and possibly, the eventual closure of the camps.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study only focuses on the witch camp in Gambaga which is located in *Mamprugu* traditional area of the Northern Region of Ghana and which is the first and the most well-established of the witch camps. Basically, it focuses on the role of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project which is committed to the reintegration of the alleged witches into their families and communities. However, passing references will be made to other places in the Northern

Region where other witch camps exist. This is because of their similarities in beliefs and practices about witchcraft.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

For our theoretical framework we used the mission statements of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Presbyterian World Services and Development in Canada. The two organizations are basically the funding agencies of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project and as such their mission statements influence the rationale of the activities of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project. One of the mission statements of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana is to promote socio-economic development through advocacy and effective delivery of social services to all people, irrespective of their religious affiliations in order to provide abundant life for all (John 10:10)⁷ Abundant life in this case refers to both physical and material needs of people. This mission statement of Presbyterian Church of Ghana, is in line with the Presbyterian World Services and Development in Canada. It is not surprising that the basic goal of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project is to ensure that the alleged witches have life in its fullness. Based on the mission of ensuring the abundant life for all humanity, the Presbyterian Go-Home Project as a faith based organization is addressing the socio-cultural and religious issues with regards to the Gambaga Witch Camp.

The Presbyterian World Services and Development (PWS&D), is the development and relief agency of the Presbyterian Church of Canada. The PWS&D thus, undertakes development, emergency relief, and refugee activities that restore human dignity, ease the pain of want, promote self-help and encourage community cooperation that benefits all. All of these are done with sensitivity to gender issues, empowerment of the marginalized and the protection of human rights. It therefore includes ecumenical and all-inclusive in their practice of faith by gladly serving women, young and old irrespective of their religion, culture or ethnicity in

⁷ Presbyterian Church Of Ghana Constitution (Article 2d) 3

order to address abject poverty, injustice, suffering and oppression of others. It works with the distressed, the marginalized and listening carefully to their stories and responding effectively.⁸

1.7.1 Theological Basis

As a faith-based organization, the ministry of PWS&D is rooted in the living hope of Jesus Christ and inspired by God's promise of abundant life. It is an integral part of the ministry of the Presbyterian Church of Canada. God enters into faithful relationship with those who respond to the divine calling. As Micah proclaimed, God requires that we "do justice, love, kindness, and walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8).⁹ During the time of Micah, social and moral standards were laid down for the individual to practice in his relation with his companions in the faith. Commitment to God includes commitment to the covenant community. Justice is the key word often used by the prophet to sum up this social obligation. It covers and transcends a host of negative precepts, such as prohibitions of oppression, perjury, and bribery. It calls for a sense of responsibility towards weaker members of society and insists on the rights of others.¹⁰

In Jesus, God became human for the salvation of people. This love for humanity as expressed in Jesus life is demonstrated by the church and man follow him as they live for justice, mercy and peace. They believe peace and wellbeing are God's will of creation. As Christians respond together to the world's pain and despair, they bear witness to the love of God among them. They believe that justice and inequality are an affront to the will of God and that their

⁸ actalliance.org/about/members/Presbyterian-world-service-and-development-pwsd/.accessed on 7/5/17 at 5:58pm

⁹ Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (Michigan: Eedmans publishing company,1976),373

¹⁰ Presbyterian.ca/pwsd/Mission/.accessed on 7/5/17 at 6:30 pm

involvement in compassionate ministry with people throughout the world is an imperative of the gospel.¹¹

The study therefore employs this mission of the PCG and PWS&D in order to address the challenges of the Gambaga Witch Camp. However, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana regards the phenomenon of witch camps as a developmental issue, and therefore based on God's love and justice for all humanity, adopted the Gambaga witch camp in order to address their basic needs, and ultimately reintegrate them back with their families for peaceful coexistence. This approach provides a very good framework for the study since it examines the role of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project in trying to address the challenges of the Gambaga witch camp in the Northern Region of Ghana.

1.8 Methodology and Methods of Data Collection

This study adopted the qualitative data collection method. Qualitative methodology in the broadest sense refers to research that produces descriptive data, for example peoples own written or spoken words and observable behavior. It places emphasis on knowing the internal dynamics of the situation as experienced by the participants. Since part of this research aims at investigating the experiences of men and women with regards to witchcraft beliefs, this method is appropriate.

In this case, the researcher employed the phenomenological approach outlined by James Cox in his book *Expressing the Sacred*. In this book, Cox emphasized that, "after the observer has suspended his previous ideas, thoughts, beliefs and judgments, he must 'enter into' the experience of the believing community he is studying. If the phenomena are to be described

¹¹ Presbyterian.ca/pwsd/Mission/.accesed on 7/5/17 at 6:35 pm

with a minimal amount of distortion they cannot be merely observed but must be understood. This corresponds to what Husserl meant by ‘getting inside’ the phenomena of experience”.¹² But ‘getting inside’ a religion or culture is not easy. Barriers of culture, language and unexplained symbols may make the task difficult. This is why the phenomenologist first needs to employ empathy, the cultivation of a feeling for the religious life of the community he is seeking to understand. This ‘feeling for’ requires him to identify with the attitudes, thoughts, and activities of the believers¹³.

The researcher who is from *Mamprugu* and, at a point in time, District Pastor and Board Chairman of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project knows the terrain, language and the social and cultural values of the people. Therefore, as an insider it was easier for the researcher to ‘get inside’ the religion and culture of the people to conduct interviews with the Gabarana who is the custodian of the witch camp, the current officials of the Go-Home Project, as well as some of the people from the original communities of the alleged witches to obtain relevant information.

The reasons for witchcraft accusations and what happens to the alleged witches was analyzed from the testimonies of the alleged witches. The study also looked at the challenges of the Gambaga witch camp, the issues of reintegration and the unique work the Presbyterian Go-Home Project has done at the Gambaga witch camp. Therefore, an interview guide was designed and used to interview the various categories of respondents; the Go-Home project officers, the alleged witches, Gambarana and the community people in Mamprugu. Because of the sensitive nature of some of the questions, the interview was done strictly on face-to-face basis especially with the alleged witches. Out of the 89 alleged witches 44 of them were interviewed. Direct observation involves seeing and recording what is spontaneously

¹² James L. Cox, *Expressing the Sacred: An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religions*, (Harare: University Of Zimbabwe Publications, 1996), 29 – 30.

¹³ Cox, *Expressing the Sacred*, 30

happening at the time of collecting data. Direct observation is probably the single most important technique for collecting data for studies of this nature, where their information is considered sensitive and where a high degree of reliability and accuracy is desired.

We analyzed their experiences in the camp and their psychological and emotional feelings. A lot of useful information was revealed and obtained from these stories, particularly their daily activities, challenges, living conditions at the camps and their relationship with society. The study also used both secondary and primary sources. The secondary data was derived from published books, thesis, archival materials, journals, and electronic media specifically the internet. The primary data was obtained from interviewing the community people of Mamprugu, reports from the Presbyterian Go-Home Project, ActionAid Ghana, and other NGOs working to free the alleged witches, among others. Apart from these, the researcher also attended ceremonies and ritual occasions to observe how alleged witches are accused and treated; the rituals performed by the Gambarana, as well as the camping of the alleged witches, trial by ordeal, and the attitude of society towards alleged witches.

Our approach is therefore to bracket all issues concerned with the existence or non-existence of witchcraft and focus on what people believe about witchcraft and the implications of these beliefs for their social life, as well as the way in which they deal with misfortune and how victims of witchcraft accusations are treated at the ‘witch camps’ in the Northern Region of Ghana. In this research, the phenomenological approach was used to collect and critically analyze data.

1.9 Literature Review

Attempts to intellectualize the phenomenon of witchcraft beliefs and practices as being one of the most evil ones in human affairs have been undertaken by a number of social commentators ranging from philosophers, psychologists, and religionists to sociologists and

anthropologists. Initially, researches and studies on witchcraft were conducted on its nature, acquisition and manifestation by foreign anthropologists. These early foreign anthropologists were attracted to these studies principally because witchcraft activities tended to inhibit missionary proselytizing and constituted a nuisance to the political dispensation-especially in the colonial period.

Although Africa is conspicuously known for its belief in and practice of witchcraft, the phenomenon of witch camps is not common in the continent. This explains why witch camps have escaped the attention of early foreign and African anthropologists. However, such camps are common in the Northern Region of Ghana which serves as places of refuge for accused witches for centuries. The literature review would therefore focus on three areas with regards to the phenomenon of witchcraft and witch camps in the Northern Region of Ghana. These are; witchcrafts accusations, the phenomenon of witch camps and their eminent challenges.

1.9.1 Witchcraft accusations

In Ghana, as in some other African countries, belief in witchcraft is prevalent and entrenched. Dovlo has noted that in recent years, the incidence of witchcraft accusation and the treatment of suspected witches has been a popular topic, making headlines in the Ghanaian media. This has aroused the concern of the government, non-governmental organizations and churches which has led to a number of seminars and workshops on the issue of witchcraft accusations and witch camps, as well as its challenges on the Ghanaian society. He observed that, recent media reportage about individuals attacking and at times killing people they suspected as ‘witches’ who are responsible for their misfortune¹⁴ is disturbing.

¹⁴ Elom Dovlo “Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana”, in Gerrie ter Haar ed. *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in contemporary Africa* (Asmara: Africa World Press, 2007), 71-72.

Witchcraft accusation is a problem faced by most countries in the world and, particularly, Ghana. Due to this problem many scholars, politicians, human rights activists, feminist movements, through lectures and writing have either condemned or commented on the prevalence of witchcraft in society. Despite their conflicting conclusions and the debate these have generated, virtually all writers have taken this phenomenon for granted. In recent times, attention has been drawn to witchcraft accusations by the media in various forms. The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) has also looked into the plight of accused witches and the treatment meted out to them most especially in the Northern Region of Ghana where the camps exist. The Commission has several times condemned the inhuman treatment meted out to the accused witches as well as the existences of the witch camps in the Northern Region. They described the phenomenon as a violation of the fundamental human rights of the alleged witches¹⁵.

A report on CHRAJ's conference that tackled treatment of suspected witches in Northern Ghana, a number of specific issues related to the whole question of societal response to persons accused of witchcraft were highlighted. Among these are the following: the Commission is extremely disturbed by the way in which people are accused of being witches or being responsible for the deaths, illness or misfortunes of others. In this regard the Commission draws attention to the fact that the population of the witch camps increases between February to April when there is so much heat (high temperature) and its associated sickness like Cerebral Spinal Meningitis (CSM). It also notes with regret the obvious gender bias in witchcraft accusations throughout the country; for instance in the case of Gambaga Witch Camp all the eighty-nine (89) persons accused of witchcraft happen to be women. The

¹⁵ Report on the conference organized by CHRAJ on the treatment of suspected witches in Northern Ghana, Tamale, 1998, 16.

Commission is also alarmed by the assaults, harassment and in some cases lynching of suspected witches¹⁶.

Another issue raised by the Commission is the method used by the various Witch doctors and especially, the Gambarana for determining who a witch is. The Commission concluded that the methods used by witch-doctors have no scientific basis to determine who is actually a witch. All these problems being faced or encountered by the alleged witches throw a challenge to the role of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project as to how to repatriate or reintegrate all these alleged witches back into their original communities.

Asare Opoku has defined witchcraft as ‘the exercise or employment of esoteric power for a definite purpose, good or evil’¹⁷. Similarly, Assimeng states that the core of witchcraft beliefs is the search for an extraordinary power that enables a person to regenerate a phenomenon from evil intentions for destruction. These two definitions point to certain components deemed essential to witchcraft. First, it is considered a power inherent in an individual that, requires no incantations or manipulation of objects for its effects to take place. This is quite distinct from what is known as sorcery or divination, where manipulatory rituals are performed. Furthermore, witchcraft is believed to be a power with a potential for both good and evil, but it seems generally to be more associated with evil intentions than with good ones¹⁸. Traditionally, when witchcraft is seen as good, it is associated with men, while the evil use of witchcraft power is normally associated with women. Allman and Parker discussed witchcraft and anti-witchcraft movement in Ghana from the 1870’s to 1920’s. It is during this period that Tongnaab began to gain significance among the Akans in the Southern

¹⁶ Report on the conference on the treatment of suspected Witches.17.

¹⁷ Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, (Accra: FEP International private Ltd, 1978), 146.

¹⁸ Max Assimeng, *Religion and Social change in West Africa: An Introduction to Sociology of Religion*, (Accra: GUP, 1989),168.

part of Ghana. The authors suggest that the rise of witchcraft concerns was a response to colonial conquest and rule.

Considering the impact of colonialism and capitalism in Asante and the Gold Coast, in particular, the way in which perceptions of health, wealth and misfortune were being reshaped by rapid social and economic changes made the Asantes to seek for the intervention from the Northern savannah gods. Tongnaab in its Southern manifestation as Nana Tongo was specifically dedicated to the eradication of witchcraft, known in Twi as *bayi* which was on the increase and considered to be dangerous to society¹⁹. Most of the accusations attributed to witches were the death of children, causing of sterility and the conversion of other people into witches against their knowledge, among others. It was therefore inevitable that witchcraft should be blamed when these misfortunes increased. Other allegations attributed to the work of witches include the power to destroy crops/ cocoa fermentation and to become rich by ‘sucking away’ the invisible essence of money so that the victim meets financial losses²⁰.

In a study by Evans-Pritchard, he concluded that among the Azande of Sudan, witchcraft allegation is given consideration once an accusation²¹ is made. Mostly, the accusations are by the accuser’s close friends or relatives. Evans-Pritchard found out that, these allegations arise from rivalry²². For example, a wife is more likely to accuse her mother-in-law as a witch once they begin to compete for the husband/son’s. In a traditional polygamous context, accusations are also rife among co-wives. Nukumya confirms the belief that witchcraft operation among close relations in West Africa, noting that the most frequent accusations are

¹⁹ Jean Allman and John Parker, *Tongnaab: The History of a West African God*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005) 114-115.

²⁰ Allman and Parker, *Tongnaab*, 115.

²¹ Dovo, “Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana,” 68.

²² Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft Oracle and Magic Among the Azande*, 19.

among kinsfolk, affine and others among whom there is frequent interaction²³. He again explained that, witchcraft does not strike at random because the supposed victim must have some relationship with the accused. This makes witchcraft accusation a function of social relations which are likely to cause, or result from jealousy, hatred, envy and fear²⁴.

Nukunya further explains that, among the Tallensi of Upper-East Region of Ghana, witchcraft is transmitted through the uterine kinship; and for the Anlos of the Volta Region of Ghana who are also matrilineal, it is believed to be inherited through mothers²⁵. The Tallensi mode of witchcraft transmission applies to my area of study, that is, Gambaga and its environs. Nukunya maintains that there is a general belief that witchcraft is associated with certain characteristics and behavioural patterns in human beings. These characteristics are, very old ladies especially those having certain defects; persons with red eyes, persons who are quarrelsome characters are equally prone to suspicion. He states further that, any one whose habit is considered anti-social may be suspected and accused. Excessive wealth or success and abject poverty or wretchedness are all linkable factors to witchcraft accusations²⁶. It is worth noting that the above characteristics and behavioural patterns serves as a form of social control. According to Debruner, the concept of witchcraft is the idea of some supernatural power, solely and exclusively used for evil and anti-social purposes²⁷. Debrunner however maintains the same view as Asare Opoku when he noted that, there is a positive application of witchcraft. He equally maintains the same belief as Rattray and Sarpong when he stated that witches supply human flesh in turns during their night meetings. At such meetings, it is decided who should feed the group at the next meeting and the one elected to do this chooses a victim and the witches begin to eat away the victim until he/she

²³ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracle and Magic among the Azande*, 21.

²⁴ G.K. Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana, An Introduction to Sociology*, 2nd Edition. (Accra: Ghana University Press, 2003), 58.

²⁵ Nukunya, *Tradition and change in Ghana*, 58.

²⁶ Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana*, 60.

²⁷ Nukunya, *Tradition and change in Ghana*, 60.

dies²⁸. To Debrunner, this type of death is usually by stages, coming after a long drawn out disease, but most consistently. However, very sudden deaths too are often attributed to witchcrafts. In essence, any evil that comes upon a person could be the work of witches. This often leads to torture and banishment of alleged witches to the witch camps in the Northern region of Ghana.

1.9.2 Witch Camps in Northern Ghana

The belief in witchcraft is widespread in Africa but the practice of keeping the suspected witches in ‘witch camps’ is only peculiar to the Northern Region of Ghana. Witchcraft belief, accusations, and banishment of alleged witches to witch camps has a long-standing role within the indigenous religion of some Ghanaian societies especially the Mamprusis’.

According to Allman and Parker, in 1922, Rattary met Yaw Adawua, a surviving follower of Domankama (the earliest recorded anti-witchcraft movement in the Akan region), who for four decades after the destruction of the movement by the Asante state was still renowned as a famous ‘witch finder’. According to Yaw Adawua, before the rise of Domankama, suspected witches were subjected to trial by the *Odom* poison ordeal and if found guilty were immediately executed by strangulation. Self-confessed witches were driven from village to village – a punishment which, if not resulting in physical death, represented the social death of permanent expulsion from human society²⁹. But Yaw Adawua claimed that, he could cure people of being witches without having to kill them, provided that once he had treated them they did not resort again to their evil practices; if they did so they would die³⁰.

This is similar to the activities of the witch camp shrines in the Northern region of Ghana. Once the alleged witches enters the camp, their supposed powers are deactivated. This is due to the perception that the alleged witches are controlled by violent and vengeful spirits which

²⁸ Debrunner, *Witchcraft in Ghana*, 178.

²⁹ Allman and Parker, *Tongnaab*, 126.

³⁰ Allman and Parker, *Tongnaab*, 127.

will not forgive them if they attempt to practice their powers. Thus, the society feels secured and achieves a temporary state of safety without killing the accused witch.

The witch camps in the Northern region of Ghana are all headed by a traditional earth priest, a chief, or both as in the case of the Gambarana, the overseer of the witch camp in Gambaga. The living conditions within the camps vary on their levels of sanitation, access to water, housing, etc, but all reports of the camps deem the conditions to be relatively poor³¹. The supply of food in the camps in general is inadequate, particularly during the dry season when not much farming can be done³². Although food insecurity is not, by any means, exclusive to the witch camps in the Northern Ghana, the lack of familial support makes living under the tough conditions even more difficult for the individuals at the camps.

Although the media, non-governmental organizations, and interest groups have good intentions in wanting to protect the human rights of those accused of witchcraft, there are serious issues with how the topic has been approached. The first mistake seen in previous literature and movements centered on witch camps is the failure to understand the basic purposes for the camps. In 1999, The Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) held a workshop in Tamale backed by the United Nations (UN) to discuss the abolishment of the witch camps.

A gender advocate newspaper (The International Women's News) described the camps as places where women were being held "captive"; and FIDA as a group working to set the women free from their suffering³³. Organizations such as FIDA and CHRAJ even sent a delegation to the witch camp in Gambaga, demanding that the chief, the Gambarana, release

³¹Report on Research on Witchcraft and human Rights of Women in Ghana: Case study of "Witches" Villages in Northern Ghana" National Commission for Civic Education. (September 2010): 1-134
<http://ncegeh.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/06/WITCHCRAFT.pdf>.

³²Kwatra, Anjali. "condemned without A Trial" Action Aid (September 2012) 1-15,
http://www.actionaid.org.uk/doc_lib/ghana_report_single_pages.pdf.

³³Mantilla, Karla. "The International Women's News" *Off our Backs* vol. 29 no.3 (March, 1999):6,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20836325>

the women. Their actions caused problems for the Go-Home project officials since the actions of FIDA and CHRAJ, upset the Gambarana, whom the Go-Home project officials works closely with.³⁴ FIDA did not see that the women were not being held against their will, in reality, the witch camp was the only safe place for many of the women. Some of the journalists that write about the camps use inherently negative rhetoric, terms like “sentenced”, “inmates”, and “prison” to describe the situation at accused witch camps³⁵. There have been different movements to “abolish” the witch camps, even from government officials, but ActionAid Ghana, has had to caution policy makers about the complexities involved with closing the camps instantly. Closing the camps with force would leave hundreds of individuals without a place of security. The media slant and misconceptions about the witch camps have the potential to stand in the way of productively helping protect the human rights of individuals accused of witchcraft.

Another issue with previous approaches is how the belief in witchcraft has been discussed. Some articles mention education as a way to completely “diminish the belief in witchcraft”, assuming that education levels have a connection with a witchcraft belief³⁶. Studies have shown, however that belief in witchcraft is not directly connected with level of education in Ghana³⁷. The belief in witchcraft is often disregarded as illogical, superstitious, and primitive, especially when compared with the West where witchcraft is no longer commonly believed in. The West is looked to as the example for “reason”, and the West’s perceptions of development and human rights are rarely examined for cultural biases and particular agenda³⁸.

³⁴Kirby, “Earth Shrines: Prison or sanctuary? 11.

³⁵“Black Magic” And Poverty Turn Into A Curse For Ghana’s Exiled “Witches” International Business Times. August 30, 2012.

³⁶ “Black Magic, And poverty turn into a curse for Ghana’s Exiled ‘Witches’ (Aug.30, 2012).

³⁷Kirby, “Earth Shrines: Prison or sanctuary? Ghanaian “Witch Camps” 52.

³⁸Kirby, “Earth Shrines: Prison or sanctuary? Ghanaian “Witch Camps” 61.

A Canadian journalist and author of *Spellbound: Inside West Africa's Witch Camps*, Karen Palmer, remarked that individuals from the West “cannot understand how people could believe in witchcraft and how it could incite violence”³⁹. Because of the West’s past with witchcraft and the way that it is now taught in schools, witchcraft is seen as a belief system without a place in modern society. Simon Atunga Ngota, a former Coordinator of the Presbyterian Go-Home project, stated that often, organizations, particularly ones backed by the West, show a complete disregard for the strong beliefs that people have in witchcraft⁴⁰.

The root of the human rights issues, however, is not the witch camps or the belief in the existence of witchcraft, but how individuals are accused of witchcraft and treated in their communities⁴¹. Dzodzi Tsikata, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Ghana, states that “Most Religions believe in good and evil. The main issue is how people respond to this belief in witchcraft”⁴². Witchcraft as a belief is not inherently bad, and the creation of witch camps only goes to show that the way witchcraft is handled has changed and will continue to change as time progresses. Especially since some of the victims of witchcraft accusation believe that they are witches, the belief in witchcraft needs to be approached with more cultural sensitivity⁴³. This study attempts to examine the challenges of the Gambaga Witch Camp and the complexities with the accusations and reintegration of accused witches which will possibly bring closure to this camp in the Northern region of Ghana.

³⁹Clair MacDougall, “Ghana aims to abolish witches camps,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 15 September 2011, localized at <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2011/0915/Ghana-aims-to-abolish-witches-camps>.

⁴⁰Kirby, “Earth shrines: Prison or sanctuary”? 10.

⁴¹Schauber, “Women and witchcraft Allegations in Northern Ghana, 123.

⁴²Kwatra, Anjali. “Condemned without A Trial” Action Aid (September, 2012):1-15, http://www.actionaid.or.uk/doc_lib/ghana_report_single_pages.pdf

⁴³Report on Research on witchcraft and Human Rights of Women in Ghana: Case study of “Witches” Villages in Northern Ghana” National Commission for Civic Education. (September 2010): 1-134 <http://ncegeh.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/WITCHCRAFT.pdf>.

1.9.3 The Challenges of Witch Camps

According to Hajia Amina, around 1870, a woman accused of witchcraft was almost lynched by her relatives. The Imam of Mamprugu intervened on her behalf and sent her to Gambaga, where she was accommodated as a refugee. Later on, as the number increased, the custody of the outcast women was handed over to the chief of Gambaga who established a settlement for them⁴⁴. There are many different opinions regarding these witch camps. It became clear that some of the suspected witches risk their lives if they did not seek refuge at the ‘camps’. Further, the poor living conditions in the camp and the fact that relatives have neglected their banished aunts, mothers or fathers, to their fate is pathetic. The existence of the camps shows the violation of the basic human rights of the accused witches.

In the Northern Region of Ghana, the traditional treatment of suspected witches is to exile them from their communities to these so-called, ‘Witch Camps’. However, in recent years, this practice in the Northern Region of Ghana has become a matter of national interest. A report by the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) noted in 1998 that, out of a total of 815 people found in ‘witch camps’ in the four districts of the Northern Region of Ghana, only 13 were males. This confirms that women are the main victims of witchcraft accusations and subject to maltreatment associated with these⁴⁵.

In 1988, the Daily Graphic, reported about the plight of the ‘witch camps’ in the Northern Region of Ghana. In one such report, suggestions were made to study about witchcraft and the institution of witch camps “scientifically” in order to ban the activities of witch doctors and to make anti-witchcraft rituals punishable by imprisonment, and to try them in law courts. Suggestions were also made to educate people to learn how to “reason logically” to realize that science and civilization have found solutions to most problems so that we do not have to resign ourselves to superstition. The problem has obviously not been solved by these

⁴⁴ Hajia Amina Adam, *The mirror*, (5th August 2000) 9.

⁴⁵ Dovo Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana; 72.

suggested methods, since witchcraft accusation continues till date. For instance, in January to April 1997, about 50 women were accused of being witches and causing the Cerebral Spinal Meningitis outbreak in Northern Ghana and at least 36 women remained in the Gambaga Witch Camp because their husbands refused to have them back⁴⁶.

Similarly, Waibel has also noted that (CSM) epidemic caused several hundreds of deaths in Northern Ghana in the early 1990`s. She maintained that, many of those deaths were attributed to witchcraft and within a short period the population of the ‘witch camps’ increased tremendously⁴⁷. According to Waibel, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana took the first initiative to support the alleged witches and to find a way of addressing the challenges of the Gambaga ‘witch camps’ in 1960. They also came out with more detailed information to alert the public on the plight of the alleged witches and the conditions of the witch camps. Therefore, the media as well as NGOs and CHRAJ made the camp and the whole subject of the existence of the witch camps as a public issue⁴⁸.

In 1996, *Timari Tana* (meaning we have hope) rural women, a local NGO dedicating its work to the outcast women, was founded in Mamprugu. During this time they were one of the most important advocates of the suspected witches. Other organizations, national and international ones, also tried to address the problem. Some of them started to implement projects and support programs in other ‘camps’. The most famous witch camp was, and still is, Gambaga Witch Camp, where various donors and groups started their activities.⁴⁹

In the year 2000, the German Development Service (DED) established a regional office for the NGO (Self Help-Initiatives support program) in Tamale. The Coordinator of the programme worked with different partner organizations which were engaged in addressing

⁴⁶ Lucy Aduma Yeboah, “Why Always the Poor” Rejoinder *Daily Graphic* (1988), 7.

⁴⁷ Waibel Gabi, ‘Women at the Outskirt: the case of the “Witches” in Northern Ghana, Workshop Report, (Accra: August, 2001), 3.

⁴⁸ Waibel , ‘Women at the Outskirt,3.

⁴⁹ Waibel, ‘Women at the Outskirt’, 5.

the challenges of the witch camps, since it became clear, that most of these efforts were not co-ordinated and that a forum should be provided for the various NGOs to exchange their experiences and approaches⁵⁰.

The deplorable nature of the witch camps coupled with the violation of the human rights of the alleged witches also prompted many gender advocates organizations such as the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Southern Sector Youth and Women`s Empowerment Network (SOSYWEN), to see witchcraft accusation and banishment of the alleged witches from their communities to the ‘witch camps’ as an affront to human dignity. Due to the fact that ActionAid Ghana and other NGOs were seeking to provide short term solution to a longer term problem which was not likely to work, their focus had recently been shifted to providing services towards the empowerment of the alleged witches so that the victims would be in a position to put pressure on the government for assistance. ActionAid Ghana has also formed a network group among the camps which they call *Tigbubtaba* (meaning let us support one another). *Tigbubtaba*’s primary focus is to inform the government of how terrible the conditions of the camps are⁵¹.

