

Naming the Witch, Housing the Witch and Living with Witchcraft: An Ethnography of Ordinary Lives in Northern Ghana's Witch Camps

By

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Abstract

In Dagbambaland, northern Ghana, people who were accused and proven to be witches and who risked being harmed were banished by village chiefs and local elders (or fled on their own) to special settlements popularly known to locals as accused women's (or old women's) settlements, and to the media and NGO world as "witch camps". Here, an earth priest and anti-witchcraft specialist, the *tindana*, ritually removed the dark powers of the morally compromised witch and committed him or her to the protection and necessary sanctions of the ancestral shrine. Post-1990 so-called "witch camps" have attracted much attention from churches, state agencies and NGOs interested in the human rights abuses that supposedly took place in these "camps".

This ethnography is an attempt to explore the "afterlife" of witchcraft accusations, when convicted witches settle in new villages after breaking trust with kinsmen and villagers in their original communities. And unlike many studies of witchcraft in Africa that focus on suspicions and rumours of witchcraft, this thesis critically analyses the ordinary lives of known, confessing witches. I look at their insertion in the social world of host communities where they lived as morally compromised strangers, and where access to community resources and networks was largely made possible through a local moral economy. Of paramount importance to ordinary life here was the question of trust. How did local host communities come to trust and accept these "moral criminals" into their midst when their own kinsmen and village friends had rejected them as untrustworthy because of the danger they posed to social order? What role did churches, NGOs and state agencies play in the social configuration of witch villages?

My findings suggest that although stomach cleansing rituals played a vital role in villagers' decision to accept the accused into their communities, such rituals were, by themselves, not sufficient to establish any meaningful social co-existence between locals and the accused. Co-existence and everyday survival were made possible through the enormous generosity shown by both the accused (in terms of the provision of their labour) and locals (who allowed dangerous Others into their midst); a mutually beneficial exchange relationship described by both as *songsim*. However, *songsim* was not neutral. In situations where witchcraft had been proven and accepted as a reality, its moral stain defined exchange relations between the accused and locals. Returns on *songsim* were often skewed in favour of locals who accepted to take on the risks of living with a witch.

Opsomming

In Dagbambaland, Noord-Ghana, word mense wat aangekla en skuldig bevind is op aanklagtes van heksery deur dorpshefmanne en ouer mans verban na nedersettings wat plaaslik populêr bekend staan as aangeklaagde vrouens- (of ouervrou-) nedersettings. Party mense vlug ook op hulle eie na dié nedersettings toe. Die media en nieregeringsorganisasies verwys gereeld na die nedersettings as “hekskampe”. In die “kampe” verwyder ‘n aardspriester en heksekenner, die *tindana*, ritueel die donker mag van moreel suspisieuse hekse en dra hulle welstand op aan die beskerming en sanksies van die voorvaders. Na 1990 het hierdie “hekskampe” groot aftrek gekry van kerke, staatsagenstappe en nieregeringsorganisasies wat geïnteresseerd was in die menseregteskendings wat glo grootskaals in die kampe gepleeg is.

Hierdie etnografie poog om die nalewe van hekserybeskuldigings te ondersoek, wanneer individue wat as gevolg van hulle skuldigbevinding aan heksery, bande met familie en vriende moet sny om ‘n nuwe lewe in ‘n vreemde dorp aan te pak. In teenstelling met ander studies oor heksery in Afrika wat fokus op suspisies en gerugte van heksery, analiseer hierdie proefskrif krities die daaglikse lewens van bekende, belydene hekse. Ek kyk na die maniere waarop hekse, wat moreel kriminele vreemdelinge is, hulle aansluit by die sosiale lewens van gasgemeenskappe. Ek is veral geïnteresseerd in die manier waarop hulle toegang tot gemeenskapshulpbronne verkry deur sosiale netwerke wat geskool is op ‘n plaaslike morele ekonomie gebaseer op vertroue. Hoe aanvaar en vertrou gasgemeenskappe hierdie “morele kriminele” wie se eie families en vriende hulle verwerp het as onbetroubaar en as ‘n gevaar vir die sosiale bestel? Watter rol speel kerke, regerings- en nieregeringsorganisasies in die sosiale opset van heksdorpe?

Ek het bevind dat alhoewel maagreinigingsseremonies ‘n sentrale rol speel in gasgemeenskappe se besluite om hekse te aanvaar, is sulke rituele in sigself nie genoeg om betekenisvolle sosiale naasbestaan tussen boorlinge en hekse te bewerkstellig nie. Naasbestaan en daaglikse oorlewing is slegs moontlik deur die grootse vrygewigheid wat beide hekse en boorlinge teenoor mekaar uitleef; hekse in hulle bereidwiligheid om vir plaaslike boere te werk en boorlinge om gevaarlike vreemdelinge in hulle midde te verwelkom. Beide partye trek voordeel uit ‘n wedersydse voordelige uitruilverhouding wat plaaslik beskryf word as *songsim*. Tog is *songsim* nie neutraal nie. Waar heksery bewys en aanvaar word as ‘n lewenswerklikheid, beïnvloed heksery se morele vlek uitruilverhoudings só dat *songsim* dikwels boorlinge wat die risiko loop om met hekse saam te leef, bevoordeel.

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In January 2016, I arrived at Stellenbosch University to commence a PhD programme in Social Anthropology. I always provoked laughter amongst my friends and colleagues at seminars organised by the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences anytime I introduced my topic and indicated my intention to engage with known witches in “witch camps”. They were curious to know more about these so-called “witch camps”, while some openly showed disgust at my keen interest to live with and interview witches. Before commencing fieldwork, while I anticipated that I was going to face an enormous task dealing with “witches”, some of my colleagues thought that I was embarking on a mission too difficult to achieve.

I wish to thank my supervisors Dr. Ilana van Wyk and Dr. Thomas Cousins for investing so much time in my work. I was highly impressed by the quality of supervision. While I particularly thank Dr. Ilana for not getting tired in reading the numerous revisions and shaping the work theoretically and ethnographically, and also providing excellent editorial services, I also thank Dr. Thomas for his critical engagement with my work at different stages and for help with formatting the final dissertation.

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With love and sorrow, I dedicate this work to my late senior brother, Iddrisu Mutaru (Dems), who died in a fatal motor accident on Sunday 10 February 2019 while I was busily finalising this work for examination.

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Abbreviations

ASA	Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth
ASNA	Anthropology Southern Africa
AWACC	Anti-Witchcraft Campaign Coalition
BMC	Baptist Medical Centre
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CHRAJ	Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSM	Cerebro-Spinal Meningitis
DOVVSU	Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit
DSW	Department of Social Welfare
DW	Deutsche Welle
FIDA	International Federation of Women Lawyers
GO	Gambaga Outcast
HAF	Helping Africa Foundation
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
LEAP	Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty
MoFA	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
NADMO	National Disaster Management Organisation
NAO	Native Ordinance Administration
NCCE	National Commission for Civic Education
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

NHIS	National Health Insurance Scheme
NPP	New Patriotic Party
RRC	Regional Reintegration Committee
U.S.	United States
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Glossary of Dagbani words

<i>alizin 'nima/kpikparsi</i>	evil spirits
<i>asadaachi</i>	dowry
<i>asanza nira</i> (pl. <i>asanza niriba</i>)	opinion leader
<i>asori</i>	Christianity
<i>assambleman</i> (pl. <i>assambleman-nima</i>)	local representative in a district assembly
<i>azafari</i>	Muslim noon prayer
<i>ba yinyaa bi tibri kpang di zaa</i>	a mad dog is never healed completely
<i>baya</i> (pl. <i>baysi</i>)	diviner
<i>baybuybu</i>	divination
<i>bayyuli</i>	libation
<i>bana n ku nyeti</i>	they are us (lit.)
<i>bii'tohagibu</i>	fostering
<i>bin 'ɣmaa</i>	traditional dress/wear
<i>buykom</i>	shrine water
<i>buyli</i> (pl. <i>buya</i>)	shrine
<i>bukpaha</i> (pl. <i>bukpahinima</i>)	male witch
<i>bukur'sung ka bubihi doli</i>	a good leader is always followed by his people
<i>chimsi chuyu</i>	Muslim festival for sacrifice
<i>dabari</i>	abandoned area or zone
<i>dabli</i> (pl. <i>daba</i>)	slave
<i>dagban'tim/moyu</i>	local or herbal medicine
<i>dakpema</i>	market leader

<i>dam</i>	locally made drink
<i>damba</i>	local dance
<i>dang</i>	clan
<i>dihili</i>	poisoning
<i>doyim</i>	family
<i>doyrikpema</i> (pl. <i>doyrikpamba</i>)	lineage head
<i>faako</i>	refuge
<i>fong/fonju</i> (pl. <i>fona</i>)	section of a town or village
<i>fong'beo</i>	bad area
<i>gambarana</i>	chief of Gambaga
<i>gbandari</i>	specialised unit for execution
<i>gbanglana</i>	regent
<i>Gnaringa</i>	back fruit-bearing tree
<i>guli/goori</i>	cola
<i>gumli</i>	cotton
<i>jina</i>	special ritual dance performed by <i>jinwariba</i>
<i>jinwara</i> (pl. <i>jinwariba</i>)	witch-finder and healer
<i>kali yili</i>	custom house
<i>karachi</i>	educated person
<i>koko</i>	maize porridge
<i>konyur'chuyu</i>	Muslim festival marking the end of fasting
<i>kpambala</i> (pl. <i>kpambalba</i>)	chief's elder
<i>kpe ti ka sheli ningda</i>	here we have nothing to do

<i>kpiin-yi</i>	ghost
<i>kukoyu</i>	dry piece of land
<i>kuli vobu</i>	taking funeral home
<i>kurginsim</i>	old age
<i>lahasari</i>	Muslim afternoon prayer
<i>lebgimsim</i>	development
<i>limamfong</i>	imam area
<i>mabihili</i>	family relations
<i>mabilgu</i>	lineage
<i>magazia</i> (pl. <i>magazianima</i>)	women's leader
<i>malam</i> (pl. <i>malams</i>)	Muslim cleric
<i>m-mali</i>	to fulfil a pledge
<i>moyuni</i>	bush
<i>moni</i>	household food or food provided by household head
<i>m-payi puli</i>	to wash a stomach
<i>m-puli</i>	to make an oath
<i>n saamba m-bala</i>	they are my visitors
<i>n zan gban m-pili</i>	to cover with a skin
<i>naa chamlana</i>	chief's go-between
<i>naa/naaba</i> (pl. <i>nanima</i>)	chief
<i>Naawuni</i>	God
<i>Naawuni yiko</i>	God's will
<i>nabipuyinga</i> (pl. <i>nabipuyinsi</i>)	princess

<i>nahimbu</i>	over-burdened with household chores (child labour)
<i>namboyu</i>	piety
<i>namship</i>	office of a chief
<i>nantoo</i> (pl. <i>nantohi</i>)	ritual insect or bird used by witches to cause harm
<i>nayilifong/nayiri fonɲu</i>	chief's area or section
<i>Nayiri</i>	paramount chief of Mamprugu
<i>n-dihi</i>	to poison (lit. to feed)
<i>nim'mantali</i>	virtuous personality
<i>ningbuna puuni</i>	inside the body
<i>ninvuy'beyu</i> (pl. <i>ninvuy'beri</i>)	bad person
<i>nivuy'choyfu</i>	person with low esteem
<i>nyintaa</i> (pl. <i>nyintahi</i>)	co-wife
<i>nyintahili</i>	co-wifing
<i>nyuy'ɲmabu</i>	child betrothal
<i>paydoyso</i>	midwife
<i>pangbu</i>	borrowing
<i>pihim</i>	fluid from the body or dress of a corpse
<i>poagnyaankura</i>	old women
<i>pori</i>	oath
<i>priba</i>	father's sister
<i>pringa</i> (pl. <i>prinsi</i>)	a woman brother's daughter
<i>puli paybu</i>	washing/cleansing of stomach

<i>puu</i>	farm
<i>saamba</i>	strangers
<i>sayim</i>	local food prepared from corn or cassava
<i>silmiin'tim</i>	biomedicine
<i>soyu</i>	witchcraft accusation
<i>songsim</i>	help or assistance
<i>son-ya</i> (pl. <i>sonima</i>)	witch
<i>soŋ</i>	to help
<i>sotali</i>	witchcraft
<i>sotim</i>	witchcraft power
<i>suhudoo</i>	peace
<i>susu</i>	local financial mutual
<i>tim</i> (pl. <i>tima</i>)	medicine
<i>timalana</i>	medicine man
<i>tindaan'nam</i>	chiefship related to earth priest
<i>tindaan'paya</i>	female <i>tindana</i>
<i>tindaanship</i>	office of the <i>tindana</i>
<i>tindana</i> (pl. <i>tindaamba</i>)	earth priest
<i>tindang</i>	an area that accommodates a community
	shrine
<i>tingbani</i> (pl. <i>tingbana</i>)	earth shrine
<i>tiŋa</i>	town/village
<i>tiŋbihi</i>	autochthons
<i>tuma</i>	work or job

<i>waljira</i>	senior (first) wife
<i>wumsibu</i>	upbringing
<i>yaa'paya</i> (pl. <i>yaa'paynima</i>)	grandmother
<i>yaanga</i> (pl. <i>yaansi</i>)	grandchild
<i>yabdoo</i> (pl. <i>yaan'nima/kpiimba</i>)	ancestor
<i>Ya-Na</i>	paramount chief of the Dagomba
<i>yelimangli</i>	truth
<i>yidana</i>	husband
<i>yili</i> (pl. <i>yiya</i>)	household/house
<i>yili yidana</i> (pl. <i>yili yidaan'nima</i>)	household head
<i>yoyu</i>	anthrax
<i>zab'beri</i>	bad hair
<i>zhem</i>	war-like song/drumming
<i>zhiri</i>	falsehood
<i>zo</i> (pl. <i>zonima</i>)	friend
<i>zong</i>	a chamber in a house for receiving visitors
<i>zummah</i>	Friday noon prayer
<i>zuu</i>	first son and potential successor of a chief

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

In 1984, when I was only four years old, my parents relocated to Gbullung from Gambaga. I was too young to know why we relocated. Later, one of my older siblings explained that my father's senior brother had died and that my father had to succeed him as the imam of Gbullung. My father was the next legitimate person to occupy the position, hence our relocation. Growing up in Gbullung, I listened to many stories about witches (*sonima*, sing. *son-ya*) and their dark deeds, often retold as my friends and I played outside on full-moon nights. These stories were sometimes so frightening that I would refuse to join my friends outside in the dark or in visiting the homes of certain old women whose names frequently appeared in these stories. My fears of and curiosity in witchcraft (*sotali*) heightened when three unnatural deaths occurred in my village. Two of these deaths involved very close friends who were also my classmates in school. The other case involved a family member.

Awabubila was a member of my extended family and we lived together in a big mud house with fourteen bedrooms at the periphery of the village, about 200 metres from the market square. In Gbullung, as in other Dagbamba villages, important title holders such as the chief (*naa*) and imam occupied such colossal homes while regular villagers commonly lived in smaller homes. Awabubila's parents did not enrol her in school. Her activities were limited to doing household chores for her mother; fetching water and firewood, cooking and washing. One evening in 1991, village farmers brought Awabubila to the house after they had found her lying under a tree crying and unable to walk. She had gone to the bush to fetch firewood but while climbing a tree, a branch snapped, and she fell to the ground. Awabubila had seriously injured her leg and something in her waist area. She died a few days later. Rumours spread that her mother, long suspected of *sotali*, was responsible for her death. Family members speculated that the mother was part of a group of *sonima* in the village who killed loved ones (preferably sons/daughters) to feast on. In Gbullung, villagers believed that *sonima* operated in groups and that members of the group contributed their loved ones to the witches' cannibal feasts in the bush at midnight. Family members speculated that Awabubila's mother had killed her daughter to satisfy this rotational requirement.

A year later, as I entered Junior Secondary School, I lost a close friend and classmate, Abdul-Rahim, to a strange illness. Before his death, Abdul-Rahim grew lean, refused to eat, looked strangely at people and uttered unintelligible words. People suspected that he was

possessed by spirits. Despite the severity of his symptoms, medical doctors could not diagnose his illness but remarked on his weight loss. Family members and friends were shocked that the series of clinical examinations did not result in a diagnosis or treatment options. Shortly after his death, family members revealed that Abdul-Rahim had named his paternal grandmother on his deathbed as the person who had bewitched him. This incident heightened my fears of *sotali*; not only did we have a witch living with us, but one had now also been identified as living in the house directly behind my family's home.

My final personal encounter with witchcraft occurred in 1997 during my final year in Senior Secondary School. It again involved a good friend and classmate known to all as Mmoro. One day after school, Mmoro joined a few other friends in cycling to a nearby market in Nyankpala. As they peddled along the dusty road, a car's side mirror clipped Mmoro from behind and he fell into the bush from whence his friends rescued him. Mmoro was not visibly injured and only complained of feeling dizzy. When his symptoms worsened, he was rushed to the regional hospital in Tamale but died the next day. Family members were incensed about his death and considered it unnatural. It was widely rumoured that Mmoro's stepmother had killed him with witchcraft. Family and community members soon turned on the woman by insulting and mocking her in public until she fled the village. I was extremely anxious because I had visited Mmoro's house on a daily basis before his unfortunate demise, bringing the number of known witches in my vicinity to three. I was therefore very happy when I could continue my education in Tamale, the biggest cosmopolitan city in northern Ghana, where we thought there was no witchcraft. Knowing some of my history and unfortunate brushes with *sotali*, my friends and course mates at the university were surprised when I decided to do my final Bachelor's degree project on witchcraft. While based on a structuralist-functionalist understanding of witchcraft, and not very illuminating of my own experiences of *sotali*, I felt it necessary to confront this phenomenon head on.

In March 2013, I accepted an offer from BRAVEAURORA¹, an Austrian non-governmental organisation (NGO), to lead its education project in Guabuliga village, a small farming community located in the West Mamprusi district of northern Ghana. First as

¹ BRAVEAURORA is an Austrian NGO that was officially founded in Ghana in 2010. It was initially established to oversee the welfare of orphans who lived in the Guabuliga orphanage. BRAVEAURORA is a combination of two words; brave (in English) and aurora (in Latin, which means dawn). According to the NGO's website, the word BRAVEAURORA is a "perfect synonym for the brave orphans who draw strength and courage from the glowing African morning-sun [sic] every day and believe in their chance for a better life".

Education Coordinator and later as Project Manager, I worked with school children, teachers, village leaders and other community members. As was the case in Gbullung, here I encountered rumours of witchcraft and witchcraft accusations. In one case, the chief of Guabuliga directed an accused woman and her accusers to visit the *gambarana* (chief of Gambaga) in order to be tested for witchcraft. At Gambaga, the woman was found guilty and was forced to stay at Poagnyaankura fonɲu, a section in Gambaga village to where women found guilty of witchcraft were banished. The media, churches, NGOs, human rights activists and state actors that dealt with Poagnyaankura fonɲu often referred to it as a “witch camp”. Poagnyaankura fonɲu was not the only settlement that accommodated accused and banished “witches” in the north. Before coming to work in Guabuliga, I knew about the existence of these so-called “witch camps” but had not seen one before. I had also read stories about these settlements in the media and was aware of the human rights violations that *tindaamba* (earth priests; sing. *tindana*) were accused of committing.

In August 2014, one of the Directors of BRAVEAURORA arrived in Guabuliga with a group of eight students from the University of Vienna, Austria. They wanted to familiarise themselves with the local operations of the NGO and its impact on the village. At the end of their visit, they asked if I could organise for them to visit the famed “witch camp” in Gambaga. It was one of the many tourist sites in the north that they had listed as potentially interesting to visit. They told me that they had heard a lot about how old women accused of witchcraft in northern Ghana were confined to “camps”. The group wanted to see these accused women and take photographs of them to show family and friends back home. I could not refuse because the organisation paid my salaries, and we hired a bus to take the group to Gambaga. It was the first time I had been back to Gambaga in 30 years. Since I was very young when my parents relocated, they did not tell me about the existence of Poagnyaankura fonɲu. I knew nobody in Gambaga apart from my sister who was married to a local. I was back to the village of my birth, not as a “native” but as a local visitor guiding foreign tourists.

Our bus driver, a Mamprusi man and a member of the Guabuliga royal family who knew local customs, led us to one of the *gambarana*’s elders who mentioned that *goori* (local Mamprusi word for cola) was needed to “see” the chief. We presented our *goori* to the elder, who then led us to the *gambarana*’s compound. The elder warned that we should be very careful in our interactions with the chief as he easily got annoyed and would drive us away. Although I had agreed to translate the meeting, the *gambarana* objected to external translators and asked one of his daughters who had just finished her Polytechnic studies to do the

translation. The chief soon became irritated when one of the tourists asked him about the source of the power which he used to control the witches. He terminated the interview and asked his daughter to tell the tourists that they were too “small” to ask him such a question. He refused to continue the conversation but asked his daughter to take us to the *poagnyaankura*’s (old women’s) compound. I expected the “witches”’ houses, which were often described by the journalists in derogatory terms, to be very different from other local homes. I was surprised that their settlement appeared as ordinary as those of other community members and that there were no walls, fences and other obstructions that separated the accused women from ordinary villagers. The only features that distinguished Poagnyaankura fonɔ from the rest of the village was that their compounds were smaller and that most of them had blue hen coops. Locals told me that the accused women could move about and work in any part of the community. In the brief conversations I had with some of the accused women during this visit, I got the impression that life in this settlement was much more complex than the one portrayed by human rights activists and NGOs; the accused women, mostly old and widowed, had lost trust with kinsmen and community members following accusations of witchcraft and bewitchment.

What I saw at Poagnyaankura fonɔ changed my perception of the media’s “witch camps” and decided the topic of my PhD research. Further checks online revealed that there were five other similar settlements in northern Ghana. They were found in communities such as Kpatinga, Gushegu, Nabuli, Gnani and Kukuo. I realised that one could only study these settlements’ inherent logics and dynamics by living with and studying the accused women.

“Witch camps”, international media and scholarly attention

Since the 1990s, so-called “witch camps” in Ghana had attracted a great deal of attention from the print media and the public (Dovlo, 2007). Local and international media, human rights watchdogs, development NGOs, religious bodies and state institutions had all expressed some form of interest in these settlements and the kinds of activities that took place in them. Media and human rights actors working with these settlements eagerly disseminated sensational information about them, portraying them as prisons or penal centres where social life was ostensibly regimented, where (wrongfully) accused women lost their freedom, where human rights were routinely violated, and where suffering and deprivation characterised daily life (see ActionAid, 2012; Whitaker, 2012). In so doing, they portrayed these places as being akin to

what Goffman (1968) described as “total institutions” while their human rights sentiments provoked a proliferation of philanthropic activities in the “camps”.

My own interactions with the accused women in Poagnyaankura fonḡu stood in stark contrast to such portrayals. Indeed, contrary to portrayals of them as “zones of social abandonment” (Biehl, 2005), the accused women themselves frequently referred to the settlements they occupied as ones characterised by *suhudoo* (peace) and *faako* (refuge) where kinsmen could visit them and where they received physical and spiritual protection from the settlement’s custodian, the *gambarana*. At the same time, the women complained of food shortages and of losing personal assets acquired through many years of hard work as well as other resources they jointly owned with kinsmen and other community members when they fled the villages where they had been accused of *sotali*. In many respects, they were also strangers in their new villages. This provoked interesting questions. If the accused women could not depend on their kinsmen, how did they survive in a new settlement where they knew nobody and where their moral crimes were well known? Could they live and work on the same terms and conditions as other ordinary villagers? How could they secure the trust of host communities when their own kin had shown such distrust in them? How was socio-economic life regulated in these settlements of morally compromised strangers? My curiosity about these settlements and the conditions that made social life possible in them triggered this ethnographic study.

Beyond my personal interest in the topic, it is also true that even though some of these accused women’s settlements had been in existence for more than a century (Adinkrah, 2004), little anthropological research has been done on them. With the notable exception of Susan Drucker-Brown (1993) who had conducted research relating to Poagnyaankura fonḡu between the 1960s and 1990s, my preliminary search yielded no results on any scholarly study of these settlements within this period. Commenting on what she called the “witches’ village”, Drucker-Brown (1993: 537) noted that “One of the most obvious implications for segregating witches rather than executing them is that the women provide useful labour” to the host community. She argued that since Gambaga was once a vibrant passage route for merchants including slave traders, the slave trade might have caused a scarcity of labour in this area, making human labour more valuable than dead witches to the locals. When Drucker-Brown (1993) did fieldwork among the Mamprusi, the local ethnographic context in Poagnyaankura fonḡu was not as polarised as it was during my fieldwork in 2016 and 2017. In other words, these “camps” were relatively unknown to the NGO world and very few institutional actors worked with them. In

the post-1990 neoliberal Ghana, most of the studies on these settlements have been conducted by NGOs, human rights champions and journalists who focused, in the main, on the exposure of human rights aberrations (Palmer, 2010; Badoe, 2011; ActionAid, 2012). This is interesting because witchcraft has long been studied by anthropologists on the continent, and northern Ghana in particular has hosted some of the discipline's foremost scholars such as Meyer Fortes (1949; 1962) and Jack Goody, (1962; 1967; 1973; see Crampton, 2013).

Before the 1930s, witchcraft studies by Africanist scholars on the continent was decidedly Eurocentric (see Macfarlane, 1970) and colonial and missionary writings on the subject clearly “shaped the image and perceptions of Africa and about Africa in the Western world” (Igwe, 2016: 28). European missionaries and colonists who first arrived in Africa regarded local people's witchcraft beliefs and practices as a sign of backwardness and their society as a “sick” one (Evans-Pritchard, 1976). In the words of Alan Macfarlane (1970: xi), the Europeans regarded witchcraft “as an alien theme, a barbaric aberration, the product of past ignorance and bigotry”. Its similar designation as “the shocking nightmare, the foulest crime and deepest shame of western civilization, the black-out of everything that homo sapiens, the reasoning man, has ever held” (Robbins, 1959; cited in Macfarlane, 1970: xi-xii) conveyed the sentiments of foreign missionaries and scholars in the 19th century.

The appearance of Evans-Pritchard's (1937) *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* spurred torrential studies of witchcraft among scholars, especially in the anthropological community. Evans-Pritchard's work stood in stark contrast to the colonial and missionary logic and portrayals. Far from debasing it, he saw witchcraft as another logic or rationality that the Azande used to explain misfortune (Evans-Pritchard, 1937: 63-65). In other words, Evans-Pritchard saw witchcraft beliefs as “explanations”, not “superstitions” (White, 2000: 16). His engagement with African witchcraft offered a discourse that placed the subject beyond the religious sphere by critically analysing “the unquestioning belief of [his] highly intelligent, sophisticated, often sceptical Zande informants in the evil powers of witches and reliability of the poison oracle” (Evans-Pritchard, 1976: xxi).

Anthropologists who studied African witchcraft after the 1930s followed Evans-Pritchard's structural-functionalist tradition. They underscored the importance of witchcraft in terms of its ability to both maintain or order social relationships as well as to destabilise the social structure (Moore & Sanders, 2001: 7). The Manchester School anthropologists who carried out studies on sorcery and witchcraft in the 1950s and 1960s “still pursued [the]

functionalist tradition in allocating to beliefs... an essentially sustaining role in societies themselves as being in the long-term equilibrium” (Evans-Pritchard, 1976: xxiii) but paid more attention to the ways in which such beliefs played out in real situations of conflict. In this tradition, Turner (1967) studied Ndembu beliefs in witchcraft, Gluckman (1968) studied such beliefs among the Zulu, Marwick (1952) studied the Cewa and Monica Wilson (1951) studied the Nyakusa. Moore and Sanders (2001: 7) suggest that the focus on “the social” essentially differentiated Evans-Pritchard and the subsequent Manchester School anthropologists from their predecessors who were preoccupied with “the metaphysical”.

Renewed studies of witchcraft from the 1980s and 1990s has sought to demonstrate its manifestations in modern political, social and economic processes (see Geschiere, 1997). A key aim of anthropological witchcraft literature from this period was to highlight that witchcraft was not limited to societies often described as “traditional” but that it was pervasively grafted onto societies or sectors of societies often described as “modern” (Favret-Saada, 1980; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999; 2002; Van Donge, 1999). Jeanne Favret-Saada's (1980: 5) analysis of witchcraft in the Bocage region of western France was especially powerful in this regard. In *Deadly words* (1980), Favret-Saada described how witchcraft activities constituted a mode of discourse and kind of therapy for “modern” French peasant farmers in the Bocage. In Africa, authors analysed witchcraft as it related to modern politics (Geschiere, 1997), economics (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999), urban social contexts (Ashforth, 2005) and in relation to new diseases such as HIV/AIDs (Ashforth, 2002; Niehaus, 2007). This literature attempted to “explain both the nature and the prevalence of witchcraft on changed relations of power, production and consumption” (Moore & Sanders 2001: 9). It revealed the dynamics of social change and attempted at “making sense of the enchantments of modernity” where the “local” meets the “global” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999: 279); in other words, where both misery and prosperity are explained as ever-increasing interactions between the forces of the occult and late capitalism.

In this tradition, Adam Ashforth (2005: 12) noted that everyday life for Sowetans in South Africa was “lived more in a mode of suspicion and fear of occult assault [witchcraft] rather than open accusation and persecution of witches”. He observed that it was rare to openly name witches in Soweto, “Yet the sense that life is continually exposed to people deploying evil forces to harm and kill is palpable, the fear of occult assault is real, and the enterprise of healing devoted to protection from evil forces is enormous” (Ashforth, 2005: 13). Isak Niehaus's (2001) study among the people of Green Valley in South Africa showed that rumours

played a critical role in the construction of witchcraft. He argued that rumours could transform local beliefs “into firm proof for witchcraft” (Niehaus, 2001: 127) and that local rumours easily escalated into serious witch-hunts and violence which sometimes had political undertones. Similarly, Geschiere's (1996, 1997) study of witchcraft in Cameroon suggested that cases of witchcraft frequently erupted in rumours. He noted that in sections of Cameroonian society where there was a pervasive notion of accumulation, “rumours about the hidden backgrounds of the new forms of wealth...[were] especially strong in these areas” (Geschiere, 1996). Unlike these other contexts where witchcraft accusations were seldom openly made and in which accusations were often couched in rumours, witchcraft accusations among the people in my research area were frequently expressed in everyday life through open accusations and the naming of witches. Although issues of witchcraft and bewitchment appeared in gossip and rumours, accusations were the norm rather than an exception.

In the extant literature, witchcraft discourses as necessary grounds (Favret-Saada, 1980; West, 2005) and explanatory tales (Geschiere, 1997; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999) stand central to research while the people accused of witchcraft seldom feature as real social actors and almost never as the focus of anthropological work. This absence of work is balanced by some notable studies by Adam Ashforth (2000) and Isak Niehaus (2010a; 2013) on the victims of witchcraft and how individuals come to believe in the reality of witchcraft. Much of the current literature approach the issue of witchcraft from the angle of gossip, rumour and suspicion. In other words, current theorising on witchcraft largely deals with rumour and abstraction, often confining its scope to the accuser (and/or victim) and the abstract or rumoured witch. Where witchcraft is discussed in the context of “lived reality” - such as in Soweto (Ashforth, 2000) and Green Valley (Niehaus, 2010a) – witches appear largely as amorphous and abstract referents, which mirror people’s insecurity around the sources of their misfortune.

This thesis is ethnographically different from the large body of work on witchcraft in Africa as it looks at known, confessing witches who lived together as social outcasts and “moral criminals” in host villages who had not been party to their accusations. In these villages, accused witches established a kind of doubtful integrity amongst themselves in a social world where they have otherwise lost trust with kin and neighbours, resulting in their banishment. My work aims to provide an ethnography of ordinary life and the subjective experiences of people accused of witchcraft who inhabited what I refer to broadly in this thesis as “settlements” (or more specifically “accused women’s settlements”) but which human rights

activists, government, NGOs and other civil society actors called “witch camps”. While I refer to these local settlements as “accused women’s settlements”, I wish to state clearly that there were some men who lived in one of these six settlements. My naming merely reflects a local understanding that women were most likely to be witches.

While the present study is not the first work to be done on the accused women’s settlements in northern Ghana (see Drucker-Brown, 1993) or in other African countries (Green, 2003), it is the first of its kind to explore how witchcraft accusations impact on local discourses about “help” (*songsim*) to redefine gift and exchange relationships between locals and other actors on the one hand and the accused women, who are confined to local protection under the *tindana*, on the other hand. While Susan Drucker-Brown’s (1993) study focused exclusively on Gambaga’s accused women’s settlement (Poagnyaankura fonɔ) and especially on the changing patterns of witchcraft accusation vis-à-vis the alteration in the local social structure and the changing gender relations, Maia Green (1997; 2003) looked at the social context of witchcraft among the Pogoro of Tanzania and especially about the operation of temporary “camps” where suspected or accused witches reported and underwent rigorous cleansing rituals in order to rid them of their witchcraft powers.

Regional context

The context of this study is a small West African country, Ghana, located south of the Sahara Desert. Ghana is often divided into “south” and “north” (see Figure 1). Under colonial rule, the vast northern half of the Gold Coast (now Ghana) was designated as the British Northern Territories (Dickson, 1968; Awedoba, 2006). Upon Ghana’s attainment of political independence in March 1957, the Protectorate of the Northern Territories and some portion of Northern Togoland officially came to be designated as the Northern Region of Ghana (Awedoba, 2006; Fuseini, Yaro & Yiran, 2017).

During the time of my research, Ghana was further divided into ten administrative regions. The northern region, with Tamale as its administrative capital, was the largest in terms of land size and the fourth most populous region after Ashanti, Greater Accra and the Eastern regions (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012).