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection for the past three years has also supported the Presbyterian Go-Home project to achieve its vision of reintegrating the alleged witches back into their communities. It is hoped that this will gradually ensure total closure of the witch camps in Northern Ghana. Through the efforts of this Ministry, the *Bonyase* Witch Camp located in the Central Gonja District was officially closed down on the 15th December 2014⁵². The fact that the alleged witches are tortured and banished from their

⁵⁰ Edward Dahamani, ‘Gambaga Outcast Home Project: Annual Report to Northern Mission Field’ (Tamale, January 1995), 9.

⁵¹ Waibel Gabi, *Women at the outskirts: The case of the “witches” in Northern Ghana*, (Workshop report), Accra August 2001, 29.

⁵² Waibel Gabi, *Women at the outskirts*, 30.

communities to the witch camps, in the Northern region of Ghana is really a big challenge which needs to be addressed.

1.10. Definition of Terms

For ease of comprehension on the part of the reader, certain technical terms, and expressions used in the study have been explained. They include the following:

Witchcraft – A supernatural power possessed by a man or woman, which can be used consciously, or unconsciously to harm others or to benefit him or herself.

Witch- A woman who possesses supernatural powers to harm members of her community.

Wizard – A man who has inherent supernatural powers to harm others or for the benefit of society.

Witchcraft accusations/allegations – The act of suspecting or labeling someone as a witch or capable of harming others, especially those with certain suspicious characteristics.

Note: For purposes of simplicity, the term “witch” may be used to refer to both female and male in this work.

Trial by ordeal – A process by which a woman accused of witchcraft has to undergo to determine whether she is guilty or innocent.

Banishment – An action taken by the people of a particular community to forcibly remove or sack a member of their community as a punishment for bewitching a member of that community.

Fundamental Human Rights – The right to dignity, freedom of expression, freedom from subjection to cruelty and dignity recognized internationally. United Nations Convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

Witches camp – A settlement, usually secluded, where condemned or accused witches are housed.

Gambaga Witch Camp – This is an area in Gambaga where accused witches are housed under surveillance.

Gambarana – The chief of Gambaga who is the custodian of the Gambaga Witch Camp.

Outcast Home – Refers to the home in Gambaga where suspected witches are driven to.

Outcast – Refers to the suspected witches in this research work. It is used interchangeably with “witches”.

Go-Home Project – Is an acronym of “Gambaga Out-Cast Home Project”. The Presbyterian Go- Home Project as the name implies, is the hope and prayer that with education and other logistics support, the women would eventually be reintegrated back with their families.

Tindana – In Mamprugu tradition, the *Tindana* (the earth priests) are considered to be descendants of the autochthonous population of the area prior to the arrival of the invading forces of Na Gbewa (Bawa) from Gruma. The Tindanas are in charge of the gods and spiritual relationship of the community with the ancestors.

1.11. Organization of the Thesis

The thesis has been organized into six major chapters. Chapter one deals with general introduction of the work which comprises the background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study and research questions. It is followed by the significance and scope of the study. The chapter will also describe the methodology and methods of data collection, theoretical framework, literature review, as well as definition of terms and lastly, the manner in which the arrangements of the chapters have been organized.

Chapter two mainly focusses on the setting of the study area. This throws light on the history of the Mamprusi, followed by the study area and population, the political organization of the Mamprusi, the economic activities of the people as well as the socio-cultural life of the people including their religion.

Chapter three discusses in broad terms the phenomenon of witchcraft and how witchcraft is perceived in Mamprugu traditional area and the factors leading to witchcraft accusations and banishment of alleged witches.

Chapter four which is the report of the field research will examine and identify the challenges and the living conditions of the Gambaga Witch Camp in the Northern region of Ghana.

Chapter five will evaluate the role and performance of the Presbyterian Go-Home project in supporting and reintegrating the alleged witches back to their original communities. And

Chapter six will feature the summary major findings, recommendations and conclusion.



CHAPTER TWO

THE GENERAL BACKGROUND OF MAMPRUSI

2.1. Introduction

In chapter one extant literature on the phenomenon of witchcraft and witch camps as well as a theoretical framework for the study, among others, were examined. This chapter focuses on the Mamprusi Traditional area. It discusses the history, aspects of the culture and geography of the area.

2.2 The study area and population.

The Mamprusi of Northern Ghana called the area they were able to bring under their control during the pre-colonial period as Mamprugu. Mamprugu is one of the centralized and hierarchical traditional states set up by a group of conquerors presumably from the Sahelian region (Fada N' Grumah), somewhere between the 14th and 15th Century. This group of invaders are said to have defeated the autochthonous populations of the area and established their authority over them. The victorious group then constituted themselves into the *Nadema*, which literally means “people of chiefs” while the autochthonous population were relegated to the position of elders (*na Kpamba*) and Commoners (*tarima*).⁵³

The Mamprusi are therefore, an amalgamation of Mampruli - speaking groups who today inhabit the area between the Gambaga ranges to the North and the Nasia River to the South. Isolated groups of Mamprusi are also found in the neighbouring regions such as in Kusasi, Builsa, and Sisala territories. They called themselves “Dagbamba” but are more commonly

⁵³Michael Schlottner, *We stay, others come and go, identity among the Mamprusi in Northern Ghana*, (London: Macmillan Press, 2000) 54.

referred to as Mamprusi and the area which they were able to extend their rule is referred to as Mamprugu.⁵⁴

The population of Mamprugu is culturally and linguistically heterogeneous. Today, Mamprugu refers more or less to the area predominantly inhabited by the over 400,000 Mampruli-speaking people of the East and West Mamprusi Districts as well as the Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo and Mamprugu Moagduri Districts of the Northern region of Ghana. The East and West Mamprusi Districts alone occupy a total land area of about 8,936 sq.km, (East Mamprusi is about 3, 037sq.km, while West Mamprusi is about 4,899 sq. km). The two administrative districts were all under the Gambaga district until 1988 when the West Mamprusi was carved out under the Provisional National Defense Council's (PNDC) decentralization programme, and in 2004, the Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo District was also carved out of the East Mamprusi District under the Kufour administration of the New Patriotic Party⁵⁵. The Mamprugu Moagduri District was also carved from West Mamprusi District with its capital at Yagaba. It was established by LI 2063 and forms part of the districts and Municipalities created in the year 2012.

According to the 2010 population and housing census in Ghana, the population of the East Mamprusi was 121,009, the West Mamprusi was 121,117, Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo was 122,591 and Mamprugu Moagduri District was 46,894. This means that the area is sparsely populated with a population density of about 32.4 persons per sq. km⁵⁶. The dominant ethnic group in the two districts of East and West Mamprusis are referred to as 'Mamprugu proper'. However, the area is one of the ethnically amalgamated, where there are several ethnic

⁵⁴ Sometimes, Mamprugu is used to refer to not just "Mamprusi proper" but used in the larger sense to include areas in neighboring Regions like the Bawku and Bolgatanga districts that were previously under Mamprusi rule.

⁵⁵ East Mamprusi District Assembly, A five – year Development plan, Gambaga, 2008, 45.

⁵⁶ Ghana Statistical Service, Population and Housing Census, District Analytical Report, Government of Ghana, October 2014.

minorities, and most of them have now lost their ethnic and cultural identity. The area consists of immigrants and the autochthonous populations whose existence in the area predates colonialism. Among the ethnic groupings found in the area are Dagomba, Mossi, Frafra, Kusasi, Kasena, Builsa, Bimobas, Tampulinsi, Fulani, Hausa, Konkomba, Chakosi, Bimobas, Busansi and some few Ewes and Akans.

The Nayiri is the king or overlord of Mamprugu traditional area and has a council of elders who advise him. The Nayiri is supported by paramount chiefs, divisional and other sub-chiefs under him in the kingship of Mamprugu. His paramountcy's extend beyond the boundaries of the Mamprugu Districts and are located in other regions and districts. Notable of mention are the Wulugu Naaba, Wungu Naaba, Soo Naaba, Kulgu Naaba etc (all in the West Mamprusi District); Yunyoorana and Bunkpurugu Naaba (in the Bunkpurugu Yunyoo District) and Zuarungu Naaba, Tongu Naab, Sakuti etc (all in Upper East Region). The Mamprusi have a deep sense of unity and belongingness and consider themselves as one people under the authority of a common traditional leader, the Nayiri. Nearly 74% of the Mamprusi live in and around their traditional area in Northern Ghana while the remaining 26% are reported to be living in Southern Ghana⁵⁷. Social and economic infrastructure is woefully inadequate and the state of available infrastructure is deplorable. This is partly due to the rural nature of the area. Generally, poverty is widespread in the area but more prominent in the rural areas than in urban settlements.

2.2.1 Ethnographic Background of Gambaga

Gambaga is a historic town located at the North-eastern part of the Northern region of Ghana which lies next to Nalerigu, the traditional seat of the Nayiri who is the king of the Mamprugu traditional area. Gambaga is the former political headquarters of the then Northern Territories (now Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana), during

⁵⁷ Ghana Statistical Service, 2014.

the colonial administration before it was moved to Tamale in 1907. It is currently the District Capital of East Mamprusi, and it is one of the oldest districts in the Northern region. Out of it, the West Mamprusi district was carved in 1988, And in 2004, the Bunkpurugu- Yunyoo district was also created to promote development. The East Mamprusi district is one of the 20 Metropolitan/Municipal/Districts of the Northern region. The District is 1,660 square kilometers which is about 2.2 % of the total land area of the Northern region of Ghana.⁵⁸

According to oral tradition, Gambaga was originally the place where the Mamprugu paramount chiefs resided, but at the beginning of the 18th century the then King of Mamprugu (Na Atabiya) moved to the neighboring town of Nalerigu, which is now the seat of the king of Mamprugu traditional area. Nalerigu is now considered to be the traditional or cultural capital of the area, while Gambaga remains the capital town of the East Mamprusi District. After Na Atabiya moved to Nalerigu, he appointed the Gambarana as the traditional chief of Gambaga. He is also the leader of all the traditional priest chiefs of Mamprugu and the custodian of the witch camp in Gambaga. The Chief Imam of Mamprugu also resides in Gambaga, and he serves as a spiritual leader, as well as an advisor to the king of Mamprugu (the Nayiri).

Gambaga town is located 48km Northeast of Walewale, where both main roads linking the North-eastern district and the Bolgatanga Municipality converge. Gambaga shares common boundaries with other districts such as Talensi and Nabdram districts, Bawku West and Garu Tempane districts in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The rest are West Mamprusi, the Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo and the Gushegu districts, both in the Northern Region.

The town is sited down the top of an escarpment bearing its name known as the ‘Gambaga scarp’. Gambaga town is situated within the Savannah grasslands of the North, characterized by tall grasses, short trees, and dry heat. There are two seasons in the Northern Region, a dry

⁵⁸ Ministry of Food and Agriculture, mofa.gov.gh/site/?Page-id=1603.

season and a rainy season. The rainy season is from May to October and the rest of the year is considered to be the dry season. The dry season brings strong winds, creating intense dust and making the farm lands barren.

No farming activity is done during the dry season which has large economic implications considering how many communities in the North rely on farming as their only means of livelihood. In the dry season people engage in either construction of new houses or renovation of old houses and other minor activities. This is also the season when most final funeral rites are performed where large numbers of people attend. The overcrowding and the excessive heat can cause either Cholera or Cerebral Spinal Meningitis (CSM) to occur leading to many deaths. During this period, people also easily contract Guinea Worm diseases and food poisoning. The death resulting from such diseases are often blamed on the work of witches which leads to frequent witchcraft accusations and banishments of suspected witches, most especially older women to the Gambaga Witch Camp.

According to Nangpaak, history shows that, Gambaga developed very early as a commercial town with trade routes converging on it from Paga and Bawku. By the late Nineteenth century it was recognized as one of the principal stopping places in Northern Ghana for Mossi traders from Burkina Faso. The town began to lose its importance and size, following the transfer of the administrative headquarters to Tamale and the realignment of the roads from Paga and Bawku to pass through Bolgatanga. These factors have retarded progress and development which affects economic activities in the area⁵⁹.

Some residents of Gambaga town have the belief that the camping of the alleged witches in the town has had a negative effect on the development of the town. They cited examples like Walewale, Nalerigu, Langbinsi and Sakogu as villages that were founded far later than

⁵⁹ Duut George Nangpaak, *The Gambaga 'Witches' Colony: Its Artistic and Cultural Life* (2007), Unpublished MA Thesis, Faculty of Fine Arts, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. 14

Gambaga, but have overtaken Gambaga in terms of modern development. They claimed that the existence of the ‘witch-camp’ in the town has brought notoriety rather than fame to the town. They also claimed that for the same reason, the pace of expansion of infrastructure in the town is slower than it is in neighboring communities that are newer than Gambaga.⁶⁰

2.3 A Brief History of the Mamprusi

The Mamprusi belong to the Mole-Dagomba people who are believed to have originated from the East or Northeast of Lake Chad, a place known as Zamfara in present day Northern Nigeria. From there, they migrated to Fada N’Grumah (in present day Burkina Faso) and later on migrated to Pusiga, under their legendary warrior chief called Bawa otherwise known as Gbewaa⁶¹. R.S. Rattray has noted that the Mamprusi migrated from Grumah land and arrived in their current homeland in small bands during the 15th century.⁶² Gbewa left Grumah land after a succession dispute following the death of his maternal grandfather, Abdul Rahamani. Though Gbewa was victorious he migrated with his followers from Sana or Sanga, south of Fada N’Grumah, whereupon he began conquering territories of the Busansi and the Kusasi further south. He then moved his base of operation to Pusiga from where he established the Mamprugu kingdom.

Gbewaa and his group are credited for having established a stable and effective administration and the introduction of a clearly defined political authority structure over the area. After the death of Gbewaa a series of chieftaincy succession disputes resulted in the division of the unified political authority system he established into several states. One of Gbewaa’s son (Tohugu) is reported to have moved South of Pusiga to over-run another village called Mamprugu where he established his own kingdom. Later, the term Mamprugu

⁶⁰ Interview with some residents in Gambaga, 6th December 2016.

⁶¹ Illiasu A.A The origins of the Mole- Dagomba States, University of Ghana, Legon, Research Review 1932, 45.

⁶² R.S. Rattray, *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, vol.ii,(England: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1932), 45.

was used to refer to not only the capital town but also to the entire territory that Tohugu conquered. Other sons of Gbewaa are said to have moved further South to conquer other areas, pacify the inhabitants and then establish what is today known as Dagbon, Nanum and Mossi states.⁵

The Mamprusi with their advanced military superiority over-ran, conquered, and brought the acephalous autochthonous population they met under their rule. A.A. Illiasu points out that, during the reign of Gbewaa, Mamprugu was coterminous with the areas around Sanga and Pusiga (in the present-day Burkina Faso and Upper East Region of Ghana respectively), to the north, stretching to Dagbon, to the south, and as far as Daboya District of the Gonja land. Upon their arrival, the Mamprusi met people like the Kantonsi, the Tampulensi, the Chakosi, the Kusasi, the Busansi, the Konkomba, the Dagbansablisi, and other ethnic groups such as the Frafra, the Builsa, among others. Most of these ethnic groups were recruited as mercenaries to protect and expand the Mamprusi kingdom.⁶³ After the death of Gbewaa, the capital of the Mamprusi Kingdom was moved to Gambaga in 1391 by Tohugu and in 1652 moved to Nalerigu by Na Atabia. The Mamprusi under their able leadership became rulers and set up a centralized government headed by the Nayiri, at Nalerigu. However, the autochthones were allowed to maintain the posts of “tindanas” (earth priests) in most cases.⁶⁴ Under Na Atabia, the kingdom expanded to include several provinces such as Yunyoo to the east, Kulugu to north-west, Kpasenkpe, Wungu and Janga to the west. Each of these provinces further was ruled by a paramount chief who wielded a lot of power over the people. The provinces are sub-divided into villages and towns. These provinces are ruled by chiefs

⁶³ Illiasu, *The Origins of the Mosi-Dagomba State*, 96.

⁶⁴ Illiasu, *The Origins of the Mosi-Dagomba State*, 97.

appointed by the *Nayiri*. It is believed that the whole area now called Mamprugu was already occupied by people before the arrival of the Mamprusi.⁶⁵

The Mamprusi adopted several measures to integrate and assimilate the autochthonous population. These strategies included intermarriage and giving leadership positions in the chief's court to some of the indigenous people, among others. Also, the earth priest's position was a preserve of the autochthones. It is said that the religious beliefs and practices of the autochthones were largely untouched. Though, without access to political authority, the leaders of the autochthones could become elders, linguists, advisors, chief warriors and sectional heads. Currently, Mamprugu is coterminous with the present East and West Mamprusi Districts in the Northern region of Ghana.

These are the areas that the *Nayiri* (the overlord of the Mamprusi) exercises full traditional administrative control over. However, some groups of Frafra, Talensi and Bimoba are still under Mamprugu administration. Traditionally, Mamprugu is made up of six provinces and four of them: Wungu, Janga, Kulugu and Kpasenkpe are located in West Mamprusi District while the central province is found in the East Mamprusi District and Yunyoo is in Bunkprugu Yunyoo District.

2.3.1 The Gambarana (Priest - Chief of Gambaga)

In Mamprugu tradition, the rights and duties of *Tindanas* (earth priests) are well recognized. They are also enskinned to office as priest chiefs by the *Nayiri* court. (Priest chiefs are the earth priests (*Tindanas*) who are enskinned by the *Nayiri* as chiefs in charge of a particular village or town). At present, there are four of these priest chiefs in Nalerigu province. They are the chiefs of Sagadugu, Zanduua, Bowku and Gambaga. They are the custodians of the shrines (*ba'a* or *buga*) and traditionally known as the *Tindanas*, meaning earth priests.

⁶⁵ Illiasu, *The Origins of the Mosi-Dagomba State*, 99.

Historically, the villages of the four ‘earth-priest chiefs’ are said to possess sanctuaries for persons condemned by the king of Mamprugu. Like the Muslim Imam of Mamprugu, the ‘priest chief’ of Gambaga were allowed to visit Nalerigu, and they could free any captive tied with ropes at the *Nayiri* palace.

In an interview with Gambarana (the priest chief of Gambaga), he noted that, his ancestors always carried a rope and a knife when they went to Nalerigu. With the knife they could cut the rope of any prisoner condemned to death or slavery, and the rope was to tie these prisoners and take them to Gambaga. From Gambaga prisoners could be ransomed by their relatives. The price of ransom was one cow and an amount of money. The cow would be slaughtered instead of the man. He maintained that his predecessors were like judges, whose decisions were final. Like the king, Gambarana claims to be able to “see” (*nya*) spiritual things afar. Thus Gambarana noted that, “I can see what is coming, and what will happen tomorrow. It is like the dry season or the rainy season. Everything has its time”⁶⁶.

Unlike the Tallensi earth-priests, Mamprusi earth-priests do not usually claim descent from an autochthonous population. Many are known to be of the slave or of foreign origin. Gambarana claims that his ancestors *Zobzia* (literally means red-hair) founded Gambaga before the arrival of the Na Gbewaa’s son Tohugu who conquered the area. However, *Zobzia* like the first Mamprugu Naaba was also a chief and an immigrant. Gambarana is the custodian of the graves of several Mamprusi kings who died in Gambaga at a suburb known as Tamalgu. He claims that there are three hundred and thirty three (333) shrines in his custody⁶⁷. This explains why the Gambaga Witch Camp is attached to a shrine. It was Na Atabiya who moved the traditional capital from Gambaga to Nalerigu and appointed a priest

⁶⁶ Interview with Gambarana at his palace in Gambaga, 22nd December, 2016.

⁶⁷ Interview with Gambarana, 22nd December 24, 2016

chief known as the first Gambarana to administer the town and to perform sacrifices to the ancestors and the shrines on behalf of the people of Mamprugu.

Gambarana claims that each Nayiri must bath and perform sacrifices at Tamalgu after his enskinment because it is the ancestral home of the Mamprusi. It is he Gambarana who performs the rituals accompanying this to strengthen the new king and calling for blessing of the ancestors upon his life⁶⁸.

The Gambarana again claimed that, traditionally, when the Nayiri dies he must be invited to confirm his death before it is announced to the general public, after which he will move to Nalerigu on that very day to live in the Nayiri palace for three months until a new king (Nayiri) is enskinned⁶⁹. For now, apart from the constitutional political figures, the Gambarana is the dominant traditional political and spiritual leader in Gambaga, who is also the overseer or custodian of the witch camp in Gambaga.

2.3.2 The Shrine and the Witch Camp

The witch camp is located in the heart of Gambaga Township. The Gambaga Camp is believed to be the first witch camp to be established in Northern Ghana. Oral history has it that, alleged witches were lynched at the outskirts of Gambaga anytime they were accused after endorsement of the elders of Gambaga and the Nayiri. In the year 1870, a mob was met by an Imam who pleaded for the release of an alleged witch who was to be lynched. She was then released to the Imam who sent her to his house in Gambaga for protection. As the years unfolded, other alleged witches ran for safety to this sympathetic Imam. However, being an Imam he found the traditional beliefs and practices associated with witchcraft to be incompatible with his faith and therefore at a point he handed the alleged witches to the

⁶⁸ Interview with Gambarana, 22nd December, 2016

⁶⁹ Interview with Gambarana at his palace in Gambaga, 24 December, 2016.

Gambarana (priest chief of Gambaga) to protect them. Since then it continued to pass on from one traditional ruler to another up to this present day.

The witch camp is believed to be a sanctuary or a safe haven where witchcraft cannot be practiced because it is attached to a powerful shrine which controls and neutralizes the power of the alleged witches. The Gambaga traditional skin is tied to the witch camp and the shrine which all prospective successive occupants of the skin are expected to inherit. It is important to emphasize that the witch camp and the shrine are inseparable. Currently, the camp provides shelter for a population of about eighty-nine (89), alleged witches and their children. Majority of the population is aged sixty (60) years and above.

2.4 The political organization of the Mamprusi

The traditional state of Mamprugu consists of the central province of Nalerigu and the five divisions or paramountcies of Kpasenkpe, Janga, Wungu, Yunyoo, and Kurugu. At the head of the Nalerigu division and the King of the Mamprusi is the Nayiri. In addition to appointing the various paramount chiefs, the Nayiri administers the province of Nalerigu with the assistance of the elders of Mamprugu state.⁷⁰ Although the Nayiri appoints all of the five paramount chiefs of Mamprugu and allocates the power of office (*naam*) to them during the installation ceremony, the various paramount chiefs administer their territories more or less autonomously. This highly decentralized administration of the estate has remained a significant feature of the Mamprusi polity.

Just like many other traditional rulers in the West African sub region, the functions of a chief amongst the Mamprusi go beyond the normal administrative duties. The chieftaincy position embodies not only the political office but also includes religious functions. This becomes apparent in the numerous ritual roles and the veneration of ancestors that accompany the

⁷⁰ David Davis Carson, *Continuity and Change in Mamprugu, A study of Tradition as Ideology*, P.hD Dissertation, North Western University, 1984, 170.

holding of political office at all levels. The spiritual qualities embodied in a chief are regarded as a source of power, prestige, and respect, and provide the general foundation for the legitimacy of the rulers.

The main administrative organ of a paramount chief in Mamprugu is the Court. It is at the Chief's Court that claims to title are judged and the power of office (*naam*) is allocated to individual members of the royal household. Furthermore, these courts also perform numerous judicial tasks. These include settling issues such as family and lineage disputes, marital problems, theft, and others considered by the inhabitants to be more serious, such as adultery, and witchcraft. Currently, two parallel systems of authority co-exist in Mamprugu: the modern District Assembly concept and the traditional customary authority. The power of the chiefs is felt throughout the area especially in customary and land issues. The other form of authority, the District Assembly, consists of the District Chief Executive and the Assembly. These bodies exercise legislative and executive powers as representatives of the central government at the District level⁷¹.

The traditional leadership has, despite the changes introduced during the colonial and post-colonial era, retained part of its authority, and continues to wield considerable influence, especially in matters relating to chieftaincy and land. The chief's court allocates land and deals with disputes arising from land claims as well as other domestic and civil disputes. Most disputes are dealt with first in a chief's court rather than in government courts. And special priest chief or earth priest (Tindana) also deals with cases involving witchcraft accusations and have custody of accused witches.

⁷¹ Abdulai Abubakari, *Integrated and Adaptation of the Fulani in West Mamprusi District*, University of Ghana, Legon, Unpublished M. Phil Dissertation, 2004, 38.

2.5 Economic activities of the people of Mamprugu

Agriculture remains the predominant occupation for the majority of the people of Mamprugu. About sixty five percent of the people are engaged in crop production, animal rearing and poultry. Fishing, hunting, and honey tapping are done occasionally especially during the dry season. Socio-economic factors still hinder the development of the people of Mamprugu. The traditional social structure discourages great inequalities in income and wealth. Social life is constrained in a matrix of socio-cultural mores in which traditionalism and the old ways of doing things thrive.

The subsistence sector is dominating in the districts with discouragingly low levels of productivity, especially in the traditional farming communities. This situation is accentuated by over- reliance on single cropping and over- dependence on rain for farming. There is a single farming season and after harvesting, much time is spent on apparently non-productive functions such as conflicts, litigations and witchcraft accusations. The overwhelming majority of the people are engaged in farming, fishing, and hunting. The more diverse employment structure exists in Walewale, Gambaga and a few urban settlements. The urban centers have an aggregate population of less than 10 per cent of the area.⁷²

There are other specialized workers or craftsmen such as butchers, masons, blacksmiths, musicians, praise singers, drummers, and weavers, among others; however, these practitioners do that on a part-time basis to supplement their farming occupation. Also, most of these services are provided on request by their clients. Land is generally abundant, especially in the rural areas, for whoever wants to engage in farming. The resident of any village is entitled by virtue of his residence, to a plot of land which will be allocated to him

⁷² West Mamprusi District Assembly, A Five Years Development Plan, 2009.

by the chief; however, others acquire land by first occupying the land. Such farm plots then become their property.⁷³

Previously Mamprusi women used not to cultivate their own farms, but helped the men in sowing, harvesting and carrying the farm produce home. Now, it is common to see housewives having their own farm plots, not only to produce vegetables but also to produce other cash crops such as groundnuts, soya beans and cereals like maize and millet. Most of their farm produce are used to augment their husbands' efforts. Also Mamprusi men do not provide their wives with money to prepare their family food. The women are only given raw grains and are expected to provide their own money to prepare food to feed the family. This situation has compelled many women who are not trading to engage in charcoal burning and carrying of firewood to sell in the towns.

A major activity of most Mamprusi women is the collection of Shea nuts. This job is the preserve of the women by tradition. Shea butter is extracted from the sheanuts. Some women are engaged in extracting and selling of shea butter as a business venture. Women may also trade in grains: they buy large quantities of grains after harvest for resale in the famine season. A few other women buy bush meat, smoked fish, ground nuts and beans and resell them at distant markets such as Techiman, Kumasi and Tamale, while other women are involved in buying and selling of manufactured goods such as wax prints, utensils and petty goods. Selling of cooked food and soup ingredients is also the preserve of the women.⁷⁴ . Some men collect “dawadawa” pods alongside the women. From dawadawa, the soup flavor called ‘kpalugu’ is prepared.

⁷³ Druker-Brown, *Ritual Aspects of the Mamprusi Kinship*, African Studies Research Document, vol.8, African Studies Centre, Cambridge 1975, 46.

⁷⁴ Abdulai Abubakari, *Integration and Adaptation of the Fulani in West Mamprusi*, 39.

The East Mamprusi District is richly endowed with human and natural resources particularly tourists attraction sites such as Naa Jeringa wall (which was built without water but only milk and honey in Nalerigu), the Gambaga Witch Camp, and the Mossi chiefs ancestors grave sites in Gambaga. There are also three functional markets at Gbintiri, Nalerigu and Langbinsi. Some women are engaged in petty trading at these popular markets in the area. Business is generally slow at the Gambaga Township because theirs is a community market as compared to the large commercial market at Nalerigu. This may be due to moving the traditional seat of the Nayiri to Nalerigu. Nalerigu has claimed business popularity of being the transit of travelers from extreme Bunkpurugu to the East and Walewale in the West. One can get a straight means of transport from Nalerigu to Bolgatanga, Bawku and even Kumasi which is in the South. This is impossible at Gambaga inspite of being the District capital. In Gambaga, some aged women also engaged themselves in cotton spinning, traditional textile weaving and firewood harvesting, mainly reserved for the alleged witches in the witch camp.

2.6 Socio-cultural life of the people.

A socio-political hierarchy in a typical Mamprusi settlement would consist of the *Naa* (chief), who acts as the traditional leader within the community and below him are the *Wudana* and the *Kpandana*. The *Wudana* is the linguist in the village and leader of the elders while the *Kpandana* (literally, holder of the spear) are the elders of the community and advisors to the chief. A *Kpandana* (who is otherwise called the *Tindana*) is usually chosen from among descendants of the first settlers, or rather, the autochthone inhabitants of the village. He becomes the earth priest and is responsible for all religious sacrifices for rains, good health, prosperity and maintaining a sound relationship between the gods and the community. Next on the hierarchy are the *Imam*, the *Kanbonaba* and the *Nabisi*.

The *Kanbonaba* is the chief Warrior and leader of the Kanbonsi, a group consisting today of descendants of persons recruited by the Mamprusi to assist them fight their expansionist wars

against their neighbours. The *Kanbonsi* are also the protectors of the chief and the defenders of the territory. The *Imam* functions as both the spiritual leader of all Muslims within the settlement and also acts as the spiritual advisor to the chief and the royal elite. The *Nabisi*, on the other hand, are the various title-holders and members of the royal elite. Some of them are sectional leaders while others are chiefs of specific settlements. Towards the end of the traditional political hierarchy are the *Nachinaa* (the youth leader), the *Magazia* (the women leader) and the *Fongu Kpamma* (the sections heads). All female heads in the various sections respond directly to the *Magazia* while the male heads respond to the *Nachinaa*.

The *Fongu Kpamma* are the leaders of the various sections within a large settlement. At the base of the hierarchy are those referred to as commoners (*Tarima*), which include all of those who are not members of the royal elite and do not have a specific function within the political structure. Among the commoners is the largest group of migrants from the neighbouring regions.⁷⁵

2.6.1 Succession and inheritance.

Marriage in Mamprusi society can be classified into two broad categories: those in which the man and the woman choose each other (marriage by choice), and those in which the man and the woman are given to each other (marriage by arrangement). An overwhelming majority of marriages amongst the Mamprusi are polygynous although monogamy appears to be gaining ground among the educated elite and in the larger settlements. The residence pattern is patrilocal and women leave their own compounds to join those of their husbands.⁷⁶ The man, however, retains a close contact with the natal home of his wife or wives. Children of such union are deemed to belong to the male and become part of his *patriclan*. Upon the death of

⁷⁵ Steve Tonah, *Fulani in Ghana, Migration, History, Integration and Resistance*, (Accra: Yamens Press Limited, 2005), 72.

⁷⁶ Wilson V. Alexandra, "The Paradox of Polygyny among the Mamprusi of Northern Ghana" Ph. D, Dissertations, University of California, 1998, 106.

the male head of the household, the leadership of the household is passed onto the elder's male child or his uncle. He assumes the position of the head of the household and manages any inherited property (especially cattle) on behalf of his brothers. Such persons are however, only custodians of all inherited property and may not dispose of such property without the consent and approval of the brothers.

2.6.2 Birth

It is a custom among the Mamprusi for a woman to give birth in the husband's house. If for some circumstances beyond their control the woman gives birth in her parent's home then, certain sacrifices have to be performed before the child is taken to the father's house, because the child must inherit from his or her father's family. The child is named on the eighth day, and if he is a boy he, is circumcised on the same day.

2.6.3 Kinship ties

Kinship ties are still strong in spite of the high level of their migration. This is evidenced by several phenomena: first, much importance is placed on the funeral of relatives. Regular attendance at funerals of relatives is very much emphasized. Kinship ties are renewed and maintained through attendance of burial and funeral rites. Secondly, there is emphasis on the maintenance of family houses even if they have no economic value for renting. Finally, there is typically an annual influx of members of a clan or village who return from their work places to celebrate festivals.

2.6.4 Death

Among the Mamprusi's when a person dies, there are certain rituals that needs to be performed before the burial. This ritual involves sacrifices and divination known as *Kum Ba`ari* which means 'death sacrifices'. This is to determine the cause of death. Normally, these sacrifices reveal whether God called the deceased (natural death), or whether witches

killed him/her, or again to find out if the gods killed the individual in question because of his/her bad deeds.

A dead person's body is not displayed, but is kept in a room at his house, and it is buried in or near the compound by specialist sextons. A married woman's body is supposed to be buried at her husband's house. A second funeral is held during the next dry season, or a later one, depending on how soon the family can obtain the necessary resources. The Muslims have forty days after the death of the deceased for the second funeral. The Christians however, have memorial and thanksgiving services for their departed ones soon after the burial.

2.6.5 Culture and tradition

Any description of the social characteristics of the Mamprusi would be incomplete without references to their overwhelming confidence in themselves, their sense of self-pride and their superiority complex. The Mamprusis' are very proud of their rich culture and tradition, their traditional political system and especially, the chieftaincy institution.

Indeed, amongst the Mamprusis', traditional title holding is one of the most cherished achievements. Being a title holder or becoming a chief is so much cherished to the extent that men are prepared to dispense of all their resources in order to clinch to the chieftaincy title. Indeed, most royals would ridicule commoners (*Tarima*) for accumulating wealth "when they cannot contest for the chieftaincy."⁷⁷

2.7 Religion

Majority of the population are Muslims and they constitute about 66.7%. Members of the indigenous religion constitute 16.3%, and Christians, 14.4% of the total population. While the remaining 2.6% is made up of other religious faith.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Steve Tonah, *Fulani in Ghana, Migration History, Integration and Resistance*, 75.

⁷⁸ West Mamprusi District Assembly (WMDA). A five year development plan (1998-2000). 2009

2.7.1 The Mamprusi Traditional Religion

The Mamprusi believe in the existence of God or the Supreme Being. They refer to God as *Nawuni*. *Na* means chief and *Wuni* means god or personal deity. God - *Nawuni in Mampruli* literally refers to the 'chief of gods'. They believe in the supremacy of God and often refer to Him as the Creator of the heaven, the earth, and the universe. God is pervasive in every aspect of their lives; from the cradle to the grave. The name of God is used in acclamation, myths and other oral traditions. In playing the praise names of the chiefs, elders and ancestors, the "Akarima" (the drummer) begins playing the *Tumpani* (talking drums) first praise *Nawuni*, acknowledges His powers, sustenance and control over everything in the universe before praising God, Secondly, he praises *Nawun'si* creation such as animals, ancestors and then the living persons. This explains the extent to which they believe in *Nawuni* as the Supreme Being.

In times of tragedies such as death, accidents, calamities, disasters, and unhappiness. One can often hear the expressions thus, *Ndan-Nawuni* (my Lord), *Zanti nawuni* (give all to God), *Nawuni tuma nmla* (that is the work of God), *den pa Nawuni Kaḡoni?* (If not God who else?) And so on and so forth. In times of success, achievement and victory, they give thanks and glory to God with expressions such as *Npia'a Nawuni* (I thank God) *Nawuni yukko zuaya* (God's power is boundless).

In searching for power, wealth, promotion, health, wife/husband, children and success in all worldly affairs, they acknowledge the power of God. However, their point of departure is their belief that whilst one is praying to God for something, one must ask human beings, gods, and ancestors to also support because God is there for everybody. This point of departure is very significant and explains why the people employ various means such as, prayers, sacrifices, divination, witchcraft, magic and medicine (tiim) in pursuing worldly and material success, power and health, among others.

A Mampruga (pl. Mamprusi) who becomes the head of his lineage takes custody of the lineage's shrine. He sacrifices regularly to the shrine on behalf of all members of the lineage, seeking the blessings and assistance of the ancestors in all matters, but especially, with respect to the health of the members and their economic prosperity. Lineage heads, as custodians of shrines, are therefore revered by those on whose behalf they perform these sacrifices. The lineage or household head (*yidana*) enjoys considerable moral authority among his subjects and the latter lives in fear of the household head's (*yidana*) authority to sanction them. Just as the lineage/household head performs sacrifices on behalf of his lineage/household, so does the earth priest (*Tindana*) perform similar religious sacrifices on behalf of the entire community".⁷⁹ This pattern of religious life is widely practiced throughout Northern Ghana. Closely associated with the practice of the veneration of the ancestors is the process of divination as practiced by a specialized group found in every Mamprusi settlement, referred to as the *ba'a* (diviners). Divination is widely practiced throughout Northern Ghana and it is the main medium through which the living contacts their deceased ancestors.

The process of divination has its own peculiar rituals among the Mamprusi and the use of diviners is part of the complex social and religious cosmology of the people. Diviners are consulted for explanations such as prolonged drought, crop failures and unexplained deaths in the community, etc. Individuals may also seek the services of diviners in case of illness, domestic conflicts, family arguments, accidents, travel worries, divorces, witchcraft and other misfortunes.

⁷⁹ Mandonsa E, *The Politics of Divination-A processual view of Reaction to Illness and Deviance among the Sisala of Northern Ghana*, (California, University of California Press, 1982), 155.

Among the Mamprusi, the work of the diviners is a specialized profession and membership of this exclusive group is hereditary, being limited to descendants of persons who previously performed this function. This is because it is widely believed that it is a person's father or grandfather who bestows the powers of a diviner on the individual. The completion of a specialized training and the performance of established rituals accompany an individual's graduation into the highly respected group of diviners.

Besides its usefulness in explaining mishaps, divination is frequently used to foretell the future or the cause of events. Diviners, it is widely believed, are able to manipulate events or occurrences in the client's favour, prevent an impending mishap and even improve upon the client's chances of success in an event or contest. It is the diviners' ability to foretell future occurrences, influence and manipulate them in their client's favour. This has made their services mostly sought after among aspirants for high offices and the population at large.

2.7.2 Islam in Mamprugu

Since the eighteenth century, the traditional, social and religious cosmology of most ethnic groups in northern Ghana that mainly involved the veneration of ancestors and the use of diviners have been altered by a largely Islamic worldview. In the centralized states of Dagbon, Mamprugu, and Nanum, Islamic practices have been superimposed upon the traditional, social and religious practices of the people.⁸⁰

Mamprusis', irrespective of whether they are Muslims or not, join their Muslim neighbours in the celebration of essential Muslim festivals such as the Eid-ul Fitr and the Eid-ul Adha. Many of these festivals have assumed the status of traditional state festivals with titled and non-titled royals in attendance. During these festivals, prayers are offered for the province, the state, and all persons occupying traditional leadership positions within Mamprugu.

⁸⁰ Wills Ivor, The Growth of Islamic Learning in Ghana, Journal of Historical Society in Nigeria, 1963, 74.

Although, many Mamprusis' have today, formally converted to Islam and the proportion of Muslim households is growing rapidly, most residents continue to combine many aspects of their traditional religion with Islamic practices. The celebration of social events such as marriages, outdooring and funerals are increasingly being celebrated the Islamic way. Nevertheless most household or lineage heads, who profess to be Muslims, still continue to offer ritual sacrifices on behalf of their members. Islam and its practices have also been irreversibly entrenched in the Mamprusi social and political system. Islamic clerics are among the most respected persons within the Mamprusi society. They contribute significantly to legitimizing the position of the traditional leadership at all levels of the political hierarchy. Every paramount chief appoints and enskins one of the Muslim clerics as the chief Imam or leader of the Muslim community. The paramount chief frequently consults his Chief Imam and other Imams residing in the province on matters affecting the stability and well-being of the provinces. The Chief Imam also visits the chief regularly. He also prays regularly for the chief and would inform him about any events or occurrences that are likely to affect his person or his reign. Generally, it is common for the Muslim communities and their Imams to try and expand their influence on the paramount chief and other royals, and thereby hope to improve upon their own social status within the community.

2.7.3 Christianity in Mamprugu

According to Peter Barker, "Christianity was introduced first into Mamprugu by the Assemblies of God Church in 1940 followed by the Roman Catholics in 1959, the Baptists in 1955, and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in the 1960s."⁸¹ There is now an increase in Christian denominations within Mamprugu. These include the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches, yet Christians are still in the minority. However, Christianity has contributed

⁸¹ Peter Barker, *Peoples, Languages and Religion in Northern Ghana*, (Accra: Ghana Evangelism Committee and Asempa publishers, 1986), 127.

immensely to the socio-economic development of the area. In the area of social services, there are three churches agricultural projects in the area. These are the Presbyterian Agricultural station at Langbensi, the Roman Catholic project at Nayoku and Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) dry season vegetable project at Zangum. These projects to an extent prevent the youth from migrating to the South during the dry season by providing seeds, tools, and technical advice to them. In the area of health, the Baptist Mission has established a very big hospital at Nalerigu to cater for the health needs of the people. The Presbyterian Church of Ghana has also established the Langbinsi Health Centre at Langbinsi area to provide health care services to the people.

In the area of education, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Roman Catholics, the Assemblies of God and the Seventh Day Adventist churches have established schools such as primary, Junior and Senior High Schools to augment government efforts in providing quality education for the people in the area.

2.7.4 Brief History of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) was established in 1828 by the Basel Mission Society (BMS). It was established after the then Danish governor, Christian von Richelieu approached the BMS to request they spread the Gospel to the Gold Coast. Three (Holzwarth, Schmidt, and Sabach) out of the first four missionaries who arrived in the country on December 18, 1828 died a year after arriving. The last of them, Henke, survived till 1831.⁸² Four years later, in March 1832, a second batch of missionaries comprising Andrew Riis, P. Jaeger, and Dr. Heinze followed but unfortunately two of them lost their lives leaving behind Riis, a Danish national. Due to the unfavorable tropical weather condition, Riis became sick and was treated by an African herbalist whose name has not been mentioned. After recovery he moved to Akwapim hills where the weather was favorably friendly. Riis who showed

⁸² Fred Agyeman, *Our Presbyterian Heritage*, (Accra: Presbyterian Press, 2006), 67.

dexterity in building was welcomed by Nana Addo Dankwa 1, Okuapemhene. Soon two more missionaries, John Murdter and Andreas Stanger arrived. Unfortunately they also died bringing the death toll to eight in ten years.⁸³

Worried about this spate of death, Nana Addo Dankwa asked Riis whether he knew of some black people who were interested in Christianity and would be able to read the Bible. Riis gave an affirmative reply and went on to bring six families from the Moravia Church. The arrival of the Moravians proved successful and wiped the mentality that the gospel was for the white man. This opened more avenues for evangelism at Abokobi, Abetifi, Anum, Adum (Kumasi), Begoro, Kwahu and Krobo. Before 1918 the church was known as the Basel Mission and as a result of the World War 1 which led to the deportation of the German nationals, the Scottish Mission led by Rev. A.W. Wilkie took over.⁸⁴

Statistics of the first Synod of the Church held at Akropong-Akwapim in August 1918 indicates that, the Church was then organized around eleven (11) central stations comprising two hundred (200) town and village congregations under the supervision of thirty (30) African Pastors and a host of Teacher-Catechists. The central stations then were: Osu (Christainborg), Abokobi, Aburi, Akropong, Anum, Odumasi (krobo), Nsaba, Begoro, kyebi, Abetifi and Kumasi. The Basel Mission Church contributed to, and in some cases pioneered agricultural, medical, commercial and educational development of the country. Through the Basel Trading Company, the church engaged in the development of palm oil trade which preceded the development of cocoa as a cash crop and a major foreign exchange earner.⁸⁵

The central stations of the church were constituted into a Synod in 1918, when the first African Moderator and Synod Clerk were appointed. These two happened to be descendants of the Jamaican group: the Rev. Peter Hall and Rev. Nicolas Timothy Clerk. The synod

⁸³ Agyemang, *Our Presbyterian Heritage*, 67.

⁸⁴ Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Moderatorial Business luncheon Brochure, Maiden Edition, (2007) 3.

⁸⁵ Presbyterian Church of Ghana. constitution, 130

meeting at Kibi on 21st July 1922 decided to create Presbyteries to enhance the administration of the church. The first five Presbyteries were constituted as follows: Ga and Dangme; Akwapim and Anum; Agona and Kotoku; Akyem and Kwahu; Asante and Asante-Akyem.⁸⁶ At the 1926 Synod in Abetifi, the church was renamed the Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast and in 1957 when Ghana became independent, the church became the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.

The church was governed by Presbyters (sometimes referred to as Ruling Elders) and Ministers (sometimes referred to as Teaching Elders) through its four courts: the Synod, Presbytery, District and Local congregation. The day to day administration of the church is undertaken by the seven Departments and other Sub-Committees established by the constitution of the Church.⁸⁷

2.7.5 Brief History of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in Northern and Upper Presbyteries

The Basel Missionaries arrived in this country in 1828, but it was in the early part of the 20th century that they were able to embark on two important exploratory visits to Yendi in 1905 and 1906 to determine the best strategy for beginning mission work in the Northern part of the country. This visit was undertaken by A. Mohr and B. Groh who arrived through Worawora, Bimbilla, Yendi, Tamale and Chereponi. These efforts made by the Basel Mission fortunately received a boost in 1909 when the Basel Mission was invited by the British Authorities to establish a post of the Basel Mission factory at Tamale to help train artisans in various trades. The mission grabbed this opportunity and sent a team of missionaries to do further explorations. The team was made up of G. Josenhans, B. Groh and

⁸⁶ N.A. David Kpobi, *Triple Heritage: Facts and Figures about the Presbyterian church of Ghana*, (Accra Asempa Publishers, 1995) 10

⁸⁷ Kpobi, *Triple Heritage*, 10 - 12.

the famous medical doctor Rudolf Fisch. In addition to Tamale and Yendi, the team also visited Gambaga, Kpandai, and Ketekrachi.⁸⁸

In 1912 the Basel Mission decided together with the Wesleyan Methodist Mission to establish a congregation in Tamale for the Southern Christian working there. The following year, the Basel Mission also dispatched a team of three missionaries led by Rev. Hans Huppenbauer to start a mission station in Yendi, but plans to extend the mission work in the North was halted due to the First and Second World War in 1914 and 1939 respectively. It was therefore only after 1945 that mission work could resume in the North. In 1945, both the Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast and the Wesleyan Mission resumed ministry to the United Congregation in Tamale, and the Synod meeting of that year approved the appointment of Rev. E. K. O. Asante as a Resident Minister for the congregation.⁸⁹

By 1954, a lot of efforts had been made to reach out to the eastern part of the north, namely, Garu, Bolgatanga, Navrongo, Bawku and the adjoining towns. It was in the 1960s that the church, in addition to establishing a base in Damongo, also turned attention to the western part of the North and started mission work in Jirapa, Wa and other towns. All this while, the work in the North was coordinated by the Northern Ghana Field Conference (NGFC) but in April 1961, the Moderator of the Synod at that time, Rt. Rev. E. M. L Odjidja presided over a special meeting during which the NGFC was transformed into the Northern Presbytery comprising of five districts: Tamale, Salaga, Bolgatanga, Garu, and Sandama. The Scottish missionary, Rev. Robert Duncan was appointed the first Presbytery Chairman and the Rev. Tom Colvin became the first Presbytery Clerk.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Abraham Beriyyu, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Northern Ghana*, (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1997), 11.

⁸⁹ Presbyterian Church of Ghana-Upper Presbytery 5th Anniversary Broucher, 4

⁹⁰ P.C.G Upper Presbytery 5th Anniversary, 4

After about ten years, the Synod commissioned a survey and appraisal of mission work in the North and the report of this committee was presented to the Synod meeting in Tamale in 1972 the report recommended that the entire Northern area should be created into a Mission field to be known as the Northern Mission Field. It was argued that the state of the of the Church`s work in the North did not warrant its designation as a Presbytery and that a designation as a Mission Field would more appropriately focus everyone`s attention to the pioneering work being undertaken there. The recommendation was remitted and discussed variously in the Presbyteries and subsequently at Synod until 1978 when the definite decision was taken. With effective strategic planning and evangelistic activities and cooperation of the social services, the congregations within the districts grew. Therefore after twenty – two years of dedicated service, the 1st General Assembly of the PCG held in Navrongo decided to change the name again from Northern Mission Field to Northern Presbytery covering the largest land mass in Ghana, comprising the three political regions namely Northern, Upper East and Upper West.⁹¹

This decision was opposed by a lot of people who felt that the conditions that necessitated the creation of the Mission Field had not changed in any significant manner. The General Assembly however, felt strongly that evangelization work in the area had now come of age and that the nine districts at the time were capable of supporting the work of the Presbytery. Moreover, there was a strong feeling that such a decision would encourage the people of the north to own the work of the church in the area. ⁹²

However, on 21st November, 2010, the Upper Presbytery was also carved out from the Northern Presbytery by a majority decision of the General Assembly and erected as the 16th Presbytery of the church by the then moderator of the General Assembly, Rt. Rev. Dr. Yaw

⁹¹ Abraham Brenyuu, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Northern Ghana*, 40, 41.

⁹² P.C.G Upper Presbytery 5th Anniversary, 4, 5.

Frimpong Manso. At the time of erection, the following were the districts under the Presbytery: Bolgatanga (headquarters), Sandama, Wa, Garu, Bawku and Gambaga. Navrongo district was carved out of Bolgatanga District to become the seventh district on 11th March, 2014.⁹³

2.7.6 Presbyterian Church of Ghana in Gambaga District and the Go- Home Project

The Presbyterian church of Ghana was started in Gambaga by civil servants who were posted by the Government of Ghana to work in the District. Evangelist P.Y Anane was the first agent to be posted to Gambaga as the Evangelist in-Charge of the Gambaga congregation in the year 1955. He was asked by the Synod committee to go for a course for a period of two terms at Abetifi Seminary. The then moderator Very Rev. E. M. L. Odjidja assured him that, his performance will determine his future postings. Rev. Addai therefore, took over the oversight responsibility of the Gambaga church from Evangelist P.Y Anane in 1962. After the commissioning of Rev. P.Y Anane, he was brought back to Gambaga in September 20th 1966, and Rev. Addai was transferred to Walewale.⁹⁴ The Gambaga district of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana was carved out from the Garu district on 1st September, 1976 by the then Chairman of the Northern Mission Field Rev. M.A Addo. He was assisted by the then Minister in-Charge Rev. P.Y Anane who was the first minister and eventually became the first District Minister of the Gambaga district.⁹⁵

Politically the Gambaga district of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana is located in the Northern region of Ghana but ecclesiastically belongs to the Upper Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church. It comprises of all the four political districts in Mamprugu. These are East Mamprusi, West Mamprusi, Bunkpurugu- Yunyoo, and Moaduri districts. The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Gambaga District is involved in holistic ministry. The church

⁹³ P.C.G Upper Presbytery 5th Anniversary, 5.

⁹⁴ Abraham Brenyuu, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Northern Ghana*, 94

⁹⁵ P.C.G Upper Presbytery 5th Anniversary, 19

has not only limited itself to the planting of churches in the area, but has also provided social services to the people. These include, the Langbinsi Presbyterian Agricultural station, Langbinsi Presbyterian Health Center, basic schools and the Nakpanduri Presbyterian Secondary/technical school among others, in the Gambaga District. Apart from these, the Church, on humanitarian and developmental grounds adopted the Gambaga Witch Camp from 1960 through the initiative of Rev, P.Y Anane. The church has been supporting the alleged witches with food, clothing and payment of their medical bills. The Church, however, in 1994 changed its policy from rehabilitation to the “Go-Home Project”. The idea behind this project is to reintegrate these outcasts or alleged witches back to their families. The Gambaga Go-Home Project therefore, operates under the Department for Development and Social Services of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the general background of the Mamprusi society with respect to their historical, geographical location, socio-political, economic, and religio-cultural beliefs including witchcraft to facilitate the contextualization of the study’s background to provide a better understanding of the thesis. Evidently, the Mamprusi society has largely been influenced by modernization and other technological changes. As a result of this, the study attempts to ascertain the extent to which the Presbyterian Go-Home project plays in the area of providing support and reintegration of the alleged witches at the Gambaga Witch Camp into the families and communities. In the next chapter, the discussion is on the beliefs and practices of witchcraft among the Mamprusis’. The main focus of the next chapter is to examine the phenomenon of witchcraft beliefs among the people of Mamprugu traditional area of the Northern region of Ghana.

CHAPTER THREE

THE BELIEF AND PRACTICE OF WITCHCRAFT AMONG THE MAMPRUSI

3.1 Introduction

In chapter two an attempt was made to discuss the general background of the Mamprusi (the setting of the study area), which comprises their historical, socio- political as well as their economic and religio-cultural background, among others, to facilitate the contextualization of the belief in witchcraft among the people of Mamprugu in Northern Ghana.

This chapter discusses in broad terms, witchcraft beliefs in the Mamprugu traditional area. Attention is focused on the factors leading to witchcraft accusations, especially among women, how witchcraft is believed to be acquired and operates. This information will be acquired through interviews with people as well as from newspapers, chiefs, and opinion leaders. The significant observations made from this fieldwork are: first, older people, especially women, are generally the targets of witchcraft accusations; and those who lead the torture and banishment of the alleged witches to the witch camps are members of their own families and the younger generations.

3.2 The Mamprusi Worldview

The worldview of the Mamprusi is a world of dualism. Mamprusi culture recognizes both a spiritual and physical dimension to reality. The two orders have different modes of existence and procedures; however, both are focused on the human world for the common good. The two are interconnected or intertwined.

To the Mamprusis', the universe is a complex mixture of spiritual and material forces. There is duality in everything; spirit and body, the other world and this world, evil and good. And

so, just as we have the actual world of human beings, we also have a spirit world. The spiritual world is believed to be more powerful than the physical world. The spiritual consists of ancestors, and known persons who have died and who appear to the living in dreams. There is also the belief in evil spirits that are considered harmful to human beings. Therefore, measures are taken to avoid contact with them. As the spiritual world is invisible to the human eye, so the knowledge of it is hidden from the ordinary person.

According to Edward Dahamani, belief in witchcraft forms an integral part of the Mamprugu society. For most Mamprusis', the phenomenon of witchcraft is considered as an anti-social behavior by both the uneducated and the well-educated, Witchcraft is not considered as superstitious; everyone believes in the existence of witchcraft in the Mamprugu society. Majority of Mamprusis' cannot imagine a world without witches⁹⁶.

Witchcraft is mostly associated with evil intensions although it is assumed or believed to have potential to do good.⁹⁷ Since the physical and the spiritual worlds are tied in with each other, the evil spirit from the spiritual world, it is easy for evil doers to attack people in the physical world through spiritual realms.

It is believed that witches feed on the flesh and blood of humans spiritually in order to survive. They meet at mid-night to devour their victims. After the witch has captured the human body through the spiritual soul of the victim, the body of the one attacked suffers illness or pains. If the person's spirit is attacked by evil spiritual forces, the person might die. Witchcraft is thus considered to be a life negating force which disrupts the life of a person⁹⁸.

⁹⁶ Edward Dahamani, 'Gambaga Outcast Home Project, Annual Report to Northern Mission Field' (January 1995), 2.

⁹⁷ Abraham Akrong "A phenomenology of witchcraft in Ghana", in Gerrie ter Harr ed. *Imagining Evil: witchcraft Believe and Accusation in contemporary Africa* (Asmara: Africa World press, 2007), 53.

⁹⁸ Akrong "A phenomenology of witchcraft in Ghana" 56.

Kirby argues that, “Witchcraft does not only threaten the individual life of the victim, it also threatens the integrity and life of the family, and in a broader sense it threatens the community and society as a whole , and, indeed, it finally threatens the principle of life itself”⁹⁹.

Since witchcraft attacks have fatal consequences, people are always careful in order not to fall victim to witchcraft attacks. People are cautious of eating food prepared by strangers or accepting gifts from someone who has shown signs of disliking them since it might be poisoned with “local medicines” or “spiritual substances”. These “medicines” might be dangerous substances infused with spiritual force.

Mysterious or unexpected events are often interpreted as spiritual attacks. It is assumed that people can never be certain that they are safe from witchcraft attacks so illness and death are signs that a witch might be disrupting one’s destiny. For example, if somebody has a chronic headache, it might be a sign that witches are using the head of that person in ‘playing football’ spiritually and ultimately death might follow.¹⁰⁰

In the light of these beliefs and perceptions among the Mamprusis’, I would like to describe witchcraft mentality as attitude associated with the manipulation of spiritual powers that prevent people from participating in their own personal development and the development of the community. Examples of these attitudes include, suspicious, jealousy, aggression, blaming others for one’s problems, witch-hunting, consulting the traditional priest with the aim of harming somebody or wishing for the downfall of others.