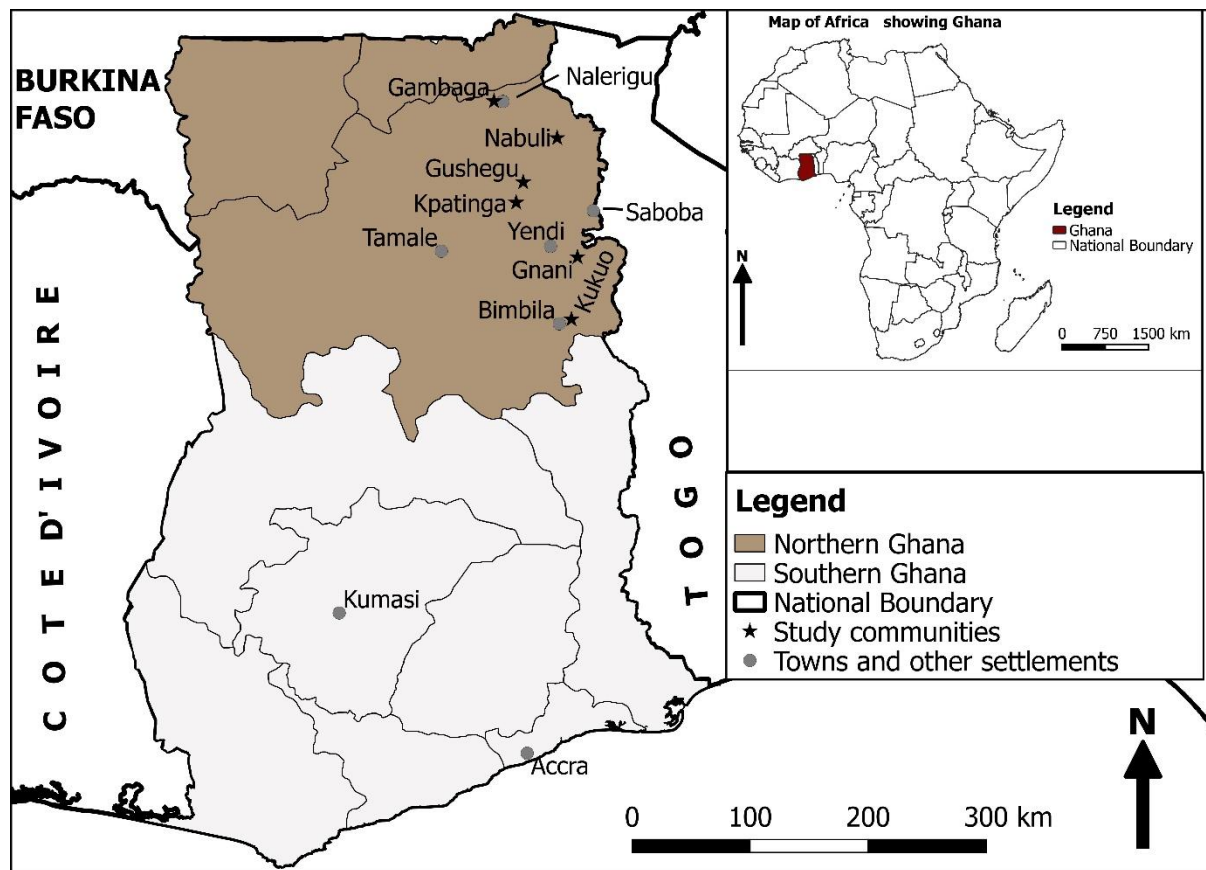


Figure 1: Study communities in northern Ghana, 2018.

Courtesy Issahaka Fuseini.

In terms of climatic features, the region was usually dry and hot, with only one short rainy season and a relatively long dry season. Compared to the forested southern Ghana, the northern savanna region recorded low amounts of rainfall, which made the region unsuitable for large-scale agriculture (Adinkrah, 2015). During the harmattan, temperatures soared to 40 degrees Celsius during the day (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013), threatening human health (e.g. causing occasional outbreaks of Cerebrospinal Meningitis). In some instances, locals invoked witchcraft to explain epidemics caused by excessive heat. For instance, the Cerebrospinal Meningitis epidemic which broke out in the region in 1997 and killed an estimated 542 people was attributed to the work of witches and triggered violent witch-hunts in some communities in the north (Adinkrah, 2004; 2015).

The region was home to more than 18 different language groups (Brukum, 2000). In all, these groups could be classified into three broader linguistic categories: Mole-Dagomba² (hereinafter called Dagbamba), Gurma and Guan. At the time of my research, the Dagbamba was the largest ethnic group in the region, constituting over 50% of the region's population, while the Gurma (predominantly made up of the Konkomba³) constituted about 27%. The Guan (to which the neighbouring Gonja belonged) was made up of just 9% of the population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013).

The historical context of witchcraft in Ghana

Ghana's accused women's settlements are said to have existed for more than a century (Palmer, 2010; Badoe, 2011). The oldest among them and the one best known in the country, Poagnyaankura fonɔ, was apparently established in the 19th century (Badoe, 2005: 39) or much earlier (Adinkrah, 2004: 338), depending on the literature source. Before this time, the most common way of punishing or dealing with accused women in Dagbamba society (and especially in Mamprugu) was through execution (Drucker-Brown, 1993; Badoe, 2005).

In Ghana, while the accused women's settlements predated colonialism (see Drucker-Brown, 1993), the current framing and policies surrounding them were shaped during colonial rule. In 1874 when the British assumed control over the Gold Coast as a colony, they banned two witch divination strategies then current; "corpse-carrying" and poison ordeals (Gray, 2001). Gray (2001: 15) explained corpse-carrying as "a form of divination in which men would carry a shrouded body, and, if witchcraft or magic caused the death, the spirit of the deceased would subtly guide the carriers to the responsible party". The British also prosecuted those who killed witches and fined locals if they accused others of witchcraft. According to Parker (2004), these measures did not undermine local witchcraft beliefs. Indeed, a number of anti-witchcraft shrines sprung up in the colony. These shrines were essentially witch-finding shrines that

² The Mole-Dagomba in northern Ghana is made of several ethnic groups, the significant ones being the Dagomba (who occupy a kingdom called Dagbon), the Mamprusi (occupying the kingdom of Mamprugu) and the Nanumba (residing in the Nanun kingdom). Together, the three groups are called Dagbamba (see MacGaffey 2013) and share significant cultural similarities in terms of political organisation, marriage, religion, economic systems and language

³ The Konkomba constitute the second largest ethnic group in northern Ghana after the Dagbamba. The two are neighbours.

sought to identify and punish people suspected of witchcraft through various rituals (see Gray, 2001; McCaskie, 2004).

Writing about anti-witchcraft movements in the colonial Gold Coast, Natasha Gray (2005) suggested that the south (not the north) was characterised by the successive emergence of various anti-witchcraft oracles, although she admitted that some of these anti-witch cults originally emerged from the north. Gray argued that the decision of the colonial government to protect the interest of the public by outlawing what it considered as outrageous superstitious activities ironically increased the demand for supernatural protection, especially from believers and initiates. She explained that while colonial laws restrained contact with these movements, “initiates believed that banned gods retained their power to punish them severely if they did not atone for violations of movement rules” (Gray, 2005: 139). Gray contends that this paradox, which colonial authorities initially underestimated, accounted for the rising appeal and popularity of these cults in the Gold Coast.

Tom McCaskie (1981) described one of the earliest anti-witchcraft shrines in the south, Sakrabundi, which replaced a previous one named Aberewa in the 1860s. He suggested that the shrine originated from the northern part of the Gold Coast and was associated with a Hausa Muslim man, Dan Garba. Nothing is said to be known about him apart from his name (McCaskie, 1981). Later, other anti-witchcraft cults such as Kunde, Senyakupo, Hwemeso and Nana Tongo emerged in the south (Gray, 2001, 2005; McCaskie, 2004).

According to Gray (2001), many of those who came to the shrines to be tested for witchcraft did so under pressure from their communities. At the shrines, they were subjected to severe beatings, had to ingest poison and were stripped half-naked. These ordeals were intended to force confessions from accused people; a prerequisite for cleansing rituals at the time. However, colonial authorities opposed the operation of these shrines as “fetish”, “primitive” enterprises that enriched their custodians or managers at the expense of vulnerable locals (Gray, 2001).

By the 1930s, the anti-witchcraft shrines were mired in controversy as local practices and understandings stood opposed to the colonial government’s assumptions about orderly rule and rational justice (Gray, 2005: 339). In response, the British colonial government revoked

the Gold Coast Native Tribunals'⁴ power to adjudicate witchcraft cases and criminalised the use of medicine oracles and the practice of witch-finding through the promulgation of the 1930 "Native Custom (Witchcraft and Wizard Finding) Order" (McCaskie, 1981; Gray, 2001, Gray, 2005). According to this Act, those found guilty of witch- or wizard-finding and any ceremony connected to it were "liable to a fine not exceeding twenty-five pounds" (Gray, 2001: 357). Chiefs, oracle priests and other traditional authorities petitioned the colonial authorities to amend the interpretation of the 1930 Order to allow for voluntary witchcraft consultations and confessions. Since the petition was framed in terms of psychotherapy, the colonial government eventually allowed voluntary appearance before oracle shrines and witchcraft confessions (Gray, 2001). Gray (2001: 341) noted that this allowance "made a decisive contribution to the eventual transformation of witch-cleansing from a coercive, quasi-judicial process driven by accusation into a voluntary practice centred on confession".

Parker (2004: 394) notes that in the 1940s, especially after the Second World War, the phenomenon of anti-witchcraft cults went into decline "as the healing and protective powers of African gods began to be replaced by those offered by the burgeoning numbers of prophetic Christian churches" in southern Ghana. In the north, particularly among the Dagbamba, *malams* (Muslim clerics) provided spiritual protection against the attacks of witches. However, despite the growing popularity of Christianity and the work of *malams*, traditional healers in both northern and southern Ghana continued to provide anti-witchcraft services alongside the Christian and Muslim practitioners.

Although not officially recognised in post-independence Ghana, witchcraft remained a "subtext" in Ghanaian society in very much the same way as it was in South Africa (Niehaus, 2010b: 66). The postcolonial Ghanaian state appeared to be ambivalent about witchcraft. The government only acted on witchcraft accusations when they led to violent witch hunts, as they did in 1997 in the northern part of the country (Adinkrah, 2015), or when civil society human rights activists and NGOs raised human rights concerns about the so-called "witch camps" (ActionAid, 2012). The Ghanaian constitution, drafted in 1992, contained no specific clause on witchcraft but included a clause that aimed to protect citizens from injurious or

⁴ British colonial authorities passed the 1927 Native Administration Ordinance (NAO) which effectively granted authority to Gold Coast Native tribunals to conduct trials in their courts regarding witchcraft cases brought to their attention. Before the passage of the 1930 law, colonial authorities left witchcraft issues to the jurisdiction of traditional courts in accordance with the 1927 Native Administration Ordinance.

dehumanising cultural practices. Accused women's settlements, or "witch camps" quickly became known as places where human rights were abused.

At the time of my study in 2016, the Ghanaian government and human rights-minded organisations (especially ActionAid) were preoccupied with the closure of what they called "witch camps". The process started in the late 1990s when both the United States of America's Department of State (U.S. Department of State) and the Ghanaian government expressed concern about the human rights dimensions of these so-called "camps". In 1999, the U.S. Department of State's human rights country report issued for Ghana (which appeared on its website), complained about the human rights violations, including what it termed as "forced labour", that occurred in the "witch camps" (U.S. Department of State, 1999). The report lamented that "challenges lie not only in persuading the custodians of the witches' homes to abolish the practice, but also in educating the community so the women will be allowed to return safely to their homes" (U.S. Department of State, 1999). In this report, the Department referred to earlier attempts by the Ghanaian government to deal with the problem of these settlements. In 1997, the Ghanaian human rights watchdog, the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), conducted investigations into four of these accused women's settlements (Gambaga, Kukuo, Gnani and Kpatinga) where 815 accused women apparently lived (Government of Ghana, 1998). In 2004, research revealed that the settlements grew to host about 8,000 accused people (Adinkrah, 2004). In 2010 and 2014, reports by the Anti-Witchcraft Campaign Coalition (AWACC) suggested that the number of accused and banished people living in all the accused women's settlements decreased to 1,543 (in 2010) and 785 (in 2014) (Igwe, 2016). At the time of my fieldwork in these settlements, the AWACC's downward trend seemed to be reversing with 958 people living in the settlements.

Naming a "witch" settlement

During my fieldwork, locals referred to the places that accommodated accused "witches", mostly women, by names semantically different from the western notion of a "camp". In Gambaga, for example, the accused women's settlement was known to the local Mamprusi inhabitants as Poagnyaankura fonɲu, literally, "old ladies' section" (see also Drucker-Brown, 1993: 535). A draft of a local Dagbani dictionary prepared by Roger Blench translated the Dagbani word *fong* into English as "town" or "a quarter of a town" (Blench, 2004: 62). It is Blench's second translation that is closest in meaning to the Mamprusi conception of *fonɲu*.

Writing on the Dagomba, Martin Staniland (1975: 15) noted that a typical Dagomba “village is divided into wards (*fona*, sing. *fong*), each being identified by its head or by the specialist group dominating it. There may be a chief’s quarter (*nayilifong*), an imam’s quarter (*limamfong*), a quarter for the soldiers, one for the butchers, another for the drummers, and so on”. In Gambaga, the word *poagnyaankura* (old women) was often used as a euphemism for women accused of witchcraft. Some interlocutors in Gambaga argued that the accused women’s settlement might sometimes be classified as *nayiri fonɲu* (chief’s quarter or section) since it was located near the chief’s palace. As far as Gambaga was concerned, it was clear that the notion of *fonɲu* was used by local people merely to refer to a place, ward or quarter of residence occupied by a group of people.

In other communities such as Gnani and Kpatinga, locals used the term *tindang* to designate the accused women’s settlements. *Tindang* was used to denote a community shrine, or a territorial boundary associated with a shrine. I should note here that the word *tindang* is derived from another Dagbani word *tiɲa* which MacGaffey (2013: 78) explains as “the terrain occupied by a human community as its place of residence and source of livelihood”. Unlike *tiɲa*, *tindang* largely symbolised the spiritual or occult sphere of a territorial community. In this sense, MacGaffey’s (2013: 78) “territorial occult” seems to offer a better understanding of the local notion of *tindang*. Every *tindang* was being “taken care of” or supervised by the *tindana* (literally “earth owner”) whose duty it was to perform rituals to the local shrine in order to bring about harmony between the physical and the spiritual realms (Kirby, 2015). By so doing, fertility, prosperity, long life, protection, safety and other positive virtues associated with “good life” were ensured.

In Kukuo and Nabuli, the local custodians of the accused women’s settlements also assumed the title of *tindana*, suggesting that such places might also be called *tindang*, although there were usually called by the names of the villages. For example, what NGOs and other civil society actors frequently called “Kukuo witch camp” was simply known to locals as “Kukuo”. In Nabuli, locals referred to the section of the community the accused women occupied as Zongo, a Hausa word which, in Ghanaian context, is used to designate an area predominantly inhabited by Muslim migrant status but which here signified their outsider status.

Since there was no one specific local name that was applicable to all the places that accommodated the accused women, and since these settlements were predominantly inhabited by women, I use the generic term “accused women’s settlements” (or simply “settlements”) to

refer to them. However, I often use specific local names to designate some of these places, such as Poagnyaankura fonṅu (for Gambaga) and Leli-dabari (for Gushegu). Where I use the term “witch camp” or “camp”, it is often circumscribed with quotation marks to indicate the caution and ambivalence with which I approach these words.

Doing fieldwork as “citizen anthropologist”

After my first encounter with the *poagnyaankura* at Gambaga in 2014, I spent eight months doing fieldwork in all six accused women’s settlements spread across Dagbamba’s three kingdoms – Dagbon, Mamprugu and Nanung (hereinafter collectively called Dagbambaland) - but also in communities that had no such settlements but who hosted state agencies and NGOs whose work involved these settlements (such as Tamale, Bimbilla and Yendi). My fieldwork commenced in August 2016 and ended in March 2017. Although I identify as Dagbana and am familiar with broader local cultural practices, doing fieldwork at “home” was both fulfilling and awkward.

While many anthropologists are shifting their field sites to their “homes” (Becker, Boonzaier & Owen, 2005: 124), they are often confronted with the problem of being a “native” (Bunzl, 2004: 435) or “citizen anthropologist” (Cheater, 1987). As a local, I had privileged access to some sites. For example, when I transgressed local rules in Gambaga by entering Poagnyaankura fonṅu through the Presbyterian Church instead of the *gambarana*, I invoked my birth citizenship in the village to assuage the local chief’s potential anger. Being a native speaker of Dagbani opened many opportunities that would be unavailable to an outsider anthropologist. My excellent comprehension of my interlocutors’ language facilitated effective communication, translation and negotiations, informed consent, and building quick and sustained rapport. However, there were some instances when my local assistants served as translators. This happened in only two of the accused women’s settlements where my interlocutors were predominantly Konkomba and had a poor understanding of the Dagbani language. In many of the villages where I did fieldwork, community entry and acceptance became much easier because I was introduced to local contact persons by long-time friends, school mates and family members: an opportunity that a non-insider might only acquire by spending more time in the field and perhaps at considerable cost.

Marilyn Strathern (1987) cautions that in doing fieldwork at “home”, citizen anthropologists are likely to take for granted the familiar terrain to which they are exposed.

The danger is that the anthropologist, in his own imagination, does not discover anything new; everything appears either ordinary and known in much the same way it is known to other “native” participants in the culture or it leads to “unnecessary mystifications” (Strathern 1987: 17) as the author tries to explain the most mundane facts to an assumed ignorant outsider. Mindful of these dangers, I have tried to balance “native” or emic presuppositions with critical etic analytics in order not to sacrifice critical knowledge production for familiar and convenient “insider” narratives.

Being an insider in this area came with one notable constraint. In many instances, my informants expected me to know the answer to questions because I was from the area and greeted my questions for elaboration with incomprehension. I often had to plead and give lengthy explanations of why I needed their individual perspectives on issues being probed. Although I encountered this challenge in almost all Dagbamba communities, my insider status ironically helped here too; I could crack local jokes with my interlocutors and sustain their interest in conversations and smoothen existing rapport even while I was asking “stupid” questions. This strategy worked well as I could elicit the cooperation of my “difficult” informants and got them to answer questions they initially expected me to know because I was one of them.

While engaging with officials from some organisations, I came across long-time friends and school mates who were now district heads of their organisations. While this familiarity was highly rewarding in terms of getting me connected to important local personalities, much of our long conversations sometimes veered off the core issues of my research. Some of my friends had worked with the accused women and the *tindaamba* (i.e. earth priests in whose custody the accused witches lived). Their referrals facilitated my entry and acceptance into these local settlements. For instance, while in Gushegu, it was my engagement with a long-time friend, Afa Sule, who was then heading the Gushegu district office of the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) that opened an opportunity and brought me in contact with Kambondoo who later served as my local research assistant and facilitated my meetings with local leaders in Gushegu and the accused women at Leli-dabari (see Chapter 4).

Notwithstanding the few challenges I encountered, doing anthropology as a “citizen” was truly rewarding.

Fieldwork and ethics

My fieldwork was guided by the ethical guidelines supplied by Stellenbosch University and Anthropology Southern Africa (ASNA) of which I was a member. The first rule of most anthropological ethical guides is to do no harm (Anthropology Southern Africa, 2005: 142). The ethical committee at Stellenbosch University highlighted this as a potential problem because I would be working with a vulnerable community, women who were stigmatised because of their accused witch status. In order to limit the harm my study would do in terms of dredging up the trauma of their accusations, the university insisted that I obtain proof of formal collaboration with a professional institution that could offer counselling services to the accused witches in the event that my research would cause psychological harm or discomfort to the accused people I interacted with in the course of my fieldwork. In September 2016 while in Tamale, I went to the northern regional headquarters of DSW and made a request for collaboration. The Department approved my request and directed its officers in the respective districts where there were “witch camps” to provide the necessary counselling services to the accused witches in the event of any need.

In the course of my research, I engaged with three main categories of interlocutors, each with their own ethical fieldwork considerations. In the first group, I dealt with NGO and church officials, and officers of government departments that worked with the accused women. Organisations that participated in my study included the DSW, CHRAJ, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service, the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) and some members of the Regional Reintegration Committee (RRC) – a committee that was initiated and funded by ActionAid to ensure the reintegration of the accused women and the disbandment of the “camps”. Since anthropological ethical guidelines proscribe “clandestine research” (Anthropology Southern Africa, 2005: 143), I first disclosed the objectives and intended activities of my research to the leaders of these organisations. My engagement with churches (such as the Presbyterian Church and the Catholic Church), and NGOs (e.g. ActionAid, Songtaba, World Vision) yielded rich data and useful insights into the ways that accused women were framed. While my engagement with these organisations was relatively easy and I was not required to go through any cumbersome procedures for clearance, the DSW and CHRAJ insisted that I needed to be officially introduced to their district offices through written correspondence. These institutions issued formal letters of introduction to facilitate my research after they had directed me to make an official request.

The second group of interlocutors involved those people whom the locals called *asanza niriba* (opinion leaders). *Asanza niriba* referred to people who were usually (but not always) considered elderly and were presumed to have superior local knowledge or access to such knowledge. Compared to ordinary community members, they were more respected and their views and suggestions on local matters carried much weight. Being an insider, I knew which title-holders were considered *asanza niriba* in the Dagbamba communities where I worked. In these communities, the *asanza niriba* I dealt with included the *tindaamba*, *nanima* (chiefs), *kpambalba* (chief's elders), imams, village church leaders, *assambleman-nima* (local government representatives; sing. *assambleman*) and in a few cases, teachers. Unlike NGO, church and state officials who were literate and could read and sign informed consent forms, most of the *asanza niriba* I engaged with were illiterate. Drawing on my past research experience (see Mutaru, 2007), I was mindful of this ethical challenge. The ethical guidelines of most professional associations of anthropology require that researchers get informed consent. While university ethics committees require signed consent forms, I realised that these would embarrass the respected and illiterate *asanza niriba* I contacted and I settled instead on verbal consent (cf. American Anthropological Association, 1998: 3; Anthropology Southern Africa, 2005: 142; Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth [ASA], 2011: 2).

The third category of interlocutors I dealt with was the accused women who lived in Poagnyaankura fonju and other accused women's settlements. Apart from participant observation, I conducted in-depth interviews with seven or more interlocutors (including their leaders) in every settlement I visited. The locals referred to the leader of the women in these settlements as *magazia*⁵ (pl. *magazianima*) (see Mutaru, 2018a). I could only get access to the accused women after the *tindana* had given permission to do so. In all these settlements, the accused women were under the *tindana*'s guardianship and no visitor could engage with them if he did not agree. In one of these accused women settlements (Tindaanzhee), it was not sufficient to seek permission from the *tindana* to engage with the accused women. The *tindana* insisted on being present to witness the kind of conversations that I had with the accused women. He told me that his decision to be present during the interview process was informed by previous nasty experiences he encountered with bad press reportage. Although I felt uncomfortable with this situation since I thought it could hamper the interview process, the

⁵ A term borrowed from the Hausa language and often used to mean a "Queen" or a leader of a group of women.

tindana was satisfied with my encounter with the first interlocutor and did not attend subsequent interview sessions.

Like the *asanza niriba*, the accused women only participated in the study after I had explained my project and obtained verbal consent from them. Once in these settlements, I had longer engagements with the *magazianima* than with other interlocutors since in their case I was interested in documenting life histories that covered almost all aspects of their lives: life before marriage, life in matrimonial homes and life after admission into the accused women's settlement.

While some anthropological ethical guidelines prohibit direct payment of research participants, they do suggest that their assistance should be acknowledged or recognised appropriately (American Anthropological Association, 1998: 3; Anthropology Southern Africa, 2005: 142). During fieldwork, I paid the accused women I worked with for two main reasons. First, as part of ethical research, Anthropology Southern Africa's codes of ethics enjoined its members not to exploit its interlocutors: "fair return should be made for their [interlocutors] help and services" (Anthropology Southern Africa, 2005: 142; see also Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth, 2011: 6). By choosing to engage with me, my interlocutors sacrificed money they would have earned by working for locals on their farms and other domestic projects. I therefore chose to pay them for their time so that they would not be out of pocket, and financially harmed, if they participated in my study. Secondly, it was a local custom for visitors to bring a "gift" whenever they visited someone's home. As a local, I could not flaunt such local rules of hospitality.

By way of discharging my ethical obligations towards my research participants, I have, throughout this thesis, used pseudonyms for all accused women and their leaders residing in the accused women's settlements. I have identified traditional or local authorities by using their specific village titles rather than real names. Where a name is assigned to a village elder, this is a pseudonym. I have also used pseudonyms for NGO workers and church members who agreed to participate in my study. Where necessary, I used real names for officials working in state departments and agencies and who made statements in their official capacity. For this chapter, in particular, I have used real names in vignettes to identify friends and family members who are deceased.

Emerging ethical quandaries during fieldwork

I encountered several ethical challenges while conducting fieldwork.⁶ These happened both in communities that hosted accused women's settlements and those without where I engaged with *asanza niriba* on important social issues. There were several quandaries I faced while doing fieldwork in Gambaga and Tamale. One involved the ethical challenge of what I call "data larceny" while the other concerned the problematic figure of the "multiple respondent" (Mutaru, 2018b: 185). The third quandary concerned my empathy for the women who were maltreated in a witch-hunt situation and my inability to help due to lethal local restrictions. The final ethical quandary had to do with the problem of secrecy and anonymity while interviewing the accused women.

During fieldwork in Gambaga, I had access to Poagnyaankura fonɲu through the local Presbyterian Church. I initially planned to visit the *gambarana*'s palace for his consent to work with the accused women. However, upon meeting with Awam, my local research assistant, she advised against my plan for two reasons. One, the *gambarana* was known to be bad-tempered and could deny me access without any reason. Secondly, she thought the process might be bureaucratically cumbersome. I agreed with Awam because she worked with the accused women on a daily basis and knew more about the dynamics of village politics in terms of gaining access Poagnyaankura fonɲu than I did. Awam worked for the Gambaga Outcasts (GO) Home - another name the Presbyterian Church used for Poagnyaankura fonɲu - project, an initiative of the local Presbyterian Church that sought to support the accused women and work towards their reintegration into their communities of origin. I had assumed that the Church had facilitated similar visits for other guests in the past.

I had previously informed the chief of Guabuliga (my good friend) about my intention to visit Gambaga for fieldwork. After concluding my research in Gambaga, I called to inform him about my departure preparations and to bid him farewell. During our conversation, he raised some important concerns about my fieldwork in Gambaga when he got to know that I did not secure the *gambarana*'s permission before entering Poagnyaankura fonɲu. He described my actions as transgressive of local norms and said that it amounted to a disregard of the *gambarana* in whose custody the accused women lived. The tone of his caution

⁶ I have published an article in *Anthropology Southern Africa* on some of these ethical quandaries (see Mutaru 2018a).

insinuated that I had been involved in something unethical. The chief's caution made me feel uncomfortable as it suggested that I had acquired data under culturally unsettling circumstances. Thoughts of possible "data larceny" (illegitimate access to data) kept haunting me. Upon retrospection, I approached the *gambarana* to explain this difficult situation and to obtain his consent for the use of the data I had collected. Contrary to my expectation that the chief would be annoyed, he received me well and even granted me an interview after I had explained my challenge. He was happy to hear that I was born in Gambaga. This probably might have been the reason for his good reception. Although the chief gave authorisation for the use of the data, I was still unsure about the ethical status of my data since some anthropological ethical codes problematise any consent that is acquired after the completion of research (Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth, 2011: 4).

The second ethical quandary also emerged in relation to engagements with traditional authorities in the area. As a child, I learnt that witchcraft was absent in cities like Tamale. Interested in the scale and aggression of witch-hunts that took place in Tamale during my fieldwork (see Chapter 3), I initiated steps to interview an important chief in Tamale (Naa Dakpema) about witchcraft and the fate of old women who were brought to his palace (see Chapter 3). After several unsuccessful attempts, I finally succeeded in meeting the chief. Before Naa Dakpema sat three of his elders who "intercepted" the questions I put to him and provided answers one after the other. In this case, I was confronted with an interesting ethical dilemma involving an interview with a "consecrated informant" who, for cultural reasons, decided to respond through the multiple voices of his elders, all, apparently, claiming to represent the opinion of the chief. The multifarious nature of the chief's response qualified him to be labelled as a "multiple respondent" – that is, a single respondent deemed to be answering questions through multiple voices, all competing for recognition and representation (Mutaru, 2018b: 190-192). This was unsettling, at least, for me when I situated myself in the field as a professional anthropologist and not a "native".

One of Naa Dakpema's elders prematurely terminated the interview without consulting my "multiple respondent" whose consent was the basis for the discussion. It was difficult for me to judge the appropriateness of the elder's decision to prematurely end the interview since I sought permission directly from Naa Dakpema. The interplay of culture and ethics made the issue more complex. By cultural requirement, the voices of the elders were supposed to represent that of the chief. But what was the limit of this representation? Did it include the power to terminate the engagement when the consent that initiated the process did not emanate

directly from them? Whose verdict of the narration should be disregarded if they offered different perspectives or opinions to an issue under investigation (as they sometimes did)? Would Naa Dakpema have differed in his opinion were he to offer direct responses? I did not have answers to these questions that my engagement with Naa Dakpema and his elders raised.

The third ethical quandary I faced happened while I was conducting fieldwork in Tamale. Here I witnessed witch-hunts involving old women suspected of being witches (see Chapter 3). I suspected that the women would face violence, but I was powerless to do something against the mob's anger. As a local who had spent about 20 years of my life in Tamale, witch-hunts were not unknown to me since I had previously witnessed many such scenes. What was terrifying in this case was the scale of the hunts. In Tamale, people who were suspected or accused of being witches sometimes faced physical violence including beating and stoning, the burning of their properties and banishment (see GhanaWeb, 2016). In this particular hunt, the accused women whom the mob had brought to the chief's palace were manhandled but their properties were not burnt. Although I felt sorry for what was happening to the old women, I could neither approach the mob to secure the release of these women nor could I report the case to the local police. In Tamale and other areas in Dagbambaland, locals regarded witches as society's prototypical moral criminals. People who attempted to protect witches from persecution were seen to be supporters of these social outcasts and their moral crimes and therefore might be subject to similar violence. Since I was aware of the local expectations regarding such hunts, I decided to stay away although I felt guilty of not being able to help.

During fieldwork in the accused women's settlements, I encountered my last ethical challenge regarding secrecy. In Poagnyaankura fonɲu, Mariama shared a house with her long-time friend, Napaga. The two had known each other long before both were accused by kinsmen and banished from their original villages. During my fieldwork in Gambaga, I noticed that most of the accused women, like Napaga and Mariama, did not like leaving Poagnyaankura fonɲu except when villagers asked them to provide labour. Mariama and Napaga always sat inside their compound to chat and gossip about other neighbours. In one of my visits, they talked about a colleague who had recently visited Bawku to have a medical screening of her eyes and another who was in a critical condition who the *gambarana* had sent home. Mariama and Napaga both looked old, but they told me they still worked. It was not possible to talk to one without the other as they always wanted to be together and shared many things. As was the practice among the accused women in Poagnyaankura fonɲu and other settlements elsewhere,

Mariama and Napaga had their crops separately packed in their rooms, cooked separately but always ate together. Any time I engaged one of them in a conversation, the other would join to listen and share ideas. Neither saw anything wrong in listening to the conversation I had with the other, although I sometimes felt uncomfortable about issues of confidentiality. I faced this challenge in almost all the accused women's settlements I visited. However, I soon abandoned my worries about secrecy and confidentiality when I realised that it was not possible to sacrifice the women's desire for solidarity at the altar of the prescriptive rhetoric of confidentiality often emphasised in academic research (cf. Giordano, Reilly, Taylor & Dogra, 2007).

Notes on nomenclature and orthography

In this thesis, I have mostly used Dagbani to indicate the local equivalents of some English words and expressions because of its predominance in the areas where this study was undertaken generally, and Dagbamba society in particular. Although the Dagbamba spoke dialects that were completely different from their Konkomba neighbours, some of the Konkomba understood and spoke Dagbani in view of the fact that the two cohabitated and interacted intimately. However, where necessary, I used very specific local dialects (e.g. Mampruli) to depict precise local understandings. Where I use a linguistic terminology other than Dagbani or its cognate dialect (Mampruli), this is clearly indicated.

Many anthropologists who have studied witchcraft in African societies have reported dual conceptions of the phenomenon – positive (or white) witchcraft and negative (or black) witchcraft (Mair, 1965; West, 2005). The people whom I studied conceived *sotali* (often translated in English as “witchcraft”) in decidedly negative terms. The positive deployment of a person's medicine (*tim*) was never conceived and treated as *sotali*. In this thesis, therefore, I use the term *sotali* or “witchcraft” in the sense in which most of my interlocutors explained it: the use of bad words, looks, animals, medicines, water, food, air and other objects to spiritually induce illness, death, material loss, accidents and other forms of harm.

There are some special Dagbani vowels and consonants I have used in this thesis, but which are not used in standard English language. These are η and γ . In Dagbani orthography, the consonant γ is often described as a voiced velar fricative (MacGaffey, 2013). Its nearest anglicised phonology version is “g”. For example, *paydoyso* (midwife) may be pronounced as *pagdogso*. The special symbol η is a velar nasal consonant and is often pronounced as “ng” as in “fang” or “gong” (not as in “fond”).

Structure of the thesis

Although the initial motivation for this thesis was to look at the economics and livelihoods in the accused women's settlements, it became apparent that I could not understand the livelihoods of the accused women as a stand-alone theme. Their livelihoods, or more broadly, the economies in these local settlements existed in relation to other facets of social and political life not only of the people in their communities but also of their interactions with neighbouring villages (through market systems, for example) and other local and international actors (e.g. NGOs and churches).

Chapter 2 discusses the socio-political organisation of the Dagbamba and Konkomba whose kinswomen predominated the accused women's settlements found in the savanna belt of the northern region where I conducted fieldwork. The two groups were neighbours and shared striking cultural similarities but spoke different languages. The comparison of Dagbamba with the Konkomba is necessary because many Konkomba women were present in settlements located in Dagbamba-controlled areas. An understanding of the socio-political organisation of the Dagbamba provides the basis for understanding the socio-cultural and political set-up of the villages where I conducted this research. It also provides insights into the dynamics of family life and structure, the economy and religion of the people through which the reader could develop a better understanding of the nature of witchcraft accusations, banishment and the dynamics of everyday life in these settlements. Chapter 2 also deals with the ways in which political authority and economic rights structurally "define" the kinds of women (and men) that would typically be accused of witchcraft.

In Chapter 3, I take a look at what it takes to be admitted into the accused women's settlements; that is, the local beliefs and practices of witchcraft, the dynamics of accusations and the pathway to these settlements. This chapter discusses the beliefs and institutions of witchcraft as they prevailed among locals and shows how the accused women's settlements and shrines were used as local strategies to dissipate the apprehensions and tensions related to *sotali* and *soyu* (witchcraft accusations). This chapter shows that while *tim* (medicine) was important in the ways that politics was practised in the area, its misuse often aroused disgruntlement from locals and amounted to the local notion of *sotali*. The chapter demonstrates that witchcraft was an everyday reality in Dagbambaland and that getting rid of witches ensured the good health of a whole community (i.e. that chiefs had to get rid of them

for the good of all). Moreover, the chapter suggests that witchcraft had long been identified as a problem in Dagbambaland and that this was evident in the historical narratives associated with the origins of the accused women's settlements. The chapter also demonstrates the singular ritual significance of the *tindana* in the scheme of local affairs, particularly his distinguished role in identifying witches, neutralising their powers and, by so doing, combating the menace of their activities to society.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the different levels of interactions that took place between the *tindana* and accused women on the one hand, and other local and international actors such as churches, NGOs, and state agencies on the other hand. These actors made various interventions in the lives of the accused women in the accused women's settlements. The chapter shows that the specific forms of interventions the churches and NGOs made in the life of the accused women – be it social, economic, political or religious – were informed by their interpretations and understandings of the plight of the accused women and the circumstances that triggered this plight.

Chapter 5 explores the ordinary lives and subjective experiences of the accused women. Since the accused women did not live in isolation, I examine their relationships with other accused women, the *tindana*, ordinary community members, kinsmen in origin villages and other relevant actors, such as NGOs and churches. In this chapter, I pay particular attention to the local notion of *songsim*, which ordinarily meant mutual “help” or “assistance”. However, I noticed that the operation of *songsim* was somewhat skewed when it came to the accused women – they were working harder for less. In other words, the notion of *songsim* was constantly reconfigured in ordinary life when actors acknowledged (or failed to acknowledge) and appreciate the reality of witchcraft and its inherent dangers.

In Chapter 6, I summarise the main findings of this study and the contribution it makes to the anthropological literature on witchcraft. Rather than restating what many anthropologists studying witchcraft often do – focusing on the dynamics of accusations, the suspected mode of operation of witches and violence against witches – this thesis, beyond acknowledging the social reality of witchcraft, analyses the dynamics of social life that characterise the world of known “witches”. Contrary to the orthodox notion of reciprocity in anthropology, this study shows that in a situation where the reality of witchcraft is acknowledged, processes of mutual reciprocity and gift exchange in everyday life are disrupted to reflect the distrust society associates with the moral crimes of the “witches” involved.

CHAPTER 2: Social Organisation and Power in Northern Ghana

Awabu, a Dagbamba woman from Napkali, was the *magazia* (women's leader) of the accused women's settlement in Kukuo when I visited the village in March 2017 to do fieldwork. Like all other accused women in this village, she was illiterate and could only guess her age. She was about 70 years old and had been living in Kukuo for six years. She told me that when her husband died and she returned to Nakpali eight years previously, she was reduced to the status of a *ninvuy'choyfu* (lit. person with low self-esteem). Awabu used the word to indicate the sort of vulnerability and disrespect associated with her status as an accused witch. She was forced to flee to Kukuo. Here the *tindana* (earth priest) became her "husband" because he provided her with protection.

Like many of her neighbours, Magazia Awabu was born to Muslim parents in a polygynous family. Her mother was the second of her father's three wives. Magazia Awabu's mother gave birth to seven children (all male, except for her), but her parents did not enrol any of them in school because "they thought formal education was not what was needed to survive", she said with regret. Growing up in a family whose livelihood was predominantly tied to subsistence farming, Awabu learnt the skills of living off the land; of planting, sowing, reaping and animal husbandry.

Dagbamba households (*yiya*, sing. *yili*), families (*doyim*) and clans (*dang*) were ruled on gerontocratic principles and decisions taken by the elderly were supposed to be complied with unfailingly. When she was ripe for marriage, Awabu accepted the husband that her parents chose for her at birth. This form of arranged marriage, long practised in the area, was locally known as *nyuy'ɲmabu* (child betrothal, but literally translated as cutting of the umbilical cord). After marriage, she moved to her husband's father's house. Because her husband was a successful yam farmer, Awabu started trading in yam later in marital life and accumulated what she described as enormous wealth, which was used to provide for her own needs as well as to cook for the family (i.e. to supply soup⁷ ingredients). When her husband died, she was denied

⁷ Liquid dish or meals prepared from vegetables in this part of the world were referred to as "soup". Soup was never a complete meal by itself. Locals ate soup with *sayim* (a thick solid meal prepared from either or a combination of the following: maize, cassava, sorghum). Note: In this part of the world, household heads provided *sayim* while the provision of soup ingredients remained the key responsibility of housewives.

the opportunity of inheriting his property. She took her personal belongings and went back to Nakpali to live with her married siblings in their father's house.

On Awabu's return, a number of deaths occurred in the village. The families of the deceased openly accused some women of being responsible for the deaths. Awabu was never directly accused of *sotali* (witchcraft) until one day, when a close friend came to warn her that gossip went around the village saying that she was a witch (*son-ya*). Surprised and alarmed by this information, Awabu approached her siblings and requested that they send her to Kukuo's shrine to have her "*m-payi puli*" (lit. stomach washed). People who underwent this cleansing ritual did so to remove witchcraft powers (*sotim*) they might have inherited or unwittingly acquired through contact with occult powers. Although Awabu went through a successful *puli paybu* (stomach cleansing) at the shrine (*buyli*), her decision to visit the shrine and undergo cleansing rituals without any initial direct accusation being levelled against her only complicated issues after her return. By taking the pre-emptive action, she had submitted to what Robert Wyllie (1970: 132; 1973: 77) described among the Effutu of southern Ghana as "introspective witchcraft" and had lost her defence against subsequent accusations. The village chief (*naa*) and his *kpambalba* (elders) regarded her stomach cleansing as a confession and conclusive evidence that the rumours about her complicity in the unnatural deaths were true. The chief openly accused her of *sotali* and banished her from the community. Awabu's brothers brought her to Kukuo where she lived under the custodianship of the *tindana* (earth priest).

In Kukuo, Magazia Awabu was the head of her household; a residential pattern uncharacteristic of the patriarchal Dagbamba. She lived with her *pringa* (brother's daughter). The family sent the young girl to Magazia Awabu to help with household chores. When they first brought her to Kukuo, Awabu's brothers built her a compound, a circular structure made up of small mud houses roofed with grass. Magazia Awabu now regarded Kukuo as her permanent home. In one of our conversations, she told me that she had no intention to go back to her original community.

Unlike Magazia Awabu, Wampuli was a Konkomba and originally a native of Maaga, a small village in the Gushegu district. At the time my visit to Nabuli, she was the *magazia* of the village's accused women's settlement. Like all accused Konkomba women in this settlement, she was a Christian. Magazia Wampuli was about 69 years old when we met and had been residing in Nabuli for 16 years since her banishment from her original village. She shared the same lamentation as other accused women: "If I had gone to school, I would not

have found myself in my current situation”. Although a Christian, Magazia Wampuli, like many of her Konkomba friends, grew up in a polygynous family where both parents were subsistence farmers. Her mother was both a farmer and a known *dam* (locally manufactured beer) seller in the village. Her father was principally a yam farmer, but also grew millet and sorghum. Wampuli usually helped her parents on the farm, but also assisted her mother in brewing *dam* after farm work.

As was the case with Magazia Awabu, Wampuli left her parents’ home when she married and moved to her husband’s village. In Naasooya, she had two co-wives and cultivated a small subsistence plot for her household, helped her husband on the larger farm, but also brewed *dam* for sale. Later, her husband married a fourth wife, who took over the junior wife position that Wampuli had occupied until this point. Wampuli gave birth to seven children, but four of them died. According to her, rumours that she was a witch went around her village when all four children died within a spate of three years.

One early morning, just after Wampuli had finished her bath and was preparing to leave for a funeral in a nearby house, she heard a thunderous knock on her door. Before she could answer, her husband’s junior brother’s son entered her room and accused her of witchcraft. Astonished, she demanded to know what motivated the accusation since, according to her, the man was not ill. He accused Wampuli of attacking him invisibly (spiritually) at night. The man told neighbours who had gathered to listen to the loud verbal exchange that he had been having sleepless nights. He alleged that on several occasions, Wampuli attempted to strangle him to death, and that he had seen this in his dreams. The young man warned Wampuli that she had to leave the house before the next day or prepare to face “consequences”. Other family members joined in the accusation and became visibly angry with Wampuli. In the ensuing scuffle, she could not enlist the support of lineage elders or her husband. Fearing that she might be further harmed, Wampuli fled her matrimonial village to take residence in Nabuli. Here, the *tindana* ritually cleansed her of her dark powers before she was accepted to live with other accused women. At the time of my fieldwork, Magazia Wampuli was recovering from an illness and was living with her younger sister in a two-room mud compound house. The family had sent her sister to care for her.

Integration of Dagbamba and Konkomba

The two villages to which Magazia Awabu and Magazia Wampuli fled were located in areas of northern Ghana known as Nanung and Dagbon respectively. The accused women's settlements, including Nabuli and Leli-dabari (the ones predominantly inhabited by the Konkomba) were located in Dagbambaland. This intimacy and interactions between the Dagbamba and Konkomba were also the reason why the Konkomba women knew about the accused women's settlements in Dagbamba communities and were accepted there. Apart from language, the two groups differed in terms of religion. While my Dagbamba informants were predominantly Muslims (as was the case of Magazia Awabu), the Konkomba were largely Christians. The two groups also had different political structures. Unlike the Dagbamba who accepted inherited chiefs, the Konkomba were labelled as acephalous (Lentz & Nugent, 2000; Schlottner, 2000) although such classification has not been without some contention among the people themselves, and the scholars who have studied the "tribes" of the north (Talton, 2010; 2011; MacGaffey, 2013).

Although they considered themselves as the "ruling class" over other neighbouring minority ethnic groups (including the Konkomba), some historical and anthropological accounts suggest that the Dagbamba are not the autochthonous inhabitants of their present settlement (Staniland, 1975; Skalnik, 1987; Talton, 2010; MacGaffey, 2013). Historians and anthropologists often speak of two "social strata" in the area, namely that of the invaders or strangers (*saamba*) and the "aborigines" (*tiɲbihi*) (MacGaffey, 2013: 7). As *saamba*, the Dagbamba trace their origin to a common warrior ancestor (*yabdoo*) called Naa Gbewaa, the grandson of Tohazie (literally red hunter) (Iliasu, 1971; Staniland, 1975) who invaded the area in the fifteenth century (Wilks, 1965; MacGaffey, 2006a: 81) and imposed his rule over the Konkomba who were *tiɲbihi* (Staniland, 1975; Awedoba, 2006: 1; MacGaffey, 2013). According to Martin Staniland (1975), the invaders were Hausa migrants from the Nigerian state of Zamfara. Legend has it that Naa Gbewaa initially settled at Pusiga, and from there his children, Tohagu, Sitobu and ɲmantambo, went their separate ways to found the Mamprugu, Dagbon and Nanung kingdoms respectively (see Staniland, 1975; Skalnik, 1987; MacGaffey, 2013).

Soon after invading, the Dagbamba⁸ started to marry the Konkomba women and assimilated the latter's cultural norms and values (Staniland, 1975; Awedoba, 2006; MacGaffey, 2013). At the time, the Konkomba had apparently managed their villages through the *tindaamba*, a group of earth priests whose functions were more spiritual than political (MacGaffey, 2013). The Konkomba did not simply accept this usurpation and at various points in time challenged the Dagbamba's political leadership, domination and control, leading to violent clashes between the two (Brukum, 2000, 2001; Pul, 2003; Talton, 2003, 2010). Since the time of invasion, the Dagbamba's *nanima* (chiefs) have co-existed with the *tindaamba*'s (earth priests) position to form a traditional governance structure in which *nanima* deal with political-judicial matters while *tindaamba* deal with spiritual matters. In this regard, MacGaffey (2013: 72) writes that among the Dagbamba "chiefs are chiefs over people, whereas *tindanas* [*tindaamba*] are chiefs over land", hence the contrast "religious *tindanas*" versus "political chiefs" (MacGaffey, 2013: 72). In Kukuo, one of the chief's elders told me that immoral and anti-social acts – such as incest, bush sex, murder of earth shrines⁹ (*tingbana*, sing. *tingbani*) and witchcraft – committed by the living might offend a community shrine or ancestors. Such despicable acts, he said, warranted pacification rituals to reconcile the living world and the invisible realm (see Chapter 3). On behalf of the chief and people of the community, the *tindana* undertook the necessary rituals to achieve this – that is, dissipate curses brought about due to social transgressions or anti-social acts. Locals believed that once the ancestors were at peace with humanity (i.e. duly pacified), requests for blessings such as long life, fecundity, good rains and bumper harvests were easily granted. During fieldwork in Kukuo, the *tindana* told me that it was these life-enhancing rituals for the entire community that extended to include stomach cleansing of accused witches.

This does not however suggest that *nanima*'s position was completely bereft of any spiritual functions. Steve Tonah (2006) noted that the functions associated with a chief's office transcends the administrative and political spheres to include the spiritual realm. "This", Tonah

⁸ In this thesis, following anthropologist Wyatt MacGaffey (2013), I refer collectively to these three identical groups – Dagomba, Mamprusi and Nanumba – as Dagbamba, and their kingdoms as Dagbambaland. Since the invasion had denied the Konkomba any legitimate access to land, and they only inhabited lands belonging to the Dagbamba, they were automatically part of Dagbambaland.

⁹ Earth shrines or *tingbana*, as locals called them, referred to ritual animals such as dog, crocodile or tortoise that inhabited villages and metaphorically represented the lives of the villages where they lived. To disturb these animals amounted to disturbing village life. Locals told me that to kill these animals was akin to invoking misfortunes such as strange deaths, illnesses and drought on villagers. To be safe from any punishment, offenders had to present animals to shrine caretakers for sacrifice to village (shrine) ancestors.

(2006: 24) writes, “becomes apparent in the numerous sacrificial roles and the veneration of ancestors that accompany the holding of political office at all levels”.

During my fieldwork, the political-spiritual power binary between *tindaamba* and *nanima* was visible in some of the villages that hosted the accused women’s settlements, such as Gnani, where the Dagbamba controlled the village’s political leadership while the Konkomba remained the spiritual rulers of Tindang (the accused women’s settlement). Beyond leadership, locals in Gnani also maintained the ethnic division between Dagbamba and Konkomba in village settlements where the two groups lived in different sections of the village. In Kuku, Gambaga and Kpatinga, the Dagbamba held both the political (chiefly) and spiritual (shrine-related) offices. In Nabuli, however, both the chief and *tindana* were Konkomba.

Patterns of local economy

Like their Konkomba neighbours, the Dagbamba were predominantly subsistence farmers. Due to their location in the northern savanna belt, they had access to vast, flat lands devoted to subsistence agriculture. Men typically cultivated such crops as maize, sorghum, yam, rice, groundnuts and cassava in large quantities for domestic consumption but also for sale. However, men who grew crops such as rice, groundnuts and soya beans did so primarily for cash rather than household consumption. Although women also grew some of these crops such as groundnuts and soya beans, crops like yam, maize, cassava and rice appeared to be grown primarily by men since they were said to be more laborious to produce and required “male strength”. But another reason why these crops were almost exclusively grown by men was that they were used in households as *moni* (household food).

While monies raised by both Dagbamba and Konkomba men from the sale of crops were used to pay school fees, medical bills and to arrange for weddings and funerals, it was also spent on food, especially during the lean season when there was a dearth of food. Although both the Dagbamba and Konkomba grew similar crops including yam, the Konkomba were uniquely associated with large-scale commercial production of yam. The Konkomba’s subsequent economic success in yam production had significantly empowered them economically, placing them in a position where they could challenge the economic domination of the Dagbamba that had until recently characterised relationships between the two (see Dawson, 2000).

Since women were expected to provide the ingredients for household soup, they grew such vegetables as pepper, okra and tomatoes but also groundnuts on smaller tracts of land allocated to them by their husbands or household heads. They could sell these in the market if they had bumper crops. Dagbamba and Konkomba women who earned cash from the sale of crops spent part of it on soup ingredients that were not available in the household, while part of the money might also be used to acquire personal goods such as cloth, cosmetics and other expenses related to their children or grandchildren.

Cattle formed an important store of wealth among the people in my research area and were usually owned by men rather than women. They held an enormous value for the Dagbamba and any household that had a herd was considered rich by village standards (cf. Ferguson, 1985; Tonah, 2006). Although goats, sheep and fowls were an important source of protein, they were also used for ritual purposes (cf. Oppong, 1967: 7-8). The most common animals and poultry reared in these communities were cattle, sheep, chicken and guinea fowl. Among both the Dagbamba and Konkomba, few village women possessed goats and sheep but many kept chickens. These animals and birds were mostly kept for the market (for extra income) and ceremonial occasions, but not for everyday household consumption.

Although agriculture was the mainstay of both groups, productivity was hampered by the generally low fertility of the soil. Other factors included the lack of irrigation and the rural-urban migration of many young people to the southern part of the country where more economic opportunities existed (see Awumbila & Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2008 on this rural-urban migration to the South). According to an elder in Kpatinga, the migration of Dagbamba youth to southern Ghana could not be explained in terms of a dearth of land in the north but rather to the infertility of such land and related problems of productivity. It was for this reason that, he explained, people needed much more land and labour to make a living than in the south.

In my research area, land was considered an important economic resource. Village livelihoods depended almost entirely on one's access to land and other resources associated with it. Ownership over or access to arable land was possible through one's affiliation to a family or lineage. Among the Dagbamba, the chief held communal land in trust for his subjects. However, arable lands were held in families or by lineages. An individual's possession of land for cultivation was therefore based on his membership of a family or lineage and community (see Abudulai, 1986). Arable lands were vested in the *yili yidana* (household head) who decided which member should cultivate which tract of land. A family member might obtain

usufruct rights to a piece of land for crop production but did not have ownership rights over it and therefore could not sell the land. This held true for both the Dagbamba and Konkomba. Disputes and conflicts over arable lands were resolved at household or lineage level. Village chiefs might only interfere with land disputes if families were unable to resolve them. The patrilineal nature of these communities meant that household heads not only controlled arable lands but also other vital resources such as trees that stood on these lands. Among both the Dagbamba and Konkomba, women did not own land, but their husbands might give them the right to cultivate small tracts of arable land. Combined with their lack of land ownership, women in Dagbamba society could not customarily head a household or hold *yili yidana* roles; facts that attested to their subaltern status.

Markets formed an integral part of the economies of the villages where I did my fieldwork. There were village-level markets where, on a weekly basis, people gathered to buy and sell crops, animals, firewood, charcoal, sandals and cloth and soap. A market drew its participants from the host community as well as close and distant communities. People came to the local markets to trade in many things, but mostly food and animals. However, while both men and women traded in food crops, animal trade was an exclusive male domain in these markets. In Gambaga, an elder told me that were a woman to be actively engaged in the sale of animals in the market, her trade might be a subject of suspicion among locals as they believed that witches might sometimes convert their victims into animals for sale. Local markets in my research area were also said to have some connection with southern markets in terms of the “occult economy” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999). Drucker-Brown (1993: 539) described a situation where some Mamprusi women were rumoured to possess the supernatural power to transform their victims into both animal and plant forms, keep them in secured places and later transport them to market centres in southern Ghana where there was a good “market”. In Gambaga and Gushegu, for instance, locals told me that women avoided any trade associated with animals because of the apprehension that people might suspect them of converting humans into animals. The fact that women were generally considered illegitimate traders in animals was a longstanding customary prohibition. Market space was shared by both men and women and each had equal rights to offer something for sale.

For the Dagbamba, the market did more than merely offering a physical space for buying and selling. It served as a place for the initiation or renewal of social relationships,

commencement of marriage proposals, the elopement of married women¹⁰, and the escalation and resolution of conflicts or disputes. Similarly, markets in Konkomba society served many other functions besides economic ones. In this regard, David Tait (1961: 21) wrote that “Konkomba markets are far from being purely economic occasions and perhaps the majority of the attenders go there to drink beer, meet people and enjoy themselves... Friends meet and lovers make assignations, while the business of trading goes on at the same time”. Unlike Kukuo where Awabu stayed, Wampuli’s village, Nabuli, had a small market where both community members and outsiders often traded food crops on market days. Wampuli took advantage of the village market in Nabuli to continue her *dam* brewing when she first arrived in the community.

Besides promoting and enhancing the welfare of locals in the host and nearby villages, a few of the markets in my research area served as transactional venues that connected both the Dagbamba and Konkomba to the economy of southern Ghanaian cities such as Techiman where trading in both farm produce and animals took place (Drucker-Brown, 1993) and Accra where the Konkomba traded yams in commercial quantities (Dawson, 2000; Talton, 2010). In towns such as Gushegu, Gambaga and Tamale, middlemen bought food and animals from local market traders and transported them to southern Ghana where they resold at higher prices. But these local markets also received middlemen from southern Ghana who sometimes travelled to take advantage of the local low prices offered by farmers.

Family organisation and witchcraft

Anthropological literature on African witchcraft and its association with “the family” or kinship is all too familiar. In a seminal study of witchcraft among the Maka of Cameroon, Peter Geschiere (1997: 11) described witchcraft as “the dark side of kinship”. He argued that because witchcraft arises, first and foremost, from the intimacy of the family “it is both such a dangerous and unavoidable threat” (Geschiere, 1997: 11). Geschiere suggests that intimacy connotes a

¹⁰ Among the Dagbamba, marriage by elopement described a situation where a married woman secretly arranged with another man whom she loved, so her new lover could sneak her out of the matrimonial village at night. An elder in Kukuo explained that this practice was very common because of the prevalence of arranged marriages where young women were married to men against their will. In such cases, married women simply arranged with “lovers” to elope them from the market during the dark hours when nobody would notice such an act. However, “wife elopement” did not only happen at the marketplace. Married women might also be eloped from their homes at night.

high sense of familiarity, solidarity and trust and therefore witches are said “to have a special hold over their relatives” (Geschiere, 2003: 43). It is this close contact and trust that reassure family members of others’ cooperation and protection, but it is also the same factors that bring about betrayal.

In my research area, people believed that witchcraft worked through personalised substances and those substances could only be personalised with bodily fluids of an intended victim. The only way to get such fluids was through intimacy. This is certainly a sentiment that the accused women could relate to; all witchcraft accusations stemmed from family and intimate relations and conflicts. While some of these conflicts stemmed from personality clashes between individuals, much of it were inscribed in the structural tensions brought about by the residence patterns, rights and obligations that stemmed from specific types of kinship organisation. As the cases of Magazia Awabu and Wampuli illustrate, the Dagbamba and their Konkomba neighbours were both patrilineal and practised patrilocal and virilocal types of residence. Among both groups, patrilineality was particularly emphasised and “belonging” – both in terms of succession to political and ritual offices, and inheritance – was strictly reckoned in terms of the father’s lineage. In the past, child betrothal (*nyuy’ɣmabu*) was preferred by both groups but is less common today (Tait, 1961; Hanrahan, 2015). Awabu’s *nyuy’ɣmabu*¹¹ fell within this pattern and saw her potential husbands donating firewood, crops or other valuable materials to her parents upon her birth.

Among the Konkomba and a few of the Dagbamba (notably, the Mamprusi), widow inheritance – a widow remarrying the brother of a deceased person – was practised. Some anthropologists have noted that in the past widow inheritance was a lead cause of witchcraft accusations among Konkomba men who were said to use witchcraft or sorcery to kill their brothers in order to inherit wives and wealth (see Tait, 1961). In my research area, this cause of witchcraft accusations no longer seemed to apply as fewer people applied the levirate and as widowed women had more say in whether they would be remarried off to their husband’s brother. In the particular case of Magazia Awabu, she returned to her paternal family house upon her husband’s death because the levirate was apparently unknown in the area. And since

¹¹ During fieldwork, interlocutors told me that while considered “traditional”, *nyuy’ɣmabu* was falling out of fashion but continued to exist. Today, many Dagbamba have embraced the practice where potential couples select their partners independently. Informants told me during fieldwork that parents were still consulted for advice on certain aspects of marriage.

Dagbamba men traditionally did not jointly acquire property with their wives and did not prioritise wives in the sharing of property, Awabu inherited nothing from her deceased husband's estate. She was not only disinherited in terms of her husband's property, she also left her two sons in her matrimonial home since children were owned by their fathers' lineage. In common with other women I spoke to about this issue, Magazia Awabu was not perturbed by her lack of inheritance. As she told me, "I still have my children there [husband's house]. They cannot deny them of their father's property. Whatever they get from their father's patrimony also belongs to me".

In my research area, locals indicated that marriage was an institution that created relationships between different families or lineages, but they also recognised that it was a source of tension. They regarded marriage not only as an institution through which new forms of *mabihili* (family or kin relations) were established but also as a conduit for *songsim* (help) and gift exchanges. In Gnani, my interlocutors pointed out that, unlike the Dagbamba, the direct exchange of women between men of different lineages characterised Konkomba society (cf. Hanrahan, 2015). In this regard, Hanrahan (2015: 1327) writes of the Konkomba: "A man who gives a kinswoman in marriage expects to receive a wife in return, but the wife is not necessarily given immediately, and she may go not to him but another man in his lineage".

Among both the Dagbamba and Konkomba, rights and obligations between husbands and wives were clearly spelt out in their day-to-day lives. Husbands bore the responsibility to accommodate their wives, provide physical protection and healthcare, take care of farm work, and also provide corn for *moni*. A wife on the other hand was expected to take care of all household chores: fetching water, cooking, washing, childcare and sweeping the compound.

In this part of the world, farming was traditionally not a woman's work. Where a wife accompanied her husband to the farm, her labour was seen not as a shared responsibility but a supplementary one. As Magazia Awabu's case illustrates, in times of divorce, the wife left the husband's house with no right to take the children along, although she might take all her personal belongings including bowls, spoons and ladles, buckets, and bedding. Although women owned and controlled no land, the *yili yidana* or husband could grant them small tracts if they needed it for their own use. Crops planted on these farms belonged to the woman, not her husband, although the Dagbamba held a general view that the wife and all that she owned belonged to her husband. It was this view that granted men unlimited powers and control over their wives.

Occasionally, husbands might beat their wives for disobedience and for transgressing his rules. Locals indicated that there were no institutionalised sanctions against men who beat their wives since, as head of household, he had monopoly over disciplining people in his household. Locally, such beatings were often seen as disciplinary or corrective measures rather than unnecessary aggression. Wives might protest spousal violence and other forms of extreme provocation by running to their paternal homes. However, parents often overturned such protests by returning daughters to their matrimonial homes. Locals indicated that spousal violence between couples were often resolved through inter-family dialogue and mediation. There was no recognised customary compensation for domestic violence in my research area.

In this area, polygyny was highly valued and ordinary men and elders could marry up to four women (a seal recommended by Islam). However, chiefs could marry ten wives or more depending on their status and power. Because of the value placed on polygyny, a man who was married to only one wife was sometimes equated with a “bachelor” in status, and such a person was not favoured for important chieftaincy titles (see Drucker-Brown, 1993).

During fieldwork, many Dagbamba women complained that although Islam encouraged polygyny, they did not like the idea of being a co-wife (*nyintaa*, pl. *nyintahi*). Regardless of the assistance that new wives lent with household chores, many of my women informants talked about “co-wifing” (*nyintahili*) as a form of punishment; for being barren or for not pleasing her husband. In my research area, women were expected to bear children. When a man’s wife was unable to produce children, the husband might marry another wife since procreation was the overriding aim of every marriage. In Kpatinga, one of the chief’s *kpambalba* (elders) told me that the inability of a Dagbamba couple to procreate might not only result in divorce, but it might also provoke insinuations of witchcraft against co-wives. Although Dagbamba men paid dowries (*asadaachi*) in the form of money to consummate and legitimise marriages (from both “traditional” and Islamic perspectives), divorce carried no obligation to return dowry, nor did it require a man to compensate his wife with any part of his property. In Nabuli, locals told me that a Konkomba woman (such as Magazia Wampuli) often remarried in her husband’s lineage upon his death. This differed from Dagbamba local practice where a woman moved back to her father’s house on the death of her husband (as Magazia Awabu did) from where she might remarry to a different family¹². However, a married woman

¹² The Mamprusi were an exception because they accepted and practised levirate.

who had passed child-bearing age and did not intend to remarry might stay in her deceased husband's house to be taken care of by her own grown-up children.

Locals traditionally built round, mud houses for women and rectangular ones for men. However, at the time of my study, many locals of some economic means used cement instead of mud and roofed their houses with aluminium sheets rather than thatch. These new cement houses were seen as status symbols. Traditionally, a typical Dagbamba compound had a “welcoming chamber” (*zong*) at the front, which the *yili yidana* (household head) used to receive visitors. In a polygynous compound, the man's rectangular house was flanked by his wives' round houses, each living with her children. A section of the compound, built with stones, was often reserved as a kitchen for the collective use of the women.

Typically, Dagbamba economic, social and political life was organised around the *yili* (household). A *yili* might accommodate a polygynous man, his wives and his children. But it usually consisted of several members of an extended family and was headed by the *yili yidana*. A *yili* might also accommodate agnatic brothers, their wives, together with their children (cf. Goody, 1967: 42)¹³. Sometimes it might include patrilineal kin such as grandparents. However, the composition of a *yili* often also included some members from the wife's kin.

In my research area, as the case of Wampuli shows, co-wives in a polygynous family were ranked hierarchically, with the first wife to have arrived in the matrimonial home always retaining the rank of *waljira* (senior wife). Wife-ranking and role differentiation was even more pronounced among royal families (Drucker-Brown, 1993; MacGaffey, 2013). The *waljira* wielded more social powers over other co-wives in a Dagbamba society than in Konkomba. Among the Dagbamba, the rule of primogeniture largely characterised their succession and inheritance systems. The first son of a polygynous man (who was always likely to be the son of the *waljira*) took over and controlled a larger part of his patrimony, most notably his house and arable land.

In every *yili*, the *yili yidana* often discharged his responsibility by providing *moni* for joint household cooking. In my research area, *moni* was often used to denote “male grown” crops (such as corn or cassava) that household heads gave to housewives to cook for the entire

¹³ Writing in the 1950s and 1960s about one of the minority neighbouring tribes of the Dagbamba (the LoWiili), British anthropologist Jack Goody (1967: 42) noted that “their dwelling groups are organised on the basis of agnatic descent; the agnatic joint family consisting of several close male agnates, their children living in one compound is the normal pattern”.

household. Since *moni* was the exclusive responsibility of men as household heads (*yili yidaan'nima*, sing. *yili yidana*) it made sense that they, rather than women, were associated with the growth of such crops. It was considered a big shame if a man was unable to provide *moni* for his household. In Gushegu, an elder told me that such a shame knew no boundary if the wife regularly provided *moni*. Among polygynous families, the preparation of household meals was rotational, and each wife took her turn to cook for the entire household. Such rotational cooking arrangements typically also regulated sexual intercourse with the husband; the woman who cooked spent the night with the husband. Informants told me that the transgression of such household principles caused enormous conflict among co-wives. Many of my interlocutors explained that this residential pattern and the competition and conflict it engendered bred witchcraft accusations among both co-wives and their children in their struggle for domination, succession and inheritance. Because of these jealousies and competitive struggles and conflicts among wives and children, the *yili yidana* often took the necessary steps to protect his successor.

Traditionally, in a polygynous Dagbamba family (especially among royals), the *yili yidana* often sent away the first son to a distant relative or friend to be brought up as a foster child. This was done to prevent potential harm from co-wives or other family members who might be jealous of his position as *zuu* (first son and potential successor). The Dagbamba traditionally encouraged *bii'tohagibu* (child fostering), believing that only non-biological parents¹⁴, tied to a child through kinship, could administer *wumsibu* (upbringing and socialisation) (see Oppong, 1967; Abubakari & Yahaya, 2013). During fieldwork, my interlocutors told me that placing children under fosterage was the responsibility of the *yili yidana*. Ideally, the *priba* (paternal aunt; pl. *prinsi*) took custody of her *pringa* (brother's young daughter; pl. *prinsi*) for *wumsibu*. Foster children were also routinely placed with people who needed care such as those who were ill or elderly. In such instances, a *yaanga* (grandchild; pl. *yaansi*) was often placed with his or her *yaa'paya* (grandmother; pl. *yaa'paynima*) in an arrangement that saw the child raised and the grandparent looked after. Children fostered under both *prinsi* and *yaansi* conditions seldom received formal education and were subjected to what was often referred to as *nahimbu* (intensive domestic chores; a euphemism for child labour). The practice continued in my research area, although it was not as common as it was in the

¹⁴ The term “non-biological parents” is used to refer to persons (kinsmen/women, friends) who take up responsibility of child fostering other the biological parents (in this case, father and mother).

past. As was the case with Magazia Awabu, many of my Dagbamba and Konkomba informants who lived in these settlements grew up as foster children.

A group of related extended families constituted a *mabilgu* (lineage) or a *dang* (clan). Although the Dagbamba had notions of *mabilgu* and *dang*, it was very apparent from their everyday conversations that these terms were often used interchangeably with *doyim* (family). Besides the *yili yidana* who headed a household and controlled decisions regarding household-level land use and agricultural productivity and *moni*, extended families or lineages had a head (*doyrikpema*, pl. *doyrikpamba*) who was often consulted on issues relating to marriage, funerals and family feuds. During my fieldwork, village informants told me that when witchcraft suspicions or accusations emerged in the household, the *yili yidana* was the first point of contact. Witchcraft accusations and disputes that were considered grave and too difficult to be handled by the *yili yidana* might be reported to the *doyrikpema*. Unlike the *yili yidana*, the *doyrikpema* did not directly provide any spiritual protection against members of the extended family but could protect his own household. During fieldwork, locals pointed out that the *doyrikpema* often convened a family meeting involving parties to witchcraft accusations. As a mediator, his principal technique of resolving witchcraft-related conflicts was through dialogue and consensus. However, he had powers to enforce certain decisions when negotiations failed.