⁹⁹ Jon P. Kirby, “Earth Shrines: prison or sanctuary? Ghanaian “Witch camps” and the dawn of the rights of culture” In Steve Tonah ed. *Contemporary Social Problems in Ghana* (department of Sociology, University of Ghana, 2009), 152.

¹⁰⁰ Akrong “A phenomenology of witchcraft in Ghana” 56.

3.3 Witchcraft Belief and Practices among the Mamprusi

Belief in witchcraft and witchcraft practices are found in most places in Ghana and many parts of the world. According to Ghana Statistical Service, 71.2% of the populations profess the Christian faith, while 17.6% are Muslims. Only a small proportion of the population either adhere to Indigenous African religion (5.2%) or are not affiliated to any religion (5.3%). Apart from the three Northern regions where Islam is the dominant religion (60.0%), higher proportions of the population in the other nine regions are reported to be Christians¹⁰¹. Despite the fact that majority of Ghanaians profess to be either Christians or Muslims, it is intriguing to note that the belief in what witches are capable of doing is widely spread even amongst them in our modern societies. Matters concerning witchcraft generate intense emotions, fear, hatred and anger amongst many people because the practice is often associated with destruction.

The traditional person sees the 'witch' as an agent of evil, because witchcraft attack is aimed at destroying the personality and property of the target person. In attacking victims, the witches may not cause outright death but can inflict harm in diverse ways. They can cause childlessness by stealing wombs, miscarriages of the foetus in pregnancy, and impotence in men. They also cause lorry accidents, bankruptcy, farm diseases, bush fires, drunkenness, dull mentality of students and unemployment. The lyrics of popular local songs, and many sayings and inscriptions on vehicles indicate the evils attributed to witchcraft. Examples of these sayings and inscriptions are *sonya ka yeda* (witches cannot be trusted), *sonya kuurila yiri* (witches destroy families) *sonya bu boori nimmaasa* (witches do not need sympathy or compassion) and *sonya nyala bun beoo* (witches are bad and dangerous) among others. In light of the danger and fear of witchcraft, the importance of witch-doctors and witch camps in the indigenous religion of the Mamprusi society cannot be over-emphasized.

¹⁰¹ Ghana Statistical Service, 2010 Population and housing Census, 2012.

Although, the belief in witchcraft is part of traditional or indigenous religious belief, both Islam and Christianity in their development in Ghana have also accepted the worldview that supports the belief by providing presumed preventive and curative measures against witchcraft attacks by administering rituals purported to neutralize the powers of alleged witches¹⁰². For example, in Northern Ghana where Islam has operated for a very long time, many *Mallams* or *afa* (Muslim Clerics and healers) help in diagnosing witchcraft when patients are brought to them.

In Ghana, as discussed, belief in witchcraft is common and transcends educational levels, social and economic status, and even religious denominations. The general belief is that witches are evil and enjoy, causing depression and pain for its own sake and not for gain. They are alleged to be able to kill and consume people spiritually. Thus, even though a person may be walking, around his soul would have been captured and is being eaten gradually. When the feast is finished the person would then drop dead. Sometimes the eating process may be slow and result in lingering sickness¹⁰³. The belief is that witches can actually inflict sickness or madness. They can make a person poor, or steal their brains making them unintelligent or cause misfortune to come upon them. In essence any evil that comes upon a person could be the work of witches. The belief in witches is thus an established way to explain the misfortunes of life.

3.3.1 Acquisition of Witchcraft

According to Nukunya, “Witches are people, male and female who are believed to possess inherent supernatural powers which they use (knowingly or otherwise) to harm others or

¹⁰²Elom Dovlo “Witchcraft in contemporary Ghana”, in Gerrie ter Haar ed. *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in contemporary Africa* (Asmara: Africa World Press, 2007), 67.

¹⁰³Araba Sefa Dedeh, “The Witchcraft Mentality in Ghana: Attribution for Emotional Turmoil and Assertion of Power Mastery” A paper presented at the Tamale Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies Seminar on “The Witchcraft Mentality and Christian Ministry in Ghana,” 8th -11th December 1997.)

benefit themselves”.¹⁰⁴ However, among the Mamprusis’, witches include animals as well as inanimate objects like trees and stones. Witchcraft among the Mamprusis’ can either be inherited or acquired. Even though, they practice the patrilineal system of inheritance, they believed that witchcraft can either be inherited or acquired matrilineally. According to Mamprugu oral tradition, it is believed that witchcraft can be acquired in several ways. It can be acquired by birth. If the mother is a witch, her children can inherit it. A woman who is not a witch can also give birth to a witch.

Another way of acquiring witchcraft is through contact with objects amenable to witchcraft. These objects may be unconsciously picked up, swallowed or received from a witch. Witchcraft can also be purchased for prosperity in trade, to use against enemies or rivals. It is believed that even though witches pass it on to their children; the most potent part is normally given to the most loved ones who are usually the last born children of families. It is believed that witchcraft can also be acquired by purchasing it from a witch. However, this is not usually very potent and does not allow the witch to operate in concert with the others in their nefarious activities.

Accordingly to Peter Sarpong in his book “*Ghana in Retrospect*”, “A witch is by nature is evil. There cannot be a good witch¹⁰⁵”. However the Mamprusi people believe that one can acquire witchcraft in order to protect one’s family and property but not necessarily to harm others. But once a person acquires witchcraft, he/she becomes a supernatural human being. For example, it is believed that such a person can see what the ordinary human eye cannot see, he/she can fly or can walk upside down and he/she can also transform him/herself into any creature. It is only another witch or wizard who can see this transformation. In short, when he/she is performing the art of witchcraft, he/she is invisible to the ordinary human

¹⁰⁴ Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana*, 59.

¹⁰⁵ Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 45.

being. One can also acquire witchcraft unknowingly by eating a substance from a witch. The victim is only told after he or she had eaten that substance that they have become a witch and should prepare to be fully initiated into it. Such people are usually coerced into it because if they refuse they will be killed by the witches in order to avoid any betrayal.

3.3.2 The existence of witchcraft and how witches are detected

The Mampruli word for witchcraft is *soo*. A witch is also called *sonya*, which literally means “somebody sees”. This explains why Mamprusis’ described a witch as ‘someone with two eyes’. This means witches can see not only physically but also spiritually. The word *sonya* (witch) is used for both male and female. Though the word used for ‘witch’ applies to both sexes among the Mamprusis’, females are the ones generally accused of witchcraft. Female witches are believed to outnumber the males by a considerable margin. It is also believed that females are more active in bewitching and using their powers more frequently to cause harm than to do well. Their brand of witchcraft is considered to be more potent, and they are more aggressive in their bewitching activities than males. Generally, witches in Ghana are portrayed as anti-social and considered as enemies to human life and society.

It is believed that, a witch can be extremely beautiful or extremely ugly with some peculiar unfamiliar features such as bright swift eyes, swift behavior, or even squint eyes. It is believed that they do not look straight into the eyes of people during the day. In Mamprugu society, people with certain character traits such as greed, inquisitiveness, quarrelsome, talkative, ugly appearance, and possess unusual features (particularly fair color old women) are accused of witchcraft practices. Also, women who have beard and moustache and have lost all their teeth with only one or two left, may be branded as witches. Fussy mothers-in-law and rival wives may also be accused of practicing witchcraft. Bestiality, insanity, and theft are also associated with witchcraft.

The existence of witchcraft is a widely accepted reality in the Mamprugu society, although some of the respondents expressed serious doubts as to its existence. According to my informants, witchcraft is not often talked about because of the social disruption, it causes through revenge or elimination from society. The witch is a source of all evil in Mamprugu society. Those who subscribe to the existence of witchcraft perceive it to be part of Mamprugu culture. However, some few educated people argue that witchcraft is a superstition that should be rooted out by education and Christianity. To them, witches do not exist since we are living in a scientific and modern technological world. This group consisted of Christians who argue that to them what people term witchcraft is rather an evil spirit, which forces individuals to commit evil because of jealousy and greed. Yet, many of these educated people, while publicly dismissing and denouncing witchcraft as superstitious, privately believe in its existence.

Expressing his opinion about witchcraft, a 30-year-old young man at Gambaga had this to say: “Witchcraft is a belief but people cannot prove it scientifically. Sometimes one is inclined to dismiss it, yet the more one thinks of strange incidents, the more one is compelled to accept it as a reality in the Mamprugu society”. He cited an example that, his friend disappeared after attending a party and going on a drinking spree. It was later learnt that a car had knocked him down after he alighted from a taxi. The question then is how can a university student be so careless and cross the road without checking if a car was coming from the other side of the road? The postmortem report revealed that he had a high fever and also he was drunk. For the Mamprugis’, the scientific or medical explanation was insufficient and therefore unacceptable. To them, some anti-social forces were responsible for the high fever and the drunkenness. But scientifically, this incident may be associated with carelessness or coincidence. The source of the inexplicable incident is traced to anti-social

forces working against the natural order, denying the university student, the opportunity of reaping the fruit of his labour.

Witches among the Mamprusi' can be detected through dreams by witch doctors like the Gambarana (Chief of Gambaga), Earth priests (Tindana), and various shrines like Tongo in the Talensi district. Another method of detecting a witch is for example, if a person dreams that a horse, cow or lion is chasing him or her, it is a sign that witches are threatening them. They would therefore, have to consult a soothsayer to find out what to do in order to outwit the witches. Again, if one is sick and dreams that a particular old lady or man is responsible for the sickness, the sick person's relatives have to confront that old lady or man in question. According to legends, in the olden days the elders confronted the witch and presented the sick person who had the dream to the accused to be treated. If the person died, shea butter oil was smeared around the whole body of the witch and some on a mat. The mat was then tied around the witch and set ablaze and the witch burnt to death. Some were also stoned to death and some ostracized from their communities. This led to the establishments of the witch camps in Northern Ghana.

3.3.3 How Witches Operate

Among the belief system of the Mamprusi' and the Dagombas' witches are said to operate in concert in the night especially mid night when many people are said to be sleeping. It is believed that they cast a spell on the people while they are sleeping which puts them into a deep sleep so that their absence will not be noticed. Their spirits then go out while their bodies are left behind just as the snake leaves its slough. It is believed that they go out with flickering lights to their common meeting grounds mainly on trees with their leaders light being the brightest of all. Because of this belief, most trees are cut down within the Mamprusi villages.

The Mamprusi' also believed that even though the witches operate in concert, they take turns to provide 'booty.' During their meetings, they are said to prepare a plan of action as to whose turn it is to provide a victim for the group. One of them chooses a victim from their relations for the group to attack. Apart from witches using their power to kill people and "eat", it is believed that they use their powers to steal from other people's farm produce to add to theirs.

A witch may not be hardworking but gets a better harvest than the ordinary hardworking farmer. It is also believed that witches suck the blood of other people's animals. Thus, while other people's animals look weak and skinny, theirs look fat and attractive. As mentioned earlier, the Mamprusi' believe that animals and inanimate objects like big trees can also be witches. It is believed that a tree can turn itself into a human being. As a human being they then go and beg from others. If they are refused they use it as an opportunity to claim another victim. This more often than not happens to greedy people. Further, Mamprusi' believe that some human witches also team up with trees to catch their victims.

Most big bush animals like the cow, the deer, and the pig are also believed to be witches and as such they have powerful spirits. They turn themselves into human beings and attend social gatherings. Some of them go to the soothsayers to consult them as to how to avoid hunters or being caught by a trap in the bush. It is believed that very good soothsayers are able to know whether a particular client is a human being or not. The Mamprusi' also believed that a strained relationship between one and his ancestral gods makes one vulnerable to witches. Relations will be strained if they refuse to offer their ancestral gods what they request. The witches will use this opportunity to catch them.

3.4 How Accused Witches Are Treated

In the Northern part of Ghana, especially in Mamprusi society, the response to witchcraft accusation is very aggressive and sometimes life threatening. When one is suspected of killing or attempting to kill someone through witchcraft in a community, the person is first accused through rumors and is later reported to the community elders. It is worth noting that the victim is often said to have revealed the identity of his/her assailant to a member of his/her family who will also mention it to the household head. The household head will then summon her (mostly women are the accused) to the community's chief palace to prove her innocence. In case the victim dies, the community members might vent their anger on the said witch; she may be beaten mercilessly, tortured or stoned to death. And if she is lucky she may be banished from the community to take refuge at the Gambaga witch camp.

All people who have found themselves in the witch camp are accused of bewitching others, because someone either died or was seriously sick. Such persons are usually women and the underprivileged in society; for example, widows, illiterates, the physically handicapped and the barren. Whilst a widower lives without any change in status and social standing, a widow is usually accused of killing her husband. Such unfortunate women go through severe physical assault, sometimes it leads to their death. Those who survive the maltreatment are banished from their communities. While some of these accused women run away from their homes for fear of their lives, others are sent by force to the witch camps for test of innocence.

One of the alleged witches called Mariama, a seventy-two (72) year old woman, from Sakogu, a village near Nalerigu, narrated her story to me on how she was accused and banished to the Gambaga Witch Camp. According to her, she returned from the market one evening only to be told that a young girl has died in the village and that, she was the suspect to have caused her death. She was asked to report herself to the chief's palace to prove her innocence. The next morning, Mariama was dragged to the chief's palace amidst hooting

from an angry mob who were ready to stone her. At the chief's palace, she was forced to confess that she was a witch who has killed the lady, but she denied the charges. She was then given time to either confess or face death. Explaining further, Mariama narrated that, she was not given time to prove her innocence. Neither did they give her the chance to say good bye to her family nor to take her belongings. From the chief's palace, the bereaved family and some of her neighbors assaulted her on her way home. Finally, she could not get to the house due to the danger of being killed. Hence her last child, a girl aged eighteen (18) years sympathized and rescued her by bringing her to the Gambaga Witch Camp.

According to her, it was so disheartening that some of her own children and family members would not believe that she was innocent. Unfortunately for her, after the Gambarana (the priest chief) performed some rituals to determine whether she is witch or not, she was found to be guilty, and so she could never go back to her village. "I was trading and living comfortably but now I depend on my daughter who is living with me, since I am too weak to do any work". When asked whether her relatives do visit her, she said: "Since I was brought to the camp, nobody from my family has ever come to ask of me or to bring me food and clothing. Look at me and what I'm wearing, you can see rags that is what my daughter gives me to cover myself".

Stating her view about the living conditions of the camp, she said, she had a knee problem. But she could not afford medical attention that is why she has not reported it. Mariama also added that she can never return to her village again, because of the fate experienced by two women who decided to leave the camp; they were poisoned by their own relatives to death.

With regards to income generating activities, she claimed that most of them cannot work due to their feeble nature. But according to her they help farmers in picking or harvesting their crops. But the situation becomes bad in the dry seasons when most of them had to eat twice

daily or nothing at all. Our only festival or source of entertainment is funeral. “Generally, I appreciate that the camp is better than death, so I will say it is better so far as we are safe here”¹⁰⁶.

Again, narrating her story to me, Mma Asana Azumah, a 70 year old woman from Kolinvai, said she was accused of “eating” her rival and also causing ailments and calamities in her family during the outbreak of Cerebral Spinal Meningitis (CSM) in 1998.

She said, one afternoon she had just returned from the farm when she heard wailing and shouting from her village. On her arrival, people started chasing her in order to beat her. Fortunately, her children managed save her. When she asked for explanations, she was told that, she was a witch and that she had killed her rival who had just died. According to her the matter was reported to the chief of the village and after performing some rituals she was found to be guilty and her younger daughter of about 16 years helped her to walk on foot right from the chief’s palace to the Gambaga camp.

As to how she finds the living conditions at the camp, Mma Asana said, she had nothing upon arrival. And so she had to beg for few clothing and food. She said;

You can see all my clothes are wretched. How can I go to farm in this present condition of sickness? I do nothing but rather my daughter goes to work to enable us to eat. If we do not get food we sleep like that. But it is better than being killed. Since the time I was brought to the camp none of my male children has visited me, so I don’t know the plight they are in and I am not even interested. Why should I upon all that they have done to me in the village? My heart has gone numb so I am just living till God calls me. Sometimes for days I would not eat but I don’t feel it, for what is more painful than to be wrongly accused.

She claims that, the Gambarana and Presbyterian Go-Home project built and maintain their houses for them. She however praised the Presbyterian Church pastors for their sermons and counseling which has always given them relief and consolation¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Mariama (Alleged Witch) at Gambaga witch Camp. 9 January, 2017.

Mariama and Asana's cases though unique, are not isolated. There are several cases of this nature which are usually associated with women. For instance, the 1997 Go-Home Project annual report to the Northern Mission Field indicated that, during the outbreak of Cerebro Spinal Meningitis (CSM) and high fever in 1997, there was a tremendous increase in population at the witch camps resulting from the accusations of women suspected to be the cause of the epidemic. Thirty-nine women from various villages in the East Mamprusi District were banished to the Gambaga witch camp in that year. The total number of accused witches at the camp stood at 328 by the close of the year.¹⁰⁸

Witchcraft accusation is a traditional and cultural belief and practice among the people of Mamprugu traditional area. Until recently, women suspected of witchcraft were being lynched without any one raising an eyebrow. Although both men and women could be accused of witchcraft, it is only women who are generally banished from their villages or communities to the witch camps while their men counterparts are usually treated lightly with caution because they wield much power and are feared in their communities. As a native of this community and a witness to some of these assaults inflicted against women accused of witchcraft, it can be said to have declined in the major towns, and even in the Gambaga Witch Camp due to the intervention of the Presbyterian Go-Home project.

3.5 Women and Witchcraft Accusations

In Ghana, witchcraft is usually associated with women. The most interesting fact is that although both men and women could be accused of witchcraft it is only women who are generally banished from their villages or communities to the witch camps. This is a sign of discrimination against women and a major contribution to gender inequality in most African societies. The reality is that no society has ever been merciful to witches; however, with all

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Mma Asana Azumah at Gambaga Witch Camp, 30th January 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Simon Ngota, Presbyterian Go-Home Annual Report to Northern Mission Field, April, 1998.6.

these accusations and torture women are always the victims of these assaults. The fact is that accusation or violence against alleged witches is generally linked an infringement on their fundamental human rights.

For instance, women's opportunity to realize their full potential to enable them lead a dignified and independent life is seriously hampered by her traditional role of caring for children. The woman's God-given opportunity to live a prosperous life is impeded by the special circumstances she finds herself in our customary, cultural and religious beliefs and attitudes. These belief systems have for year's molded women into being satisfied with mediocrity and fear of asserting themselves. It has reduced most women into accepting subordinatory roles in society, making women always dependent on men.

Moreover, the traditional and cultural biases against women begin at birth where in most traditional settings in the country, people prefer the male child to the female child. This is where the discrimination against women begins. It is no secret that most couples who have the unpleasant experience of having only female children offer a lot of prayers and other interventions to God just to bless the family with a son. In most cases especially in Northern Ghana, it serves as a major incentive for the man to look for a second wife. This sometimes leads to divorce because the woman has failed to give the family a son who by tradition will take after his father or grandfather.

In fact cultural practices and traditions still subjugate women in Ghana, like those in other parts of Africa. Witchcraft accusation is one of the areas in which women's rights are abused the most. Some of the accusations leveled against these witches include putting a drum into the stomach of the victim which causes habitual drunkenness, losing one's job, converting victim's souls into animals and eating them.

At the Gambaga Witch Camp, traditional rituals are performed by the chief to determine who qualifies to be a witch. In this case, the woman accused must come to Gambarana with the accuser, accompanied by some few people. A fowl is slaughtered and thrown in the air, if it lands and finishes struggling and lies on its side or stomach the accused is perceived to be guilty, but if it lies on its back, then the accused is declared innocent. Performance fees is charged before this ritual done. In fact one may not be far from the truth to suggest that most cultural practices are unfavorable to women in Northern Ghana as they continue to go through outmoded widowhood rites and do not have any right to inherit properties of their parents including land ownership.

Also, in the Northern part of Ghana, women who are domineering and assertive are easily branded as witches most especially when they are successful in their businesses. Most women who became rich through trading or any other ventures are accused of using witchcraft powers to become rich. They are sometimes accused of using or converting human souls into animals, groundnuts, shea-butter, millet among others and sending them to sell at Techiman market and other places for money. All these allegations retard the socio-economic development of women.

From the indigenous religious beliefs and practices in Mamprugu, women are always the focus of witchcraft accusations. There are several reasons why women are accused of being witches. The reason may be linked to anger, aggression, envy, jealousy, hatred, unfriendliness, etc. Negative attitudes are not found in only women but also in men however, women are said to exhibit them more than men. This tends to bring their status and dignity into disrepute. From my own experience, most of the root causes are linked with sicknesses, death, barrenness, inheritance, economic hardship and failure in life. Traumatic experience like the death of a husband or the loss of a child affect women more than men, hence in their

attempt to find out the cause of their misfortune, witchcraft becomes the medium of explanation and the blame is put on women especially those who cannot defend themselves.

Again, popular opinion has it that a barren woman is easily suspected to be a witch, because she has no children of her own she since she can be jealous of other women who have children so she uses her witchcraft to cause harm to other's children. Moreover, a woman who always depends on her son for her livelihood can be accused by her own son as a witch. The son attributes all his socio-economic problems on the mother who has become a burden to him. Although, witchcraft beliefs cut across religious, social status, age and gender, there are more witches than wizards.

According to most respondents to the questionnaires, accused women are denied their basic human rights; these include the right to food, the right to physical well-being, the right to free movement and even the right to life. However, if a woman has a reliable economic base or if she is of royal descent, such as a queen mother or a women's leader (Mangazia), she can show any peculiar behavior and will not be accused of witchcraft. Indeed, she would be expected to provide protective powers to her relatives (the chief or the chief's family) and to her own children.

Similarly a literate woman who behaves in a peculiar manner will not be accused of witchcraft. Women who are mostly accused of witchcraft are mainly those without solid economic base. In this case gender and poverty dynamics stimulate allegations of witchcraft. Another criteria for determining a witch also has to do with women's fight for equality. For example, women who acquired higher education and rub shoulders with men are also classified as witches. This belief does not encourage women to pursue higher education just for the fear of being accused as witches thus, retarding the progress and development of women and the country at large.

In Mamprugu traditional area, witchcraft allegation is one of the acceptable grounds for divorce. For instance if a wife is accused of witchcraft practice she may be divorced. This also adds gender dimension to witchcraft. While a young wife is rarely accused, the same cannot be said about older women. Thus, it is the woman approaching old age who may suffer accusation. If she is divorced, she would find it difficult to remarry and her own paternal home will not readily accept her back. Also, men for fear of the power of women, especially in economic sphere, where women may turn to be arrogant toward the males, label them as witches to serve as a social control measure.

This also happens in the political circles when women rub shoulders with their male counterparts to contest for political positions. Those women are also branded as witches for doing the extraordinary. In traditional shrines and in the new Ghanaian spiritual churches, those most often suspected and accused of being witches are women.

According to Elizabeth Amoah, belief in witchcraft has been and still is an aspect of the indigenous religious beliefs and practices in Ghana. She identified various types of witchcraft accusations when she noted that “there are those who use their supposed witchcraft to promote their own interests, in business or education, and there are those who use it to promote others, such as their children or relatives, and there are those who are victims of the witchcraft of other women”¹⁰⁹. To her, majority of those who accused women of being witches are women themselves such as rivals, in-laws, business competitors among others¹¹⁰.

In the context of the family, Amoah observed that, “women may be accused of witchcraft if they have no children, or if they have too many children; if their children are unsuccessful, or if their children are too successful. Women may be seen as both perpetrators and victims of

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Amoah, “Women, Witches and Social Change in Ghana” in Diana Eck and Devaki Jain (eds), *Speaking of faith: Cross Cultural Perspectives on Women, religion and social change*, (Delhi; Kali for women, 1986), 85.

¹¹⁰ Amoah, “Women, Witches and Social Change in Ghana”, 85.

witchcraft. Witchcraft has an effect on ambitious women who want to break through the barrier of traditional occupations. These social accusations frustrate women, especially those who wish to appear decent in society”¹¹¹.

3.6 Effects of Belief in Witchcraft

The effect of the belief in witchcraft on the social life of the people of Mamprugu traditional area is tremendous. For example, the belief that somebody can offer you a gift that is witchcraft substance makes parents warn their children not to receive gift from, especially old people or strangers. Children are told to be careful not to pick strange items from the ground. When people are sick, they will not stay near their houses because it is believed that witches strike at short range, not a long range. If you are far from home, they cannot strike you.

So it happens when somebody is going to have a surgical operation, he or she will not tell anybody in his or her immediate family because witches attack their relatives, and they may take advantage of the situation to attack them, and so they travel far away to have their surgery. The belief destroys relationship amongst family, especially the relationship between the young and the old. The older a person becomes, the more susceptible he or she becomes as a witch. There are many conflicts in the villages because people are accused to be witches. Many people are shunned because they are thought to be witches. Certain diseases are also blamed to be the work of witches. And young people are afraid to build decent houses for fear that it may be regarded as a show-off of wealth and lead to witchcraft attacks. All these fears affect the economy and retards progress in the society.

¹¹¹ Amoah, “Women, Witches and Social Change in Ghana”, 86.

3.7 Some Positives about Witchcraft

The general problem with the concept of witchcraft is that, witchcraft could be either good or evil. These diverse perspectives on witchcraft give the impression that, the witchcraft spirit, which people believe to exist, is neutral and it takes character from how it is used. If one uses witchcraft for evil, it will become an evil destructive force; on the other hand, if one uses witchcraft for good, it would be positive force that can be used for one's personal improvement or social advancement¹¹².

It is believed that strong witches have what is termed as the 'lion's spirits'. These powers are used to protect the family from witches. The power is used for socio-economic growth of the children and other members of the family. A positive witch can use his/her power to treat diseases as a herbalist will do. Some community leaders also require witchcraft powers to be able to rule or manifest their powers.

The ambivalence of witchcraft means that there are also cases where the belief in witchcraft can be said to have positive implications for society. For instance, witchcraft beliefs encourage sharing. It is believed that witches like to set up traps for their victims. For example, they beg or ask for minor favours, and when these are not acceded to, they attack. In this respect the belief support the generousities that are associated with kinship. Just as people fear the harmful effects on an old person's curse, they tremble at the possibility that if the old one's needs are not addressed he or she might bewitch them.

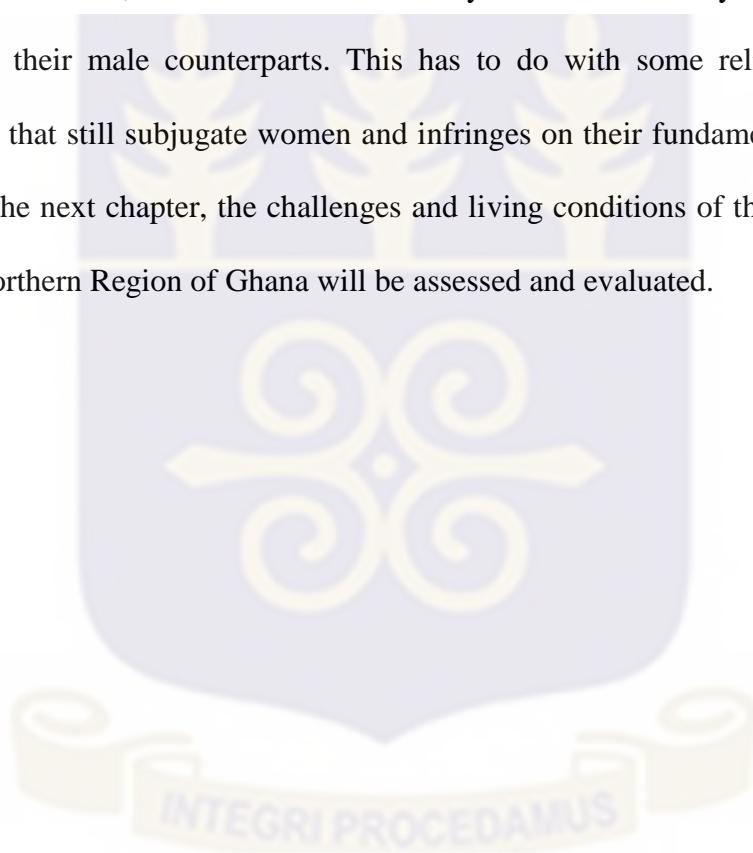
Those who do not wish to be accused of being witches make sure they abide by the norms of the society. They avoid anti-social behaviours. Witches are presented as greedy, quarrelsome, envious and unreasonable. Therefore, individuals who wish to avoid such accusations try to live morally upright lives and to be on good terms with their neighbours.