Although he held a bigger and more prestigious title, the *doyrikpema* played a very restricted role in allocating arable lands. As “father” of the entire *mabilgu* or *dang* he exercised a titular oversight responsibility over arable lands; real allocative powers resided in household heads. In most cases, however, the *doyrikpema* supervised the distribution of inheritance to the children of a deceased person in affected households. Locals maintained that his decisions were highly respected and were rarely ignored.

Village organisation and the chief/headman

In Dagbambaland, groups of related and unrelated extended families constituted a village (*tiŋa*). Each village was headed by a chief (*naa*, pl. *nanima*). In consultation with his *kpambalba* (elders, sing. *kpambala*), the *naa* made important decisions affecting the lives of his subjects. Chiefs of small villages were answerable to chiefs of bigger chiefdoms (sub-divisional chiefs), who were in turn answerable to divisional chiefs. All divisional chiefs owed

their allegiance and were answerable to the paramount chief who was considered sovereign, and above whom lay no any other traditional authority (see Tonah, 2006).

Nanima were highly revered and exercised great powers over subjects who rarely questioned their decisions, no matter how capricious or illegal when compared to the Ghanaian constitution. In Dagbambaland, the power of the *naa* was often perceived metaphorically as only limited by his inability to change a person's sex. Susan Drucker-Brown (1992: 72) described this sovereign power beautifully in relation to the paramount chief of Mamprugu, saying that the Mamprusi regard their "king" as the "owner of the world, rocks and trees and all living things" (cf. MacGaffey, 2006a). This, for example, found expression in the decisions of *nanima* to banish subjects accused of witchcraft from villages, even though such decisions violated human rights defined by the national constitution. The case of Magazia Awabu is a classic illustration of the power relations between a Dagbamba chief and his subjects. Awabu was born in Nakpali and, like any other autochthon in the village, possessed a natural right of residence. The village chief suspended this natural right without any sanction from the state. She could not turn to anyone else to revise the chief's decision and everyone else accepted it as final.

Among the Dagbamba, a chief's position was an inherited one and his political and ritual power derived not from his personal charisma but from the skin (chiefly throne) which he occupied. Traditionally, chiefs were selected from specific royal lineages and one could not dream of becoming a chief without such a lineage affiliation. When a chief died and left a vacant skin, it was opened to fierce competition among royals who might include the deceased chief's *gbanglana* (first son), his brothers and chiefs who occupied skins of lower status and were eligible to compete for the skin. Once a person became a chief, he occupied the office for life (MacGaffey, 2013) and nothing threatened his position except dangerous occult powers from opponents and rival chiefs who might attempt to kill him spiritually and ascend to his position. In this regard, Dagbamba expected their *nanima* to have *tim* (medicine) to counteract or deflect the *tim* of rival chiefs, thus protecting themselves and their skins (Drucker-Brown, 1989). It was also because of this that the chiefs' sisters (*nabipuyinsi*; sing. *nabipuyinga*) acquired *tim* to protect their brothers and other members of the royal family. The *nabipuyinsi* could only be accused of *sotali* if they deployed their powers to cause harm, instead of protecting the rightful heir. Unlike the Azande where members of the Avongara class were shielded from witchcraft accusations (Evans-Pritchard, 1937; 1976), members of Dagbamba royal families could be accused of witchcraft if they used their *tim* to harm innocent people.

However, unlike Cameroonian chiefs who could contain “to some degree the frenzy about witchcraft”, but whose “moral authority were not invulnerable to the charge of having themselves succumbed to witchcraft temptations” (Ciekawy & Geschiere, 1998: 8), a *naa* in Dagbambaland was fully protected against witchcraft accusations. His immunity against accusations lay not in the fact that he occupied office for life but that his powers were generally geared to protecting himself and his community.

Damba was an annual traditional festival celebrated by the Dagbamba (but also other Islamised groups of the north) to mark the birth of the holy prophet, Muhammed. It was probably the Dagbamba’s most important traditional festival. During the time of my fieldwork, I observed the celebration of this festival in Tamale. During this celebration, chiefs, village elders and even male youths publicly displayed their *tima* (medicines, sing. *tim*) using talismans, amulets and other protective medicines. According to an ethnographer of the Dagbamba, Wyatt MacGaffey (2013: 48), “The Damba festival is dangerous because ambitious princes and lesser chiefs test the strength of their ‘medicine’ against that of others like them and against that of the higher chiefs”. Locals knew that apart from protecting their subjects with their *tim*, chiefs could also use their *tim* to kill potential rival competitors. It is worth emphasising here that during this celebration, men, rather than women, had the exclusive customary right to publicly and legitimately display their *tima*.

In Dagbambaland, *nanima* received tributes from their subjects in the form of “greetings”. This was not the normal everyday greetings people received on the streets and their homes. It referred to a specific ritualised greeting in which gifts (e.g. cola, farm produce, labour) were exchanged. Villagers worked on *nanima*’s farms and the *nanima* were expected to reciprocate by providing protection for their subjects. As part of their protective roles, *nanima* guarded their villages at night by roaming through them in order to spiritually clamp down on the malevolent activities of *sonima* (witches). This nightly roaming was necessary to ensure social order in a society where locals continuously felt insecure and apprehensive about the activities of witches. My Dagbamba interlocutors told me that it was unheard of to accuse a village chief of witchcraft, despite these powers. Where there were rumours or gossip about the potency of a chief’s medicine (*tim*), an informant told me, such powers were often spoken of with admiration by villagers who praised their chief for surpassing witches and rival chiefs with more potent medicine. Informants told me that in the process of “invading” the spiritual realm at night, village chiefs could “see” and warn *sonima* that their malevolent activities were known but were not able to cleanse them as that function was reserved for specialised ritual

persons (*tindaamba*). The inability of chiefs and elders to cleanse “seen” witches during their nocturnal roaming and the need to prevent them from disrupting the social order often called for open accusations and the naming of witches they had seen at night who did not heed their warning to cease their dark deeds. Once a witch had been named, *nanima*’s elders or designated representatives often accompanied the accused to the *tindaamba* for testing and cleansing.

In other parts of Africa such as in Mozambique and Cameroon, traditional authorities fulfilled similar functions (West, 2007; Geschiere, 2013). Among the Muedans of northern Mozambique, Harry West (2005: 72) described a situation where settlement heads bore the ultimate responsibility to protect their village subjects from the vicious attacks of sorcerers. “With so much at stake”, West (2005: 73) wrote, “settlements heads could ill afford to sit idly by while others waged war in the invisible realm of sorcery”. In order to allay villagers’ fears of “spiritual insecurity”, to borrow Ashforth’s (2005: 3) term, Muedan “settlement heads themselves intervened in the invisible realm” to invert or overturn the attacks of sorcerers by employing constructive “sorcery” (West, 2005: 73). In his study of witchcraft in Cameroon, Geschiere (2013) observed that among the hierarchical Bamileke and Bamenda people, villagers similarly expected their chiefs to protect them from the dark deeds of witches. He noted that in these chiefly societies, as elsewhere in Africa, the occult was distinctly compartmentalised into “negative” and “positive” forms and that the powers of chiefs were often associated with the latter.

In Dagbambaland, every chief had elders (*kpambalba*) at the village level who assisted him in the day to day management of village affairs: the settling of family and land disputes, the adjudication of cases relating to witchcraft accusations and banishment, and discussions of general community welfare. The chief received visitors through his *kpambalba* who also helped him to monitor the invisible realm. In Gushegu, one of the chief’s elders, Kpalbo-Naa, told me that while he occasionally conducted night “checks” or “inspections” in the community by physically roaming around, he also monitored the invisible realm from the comfort of his home. He claimed that other elders in the community also performed such roles. However, unlike the village chief who was completely immune from accusations, any other villager (including the elders) could be accused of witchcraft if they applied their *tim* (medicine) in a negative way. Besides his spiritual and political roles in the village, the chief also had some exclusive powers to grant NGOs and churches access to the village. This made him the most important actor in the decision-making process of the village’s “development” (*lebgimsim*) agenda and a potential recipient of significant “tribute”.

Since Dagbambaland was highly Islamised, chieftaincy was not divorced from the imamate (office of the imam). For the Dagbamba, a large part of their local beliefs, values and practices had been remodelled along Islamic law and principles (Haruna, 2015). In the 1960s, anthropologist Christine Oppong (1967: 7) wrote that the “Islamization of the [Dagbon] kingdom has taken place in the last two hundred years with the result that the major annual and domestic ceremonials contain a large part of Muslim ritual and ideology”. This process of Islamisation could be traced to the early 18th century when some important towns in northern Ghana, including Gambaga and Yendi, where two accused women’s settlements situated, were used as trading routes and centres for early merchants such as the Hausa and Wangara people (Staniland, 1975; Drucker-Brown, 1986; Awedoba, 2006). Writing about the Dagbamba, anthropologist Albert Awedoba (2006: 3) observed that “where and when the ruling elites espoused Islam many of their subjects followed suit” and therefore it became an established religion for the people of the north. Consequently, names were “arabicised” and locals observed the two main Islamic festivals of *chimsi chuyu* (the festival symbolising Abraham’s sacrifice of Ishmael) and *konyur’chuyu* (the festival marking the end of Muslim annual fasting).

Among the Dagbamba, village chiefs had the power to appoint imams who remained answerable to them and could be removed from office for disloyalty and insubordination to the chief’s skin. In this sense, village imams were not just seen as providing spiritual leadership to the Muslim community but were also regarded as the spiritual protectors of the chiefs. They were mandated to occasionally offer prayers to the chief at his palace and especially on important occasions such as the celebration of local festivals such as *damba* (see Tonah, 2006).

While traditional political institutions among the Dagbamba were highly centralised and considered to be effective in local governance, they did not exist in isolation. Traditional political authorities had co-existed with state-level politics since the colonial days. When the British colonists officially established “the Protectorate of the Northern Territories” (now northern Ghana) in 1901 (Staniland, 1975: 11) or 1902 (as other anthropological accounts suggest; see MacGaffey, 2013: 15), they found the Dagbamba to have well established centralised political structures. They took advantage of this organised political structure to introduce their indirect rule system and to expand existing centralised chieftaincy structures to rule the indigenous “chiefless” societies such as the Konkomba (Staniland, 1975; Talton, 2010). Since Ghana’s political independence in 1957, there had been a high level of interference by successive governments in the political affairs of the Dagbamba (Staniland, 1975; MacGaffey, 2013). With the decentralisation of state political structures, emissaries of

the state such as parliamentarians, District Chief Executives, and Assembly and Unit Committee members worked with local chiefs and other traditional authorities to bring about *lebgimsim* (development).

The *assambleman* (assembly man), as the Dagbamba often referred to this local government representative, was democratically elected by the villagers to represent them at decision-making level in the district assembly and to attend to village-level concerns such as sanitation and other development-related issues. As *asanza nira* (opinion leader), the *assambleman* was usually directly involved in village matters including issues related to witchcraft accusations and family conflicts. Although he was considered an opinion leader in all the villages where I did fieldwork, the *assambleman* was not part of the chief's elders and was also not associated with any role as far as the monitoring of the invisible realm was concerned. Although the village chief and his elders sometimes sought his opinions on certain village matters, ultimate decision-making authority, including the power to decide on the “state of exception”¹⁵ (Agamben, 2005), lay with the chief.

Konkomba political system

In contrast to the centralised, chiefly political structure of the Dagbamba, the Konkomba were characterised by segmentary lineage and clan systems (cf. Fortes, 1945, 1949). Writing in the 1960s, anthropologist David Tait (1961) stressed the importance of the lineage system (minor and major lineages) to the basic social, ritual and political structures of the Konkomba. Tait suggested that clans and lineages were the linchpins around which Konkomba political and religious life was built. Many of these patterns still held during my research. Like the Dagbamba extended family, the Konkomba lineage was headed by a male elder – in this case the eldest man in the lineage. The concept of “elders” was very important in Konkomba political and religious affairs. Traditionally, a Konkomba village had two authorities (or elders); an elder for the land and one for the people (Talton, 2010). While the first exercised ritual or religious functions, the second was recognised as exercising political authority in the

¹⁵ Philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2005) uses the concept of “state of exception” to denote a political strategy or move employed by a state or “the sovereign” to suspend ordinary rules for all or some of his/its subjects or citizens (and all other persons living under his/its political and juridical control) as a way of conferring on himself/itself additional powers in order to undertake any action they consider necessary including the suspension of the subjects' rights.

village. Like the Dagbamba chiefs, Konkomba elders policed the invisible realm on behalf of their subjects.

While the Konkomba historically did not have chiefs, there is some evidence that they have started to adopt the chieftaincy model, apparently influenced by Dagbamba tradition (Dawson, 2000; Talton, 2010). However, during fieldwork I was told that so-called “new chiefs” in Konkomba society lacked the powers to assert their authority over lineage and clan elders and were subject to the latter’s authority. As we have seen with Magazia Wampuli, it was lineage elders, not the chief, who reproached her in the wake of the witchcraft accusations against her. While Konkomba lineage and clan elders had enormous powers and could fiercely oppose and contest the decisions of their chiefs, they were not as powerful as Dagbamba chiefs and elders. In Nabuli, one of my interlocutors mentioned that while elders had the power to banish women accused of witchcraft from their villages, this power was not absolute and that some household heads sometimes flouted these orders.

Unlike the majority of the people in Dagbambaland who were Muslims, the Christians in the area were mostly from Konkomba descent. Although Islam had spread to this area since the 18th century, it was not until 1906 that “the White Fathers, or the Society of Missionaries of Africa, introduced Christianity to Northern Ghana” (Talton, 2010: 116). The missionaries were particularly attracted to the Konkomba and other non-centralised groups in this region because they were known to be non-Muslims at the time, which meant that the missionaries did not have to overthrow the authority of powerful religious leaders (Talton, 2010: 116). According to Talton (2010: 116), the missionaries used “medical clinics to develop friendly relationships” with the Konkomba, and in the process succeeded in enticing them to accept Christianity. Although small in terms of population, the Christian community had a significant impact on northern Ghanaian villages. During my fieldwork, I noticed that Christian communities had built many schools, church buildings and clinics in Dagbambaland. As part of their philanthropic activities, some churches had also become actively involved in the region’s accused women’s settlements (see ActionAid, 2012; see also Chapter 4).

Host Communities

In Dagbambaland, almost every village had some form of a shrine, although not all were devoted to *puli paybu* rituals. Most of these shrines performed generalised functions such as ensuring business and farming success, healing, success in examinations and victory during

wars. Each shrine had a shrine priest while larger shrines had whole coteries of priests and helpers. The shrines devoted to anti-witchcraft were very popular and were few in number. While many people accused of witchcraft visited village shrines for anti-witchcraft rituals, not all of these shrines made provision for people to stay after rituals had been performed. In her research among the Mamprusi in the 1990s, Drucker-Brown (1993) discovered that accused women visited Bugiya's anti-witchcraft shrine - which she described as complementary to Gambaga's - for witch-finding and other related rituals. During my fieldwork, my own enquiries revealed that Bugiya's shrine still existed. But unlike Gambaga, it did not provide permanent or semi-permanent shelter to its clients. Like Bugiya, women in Dagbon visited Nawuni and Piang-Tindang for anti-witchcraft rituals but were never sheltered (Igwe, 2016). In the north, the six communities that hosted the accused women's settlements - Gambaga, Gnani, Gushegu, Nabuli, Kukuo, Kpatinga – were unique because they provided permanent residence to groups of people accused of witchcraft. But these host villages were also individually unique in terms of their location, size, historical relevance within the region, and rank in respect of chieftaincy.

During my fieldwork, Gambaga¹⁶ was the capital of the Mamprusi East district and one of the oldest and most important host communities in Mamprugu. According to the last Population and Housing Census that preceded my research, the people of Gambaga numbered 9,479 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a), but the accused women's settlement (Poagnyaankura fonju) hosted 76 accused at the time. Gambaga town was predominantly inhabited by the Mamprusi and occupied an important political and cultural position in the Mamprugu kingdom. Apart from hosting the oldest accused women's settlement in the country, Gambaga was famous for other reasons such as its early association with Islam and the fact that it had, in the past, served as the main trade route to the ancient Salaga market which was a well-known destination for slave trade and exchange (Drucker-Brown, 1986). Secondly, in colonial Gold Coast, the colonists initially made Gambaga the capital of the Northern Territory before it was moved to Tamale in 1907 (MacGaffey, 2006b). The chief of Gambaga, the *gambarana*, was also the earth priest (*tindana*) for the community's shrine and the locals considered him as a powerful spiritual figure with the power to detect and control witches; a spiritual feat he acquired through inheritance (see also Palmer, 2010). In this sense, the *gambarana* was like other *tindaamba* who claimed to have inherited their witch-finding and ritual cleansing powers

¹⁶ See map in Chapter 1 for the location of Gambaga.

from their ancestors. According to Drucker-Brown (1993: 538), the *gambarana* is technically not a royal chief, but that he is regarded as being part of a group of earth priests who are associated with the “mystical powers of the earth”. The “task of Gambaga’s chief, as custodian of witches and owner of the witchcraft antidote”, Drucker-Brown (1993: 538) wrote, “is complementary to that of the chief of Bugiya” who also falls within the mystical class of earth priests.

Unlike Gambaga which was located in Mamprugu, Gushegu fell under the Dagbon kingdom (see Figure 1). It was the largest host community with a population of about 20,413 people. Its accused women’s settlement (Leli-dabari) only hosted 114 women at the time of my fieldwork. Gushegu was not only a district capital, it was also an important and sacred chiefdom in Dagbon as its chief, the Gushe-Naa, performed a specialised ritual function to validate the *namship* (chiefship) of the Ya-Na; the king and the highest chief of Dagbon (see MacGaffey, 2013). As a highly ranked divisional chief, the Gushe-Naa exercised traditional authority not only over his Dagbamba subjects but also over Konkomba neighbours and other minority ethnic groups who lived on lands recognised as belonging to the Gushegu chiefdom.

Kpatinga was a farming community (see Figure 1) located twenty miles from Gushegu and had an estimated population of about 6,316 people (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014b). It was also found in Dagbon. The accused women’s settlement in Kpatinga (Tindaanzhee) hosted 41 accused people during my visit to the village. Unlike Gushegu where almost all the accused women were Konkomba, Tindaanzhee was divided into two parts; a section for the Dagbamba women and another for the Konkomba. During fieldwork, Kpatinga’s *tindana* told me that he assumed custodianship of Tindaanzhee when the most qualified person to occupy the office as required by tradition refused to take it on. Although the ancestors selected this person to occupy the office of *tindaanship* (priesthood), he declined because he was a faithful Muslim and denounced an association with any deity apart from Allah.

The smallest host community, Nabuli (see Figure 1), was also located in Dagbon although its inhabitants were predominantly Konkomba. Nabuli was a small village with a population of less than 800 people. Nabuli’s settlement hosted 35 accused women during my visit to the community. Unlike the rest of the host communities, in Nabuli the brewing of *dam* seemed to be the major economic activity of the accused women apart from subsistence farming. They largely engaged in this economic activity in the dry season when there was little

or no farm work to be done. Both the accused women and other locals sold *dam* to community members as well as outsiders who visited the Nabuli market on market days.

Like many host communities, Gnani was also located in Dagbon (see Figure 1). It was a small farming community of about 974 residents (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014d). Gnani village was well known for hosting the biggest accused women's settlement (Tindang). The community was sharply divided into two sections; one was occupied by the Dagbamba while the other was inhabited by their Konkomba neighbours. The bifurcated nature of Gnani village was replicated in the composition of Tindang where most of the accused were Konkomba and Dagbamba. During fieldwork, I found Gnani's accused women's settlement unique because it was the only one among the six that hosted both male and female accused. During my visit to Gnani, the *tindana* mentioned that the accused numbered about 584 although ActionAid's official disputed this figure, saying that the list had been bloated in order to receive more aid from donors (see Chapter 4).

Kukuo village (see Figure 1) was located in the Nanung kingdom. In the cultural affairs of Nanung, Kukuo was considered sacred because of the ritual role it played in the selection and enskinment¹⁷ of the Bimbilla Naa (Nanumba's paramount chief)¹⁸. The population of Kukuo numbered about 1,460 people during my fieldwork (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014c). It was the only community in Nanung known to host accused women. Here, apart from the main subsistence agriculture, the closeness of the community to the Oti river presented an additional economic activity to the people who had access to the supply of fish from the Battor (fisherfolk) people - mostly, Hausa and Ewe. At the time of my visit, Kukuo accommodated 108 accused women. Unlike other host communities where the "witch-population" was concentrated at particular sections of the village, Kukuo was unique in terms of its residential pattern. Accused women's houses were dispersed with those of other community members such that there was no accused women's settlement per se, but rather a village in which accused and non-accused lived together.

Like other Dagbamba villages, the host communities had *nanima* who served as political heads. Alongside the *nanima*, these communities also had *tindaamba* who oversaw

¹⁷ Steve Tonah (2012) explains that because chiefs in northern Ghana traditionally sit on skins of such animals as lion and leopard, the official ceremony characterising their installation or coronation is known as "enskinment".

¹⁸ The Kukuo village and its accused women's settlement are said to be closely related to the origin of the Nanung paramountcy. The received mythology traced the origin of Kukuo to the first paramount chief of Nanung, Naa Abarika I.

local shrines and undertook witch-testing and *puli paybu* rituals since such ritual functions had long been associated with lineages of earth priests, not chiefs (Drucker-Brown, 1993). While a *naa* was often regarded as the political head of the village, the *tindana*'s role was more ritual and spiritual in its orientation. It was only in Gambaga where the functions of the *tindana* and the *naa* were merged in one authority, the *gambarana*. In other host communities, the ritual figure (*tindana*) stood separate from the political figure (*naa*). It was only in Gushegu where the accused women's settlement was not associated with any officiating *tindana* and therefore no witch-testing and *puli paybu* rituals were carried out. Perhaps this explains why locals decided to settle the accused women far away (about 4km) from Gushegu town.

In all the host communities, the accused women's settlements were near the shrines and the women who inhabited them received spiritual protection from the *tindana*. As was the case with *nanima*, village imams did not interfere in the ritual activities carried out by the *tindaamba* in respect of the accused women. Neither did village pastors play any direct roles in the ritual activities undertaken in these settlements. It was this non-interference that made the *tindaamba* almost autonomous actors in the administration of these local settlements.

Local tales about accused women's settlements

During fieldwork, when I listened to the narratives of the origin stories about the accused women's settlements recounted by my interlocutors, I noticed that some of them were relatively recent, less than a hundred years ago, affirming what I had previously read in the media and NGO reports. Many of my interlocutors either witnessed the origin of some of these settlements or actively took part in their establishment process. For others, however, the origin stories were too abstract to recount genealogies and sounded almost mythological. Following William McNeill (1986), some of these origin stories pertaining to the accused women's settlements may be classified as both myths and histories. The two, according to McNeill "are close kin inasmuch as both explain how things got to be the way they are by telling some sort of story" (McNeill, 1986: 1).

The origin stories of these accused women's settlements were "true" to the locals who laid claim to them. Their belief in and collective association with the stories provided a sense of spiritual belonging and purpose. As Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955: 429) maintains, for such [mythical] stories "any characteristic can be attributed to any subject; every conceivable

relation can be met...and everything becomes possible”. Locals told the following origin stories about the six accused women’s settlements to me.

Poagnyaankura fonɲu

Gambaga elders told me the origin story of Poagnyaankura fonɲu as it was apparently passed down to them through village lore. Many elders I approached in Gambaga referred me to Mba Yidana because of his knowledge of the genesis and historical development of Poagnyaankura fonɲu. Mba Yidana was an elderly man in his early 70s whose house stood close to the chief’s palace. According to Mba Yidana, in the Mamprugu kingdom of the Gold Coast, people who were accused of witchcraft in the olden days were taken to the *nayiri*’s (paramount chief) palace and handed over to the *gbandari*, a specialised palace unit, to be executed. This changed with the onset of colonialism when a sanctuary was opened for accused witches. Local legends attribute the opening of the sanctuary to two possible “fathers”; the local chief and a well-known imam. In the first version of the story, Mba Yidana said, Gambaga at that time did not have a chief but one was soon enskinned. One day, the new *gambarana* (chief of Gambaga) paid a courtesy call on the *nayiri* at his palace just as an accused woman was to be executed for witchcraft. Taken with the woman’s plight, the *gambarana* pleaded with the *nayiri* to release the woman into his care. His sanctuary soon accommodated many more women. Mba Yidana talked about the customary significance of the *gambarana* as far as ritual sacrifices were concerned. Traditionally recognised as the “chief of the land-shrine”, the *gambarana* managed the community’s shrine through pacificatory ritual practices that would ensure prosperity or restore social order. It was this chiefly function that had been extended to include witch-testing (witch-finding) and witch cleansing of people accused of witchcraft. He mused that it was his roles as a witch-finder and a ritual cleanser that the *gambarana* and his community found fame and prestige throughout Ghana and beyond.

In a second version of this history, it was the Imam of Gambaga who pleaded with the *nayiri* and brought the accused woman to Gambaga. Here, she was asked to swear on the Quran that she would never bewitch anyone again. The woman complied, and she was allowed to stay in the imam’s house. With time, his house expanded to accommodate more accused women and became a witchcraft sanctuary. However, community members who did not like the imam told the colonial authorities that he did not have the authority, according to custom, to keep the accused women (whose number had now multiplied) in his custody. They argued that the newly enskinned *gambarana* was the right person to exercise such jurisdiction over the women.

Persuaded by the customary argument, the colonial authorities transferred the women from the imam to Gambarana Bawumia. Since then, accused women fleeing to Poagnyaankura fonṅu had been under the full custody of the *gambarana*.

Gambarana Bawumia was a great and powerful chief in Mamprugu. “It was not only his people [the people of Gambaga] who liked him. He was a great chief, and everybody in Mamprugu liked him”, Mba Yidana said. The chief took great interest in the welfare of the accused witches, attracting for himself much love and respect from the women. Locals speculated that the love for the accused women might have been historically transferred from one *gambarana* to the next. The current chief’s love for accused women and the good relationship that existed between the women and the chief were part of the reasons why some of the women wanted to remain in Poagnyaankura fonṅu.

Leli-dabari

In Gushegu, my local research assistant and other elders I spoke to recommended that I speak to Kpalbo-Naa, one of the chief’s elders, about the origin history of Leli-dabari, the local name for the accused women’s settlement. According to Kpalbo-Naa, Leli-dabari started during the reign of Gushe-Naa Bawa (chief of Gushegu, hereinafter called Naa Bawa). Naa Bawa, who was a senior police officer in the Ghana Police Service, later became Ghana’s Inspector-General of Police (IGP) from September 1969 to June 1971. My interlocutor told me that Naa Bawa ascended to the Gushegu skin in 1971. Although he could not pin down the year in which the settlement started, he agreed that it was after 1971 and that the place was less than 50 years old.

This accused women’s settlement originated in response to frequent witchcraft accusations and the publicised victimisation of accused women that took place in the many Konkomba villages that surrounded the town of Gushegu. This intensified when Naa Bawa was enskinned and many Konkomba women were beaten and chased away from their communities. The recurrence of these attacks compelled Naa Bawa to take steps to contain these accusations and the accompanying violence.

One day,¹⁹ a certain Konkomba woman who was being persecuted by her own community members fled to Gushegu to seek protection. Upon seeing the woman, Naa Bawa

¹⁹ Elders in Gushegu were unable to tell me the exact date this was supposed to occur. But since the settlement was established during the reign of Naa Bawa (who first became the chief of Gushegu in 1971), we can say with

was greatly disturbed by her plight and quickly intervened to save her life. Kpalbo-Naa, who was the incumbent custodian²⁰ of Leli-dabari at the time of my visit and occupied an important village title during Naa Bawa's regime, indicated that Naa Bawa's mother was a Konkomba. According to him, the chief could not sit unconcerned while women from his "uterine kin" were victims of witchcraft accusations on a regular basis. Naa Bawa took the woman into his custody and provided protection for her. The chief then sent an invitation to the woman's family requesting them to come and build a house for their banished kinswoman. He allocated a piece of land at Gariche fong No. 2, a suburb of Gushegu, for the construction of accommodation for the banished woman.

News of the chief's clemency spread to other neighbouring Konkomba villages in the district and other persecuted Konkomba women sought refuge in Gushegu. After Naa Bawa's death, a philanthropic international NGO (whose name and country of origin Kpalbo-Naa was unable to remember) intervened to provide better accommodation for the accused women. Naa Bawa's *gbanglana* (regent) tasked Kpalbo-Naa to conduct feasibility studies and to advise on the most suitable location for the new accused women's settlement. Once Kpalbo-Naa advised that Leli-dabari was the most suitable location, the accused women were moved from Gushegu township to Leli-dabari where the NGO had constructed some accommodation. However, since the accommodation was insufficient to accommodate all the accused women, a few of them remained in Gushegu. Over time, these women had merged spatially and socially with the Gushegu locals, making it difficult to distinguish between regular villagers and once-accused women. While I often heard NGO and state officials refer to this settlement as "Leli-dabari camp", others called it "Gushegu camp". Kpalbo-Naa explained the confusion with reference to the place's specific history.

Before Naa Bawa's ascension to the Gushegu skin, his elder brother, Naa Sugri, ruled Gushegu for many years. Before being enskinned to Gushegu, Naa Sugri was the chief of a small village called Leli, about four kilometres away from Gushegu township, but under the direct jurisdiction of Gushegu's chief. When he was enskinned as Gushe-Naa after the death of his father, he and his family (as is custom) left his subjects and moved to Gushegu. With

certainty that the flight of the persecuted woman happened after 1971, but before January 2002 when the chief passed away.

²⁰ Since the accused women in most of the settlements were under the custody of the earth priests, I often use the terms "custodian" and "earth priest" interchangeably. However, since the Gushegu witches' settlement did not have an earth priest and was not associated with rituals, I consistently use "custodian" when making specific reference to it.

time, his subjects gradually deserted the village to join him at Gushegu, effectively turning the village into an unoccupied or deserted zone (*dabari*). It became known as Leli-dabari. According to Kpalbo-Naa, Naa Sugri's subjects vividly illustrated the popular Dagbamba proverb: *bukur'sun ka bubihi doli* (meaning, a good leader will always be liked and followed by his subjects).

At the time of my fieldwork, Leli-dabari might have been classified as a village rather than a "camp", a village in which all inhabitants (except for children or grandchildren) had once been accused of witchcraft. The village was secluded and was surrounded by farmlands belonging to people from Gushegu. Leli-dabari's chief ruled over his subjects from Gushegu and since it was under the jurisdiction of the Gushe-Naa and was not connected to *tindaan'nam* (chiefly office of *tindana*), he reserved the sole royal authority to decide who occupied the skin of the village.

During my visit to Gushegu, Kpalbo-Naa was the custodian (not *tindana*) of Leli-dabari's accused women settlement. Unlike other accused women's settlements, the emphasis here was on custodianship, not *tindaanship*, because no witchcraft-related rituals took place in this settlement. Rather than performing witch-testing rituals to determine innocence or guilt of newly arrived accused women, admission to this settlement was based on the mere introduction of the accused to the chief of Gushegu who admonished her to be of good behaviour. This constituted sufficient basis for her acceptance to the settlement.

Nabuli

According to Nabuli's chief, the accused women's settlement in Nabuli was the youngest among the six settlements in the north. The chief maintained that its establishment was triggered by the devastating ethnic conflict between the Konkomba and Dagbamba that broke out in 1994 (see Brukum, 2000, 2001; Pul, 2003). Following the outbreak of the war, banished Konkomba women who had initially taken residence in Tindaanzhee (Kpatinga's accused women settlement) ran away to escape potential attacks from the combatant Dagbamba. Since the women were originally from the Nabuli community and were running from life-threatening conditions, the chief and community members accepted them back. Their return to the community triggered discussions among the village chief and his elders, and the *assambleman* of the area concerning resettlement. The chief and his elders agreed that the women be settled at their present location, *zongo*, a suburb of the village. The *tindana* admitted the women after

they had gone through a secondary cleansing ritual; the first one took place in Kpatinga where they initially lived.

According to the village chief, families of the initial returnees volunteered and built accommodation for their kinswomen in the new area. These families were apparently keen to resettle the returnees rather than allow them back into family homes because they feared that the women would return to their old ways. Although the returnees had been away from home for a long time and had undergone ritual cleansing, the locals did not trust their kinswomen or the intercessions of the *tindana* at Kpatinga. In time, accused and banished women from other communities were also admitted. At the time of my fieldwork, most of the inhabitants in this settlement came from elsewhere as many of the initial returnees had died.

While the Nabuli's chief and other village interlocutors insisted that the accused women's settlement originated in 1994, MacGaffey (2006) described the establishment of an anti-witchcraft shrine here in the 1950s. According to him, "In 1955, popular anxiety over impending changes was reflected in the excitement over a new fetish at Napuli [sic], near Gushiegu, controlled by a Chokosi priest" (MacGaffey, 2006: 116-117). He noted that the Gukpe-Naa of Tamale compelled all old women in Tamale to seek treatment at Nabuli. This directive was in response to an increasing local fear that old women possessed witchcraft powers and that they were potentially dangerous to the youth. Old women were transported en masse to the shrine for ritual cleansing. This directed colonial authorities' attention to the so-called "Nana Tongo" anti-witchcraft shrine. A man named Ndaka Chokosi who had returned from Asante with "Nana Tongo" and settled in Chereponi apparently triggered the spread of this shrine to Nabuli (Parker, 2006).

At the time of my visit to Nabuli, the accused women's settlement had no *tindana*. The *tindana* died long before my arrival in the village and a new one was yet to be appointed. Since new admissions to the settlement had to undergo ritual cleansing, fresh admissions were halted until a new *tindana* could be appointed. Although the village chief told me that he was the acting custodian of the settlement, he quickly added that he lacked the spiritual capacity to perform any rituals for accused women.

Tindaanzhee

As was the case with other accused women's settlements, in Kpatinga my interlocutors could not tell the exact origin of Tindaanzhee, as the local accused women's settlement was known to the community and other surrounding villages. But the local *tindana*, who claimed to be 68

years old at the time of my research, mentioned that the settlement predated his grandfather's time. He therefore concluded that Tindaanzhee had been in existence for more than a century. As was the case of Poagnyaankura fonju, a rich lore had grown about the origins of Tindaanzhee which was passed from one generation to the next. The local *tindana* was well versed in this lore and explained that the emergence of Tindaanzhee was motivated by the hatred among a certain group of kin whose names had been forgotten.

According to the *tindana*, Tindaanzhee's apical ancestor came to the inescapable conclusion that his own kinsmen harboured some hatred against him. Based on their utterances and actions, he was convinced that they did not like the progress he made in the world. To prevent potential aggression from them, he deserted his family to go and stay in an isolated place where no human settlement existed. There, he built his house and lived a secluded life. Part of the reason for his movement was to afford him the opportunity to find out who, among his family members, hated or liked him. He reasoned that any kinsman who bothered to look for him was not an enemy and had loved him. Only his real enemies would be unconcerned with his absence. According to the lore, this man knew most of the family's secrets and had the most comprehensive knowledge of important customary and spiritual secrets.

After founding the new settlement, the man informed the chief of his original village that he had relocated because of his family's hatred. He asked the chief to direct any woman in his village (strangers from elsewhere) who sought refuge due to hatred, aggression, persecution or banishment, to his new settlement. The man declared that such female asylum seekers would become his "wives" and they could live together peacefully. With time, women who had been banished from their villages because of witchcraft accusations and persecutions came to settle with him. Being the founder of this settlement, he came to be known as *tindana*.

From the start, the man did not allow men to settle in Tindaanzhee. This was still the case during my fieldwork as no *bukpahinima* (male witches; sing. *bukpaha*) were admitted at Tindaanzhee. Accused women who inhabited Tindaanzhee came from different places in the north such as Tamale, Yendi, Karaga and Savelugu. At the time of my visit, Tindaanzhee was popularly known to outsiders (including NGO and government workers) as "Kpatinga witch camp".

Gnani-Tindang

The accused women's settlement in Gnani was known to locals and other people in nearby villages as Gnani-Tindang (or simply, Tindang). Like Tindaanzhee, locals were unable to say

exactly when this settlement started; its origins were understood to lie at some hazy point in the past. Though the incumbent *tindana* could not pinpoint the settlement's origin, he presumed that it came into existence more than a century ago. "Tindang existed long before Ghana's independence" and predated the birth of his grandfather, he said authoritatively. At the time of our interview, the *tindana* was 42 years old. Unable to remember all the specific details about the origin story, the *tindana* requested the assistance of one of his siblings who was a pastor in one of the local churches in Gnani.

According to the *tindana* and his pastor-sibling, this settlement started with Jabal, their "great-great grandfather" who was a great hunter. On a hunting expedition, Jabal had migrated from somewhere and settled at the place which is today known as Gnani-Tindang. In the course of making a living here, Jabal developed a shrine and started performing libation (*bayyuli*) as a way of seeking protection, favours and good health from the spirits of the land. As the founder of the new settlement, Jabal later assumed the title of *tindana* and the settlement subsequently came to be known as Tindang. Being the first man to have settled on the empty land, all rituals associated with the shrine fell under his jurisdiction.

Meanwhile, back in her matrimonial village, the lore continues, Jabal's sister was harassed and accused of being a witch following the death of a kin member. Hearing of her trouble, Jabal invited his sister to his home and gave her a medicinal preparation, thus neutralising the witchcraft powers she was supposed to possess. After taking this treatment, Jabal's sister refused to return to her matrimonial home. She settled and lived happily with her brother.

With time, a stranger arrived at Tindang and expressed his interest to settle there. Jabal expressed fear that potential future problems and misunderstandings could develop with the stranger and provided him a piece of land not far from Tindang where he could settle. On this land stood a black fruit-bearing tree known as *Gnaringa*. The name of the tree was often used to describe the location of the newly founded settlement. The new settlement soon took on this name. Over time, people simply referred to the settlement as "Gnani". During my fieldwork, people in Gnani and neighbouring villages referred to the community's accused women's settlement as Gnani-Tindang, although ActionAid's signboard that greeted my presence in the

village boldly displayed “NGANI²¹ CAMP” to welcome visitors to Gnani-Tindang. ActionAid’s report compiled in 2008 however contained a different version of the origin story of this settlement. In 2008, ActionAid compiled a report in which they put forward another origin story for Gnani-Tindang. Relying on this report, Leo Igwe (2016: 56) contends that the first Ya-Na of Dagbon invited a Togolese priest to provide spiritual protection for his people. He brought a magic stone and placed it at Gnani. The placement of this stone, under the watch of a local priest, apparently marked the beginning of Gnani-Tindang. My engagement with locals did not confirm ActionAid’s version of the origin story. My interlocutors, from whom I enquired, appeared to be ignorant about this origin story.

Kukuo

My history of Kukuo’s accused women’s settlement is based on long discussions I had with the *tindana* and one of the royal members of Kukuo chieftaincy (who was also a former *assambleman* of the community). Honourable, as I used to call him, was my local contact person from whom I made several initial inquiries even before my arrival in Kukuo for fieldwork. He also served as my host during the period of my stay in the community.

Like other accused women’s settlements in the north, the one in Kukuo was closely connected to the village shrine and was presumed to have originated during the reign of one of the famous kings of Nanung. The legend starts with Bimbilla Naa Abarika I, who settled at Duuni, a village close to Yendi. It happened that a serious war took place around this area, and Naa Abarika I was forcefully displaced. He fled to a village in Togo called Jarikpanga. After the war, Naa Abarika I thought about how he could reclaim his original settlement. However, reclaiming his lost land meant that he needed to fight another war to defeat his opponent. While in Togo, Naa Abarika I met two Hausa Muslim twins called Alhassan and Fuseini. Although Alhassan and Fuseini were doing some spiritual work for people, they were fishermen by profession. Naa Abarika I asked Alhassan and Fuseini to spiritually prepare him to fight back and reclaim his lost land. With their assistance, the chief launched a war in which he fought and defeated many tribes. When his army reached Bimbilla, they settled there with the full assistance of Alhassan and Fuseini.

²¹ When I asked my local research assistant about the possible wrong spelling of the village’s name - “NGANI” - on ActionAid’s signboard, he clarified that ActionAid’s spelling was one of the two options generally used; the other one being “Gnani”.

After the war, Alhassan decided to go back to Nigeria to take care of the sick mother that they had left behind, while Fuseini stayed behind to protect against possible revenge attacks from the defeated enemy. In gratitude, Naa Abarika I gave his daughter, Mariam, to Fuseini in marriage. According to Dagbamba tradition, a man and his in-laws do not live in the same house. In the spirit of this custom, the chief told Fuseini to search for a place within the Nanung kingdom to settle. After a thorough search, Fuseini finally decided on a place close to the Oti river where fish was plentiful. One of Naa Abarika's elders accompanied Fuseini in his search and reported the location of the new settlement to the chief. The elder confirmed that Fuseini had chosen a dry piece of land (*kukoŋu*) close to the Oti river-bank. Gradually, the word *kukoŋu* was corrupted to be pronounced as *Kukuo*.

Fuseini's wife, Mariam, gave birth to a son, Yakubu. She also brought her niece, Powuni, to stay with them at Kukuo. Powuni later got married to Fuseini's twin brother, Alhassan, when he visited from Nigeria. Powuni gave birth to Sibri, who grew up with Yakubu. Since Mariam had died and Alhassan went back to Nigeria never to return, the boys were raised by Fuseini and Powuni. When Fuseini passed away, Powuni assumed full responsibility for both Yakubu and Sibri. Yakubu inherited his father's property, which included his religious relics (Arabic text documents) and clothing. He built a small room to house these relics and through constant preservation and devotion, the room later came to be treated as a holy place – or shrine – with Fuseini recognised as the apical ancestor.

Hearing of the shrine, visitors from different backgrounds (sick people, traders, accused and persecuted women) all came to the shrine to seek assistance. Since the shrine was meant to give protection to anybody who sought its help, people accused of witchcraft and subjected to persecution fled their communities to seek sanctuary. It was soon unrecognisable as an exclusively Muslim space and people were offering chickens to the ancestors. The shrine started with the chief of the village also performing the role of *tindana*. However, with time and through a long acquaintance between the chief and one of his devoted *daba*²² (literally, slaves), the chief assigned spiritual responsibility of the shrine to the closest *dabli* who spent more time with him. By receiving protection from the *tindana*, the *daba* were also required to work for him and obey his commands. The major difference between this kind of “slavery” and standard forms was that *daba* were never sold or given forcefully to the *tindana*. They

²² The *tindana* used slaves, translated locally as *daba* (sing. *dabli*) to describe any stranger who ran to him for spiritual protection and safety.

came voluntarily to seek protection and treatment, and often chose to remain thereafter. It was explained to me that these people coming to seek protection from the shrine were only regarded as the shrine's *daba*, not the *tindana*'s. Being the priest of the shrine, the *tindana* could make the *daba* work for him but could never sell them. At the time of my visit to Kukuo, the lineage members of this *dabli* were considered the original custodians of the shrine and the accused women.

According to Honourable, the accused women were initially convened at one section in Kukuo. During the reign of Naa Dawuni, he consistently maltreated them. He died within three months after ascending to the Kukuo skin. A post-mortem divination that was conducted to probe Naa Dawuni's death revealed that the shrine (through the ancestors) had killed him because of his unrepentant maltreatment of the accused women. Honourable told me that the shrine regarded the accused women highly and did not accept any maltreatment or discriminatory acts against them. As part of attempts to curb future maltreatment, it was decided that the accused women must not be confined to one section of the village. They were granted freedom to live in any section of the village they so desired. This was why the houses belonging to the accused women in Kukuo, unlike some other settlements, were scattered in all sections in the community, an arrangement that gave the settlement a semblance of a typical ordinary village.

About the origin stories

All the stories about the origin of the accused women's settlement were centrally about men who established sanctuaries for women accused of witchcraft. In none of the stories did these founders dismiss the accusations as "made up" but in all of them, the men offered alternatives to the kinds of violence that accused women faced. Men set up specific spaces set apart for accused women to this end. In these origin stories, men did not feature much as witches. Some of these settlements had initial contestations regarding "ownership" or custodianship (as the origin story of Poagnyaankura fongu shows). Because chiefs in Dagbambaland were known to possess sovereign power and control over their subjects, accused women were initially placed under their care and protection. However, the reality was that in many of these places, the village chiefs lacked the requisite specialised spiritual power to deal with the dark deeds of the witches; the powers of the witches could only be controlled by a specific ritual specialist (typically *tindana*).

These origin histories also reveal something about local conception of sociality- that that social life is filled with conflict, power struggles and problems with kin. These historical and mythical stories provided locals with a blueprint for life or a charter for social action (Malinowski, 1948). Locals referred to these stories as justifications for the continued existence of *tindaanship* in certain areas; their fathers and grandfathers occupied this ritual office. Locals thought that it made no sense to abandon these historical sacred places that they had considered as sources for protection and prosperity. Through longstanding association with these shrines and their ability to reward (compliance) and punish (disobedience and intransigence), locals were acutely aware of what could or could not be done to an accused witch who took shelter in an accused women's settlement.

The origin stories clearly show that many of these accused women's settlements had been in existence for over a century, although they only recently (beginning from the mid-1990s) received attention from the state and civil society. The ages of most of these settlements indicated that the Dagbamba had long (at least since precolonial times) considered *sotali* as a palpable reality whose malevolence could be effectively counteracted or "contained" through physical separation – that is, banishment to Poagnyaankura fongu, Tindang or similar places in the north where the accused women were tested by the *tindana* for witchcraft, cleansed (if found guilty) and admitted into residence where they lived permanently under the *tindana*'s protection. Through this practice of permanent containment in so-called "witch camps", the people in my study area were somewhat unique from many other groups elsewhere in Africa. Most commonly, accused witches in other parts of Africa were subjected to extreme violence, even killings (see Geschiere, 1997; Niehaus, 2001; Siegel, 2005). Although Maia Green (1997; 2003) reported about the existence specialist camps in Tanzania where suspected witches were sent for anti-witchcraft cleansing activities, these camps did not provide permanent shelter for visiting clients.

Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned mainly with the kind of social organisation and political power that characterised the northern savanna region of Ghana where I did fieldwork. Since families in the area were primarily polygynous, domestic or household life was characterised by intense competition among co-wives. The existential questions of who got more of the *yili yidana*'s estate and who would succeed as a head of household aroused jealousies among co-wives who

were said to attempt to circumvent normal processes of social order by initiating witchcraft attacks against step-children. The practice of primogeniture in particular was a great source of worry to junior wives in polygynous homes. Acutely aware of these tensions, locals believed that women employed witchcraft to circumvent local kinship rules regarding succession and inheritance.

One might argue that both Dagbamba and Konkomba women held less power and were more vulnerable to witchcraft accusations than men. This could partly be explained in terms of the local normative patterns of patriarchy. A number of non-anthropologists (particularly journalists and development or NGO workers) who have worked with the accused women have suggested that the women who were accused of witchcraft and banished to the “camps” were those who often transgressed culturally demarcated areas of behaviour or role performance reserved for the respective gender and that such accusations were intended to keep women in total submission to men (see Badoe, 2005; Palmer, 2010; ActionAid, 2012; Whitaker, 2012). Although patriarchy contributed to the skewed gender dynamics of witchcraft accusations (more women than men were accused), the issue of patriarchy did not tell the whole story. Although locals complained that women used their witchcraft to harm and threaten the social order (e.g. causing epidemics of particular diseases, frequent deaths, panic and forced migration), there were instances in which women (like their male counterparts) used witchcraft to protect kinsmen.

Given that women depended almost entirely on their husbands or household heads for all or most of their material and intangible needs – *moni*, healthcare, clothing, housing, protection against physical violence from other men – they were highly vulnerable to witchcraft accusations and aggression from other kinsmen and villagers in the absence (death) of these protective figures (husbands) – as Magazia Awabu’s case showed.

The local or customary rules where access to arable lands depended solely on one’s affiliation to a particular family or household posed serious challenges to women accused of witchcraft. Since livelihoods and survival in the village were tied principally to (male) land ownership and control, witchcraft accusations against women and their expulsion from families and villages spelt livelihood crises for them as they remained perpetual “strangers” with less or no access to land in the host communities where they had no kinship affiliation.

At the wider village level, there was a concentration of powers (both political and spiritual) in chiefs (among the Dagbamba) and elders (among the Konkomba). Locals

explained the concentration of powers in terms of the need for social control and order of daily life. This concentrated power, locals believed, was an effective regulatory mechanism to deal with the saboteurs of social order, namely, witches.

As the cases of Magazia Awabu and Magazia Wampuli illustrated, witches were seen as the face of potential disorder and this necessitated their banishment from society. The people in my research area lived in a world where they imagined that the balance between order and disorder had to be continually managed because of the reality of witches working in daily life. This ordering happened at every level of social life - household, extended family, village. In this regard, chiefs needed not only real political power, but also spiritual power to bring about the expected social order. Witchcraft, then, was not simply conceived as the dark side of kinship, but also of politics.

While the Dagbamba associated witchcraft with family intimacy, they nonetheless handled witchcraft accusations as community rather than a family affair because of its potential threat to village social order. Being accused was a moral point of no return. Accusations did not only lead to family reprisals and rejection but also banishment from an entire community. The recognition that *sonima* were unequivocally bad and dreadful and possessed the capacity to destabilise community social and moral order was the reason why the Dagbamba institutionalised specialised ritual places where *sonima* were cleansed, disempowered (cleansed) and accommodated as way of “containing” or combating their threat to the prevailing social order. Interesting, in the origin stories of these settlements, the *tindana* features as a good household head who protects and cares for the women in his care. While witchcraft accusations and beliefs were common in other parts of Africa, what was unique about witchcraft in Dagbambaland was the practice of settling permanently and confining or committing a whole population of “witches” to the spiritual protection of ancestors (see Chapter 3).

In my research area, many of the witchcraft accusations levelled against women, the intervening forces in their banishment, their subsequent cleansing and acceptance into the accused women’s settlements were shaped by a constellation of practices and actors: shrines, ancestors, earth priests and other local ritual actors; the subject matter of chapter three to which I now turn.

CHAPTER 3: Witchcraft, Shrines and *Tindaanship*

Although not a host community, Tamale featured prominently in my research for two main reasons. First, it hosted government departments, non-governmental organisation (NGO) offices and other civil society organisations that I needed to engage with during my fieldwork. Second, several witch-hunts took place in some suburbs in the Tamale Metropolis during my research, which generated heated public discussions.

In October 2016, not long after my arrival in northern Ghana to start fieldwork, I witnessed the noisy, violent and chaotic scenes that marked witch hunts in Tamale while riding a motorbike through Dakpem’fong and Changli. Stopping on the side of the road, I saw angry mobs drumming and singing local war-mongering songs (*zhem*) to flush out local witches²³. While marching down the road holding sticks, stones and cutlasses, the crowd stormed the houses of suspected witches and brought out the accused women one by one. I stored my motorbike at the Naa Dakpema’s²⁴ palace where one of the hunts was taking place. Because I could not see well, I drew nearer to the noisy mob. They had surrounded an old woman and kept pushing her forward with their hands and sticks. I heard some of them chiding her for walking too slowly and for wasting their time since they had more “work” (witch-hunts) to do. The mob, most of whom were in their 20s and 30s, finally pushed the old woman into the *zong* (visitors’ chamber) at the Dakpema’s palace where the palace guards took custody of her. Their job done, the mob left immediately amidst loud drumming and singing to continue their witch-hunt.

As the mob roughly shoved the third woman into the *zong*, I saw two young women standing by a kiosk. Shocked that this particular woman had been brought in, they raised their hands to their heads. I heard one of the women exclaim, “Eerrhh! Look Amina, it is Ninkpeng they’re leading to the palace. Wonders will never end”. When I approached the women and asked about Ninkpeng (literally, strong person), one of them explained that Ninkpeng’s son recently burnt to death in Accra when the car he was driving mysteriously caught fire and burnt to ashes. She explained that soon after the incident there were rumours among kinsmen and neighbours in the area regarding Ninkpeng’s possible involvement in her son’s tragic accident.

²³ Some ethnographic details in this section of the chapter has been published in *Anthropology Southern Africa*.

²⁴ A prominent chief in Tamale.

Still in a state of shock, the woman asked rhetorically, “So the gossip about this woman’s *sotali* [witchcraft] is true?”

I left the palace soon after this, aware that the mob would continue their “work” as more accused women were placed under custody at the palace. They would eventually be interrogated by Naa Dakpema and his *kpambalba* (elders). The seriousness that characterised these witch-hunts and the war-like mood of the participating youth were terrifying. Residents in the area came out of their homes to see what was happening but stayed well clear of the sharp end of the mob. Since Naa Dakpema’s palace was located near the main road connecting Tamale to Accra, many motorists had parked on the shoulder of the road to catch a glimpse of the chaos. People stood in small groups discussing the event.

As I picked up my motorbike to leave, I saw a large number of people coming from the direction of the Tamale central mosque. The mosque was less than a kilometre from Naa Dakpema’s palace. It was this flock, dressed in their usual long Muslim attire, that reminded me that it was a Friday. The believers had finished their *zummah* (Friday noon prayers) and were rushing to the palace to find out what was happening. People were so engrossed by the unfolding drama that I could not get answers to my questions. I eventually left but came back the next day to ask questions about the previous day’s witch hunts. My further enquiries revealed that residents in the two suburbs had reported several deaths which were considered unnatural. They also complained that many locals were on their sick-beds awaiting death. Several locals confirmed that something had to be done and that the mob’s action was an appropriate response to forestall further calamities.

I wanted to interview Naa Dakpema about the accused witches but had many difficulties in making an appointment to see the chief. A couple of my appointments were interrupted by visits from politicians and locals who had brought more urgent cases for him to adjudicate. Each time our appointment was moved to a future date, I joined people with less pressing matters to stand around the palace and chat. It was in these settings that I learnt more about the chief. He was a Muslim, had married five wives and had instituted an educational endowment fund that was meant to help brilliant but poor students. My interlocutor also told me that Naa Dakpema succeeded his father in 2008 when the latter passed on. His position as “chief of Tamale” had been fiercely contested by a rival faction who argued that he was only a *dakpema* (literally, market leader) and therefore could not hold himself as the legitimate chief of Tamale.

Naa Dakpema's opponents recognised a rival traditional ruler, Gulkpe-Naa, as the "chief of Tamale" (see MacGaffey, 2013).

After several unsuccessful attempts, I finally secured an appointment to interview Naa Dakpema. When I entered the *zong* where our interview would take place, he was surrounded by his elders. Referring to the witch-hunting episode that took place a couple of weeks earlier. I asked how they had dealt with the accused women. The chief, speaking through his elders, told me that he had no spiritual eyes to "see" and distinguish a witch from a non-witch. He mentioned that when accused people were brought to his palace, he asked one of his elders to lead the two parties (accused and accuser) to a shrine (*buyli*) where the *tindana* (earth priest) could ritually subject the two parties to a witchcraft test to establish the guilt or innocence of an accused person. The *kpambalba* confirmed that some of the accused women who were brought to the palace by the mob tested positive for witchcraft at the shrine and were ordered to relocate. At this point, one of the *kpambalba* terminated our interview, saying they were tired and needed to attend to other issues. But I suspected that the elder had prematurely ended the interview because he was not satisfied with the amount of *guli* (cola) I had offered to see the chief – a dissatisfaction he expressed even before the commencement of the interview (see Mutaru, 2018b).

Testing for witchcraft

Two months after my conversation with Naa Dakpema and his *kpambalba* in Tamale, I visited Gnani to continue my fieldwork. Unlike other host communities where the *tindana* was always the last person I interviewed, here I began my engagement with the *tindana*, a young Muslim man in his mid-40s, who inherited his position following the death of his father. Although he was the *tindana* for the shrine and the custodian of the accused women, he was not called by his local title. Neither was he called by his Muslim name. I frequently heard locals address him as "chief", the English equivalent of his local title. He clearly liked being called chief. As custom demanded, when I first arrived in Gnani, my local contact person, who was also the *tindana*'s younger sibling and a pastor in a local church, first took me to greet and seek permission from the village chief (*naa*) to conduct research in his community. As custom demanded, we approached the chief through an elder, *naa chamlana* (literally, chief's go-between). We presented our *guli* and answered questions about my research and my experience as a Ghanaian in South Africa before the chief and his elders granted permission for me to do

research in their town. In theory, the chief's permission meant that I could engage with any inhabitant in the community.

The next day, I had a lengthy interview with the *tindana*. On this day, the weather was unusually hot. Kin and neighbours sat conversing in an open hut in front of the *tindana*'s house; a frequent occurrence in this part of rural Ghana. Since our conversation was to be confidential, the *tindana* and I excused ourselves from the group and went to sit in his *zong*. The *tindana* started by saying that he did not go out to look for people to come to his *buyli* for any rituals. Every *tindana* I met emphasised this because they were acutely aware of the NGOs working with accused women who portrayed them as preying on vulnerable locals. According to the *tindana*, parties to a witchcraft accusation (*soyu*) either visited the *buyli* on their own accord or on the order of their chiefs or community elders. Sending chiefs and elders would tell the parties to the accusation what they needed to present to the *buyli* for the ritual performance.

During our conversation, the *tindana* revealed that he would often not conduct a witch-testing ritual if the accused person came unaccompanied by a witness, preferably a kinsman. Both accusers and accused reported to the *buyli* with a chicken to undergo testing. Each party would then make a declaration to the *buyli* to accept their chicken if they were innocent or reject it if guilty. The *tindana* would then slaughter each party's chicken. According to the *tindana*, a slain chicken that died on its chest (face downward) was a confirmation of guilt. In contrast, a chicken that died on its back (face upward) signalled incontrovertible proof of the person's innocence. We were mid-way through his explanations of witch-testing rituals when we realised that it was time for *azafari* (Muslim noon prayer). The *tindana* asked that we pause our conversation, go for the prayer and resume afterwards. When we returned, the *tindana* talked about the accused women in his care who had stayed on when their chickens were rejected.

Towards the end of our conversation, three cars arrived in the village. They immediately caught the attention of everybody present. As the children ran to touch the cars, village elders shooed them away. The cars made their way to the *tindana*'s house and parked a few meters from the *zong*. Looking on as the visitors left the cars, the *tindana* announced, "*N saamba m-bala*" (they are my visitors) and that they came for a witch-finding "consultation". It immediately went very quiet in the vicinity of his house. There were eleven visitors, but only four held chickens for the rituals. The rest were family members and representatives of the chief who had followed to observe and report the results of the tests back home. The *tindana*

provided benches for the visitors to sit on. While they were waiting, the *tindana* went inside his compound and changed into his *bin'ɲmaa* (formal traditional dress) usually worn by the Dagbamba and some other groups in northern Ghana during funerals, local festivals and other important traditional occasions.

Uncertain, the visitors, and especially the accusers, looked visibly apprehensive. It soon transpired that the group were sent by Choggu-Naa (the chief of Choggu, a suburb of Tamale) to report to the *buyli*. Following witchcraft accusations in Tamale, two men and a woman had to be tested for *sotali* (witchcraft). In addition to the chickens they had brought, the *tindana* asked each party to buy a bottle of *dam* (local beer) and pay an amount of 65 Ghana Cedis (GHc65) - equivalent to US\$14 - each for his ritual services. After the parties had gathered all the necessary materials needed for the rituals, the *tindana* led the visitors and other community members to the shrine, which was located about 70 metres away from his residence.

The procession to the shrine was quiet. At the shrine, the atmosphere was even quieter. The shrine was a small territorial space marked by a single big tree with stones under it where the *tindana* poured libation to the ancestors and slaughtered animals his clients brought for consultation. The *kali yili* (literally custom house), which was located a few metres away from the tree, was also part of the bigger shrine. The *tindana* and other informants told me that the lineage's ancestors inhabited the *kali yili* and watched over the living. Sacrifices to the shrine (through the ancestors) not only showered blessings on the village, but local people also believed that they invoked the ancestors' wrath on cultural offenders (cf. MacGaffey, 2013).

Before commencing the witch-testing rituals, the *tindana* cautioned all present to avoid unnecessary conversations. He also prohibited the taking of pictures during the ritual. In public, the accuser (who was also the victim in this case) told the *tindana* that the accused were spiritually tormenting her. The chief's elder, who led the delegation to the village, told the *tindana* that the goal of their visit was to separate *yelmanɲli* (truth) from *zhiri* (falsehood). The *tindana* ordered the first accused man, Baako, to step forward and undergo the ritual testing. Holding his chicken and looking visibly worried, Baako stepped forward and made a public declaration. He said,

My sister here has accused me of trying to bewitch her. She claims that I attack her every night, but I am not a bad man. I am innocent of this accusation. I use my *tim* [medicine] to treat people and save their lives. If it is true that I am using my *tim* to harm her, may the shrine reject my chicken. If I am innocent, I beseech the shrine to accept my chicken and exonerate me.

With that, the *tindana* poured libation to the *yaan 'nima* (ancestors) using the *dam* the accused bought. He then recited some incantations in which he invoked the *yaan 'nima* to rise and separate truth from falsehood. In invoking his *yaan 'nima*, the *tindana* mentioned the names of a few of them, presumably the most important, and asked them to “wake up” and receive the chicken and help to identify the real witch (*son-ya*). He grabbed the chicken and cut off its head. He then threw it on the ground so that the chicken’s contorting body could channel the ancestors’ answer. After a few minutes, the slain chicken finally died on its back. The *tindana* affirmed what everyone knew from this sign; Baako was not guilty. His brother who had accompanied him to witness the test, and had until now looked quiet and pensive, smiled after the verdict, but Baako himself did not. He only heaved a sigh of relief and wiped the sweat that ran down from his face.

The remaining two accused persons, a man (Bangahim) and a woman (Adinpuya), underwent the same ritual process as the first. Unfortunately, both their chickens died on their chests; a clear sign of guilt. At this stage, Adinpuya’s two sons who accompanied her to the shrine stepped forward and openly challenged the ancestors’ verdict. Tempers flared as they demanded the test to be repeated. The *tindana* intervened by saying that the *buyli* did not lie and that it had always rendered impeccable verdicts to its clients. According to the *tindana*, no witch-testing ritual had ever been repeated in the shrine. “I was born here. I grew up with my father who was the *tindana*. My father never repeated it for anybody. Since I took over from my father I haven’t repeated this ritual for visitors”, the *tindana* clarified. He further explained that a repetition of a ritual could bring grave consequences to him and his lineage since that might amount to casting doubt on the integrity and capacity of their ancestors. To reassure the “doubting Thomas”, the *tindana* mentioned that in the past he had received clients from neighbouring West African countries who had heard about the shrine’s power and had come to consult. Adinpuya and her protesting sons remained unhappy but all others present, including the elder who had led the delegation to the village, accepted the shrine’s verdict.

After the tests, it was the accuser’s turn to address the shrine. The accuser, Salima, was in her early 40s. She immediately started insulting the accused when she got up to speak. The *tindana* growled at her and warned that insults at the shrine constituted grave misconduct and amounted to disobedience and disrespect towards the ancestors. The *tindana* asked her to apologise to the accused and the shrine before her ritual could proceed. She did. When the

tindana asked her to make her *pori* (oath) to the *buyli*, Salima stepped forward holding her chicken by the legs and wings and declared,

I have seen Adinpuya [pointing at the accused woman] and her collaborators in my dreams. They always attempt to harm me. I accused them by reporting them to the chief but they have denied. I have come here to seek the truth. If my accusation is true this shrine should accept my chicken. If I am lying against them the shrine should reject my chicken.

After the *tindana* had performed the libation, his assistant grabbed the chicken and cut off its head. The twisting body of the chicken made some peculiar movements that thrilled the audience. The slain chicken continually moved in dancing fashion towards the *tindana* and retreated. After several such iterative and graceful moves, it finally fell flat on its chest in front of the *tindana*. Everybody was quiet. The *tindana* got up and asked Salima to tell the crowd what had happened to her chicken. She remained quiet. Although everybody knew what the position of the dead chicken meant, the *tindana* wanted her to acknowledge her guilt. The *tindana* again instructed her, “Tell everyone here what it means for a chicken to die in the manner yours has”. Salima publicly admitted what everyone knew already: “The shrine has rejected my chicken”, she said. Although the two people she accused were found guilty, the shrine showed that she had accused them wrongly. The *tindana* explained that someone else was attempting to bewitch her and that the guilty parties were in the process of bewitching another person. This was a complex case, and the *tindana*’s assistant interpreted the shrine’s verdict in the popular Dagbamba bewitchment logic of *n zaŋ gbaŋ n-pili* (literally, to cover with a skin); a phenomenon where witches masked their identity by appearing in their victims’ dreams with the face of another person known to the victim. Many of those present at the shrine, including the *tindana*, agreed with this interpretation.

Before everybody left the shrine’s premises, some confusion arose when the *tindana*’s assistant detected that one of the visitors had secretly filmed the witch-testing, something the *tindana* had prohibited from the outset. The *tindana* rebuked the man for such gross disobedience and instructed that he delete the footage from his phone immediately. Before the visitors (including those found guilty) left, the *tindana* prohibited violence between the parties on their way home or upon their arrival in Tamale. He told the visitors that people from many communities in Dagbon had visited the shrine over many years for similar consultations and it had always been peaceful. He led the visitors to where they had parked their cars, shook hands with the chief’s elder who led the delegation and wished them a safe journey back home.

Bangahim and Adinpuya accompanied the *kpambala* (elder) back home to report to the chief. The Choggu-Naa and his *kpambalba* needed to deliberate on the outcome of the witch-finding ritual before prescribing further sanctions regarding the guilty parties' *puli paybu* (stomach cleansing) and relocation. Besides, the accused were not ready for stomach cleansing as they still needed to go back home and get the necessary goods and animals needed for such cleansing rituals.

The visible and invisible realms

The people in my research area lived in a world that constituted both the visible and invisible realms (cf. West, 2005; van Wyk, 2014). My Dagbamba and Konkomba informants both recognised the existence and reality of the material and spiritual domains of their world. They believed that the death of people in this world was only a transitory process. Death enabled the dead to inhabit the unseen or spiritual world from where they might influence the life chances of the living. The material realm consisted of the living (people), animals, plants, trees, water bodies, birds, rocks and human relations and interactions. Such “persons” or things as God (*Naawuni*), shrines (*buya*), earth shrines (*tingbana*), ancestors (*yaan'nima* or *kpiimba*), spirits (*alizin'nima* or *kpikeparsi*) and ghosts (*kpiin-yi*) occupied the invisible domain. The classification between material and spiritual worlds was not always neat or distinctive as locals believed that these two realms overlapped and interacted daily. For example, among Dagbamba it was believed that some trees found in their physical environment had spiritual underpinnings. Missionary anthropologist Jon Kirby (2015), for example, observed that Dagbamba *baysi* (diviners) wrapped a white cloth around some Kapok trees that they had identified as ancestors who have come back to the material world to protect the living. In a similar manner, *tingbana* and *buya* which were material in nature had spiritual powers that belonged to the invisible realm. Locals considered *sonima* (witches) to be part of the seen or material world during daytime but believed that *sonima* transitioned to the invisible realm at night²⁵.

In my research area, locals believed that most deaths and other misfortunes were caused or influenced by actors in the spiritual world. While natural deaths (due to old age, for instance) were said to be the work of *Naawuni* and were often described as “*Naawuni yiko*” (literally God's capacity or the will of God), other deaths and misfortunes were said to have been caused

²⁵ Similar beliefs existed in the Bushbuckridge area of South Africa (Niehaus 2001: 48).

by the intervention of other supernatural forces or human agents such as aggrieved ancestors, *sonima* or evil spirits. People learnt of these unnatural causes through divination. When a string of misfortunes plagued an area, as it did in Tamale, locals would recognise the need for forceful human intervention and might turn to witch-hunts in order to identify the source of their misfortune.

Although local imams often told their Dagbamba believers that it was forbidden to attribute the cause of any death or misfortune to human or spiritual agency other than Allah and that Islam did not sanction consultations with *buya* when deaths occurred, locals commonly attended both mosque and *buya* consultations. Local Muslims also accused people of *sotali* and participated in rituals such as *baybuybu* (divination) to find the cause of a misfortune just as they said the five daily Islamic prayers. There was no competition between the traditional healers and the Muslim clerics for clients, although the latter often derided and denounced the ritual activities of the former, describing it as an act of disbelief.