¹¹² Akrong, "A Phenomenology of Witchcraft in Ghana", 54

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed in broad terms the traditional concept, beliefs, practices and perception of witchcraft among the Mamprusi in Northern Ghana. In sum, it has enhanced understanding of the worldview of the communities involved in the accusation and banishment of alleged witches to the Gambaga Witch Camp. This is important because from the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of Mamprusis', women are usually the focus of witchcraft accusations.

The chapter has therefore, looked at the reasons why women are mostly branded as witches as compared to their male counterparts. This has to do with some religious beliefs and cultural practice that still subjugate women and infringes on their fundamental human rights and dignity. In the next chapter, the challenges and living conditions of the Gambaga Witch Camps in the Northern Region of Ghana will be assessed and evaluated.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE PHENOMENON OF THE GAMBAGA WITCH CAMP AND ITS CHALLENGES

4.1 Introduction

In chapter three, we discussed the phenomenon of witchcraft beliefs and how witchcraft is perceived and practiced in Mamprugu traditional area of the Northern Region of Ghana. Also, factors leading to witchcraft accusations, especially among women have also been discussed. This chapter is a report of the field research conducted to examine and address the challenges and the living conditions of the Gambaga Witch Camp in the Northern region of Ghana.

The findings and analysis in this chapter are based on some of the responses from sets of questionnaires administered across the various traditional communities in the East Mamprusi District, and interviews and discussion conducted in different parts of Mamprugu traditional area, and observations made in the course of the research, as well as secondary data gathered. There were 3 sets of questionnaires. The first set was administered to 100 persons comprising of chiefs, elders and opinion leaders of Gambaga and Nalerigu, Presbyterian Go-Home project officers, and Presbyterian Church workers to ascertain suitable data on the thesis topic. Out of 100 questionnaires administered, 70 people responded. This constitutes 70 percent of questionnaires administered.

The second set of questionnaires was in the form of an interview guide which was used to aid in the interview of the Gambarana (witch doctor), his elders, and the Chief Imam of Gambaga. These people were interviewed by the researcher, and through the help of the headmaster of the Gambaga Presbyterian Junior High school, and some of his teachers and friends. In all, the Gambarana and 20 of his elders were interviewed.

The third set of questionnaires was an interview guide administered to the alleged witches, their children, the reintegrated alleged witches, and people from the communities where the alleged witches are coming from. Out of 89 alleged witches, 50 were interviewed on one on one interview basis which constitute 56.18%. However, almost all of them were interviewed as a group during their church service on Sundays which I personally conducted. This involved 85 alleged witches. The researcher also paid a visit to the Tindang Witch Camp which is located in Gnani, a village 10 miles away from Yendi to ascertain the living conditions there as compared to the Gambaga Witch Camp. He also visited the Tindan-zhie Witch Camp which is located on the outskirts of Kpatinga in the Gushiegu District. It is a relatively smaller camp with a population of 40 alleged witches and over 70 children.

We interviewed the alleged witches in both camps and asked questions about the events that took place before their banishment, their opinions on the accusation and banishment, their experiences with staying at the camp, and whether they will like to be reintegrated with their communities and families. In the case of the reintegrated alleged witches, we asked about their experiences and how the community is treating them after their return. Through this interaction, we gained knowledge of the alleged witches' experiences, and the challenges they faced and the significant role Presbyterian Go-Home project is playing in the area of repatriation and reintegration of the alleged witches in Gambaga Witch Camp. This chapter therefore presents the findings of the field research at the Gambaga Witch Camp.

4.2 Witch Camps in Northern Ghana

The information gathered during the field work in Gambaga, Gnani (Tindang) and Kpatinga (Tindan-zhie) Witch Camps suggests that the alleged witches are considered as perilous to the society. Thus, witch camps are the community's way of handling this fear. In light of the above, witchcraft accusations, banishment and violence against accused witches will be examined. Moreover, the trial by ordeal and the abuse of human rights associated with it as

well as the challenges and living conditions of the witch camps in Northern Ghana needs to be addressed.

In the Northern Region of Ghana, majority of women accused of witchcraft and banished by relatives or members of their communities are living in ‘witch camps’ after being beaten, tortured and banished from their communities. The witch camps are believed to be safe places where witchcraft cannot be practiced due to the power of the shrines which are attached to the witch camps.

Despite the fact that, witchcraft is a universal phenomenon, the way alleged witches are treated and handled in Northern Ghana is peculiar and unique. The alleged witches may not only be excommunicated, but may be banished or lynched. As a result, the establishment and running of witch camps, to serve as safe havens for alleged witches who are being pursued to be lynched are peculiar to only Northern region of Ghana.

On the question as to how accused witches are treated in Mamprugu society, one of the respondent, Mba Yakubu Abdulai (an elder and linguist to Gambarana) explained to me that; “In Mamprugu society, when a woman is accused of witchcraft, she is first sent to the community leaders for trial. This trial takes the form of confession from the accused witch to the community elders. If the suspected witch denies the allegations, she is sent to the village chief for another trial by ordeal amidst hooting, torture and beatings. If she again denies the charges, she is then sent to Gambarana (the priest chief) of Gambaga who is an exorcist and has the power to identify witches.”¹¹³

He maintained that, in identification of witches, the trial takes various forms and varies from traditional societies. In some areas, some concoctions are prepared and the accused is forced to drink it. If she did not capture the soul of the victim, she will not die but if she did she will

¹¹³ Interview with Mba Yakubu Abdulai, Gambaga, 22nd December 2016.

die instantly. In other instances, the accused is beaten and made to confess. In some other cases, the identification is determined by the position of a dying fowl which is presented by the relatives of the accused to the priest chief (for example in the case of Gambaga). When the priest chief identifies one as a witch, the family has a bill to pay before the chief takes him/her to the witch camp for security reasons from the accusers, who are eager to vent their anger on the accused witch for the loss of their loved one. If it involves a sick person, the accused witch is detained by the Gambarana at the witch camp to provide herbs to heal the sick person.¹¹⁴

He further narrated that, in the case of male witches, it is believed that if a man is a witch, he uses his power to protect his family and the community, therefore not much harm is done to him when he is identified. In some few cases however, they are exorcised and allowed to go back home because they have their own houses. But women identified as witches cannot go back home for fear of being lynched or poisoned. They therefore, seek refuge at the witch camp. He observed that, there are three categories of women at the witch camp. They are women who confessed by themselves that they are witches. Secondly, there are women who are forced to confess that they are witches and there are other women who denied to be witches but ran to the camp for security reasons¹¹⁵.

4.2.1 Leadership/Management Structure of the Witch Camp

The priest chief, or “Tindana” of the community in which the witch camps are situated is the overseer and custodian of the camps. For instance, in the case of Gambaga Camp, the Gambarana exercises an oversight responsibility over the camp. In the case of the priest chief, he is customarily appointed by the Nayiri from a lineage of priests who are responsible for taking care of the community, the shrine and the camp. The priest is believed to be

¹¹⁴ Interview with Mba Yakubu Abdulai.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Mba Yakubu Abdulai

powerful and capable of neutralizing the powers of a witch. The priest chief or Tindana is also responsible for the provision of health care and takes major decisions on behalf of and in the interest of the residents in the camp.

The nomination or selection of a leader within the women`s group is also vital and crucial for the smooth running of the camp. The eldest surviving woman automatically becomes the leader of the women called the “Magazia” and is appointed by the priest chief/ Tindana of the camp. The leader is believed to be powerful and her power emanates from being the longest surviving woman in the camp. The leader of the women is responsible for settling minor cases among the women. The leader mobilizes the women and takes instruction from the priest chief/Tindana and disseminates information to the women in the camp. In instances where there are more than one ethnic group, each group has its own leader. However, the Magazia is the overall leader of the women in the camp.

A network of alleged witches living in all the six witch camps in the Northern Region has been formed and called “Tigbubtaba” (meaning, lets support one another). This was done through the facilitation of ActionAid Ghana and partner, “Songtaba” (meaning, help one another), to provide a common front, voice and platform for alleged witches themselves to champion their own cause.

4.2.2 History of the Gambaga Witch Camp

As mentioned earlier, there are six established witch camps in Northern Region of Ghana. The Gambaga Camp was the first one of its kind in Ghana. According to oral history, the Gambarana and his elders narrated that:

The Gambaga witch camp is said to have been established around 1870, in the mid nineteenth Century, during the reign of the then paramount chief of Mamprugu Traditional area, Naa-Bariga who judged a case at his palace in Nalerigu whereby a woman was accused of witchcraft was found guilty and was almost lynched to death by her relatives and some angry mob at a hill

known as Kpinkpamalisigu, which literally means “seeing only swinging arms”. The hill is located between Gambaga and Nalerigu road. The then Imam of Mamprugu called Imam Baba was touched by the torture meted out to this old woman. Out of sympathy he pleaded with Naa Bariga to rescue her from being killed by allowing him to take her away to Gambaga where he lived. The Imam also appealed to the angry mob not to kill the woman but instead leave her in his custody. Naa-Bariga agreed for Imam Baba to take the woman to Gambaga. The Imam brought the woman to his home at Gambaga where he performed a Muslims cleansing ritual to rid her of the witchcraft so that she could return to her community. However, she eventually lived there as a refugee. After this incident, many alleged witches sought refuge at the Imam’s house. Consequently, any similar case was always referred to Imam Baba in Gambaga and the numbers of such outcasts kept increasing as the years passed by with the succeeding paramount chiefs and Imams until in 1900 when the then Imam Abudu declared he could no more handle both Islamic religious activities and traditional duties together. Moreover, reintegration also turned out to be difficult and the number of those waiting to go back increased. He therefore discussed the handing over of the traditional duty of keeping the alleged witches as refugees to Nayina and Nachinaba, who were both elders of Gambarana. These elders told Imam Abudu that they would confer with the Gambaran Bawumiah, who was then the chief of Gambaga. After consultations, it was agreed that since Gambaran Bawumiah is the traditional ruler and he performs sacrifices to the gods of the Land for the people of Mamprugu, it would be appropriate for him to take custody of the alleged witches. Gambaran Bawumiah then took over as the custodian of these alleged witches and established a settlement or a sanctuary for the old women. The responsibility of caring for the old women and performing cleansing rituals was thus transferred to Gambarana, the priest chief of Gambaga till date¹¹⁶.

According to Dovlo, “the media use of two terms ‘camp’ and ‘sanctuary’, reflect the debate in Ghana, revealing the modern and the traditional perceptions of these places. When these

¹¹⁶ Interview with Gambaran Wuni Yahaya and his elders at his palace in Gambaga, 22nd December, 2016.

places became known nation-wide, through the media in the late 1980s and more prominently in the 1990s, the word ‘camp’ was used by the media to describe them”¹¹⁷.

However, the use of the word ‘sanctuary’ actually reflects the history narrated above in which the origin of the practice suggest that Gambaga was supposed to serve as a town of refuge for those accused of witchcraft, preventing them from being tortured and lynched. Hajia Amina Adam also noted that, “the Gambarana is only a custodian of these unfortunate women. The camp serves as a haven or sanctuary. The Gambarana does not keep them in bondage. It is the society which they come from which has stigmatized and treated them with total reject and contempt”¹¹⁸. Indeed the current Gambarana claimed that he is offering a sanctuary and providing humanitarian service to the alleged witches who would have been otherwise killed in their communities.

Today the Gambaga Witch Camp has been engulfed by other houses to the extent that the position of the camp is now almost at the centre of Gambaga township. The witch camp is also known as *Poakura fongu*, “literally means old ladies section/home” and the women are also called *Poakura*, meaning old ladies. On approaching the Gambaga Camp, one notices the distinct small huts, with thatched roofs and small doors without windows. The Gambaga Witch Camp can be described as a cosmopolitan community since people of different ethnic backgrounds are converged. However, they all share similar traditional beliefs and customs. Though they speak their local languages, the most dominant language spoken is Mampruli.

The witch camp in Gambaga has 25 compound houses but these are not inhabited according to ethnic groupings. Currently, the inmates of the camp consist of 12 Bimobas, 32 Mamprusis, 14 Dagombas, 7 Kusasis, 3Talenses, and 21 Konkombas. However, this number is not fixed; it can either increase or decrease at any time due to new admissions or

¹¹⁷Elom Dovlo, *Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana*, 74.

¹¹⁸ Hajia Amina Adam, ‘What goes on at Gambaga “Witches Camp”’ *The Mirror*, 5th August 2000, 19.

reintegration and repatriation exercise carried out by the Presbyterian Go-Home Project. Their number of children also stand at 49. These are children of school going age mostly sponsored by the Presbyterian Go-Home Project.

The difference is that, while *Imam Baba* simply offered refuge and also performed Muslim cleansing rituals to exorcise the women of witchcraft so that they could return home, Gambarana on the other hand performs rituals to determine whether they are indeed witches or not. He is believed to have the power to detect whether the accused are really witches or not, and to neutralize the power of witchcraft in the women who are allegedly found to be witches¹¹⁹.

In the case of Tindang and Tindan-zhie Witch Camps, the Tindana`s (earth priests) are overseers or custodians of the camps. The Tindana is someone originally from the village of Gnani. People accused of witchcraft whom he took care of were, however not hosted in Gnani but in a new settlement called Tindang. Tindang has a unique feature. Unlike the other witch camps, it constitutes a village by itself. Therefore the alleged witches living there faced physical isolation even more than the inmate of the Gambaga Witch Camp. Unlike the Gambaga Camp, Tindang has both sexes and there is no discrimination among them. Kpatinga and Kuku are also located within “normal” communities. These two camps receive little external support.

4.2.3 Rituals of Identification of Alleged Witches

According to Nangpaak, “the existence of witch camps in Northern Region of Ghana in general, and Gambaga in particular, is linked with the people’s concept of witchcraft on one hand and also the Gambarana (priest chief) on the other hand, who is believed to be powerful

¹¹⁹ Dovlo, “Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana”, 75.

enough to neutralize and to accommodate the alleged witches”¹²⁰. In an interview with Gambarana he explained that; “When an alleged witch is brought to Gambaga, she is taken through a ritual that determines her guilt or innocence known as *Noapohagu* literally means “testing of fowls”. According to him, there are three categories of alleged witches living in the Gambaga witch camp under his care and supervision. These groups of alleged witches exclude children who are living with their mothers and grandmothers. The first group is those who are forcefully sent by their relatives upon suspicion of bewitching other persons. Majority of such alleged witches do not go through the test of innocence because they immediately accept and confessed that they are witches. In the case of the accused persons who insist that, they are innocent, they are taken through the ritual of proof, which in most cases, do go against them. The second group of alleged witches comprises of those who have been accused of practicing witchcraft and have escaped to the camp. The third and last group is, those who have been rejected by all relations and banished from their communities to seek refuge in the Gambaga camp¹²¹.

In an interview with one of the alleged witches called Adisah Sandow, a 78 year old woman from Zarantinga, told me that, she was brought to the Gambaga witch camp about 20 years ago, after she had been accused of killing her rival’s daughter by her husband’s family and the deceased’s mother. When I asked her to tell me whether she was a witch, she answered, “those who brought me here can give the answer. But I am happy that by God’s grace I am still alive to tell my bitter story. Look at where I am staying. I have a decent home at my village with, my children but because I have been declared a witch, I am separated from my children and family. God will judge this matter one day”¹²².

¹²⁰ Duut George Nangpaak, 1.

¹²¹ Interview with Gambarana (Yahaya Wuni) in his Palace at Gambaga, 27th December 2016

¹²² Interview with Adisah Sandow at Gambaga Witch Camp, 10 January 2017’

In another interview with Poanaa Karim, 60 years old and an alleged witch narrated how the people of her village (Gyawani) forced her to undergo a dehumanizing trial by ordeal, by making her to strip naked while her public hair were shaved by a male diviner in public and her finger nails cut and used to perform rituals at a shrine in an attempt to de-witch her of witchcraft spirit and later banished her to the Gambaga witch camp for the past five years. The reason being that, she was accused of causing the death of a young boy in the village¹²³.

These unfortunate stories of Adisah and Poanaa are examples of those who have been accused by their own relatives or families and endured maltreatment of torture, and going through a dehumanizing trial by ordeal, and finally banished by their own families from their respective communities to seek refuge at the Gambaga Witch Camp. These constitute violation of their human rights. The findings indicate that, more than half of the alleged witches were forced to the camps and few went there on their own free will due to stigmatization. Some also felt that their lives were threatened so they had no choice but to run to the witch camps for safety.

4.2.4 Rituals of Test of Innocence (*Noapohagu*)

The test of innocence is publicly conducted to determine whether one is a witch or not. It then implies that, only if one is “diagnosed” to possess a witch spirit, through a test of innocence that he/she may require the ritual of exorcism or condemned to the witch camp¹²⁴. The witch camp is seemingly a better way of getting rid of witches without killing them, since the shrines attached to the witch camps are believed to determine whether one is a witch or not. The shrines are also believed be powerful enough to stop witches from using their alleged powers to harm others.¹²⁵

¹²³ Interview with Paonaa karim at Gambaga Witch Camp, 15 January 2017.

¹²⁴ Interview with Gambarana (Yahaya Wuni) in his Palace at Gambaga, 12th January 2017

¹²⁵ Karen Palmer, *Spellbound Inside West Africa's Witch Camps* (New York; Free Press). 52

In an interview with Zenabu Bogei (acting Magazia), she observed that, when an alleged witch is brought to Gambaga by the accusers, the Gambarana (priest chief) of the shrine will ask both the accused and the complainant to provide a fowl each for the test of innocence. In each case the accused person is expected to pass the test of innocence in order to be exonerated. The accused is made to kneel before the shrine, holds the fowl and says, “I stand before you (shrine) to swear that I am not a witch; if I am a witch as alleged, this should be proven in the sacrifice of this fowl given to you”. The Gambarana will then slaughter the fowl and throw it to the ground. As soon as slaughtered fowl falls on its back, the accused is declared innocent by the shrine spirit but when the fowl falls on its stomach, with its peak on the ground (indicating that, it is ashamed to look up to God and the shrine)¹²⁶, the accused found guilty.

According to her, when the person denies the accusations, she is threatened with a second ritual. The second fowl determines whether the attacks have been carried out in collaboration with the ancestors which needs to be consulted through divination to find out the truth. After the slaughtering of another fowl the witch can drink a concoction that will cleanse her of the witchcraft spirit. And if she is found guilty but proves to be difficult to confess, she is made to understand that she will be given a powerful concoction or spiritual water from the shrine by the Gambarana to drink; if she knows that she is guilty but drinks it, she will die¹²⁷. According to Akrong, this threat makes many women accept and confess that they are witches. Whenever the accused accepts the outcome of the trial by ordeal and confesses to be a witch she is made to go through a ‘de-witching’ ritual. Upon the payment of a fee, a herbal

¹²⁶ Interview with acting Magazia, Gambaga, 13th January, 2017

¹²⁷ Interview with Acting Magazia, Gambaga, 13th January, 2017

preparation is given to the accused to drink and bathe. This latter treatment is believed to exorcise the alleged witches of their evil potency, rendering them powerless forever.¹²⁸

When the cleansing rituals have been performed, relatives of the accused are expected to pay an amount of money, two fowls, cola nuts and a sheep, and may then take the woman home. But if she is not welcomed by the community, she stays in the Camp. There, the earth shrines are violent and vengeful spirits which prevents the alleged witch from practicing her evil activities. However, all new comers must provide a fowl, white cloth and cola nuts to the Gambarana for rituals to be performed before being allowed to stay at the camp.

4.2.5 Accommodation and Basic Needs of the Alleged Witches in Gambaga

On the issue of accommodation, Nangpaak, in an interview with Gumah Tindoo (spokesperson for Gambarana) noted that, there are normally no available rooms awaiting any new comer. However, they are readily accommodated on arrival either temporally with the Magazia of the camp or the new comers are made to sleep in the rooms of the ethnic group leaders or with other inmates until new rooms are built to accommodate them. But those who come to the camp on their own, the chief normally interviews them and allows them to stay while waiting patiently to see whether their relatives will visit them or not. Such newcomers are temporally accommodated. After a long period of time, if there is no follow up by the person's relatives, the Gambarana instruct his men or the Presbyterian Go-Home Project to put up a new room or rehabilitate any of the abandoned rooms for her. A bill on such expenses is prepared for the relative to pay any time they show up¹²⁹.

From the respondents of chiefs and opinion leaders of Gambaga and Nalerigu, it was clear that, the living condition at the Gambaga Witch Camp is very poor and therefore, needs serious attention by the Presbyterian Go-Home Project, NGOs and the Government. The

¹²⁸ Abraham Akrong, "A phenomenology of Witchcraft in Ghana" 75.

¹²⁹ Duut George Nangpaak, *The Gambaga 'Witches' Colony: Its Artistic and Cultural Life* (2007), 14

housing system in the camp is one of the first structures that one notices on a visit to Gambaga. Without asking, a stranger can pass them for local hencoops or ovens. The inmates practically have to bow before entering or coming out of the rooms. Moreover, these huts built for the women are in such a deplorable state that any strong wind can easily destroy them. One of the alleged witches, Asibi Guma explained that, despite the regular maintenance of cracks by the women during rainy season, their rooms became flooded with water and some parts fell off. So during such rainfalls they stay awake to drain the water from their rooms.

Overcrowding is another issue faced by these unfortunate women. Even with the unventilated and unspacious nature of their rooms, being shared by three or four inmates. Since most of them normally have their younger children or grandchildren living with them, the rooms become congested. In the warm seasons, they are uncomfortable and may contract communicable diseases. To address these unfavorable conditions of the alleged witches, the Lordina Foundation which is headed by the former first lady of Ghana is putting up a 30 bedroom apartments for the inmates of the Gambaga Witch Camp which is about 80 percent complete. It is located at the outskirts of Gambaga town. The building project, when completed will serve as accommodation and vocational training school for the inmates and their children. It will provide some comfort for the inmates when they move from their current dilapidated abode to the new settlement.

But the issue now is whether the Gambarana would allow the women to move to the new place when completed. In an interview with Gambarana, he lamented that he was not properly informed as to what the building will be used for, According to him, the witch camp which is behind his palace is attached to a shrine, perceived to be protecting and controlling the activities of the alleged witches. The shrine will not forgive any alleged witch if he/she should attempt to attack someone. In a group discussion with the alleged witches on whether

they would like to relocate to the new settlement when completed, the women also complained about the distance and fear of attacks and rape by criminals. They therefore prefer to remain at the current place in order to be protected and doing their normal businesses even though living conditions are very poor. In actual fact, building a new settlement to help accused witches is not a bad idea but however, this would not automatically change the perception of the belief and accusation of witchcraft. The proposed solutions should be approached cautiously.

On the question on how they are clothed, it is interesting to note that, during the time of their banishment from their various communities, they ran to the camps without their cloths and personal belongings. This means that they ran to these camps with either one cloth around their waist or sometimes stark naked due to harassment and the beatings they received in their communities. Due to the torture and beatings, their cloth becomes wretched and torn exposing their naked bodies.

The researcher wanted to know how they come by clothing. In response, the women claim that, some benevolent individuals and Non-Governmental Organisation such as Lordina Mahama Foundation, ActionAid Ghana and religious bodies such as the Presbyterian Go-Home project, Catholic Relief Services, among others, occasionally provide them with clothing and food. The women added that, it is not all the times that they receive donations and food aid from these organizations.

On the issue of their movement, the researcher asked the Magazia (women's leader) at the camp as to whether they are told to observe certain taboos or forbidden to go to certain places. The Magazia reluctantly explained to me that; they are free to move to any place they want but permission must be obtained from the Gambarana especially if one wants to visit home. She however stated that they are not allowed to attend certain functions and occasions,

if they are not invited. She listed these occasions as naming ceremonies, durbars, funerals, political rallies and other occasions. According to Nangpaak, the reason for restricting them is that they are under surveillance because of their alleged evil practices. Restricting the women from public functions and occasions may be a consideration of their old age or from any possible stampedes and violent incidents that always characterize such occasions. Also, since some of them were banished from their own communities, people from such places who may happen to meet them at those occasions may be tempted to stare at them and also point fingers at them.¹³⁰ Also, the burial ceremony is normally performed by the Presbyterian pastor at Gambaga because majority of the women are all members of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana which adopted them since 1960.

However, in a discussion with the Gambarana on the issue of taboos, he observed that, there is one property or quality of a witch which the ordinary eyes may see when the witch exhibit it in the night. According to him every witch is believed to possess *sobugum*, “flickering light” which he/she may use at night when he/she is flying. This flickering light is put on and off as the witch flies. The ordinary human eyes will see the light but not the actual person of the witch. The Gambarana noted that, all the alleged witches in the camp are seriously warned on their arrival never to exhibit such flickering light at night else they would incur the wrath of the shrine. The shrine will never forgive any witch who exhibits such flicking light at night. The said witch may be strike dead by the shrine if he /she disobey this order.¹³¹

4.2.6 Relations between Alleged Witches and the Host Community (Gambaga)

The relationship between the alleged witches and the people of Gambaga community is very cordial due to the belief that the alleged witches are under the control of the Gambarana’s shrine which is located at the chief’s palace. Some residents of Gambaga ply through the

¹³⁰ Duut George Nangpaak, *The Gambaga ‘Witches’ Colony: Its Artistic and Cultural Life* (2007), 15.

¹³¹ Interview with Gambarana at his palace-Gambaga, 28 January 2017.

witch camp to get to their relatives at either side of the camp, and people could enter into the camp either to greet them or to transact business with them. The Presbyterian Church of Ghana in Gambaga also holds church services and counseling at the camp on Sundays for the inmates. While their children go to the main church to join the children service for worship. However, very few of them also join Muslims in various mosques for prayers, especially on Fridays.

The alleged witches also depend on the infrastructure of the town, such as the schools, market, health facilities, toilets and water facilities. The Assemblyman for the area noted that, the District Assembly's budget allocation for the entire district does not exclude the alleged witches. He claimed that some of them are enrolled on the Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) programme instituted by the government. During funerals people visit the place to mourn and sympathies with them. They also relate well with pito brewers who come to buy firewood from them.

According to the Mangazia, they are not restricted from marrying or remarrying especially the younger ones. She cited an example of those who have remarried and are now living with their husbands in Gambaga town. She however stressed that, when one gets married she must leave the camp and join her husband. The Gambarana in response to this question told me that, if a man wants to marry a woman at a camp, he normally brings cola nuts and a small amount of money to his palace to ask of her hand in marriage. The woman in question is then invited to testify her acceptance.

Mma Hannah Awungura, a remarried alleged witch in an interview narrated similar story claiming that she had divorced her former husband due to witchcraft accusation, but got remarried to Mba Awungura a member of Presbyterian Church of Ghana-Gambaga. They are blessed with four children and living peacefully for the pass forty years.

4.3 The Challenges of the Gambaga Witch Camp

The Gambaga Witch Camp in Northern Ghana was established in an attempt at preventing the killings of alleged witches. Even though, the alleged witches at the camp are not subjected to any torture or maltreatment they suffer various challenges and hardships. Dovlo has observed that, “the women at the camps are sickly, worn out, anaemic, malnourished, and dirty. Some are crippled, dumb and blind”¹³².

Similarly, Hajia Amina reporting in *The Mirror* newspapers stated that, the alleged witches in Gambaga look very weak, pale, hungry and wretched. According to her some of them have been there for over 20 years, and engaged in menial jobs, fetching water and work as farm hands for leftover food and paltry sums of money. She further asserted that, it is only fate that determines how they live or eat. She also observed that, their ventilation is very poor and their mud-thatched houses look just like the local hencoops. They live in constant misery and dare not go back to their communities, since they have been stigmatized by the same communities and are likely to be lynched should they attempt to return.¹³³

The alleged witches and their children live in varying degrees of discomfort and penury. Some do not have access to safe drinking water and are compelled to walk miles in the blistering heat during the harmattan season to fetch water. Others perform hard labour in the fields of nearby villages in exchange for bowls of cereal or tubers of yam. Those who are fortunate have families that cater for them and occasionally send them food; others are rejected by their families and left to fend for themselves or rely on the benevolence of neighbors and NGOs that provide them with food aid¹³⁴.