My enquiries revealed that all the actors involved in the Tamale witch hunts – the accused and accuser, Choggu-Naa and the elder who led the delegation to Gnani’s shrine – were all Muslims. Also, in Gnani where I witnessed the witch-testing rituals, the *tindana* and his wives, as well as the assistants who participated in the ritual performances were all Muslims. Here, I witnessed the *tindana* offer his Islamic prayers on a daily basis. He explained that some Muslims might see the rituals he performed to the ancestors as being an “invention” and an act of disbelief but explained that it was a complex issue. He told me that the shrine was something their ancestors bequeathed to them and that they could not abandon it altogether. Doing so, he explained, could amount to a sacrilege, with the expected severe consequences from the ancestral world. The *tindana* explained that Islam was only against the worship of any other deity apart from Allah. But he did not consider his sacrifices to the ancestors as worship. He explained that by continuing the ritual performances to his lineage as his father and grandfathers had done, his aim was to provide social and spiritual relief to his clients. MacGaffey (2013: 5) explained that such pragmatism was about people who want results,

they ask at shrines for what they need and respectfully bring an appropriate gift (‘sacrifice’) if they get it. They make their request to the dead because their invisible grandfathers shaped the lives they lead and are ever-present in it; their needs and their beliefs are eminently realistic rather than spiritual.

Since the *tindana* was chosen by the ancestors, he commanded a good technical understanding of whatever message emanated from the shrine ancestors. Locals believed that he could decipher the mixed messages from the ancestors, as the Gnani chicken story and witch-testing for the visitors from Tamale shows. Most locals accepted the *tindana*'s verdicts because they believed that the *tindaamba* could not lie (even if they wanted to). Locals associated with ancestors unrestricted power, truth, just actions (in terms of punishment and rewards) and accuracy. In Gnani, an elder pointed out that since the shrine ancestors were just in their actions, the *tindana* could not manipulate any witch-testing verdict in favour of his preferred client or do something that stood against the will and command of the ancestors. Doing so, according him, would provoke the ancestors' anger who would kill him for distorting their verdicts or "telling lies against them". Anti-witchcraft shrines, such as the one in Gnani, had gained credibility over the years in the eyes of locals because their fathers and grandfathers had told them the success stories of these sacred sites, which they had come to believe. During my visit to one of the accused women's settlements, the one in Kukuio, the *tindana* told me a story of how the village's shrine ancestors killed a chief in the past because of his unjust actions. The man had maltreated accused witches protected by the local shrine.

Local notions of medicine and witchcraft

Medicine or *tim*, as it was broadly and popularly known in my research area, referred to many things. One could only get an accurate understanding of the term when it was used in a specific context. In one sense, it meant the spiritual power inherent in the body of an individual. In another sense, it referred to physical materials with spiritual properties such as talismans and amulets. In other contexts, it meant western medicine (*silmiin'tim*) or herbal preparations (*dagban'tim* or *moyu*) used for healing purposes. In many uses of the term, *tim* was used in a neutral sense and there was nothing inherently bad about such "magical" properties or abilities. However, when it was used in relation to *sotali*, locals always conceived of *tim* as an evil and dangerous spiritual power possessed by individuals bent on doing harm.

Although locals believed that both men and women possessed *tim*, they often assumed that regular men used theirs for the benefit of society such as healing or treating the sick while women harmed with such powers. This was an extension of local assertions that chiefs could not use their *tim* to harm those in their care (see Chapter 2). They are some exceptions to this gendered view on the use of *tim*. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, women in the royal families

were believed to use their *tim* to protect the chief. During an interview with one of the chief's elders in Gushegu, he admitted that it was not uncommon for *nabipuyinsi* (princesses, sing. *nabipuyinga*) to possess *tim* which they used to protect themselves and royal members, especially the chief. The esteem for a *nabipuyinga*, he said, would diminish were it to be known that she did not have *tim*. The notion that men generally used *tim* for healing purposes was evident in the predominance of men as witch-seers and healers. During my fieldwork, I met countless men who professed to know how to use one local herb or another to prepare healing medicine. In Kukuo, for example, almost all village elders and *asanza niriba* (opinion leaders) I met knew how to heal people with local herbs. In the course of my fieldwork, I encountered only two women who were healers. Unlike the case of *son-ya* (witch) who would often hide her *tim* and maintain strict secrecy about what she did at night, the women healers I met publicly displayed their medicines in their compounds and clients often visited them in their rooms for spiritual help regarding healing. Everybody in these communities knew what they did with such medicines and their powers. Locals told me that these women were not afraid of anybody and that they felt very comfortable with their practice because they did not use it to harm or kill. Community members praised them for their healing roles.

A large body of anthropological literature has accumulated on African healing systems and practices. In a study conducted in Green Valley in South Africa, Isak Niehaus (2001) argued that owners of medicines or herbs were not inherently bad. He noted that while the *dingaka* (healers-diviners) used their medicines for constructive (healing) purposes, they could be accused of being *baloi* (witches) if these medicines were used to harm innocent people. To this end, Niehaus argued that there was a very thin line between the *baloi* and *dingaka* and that healers could easily transcend into the realm of witchcraft if they so wished since they had expert knowledge of medicine and could manipulate it to work in the reverse. Likewise, in *Kupilikula*, Harry West (2005) suggested that healers in Mozambique maintained a shadowy distance from witches since Muedans could employ the *mitela* (medicines) to harm as well as to heal. West contended that in Muedan society, healers were respected as well as feared since they were attributed with the powers of sorcery of construction as well as sorcery of ruin. Although most Muedan healers did not agree to being sorcerers, to heal, nonetheless, required knowledge of sorcery. Apart from traditional healing, anthropologists have also studied Christian practices of healing and the use of these same magical abilities to cause harm. Ilana van Wyk's (2014) work on the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in South Africa showed how perceptions of the church's pastors' ability to use medicine or spiritual power to

heal different kinds of illness which attracted massive patronage to the church's services. However, despite the supposed constructive use of medicine, van Wyk (2014: 146) noted, pastors were suspected of sending "life-threatening diseases" and "were also suspected of sending AIDs to congregants who did not donate enough blood or who had left the church".

During my encounter with Naa Dakpema in Tamale, his elders explained that a person with *tima* (spiritual powers) was called *timalana* (medicine man). When the person used his or her *tim* to harm, kill or cause sickness, it was called *sotali* (witchcraft). Although my Dagbamba informants said that some women might acquire *tim* to protect their families, as the chiefs' sisters did (see Chapter 2), witchcraft was another matter. According to village elders, people who used their *tim* for positive ends such as healing, growing a business or acquiring other forms of prosperity were not classified as *sonima* and were never hunted. Through ritual sacrifices to the ancestors, *tindaamba* often exonerated such healers from (wrongful) accusations. As the case of Baako shows, he was exonerated by the shrine for any wrongdoing. It was established that he had *tim*, but that he only used it to heal and to help people who had come to him for remedies to their social and spiritual problems. In Kpatinga, local elders told me that many healers had the ability to detect witchcraft when it occurred, and detection often preceded healing processes.

Locals believed that a witch could be male (*bukpaha*) or female (*son-ya*) but in general, villagers believed that women were more likely to become witches (cf. Jackson, 1975; 1977). The accused women's settlements, with their majority female populations, bore out the asymmetrical gendered nature of witchcraft accusations. Of the six settlements where I did fieldwork, women exclusively inhabited five. It was only in Gnani-Tindang that I found both men and women living together. Even here, the population of the women outnumbered that of men.

In these Dagbamba communities, unlike others elsewhere in Africa (see Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Wilson, 1951; Englund, 1996; Ruel, 2017), locals did not categorically distinguish between sorcery and witchcraft – that witches use inherent powers to harm or kill while sorcerers employ other medicines to achieve similar effect. A *son-ya* might harm or kill her victim by using inherent spiritual powers. But she might also perform rituals or administer noxious medicines to achieve a similar effect. *Son-ya* had many ways to harm those in their midst; they could bury medicines in the house of their victims and this might result in sickness or death. During my fieldwork, locals said that a *son-ya* often removes the intestines of her

victim and replaces it with a special or ritual cotton wool (*gumli*) which could result in sickness, leading to the person's death. But among these kinds of witchcraft, the most feared was *dihili* (literally feeding, but in technical terms it meant poisoning).

Although some African witchcraft discourses point explicitly to the stomach as the place where witches store their dark powers (Drucker-Brown, 1993: 533; Niehaus, 2001: 57) most of my interlocutors only vaguely identified *ningbuna puuni* (literally, inside the body) as the place where the *sotim* (witchcraft power) was hidden. However, although they did not directly mention the stomach, their description of ritual cleansing as "*puli paybu*" (stomach cleansing) clearly hinted at the actual location of *sotim*. Among the Dagbamba, *sotim* might be inherited or acquired (see Mutaru, 2007). They believed that women who were witches could pass on their dark powers to their children at a very tender age. My interlocutors noted that children who grew up with their aunts or grandmothers (through fosterage) were morally compromised as they often acquired the *sotim* from these guardians. Children who grew up with these powers began to use them wittingly or unwittingly (cf. Mutaru, 2007). Adult women might give their *sotim* to other adults as gifts, while some women might also exchange money for their dark power. My interlocutors also pointed out that women who wished to harm their rivals or other people but did not have *sotim* might conspire with known witches to accomplish their dark deeds. Irrespective of whether *sotim* was acquired voluntarily or unwittingly, my interlocutors maintained that the power was passed on through the ingestion of a medicine.

Maia Green (2003: 125) writes of the Pogoro of southern Tanzania that "ideas about witchcraft are intimately connected to more general notions about morality, sociality, and humanity". "The defining characteristics of witches", she writes, "is that they are people who are excessively greedy and anti-social, to the point where they quite literally embody the inversion of normal human attributes" (Green, 2003: 125). Similar ideas were current in my research area. In the Bushbuckridge area in South Africa, Niehaus (2001: 50-51) noted that in an inversion of normal human sexual relations, witches were said to cause infertility through having sex with their victims (via a familiar). Similarly, Geschiere (1997: 40) noted that one of the striking anti-social and immoral aspects of Maka's witches was that "they divulge in so many ways an inversion of everyday relationships...men make love with men, and 'even' women with women". Likewise, the Dagbamba, among whom I worked, regarded the witch as a *ninvuy'beyu* ("unclean" or bad person, pl. *ninvuy'beri*) who was not only an anti-social, fearful and reprehensible figure but also as a "dirty" person whose *nim'maṅtali* (literally, virtuous personality) had been compromised and who needed to be cleansed or purified before

she/he could be accepted for refuge in a host community. Sex was central to the ways that uncleanliness was conceptualised in this area.

In my research area, local notions of cleanliness were associated not only with personal or environmental hygiene but was also closely linked to personal innate attributes such as having a “good heart” (i.e. one’s love for people), not feeling jealous of other people’s possessions, not having a penchant for bloodshed and avoiding bad and hate speech. In this sense, people who lacked “good hearts” were considered “unclean” and could potentially engage in any bad acts, including witchcraft. Among local Muslims, people who lacked “clean hearts” or good intentions toward society were said to be polluted in the sight of Allah. Since witches engaged in all kinds of dark deeds that opposed the notion of a good and clean heart, they were said to be polluted. Locals often referred to the Quran and the sayings of prophet Muhammed that emphasised cleanliness when they admonished those who were acting contrary to the ideal. In one of my discussions with the Iman of Gushegu, he emphasised the need for a person to be clean before approaching Allah. He quoted a verse in the Quran (Al-Baqarah 2: 222)²⁶ to support the need for cleanliness in Islam. To live peacefully with other people, therefore, witches had to undergo cleansing.

For those accused of being *ninvuy’beri*, locals said that they could drink *buykom* (shrine water) to deactivate their witchcraft power. But in some of the communities, these people were not absolutely “pure” or “clean” until they were shaved. In many societies in Africa, shaving aspect of many rituals are associated with cleansing (cf. Green, 2003). Among the Pogoro, for instance, Green (2003) noted that shaving was considered as one of the most vital cleansing rituals that accused women were mandated to undergo at specialised anti-witchcraft cult centres. In a Pogoro society, to be shaved was to be pure. Since witches were regarded as “rubbish” and “dirty”, the idea of shaving was “intimately associated with cleansing and purification” (Green, 2003: 131). In my research area, it was not all the host communities where shaving was done. In villages where shaving was not done, the *tindaamba* could not explain to me why it was so, except to say that this was how things had always been done even before they took over the *tindaanship* (office of the *tindana*). In villages where shaving was done, the *tindana* or one of his assistants shaved the accused women. According to my local informants,

²⁶ Quran Chapter 2 (Al-Baqarah), verse 222 reads: “They ask you [Muhammed] about menstruation. Say: It is an impurity. So, keep away from women during menstruation; and do not have intimacy with them until they are cleansed. But when they are cleansed, go to them from where Allah has commanded you. Surely Allah loves those who are most repenting, and loves those who keep themselves pure.”

the hair, which the accused had brought from home where they committed their foul deeds, was considered to be *zab'beri*; literally bad hair (infected with witchcraft impurities) and had to be removed as part of purifying the body of the “witch”. In Kpatinga, the local *tindana* told me that the shaved hair was deposited at the shrine where it was eventually blown away by the wind.

In my research area, while an accused woman would often be accepted by the host community where she had been cleansed, locals in her original village were often unwilling to accept her back. Some of my interlocutors could remember cases where accused women who had gone through cleansing rituals were chased away after returning to their communities. One elder explained this by saying that these communities believed that some accused women removed their powers and threw them in the bush on their way to the shrine. The women were able to retrieve their powers on their way back home after the stomach cleansing ceremony. In Kukuo, an informant (and a friend of my host) pointed out that although the village shrine was powerful, locals in the communities from where the accused women fled still did not trust their kinsmen because they believed that the cleansing was not effective enough to remove all dark powers. In the sending communities, said my informant, “the people don’t still trust their own people. They believe that not all the medicine is gone after the cleansing. They think the women can still harm, so it is better to protect themselves by not allowing them to come back”. In contrast, all the *tindaamba* I interviewed insisted that an accused woman who had been ritually cleansed could not harm, even if she acquired new powers after her cleansing. They explained that the shrine would not sanction any bewitchment and that the powers which she had ingested during the cleansing ceremony would kill her if she tried to return to the old practice.

Distance, intimacy and witchcraft

In all the communities where I did fieldwork, locals regarded *sonima* as evil persons who had to be punished and who had to be kept away from society to avoid their harm. The practice of sending accused women away from the immediate family and community was based on the longstanding belief that geographical distance created a barrier to witchcraft and limited the ability of the *son-ya* to attack. In recent years, however, people in the area where I did fieldwork have heard that modern witches were no longer constrained by geographical distance. Ghanaians in the diaspora have also expressed lingering fears of witchcraft among them and

their “belief that ‘witches’ now travel overseas to strike their victims there” (ter Haar, 2007: 107; cf. Geschiere, 2013; Parish, 2005).

Like the cases of Magazia Awabu and Magazia Wampuli (see Chapter 2), all the other accused women in the accused women’s settlements came from villages where locals believed that witchcraft was dependent on social intimacy; witches did not bewitch strangers or non-kin. Marwick's (1952) study in Zambia emphasised the tension, disorder and instability that characterised relationships within Cewa families. Among the Cewa, he discovered that the matrilineage was a hotbed for witchcraft accusations, arguing that these accusations acted as a gauge for social strains among members of a family, made allowance for the release of built-up tensions, but also reconfigured social relationships among kin. Marwick (1952: 216-217) suggested that it was within “the house” (i.e. matrilineage) that witchcraft accusations had the greatest utilitarian value since “witches generally attack their own matrikin with the fact that the matrilineage is the natural arena for quarrels about succession to status, about inheritance of property”. Among the people of Green Valley in the Bushbuckridge area in South Africa, Niehaus (2001) attributed the eruption of witchcraft accusations partly to acrimonious relationships that characterised polygynous households. He argued that the discontent that triggered witchcraft accusations was less about rank or hierarchy among polygynous women than it was about the unequal treatment of wives by their husbands. Witchcraft accusations, he noted, erupted when “women constantly feared that their dissatisfied co-wives could resort to witchcraft” to harm them (Niehaus, 2001: 105). Niehaus (2001: 105) concluded that “witchcraft accusations were most acute when co-wives contested the estates of their deceased husbands”.

As Geschiere (1997: 212) showed for Cameroon, witchcraft is “the dark side of kinship” and “expresses the frightening realisation that aggression threatens from within the intimacy of the family – that is, from the very space where complete solidarity and trust should reign without fail”. This belief was partly responsible for the host communities accepting the accused women into the accused women’s settlements – they were not family and were seldom in a position to establish intimacy with other villagers from the host settlements. Another important factor in the acceptance of the accused women was that the women had undergone ritual cleansing to remove their *sotim*. While some locals held that one could hide witchcraft powers in a bush, others were more willing to believe that the women were ‘neutralised’. In Kukuio, my research assistant and the *assambleman* for the village pointed out that the local shrine was very powerful and effective in terms of stomach cleansing. He noted that,

When you [referring to the fleeing witch] come to the shrine, the *tindana* will let you go through all the rituals to remove the power. Once this is done the person becomes powerless. She can't chop or kill again. The ancestors won't agree. If she attempts, she will die. Even if she acquires new powers, she can't use it. She will die.

For many of the accused women I interviewed in the accused women's settlements, the reasons for their banishment mostly related to the betrayal of kin. Some of the accused women told me that their crime for being banished from their villages was that they appeared in the dreams of family members who interpreted it as evidence of their bewitchment (cf. Mutaru, 2007: 32). For others, their accusations were triggered following sudden illnesses suffered by kinsmen. Locals told me that *sonima* killed their victims by putting poisonous substances in their food. My interlocutors referred to this kind of bewitching as *dihili*. Because of this form of witchcraft, locals were often suspicious when family members offered them food out of turn in the case of polygamous households (see Chapter 2) or in a context where sharing was not usual. Informants told me that food prepared by family members in one's absence could not be received without some suspicion; the only exception being the case of couples. Even so, informants maintained, husbands sometimes fell victim to *dihili* from their wives. People who were bewitched in this manner (and I encountered no less than three such cases during my fieldwork), an interlocutor explained, saw their stomachs gradually enlarged until it got to a point where eating, drinking and breathing became difficult for the victim. The victim remained in such a state until he or she died. During earlier research in 2007²⁷ in one of the Dagbamba villages (Gbullung) in northern Ghana, my informants frequently revealed that one of the witches' favoured "medicines" to bewitch (*n-dihi*) their victims was *pihim* (leftover water retained after washing the clothes or body of a corpse) (see Mutaru, 2007: 30-31). Witches, I was told, often dropped this substance in the food or drink of their victims, and once consumed, there was a very slim chance of survival.

Locals told me that one of the most common bewitchment mechanisms employed by *sonima* to harm kinsmen was the use of *nantohi* (ritual insects; sing. *nantoo*). These *nantohi* were ritually manipulated by the witch and hidden inside the house of the victim to foment spiritual harm. Local explanations for *nantoo* varied slightly. While some interlocutors described it as a spiritual bird, others maintained that it was a spiritual insect deployed in the

²⁷ Research conducted in fulfilment of a Bachelor's degree submitted to the University of Ghana

house of the victim by his/her assailant witch. At Kpatinga, the *tindana* told me that a *nantoo* was often used by a witch to harm a kinsman. He explained that a witch could deploy the *nantoo* in any part of the house: it could be hidden under the victim's bed, buried at the entrance of his door, hidden in his roof, kept under a stone inside or behind the house. Because *nantoo* was a spiritual object, its presence in a room or house caused misfortunes such as illnesses or deaths, but it could not be seen by an ordinary eye. According to my interlocutors, whenever frequent and strange illnesses or deaths plagued a house, the household head could ask for the services of a ritual specialist such as *jinwara* (witch-finder/healer) who had spiritual eyes to see and remove *nantohi*. The successful removal and destruction of *nantohi*, locals maintained, was the surest way of protecting people from the harm of marauding or predatory kinsmen.

***Tindaamba*, ancestors and shrines**

Writing about the Dagbamba, Wyatt MacGaffey (2013) observed that local *buya* (shrines) were characterised by their specialisation, something that was not common in other parts of the country. “The more unusual an entity [shrine]”, he wrote, “the more it stands out, attracting attention and speculation as to what special powers make it so” (MacGaffey, 2013: 78). Although many shrines in Ghana provided general services, the *tindaamba* I dealt with were popularly associated with anti-witchcraft antidotes and also served as permanent sanctuaries to those accused of witchcraft. By virtue of specialising in witchcraft rituals, the *buya* I studied were unique because there were very few *tindaamba* who claimed to be able to deal with witchcraft. While almost all Dagbamba communities had shrines, not every *tindana* was empowered to deal with witchcraft or to neutralise *sotim*. While my local interlocutors believed that the *tindana*'s special powers were vested in his lineage and bequeathed from generation to generation, they could not explain why such witch-finding powers were limited to specific *buya*.

And while the *buya* that specialised in witchcraft dealt with these cases, their *tindana* also attended to non-witchcraft-related cases. People who needed success in exams, trade and politics, could visit the shrine to seek its help. Apart from those visiting for reasons related to witchcraft, clients who visited the shrine to seek solutions to their problems (such as business crisis, political competition) had to make pledges (*m-puli*) regarding what they would offer in return (e.g. cattle, sheep) for the shrine's help. On attaining success, clients were mandated to return to the shrine to fulfil their pledges (*m-mali*) to the shrine or risk losing it again.

In terms of their physical manifestations, *buya* were specific sites often distinguished from other ordinary sites by unique features such as a collection of trees, a small hill, a room surrounded by trees, or a single tree under which might be found some ritual objects such as stones painted with blood, animal fur or bones.

In Kukuo, for example, the shrine was a specific site in the village characterised by a collection of trees and the presence of a sacred room in which relics and ritual objects were kept. Locals considered the place to be sacred and its secrets were not supposed to be shared with strangers. The *tindana* therefore did not want to tell or show me what kind of ritual materials were found in the sacred room. In conversations with some members of the *tindana*'s family, however, they revealed that the sacred room contained Fuseini's relics (see Chapter 2). One unique feature I noticed about Kukuo's shrine was that it had two *tindaamba*; a male (*tindana*) and a female (*tindaan'paya*). Like the *tindana*, the *tindaan'paya* was appointed by the ancestors and lived in a separate house from the *tindana*. Like the *tindana*, she lived ordinarily with other villagers and was married not to the *tindana*, but to another man who was a commoner in the village. Her role was complementary to that of the *tindana* and usually limited to fetching water for shrine rituals.

In Kpatinga, where Tindaanzhee was located about two kilometres away from the main village, the structure of the *buyli* was not significantly different from those found in other host communities. Kpatinga's shrine constituted a dilapidated sacred room surrounded by some shrubs with trees at its perimeters (see Figure 2). A section of the house that formed part of the shrine had fallen down. It was in this dilapidated structure where the lineage's ancestors stayed. The *tindana* slaughtered animals and poured libation during witchcraft rituals in this spot. Here the officiating *tindana*, a Muslim in his late 60s, lived with other locals in the main village and cycled to Tindaanzhee when accused women arrived or whenever he needed to perform some ritual sacrifices to the ancestors. The *tindana* told me that ActionAid donated the bicycle to him to help him visit the accused women regularly.



Figure 2: The shrine at Tindaanzhee (in Kpatinga).

This is where chickens are slaughtered during witchcraft rituals. The *tindana* told me that this house is only inhabited by his ancestors and that they always “wake up” to supervise any witch-finding or stomach cleansing rituals.

In Gnani, where I lived with the *tindana*’s family throughout my fieldwork, the *tindana* showed me the *kali yili* which stood about 30 meters away from the site where he performed witch-testing and cleansing rituals. It was a deserted mud house, roofed with thatch and somewhat dilapidated. When I wanted to take a picture of the house, the *tindana* immediately refused, saying that the house was “sacred”. For the same reason that I was refused a picture of it, nobody was allowed to live in the house. The *tindana* and other members of his lineage regarded it as the repository of the lineage’s ancestors. He ensured that the house did not fall down by occasionally rehabilitating it. A member of the *tindana*’s family told me that to allow the house to fall down was a bad omen and its consequences might be severe for the lineage.

The custodian of Gambaga’s accused women’s settlement refused to describe the nature of the local shrine. His counterpart in Nabuli had died when I visited the village for fieldwork, and the chief (who acted as *tindana* but lacked the requisite spiritual powers) similarly showed no interest in allowing me to see the shrine that provided protection to the accused women. Unlike other host communities, in Gushegu, the chief’s elder, under whose custody the accused women lived, pointed out that accused women were not associated with any specialised shrine.

The accused women's settlements and the shrines were physically distinct but overlapping. In other words, the settlements and shrines maintained separate physical structures but were spiritually tied together. The settlements assumed a more social and political character while the shrines were fundamentally associated with traditional or indigenous ritual practices and ancestor veneration. Except for Leli-dabari's women (who were not tied to any shrine), all other settlements had a connection with the shrines from whom they derived their socio-spiritual existence. The *tindana* strengthened this connection between the shrine and the settlement by making sacrifices to the shrine to secure ancestral protection for each new accused woman that joined the settlement. Locals did not conceive of the accused women's settlements as existing independently of the shrines. In villages where these anti-witchcraft shrines existed, locals believed that the *tindana*'s sacrifices to the ancestors ensured that the accused women got continuous protection. The shrines protected the women against external supernatural harm. It also protected them against physical harm perpetrated by locals. In Kukuo, as we saw, locals attributed Naa Dawuni's death to his persistent maltreatment of the accused women (see Chapter 2).

The *buyli* did not simply constitute a physical space; it also included the collection of ancestors. The *tindana* then sought the supernatural help of the *buyli* through the ancestors. In other words, the *tindana* did not make declarations or verdicts on his own except through the guidance of the ancestors. The local understanding was that a verdict delivered by the *buyli* involved a chain of agencies. The *tindana*, who represented the ancestors in the material world was the highest ritual authority in the process of carrying out mediation between the visible and invisible realms. In each accused women's settlement, the *tindana* was responsible for all sacrifices to the ancestors. As "caretaker" of the shrine or ancestors, the *tindana* was centrally important to the general welfare of the village. Any ritual practices the *tindana* undertook in respect of the shrine was done in the name of the ancestors. To start a ritual, the *tindana* first invoked them by mentioning their names and asking them to "wake up" and accept the drinks and animals he offered. He spoke to them directly and it was believed that they heard and understood him. The ancestors' verdict represented the verdict of the shrine in much the same way that a verdict announced by a *tindana* to a visiting client represented the verdict of the ancestors.

In Gnani-Tindang where I observed the witch-testing ritual involving the delegation from Tamale, the *tindana* displayed more humility in his interaction with the ancestors than he did with his fellow human beings in everyday life. He squatted when he served the ancestors

and kept his voice low and pleading, showing extreme reverence (cf. MacGaffey 2013). MacGaffey (2013: 80) described the *tindana*'s obeisance in Dagbon by saying that it is "not the vocabulary but the tone of address to the dead [that] is different from ordinary speech" and "specifically similar to that of address to elders when making a request: voice very quiet, eyes lowered, attitude deferential".

In daily life, the *tindaamba* differed from other community members only in two main ways; the title they carried, and the ritual mediation work that they undertook between locals (or more generally human beings) and ancestors of the shrine. The *tindaamba* lived in houses similar to those occupied by other locals without such titles. He and other locals attended funerals and naming ceremonies, participated in local festivals, ate the same staple food, drank from the same sources of water, wore similar dress, attended mosque for Islamic prayers and sat together to talk about community and other social issues. Apart from Gambaga, in other host communities the *tindana* personally participated in farming activities with family members. In Nabuli, for example, the first time the *assambleman* introduced me to the village chief (who was then acting as the custodian of the accused women's settlement following the death of the incumbent *tindana*), he had just returned from the farm, and sat on a chair dehusking maize with his family members. Also, when I first arrived at the *tindana*'s residence in Gnani, I met him sitting outside his compound with a group of young men and one old man. They were busily chatting and laughing.

The only place where there was a marked distinction between the *tindana* and community members was in Gambaga where the *gambarana* combined the roles of *tindana* and chief. Compared to other *tindaamba*, his position was more revered and highly respected. According to local custom, his role as *naaba* (Mampruli word for "chief") made it unseemly for him to converse with ordinary community members in public.

Literally translated, the term *tindana* meant "earth owner". As such, locals widely recognised the *tindana* as the spiritual caretaker of village land but emphasised that *tindana* had no political or economic control over these lands. In the past, locals pointed out, *tindana* had both spiritual and political control over land but lost the political control when the Dagbamba conquered and imposed their rule on the area (see Chapter 2). MacGaffey (2013) chronicled the historical tensions that existed between *tindaamba* and chiefs in Dagbambaland - especially between the Gulkpe-Naa and Naa Dakpema in Tamale - over resources such as land.

Both *nanima* and *tindaamba* inherited their positions and came from specific lineages. While the appointment of chiefs was rather straight forward with the eldest son of the deceased chief (or the deceased's brother) competing for the position with chiefs in other villages who qualified to occupy the skin (see Chapter 2), the *tindana* was chosen by the ancestors from a particular lineage. In Kpatinga, I had the privilege to discuss with the *tindana* the procedures for appointing a new *tindana* to replace a deceased one.

Mba Sampa, as the *tindana* was known and addressed by locals in Kpatinga, told me that when a *tindana* died, a group of men would carry his corpse on their heads through the village. The corpse would then direct its carriers to move in a particular direction until they reach the house of the successor²⁸. In this regard, locals believed that the process was devoid of any competition and the politics of human influence. Mba Sampa explained that after the deceased *tindana*'s funeral, his customary and spiritual accoutrements – his special horse tail, the skin of a lion or leopard, the staff which symbolised his power - were transferred to the new *tindana*.

Although MacGaffey's (2013)²⁹ interlocutors in Dagbambaland claimed that new *tindana* could not refuse their appointment, *tindaamba* in my study area were said to have a choice in the matter. On some occasions, potential successors declined *tindaanship* (priestly office) on the grounds of other religious commitments. Islam was very influential in this regard. During our discussions, Mba Sampa mentioned that he assumed *tindaanship* when the person who was customarily selected declined because he could not reconcile his belief in Islam with the office of the *tindana*. Not even a plea from family elders could make the natural successor change his mind. Some *tindaamba* avoided the title because of the economic demands of the position. Once installed, the *tindana* had to use his own money to buy sacrificial animals for occasional sacrifices to the shrine (excluding witchcraft cases where visiting clients brought their own sacrifices). In Kpatinga, for example, Mba Sampa complained of the difficulty in combining the burden of *moni* with the purchases of animals for shrine rituals (see Chapter 2).

In Kpatinga, where I developed strong rapport with the *tindana*, his special assistants aided him in the performance of witchcraft rituals. These assistants were usually members of his family and were appointed, as one assistant explained, as “physical, not spiritual assistants”.

²⁸ This process corresponded to the precolonial witch-finding rituals recorded by Gray (see Chapter 1).

²⁹ MacGaffey (2013: 3) writes of the Dagbamba that “the sign of the *tindana*'s office is a horsetail, which is said to go of its own accord to the successor, who has no choice but to accept it” even if the successor is living abroad.

For example, they held animals that the *tindana* slaughtered during witch-testing and cleansing processes, dressed the meat and ran errands for the *tindana*. The assistants also issued instructions on behalf of the *tindana* regarding what was permitted and what was forbidden at the shrine to visiting clients and the relatives who accompanied them. At some shrines, such as the one in Gnani, the *tindana*'s assistants participated in the shrine rituals. For example, on one occasion, after pouring libations, the *tindana* sat back to watch while his assistant slaughtered the chickens of the two parties who came for witch-finding rituals. In Gambaga and Kukuio, the *tindaamba* also had assistants who helped during ritual sacrifices. Like other villages, here the assistants were family members. Unlike Gnani, however, in both Gambaga and Kukuio, the assistants' roles were not ritual-related.

The fact that accused persons were morally compromised and had, more or less, been declared by locals in their original communities as *persona non-grata* or "undesirables" (Agier, 2011) meant that they had nowhere else to go except the *tindana*'s shrine. The lack of alternative choices regarding where to seek protection made the accused persons "slaves" to the local shrines that guaranteed their protection. It was in this context of "slavery" that the accused women were metaphorically seen as the *tindana*'s "wives" which called for total obedience, submission and reverence on the part of the women (see Chapter 2). It was this kind of special relationship between the *tindana* and the accused women that automatically induced the notion of indebtedness on the part of the women to the *tindana* and his family.

However, although the *tindana* occupied a position that promised to cleanse *sonima*, not all people regarded this cleansing as foolproof "containment" mechanism for bewitchment. Since some people (especially those in the accused women's original communities) believed that these morally compromised women could still retrieve their dark powers (they supposedly left in the bush while visiting the shrine) on their way back home after cleansing and could return to their old ways, it made it difficult for the accused and convicted women to return to their home villages despite the fact that they had been cleansed.

The Jinwara

Besides the *tindana* who was known to apply his powers through a shrine, my interlocutors also talked about an important ritual specialist called *jinwara* (pl. *jinwariba*; witch-finder and healer). The word *jinwara* is derived from another Dagbani term *jina*; a special traditional dance performed by the *jinwara* in order to identify witches (see Igwe, 2016). According to

locals, a *jinwara* could be female or male and was said to inherit his or her position from a lineage. She/he was ritually associated with a spiritual calabash and cowrie shells which could be worn around the neck or wrist. Locals believed that *jinwariba* detected looming or real misfortune while, for example, passing by a “dangerous house” or a troubled spot. But mostly, they detected and announced the identity of witches in public (cf. Tait, 1963). In this regard, the practice of *jinwariba* in Dagbambaland bore quite a striking resemblance to the *kamcape* anti-witchcraft movement (Willis, 1970: 218-230) and similar indigenous therapeutic ritual performances widely reported by anthropologists in different places in Eastern and Central Africa (Richards, 1935; 1970, Marwick, 1950; 1970, Willis, 1968; 1970).

During fieldwork, I never had a chance to engage with a *jinwara* directly. Once in Kpatinga, my local assistant took me to a *jinwara*’s house, but we only met his wife because he was in Tamale for a funeral. The wife was preparing to leave home when we arrived, but she generously agreed to spend some time with us when she learnt that I shared a name with her father, which she saw as a good omen. During our conversation, the *jinwara*’s wife told me that her husband accepted many invitations from villages that wanted him to help detect or find witches. She pointed out that her husband did not charge for his services but that villagers who consulted him often gave him gifts after his ritual intercessions. Her husband inherited his powers from his father who was a *jinwara* too. She explained her husband’s witch-finding activities,

Sometimes he does it alone. Some people can call him to come and solve their problem for them in their village. This usually happens when someone is very sick, or when someone dies and the family members believe that it is not natural, or if they think that it is caused by another person. If the sickness or death is really not natural, when he gets there he will be able to “see” *naantohi* [insect vectors] and remove them from the victim’s room or house and neutralise the bewitchment process by prescribing a spiritual remedy [*tim*] for the victim to take. Sometimes he performs *jina* with other *jinwariba*. They make fire, sing and dance around it. In the process, they get spiritually enchanted and make public the identity of the witches who have killed or are disturbing the sick person. After finding out what the problem is, they then recommend remedial measures [medicines] that could be used to avert any impending calamity.

Unlike the *tindana* in Gnani and other host communities, the *jinwara* had no attachment to a shrine and often moved from one place to another. Their status and roles could be likened to the ritual “itinerant specialists” that Maia Green (2003: 120) referred to in her study of witchcraft suppression practices in Tanzania. Among the Pogoro, Green (2003) described how anti-witchcraft ritual specialists carried out ritual performances to suppress witchcraft activities

in order to “contain” or assuage public apprehensions. However, unlike the Pogoro’s itinerant anti-witchcraft specialists, the *jinwara* who visited villages for anti-witchcraft suppression activities did not seek permission from local government authorities, thus decoupling their activities from the notion of any possible government involvement or endorsement. As itinerant specialists, the *jinwariba* performed their witch-finding activities as private persons in the public domain. His or her inherited *tim*, gave him or her the supernatural abilities to “see” and identify *sonima* and to prescribe remedies for bewitchment.

Although the *tindana* and *jinwara* both had spiritual power to detect witches, *tindana* was considered spiritually more powerful than the *jinwara*. The *jinwara* could and (did) publicly accuse people of witchcraft. Though locals generally considered the *jinwara*’s revelations (witchcraft accusations) as reliable and “true”, my informants told me that there were some instances when some accused people rejected the *jinwara*’s public accusations. In Kpatinga, an elder told me that accused persons who denied the *jinwara*’s accusations in public only did so to save themselves from enormous shame and ridicule. “Those who deny the *jinwara*’s pronouncements know that he [or she] is speaking the truth”, the elder said. An accused who denied an accusation made by a *jinwara* could appeal to have the accusation reversed by requesting a test at a *buyli*, which was the final and last resort. As we saw at Gnani, people found guilty at the *buyli* had no other authority to turn to. In this regard, *buyli* commanded the same kind of power and supremacy in Dagbambaland as *benge* did among the Azande (Evans-Pritchard, 1937).

***Puli paybu* (stomach cleansing)**

Once the *buyli* had found an accused person guilty – as it had in Gnani - or once someone confessed their crimes, that person had to bring the necessary sacrificial animals and offerings to the ancestors in order to commence with the cleansing rituals that would allow them to settle in the shrine grounds with other accused people. In the case of Gnani-Tindang, to appear at the shrine for cleansing, a convicted accused had to present a sheep and chicken to the *tindana* to be sacrificed to the shrine. Although the major requirement in all the host villages was the provision of a sacrificial animal, the specific nature of the requirements varied slightly from one settlement to another. While Gnani’s *tindana* required sheep and chickens to cleanse witches, the *tindana* at Kpatinga asked for goats, guinea fowls and chickens. Despite the variation, the most important thing, a *tindana* told me, was that “blood has to flow”; an animal

had to be sacrificed to the shrine to cleanse or rid the accused of his or her dark powers and to sanction their acceptance into the settlement. “Until this is done”, an elder in Gnani told me, “everybody will continue to see the accused as *ninvuy'beyu* and will fear and avoid her”.

In Gnani-Tindang, any accused person who reported to the shrine for cleansing needed to spend a night in the *kali yili* alone. The next day, the *tindana* and his assistants would bring him/her to the ritual ground where they poured some *dam* on the ground at the shrine in libation to the ancestors. Only then would they commence with the stomach cleansing ritual. As was the case in Gnani when I witnessed the *tindana*'s ritual performances, in Kpatinga the *tindana* slaughtered the animal for the ancestors. Once the ancestors had spiritually partaken of the animal, the *tindana*'s assistants dressed the slain animal for his household to consume.

In Gnani, the *tindana* told me that the soil, soaked with the blood of the sacrificed animal, was collected from the ground and mixed with water to obtain the desired consistence for *buykom* (literally, shrine water). *Buykom* was believed to be a mystical and sacred potion sanctioned by the ancestors and therefore more powerful than the accused person's *sotim*. The accused then had to drink this *buykom* in order to stay at the settlement. The accused women I spoke to did not like the taste of the mixture and talked about the discomfort and the strange feelings they had when they first drank the *buykom*. After drinking *buykom* the accused's hair was then shaved. Locals believed that the accused woman could not use her powers to harm after these rituals, and that any attempt to do so would incur the wrath of the ancestors who would kill her (cf. Green, 2003).

In Kukuo, the stomach cleansing rituals were like those in Gnani, but also differed in certain important ways. Unlike other villages, here there were two ritual specialists, the *tindana* and his ritual counterpart, *tindaan'paya*. Both performed important roles in the ritual cleansing process. Unlike most of the shrines in other host communities, in Kukuo ritual performances only took place on Mondays and Fridays. Clients who visited on days other than the stipulated days had to wait for the “service days”. On the day of *puli paybu*, the convicted “witch” was forbidden from drinking or eating any food before the ritual. “She can't even use a chewing stick before the ritual”, the *tindana* emphasised. At dawn, the *tindana* took the accused witch and the two chickens she had brought from home to the shrine. One chicken had to be white while the other had to be red. Among the locals, red signified danger while white was associated with success, blessing or happiness. The *tindaan'paya* fetched water from her home and met the *tindana* at the shrine. The *tindana* then poured this water in libation to the ancestors onto

the slaughtering grounds. He would then sacrifice the first chicken (red in colour) to the shrine. Since Dagbamba tradition prohibited women from slaughtering animals, the *tindaan* 'paya just watched. As the animal blood and water mixed on the ground, it became *buykom*. The accused had to both drink and smear her body with the sacred water. The cleansing ritual climaxed with the sacrifice of the second chicken (white in colour) to the shrine. "I do this second sacrifice", the *tindana* explained "to protect the woman from anything bad in this world and to ask the shrine to bless her wherever she finds herself". The *tindana* explained further that "this protection and blessing follows the woman everywhere she goes, even when she returns to her original community".

Unlike Kukuo where *puli paybu* rituals only involved two chickens, in Kpatinga the accused had to present a goat to the *tindana* in addition to a chicken and a guinea fowl. The *tindana* told me that the goat or chicken could be of any colour. Kpatinga's *buykom* also involved a mixture of water, soil, *dam* and blood of the sacrificed animals. While the *buykom* was similarly powerful, here shaving was considered a very critical component of the cleansing process.

The monopoly over powers relating to *puli paybu* by the *tindana* and the lack of such powers by the village chief led to a situation where chiefs rarely interfered with matters relating to stomach cleansing. This was also the reason why *tindana* retained autonomy in the management of the accused women who lived under his exclusive spiritual protection.

Conclusion

Peter Geschiere (1997: 12-14) has cautioned about the tendency to moralise about witchcraft. He argued that most anthropologists tended to reduce the discourses on witchcraft to the binary opposition between good and evil. He noted that local concepts seemed to overcome this binary with a broader perspective on the understanding of witchcraft. Geschiere (1997: 13) contended that "the diffusion of these terms [witchcraft or sorcery] on a truly worldwide scale seems to demonstrate the success of the Western vision (strongly propagated by missionaries, civil servants, and also anthropologists) of these forces as by definition linked to Evil and opposed to all Good". His study of Maka witchcraft, however, showed that rather than being limited to the conservative notion of its "levelling" ability, witchcraft offered utilitarian or "accumulative" prospects as well (Geschiere, 1997: 17).

In my research area, people held a highly restricted view of what really constituted *sotali*. Among them whatever was properly conceived as *sotali* could never be constructive. Compared to *tim* which had wider applicability and could be used for both negative and positive ends, *sotali* was always spoken of in negative sense involving instances of affliction of infertility, accidents, illnesses and deaths. Although locals believed that women, rather than men, were likely to use their *tim* for harm, people were not convicted at shrines on the basis of ontological reality of gender or mere possession of *tim*. As the case of Baako showed in the Tamale witch-finding ritual ceremony, shrine or ancestral convictions of witchcraft depended on the practical use to which *tim* was put.

In a world where witchcraft had deadly consequences for individuals and the social order (see Chapter 2), only a handful of people could contain witchcraft. In my research area, these people were tied to servitude, to invisible but demanding ancestors and spent their lives in obedience to ancestors that were ever ready to mete out appropriate punishments for transgressions of social norms. Being *tindana* was not easy. The position or title came with heavy and difficult responsibilities and much work. *Tindaamba* had to balance the demands of both the living and the dead. Among the living, the *tindaamba* had to balance the demands from communities that brought their accused witches plus host communities who had to live with proven witches. The dead were no less demanding. Locally, the ancestors were meticulous in their demands and each shrine had different shrine waters, sacrificial animals and colours used for rituals. Accused people who faced the *buyli* were taken out of the flow of daily life and, in the moment of the ritual, faced enormous consequences should they be found guilty. They knew that they could not stay on in their homes and that they would be banished. These accused people truly had nowhere else to go but found sanctuary at the shrine and with the *tindana*. It was a grudging acceptance on the part of the *tindana*; he had to accept the accused and take responsibility for their welfare (and was responsible to the ancestors for this task).

As the only person in the village who possessed witchcraft antidotes and retained monopoly over *puli paybu*, the *tindana*'s position was indispensable to the village's social life. Although the *tindana* commanded great respect and ritual importance in these communities, his cleansed clients were still viewed by the sending communities with suspicion and distrust since they believed that the accused's *sotim* did not leave her/his body completely, or that she might reacquire her old powers which she hid from been seen and deactivated by the *tindana* who carried out the cleansing rituals. Since it seemed almost impossible to replenish the lost

or broken trust, my informants (the accused witches) told me that they had no option than to make the accused women's settlements their permanent homes.

In the next chapter, I turn specifically to these accused women's settlements and to the ways in which they have come to take centre stage as places of human rights abuses in both national and international media. This attention, in turn, has attracted the involvement in these settlements of a number of NGOs and government agencies.

CHAPTER 4: The Witches' Plight: NGOs, Churches and the State

In October 2016 when I arrived in Gushegu to begin fieldwork in Leli-dabari, I was fortunate to meet a friend and former school mate who had become a teacher at the local senior high school. He claimed to know little about Leli-dabari because he had only recently taken up the post at the school but offered to put me up at his house. In the town, I was again fortunate to meet Afa Sule, another good friend of mine, who had been appointed by the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) as the district social welfare officer. Afa Sule oversaw the payment of state welfare benefits, then known as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) benefits, whose beneficiaries included some of the accused women in Leli-dabari. Afa Sule in turn introduced me to one of his friends, Kambondoo, a Gushegu local who was well-known as a political activist. It transpired that Kambondoo often assisted Afa Sule to disburse LEAP benefits to the accused women, even though he was not an official employee of the DSW. His work as an “assistant” brought him closer to the accused women than other ordinary community members. I was lucky to have Kambondoo as my local assistant because he knew almost all the accused women at Leli-dabari and could also speak Likpakpaaln, the Konkomba dialect used in Leli-dabari.

On 26 October 2016, I visited Leli-dabari with Kambondoo. I was curious to see the accused witches at Leli-dabari because of the uproar they had caused a few months before my visit when they embarked on a protest against the government for failing to pay their LEAP benefits (see Doudu, 2016). The local radio station reported on the protest saying that it halted “work at the Gushegu district assembly temporarily... when alleged witches angrily invaded the premises and amidst chanting dirges demanding payment of their two years LEAP allowance” (Boafo, 2016). Kambondoo mentioned that he had planned and instigated the said protest because the government treated the accused women unfairly. He insisted that “the government wanted to ‘sit’ [infringe] on the interests of the women”.

My first visit to Leli-dabari was not a pleasant one. The narrow path to the settlement was crisscrossed by deep gorges that were created in the latest downpour. Typical of this part of Ghana, it was very hot and the waterlogged path made walking difficult. Struggling to make our way, we were both happy when we crossed the last pool of water. Kambondoo pointed to some buildings amid tall grass and green bushes, saying that they were the “famous witches of Leli-dabari’s” homes.

We did not walk directly to these homes but first visited Kpalbo-Naa, the local custodian³⁰ of the accused women. He called the *magazia* (the leader of the accused women), who then convened a quick meeting with all the women. Kambondoo introduced me to the women but just as I started explaining my mission to them, two white women arrived with Mr. Alomo, a local community member. Kambondoo introduced Mr. Alomo as one of the “pastors” of the Gushegu Catholic Church. Mr. Alomo introduced the white women as German *zonima* (friends; sing. *zo*) of the accused “witches” and of the Church. The Germans had apparently been providing livelihood support over the past few years to the accused women via the Catholic Church. While *zonima* literally meant “friends”, I soon learnt that custodians or caretakers of the accused women’s settlements used the term for all philanthropic donors.

While the two white women were conversing, Mr. Alomo had a brief conversation with Kambondoo. Afterwards, Kambondoo walked to me and said in a low voice, “We have to close our meeting. The people want to talk to the women. Let us go and come back tomorrow”. I could see that he was not happy about this and that he did not relish a return journey over the muddy paths. I had similar feelings. Although we were all visitors, and Kambondoo had a working relationship with the accused women, Mr. Alomo had, by virtue of the Catholic Church’s longstanding relationship with the accused women, dismissed us. Kpalbo-Naa’s permission to engage with the women seemed to count very little.

While there were many churches in Gushegu, the Catholic Church had the closest relationship with the accused women. Although the Church did not have an office at Leli-dabari, its representatives often visited the accused women to see how they were faring. They also assisted with food and clothing and provided medical care by arranging for local medical experts to conduct health screenings and to administer medication. The Church’s relationship with Leli-dabari was so important that Kpalbo-Naa would not take major decisions regarding the accused women without informing the Church. The Church also put up any influential visitors to Leli-dabari, such as the German “friends”, at their mission in Gushegu.

Although Kambondoo had initially suggested that we leave and come back at another time, he later insisted that we stay on. He wanted to see what the white visitors had come to do. Unusually, they carried no food when they arrived. After Mr. Alomo had led the accused women in prayer, they all started singing a song, praising Jesus for what he had done in their

³⁰ Here I refer to the chief’s elder who took care of the accused women as a “custodian” (not *tindana*) because there was no anti-witchcraft shrine and therefore the elder performed neither witch-testing nor cleansing rituals.

lives. After repeating the song several times, Mr. Alomo stopped and asked the women to stand up for another prayer. This time, he asked the *magazia* to pray for the gathering. She prayed for a long life for all the women and for blessings for the Catholic Church and the white “friends” so that they could continue supporting the accused women. Translating for the Germans, Mr. Alomo explained that their visit was not to provide food; they had come to see how the women were coping with life after having received much previous support. While Mr. Alomo was translating for one of the white women, the other one went over and sat with the accused women, beaming smiles and shaking hands with some of them. Mr. Alomo said that the visitors were excited to see all the accused women in such good condition since their previous visit six months ago. They also prayed for one of the accused women whose kinsmen took her back to her community following a serious illness. Two months before my visit, the woman had passed away.

One after the other, the white women asked the accused women to share their personal experiences in terms of how they coped with life in general and how they felt whenever they attended church services. All the accused women present at the gathering were Christians. Many complained that the Church in Gushegu was far from their settlement and given their age, it was difficult to attend church services on Sundays. Perhaps fearing that the important visitors might be weary of such complaints, Mr. Alomo interrupted the conversation with a local hymn, which the women quickly took up. One of the Germans got up and loudly joined in the singing. The *magazia* later revealed that the Church had taught them the hymn which they used to welcome any visitor to Leli-dabari.

When the hymn ended, one of the white women hauled a bulging plastic bag from behind some trees. The accused women were curious to find out what it contained and looked surprised when the visitors distributed coloured handkerchiefs from Germany as gifts. Kambondoo was equally surprised, remarking that the handkerchiefs probably meant “nothing” to the women and were quite “useless”. He scoffed that none of the women would ever buy a handkerchief; they needed money and food more. There were some murmurings among the women, probably on the same lines. At this point, we left Leli-dabari because it was clear that we would not be able to speak to the women as we had planned. Besides, we had appointments with other community members.

Two days after my visit to Leli-dabari, I booked an appointment to see Mr. Alomo. He was a very busy man as he combined three different jobs: tailoring, farming and church

activities. After two unsuccessful attempts, we finally met at his tailoring shop. It was not a good interview space because it was noisy, and his many apprentices frequently interrupted us to alert him to the presence of customers. During our conversation, Mr. Alomo said that he was not a Catholic “father” or “pastor” as Kambondoo had initially mentioned, but the chairman of the local Catholic laity. The Church’s principal overseer, Father Bacus, had travelled to Accra for a meeting and would be away for three weeks. Mr. Alomo knew a lot about the German visitors and explained their relationship with the accused women,

I joined the Church in 2010. I first joined as an ordinary member and later the Church appointed me as chairman of the laity. Sometimes I lead the congregation during worship if father is not in town. I don’t know how or when the Church’s relationship with the accused witches started here. The two white women you saw at Leli-dabari have been working with the Church before I joined. They give money to the Church and they also occasionally donate other items to the women. The white people are like “friends” to the Church. But they only started working with the accused witches about five years ago. It happened that on one occasion they visited Gushegu to attend one of the Church’s programmes. When they arrived, Father Bacus was not around. He had gone to visit the accused witches at Leli-dabari. So, when we told the women that father had gone to see the accused witches, they said we should take them there to see how it is. So, we met Father Bacus there. The ladies were surprised to learn that all the women there were banished from their communities, and now living there without male guardians. They felt sorry for the women. They saw the difficult conditions under which the women lived. Before they left for Germany, they gave some money to father to buy food for the women. They went back to Germany and later came back and brought clothing for the women. That was how they became “friends” to the women. Since that time, they have been providing some support for them.

During my conversation with Mr. Alomo, he frequently referred to an elderly man in Gushegu, Mr. Arizona, who had been serving the Church as an auxiliary staff member. Mr. Arizona held the keys to the Church and was also responsible for opening and cleaning the place. He had served the Church for several years and had witnessed different regimes of church leadership. Mr. Alomo suggested that I talk to Mr. Arizona about Leli-dabari. Kambondoo arranged the meeting for the following evening at Mr. Arizona’s home.

According to Mr. Arizona, the church started its charitable and evangelical work with the accused women in the early part of 2007. The church’s intervention at Leli-dabari was motivated by two events. Early one morning when Mr. Arizona had come to clean the church in readiness for Sunday worship, he saw a woman lying under a tree that was close to the church. She had a plastic bag containing a few items of clothing and at first refused to talk. He took her to Father Bacus’s residence where she confessed that she had been accused of

witchcraft in a neighbouring village and had to flee. A family member had accused her of killing his daughter with witchcraft and mobilised people to beat her up in the night. She left the village when everyone was asleep and fled to Gushegu. Because she did not know where Leli-dabari was, she decided to rest under the tree and to ask for directions in the morning. Father Bacus took the woman to Leli-dabari later that day and introduced her to Kpalbo-Naa and the *magazia*. They gave her permission to settle in the village. According to Mr. Arizona, this event inspired Father Bacus to order his parishioners to visit Leli-dabari. The parishioners soon started preaching to the accused women and encouraged them to attend the church on Sundays for worship and prayers. This was how evangelism started at Leli-dabari.

The second event that precipitated the Catholic Church's intervention in Leli-dabari was the discovery that ActionAid had excluded the settlement from its list of "witch camps" needing humanitarian aid. During my research, all the accused women's settlements, except for Leli-dabari, received occasional food and other material support from ActionAid (via Songtaba, a local partner). Father Bacus was shocked that ActionAid had omitted Leli-dabari and declared that his church would focus its philanthropic attention on that settlement. ActionAid, he said, could support the other two accused women's settlements (Tindaanzhee and Nabuli) that also operated in the Gushegu district.

Neither Mr. Arizona nor Mr. Alomo could tell me why Leli-dabari had been excluded from ActionAid's list. The project officer at ActionAid who was in charge of "witch camp" issues explained why,

Most of the women who are staying there [Leli-dabari] are not accused of witchcraft. Many of them relocated to the place not because they were accused of witchcraft. They wanted to benefit from the support that those living there get from organisations. And the problem is that there is no any ritual person like the *tindana* we have in other places who can verify whether they are really witches. So, we don't believe that many of those staying there are vulnerable and really need support like those in Gambaga or Gnani. That is why we don't include that place in our list of camps that we deal with.

ActionAid was not alone in this suspicion; some villagers felt the same way. While interviewing an elderly man in Gambaga, he triggered laughter from the crowd that had gathered around him when he said that for some of the accused women, their accusations were "blessings in disguise" because it brought them to the attention of the development and philanthropic community from which they received much support. Other community members were envious of this. He claimed that the accused women were much better off in these

settlements and that a number of them had quickly returned to the settlements after they were reintegrated into their communities because life was too hard “outside”. The old man insisted that none of these returnees had been re-accused of witchcraft; life in these settlements was simply more comfortable.

“Witches” and Christian churches

The body of literature on the arrival of Christian churches in Ghana and their evangelical endeavours in the country has grown enormously (Debrunner, 1967; Atiemo, 1993; Meyer, 1999; Onyinah, 2002). Anthropologists have long written about missionary Christianity in Ghana and its relationship to indigenous beliefs and practices (Debrunner, 1967; ter Haar, 1994; Meyer, 1999). In their dealings with Africans, both Catholic and Protestant missionaries have rejected or denounced “African concepts and practices which they qualified as ‘heathen’ or ‘diabolic’” (Meyer, 1992: 98). But as Birgit Meyer (1992) showed in her work on the Ewe, local conceptions of witchcraft were folded into mission Christianity when translators of the Bible incorporated Ewe words that approximated the nature of the Devil. The German pietist missionaries to Ghana were soon surprised at the centrality that the Devil assumed in local appropriations of Christianity (Meyer 1992: 106-7).

Similar processes occurred with other translations of the Bible in Ghana (Kuwornu-Adjaottor, 2006). But witchcraft did not only insinuate itself into Christianity through translation; many Christian denominations had to deal with the reality of witchcraft in local settings. Some denounced this as mere ignorance or as a stubborn reminder of “old beliefs”, bound to disappear as Christians grew in their faith (Onyinah, 2002). Other denominations, and especially the new Pentecostals, saw witchcraft as the work of demons and fervently fought a spiritual war against such dark forces (see Onyinah, 2002). Church denominations’ interpretations of witchcraft played a large role in the ways that they engaged with “witch settlements” in Ghana.

The influence of church dogma on the ways that certain churches engaged with “witch camps” in Ghana was not the only determinant of their involvement. Indeed, a long history of mission and vying for converts have also had an impact on the areas in which certain churches had sway when it came to the “witch camps”. In Ghana, almost all initial attempts by missionaries to propagate Christianity started in southern Ghana, especially in Cape Coast and Accra, and then much later in the north. The first missionary church to have arrived in 1828 in

the Gold Coast, the Basel Mission (which gradually mutated into the Presbyterian Church), initially concentrated its work in the south (see ter Haar, 1994; Asamoah-Prah, 2011). This was soon followed by the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in 1835 with an initial presence in Cape Coast, and from which emerged the Methodist Church (ter Haar, 1994). It was not until 1880 that the Roman Catholic Church in Ghana was founded by the Society of African Missions. As far as Christian evangelism was concerned, the north was only missionised from 1906 onwards when the White Fathers or the Society of the Missionaries of Africa introduced Catholicism to the “northerners” (see Talton, 2010). In the 1940s, the Presbyterian Church expanded to northern Ghana and by the 1950s it had become involved with the alleged witches (Oral communication with Reverend Duru in Gambaga, see also Naboo, 2017). During my fieldwork, locals claimed that the Presbyterians had been involved with the accused women’s settlements the longest.

The Presbyterians and “witch camps”

In the early 1970s, the Local Council of Churches was formed in Gambaga to deal with “the appalling conditions at the Gambaga Outcast Home” (Government of Ghana, 1998: 20). Taking an ecumenical approach, the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) began to provide monthly food rations in the form of maize and oil to supplement the support the accused women received from the coalition of churches (Government of Ghana, 1998). In 1994, the Gambaga Presbyterian Church “adopted” Poagnyaankura fonɔ and committed to assist and supervise the reintegration of the accused women with their communities. My interlocutors in Gambaga were unable to tell me why the Presbyterians had limited its relationship with accused women to those living here. A team was set up to draw a plan to best manage or rehabilitate the accused women (Government of Ghana, 1998). An advisory body was then established by the local Council of Churches to advise and support the work of the committee. This culminated in the production of a working paper which officially became operational in 1994 and had since become the basis of the Gambaga Outcast (GO) Home project. Although other churches were initially involved in the GO Home project, it was the Presbyterian Church that paid serious attention to its implementation and officially made it part of their church’s projects. Since its inception, the main objective of the Presbyterian GO Home project “has been to bring about the reintegration of the women back into their original communities where they could live in their families and enjoy life meaningfully as active members” (Government of Ghana, 1998:

20). Although the Church's GO Home project had been providing food and medical care to the accused women, its main work concerned advocacy and sensitisation, in collaboration with other stakeholders such as the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ).

I met Reverend Duru, who presided over the local Presbyterian Church in Gambaga, in March 2017 after several attempts to interview him. Whilst waiting for him on a chair outside his home, someone drove a car into the premises and parked it very close to where I sat. On the side of the car was written "Donated by Helping Africa Foundation (HAF), New York – USA, in Service of the Gambaga Camp". Awam, my research assistant and GO Home project officer, had told me earlier that the Presbyterian Church received much of its funding for the accused women from "partners" abroad, including the HAF and the Presbyterian Church of Canada. The Presbyterian Church of Canada not only occasionally used its website to disseminate the work of the local Presbyterian Church's GO Home project with regards to the accused women, it also did fund-raising through this platform (see Presbyterian Church Canada, 2012).

Although Reverend Duru was not in Gambaga when the local Presbyterian Church first started, he seemed to know much about the church's historical relationship with the accused women. During our conversation, he mentioned that before the 1990s, villagers used to keep their distance from the accused "witches", and that the community even restricted their movements. According to him, the stigmatisation and marginalisation of the women were so visible that the women preferred to confine themselves to Poagnyaankura fonɲu since that was the only way they could avoid public gaze and ridicule. He said,

What you are seeing now in the camp about the women and their relationship with the community is not what existed long, long ago. The stigmatisation was too much then. Although the women were safe in the settlement and nobody could go in there and disturb them, they lived in fear and were isolated from village life. The continuous education carried out by the Church and NGOs have changed things for the women.

During our conversation, Reverend Duru insisted that all members in his Church believed that witchcraft was real. He said,

I believe in witchcraft because the Bible talks about evil and evil powers. I believe it is also in the Quran. In this part of the world, part of our witchcraft is found in our mouths. You offend a woman and she tells

you that you will see. The next day you ride a motorbike and get involved in an accident. The woman will be accused of such misfortune because of the earlier warning she gave.

Reverend Duru's explanation of witchcraft and accused women was very different from the explanation that appeared on the Presbyterian Church's local and international (Canadian) websites. The Presbyterian Church of Canada presumed innocence for the accused women in Poagnyaankura fonju. It reported on its website (see Presbyterian Church Canada, 2012) that,

These women were accused by family, husbands, and friends based on nothing, who wanted nothing more than to get rid of these women from their community. There [sic] community turned a blind eye as these women who were "allegedly" witches were beaten and left for dead, having to abandon all they knew and seek shelter at the Gambaga Go Home Project where they were not judged and were welcomed with open arms.

Contrary to the website, Reverend Duru insisted that the accused women were not innocent with regards to their powers and that some confessed to the *gambarana* when they arrived without even undergoing any ritual testing. While Reverend Duru and other local church members I spoke to were happy to talk about witchcraft and their cooperation with the *gambarana*, they were less enthusiastic when it came to talking about the *gambarana*'s stomach cleansing activities. They evaded direct questions and simply responded that these rituals were "non-Christian". Despite this, the Presbyterians cooperated with the *gambarana* in two main ways; first, they helped him to feed and care for the women by providing food and medication, and, second, they provided money for the purchase of animals for the *gambarana* to make sacrifices to the ancestors. With regards to the contributions they made to the *gambarana*'s "non-Christian" rituals, the Presbyterians I spoke to insisted that this was a pragmatic collaboration to allow the release and reintegration of the accused women that their project targeted. In assisting the chief to buy ritual animals, church elders did not regard it as "participation" in local rituals. Reverend Duru explained that some of the *poagnyaankura* (old women) were too poor to buy animals for sacrifices when they wanted to go home, hence the Church's intercession. He believed that the women needed frequent prayers from the Church and especially on Sundays to "transform them and make them good and acceptable for the Lord and for society". This was also the reason why the Church had organised special prayer sessions for the accused women on Wednesdays and made Sunday worship compulsory. Reverend Duru explained,

For a long time, the Church decided to bring them closer to Jesus to receive salvation. Church authorities considered the accused witches as children of God, like any other persons in Gambaga. So, they needed Jesus Christ in their lives when they felt neglected by community members. That was when the Church came in to lift them high and give them that joy. The Church started supporting them with food and talking to them about Jesus Christ and what he could do for them. Now they are so close to us that if we relocate to a different town many of them will come there.

At the heart of the disagreement between Reverend Duru and the wider church was the idea of guilt. Reverend Duru thought that the women committed a moral sin and that they needed to be cleansed of it while the wider church simply dismissed their guilt and blamed locals for their ignorance in blaming people for “nothing”.

Apart from its intensive evangelical work in Poagnyaankura fonɲu and its GO Home project, the Presbyterians also “empowered” the women through a microcredit scheme which, church members thought, would make the women self-sufficient in the long-run and promote socio-economic development in the host community. Since some of the accused women were engaged in petty trading of, for instance, cola, sugar and salt on top of their subsistence farming, the loans granted by the church helped to expand their businesses. For those not engaged in any trade, the GO Home project officers discussed potential business interest with the women before disbursing the new loans. Magazia Saanpoaga, the leader of the accused women, told me that the Church expected loan beneficiaries to pay back the money and that they charged a low interest rate. While the GO Home project waited for economic “empowerment” to happen, the Church was the main provider of food and clothing at Poagnyaankura fonɲu. It also renovated dilapidated rooms, renewed health insurance cards and took care of the accused women’s children and grand-children’s educational expenses.

As part of their “support package” here, the Presbyterian Church had put up a large multi-purpose building inside Poagnyaankura fonɲu. The building hosted different kinds of activities including meetings and Christian worship. It also contained the Presbyterian Church’s GO Home project office which was furnished with only a sitting desk where Awam sat to attend to the women’s complaints and requests.

The accused women often relaxed in the shade provided by the structure during the day when there was no work to be done and watched television at night. The television, I was told, was provided by a certain NGO which had no connection or relationship with the Presbyterian Church, and whose name neither Awam nor the accused women could remember.

Poagnyaankura fonngu was surrounded by a largely Muslim population (see Chapter 2) and many of the women in the “camp” were once Muslims. Many of my interlocutors here had decided to convert to Christianity because of the generous support they had received from the Presbyterian Church, and the incessant invitations to join the church’s worship on Sundays. For example, Memunatu and Salamatu (70 and 35 years respectively) told me that they used to be Muslims in their hometown, Yunyoo, but had decided to become Christians following their admission and the generosity shown by the Presbyterian Church. Memunatu, who had lived in Poagnyaankura fonngu for seven years, explained her conversion as follows:

The Church is always helping with food. They renew our health insurance cards for us when they expire. They help us to pay fees for our children who are with us here attending school. They try to make our stay here very comfortable. We have no problem with them so far. When I was in my hometown [Yunyoo] I was a Muslim. But here I am with the Church people all the time and they feed me. I decided to join *asori* [Christianity]. When I first came here and was struggling with life nobody cared for me. They are many Muslims here but they did not help me. Awam and her people have been very helpful and supportive.

While many of the accused women said that they had converted to Christianity because they were grateful for the help they received from the Presbyterians, Awam insisted that Poagnyaankura fonngu was majority Christian because the women were Konkomba and that not all of them had converted.

The Catholic Church and “witch camps”

In Eastern Dagbon, about 81 kilometres away from Gambaga, the Catholic Church had taken on the position of “caretaker” for Leli-dabari. In collaboration with their foreign “friends”, the Gushegu Catholic Church had constructed one toilet at Leli-dabari to help improve sanitation. Until this time, Mr. Alomo revealed, the accused women had resorted to open defecation, which the Church considered unhealthy and unclean. The Church wanted the women to attend church services and to be close to God, but they could only do this if they were “in a state of cleanliness” (cf. Green, 2003: 72). Apart from the toilet, the Church also drilled a borehole in Leli-dabari to relieve the acute water shortage in the settlement; something the women had often bitterly complained about. The Catholic Church had also constructed a multi-purpose building where the accused women could “rest” and receive visitors. This structure was used

for Christian prayer and for teaching the women all kinds of “skills”. Mr. Alomo mentioned that the Church had assigned a sister, a local member of the Church, who visited Leli-dabari on weekdays to teach the women the “Word of God”. This was necessary, said Mr. Alomo, because “witchcraft is real”. But when I asked him whether the women living in Leli-dabari were “real witches”, he replied,

It is difficult to know if someone is a real witch. That is difficult to determine. From the women’s stories, some of their accusers borrowed things from them and when it was time to pay back they found ways of accusing them to get them out of the village. Even though witchcraft is real, but you can see that some of these accusations are just done for nothing, and sometimes out of personal hatred. We don’t do special exorcisms for the accused witches in church. We accept them the way they arrive, and when they come for church service we pray for them; we pray for their health. We also pray for forgiveness for their sins, like we do for all other members.