¹³² Elom Dovlo, *Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana*, 80

¹³³ Hajia Amina Adam, “what goes on at Gambaga Witches Camp”, (*Mirror*, 5th August 2000), 19.

¹³⁴ Joseph Ziem, *Don't Rushed Disbandment of Witches Camps* (Published in the July Edition of the *Advocate*, 2015).

Schauber maintained that, the alleged witches are denied their basic human rights: these include the right to food, the right to physical wellbeing, the right to free movement and even right to life¹³⁵. Women accused of witchcraft in Northern Ghana, are mainly those without a solid economic base. From this perspective, the exclusionary dynamics of witchcraft accusation are tangible; gender and poverty dynamics stimulates accusation of witchcraft.

Naa Alhassan Issahaku Amadu, the Northern Regional Population Officer, also observed that, the continuous witchcraft allegations and the camping of alleged witches in poverty Northern Ghana is further weakening the family unit or social networks. It can also be said to be responsible for increasing the illiteracy and school dropout levels, reducing the social value of grandmothers, mothers, sisters, aunties and children¹³⁶. The researcher observed that, witchcraft accusation and banishment of alleged witches to the witch camps is not only a social and moral issue, but it is a serious violation of the fundamental human rights of the alleged witches.

4.3.1 The Effect of Banishment on the Alleged Witches

The belief in witchcraft is so intense in Northern Ghana to the extent that people believed to be witches and wizards are isolated and banished to various witch camps. This policy means that the accused is denied a right to reside where he/she chooses and must live away from her immediate family. As it is usually the aged ladies who are mostly treated this way, they are thus denied family support. It also implies denial of access to their property such as houses, land and chattels.

The phenomenon of witch camps is perceived as a place whereby the alleged witch is protected from being attacked by her accusers while at the same time she gets help from ritual experts equipped with the means to treat her and neutralize her from witchcraft spirit.

¹³⁵ Almuth Schauber Women and Witchcraft Allegations in Northern Ghana, 121.

¹³⁶ Joseph Ziem, (Published in the July Edition of the Advocate, 2015).

In some cases, it is believed that once the alleged witch is cured he/she is free to return to the community. The question however, is whether a reformed witch returning home will be allowed to live in dignity as a bona fide member of the community, and as one who does not feel maligned and disgraced. It is questionable whether such a person will receive the full cooperation of his/her community. Once the accusation has been made, it cannot be expunged; consequently, the supposed witch will never be able to redeem him/ herself. Such a person is liable to be accused in future when misfortune strikes in the community.

Moreover, in the context of the rural community, each member's needs are everybody's concern. For instance, people show concern for a member's ill-health, they defend a member when attacked by outsiders, and the person who is in need of assistance on the farm will be assisted. In the Northern part of Ghana, it is possible to mobilize the community to assist in cultivating a member's farm. However, in the case of a suspected witch who is considered as a dangerous person, community support cannot be expected. There is total break in family ties and there is no financial support from the family.

In some communities in the North, suspected witches are denied proper funeral rites. Dead witches are believed to be capable of resurrecting in some form hence they pose as a danger to the living. Therefore, their dead bodies are usually mutilated to prevent resurrection. Another psychological challenge, facing the alleged witches is the fact that they have developed inferiority complex. They are of the mindset that people consider them to be dangerous to society so they always move in groups; even when they are going to church, farm, or visiting the mission house.

According to them, they prefer moving together in groups in order to avoid being attacked by their accusers who may be hunting for them. They are also careful not to meddle in people's affairs, which may further aggravate their plight. Also, the social stigma cast on them does

not grant some of the strong women the moral courage to continue with active business. Due to witchcraft accusation, some families have destabilized, generating tension, division, and feuds in the families, clans, and communities. Friendships have been broken and others divorce their wives and husbands for the fear of witchcraft accusations.

Most of the alleged witches were previously married, but had to lose their husbands due to witchcraft accusation and banishment to the witch camps. Even though some of them especially the younger ones are fortunate to get remarried, it was never their intention to break their first marriages. This has immense negative consequences on the children and the rest of society.

4.3.2 Economic Challenges

The occupations of the alleged witches like those of the indigenous people of Gambaga are petty trading, shea-butter extraction, cotton spinning, firewood gathering, local soap making, beads making, among others. But due to inadequate capital, most of these activities are done on small scale to support the livelihood of the women. However, the women provide very cheap source of labour on farms for cash during plowing, weeding and harvesting seasons. They also sell water, crack groundnuts and also de-husk maize for farmers. These activities earn them meager income to sustain them. As a result they are malnourished and can easily be attacked by strange diseases. Some of the inmates also claim they sometimes work for the Gambarana and Tindana's (earth priests) in return for farm produce. But this according to them is on voluntary basis.

Mma Kankwaa, one of the alleged witches noted that, "some of us were not dependents but rather hardworking women who feed our families and strangers, but now we live on a meager sum of money given to us after working the whole day on people farms"* . In my investigations, one of the scarce commodities at the various camps is food. Most of these

women are too old to work for food, and are either blind, mentally ill or crippled. The women and their children look very lean and hungry and have no resistance to any diseases, because they do not get a balance diet. Dry seasons are normally the most difficult time for them to get food. During that season farm products have been harvested and most of the women do not get any work on the farms to do.

There is no potable water within the camp. Though, there are two old stand pipe sited within the camp, they are not functioning well. But the fact is that, these alleged witches in the Gambaga camp in Northern Ghana are deprived of many basic socio-economic amenities such as electricity, pipe-borne water, clinics, schools, market places and community centers. Moreover, due to the inability to continue with their various income generating activities, these women become destitute.

4.4 Role Played by Coalition of NGOs and CBOs

The issue of witchcraft accusations, banishment, and witch camps are not new to Ghanaians. However, it has in the recent past been a source of controversy and worry to many Ghanaians especially those who have the interest of women at heart. Since the issue of witch camps was brought to the limelight, there have been responses and interventions by various NGOs, Community-Based Organization (CBOs), CHRAJ and religious organizations.

In recent years, the NGOs and CBOs in the three Northern Regions came together to initiate a programme known as the Anti-witchcraft Allegation Campaign (AWAC). This was necessary because it had been alleged that, the belief in witchcraft was a “forbidden myth” to be discussed in the culture of some communities in the Northern part of Ghana. This myth however got broken when the coalition launched the campaign to educate people. The campaign took the form of workshops for opinion leaders in various communities in Northern Ghana. The advocacy group which they formed also distributed posters and flyers throughout

the community. The programme was assisted and funded by the German Development Cooperation (DED)¹³⁷.

Interventions by other organizations such as The Widows and Orphans Ministry, the Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC), Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Commission on Human Right and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), ActionAid Ghana and religious bodies such as the Presbyterian Go-home Project, and the Catholic Relief Service (CRS), among others. All these NGOs and CBOs aim at addressing witchcraft related violence and the phenomenon of witch camps in Northern Ghana.

For the NGOs seeking to improve the condition of accused witches in Northern Ghana, their work is effective in providing basic needs and services. However, education initiatives and media information fail to significantly address the source of the problem as there is no visible decrease in witchcraft accusations.

In the aftermath of the CHRAJ Commissioner`s visit in 1998 to the Gambaga Witch Camp and his subsequent order that the alleged witches be released to go back home, the response from alleged witches was rather surprising because of their refusal to go home. Even when the Gambarana gave them permission to leave, they refuse to. Similarly, in 1998, after the Women Parliamentary Caucus had visited the Gambaga Witch Camp, and presented cloths, food items and utensils, the fervent pleas from the alleged witches to the female parliamentarians was for the government to allow them to live in the Camp for the rest of their lives, since they would die or be killed as soon as they return to their communities. They argued that the stigma attached to them, makes it impossible to return to live in the society that has traumatized, and banished them to the witch camps¹³⁸.

¹³⁷ Duut George Nangpaak, *The Gambaga 'Witches' Colony: Its Artistic and Cultural Life* (2007), 77

¹³⁸ Gabi Wailbel, 'Women at the Outskirt: The case of the "Witches" in Northern Ghana' (Workshop Report, Accra: August 2009. 31.

They found the camp as a sort of sanctuary. Similarly, when the Chairman of the Council of State, Alhaji Bawumia, during President Rawlings regime, paid a visit to the camp to call for their liberation, he was disappointed when the alleged witches themselves appealed to him to rather assist them out of their present socio-economic conditions instead of advocating for their return to their communities.

In June 1998, a meeting was held by the Mamprusi Traditional Council and representatives of FIDA. In the meeting, FIDA added its voice to the cry for their liberation. They maintained that, the witch camps violated Article 26(2) of the 1992 constitution and called for public education against the dehumanization aspect of witchcraft accusations and that all chiefs in Mamprugu should ensure that accused witches brought to the Gambarana for exorcism should be exorcised and allowed to return to their communities without delay¹³⁹.

To the researcher, this sounds excellent theoretically. However, practically, it is unrealistic to demand an immediate exorcism and release of the alleged witches to their communities, without ensuring that the very chiefs who are to supervise their return to the communities have themselves understood and appreciate the need for the role they are supposed to play in their liberation. It is equally important to get their subjects well educated on the need to get rid of negative and outmoded customs in the society. This is an issue that needs more tact, diplomacy, sensitization and advocacy rather than mere utterances and orders.

In a discussion with the manager of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project, he asserted that; regarding the various reactions and responses to the plea for their release, one can clearly conclude that the Gambarana is not an obstacle to their liberation. When he asked them to go back to their various towns and villages, they refused. For instance on the 23rd July 1998, about 150 alleged witches at the Gambaga Witch Camp were set free to go home. Instead of

¹³⁹ Wailbel, 'Women at the Outskirt, 31

stepping out to start enjoying their new freedom, the women refused to go home. About 60 of them who went home returned after being tortured. For example, Ayishetu, came back with one of her ears cut off. She was told that, it was just a warning. Next time she returns, the other ear will also go off¹⁴⁰.

In the year 2000 there were two NGOs working in only two of the six witch camps in Northern Ghana. Management Aid (MAID) a local NGO was active in Tindang Camp while the Presbyterian Go-Home project was active in Gambaga Witch Camp. MAID focus was to improve upon the structures of the Tindang Witch Camp, while the Go-Home Project approach was to reintegrate the accused witches to their various communities. There was however, no exchange of experiences between these two NGOs and the other organizations that provided relief to the alleged witches.¹⁴¹

Despite the efforts of the NGOs, CBOs, Presbyterian Go-Home Project, Human rights activists such as CHRAJ, NCWD, FIDA to resettle these women in their communities, it was unsuccessful. Due to the fear of being lynched in their communities, the women preferred to spend the rest of their lives in the witch camps.

Before the closure of the Bonyanse Witch Camp in 2014, the government of Ghana through the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs took a decision in 2011 and announced that, all the witch camps should be closed down in 2012. However, the alleged witches in various witch camps protested that they preferred to stay in the camps if proper negotiations had not been carried out in their communities to prevent further attacks, lynching and banishment.

ActionAid Ghana, in November 2011 organized a two day international forum on the various witch camps to bring together alleged witches, chiefs, priests, local government agencies and

¹⁴⁰ Discussion with Mr. Sampson Laar, (Presbyterian Go-Home Project Manager) at his Office-Gambaga, 29th January 2017.

¹⁴¹ Schauber, Women and Witchcraft Allegations in Northern Ghana, 136

CSOs. In a statement, the forum in agreement with the alleged witches resolved that government must put in place a road map for camps to be closed in a sustainable manner, so that once reintegrated, the alleged witches would feel safe in their communities and are able to support themselves.

The women with the help of ActionAid Ghana demonstrated their displeasure by marching through the principal streets of Tamale, the Northern Regional capital, holding placards which read; why are alleged witches always old women? Banishing of women into witch camps is unjust; and the government must act to restore the human rights of the alleged witches¹⁴². The women's plea was been recognized by the government. Subsequently, it was agreed the witch camps must be closed gradually. ActionAid Ghana and the Presbyterian Go-Home Project agreed that, their "ultimate objective is to reintegrate the women which will gradually close down the witch camps, but they are not going to force the women out because they see those camps as safe havens.

4.5 Disbanding Witch Camps

There has been overwhelming condemnation by government officials, human rights groups and NGOs of the spurious accusations of witchcraft against vulnerable women and children and the general consensus is that it is an infringement of the fundamental human rights of the alleged witches of such accusations.

As part of efforts to end human rights abuses associated with witchcraft accusations, the Bonyase Witch camp located in Central Gonja District in the Northern Region of Ghana was closed down on December 15th 2014. The Bonyase Camp was disbanded in attempt by the government of Ghana to erase what it considers as a stain on its human rights records. To live in isolation and discrimination is a violation of their human rights.

¹⁴² Anjali Kwatra, *Condemned Without Trial: Women and Witchcraft in Ghana*, Action Aid Report, September 2012.

According to Nana Oye Lithur, (who was then Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection), “it is unacceptable for human beings to undergo dehumanized process on assumption that they were witches without establishing proof of guilt. She added that the government will continue to dialogue with traditional leaders and stakeholders to disband the remaining camps”¹⁴³.

The Presbyterian Go-Home Project and ActionAid Ghana with support from other stakeholders including the Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Northern Regional House of Chiefs and many others have been following a road map towards the reintegration of the women and the closure of the remaining witch camps to secure the dignity and respect of the alleged witches. Closing down the witch camps and reintegrating the alleged witches are part of the process towards addressing the problem of witchcraft accusation. The programme to close down and disband the witch camps are genuine steps towards securing the human rights, liberties and freedoms of the alleged witches, as provided in the 1992 constitution of Ghana. To live in a witch camp is violation of human rights.

However, Leo Igwe’s, article published in the November 17, 2015 edition of the Daily Graphic, regarding witchcraft accusations in Ghana and the disbandment of witch camps in Northern Region, asserted that the closure of the Bonyase Witch Camp was “a step in the wrong direction and would endanger the lives of the victims of the accusation and further complicate efforts to tackle this cultural scourge”¹⁴⁴. He added that, “the pervasive belief in Ghana that people can harm others through witchcraft is the ‘elephant in the room’ that has to be called out, not safe places which alleged witches flee to”¹⁴⁵.

¹⁴³ Dasmani Laary, Ghana shuts down ‘Witches’ Camp, (Article Posted on Friday 19th December 2014.

¹⁴⁴ Leo Igwe, Daily Graphic, November 17th 2015.

¹⁴⁵ Igwe, Daily Graphic, November 17th 2015.

In the end, he calls on the government to focus on shutting down witchcraft belief and accusations, not the witch camps. To him, the government of Ghana needs to retrace its steps and focus its energy and resources on addressing the phenomenon of witchcraft allegations. Witch camps are the consequences, not the disease. He further maintained that, most people living in the witch camps did not just take residency there without any reason. People in these camps are accused persons who were convicted at shrines or banished by families and would have been killed if they had stayed back in their communities, and had not taken refuge at these witch camps¹⁴⁶.

In the year 2015, the Government of Ghana again wanted to close down the Tindan-zhie Witch Camp located in the Gushiegu district shortly after the closure of the Bonyanse witch camp. But the local NGO, AWACC, wrote a letter to the Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection drawing her attention to their position on this issue.

It states: “we do agree and support the idea to close down these witch camps. However, we propose that the process be carried out through a long term planning alongside various innovative interventions (looking at between 7 to 15 years) with more focus on intensive public education, undertaking gradual processes, multi-partnership and consultations at all level to avoid duplication of efforts, bearing in mind the interest of the victims, their families and communities these women will be reintegrated to eliminate backlash.”¹⁴⁷

The group makes it clear that closing the witch camps has little or no bearing on the challenges on the ground. The coalition believes that, the immediate closure of these camps does not resolve issues of accusations and banishment in their communities. The group is also concerned about how the women will survive when they return home. They are worried

¹⁴⁶ Igwe, Daily Graphic, November 17th 2015.

¹⁴⁷ Leo Igwe, ‘Witchcraft Accusation: Is Disbanding ‘Witches Camps’ The Solution? (Daily Graphic November 15th 2015).

because the women who were sent back to their communities and homes still lack any vocational or employment skills to become economic and self-dependent which will still make them become social liabilities or more vulnerable to witchcraft accusation and banishment.

The coalition makes it clear that, the alleged witches in these camps will be at risk when they are forced to return to their communities, especially communities since these victims hail from very deprived rural areas without access to police and other law enforcement agencies. They also foresee the possibility of these women being poisoned to death, if family members can no longer contain them.

The group highlights a disturbing outcome of the closure of the Bonyase Camp. They noted that, “it is sad and disappointing to note that, only 3 days after the ceremony held in Tamale (Monday, 15th December 2014) to have officially closed down the Bonyase witch camp, 2 out of the 5 alleged witches (namely Napari Abdulai and Adisah Iddrisu from Jakpahi and Mankpan respectively) had to immediately relocated to the Gnani Witch Camp near Yendi”.¹⁴⁸ This is a justification of their claim that, hurriedly proposed closure of the witch camps cannot be sustained. Calling for the closure of witch camps is like campaigning to shut down a refugee camp when the war is still in progress.

In a focus group discussion with the alleged witches at Gambaga Witch Camp, almost all the women were against the disbandment of witch camps. They were afraid of being killed if the camps are closed down and they are forcefully returned to their communities. They maintained that they were content in the camps and could not risk going back to their former homes.

¹⁴⁸Igwe, ‘Witchcraft Accusation: Is Disbanding ‘Witches Camps’ The Solution?’

Schauber indicates that, “the existence of witch camps only constitutes the visible tip of the iceberg of a violent manifestation of the belief in witchcraft. Dismantle or not, they are not the reason for the ostracisation of the women. Exiling of women is caused by a violent manifestation of the belief in witchcraft. Therefore, the allegation and not the belief in witchcraft as such is the prime problem”¹⁴⁹.

Therefore most organizations working to address witchcraft accusations are of the opinion that it would be appropriate to for the state to take time in closing the camps to prevent creating more problems with a forceful closure. This could be achieved by not admitting new accused witches into these camps.

4.6 Addressing the Challenges of the Gambaga Witch Camp and the Abuse of Women`s Human Rights

The Gambaga witch Camp has been created, where individuals accused of witchcraft are usually forced to live there for safety purposes. The alleged witches were threatened with lynching and they go on self-imposed exile at the witch camp. The 1992 constitution established that citizens are entitled to certain rights and freedoms. These include; equality before the law, freedom from torture, cruelty and inhuman treatment. Every citizen deserved to be treated with human dignity, however, women at the witch camp are tagged as witches with no legal justifications. They are illegally banished from their families and communities. They live in the camp without their families and they cannot participate in the community life of their own villages. Since the 1992 constitution guarantees the freedom of movement and association among others, of every citizen, the alleged witches irrespective of their conditions have the right to participate in every lawful social activity of their choice in the community.

In a focus group discussion, the assertion of the alleged witches seems to suggest that they were well integrated in the camp. They clearly made it known that, their relations with one

¹⁴⁹ Schauber Women and Witchcraft Allegations in Northern Ghana, 123.

another was cordial and they supported each other. However, over 50 percent of the alleged witches in Gambaga said they experienced loneliness. Indeed these women are psychologically traumatized, they miss their relatives back at home and this could degenerate into other mental health problems. It is not a good experience for one to leave his/her community under such an unpleasant circumstance and relocated elsewhere tagged as a witch camp. The researcher further enquired from the alleged witches if they would like to be reintegrated into their families and communities. Again, about 80 percent of the alleged witches interviewed did not want to go back home. This could be due to the treatment meted out to them when they were accused and they also appear to have found the camps safer.

In the same vein, the respondents of the Gambaga and Nalerigu communities were of the view that the alleged witches would not be accepted back into their communities. When the same question cropped up in the focus group discussions, majority of the alleged witches at the Gambaga and Tindang camps were not interested in any reintegration for fear of further accusations, stigmatization and rejection. They cited examples of some colleagues who went home only to be chased back to the camps a month later. They however maintained that, they will only go back home on condition that their relatives come to ask for their release and ensure their lives would be protected.

The investigation also exposed the procedure the alleged witches go through on arrival at the camps to ascertain whether they are actually witches, which can be described as rituals. The concoction or potion they were made to drink in order to confess or to disarm them could constitute into human right abuse since one can die in the process. The potion of this concoction was not established. There is therefore, the need for further investigation to establish whether it does not contain any poisonous substance that can adversely affect their health.

In relation to the abolition of the witch camp, the overwhelming majority, about 95 percent of the alleged witches vehemently opposed to the abolition of the camp, while few of them were in favor of its abolishing. Almost all respondents comprising of chiefs, elders and opinion leaders of Nalerigu and Gambaga were also against the disbandment of the camp.

According to the respondents, the major challenges facing the alleged witches at the camp include, financial, isolation, mental trauma, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, their childrens education and other basic needs. Electricity seems to be the facility majority of the inmates had a problem with, since almost all the respondents of the alleged witches complained that, this facility is nonexistent. At the focus group discussion, the alleged witches from Gambaga Witch Camp made mention of a small solar panel that is not working. A substantial number of alleged witches rated their access to good drinking water to be very poor. Housing facilities also appears to be a big challenge for the alleged witches. Over 95 percent of the inmates were of the opinion that their situation was very poor. However, the alleged witches indicated that the water facility was better.

Another challenge is the nonexistent of social amenities such as schools, clinics and recreational centers in these camps to enhance the learning process of their children. Lack of these social amenities means that the children at the camp will also be like their mothers and grandmothers, spending the rest of their lives as social outcasts. There is no doubt that the allegation leveled against these women and their children, violates their basic rights to decent livelihood, clothing, health and accommodation.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter which is the report of field research has examined and discussed the challenges and living conditions of the Gambaga Witch Camp in the Northern Region of Ghana. Apart from examining and addressing the challenges of the witch camp, two other witch camps

have also been discussed for comparison purposes. The chapter has discussed among other things, such as the history of Gambaga Witch Camp, rituals of identification of alleged witch, the rituals of test of innocence, among others. Apart from identifying the various challenges and living conditions through data analysis interviews and interpretations, the chapter also examined the role played by coalition of NGOs, and CBOs as well as the attempt made by the government of Ghana to disband the witch camps among others. The next chapter will discuss and focus on the role of the Presbyterian Go-Home project in Gambaga witch camp which is trying to reintegrate and repatriate the alleged witches back to their families



CHAPTER FIVE

THE ROLE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN GO-HOME PROJECT IN GAMBAGA WITCH CAMP

5.1 Introduction

In chapter four, we discussed the report of the field research which examined and identified the challenges and living conditions of the Gambaga witch camp in the Northern Region of Ghana. The aim of this chapter is to analyze and evaluate the role and performance of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project in supporting and reintegrating the alleged witches of the Gambaga Witch Camp, back to their original communities and families. It also examine the aims and objectives of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project as well as their programme of activities, achievements and challenges in the area of reintegration of the alleged witches to determine how the project has contributed in addressing the challenges of the Gambaga witch camp.

5.2 History of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project

As part of her social responsibility, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana started their first support programme for the alleged witches of Gambaga Out-cast Home, (now known as witch camp) in 1960 as a result of the daily visits to the alleged witches by the late Rev. P.Y Anane who was then the District Pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana at Gambaga. The women eventually became members of his congregation and he took care of their basic needs such as, feeding, clothing and shelter.

This support system became necessary due to the fact that, in the early 1960's the number of women in the camp became too large for the Gambarana alone to manage in terms of providing accommodation, feeding, clothing, health care, among others. Rev.

Anane was touched by the plight of the women and therefore sought assistance from some Christian friends and sympathizers. He got assistance in the form of used clothing and some food items for the women. Though, this was quite helpful but the women still needed more assistance.

Rev. Anane was often called in when any of them fell sick. He would take them to the Nalerigu Baptist Medical Centre for treatment, and if death occurs, he was often called by the Gambarana to give the corpse a decent burial. Rev. Anane was nicknamed “the father of witches”. When asked by the alleged witches why he loved them so much when their own families rejected them, Rev. Anane always responded by saying that, “God loves you so much and cares for you all, that is the reason why I also love you and I will care for you.”¹⁵⁰

In 1994, though, the Presbyterian church of Ghana (PCG) appreciated the initiative of Rev. P.Y. Anane, the church still saw the need to look beyond what was being done for the women, that is, provision of basic needs or relief services by the pastors. Therefore, the then Langbinsi Agricultural Station Manager, Mr. Dan Kolbilla who is now the Director for Development and Social Services in the Northern Presbytery initiated the project on behalf of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. After one year of operation, he handed over the project to the Garu Community- Based Rehabilitation Centre (CBR).

However, in March 1994, the church saw that, her involvement with the Out-cast Home should be more of a rehabilitation process than just providing relief services to the alleged witches. Therefore, the Presbyterian Community- Based Rehabilitation programme (CBR) for disabled persons at Garu were consulted to take over the task of rehabilitating the alleged witches of the Gambaga Out-cast Home. The main

¹⁵⁰ Sampson Laar, ‘Gambaga Outcast Home Project: Half-year Narrative Report Submitted to PWS&D’ (July-December 2010), 2.

objective of the Presbyterian Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programme was to continue the support but also think about reintegration of the women back to their original homes without problems.

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana therefore sought funding for the project from some of their donor partners to achieve this laudable vision. According to Mr. Edward Dahamani, (the former Garu CBR Coordinator), the first donor partners for the project was Rev. Gehard Hofmeister and his congregation in Lowenstein-Germany who supported the programme from the beginning. It was also envisaged that funding would be borne by the German organizations such as Bread for the World, Eze and Evangelische Tanguinstatt of Germany, as sponsoring agencies. He added that their funding helped them to create awareness on the abuse of the rights of the alleged witches and to improve their living condition at the camp. It also made it possible for them to reintegrate four accused women in 1995¹⁵¹

The CBR centre was therefore charged with the following responsibilities; to build up a rehabilitation programme suitable for both the members of the camp and those that would be reintegrated into their original families in their communities. There was therefore, the need to engage permanent staff to run the programme effectively. The Gambaga Outcast Home project therefore came into being with the aim of providing humanitarian support for members of the Gambaga witch camp and also to facilitate their reintegration into their families and communities.

Their activities were to include regular home visits, carrying out outreach programmes, organizing awareness creation workshops, provision of health services to members of the home, and organizing members of the home and the reintegrated into groups for basic training in small business management skills and provision of micro-credits. They were also

¹⁵¹ Edward Dahamani, 'Gambaga Outcast Home Project, Final Proposal For Support to Rehabilitate Suspected witches at Gambaga', (February 1996), 14.

tasked to ensure the provision of formal education to children of school going age in the home and to continue providing relief services to the women¹⁵².

Today, in addition to the Presbyterian Church of Ghana Go-Home Project, other NGOs are also known for their efforts to ease the burden of the alleged witches. There are also some innovative projects, targeting the communities of origin of the alleged witches as well as the host communities of the other camps. Nevertheless, most of these activities seemed to be concentrated in Gambaga and Tindang Witch Camps which are only two out of the four witch camps in Northern Ghana.

Even though, the Presbyterian Go-Home Project works exclusively at the Gambaga Witch Camp, they however collaborate and share ideas with other NGOs to address the challenges of witch camps in Northern Ghana. For instance, they share ideas with ActionAid Ghana, Anti-Witchcraft Coalition Campaign (AWACC), Songtaba, a local based NGO in Yendi, Management Aid (MAID), and the National Committee on Disbandment of Witch Camps in Northern Ghana.

5.3 The Development of the Gambaga Outcast Home into a Project (The Presbyterian Go- Home Project).

The Gambaga Outcast Home Project now called the Presbyterian Go- Home Project became formally operational and run as a development project since 1994 through the joint initiative of Ms. Comfort Ntiamoah Mensah, the then Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) Development Officer and the former Manager of the Presbyterian Agricultural Station at Langbinsi (Mr. Dan Kolbilla) with funding support from

¹⁵² Edward Dahamani, 'Gambaga Outcast Home Project' (February 1996), 12.

Germany after his visit to present a paper on “Witchcraft in Northern Ghana: the Case of the Gambaga Witch Camp”¹⁵³.

The Project “Go-Home” as the name implies, is the hope and prayer that, with education and other basic support, the alleged witches would eventually be accepted into their various communities from which they hail from. However, this project name is an acronym for Gambaga Outcast Home Project (“Go-Home Project”). It is limited only to the Gambaga Witch Camp and ran by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.

The inception of the project resulted in the formation of the local council of churches and an advisory committee in 1996 to jointly take oversight responsibility of the alleged witches. It was through this initiative that a lot of support was received from Christian communities from various parts of the country especially those in the southern part of Ghana. These came in a form of used clothing and food for the women. Other churches involved were: the Assemblies of God church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Baptist church. Together they formulated strategies to take good care of the alleged witches. The project which was handed over to the Garu Community- Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Centre for management as a social intervention project began to take a formal shape in 1998, with the appointment of Mr. Simon Ngota, as the Project’s first Coordinator stationed at Gambaga.

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, through the Department for Development and Social Services at the Head Office provided a vehicle to facilitate the re-integration programmes and for the movement of the women to the hospital in times of sickness. An officer (Madam. Gladys Lariba Mahama) was also appointed by the Head Office of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana to assist Mr. Ngota. Her job was to conduct daily visitations

¹⁵³ Sampson Laar, ‘Gambaga Outcast Home Project; Half-Year Narrative Report, (July-December 2010), 2.

to the camp and to counsel the alleged witches on sanitation and maintenance of healthy living.

Currently the project has three staff members with Mr. Sampson Laar as the Project Supervisor and Manager after the resignation of Simon Ngota in 2010, Madam Gladys Lariba Mahama as the Project Officer, Francis Mensah as the driver, and Jonathan Malnaba as the Project finance Officer. The Northern and Upper Presbyteries oversees the Go-Home Project as part and parcel of their development project within the two Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. The Director for Development and Social Services at the Presbytery level receive reports and supervises the project for the achievement of results.

However, in 2013, the Project Officer, Madam Gladys Lariba pursued the Special Ministerial Training (SSMT) at Akropong and was Commissioned as a Rev. Minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. She was replaced by Mad. Ruth Aloriweh as the Programme Officer. According to Sampson Laar, the aim and mission of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project is to ensure that alleged witches get basic needs in life and are finally reintegrated peacefully back to their home communities through education, negotiations, and advocacy¹⁵⁴.

Currently, the project plan of activities is moving on smoothly through the funding support by the Presbyterian World Services and Development (PWS&D), which is the development and relief agency of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. As at now, it is the only donor partner providing funding for the running of the project. The other supporting agencies are the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, and the East Mamprusi District Assembly. The Assembly provided the camp with a grinding mill to facilitate the income generating activities of the inmates. However, the corn mill ceased to function due to high cost of electricity bills. In 2014, an NGO known as Helping Africa Foundation donated a

¹⁵⁴ Sampson Laar, 'Gambaga Outcast Home Project: Half-Year Narrative Report to upper Presbytery' (July-December 2013), 1.

double-Cabin pickup vehicle (Foton Tuland) to the project to facilitate its work in the area of reintegration of the alleged witches.

5.3.1 Project Management

The day-to-day administration and running of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project is entrusted into a Project Manager appointed by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Others includes the programme officer, the finance officer, and the project driver. However, to ensure effective and successful administration of the project, an Advisory Board is appointed to supervise their activities. Their functions include: planning, monitoring and evaluation of programmes, as well as approving reports and budgets.

The Advisory Board is made up of the project manager, and some key stakeholders namely: the Presbyterian Church of Ghana being represented by the District Minister of the PCG-Gambaga as the chairman of the Board, the District Assembly represented by the Coordinating Director of the Assembly. Others include; the President of the Local Council of Churches, District Head of Department of Social Welfare, Head of Department- CHRAJ, Magazia(the alleged witches representative) and a representative of the Gambarana (the witch doctor and the custodian of the camp). The Advisory Board meets quarterly to review the level of achievements made, identified challenges and to plan the way forward in making sure that the project achieved desired results. They are also to ensure that decisions taken during Board meetings are implemented successfully for the benefit of the alleged witches.

5.3.2 The Role of the Go-Home Project

According to Dovlo, “long before issues related to the ‘witch camps’ were brought to the attention of the nation through the media, various church organizations like the Presbyterian Church of Ghana had tried to help victims of witchcraft accusation in the Gambaga Witch

Camp”¹⁵⁵. The Presbyterian Church of Ghana regarded the alleged witches as outcasts who have lost their human dignity due to witchcraft accusation. This throws a big challenge to the church. The church therefore initiated this project to address the living conditions and challenges facing these unfortunate women.

The long term vision of the Go-Home Project is that, the practice of accusing, torturing, harassing, and banishing women from their communities to the witch camps will be completely eradicated, so that there will be no reason to have witch camps any longer in Northern Ghana. The current project manager, Sampson Laar enumerated the goal of the Go-Home Project as follows:¹⁵⁶

- The project staff tries to find a way of reintegrating the women back to their original communities through negotiations with their family members, chiefs and opinion leaders.
- The project provides advocacy initiatives on witchcraft and women’s rights with other partners such as, Care International Ghana, Action Aid Ghana, and the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection.
- The project also provides some livelihood support to the alleged witches in a form of income generating activities while they are in the ‘outcast home’ and when they return to their original communities as a way of improving their living conditions and sustaining them.
- The project staff, ministers of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and other men of God also visit the accused women to counsel them in order to live peacefully with other members at the camp and also to identify and provide their immediate needs such as health, clothing and food related items.

¹⁵⁵ Elom Dovlo, ‘Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana’ 84.

¹⁵⁶ Sampson Laar, ‘Presbyterian Go-Home Project: Annual Report to Upper Presbytery’ (December 2012), 2.

The idea of reintegration is the greatest role of the Go-Home Project. It is their singular objective that these alleged witches will leave the camp and be reunited with their families. This will bring total closure to the witch camp in Gambaga. Even though, the Go-Home Project in Gambaga has succeed in achieving its major objective of repatriating and reintegrating many of those who the alleged witches to a large extent, many more camp inmates refuse to go back to their communities. This throws a big challenge to the Go-Home Project which is trying to reintegrate all the women back into their communities and with their families.

5.4 Aims and Objectives of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project

The Presbyterian Gambaga Outcast Home Project commonly known as Go-Home Project provides services to the alleged witches in the Gambaga Witch Camp. The primary aim of the project is to negotiate the return and reintegration of women who have been banished from their homes and communities back to their families. Though the church sought to curtail the number of women brought to the camp, reintegration and repatriation became the main focus of the work. Edward Dahamani, the Presbyterian Go-Home Project former manager outlines the objectives of the project as follows:¹⁵⁷

- To provide the women with a means of generating income, a few days upon arrival to give them an income security.
- To provide food, shelter, and other basic necessities to the alleged witches.
- To assist the alleged witches in the camp to farm and engage in income generating activities to fend for themselves.
- To educate and create awareness in the communities where the women are coming from, to desist from banishing women to the Gambaga camp as witches, and to accept those already in the camp back, and to be reintegrated.

¹⁵⁷ Edward Dahamani, 'Gambaga Outcast Home Project' (Report to Northern Mission Field, 1996), 12.

- To initiate a strong community advocacy programme to create awareness in the communities on the human rights of the women.
- To provide essential medical support to the women in collaboration with the Baptist Medical Centre in Nalerigu and other existing hospitals.
- To register all the alleged witches and their children with the National Health Insurance Scheme.
- To rehabilitate or reintegrate the accused women back to their communities and their families with a settlement package to start their own businesses.
- To educate the girl-child or grandchildren of the accused women in the home and returnees, since there is a basic belief that witchcraft is passed on to them.
- To assist families to be reintegrated properly with suspected witches by supporting them with small business loan for income generating groups within the communities, which includes the alleged witches.

Under each specific objective are many activities carried out to achieve the above-stated objectives. These are explained below:

For instance, on the issue of accommodation of the alleged witches, the Go-Home Project always support the Gambarana to repair the roofs of their huts, mend cracked walls, and to put up new huts that collapsed during the rainy season. The project also tries to prevent outbreak of diseases within the camp by ensuring that the environment is kept clean. Members of the home together with their children are vaccinated against CSM, yellow fever, among others. When they encounter any health-related problem, they are sent to the Gambaga Health Centre for treatment and in serious cases, they are referred to the Baptist Medical Centre at Nalerigu. Eye cases are either handled by Bolgatanga Mobile Eye team or Bawku Eye Unit, especially when they are to undergo some operations.

The project has also organized the strong women to embark on farming to feed themselves. In difficult times, the project buys grains as supplement. The Catholic Relief Services (CRS) also support the women with food aid occasionally. Other organizations, for example, the Presbyterian Congregation in the Southern part of Ghana occasionally send in some used clothing for the women. Currently, the children of the alleged witches in the camp are forty-nine in number. They are all supported to be enrolled in schools and some are now in secondary and tertiary institutions. It is important to emphasize that, education is the bedrock of development. If the children are well educated, they will not accept such blatant disregard from the abuse of human rights and the brutalities meted to their mothers and grandmothers or to themselves. This will gradually lead to the reduction of this horrible practice of banishing women out of their marital homes. Apart from these, the project also pays visits to the villages of the accused witches to counsel the relatives to consider accepting their people back to their communities.

When they succeeded reintegrating the women they made follow-up visits and form women groups in the communities, and the reintegrated women are included in the groups. They are made leaders. These group members are given some basic training in small business management and are supported with some capital to start the business. This method helps the alleged witches to be peacefully and properly reintegrated within their communities.

Healthcare programmers are also put in place to educate the people on the causes of diseases such CSM, high fever, and others which are often wrongly attributed to witchcraft. By these objectives, the Presbyterian Go-Home Project seeks first of all to address the living conditions and the challenges confronting the alleged witches and then tend to gradually reintegrate them back into their original communities.

5.5 Reintegration and Repatriation Programme

It is important to emphasize that one of the most precious things in life for every human being is to stay at a place where he/she feels happy and live freely and peacefully with family members and the entire community. This is not the case for the alleged witches, some of whom are at the terminals of their life on earth. Something positive needs to be done to encourage reintegration of these accused witches back to their roots. The Presbyterian Church of Ghana therefore realizes that this would only succeed through a gradual process of reintegration instead of using force to stop the practice. The church realizes that the use of force will only encourage the inhumane acts of lynching the suspected witches quietly in the communities as was the practice many years ago.

The main goal of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project is to work towards total disarmament of the Gambaga witch camp through reintegration and repatriation of the alleged witches back to their original communities or relocate them to their families for a peaceful co-existence through advocacy (that is education and negotiation). The advocacy initiatives take place at the community level using different categories of stakeholders, such as chiefs, Assembly members, opinion leaders, youth groups, among others, in the reintegration process. The project uses tools such as dialogue, mediations and negotiations, lobbying and campaigning to reach its target groups at the communities where the alleged witches are coming from.

The reintegration programme which is to negotiate with the family members, traditional rulers and opinion leaders of the communities where the alleged witches hail from is very vital to the success of the whole exercise. The intervention of the Go-Home project in the repatriation programme has also worked very well to the admiration of many people. The repatriation programme is the process of negotiation to send back alleged witches to their original homes or communities immediately or after some few days when the de-witching rituals is performed by the witch doctor (Gambarana), which is believed to make the person

impotent and not dangerous to the community. The returnees are accompanied by the project staff to ensure their safety in their communities after several education and advocacy has taken place. This is necessary because when they have no support, they stand the chance of being re-accused and brutalized or lynched. This is the more reason why most alleged witches preferred to stay at the Gambaga Witch Camp for the rest of their lives than going back home to die.

5.5.1 How does the reintegration work?

According to Ruth Aloriweh (Go-Home Programme Officer), in an interview explained to me that, when an accused woman arrives at the Gambaga Camp after going through the necessary rituals by the Gambarana (witch doctor), she is first of all interviewed by the Go-Home Staff members in order to ascertain her background and compile a profile of the person, for example, her family, marital status, tribe, the community or the village she is coming from, the cause of accusation and banishment, and to assess the potential for her return¹⁵⁸.

According to Ruth, the Go-Home staff will then visit the village or the community which banished the woman for consultations and negotiations regarding her reintegration. This often requires lengthy discussion, lobbying, and negotiations to ensure that the alleged witch will not be at risk if she returns. The Go-Home project officers usually negotiate and discussed with the village chiefs, opinion leaders and family members of the accused women for their possible return, but not directly emphasized on education of witchcraft or attempt to deny the existence of witchcraft to eradicate the witchcraft belief in its interventions. As noted by the

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Ruth Aloriwe, (Go-Home Programme Officer) at Gambaga 30th January 2017.

former coordinator, Simon Ngota, “attempt to change people’s belief would be counter-productive and may threaten the work of the Go-Home project”¹⁵⁹

Therefore, after a lengthy negotiation, the chief will have to talk to the community himself. If the situation is still hostile they do not proceed. But if the situation is favourable for the woman to return, they check her future accommodation, and economic options. As noted earlier, they also provided a micro-credit for the accused woman who is reintegrated and some other women in the village. This ensures that she can trade and will be involved in a women’s group to prove to the community that she is not dangerous but useful to the society. During her return, she is accompanied by the Presbyterian Go-Home staff and a representative of the Gambarana (witch doctor), to ensure that she is fully accepted and reintegrated back to her family. In some cases, enlightened children of some of the alleged witches also do come to demand the return of their mothers, but that is when they feel the woman is weak and considered exorcised by the witch doctor (Gambarana).

The Go-Home project works with the accused witches and their villages to achieve reconciliation and to make peace between or within families. Unlike other NGOs, the Go-Home project manager has his office and works in the camp on a daily basis, thus the relationship between the project and the Gambarana as well as the alleged witches in the camp and their family members, both at the camp and in their home villages is very cordial. As a religious organization, the Presbyterian Go-Home project also works with local council of churches to provide ecumenical partnership in the camp, where prayer services and spiritual support are available daily. In Go-Home’s reintegration efforts, the role of traditional authorities is central and the chiefs are consulted before any other village resident or family member. In addition to their influence on public opinion, the willingness of a chief to accept the return of an accused witch is considered to be a guarantee that the woman will not be

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Simon Ngota (Former Go-Home Project Coordinator), at Gambaga, 31st January 2017.

harmed once she returns to the village. The reintegrated women are also visited regularly by the Go-Home staff to ensure their continued safety. Part of the reintegration and the reconciliation process which Go-Home facilitates involves periodic visits where the reintegrated women are brought to the camp, or accused women to their villages in order to diffuse the sense of anxiety and insecurity for both parties. These efforts are generally successful though, progress towards this method may take time.

The Go-Home Project organizes advocacy programmes and has conducted education initiatives in various communities in the Northern Region on the rights of the alleged witches. Also, health education is seen as essential as it provides people with information that allows them to differentiate illness from witchcraft attack. The, Go-Home Project also organizes educational workshops in the villages where majority of women have been banished or lynched to inform the people of the illegality of the action. These efforts have targeted chiefs specifically by seeking their commitment to prevent violence, banishment and lynching of suspected witches in the future.

5.5.2 Some Challenges of the Go-Home Project

The Go-Home Project Manager in an interview stated that, about ten (10) alleged witches are said to have been reintegrated annually. He however emphasized that, three factors have adversely affected the programme. First, he observed that, even though the project managed to reintegrate and repatriate more alleged witches back home, this did not stop new ones from being banished to the camp. Thus, while between the year 2010 and 2016, 145 alleged witches were successfully reintegrated with their families, 120 others were admitted into the Gambaga Witch Camp. Secondly, it has been reported that some women who were reintegrated with their communities were found dead in mysterious circumstances. The third factor is that, though, the communities have agreed to accept back the alleged witches, some

few women were re-accused and sent back to the witch camp¹⁶⁰. Though, these incidents are heartbreaking to the Go-Home staff, however, there are evidence to show that the project is making a lot of success in its operation at the Gambaga witch camp.

The Presbyterian Go-Home Narrative Report for 2016 indicated that, two alleged witches reintegrated were re-accused and brought back to the Gambaga Witch Camp. These women had gone through the purification rituals successfully performed by the Gambarana (witch doctor) and their fees for the rituals paid by the Go-Home project, and successfully reintegrated. However, Fatimah Pancha who was reunited with her family at Yunyoo was re-accused when the same sick child for the reason she was first accused died. Fatima stayed at home for almost four months. In another development, Dahamatu Tampuri also went home at Kpavaka and was re-accused for almost in a similar case when a child fell sick and the community members suspected her again. Her accusation became very serious as the chief of the community invited the project staff to peacefully take her back to the Gambaga Witch Camp, to avoid possible brutalities, torture and lynching¹⁶¹.

The Go-Home project considered the above re-accusation as a worry to their efforts to reintegrate the alleged witches. According to Sampson Laar, more mechanisms have been put in place to avoid future re-accusation of the reintegrated alleged witches. He noted that, the project, together with the chiefs, saw this action by the people as a disrespect to the chiefs from the communities where alleged witches were re-accused. This was an indication that, some of the communities did not accept and were not convinced with the purification rituals being performed by the Gambarana. This shows disrespect and disregard to the custom and

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Sampson Laar, at Go-Home Office at Gambaga 4th February 2017.

¹⁶¹ Sampson Laar, 'Gambaga Outcast Home Project; Narrative Report to PWS&D-Canada; (July-December, 2016), 14.

tradition of the Mamprusis', especially for disobeying the traditional ruler and the great priest chief of Mamprugu (the Gambarana)¹⁶².

In Northern Ghana, chiefs play very important roles within traditional set ups. They are listened to and obeyed by their subjects and are regarded as fathers of the communities. Their advice to family members are not taken for granted. Thus, if a chief decides that a suspected witch should not be cast out of the community, its members would obey. On the other hand, any chief of a village can vehemently refuse to have anything to do with a woman accused of witchcraft. This means such a person must leave that community and go to the witch camp. The Go-Home project in their approach also targets local chiefs to carry out the programme of reintegration of alleged witches to their communities, and possibly desist from bringing suspected witches to the Gambaga Witch Camp.

The Go-Home project therefore tasked the local authorities, especially the Assembly members to help the village chiefs to prevent and advocate for the rights of the alleged witches. Sampson Laar further observed that, things that did not go on well with the project during the period was when families refused to accept returnees back when all purification rites were performed by the Gambarana. He observed that, it is generally believed that witches do not need mercy and sympathy in anyway. The belief is that if they are treated harshly by beating and brutalizing them, they will release the souls of their victims. In some cases even the corpses of the suspected witches would not be accepted for burial in their original communities or towns. A total deprivation of a decent burial which is a mark of last respect for humanity is in cases meted out to the departed. Community members therefore, are being educated and encouraged to eliminate such perception by the project team and rather think positively in all spheres of life.

¹⁶² Sampson Laar, 'Gambaga Outcast-Home Project Narrative Report', 14

According to Ruth Aloriweh (programme officer), plans to reintegrated about ten women within the year 2016 did not materialize due to family's refusal to accept them back. Efforts were made by the project but some of the families did not accept their returnee's home. Also, alleged witches reunited with their families had very little packages to assist them settle at home due to financial constraints. She also mentioned that many communities need to be sensitized to help educate people on the rights of women, especially the alleged witches. This is important because, communities where sensitization workshops were carried out saw people expressed openly their appreciation to the project and their ignorance on the subject of witchcraft accusations.¹⁶³

Aloriweh also mentioned that the indirect beneficiaries (children of alleged witches) education, is becoming too expensive for the project. Since many of them are now getting to the second cycle and tertiary institutions. Admission fees as well as school fees are getting higher making it difficult for the project to pay¹⁶⁴. In an interview with Simon Ngota, about his experience as the former Go-Home Project Coordinator, he noted that, in Northern Ghana, it is difficult defending the rights of alleged witches without being perceived as a protector of dangerous people who are considered perpetrators of spiritual violence and a threat to society. This means individuals engaged in such humanitarian jobs find themselves in a precarious situation. The bigger challenge is that they are stigmatized and ridiculed because of their work¹⁶⁵. From my own experienced as the former Go-Home project Board Chairman, I observed that all Go-Home workers are perceived as witches. They are called names such as 'witch lovers or father of witches'. In fact, the Go-Home manager's car is also called 'witches car'. In Mamprusi tradition, to help someone accused of witchcraft is considered inappropriate and anti-social because society perceives alleged witches as

¹⁶³ Interview with Ruth Aloriwe at Gambaga 6th February 2017.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Ruth Aloriwe at Gambaga 6th February 2017.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Simon Ngota at Ganbaga, 7th February 2017.

dangerous and threat to their lives. Working with or assisting persons accused as witches or wizard is seen as an enemy to society.

Many people believe that 'witches' must be left to their faith and to suffer for bringing nothing but suffering and death to humanity. Upon all these stigmatizations, the Go-Home project workers are not perturbed, because they see their work as rendering service to humanity and to God. However, communities where advocacy workshops and community durbars were organized by the project team has recorded lesser women accused from such communities as compared to the previous years.

5.5.3 Some Achievements of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project

Despite the numerous challenges facing the project, its operations has made some modest achievements, especially in the area of providing basic needs, protecting the human rights and improving the circumstances affecting the quality of life at the alleged witches in the Gambaga Witch Camp. The project has also worked well in collaboration with the Gambarana (the witch doctor and custodian of the camp), other traditional rulers, government and NGOs to help reintegrate the alleged witches back to their communities. The Go-Home Project has created awareness within the country and most parts of the world about the challenges of witch camps in Northern Ghana and the plight of alleged witches, especially in the Gambaga Witch Camp. As a result, it attracts a lot of tourists to the camp. Furthermore, dozens of articles in international and Ghanaian newspapers and magazines about the plight of the alleged witches are published. This is a clear indication that the project has not deviated from its primary objectives. To achieve its main objective to reintegrate all the alleged witches, the project works closely with the Gambarana and the communities where witches alleged hails from in order to sensitize or educate those communities to stop witchcraft accusations and banishment of alleged witches to the Gambaga Witch Camp.

The project therefore organizes educational programmes in villages, and communities on human rights of women and the causes and prevention of diseases and sickness often linked with witchcraft accusations. The project's community sensitization programmes organized at the village levels made good use of medical practitioners who spoke on topics such as causes and preventions of malaria, epilepsy, mental health, CSM, high fevers, among others. These are sicknesses normally linked with witchcraft allegations.

To avoid the spread of witchcraft accusations and banishment of alleged witches, more education in village communities is needed even though, very expensive. For example, one young girl who was sick of malaria after visiting the hospital for treatment gave her testimony openly in one of the community durbar that, " I saw my late mother in a dream holding a knife to slaughter me". She added that, if her mother were to be alive, she would have accused her of being a witch.

According to the Go-Home narrative report for 2016, no new case has been recorded in the communities where sensitization programmes were organized. Those communities are now defending the right and welfare of alleged witches as a result of the awareness creation campaigns. The Go-Home Project Manager mentioned that, communities where women's right were mostly violated have reduced drastically. He gave example of villages such as Kparigu, Jawani, Kolinvai, Namonga, and Dazio, where awareness was created in previous times have not recorded any accusation and banishment for the past four years¹⁶⁶. Simon Ngota noted that as a result of their sensitization workshop organized, and community's visits by the project staff, violence against women, brutalities and killing of suspected witches in the rural communities have been reduced by 60 percent, according to their estimations.

¹⁶⁶ Sampson Laar, 'Gambaga Outcast Home Project Narrative Report' (July-December 2016), 13.

Regular communities and home visits also revealed that most of the integrated women are living peacefully and happily with their families and communities¹⁶⁷.

Similarly, Dan Kolbila (the initiator of the Go-Home Project), in a paper presentation gave an insight into witch sanctuaries in Northern Ghana, with particular reference to the Gambaga Witch Camp. He pointed out that, some victims of witchcraft accusations in Gambaga had been rehabilitated and that violence against women had reduced by 65 percent. However, reintegration of the victims into the society still remains a problem¹⁶⁸.

In the area of reintegration, the former project manager, Simon Ngotah, in 2009 again reported that, the Go-Home project has been able to reintegrate 505 women and one (1) man back to their families¹⁶⁹. Information available at the Go-Home Project Manager's office also revealed that, since the inception of the project in 1994, about one thousand and fifteen (1,015) alleged witches have been successfully reintegrated with their families. This has led to the drastic reduction of inmates at the camp. Currently the total number of alleged witches in the Gambaga Witch Camp stood at (89) women¹⁷⁰.

Again, most alleged witches are accepted back to their communities when the purification rituals are performed by the Gambarana, without which the accused women are seen as still powerful and possess the witchcraft spirit. These rituals are very significant to the families and communities where alleged witches come from. It made the communities to believe that they are being exorcised and could be accepted or welcome back home without fear. The project also provides the alleged witches with income generating activities to meet their financial needs. They are engaged in soap making, beads making and sheabutter extraction

¹⁶⁷ Simon Ngota, Gambaga Outcast Home Project: Paper Presented at Culture Initiatives Support Programme (CISP), Kumasi June 20-22, 2009. 29.

¹⁶⁸ Dan Kolbila, 'Witch Sanctuaries in Northern Ghana: the Case of the Gambaga Witch Camp' (Culture Initiatives Support Programme (CISP)'), Kumasi: June 20-22, 2009. 58.

¹⁶⁹ Simon Ngota, Gambaga Outcast Home Project, 2009, 28.

¹⁷⁰ Sampson Laar, Gambaga Outcast Home Annual Report to Upper Presbytery, April 2016

business to support themselves. The health needs of the alleged witches are also catered for by the project. Many of the alleged witches often fall sick due to old age as well as the compact nature of their huts and surroundings. The project has therefore, registered all the women with the National Health Insurance Scheme and registration premium renewed annually to enable them access health facilities without paying money for their treatment.

The government of Ghana in a bid to discourage accusation of women as witches and banishing them to the witch camps has also tried to protect the rights of the alleged witches through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. They have introduced the Legal Aid Department to support individuals who are accused as witches to prosecute their cases without Legal fees. Even though victims have not started to use this opportunity, however it is seen as a moral buster to curb this menace. The Go-Home Project welcomes this policy as it supports their efforts as a religious organization to fight against the old traditional practice of accusing old women as witches. If cases will be prosecuted in relation to witchcraft allegations using the Legal Aid Department without paying fees, it will become a significant method to reduce incidence of women accused as witches. This will also help to address the challenges of the witch camps in Northern Ghana.

The Go-Home Project also collaborates well with other NGOs and organizations working to ensure the quality of life at the camps, in a bid to totally close down the witch camps in Northern Ghana. However, the Go-Home project believes that, educating communities, opinion leaders and families of where the alleged witches come from, and the general society on the rights of every person to stay where he/she wants without harassment and on the acceptance of the alleged witches back to their families is seen to be a much better choice than what is being advocated by the media and government for forceful disbandment of the witch camps in Northern Ghana.

5.6 Sustainability of the Project

On the issue of sustainability, the Presbyterian Go-Home Project Manager stated in his report that, the sustainability of the project is very dear to the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and other stakeholders involved. He noted that signs of sustainability of the project prove that, community members of alleged witches are beginning to accept ownership of the project with the understanding that, it works for their own interest. He stated that, during sensitization programme organized at the community level, members were urged to help sustain the project's effort by accepting their families back and taking up measures to deal with witchcraft accusations rather than lynching and banishment of alleged witches to the witch camp¹⁷¹. The project's team therefore enjoined members of the various communities to see the fight against the old menace as their own and not for the project. According to Sampson, this message has really gone down well with the people. He cited an example that, in June 2015, the chief of Jawani visited the Go-Home Project Office in Gambaga and confessed that, his community is now enjoying total peace due to the community durbar organized by the project team. He says that, the youth who used to brutalized and lynched women accused of witchcraft are now engaged in protecting the alleged witches from being attacked. This is due to the fact that awareness. Creation activities as well as advocacy programmes carried out in the community are showing positive results. Even though, it might take some number of years at least 10 to 20 years, to end the old traditional practices of accusation of witchcraft in the area. However, evidence shows that, majority of the reintegrated women are living peacefully with their families¹⁷².

Sampson also stated that, the past few years has seen very little witchcraft accusations as compared to the previous years which is a booster to the sustainability of the project. He farther noted that, the sustainability of communities stopping the accusation of women of

¹⁷¹ Sampson Laar, Gambaga Outcast Home Project, (Narrative Report January-June 2015), 16.

¹⁷² Sampson Laar, 'Gambaga Outcast Home Project', (Narrative Report January-June 2015), 16.

witchcraft is very high due to the education and sensitization programmes carried out by the project.

Sampson Laar again intimated that, the alleged witches are trained in sustainable income generating activities. The alleged witches are made to learn trade in order to keep them in business. They are also taught to cultivate the habit of savings to sustain them in case the donor partners happens to stop or delay in releasing funds to the project. To ensure financial sustainability, the advisory board has also urged the project to prune down its expenditure and to invests in more income generating activities such as farming, rearing of fowls, buying of cereals to be sold during the lean season to support the women in case of donor fatigue¹⁷³.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has evaluated the role and performance of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project in supporting and reintegrating of the alleged witches of the Gambaga witch camp, back to their original communities and families. The chapter has also discussed the history of the Presbyterian Go-Home project and its management as well as the aims and objectives of the project and its activities. The reintegration programme which is the main objective of the project has also been examined with particular reference to its challenges and achievements to determine how the Go-Home project has contributed meaningfully in addressing the living conditions and challenges of the Gambaga witch camp. The next chapter, which is the final one, will discuss the summary, major findings, recommendations and conclusion.

¹⁷³ Interview with Sampson Laar at Gambaga 2nd April 2017.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, MAJOR FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

In chapter five, we analysed the role and performance of the Presbyterian Go-Home project in supporting and reintegrating the alleged witches of the Gambaga witch camp back to their original communities and families. The chapter has revealed that, the Go-Home project has contributed significantly towards addressing the challenges of the Gambaga Witch Camp in the Northern Region of Ghana.

This chapter which is the final one will discuss the summary, major findings, recommendations and conclusion. The chapter will highlight the implication of findings in the previous chapters. It will also suggest some recommendations to address the problems presented and discussed. Finally, we will conclude with recommendation for further research on the phenomenon of witchcraft accusations and the challenges of ‘witch camps’ in Northern Ghana, especially the Gambaga Witch Camp and the role Presbyterian Go-Home Project Plays in trying to address these challenges.

6.2 Summary

This study has basically looked at the measures put in place to address the challenges of the Gambaga Witch Camp in the Northern Region of Ghana and the role of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project plays in addressing these challenges. The belief in witchcraft is widespread in Northern Ghana, and for that matter in the Mamprugu traditional area. It is deeply rooted in the culture of the people to the extent that the belief is “institutionalized” in some parts of Northern Ghana. This is manifested in the existence of witch camps in some places in the

Northern Region. Women accused of witchcraft are either maltreated or banished from their communities or go on self-imposed exile for fear of being lynched. These unfortunate women eventually end up in these so-called witch camps. In Mamprugu traditional society, witchcraft (*soo*) is perceived as the ability of a person to use supernatural means to cause harm, cast spells of sickness, death, bad luck, failure in business, education, droughts, diseases like, CSM, high fever, malaria or just appearing in someone's dream. The camps only exist in the Northern Region of Ghana where poverty level are far higher than other areas of the country. Currently, there are six establish witch camps located only in the Northern region of Ghana.

'Witch camps' were established as traditional sanctuaries aimed at protecting or providing personal security for the accused witches to take refuge in order to escape the cruel and inhuman treatment including lynching. The study shows that all the witch camps in Northern Ghana are attached to traditional shrines which provide protection for the alleged witches by neutralizing their powers and preventing them from causing harm to others. Before the camps were established, individuals accused of witchcraft were ostracized, tortured or lynched by community members for alleged offenses. Even some of the individuals who currently lived at the camps were physically abused before their escape. Though, those who made it to the camps were saved from being lynched, they were treated with little or no human dignity, because they were considered by their original communities as outcasts who did not deserve to live.

It is against these challenges that the Presbyterian church of Ghana, civil society organizations such as ActionAid Ghana, human rights activities, among others expressed reservations about keeping the accused women at the witch camps. They consider the existence of the camps as an affront to human dignity. The study shows that, long before issues related to the 'witch camps' were brought to the attention of the nation through the

media, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (since 1960) was already involved in trying to address the challenges of the Gambaga Witch Camp. The church saw it as a developmental issue and as part of her social responsibility started given support to the alleged witches in the Gambaga camp with basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and payment of their medical bills.

In 1994, the church initiated a project known as the Gambaga Outcast Home Project (Go-Home project), whose objective was not only to continue the support to the alleged witches, but also to facilitate their reintegration back to their original communities and families. This will eventually lead to the total closure of the Gambaga witch camp while others will follow suit. Their efforts are being complemented by the ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection which has been making relentless effort to disband the camps. This led to the closure of the Bonyase witch camp in 2014. The study revealed that, since the inception of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project in 1994, about one thousand and fifteen (1,015) alleged witches have been successfully reintegrated with their families. This has led to the drastic reduction of inmates of the Gambaga witch camp.

6.3 Major Findings

It is necessary to examine the relationship between the new findings and the background study. The main objective of the thesis was to analyze the role of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project in trying to address the challenges facing the Gambaga Witch Camp in Northern Ghana.

The findings of the research revealed that, majority of the accused witches were brought to the camp by their own relatives, because they were perceived of causing harm or misfortune to people in their communities. However, the researcher found that most of these accusations normally occurred during the dry season within the period of February and April when the

temperature is very high and people suffer from various diseases such as Cerebral-Spinal meningitis (CSM), high fever, and guinea worm disease. Most diseases during this period are all attributed to witchcraft, of which some of the inmates have been fallen victims to. In an interview with one of the alleged witches in Gambaga, I asked whether she was indeed a witch, she responded; “My people says I am a witch, but I know within me that I am not a witch”. This shows that some people in the camp might have been accused falsely of being witches.

The findings of the research proved that, witchcraft accusation is the real problem that should be addressed. Accusation takes place in the villages and communities. These are the place where any efforts to address this problem should focus first but not the witch camps. If the practice of witchcraft accusation stops, the witch camps will simply disappear.

The study also shows that, villages where community sensitization programmes were organized by the Go-Home Project, have seen a drastic reduction of witchcraft accusations and banishment. However, the project is now faced with new cases in communities where awareness creation is yet to be carried out. This means that the Go-Home Project needs financial support to reach out to all communities in the area.

The study also exposed the procedures the alleged witches go through on arrival at the camps to test whether they are actually witches or not, known as ‘Noapohagu’ (test of innocence rituals). The concoction they are made to drink to confess and exorcise them could constitute human right abuse since one can die in the process. The chemistry of this concoction was not established whether it does not contain any poisonous substance that can adversely affect their health.

In relation to the facilities at the camp, it was disclosed that they have no access to electricity. However they enjoyed freedom of movement, worship and association with other people.

The study shows that, majority of the alleged witches are not willing to be reintegrated with their families. As one inmate claimed; “I was nearly lynched when I decided to go back to my community. My own family did not want to put up with me. I was in total isolation within the twenty-four (24) hours and felt like running back to the camp where I have my peace”. This clearly depicts the agony the alleged witches go through when they decide to resettle in their own communities.

The investigation has revealed that the alleged witches are still used as cheap labour to the community and engaged in petty trading, despite the assistance or aid offered to them by the Presbyterian Go-Home Project. This implies that the project faces financial difficulty in caring for the accused witches.

It was revealed from the study that, most of the problems and the challenges of witchcraft accusation boils down to abject poverty as many people cannot afford to pay for the common treatment of malaria. Such people prefer to stay back home when they are sick and later suffer nightmares which are always blamed on the work of old ladies. According to Gambarana, he has personally dismissed such cases in his palace and directed them to the hospitals. This buttress the fact that, some people are sometime accused innocently because of some other people`s sickness.

The research shows that, the accommodation and general living condition at the Gambaga witch camp is very poor. The study indicates that, the housing system in the camp is not the best. Without asking, a stranger can describe them as local hencoops or ovens. The inmates practically have to bow before entering or coming out of the rooms. Moreover, these huts built for the women are in such a deplorable state that any strong wind can easily destroy them. The study revealed that despite the regular maintenance of cracks by the women during

rainy season, their rooms become flooded with water and some parts fell off. During such rains they stay almost awake to drain the water from their rooms.

Overcrowding is another issue faced by these alleged witches. Even with the unventilated and un-spacious nature of their rooms, they sometimes share it with about three to four inmates. And since some of them normally have their younger children or grandchildren living with them, the rooms become congested. In the warm seasons, they are uncomfortable and may contract strange diseases.

It was also observed that, the alleged witches live in constant misery and dare not go back to their communities, since they have been stigmatized by the same community and are likely to be lynched should they attempt to return.

The findings of the researching also established that, the alleged witches are denied their basic human rights; these include the right to food, the right to physical wellbeing, the right to free movement and even the right to life. The study again shows that women accused of witchcraft in Northern Ghana, are mainly those without solid economic base.

The research further revealed that, one of the scarce commodities at the Gambaga camp is food and money. Most of these women are too old to work for food. The women and their children look very lean and hungry and have no resistance to any diseases, because they do not eat a balanced diet. The research shows that the alleged witches are deprived of many basic socio-economic amenities such as electricity, pipe-born water, clinic, schools, markets places and community centers.

The findings of the research again revealed that, about 95 percent of the alleged witches in Gambaga were vehemently opposed to the disbandment of the witch camp. The alleged

witches harbour fears that they are not safe in their old communities hence some insisted that they preferred staying at the camp for the rest of their lives.

The findings of the research revealed that, the Presbyterian church of Ghana regarded the alleged witches as outcasts who have lost their human dignity due to witchcraft accusation and banishment. Therefore, the long term vision of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project is that the practice of accusing, torturing, harassing and banishing women from their communities to the witch camp will be completely eradicated through reintegration and repatriation programmes, so that there would be no reason to have witch camp any longer in Northern Ghana.

The finding of the research also realized that, the Presbyterian Go-Home Project sometimes faces financial constraints in their quest to support and reintegrate the alleged witches. Currently, the study shows that, there is only one donor partner supporting the programme, that is, the Presbyterian World Service and Development (PWS&D) in Canada.

The study disclosed that, the Go-Home Project reintegrates alleged witches who are being exorcised from witchcraft spirit by the Gambarana and sometimes pay for the cost of rituals if the women cannot afford to pay. They also give resettlement package to the returnees to start their own business. This is very necessary because when they have no support but accepted by their original communities, they stand the chance of being re-accused or lynched

The findings of the research indicated that, about ten (10) alleged witches are said to have been reintegrated annually by the Go-Home Project. However, there are three factors which have adversely affected the programme. First, even though, the project managed to reintegrate and repatriate more alleged witches back home, this does not stop new ones from being banished to the camp. For example, between the years 2010-2016, 145 alleged witches were successfully reintegrated with their families, while 120 others were admitted into the

Gambaga witch camp. Second, it has been reported that some women who were reintegrated with their families were found dead in mysterious circumstances. The third factor is that, though, the communities have agreed to accept back the alleged witches, some few women were re-accused and sent back to the witch camp.

Finally, the study revealed that, the Presbyterian Go-Home Project has collaborated well with other NGOs working to address the challenges and living conditions of the alleged witches, to ensure total closure of the witch camps in Northern Ghana. However, the Go-Home Project believed that educating communities, opinion leaders, chiefs and families of the alleged witches and the general society on the rights of every person, and to accept back the alleged witches, thereby gradually closing down the witch camps is seen to be a better choice than forceful disbandment of witch camps in Northern Ghana.

6.4 Recommendations

The researcher has outlined the following recommendations:

- The government of Ghana must not rush into disbanding the witch camps, but must develop a detailed roadmap in consultation with all stakeholders such as the religious and traditional leaders, the Presbyterian Go-Home project, ActionAid Ghana, earth priest/priest chiefs, the alleged witches themselves and the communities where the alleged witches hail from.
- The alleged witches must only be encouraged to return home after a sensitive and comprehensive education on reintegration is done by the Presbyterian Go-Home Project involving the alleged witches themselves, Gambarana, families and opinion leaders of the women`s home communities. The Ministry of gender, children and social protection must support the Presbyterian Go-Home project financially to step up more efforts in their village to village sensitization programmes to educate people in the rural areas on the effects of witchcraft accusation and witch-hunting.

- The government and the law enforcement agencies must make it illegal to accuse and banish someone as a witch and to help the Go-Home project to ensure proper reintegration of the alleged witches and their children. In case their families refused to accept them back, the accused witches could be relocated and resettled in other communities where they are not known. However, there should be frequent visits by the officials of the Go-Home project to educate members of the accused families to wholeheartedly accept them.
- The Presbyterian Go-Home project must intensify education on human rights at their sensitization programmes. Such education on human rights must be culturally based in order to be effective. In fact, using cultural idioms of human rights will be more effective than just citing the universal declaration of human rights which the people have no idea about. However, the international human rights and the constitution of Ghana can be woven into traditional proverbs, sayings, lyrics, taboos, rituals and practices that place value on the human being. This will question the practice and will dawn on them to realize that, there must be some contradiction between the values they place on human life and the abuse perpetuated through some cultural practices. Indeed this method could be used to liberate women from all forms of inhuman practices that infringe their human rights. This traditional method of intervention is what Abamfo termed as “universal dream values of humanity”, that is, embedding cultural practices with the universal declaration of human rights to thrive in order to protect human dignity and liberation of humanity¹⁷⁴.
- The alleged witches themselves should be empowered and educated to demand their rights. If the constitution of Ghana guaranteed the freedom of association of every

¹⁷⁴ Abamfo Ofori Atieno, *Religion and the Inculturation of Human Rights in Ghana* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 193.

individual, then the alleged witches also have the right to live with their families and participate in the social life of the community.

- If witchcraft is a universal phenomenon, and there are ‘witches’ all over the world and for that matter Ghana, where ‘witches’ in other regions are not kept in camps, then the alleged witches in the Northern region should also not be kept in witch camps either.
- In the meantime there is the need to raise the living standard of the Gambaga witch camp without the intention of making the camp a permanent home. For instance, new buildings should be constructed in consultation with the Gambarana and other stakeholders for the inmates. They should also be provided with basic social amenities such as portable water, electricity, K.V.I.P, health care facilities, corn mill etc.
- All the alleged witches and their children must be registered with the national health insurance scheme by the Presbyterian Go-Home project. The District Assembly must ensure that all the alleged witches are enrolled on the livelihood empowerment against poverty (LEAP) Programme initiated by the government.
- There is a vital need for a theological reformation and education that project the sovereignty and supremacy of God and affirmation of his love for humanity. Counselling should be intensified to address witchcraft related beliefs and remedy the poisoned human relationship that engenders such beliefs.
- There is critical need for the education of the Christian and Muslim congregations to encourage human responses to the plight of those accused of witchcraft, thereby inspire Churches, Mosques and civil society organizations to give respect to the human rights of the accused witches.
- We need a system of regulation to control the activities of the church groups that seems to have majored on witch-hunting and witchcraft deliverance ministries, thereby curbing the violation of human rights of victims of witchcraft accusations.

- Hence forth, newly alleged witches should not be sent to the camps. However, more efforts should be put into reintegrating the ones in the camps into their old communities. By this method, the camps can be totally closed down gradually without backfiring.
- The rituals performed for the alleged witches at the camps need to be investigated to establish whether the concoction given to the alleged witches does not contain any poisonous substance that can adversely affect their health. Once the authorities who administer the concoction admitted that it could result in death if the alleged witch tells lies to the shrine. This also constitutes human right abuse.
- The police force need to be well sensitized about the human right violation and other negative effects resulting from witchcraft accusations. Also the police should establish crisis response units in the witchcraft prone areas in the Northern Region to quickly intervene anytime there is an attack on a suspected witch.
- The researcher recommends that promotion of formal education may also reduce the incidence of witchcraft accusations. Access to education will not eradicate the problem itself, but reduce the maltreatment of alleged witches. The government must foster quality female education and engage women in key positions at the local and central government levels and improve livelihood sources of women to reduce their “male dependency syndrome”.
- The Presbyterian Go-home project in collaboration with the Gambaga District health directorate must intensify healthcare programmes in the rural areas to educate people on the climatic changes and causes of diseases such as, Cerebral Spinal Meningitis(CSM), high fever, Malaria and others which are often wrongly attributed to witchcraft. This may also reduce the incidence of witchcraft accusations.

The above recommendations demand advocacy by civil society organizations, NGOs, religious bodies and the government to collaborate in other to find lasting solution to address the challenges of the witch camps.

6.5 Conclusion

The research was carried out in order to investigate and examine the strategies put in place to address the challenges facing the Gambaga witch camp in the Northern Region of Ghana. The objective was to examine and evaluate the role of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project in supporting and reintegrating the alleged witches in the Gambaga witch camp back to their families.

The long term vision of the Go-Home Project is that, the practice of accusing, torturing, harassing, and banishing women from their communities to the witch camps will be completely eradicated, so that there will be no reason to have witch camps in the Northern Region of Ghana. The idea of reintegration is the greatest role of the Go-Home Project. It is their singular objective that these alleged witches will leave the camp and be reunited with their families. The project staff tries to find a way of reintegrating the women back to their original communities through negotiations with their family members, chiefs and opinion leaders.

The project staff, ministers of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and other men of God also visit the accused women to counsel them in order to live peacefully with other members at the camp and also to identify and provide their immediate needs such as health, clothing and food related items. The project collaborate with other partners such as, Care International Ghana, Action Aid Ghana, and the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, to provide advocacy services on witchcraft and women's rights with.

The project also provides some livelihood support to the alleged witches in the form of income generating activities to supplement their livelihood while they are in the ‘outcast home’ and when they return to their original communities as a way of improving their living conditions and sustaining them. All these strategies adopted by the Presbyterian Go-Home project aimed at addressing the challenges of poverty facing the women in the Gambaga Witch Camp.

The findings of the research revealed both negative and positive developments, but it is possible to conclude that the negative development outweighed the positive ones. The positive ones include; the overwhelming number of reintegrated alleged witches by the Presbyterian Go-Home Project and the registration of most of the alleged witches with the National Health Insurance Scheme. The study also found that majority of the children of the alleged witches are enrolled into schools. The women also benefit from periodic donations in the form of used clothing from philanthropic organizations and the Go-Home Project. All these gestures are signs of attention from benevolent institutions and government to address their living conditions.

The negative developments on the other hand, were that, the alleged witches were made to go through some cruel and dehumanizing practices designed by the Gambarana: these include shaving of hair when going through the de-witching process and the drinking of concoction whose chemistry is not known. The rest has to do with their living conditions; the alleged witches at the camp, usually old and weak women, have suffered the indignity of living in very miserable conditions where basic needs such as, food, and clothing are unaffordable luxuries. With no income or any reliable source of livelihood support, they sometimes scavenge on left over resources in their community for survival. The women and their children do not live in the camp as free and respectable community members. They face discrimination and stigmatization, and education of their children have been difficult, whiles

conditions in the camp continue to deteriorate making daily life an unbearable struggle for the economically marginalized women.

The implication of the findings point to the fact that the effects of the negative aspect can be remedied through education and awareness creation to both the alleged witches, the Gambarana and the rest of the society. The recommendation of the research is not only calling for the correction of the social injustice meted out to the alleged witches but for the human rights activists to intervene for the rights and freedom of the alleged witches. The recommendations are also pointer to the fact that civil society organizations, NGOs and religious organizations have the moral responsibility to see to the improvement of the socio-economic life of the alleged witches, and the other challenges they face at the witch camps. Therefore, the recommendations, if implemented, can improve the social, and economic conditions of the alleged witches as well as respect for their human rights. It will also help in the reintegration of all the alleged witches, which consequently will lead to the total disbandment of the Gambaga witch camp and all witch camps in the Northern Region of Ghana.

While drawing the curtain on this concluding part, it is the wish of the researcher that other researchers will further investigate more into the phenomenon of witchcraft accusations and challenges facing the witch camps in the Northern Region of Ghana, especially the Gambaga Witch Camp in addition to the contributions of the Presbyterian Go-Home Project in trying to address these challenges.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA – LEGON

DEPARTMENT FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH TOPIC – The role of the Presbyterian Go-Home project in addressing the challenges of the Gambaga witch camp.

You will be contributing significantly towards the success of this study if you respond to these questions as frankly as you can. Indeed the purpose of this exercise is purely academic and your responses will be treated as confidential.

Thank you.

Section A and B is for chiefs and opinion leaders.

SECTION A : Background of Respondents.

1. Name of respondent community
.....
2. Sex a. Male [], b. Female []
3. Marital status a. Married [], b. Not married []
4. Age a. below 29 yrs [], b. 30-39 yrs [] c. 40-49 yrs [] d. 50-59 yrs [] e. 60-69 yrs [] f.70 + yrs [].
5. What is your level of education? a. No formal education [] b. Basic education [] c. Secondary education [] d. Tertiary education [] e. Others.....
6. What is your occupation?
7. What is your religious affiliation? a. A.T.R [], b. Christianity [], Islam [].

SECTION B

1. In your own view, how do you define witchcraft?
.....
2. How does one acquire witchcraft?
.....
3. Does witchcraft really exist? a. yes [] b. no []
4. Give reasons why you believe in the existence of witchcraft.
.....
5. What are the factors leading to witchcraft accusation?
.....
6. Who are considered as their first accusers? a. family members [] b. rivals [] c. outsiders [] e. others.....
b. If family members, give reasons why
.....
7. Why women are mostly accused as witches?
.....
8. How does accused witches treated in your community?
.....
9. Are the alleged witches forced to go to the witch camp?
.....
10. What happen when the accused witch is brought to the Gambarana?
.....
11. Under what challenges and living conditions the alleged witches face in the witch camp?
.....
12. What do you think must be done to address these challenges?
.....
13. Do you think the human rights of the accused witches are being violated? If yes, give reasons for your answer.
.....

14. Is there any form of support given to the alleged witches? If so, what are the sources of these support and how useful are these to their lives?

.....

15. Do you agree that witch camps should be disbanded? Give reasons to your answer.

.....

Questionnaire For Go-Home Officers And Presbyterian Church Of Ghana Workers.

1. How long have you been working with the Presbyterian Go-Home Project?

.....

2. What are the aims and objectives of the Go-Home project?

.....

3. How does Presbyterian Go-Home project operate?

.....

4. What role does the Presbyterian Go-Home project plays in supporting and reintegrating the alleged witches to their original families?

.....

5. What kind of support is available to the women in the camp?

.....

6. Is there any NGO supporting the Presbyterian Go-Home project to take care of the alleged witches?

.....

7. What is the success of the Presbyterian Go-Home project?

.....

8. What are the challenges and failures of the Presbyterian Go-Home project in the area of reintegrating the alleged witches?

.....

9. What are the psychological, emotional, and social statuses of the women in the camp?

.....

10. What are the effect of stigma and social isolation of the women in the camp?

.....

11. What method should be used to free the alleged witches? Reintegration or Disbandment? Give reasons for your answer

.....

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE ON ALLEGED WITCHES

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name of respondent

Age of respondent

Marital status and family size

Educational background.....

Where do you come from.....

District of origin.....

2. HOW SHE/HE CAME TO BE BRANDED AS A WITCH/WIZARD

a. Can you please tell me how long you have stayed in this camp?

b. Can you please tell me the reason why you were accused as a witch/ wizard? Do you believe in the existence of witchcraft?

3. CAMPING OF ALLEGED WITCHES

a. How did you come to the camp?

b. After realizing you are not a witch, can you return to your community? And would you be accepted back?

c. Are you ready to go back to your community?

4. LIVING CONDITIONS

a. What rituals did you go through by the Gambarana before being admitted to the camp?

b. What work were you doing before coming here?

c. How did you find the living condition in the camp here?

d. Is it better than your previous home or vice versa?

e. How do you acquire a room or hut at the camp?

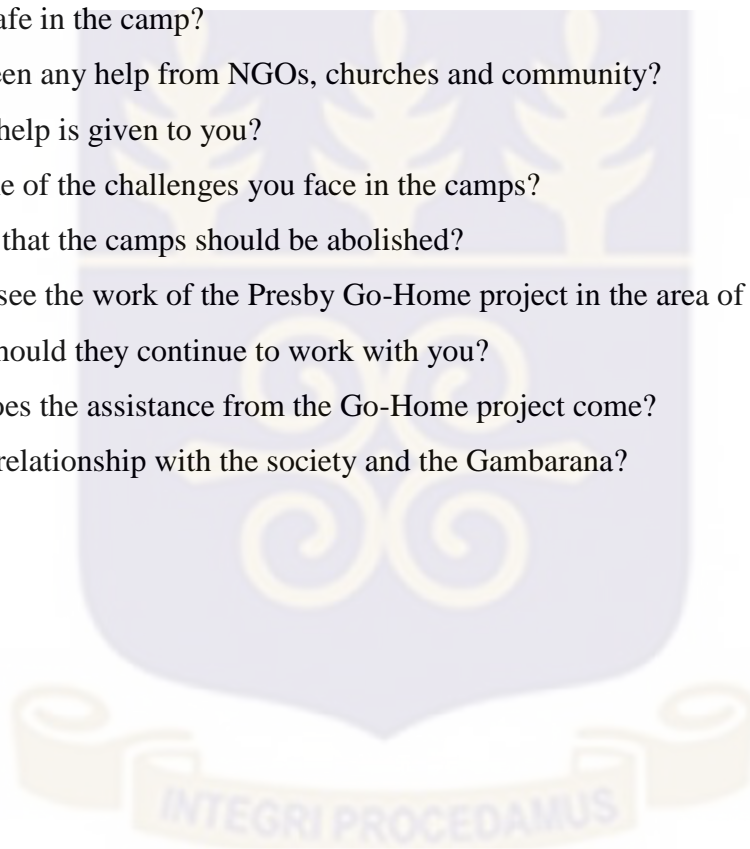
f. Who maintains your room in case of deterioration?

g. How do you come by food? How many dependents do you have?

h. In the camp do you have any income generating activity? If yes, is it sufficient to cater for all your needs?

i. Do your family members visit you? Do you still maintain family ties?

- j. Do you feel free to do what you want to do, such as enter into marriage, and take part in electoral activity or trade?
- k. Why are women mostly accused as witches?
- l. Do you have any source of entertainment?
- m. Do you have educational facilities for your children at the camp? If no, where are they schooling?
- n. Did your children complain of stigmatization?
- o. How do you come by clothing?
- p. Do you have access to any medical facilities? Can you afford it? Or do you enjoy the National Health Insurances Scheme?
- q. Do you feel safe in the camp?
- r. Have there been any help from NGOs, churches and community?
- s. What kind of help is given to you?
- t. What are some of the challenges you face in the camps?
- u. Do you agree that the camps should be abolished?
- v. How do you see the work of the Presby Go-Home project in the area of repatriation and reintegration? Should they continue to work with you?
- w. How often does the assistance from the Go-Home project come?
- x. What is your relationship with the society and the Gambarana?



APENDIX C

**INTERVIEW GUIDE ON GAMBARANA (WITCH-DOCTOR), HIS
ELDERS AND THE CHIEF IMAM OF MAMPRUGU**

Name of Respondent

Age of Respondent

Marital status and family size.....

Place of Residence

Status / Position

1. Can you please tell me the history of the Gambaga witch camp?
2. Can you tell me why people accused of witchcraft are brought to Gambaga?
3. Can you please define who a witch is?
4. How does witchcraft acquired?
5. What ritual does the Gambarana performs to determine the veracity of a witch?
6. How does the accused witch become a member of the witch camp?
7. Who is responsible for allocation of rooms to the alleged witches? And who maintains their rooms?
8. Who is responsible for their well-being?
9. Can the accused witch be exorcised and be allowed to return home? What ritual does she have to go through?
10. Is it true that the witch camp is attached to a shrine? What role does the shrine plays?
11. What are some of the challenges and living condition at the witch camp?
12. How do you see the work of the Presbyterian Go-Home project in the area of reintegration? Should they continue to work with you?
13. What are the alleged witches expected to do? Are they restricted from doing certain things?
14. What is your relationship with the alleged witches?
15. Do you agree that the witch camp be disbanded?