In Gnani, the Christian community was the accused women’s main source of livelihood support. Although it was only a small farming community with less than one thousand people, Gnani had seven churches that all occasionally provided food for the accused women. And although all of them helped, the Catholic Church unofficially “adopted” the accused women. During an interview with an elder in Gnani, he mentioned that the Catholics had renovated the accused women’s compounds, provided food and water, and donated clothing and toiletries. As he put it,

Father Gawan and his Church members are putting smiles on the faces of the women. The Church gives them food, and that is all the women need to be happy. They need love and care from us. Just as God loves us, we should also love those who have been victimised in society. That is why the Church brings them closer to God by assisting with food and water.

In Gnani, the Catholic Church had long looked after the women, believing that they had been victimised by their communities. They framed their work not only in terms of the important Catholic Sacrament of “reconciliation” and forgiveness but also in terms of the injunction Jesus gave his disciples to look after the poor and needy. The message and its work seemed to be well received; on Sunday, the local Catholic Church was full. Unlike the Presbyterians in Gambaga, Father Gawan did not help to procure animals for sacrifices to the ancestors during the reintegration of the accused women. In Gnani, members of the Catholic Church I interviewed all believed in the existence of witchcraft but did not always refer to it

plainly as such. They spoke about it as “the work of the Devil” or “Satan”. They differed in their opinions about the “righteousness” of the shrine. Some, like Father Gawan, spoke in a manner that showed their repugnance for these rituals. Others, such as Gnani’s *assambleman* (local government representative in the village), a member of the Catholic Church, were more ecumenical in their attitude. As a Catholic, the *assambleman* explained how he differed from the *tindana*,

He [*tindana*] does his sacrifices and we also do our worship. He is a Muslim, but he combines his Muslim prayers with these rituals. That is his work which he has done for many years for the people. I don’t have problem with his work, that is his belief. In Gnani here nobody condemns another for his religious practices. As a Christian I don’t believe in those things [rituals] he is doing but we still must co-exist. We accommodate each other and live peacefully. But when the accused witches come to the Church every Sunday we pray for them and sometimes the Church gives them food. So, they are always happy to be with us.

Although many of the Catholic Church’s members believed in the reality of witchcraft and acknowledged that the Church occasionally exorcised people plagued by demons, the local Church did not carry out exorcisms. Some members of the Church believed that the women were not doing this “work” (bewitchment) consciously. They believed that the dark deeds attributed to the accused women were the work of the devil and that locals had wrongly accused vulnerable women. Father Gawan and his church members believed that the women, like any other persons, needed Christ in their lives. For this reason, he said, they needed to attend worship and prayer sessions.

Unlike some churches, here magical things, or let me just say, witchcraft is not an issue we focus on. We don’t do deliverance. We just accept the accused women as children of God and we pray for them when they come. By so doing, any evil thing that is in them will be removed. Jesus Christ is so powerful, trust me.

The independent Christians

During my fieldwork in Gnani, Pastor Biljo, the local *tindana*’s sibling, had established his own church and competed with the Catholic Church for members among the accused women. A community member told me that Pastor Biljo had developed a close relationship with a foreign “friend” who used to visit the accused women. The friend soon became his benefactor and paid for Pastor Biljo to pursue a Diploma programme in Bible studies outside the country.

Upon his return, he established a local church which he named “Christian As Riches Ministry”. Pastor Biljo tried very hard to get the accused women to attend his church. Locals gossiped that getting more of the accused witches to attend his church meant more support from “friends” abroad. As one man remarked, “he is only relying on the brother’s title to use the accused witches for his own benefit. He has gone to abroad because of the women, and he is now trying to claim credit where there is none”. His friend, who listened to the remark, agreed. Everyone knew that Pastor Biljo, unlike the Catholic father, showed great interest in the *tindana*’s ritual work and shrine rituals. In my interview with him, Pastor Biljo told me stories about the shrine’s effectiveness, an admission that undermined the work he did in his church.

Unlike the cases of Gushegu and Gambaga where the Catholic and Presbyterian Churches had permanent relationships with the accused women, Tindaanzhee at Kpatinga did not have any resident (permanent) “caretaker” church. Accused women in Tindaanzhee talked about the occasional support they received from the Shalom Baptist Church, a local-based church at Tarikpaa – approximately 95 kilometres from Tindaanzhee. Reverend Napari, my former schoolmate, who managed the Tarikpaa Shalom Baptist Church, told me that “there is witchcraft but the violence and ill-treatment against the women is bad”. The church received funding from its “overseas partners” in the United States of America (USA) whose representatives visited occasionally. These overseas partners often sent money for food and clothing for the accused women. During my conversation with Reverend Napari, he indicated that the last support he had received was a year ago, and that he was unable to tell when the next donation would come. He explained with uncertainty,

It may be once or twice a year, or there may be no donation for a long time. It all depends on when we get support from our partners. But we do often get support for the women when Christmas is approaching. This is the time everybody is happy, and we want them to be happy too.

According to Reverend Napari, the accused women, being the children of God, needed love and compassion from society. “Apart from human love, they [accused women] need to be brought close to Jesus Christ for salvation”, he stressed. As Reverend Napari explained,

We were motivated to support because we wanted to be like Jesus. Jesus the Messiah used to meet the needs of people in society. These needs include the physical, psychological and the spiritual. So, we thought it wise to extend food support to the to the needy and the vulnerable.... Our church supports the camp with food and clothing. We give them rice, maize, oil, tomatoes. During the time of support, we

provide counselling and offer them the word of God. Through that some of them develop interest in Christianity.

Unlike many other men of the cloth, Reverend Napari was quick to take me into his confidence and we had hearty conversations. He also added me as a Facebook friend. In one of his Facebook posts on 6 June 2018, Reverend Napari posted a picture of his church's latest visit and donation to the accused women at Tindaanzhee. Accompanying the picture, he wrote, "Shalom Baptist Church members visited Kpatinga witches camp yesterday and donate [sic] food to the women as part of our 10th anniversary celebration. It was a time of blessing and full of love. Many thanks to all our friends and partners who have prayed and supported this financially. God bless you". Reverend Napari's local church had no website and only updated its foreign partners and "friends" about the church's activities at Tindaanzhee through his Facebook page.

Reverend Napari's parent church and donor, Shalom Baptist Church USA, operated a website where it listed all the things they believed in. Among these beliefs were the notions of "separation of church and state" and "salvation by Grace through faith" (see Shalom Baptist Church USA, 2016). Referring to these beliefs and in contrast to other local churches, Reverend Napari not only spoke against the idea of reintegrating the accused women but also condemned the intervention of the state to close down the accused women's settlements. He maintained that the accused women had made a pact with evil forces to harm innocent souls.

Since Reverend Napari's church was very far from Kpatinga, he often encouraged the women to attend worship and prayer sessions in other local churches in Kpatinga. He believed that their constant association with "the church" (Christian community) would open the grace of God for them and create a pathway to salvation.

In December 2018, Reverend Napari posted on Facebook about his church's visit and donation to the accused women at Tindaanzhee. During the visit, Reverend Napari first led the accused women in prayers before sharing the food his team had brought to the "camp". While praying for the women, he referenced a portion of the Bible (Ezekiel 22:30) which he posted on his Facebook wall. The following prayer, which Reverend Napari wrote on Facebook, was said for the accused women,

Father today I lift up intercessory prayer on behalf of these poor women by standing in the gap so that you will hear their cry and plight in the camp, and raise up fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters who will become a blessing to these women so that they would not be destroyed or starve to death.

It was clear that while all these local churches were different from the NGOs by accepting witchcraft as real and focusing less on human rights issues, and more on the spiritual dimension (evangelism), they nonetheless shared a key sentiment with the NGOs; that these women were deprived and needy and therefore needed livelihood support to reduce suffering.

At the time of my fieldwork, the Neo-Pentecostals or Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches (see Meyer, 2004: 447) who had operated in the northern region and who had been publicly exorcising people who confessed to witchcraft did not involve themselves in permanent or semi-permanent “caretaking” responsibilities in the accused women’s settlements. In Gambaga, one of my informants, a member of the Presbyterian Church, said that the Neo-Pentecostal churches who had visited the “camp” in the past came from southern Ghana where their activities were more concentrated. He clarified that the Neo-Pentecostal pastors who visited Poagnyaankura fonɔ in the past came there to donate to the accused women, not to undertake exorcisms. He remembered that in 2016, a Ghanaian clergyman and one of the prominent Neo-Pentecostal leaders in the country, Reverend (Apostle) Sam Korankye Ankrah, visited from Accra to “share the love of God” – donations - with the accused women (see Edward Bryan, 2016).

In contrast to other host communities that had “caretaker” churches, Kukuo was the only host community where there was no single church and where the accused women had no “settled” relationship with any Christian community. My local assistant in Kukuo, Honourable, spoke about the village’s uniqueness with pride. He estimated that Muslims constituted about 98% of the village, the remaining being Christians who were migrants from elsewhere in the country. Although charity is one of the pillars of Islam, there were no Muslim organisations in Kukuo that supported the accused women. The imam and some locals attributed this to the apathy of local Muslims in giving offerings in the mosque which could be used to support such activities. Instead of a religious body, Kukuo’s accused women were supported by Songtaba, a local human rights NGO that received its funding from ActionAid.

Human rights organisations and “witch camps”

Since the promulgation of the 1992 Republican Constitution, also known as the dawn of a new era of democracy in Ghana, “human rights” and “democratisation” have been central to Ghanaian development projects and the work of civil organisations (Gary, 1996; Mohan, 2002). As Harri Englund (2006) showed in his work on NGOs in Malawi, “human rights discourse” is “a relatively recent phenomenon associated with the post-Cold War wave of democratization which arrived in postcolonial Africa neatly packaged in official languages inherited from colonial rulers” (Englund, 2006: 48). Englund cautions about the way the idea of human rights is embraced in Africa and how its discourse is interpreted. He noted that the translation of human rights in Africa is often bereft of local texture and argued that the top-down approach of human rights discourses in Africa leaves little space for the emergence and development of local versions of human rights with the effect that “activists, politicians, journalist, and others spear-heading the translation have taken their particular interest in democratisation as a universal concern... with a particular emphasis on political and civil liberties” (Englund, 2006: 48). For Englund, relativist anthropology requires that we understand human rights as making sense in a particular context. He contends that in discussing human rights from the perspective of “culture talk”, “there can be nothing that is truly universal” and therefore it is imperative “to reconsider the grounds for making general claims” about human rights in Africa (Englund, 2006: 204).

During my research, news of human rights violations regarding the “witch camps” flooded the local media landscape. International and local discussions about the “witch camps” were related to ideas about a lack of liberty, women’s marginalisation and gender-based violence. As the district director of the local human rights watchdog (CHRAJ) in Gambaga pointed out, “Government and ActionAid are seriously working to close down these camps because of the human rights problems they pose, both in Ghana and outside the country”.

In March 2017, I visited the offices of ActionAid in Tamale. I wanted to ask about the livelihood support the NGO gave to “witch camps”, its leading role in reintegrating accused women into their communities and in disbanding the “witch camps” (see ActionAid, 2015) despite local opposition. Prior to my visit, I had read much about ActionAid on its website and waded through its 2012 detailed report on the so-called “witch camps” (ActionAid, 2012).

On its website, ActionAid described itself as “a global movement of people working together to further human rights and defeat poverty for all” (see ActionAid, 2015). It aimed to

achieve this through its “Take action” approach; an approach the NGO explained as follows: “ActionAid uses the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) by sensitising marginalised people and those living in poverty about their rights, leading them to advancing their own rights and demanding equality” (see ActionAid, 2018). In the 2012 report, ActionAid framed the women in the “witch camps” as the most victimised and suppressed group in Ghana and indicated that it was “working with partners worldwide to campaign for changes in the law, demand access to justice and provide services for survivors of violence and support programmes for women’s empowerment” (ActionAid, 2012: 9). The NGO regarded the accused women and the dependents living with them as suffering from what the report called “huge violations of their rights” (ActionAid, 2012: 5). It concluded that, “The witch camps are effectively women’s prisons where inmates have been given no trial, have no right of appeal but have received a life sentence” (ActionAid, 2012: 5). The report acknowledged that although Ghana was a signatory to some global human rights treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), it suggested that local human rights bodies and state agencies lacked the needed capacity to facilitate their enforcement. It maintained that although “Bodies such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) and the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) all operate at the local level in Ghana to protect human rights, these institutions have difficulty in fulfilling their responsibilities because of a lack of technical expertise, capacity and logistical support” (ActionAid, 2012: 9).

During my fieldwork in Tamale, Madam Mashina, ActionAid’s local project officer, explained that the organisation engaged with the “witch camps” at different levels. They provided material support to improve local livelihoods, undertook advocacy work to educate local people about the women’s rights, and also undertook sensitisation programmes to facilitate the return of accused women to their original communities. Madam Mashina spelled it out,

ActionAid sees the witch camps as both places of protection and centres of exploitation. When the women are accused and banished, they have no place to go for protection apart from the witch camps. So, their first point of call is usually the camps. In this case the camps serve as sanctuaries for the banished witches. After they have been admitted into the camps the women become very vulnerable and powerless, and the *tindana* takes exploitative actions against the interests and rights of the women. Some of the exploitative actions include using the women as labour to work on the farms of custodians, and also subjecting the women to sexual abuse by community members. Sometimes materials donated to the

accused witches via the *tindana* never reach the women, or sometimes the *tindana* will give them very little quantity and keep the rest to himself. We get to know all these things during our follow-up visits to the camps.

ActionAid started working in the northern region in 1993. At the time, the organisation focused on general human rights issues and advocacy work. According to Madam Mashina, ActionAid's research in the north showed that violence against women was rife and that there was a lack of local information about people's human rights. In 2005, ActionAid started to focus on the area where these two issues were most visible, the "witch camps". Because it could not do the work alone, said madam Mashina, ActionAid formed a coalition involving local civil society groups that were interested and committed to the promotion of women's rights and welfare. The coalition, which was named Songtaba, was to work on behalf of ActionAid in the fight against violence and injustice against women in society and to empower and promote the welfare of women in local areas. As an international NGO, ActionAid operated through its satellite offices in six out of the ten regions in Ghana, including the northern region. In the northern region, its office was located in Tamale, which was approximately 100km from the two nearest "witch camps", Tindaanzhee and Gnani-Tindang. ActionAid Ghana received its funding from ActionAid UK and implemented its programmes in the "witch camps" through its local partner, Songtaba.

Songtaba had an office in Tamale, but also operated another office in Bimbilla in the Nanumba North district. In 2009, the collaboration between ActionAid Ghana and Songtaba led to the formation of Tigbubtaba (literally, "let's keep each other", or "look after one another"), a network of accused witches from "camps" across northern Ghana (see ActionAid, 2012). According to ActionAid (2012: 12), Tigbubtaba "brings together all residents of the six camps, giving them a strong collective voice" to fight for their own rights and welfare. ActionAid and Songtaba appointed leaders from the "witch camps" to Tigbubtaba. During my research, the *magazia* of Poagnyaankura fonju was the president of the Association.

Two years after the formation of Tigbubtaba, in November 2011, ActionAid Ghana collaborated with the government to organise a regional conference in Tamale on the plight of the women in the "witch camps". A significant outcome of this conference was ActionAid's decision to form what it called a Regional Reintegration Committee (RRC), chaired by Dr. Kimaki, a university lecturer. The RRC was responsible for drawing and implementing a sensitisation "roadmap" that sought to reintegrate all accused women into their original

communities. Although the RRC was mooted and funded by ActionAid Ghana, it was largely a collaboration between ActionAid and state agencies. Members of the RRC included the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service, Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and the Department of Gender. Other non-governmental organisations that collaborated on RRC included Songtaba, the Presbyterian Church's GO Home Project, traditional leaders, leaders from Muslim and Christian communities, and representatives of Tigbubtaba.

By funding the reintegration project, ActionAid officials had hoped that education or public sensitisation would help decrease the "ignorant" beliefs and practices about witchcraft and witchcraft accusations. Dr. Kimaki's comments conveyed this conviction during my interview with him in Tamale in February 2017. He noted that,

Although witchcraft accusation is cultural, part of the reason for the accusation could be attributed to illiteracy and ignorance. Poverty is also a factor responsible for witchcraft accusations...Accused people should not lose their human rights. Unfortunately, human rights are not very known to villagers. They need much education to be able to appreciate the perspective of the law on human rights.

Dr. Kimaki further highlighted and justified the rights-based approach within which ActionAid expected the RRC to operate. Despite its important mandate, Dr. Kimaki complained that the RRC was not given much publicity. Television and radio stations did not air public advertisements for the project, nor did ActionAid sponsor billboards to disseminate its intentions. This, according to Madam Mashina, was largely due to the nature of the subject matter involved and the RRC's sensitivity to the fact that witchcraft should not be publicly discussed. According to Dr. Kimaki, the RRC's work mainly involved occasional meetings to visit villages where the organisation intended to reintegrate women and to talk to village chiefs, community elders, youth and kinsmen of those women the committee intended to send back. "If they [villagers] agree, we proceed with our work. If they don't, we retreat and try again later because it is very dangerous to send an accused witch back to her community where villagers are holding sticks in readiness to 'welcome' her", he explained.

Although Songtaba was part of the RRC, it also worked independently as a human rights NGO, making livelihood and human rights interventions in "camp" communities, with funding from ActionAid, but also from other rights-minded organisations. Songtaba described one successful reintegration project on its website (see Songtaba, 2018) as follows,

The real solution is for the women accused of witchcraft to come home. That's why we've developed the reintegration project. Thanks in large part to individual donors who have supported our projects...we have succeeded in raising over \$12,000 dollars to fund the complete, safe reintegration of twenty women from the Kuku camp for alleged witches. We begin by meeting with the women, their families, and community leaders, ensuring that all parties involved are invested in the safe return of the woman accused. Then we ensure she has a safe, suitable home to return to. If none is available, we provide her family with the necessary materials (including concrete, tin, and wood) to construct a safe, suitable home for the reintegrated woman. Finally, we help her pay for and complete the necessary purification and exit ceremonies from the camp and provide her with a small sum of money to assist in establishing a source of income in her new community.

During my fieldwork, traditional community leaders were not happy with ActionAid's reintegration campaigns. The *tindana* for Tindaanzhee (Kpatinga) had initially tried to avoid me when my local assistant told him about my intention to speak with him. He said that he was not free to receive me but on my assistant's pleading, agreed to accept my greetings. However, after I had introduced myself as a researcher who wanted to know more about his work, he was happy to talk. The *tindana* explained that when my assistant told him that a visitor was coming to see him, "I thought it was those people who always talk about returning the women to their communities. That is why I asked him to inform you that I was not free". Although he had once declined an invitation from ActionAid to attend a meeting in Tamale, he had sometimes cooperated with ActionAid and the government. He insisted that the government and ActionAid were all getting it wrong,

I have told you that Tindaanzhee has been in existence for more than a century. I grew up and met my grandfather and my father perform rituals to the shrine to accept witches for protection. When it was my turn I also accepted the responsibility. So, *karachi* [literally, educated man) tell me, how do I abandon something that is not my own initiative but has been passed down as a result of longstanding tradition? So, if you ask me about my opinion, I will tell you that I do not support the closure of this settlement. The women run to this place for protection. I don't go out there and force anybody to come and stay here. Here the women feel very secured and comfortable. Some of the women who have been reintegrated have run back to this place. Let me also tell you something. The inhabitants of the Bonyase witches' settlement that was closed down some time ago have run to Gnani-Tindang to seek refuge. This should tell you that the women feel comfortable living here.

I was initially surprised to find out that other *tindaamba* who shared Kpatinga's opposition also participated RRC meetings and activities. Madam Mashina explained that RRC

sometimes “incentivised” the “witch camp” custodians to cooperate. She gave the example of Bonyashe “witch camp”, located in neighbouring Gonjaland, which was disbanded in December 2014. The local “camp” custodian apparently mounted stiff resistance when the RRC wanted to close it. The custodian (earth priestess) explained that accused women were the shrine’s “slaves” and therefore could not be released. She also complained that the women worked for her and that losing authority over them meant that she would be denied the labour of the women to which she was customarily entitled. According to Madam Mashina, the RRC only succeeded in closing the “camp” after ActionAid gave the custodian a corn mill, tricycle and some food. During my fieldwork, the disbanded Bonyase settlement remained closed. But when I spoke to the *tindana* of Gnani-Tindang, he confessed that the supposedly reintegrated accused women from Bonyase had run to his place “because of the insecurity in their home villages”. When I confronted Madam Mashina with this evidence, she denied the *tindana*’s testimony, claiming that “It is not true. That is what they will always tell you. The people are saying all these things just to create the impression that the women want to live in the camps”.

In interviews with members of the RRC, they happily recounted the reintegration project’s success stories, pointing to the number of accused women they had successfully reintegrated. Madam Kamkam, Songtaba’s Executive Director and member of the RRC, boasted,

We have brought the plight of these women to the attention of the general public. The women now feel dignified through our work. Some of them have had the opportunity to board flights to Accra for the first time in their lives to attend reintegration meetings, and they feel happy. We have reintegrated many of these women into their communities. Over 150 women have been reintegrated. Another success story is the closure of the Bonyase witches’ camp.

Despite their insistence that the reintegration “worked” and that RRC helped the accused women, some NGO officials and members of the RRC admitted that the programme lacked local support. They complained that many of the accused “witches” openly expressed their unwillingness to go home, while sending communities were often uncooperative in receiving back banished women. Mr. Bani of CHRAJ and member of the RRC confessed that,

When government first announced its intention to close down the camps, there was public outcry. The confined witches themselves don’t want to go back to their home communities because they believe that the place is not safe for them. Even community members are not ready to accept them back into the community.

In an interview with a German media house, Deutsche Welle (DW), an official from ActionAid conceded that the reintegration project faced difficulties, “We have had instances where community chiefs resisted and also [where] the youth [was] resisting the reintegration of some inmates back into their communities...It is really affecting the work, because when you impose the person on them, you might not know what will happen afterwards when you leave” (quoted in Suuk, 2014).

As the *tindana* of Kpatinga said, opposition to ActionAid’s reintegration project did not only come from the *tindaamba* and village chiefs, the majority of accused women living in so-called “witch camps” also expressed their displeasure about the reintegration campaigns and disbandment of their settlements. Maata, one of the accused women in Kukuo explained why there was no need for reintegration,

I will always speak against any suggestion for the closure of these settlements. They are very useful to us. Nobody can get to harm you. If they are closed, we are not safe. Even if they convince our people to accept us back, our safety is still not guaranteed. If a misfortune strikes again in the village you become the prime suspect. So, they should let us be here.

Another accused “witch” at Leli-dabari, Godia, had the following to say about ActionAid’s intention to close the “camp”,

Personally, I feel happy being here. Initially I thought I was coming to suffer when I fled my village. But I have seen that the people live normal life here. It is really not different from home. I prefer to be here than going back home...I think that this place serves a very useful purpose. I do not support the idea of closing down the place. This place protects us. It saves our lives. Without it many women in our villages will be killed when villagers turn against them by accusing them for certain misfortunes.

Godia, like many other accused women I encountered in these accused women’s settlements, lacked confidence that ActionAid’s reintegration project would be able to protect them once they leave the “camps”. The women felt that ActionAid’s sensitisation campaigns around human rights ignored or did not know the cause of the danger they faced back home. Although all of the women, like Godia, claimed to be innocent, they believed that witchcraft was real and that no amount of sensitisation could erase their communities’ hatred and

bitterness towards those accused. For them, witchcraft was not simply about the issue of restoring human rights through education and reunification; it was a much more complex issue.

At Gnani-Tindang, the 75-year Samata was deeply uncomfortable when I talked about the campaign to disband the accused women's settlements. She explained,

I feel that this place gives me protection but living conditions are not the best of standards, even though we get food to eat and we sleep in absolute peace. So, once I eat what I want, I am okay. I like this place because it is safe for me. It is not a good idea to disband it. It will be unwise to do that. Where are we going to stay if it is closed? Because home is not safe for us. The people are not ready to accept us back. Even if they accept, it is with some reluctance. And we are in trouble if something bad happens in the village again.

Somua, Samata's close friend, was even more vehement about the possible closure of the accused women's settlement: "It may be better to get killed by the government than returning us home".

Not everyone felt this way. Tani, a resident of Tindaanzhee, was one of the few that supported disbandment and reunification, "but with a condition; adequate education should be carried out in our various communities so that people will learn to accommodate others when there is accusation. We are all one. Why should I harm you? What will I get from that?" Tani was relatively young (about 55 years old) and had embraced ActionAid's hopeful rights discourse. She had spent one year in Tindaanzhee after fleeing her hometown, Nayugu, when villagers attacked her after a dying neighbour mentioned her name as the one responsible for his illness. Although she had converted to Christianity in Kpatinga, she insisted that she would revert to Islam if she had the opportunity to return to her community since her husband would not accept her back as a Christian.

Madam Mashina acknowledged that reintegrated "witches" often "keep coming to the camps due to threats of violence in their villages". With other ActionAid officials, she insisted that reintegration was a long-term goal and often admiringly referenced the Gambaga Presbyterian Church's GO Home project. She said,

In Gambaga the Presbyterian Church is doing a very good job. When I spoke with the manager of the GO Home project there, he gave me hope that if we pursue this [reintegration] vigorously we can succeed in closing them. If we could have more churches and NGOs showing interest in this reintegration thing, like the way the Presbyterian Church people are doing, by now many of these camps would be closed.

While the “best way to improve their conditions is to help in reintegrating them into their original communities”, Madam Mashina emphasised that without ActionAid and other organisations working with the accused women’s support, “life in the camps will be hell”. Much of this work though was done by Songtaba who had become a household name in many of the settlements. In Kukuo, an accused woman explained Songtaba’s work by saying, “*Bana n ku nyeti*” (literally, they are us). She explained that Songtaba and ActionAid were indispensable to their survival, and that livelihood might be difficult without their support. When I spoke with the *tindana* of Kukuo, he praised Songtaba and ActionAid not because they had reintegrated some of the accused women but because of the livelihood support they provided from time to time. Like the accused women, the *tindana* had personally benefitted from the NGO’s support to the “camps”. Mr. Freeman, a programmes officer working with Songtaba in its Bimbilla office explained some of the interventions Songtaba had made in the “witch camps”; they trained accused women on how to produce soap, process shea-butter, provided food and second-hand clothing, and occasionally supplied water.

During our conversation, Freeman explained that Songtaba’s livelihood intervention was to lessen the suffering of the women while it worked to get the “camps” closed. This necessitated the simultaneous implementation of livelihood and human rights programmes in local communities. For its human rights programmes, Freeman said that Songtaba recruited youth campaigners who had received training to “sensitise feeder communities about the human rights implications as far as the persecution of accused witches is concerned”.

ActionAid’s livelihood support to the accused women was not consistent, and Madam Mashina could not quantify the organisation’s support to each “camp” or accused woman. However, ActionAid and Songtaba had maintained a fairly stable relationship with the accused women over many years. Madam Mashina was quick to note, however, that in providing a livelihood for and improving the living conditions of the accused women, Songtaba and ActionAid did not want to prolong their stay in the “camps”. This was an accusation often levelled against the organisations by men such as Kambondoo. Some locals agreed that the support from NGOs meant that the accused women and the *tindaamba* would not disband the “camps” because they had gotten used to ActionAid’s and Songtaba’s support.

The accused women seldom agreed with such sentiments. Ekom, one of the accused women who had lived in Lei-dabari for 24 years was an exception. She was one of my few

informants who wanted to stay in the accused women's settlement, not because of security and protection, but because she thought living conditions there were better than what prevailed at home. Ekom was about 70 years old when I met her. She had lost both parents before getting married to her husband. Unlike many of the accused women, she did not have living children. Her only daughter died before her fifth birthday, and she had struggled to conceive again. Ekom's husband was poor, a situation that was exacerbated by his heavy drinking. Before her husband's death, villagers had rumoured that she was responsible for her husband's poverty. As if community members were waiting for her husband's death, Ekom explained that a neighbour brought witchcraft accusations against her three days after her husband's funeral. Ekom's accuser had arranged with some village youths to kill her at midnight, but she got word of it and fled before the stipulated time. She explained why she would prefer to remain in Leli-dabari,

A lot of support comes to us. Apart from the government cash grants we receive, NGOs also help us. The Catholic Church helps us. They give us rice, maggie [food spice], soap, fish and oil. Other NGOs also donate clothing. Personally, I think the living conditions here are better than what I used to encounter back home. I prefer staying here to going back to my community. Gushegu is a town (city). Where I am coming from is a village. So, there are more opportunities here. I am now close to a market. I can easily walk to the market if I want to buy something, or if I want to sell my food. There was no any market close to my hometown.

In contrast to Ekom's view, the majority of accused women I spoke to attributed their desire to continue living in the accused women's settlement to the safety and protection in the settlements rather than to the access to support and opportunities NGOs gave them. For instance, Katuni, an accused woman at Gnani-Tindang, explained that living conditions back home were better; "Here I have no farm on my own. Back home I used to own a large farm. Home is better, but I prefer staying here because of my safety". Women such as Katuni thought that the NGO's assumption that empowerment was what was required to normalise relationships strained through witchcraft accusations was naive. They knew that they would be the first to be accused if witchcraft was suspected in their original villages and that they would shoulder shame and face avoidance in their communities. Danger lurked at home, and the women knew that nothing could erase the moral stain of a witchcraft accusation.

Both ActionAid and Songtaba employed locals, mostly university graduates such as Freeman and Madam Mashina, to work on their reintegration projects. Like the women with

which they worked, some of these local employees knew that witchcraft was real and that there were lurking dangers in the accused women's hometowns. This made them quite ambivalent about their work for ActionAid; at a personal level they knew that the women's fears were well-founded and that villagers would not easily abandon their beliefs. However, on a professional level, they knew that their employer maintained a disbelieving attitude towards witchcraft and saw the whole issue as one of illiteracy and human rights violations. As representatives of the NGOs, these local employees were required to publicly portray attitudes that reflected the values of their "pay masters".

World Vision

Unlike ActionAid and Songtaba, some NGOs maintained very short-term relationships with the "witch camps". For example, while doing fieldwork in Kpatinga, I noticed that unlike other houses in the village, some of the accused women's homes were well maintained and had aluminium roofs. The *tindana* explained that World Vision International had built these homes after they had learnt of the perennial accommodation challenges that accused women faced. Although very transitory, World Vision's relationship with Tindaanzhee resulted in massive infrastructural improvement in this settlement. During my visit to the offices of World Vision International in Savelugu, the regional manager of the organisation, Mr. Kudamor, explained that their NGO intervened "to empower our vulnerable old women who have been wrongly accused of witchcraft and now living in the camp. If you visit the camps and listen to the stories of the women, it is so pathetic. They are all very poor and barely have food to eat". World Vision International was also concerned that the children whose families sent them to assist accused women, were exploited as "child labourers" and did not attend school. World Vision wanted to help improve the situation of these children and assisted the accused women because they were concerned over the children's rights violations they saw in the "camps".

NGOs that worked in these "camps", including World Vision International, often explained the accused women's lack of access to decent accommodation and their children's difficulty in accessing educational facilities as human rights violations. At the time of my visit to Kpatinga, World Vision International had provided what their manager described as "immense empowerment" to the accused women and their dependents. The NGO had dug a borehole for Tindaanzhee's accused women and had also built a school for their children and grandchildren. According to the NGO's official, the school was open to all children in Kpatinga

and government was supposed to pay the teachers. However, locals showed no interest in sending their children to the school and it soon closed down. During my visit, the school building stood deserted at the entrance to Tindaanzhee. Grass had grown around it and animals had turned the unkempt classrooms into shelter. Although the accused women in Tindaanzhee were cleansed, locals feared that they could not guarantee their children's safety in such a morally compromised environment. Since locals believed that fostered children could easily pick up *sotim* (witchcraft power) from their aunts or grandmothers with whom they lived in the accused women's settlement (see Chapter 2), some of my interlocutors thought that children who were infected with *sotim* could easily taint or harm their children.

World Vision had also built a vocational training centre which was meant to provide skills training in different vocations to the accused women. Initially, World Vision had facilitated training programmes such as weaving and soap-making before handing over the management of the facility to the local community. The training centre was also defunct when I visited Kpatinga. World Vision had officially stopped working with Tindaanzhee before my visit, although the accused women and other locals could still remember their support. Because World Vision had withdrawn its support in terms of providing material inputs to the accused women for local production, the project became unsustainable as the accused women said that they lacked the wherewithal to continue with production. During fieldwork, one of Tindaanzhee's accused women pointed out that although they (accused women) sold manufactured products in the local markets, the gains made were too little to sustain production.

Louis Dreyfus Foundation

While ActionAid, Songtaba and World Vision International focused mainly on human rights-related interventions, the Louis Dreyfus Foundation, an international NGO based in the Netherlands, in collaboration with Ghana's Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA), concerned itself with food security in the accused women's settlements. Louis Dreyfus described itself as a Foundation that "aims to promote projects in the areas of sustainable agriculture, food security and self-sufficiency, particularly through direct support to farmers" (Louis Dreyfus Foundation, 2013: 1). In 2013, the Foundation made a significant donation of hen coops and chickens to accused women in Kukuo, Gnani and Gambaga to help promote subsistence agriculture and poultry farming. This was still fondly remembered by accused

women and community members during my visit to the settlements. It was not clear why the NGO assisted only three “witch camps”, and none of their officials could be reached because they did not have an office in the northern region and only visited the region to undertake field programmes. Louis Dreyfus’s blue wooden hen coops were highly visible in the area during my fieldwork. In Gambaga and Gnani, the coops served to distinguish the accused person’s section from other villagers. In isolated cases where other locals possessed these coops, it was due to the accused people’s generosity. Once the chickens they had received from Louis Dreyfus had been killed in the harmattan, the accused women had no use for the empty structures and decided to give them to needy community members in their host villages. Giving out a hen coop was, however, a personal decision rarely made. Villagers apparently constantly pestered accused “witches” for coops, something the accused interpreted as a form of envy.

By classifying the accused people as part of its “vulnerable farmers” group in northern Ghana, Louis Dreyfus also provided agricultural seeds and fertilizer to them. As an international organisation with little knowledge about local farming practices, Louis Dreyfus partnered with the Ministry of Food and Agriculture to undertake its food security project. Since government was concerned with poverty reduction in the north, it quickly accepted the partnership and provided local extension officers to give basic training to the women. Many of the accused women I interviewed talked about the positive impact Louis Dreyfus had made on their lives. During my visit to Gnani-Tindang, Ayishetu explained how the project had impacted on her, “When we are in the lean season and things become difficult, I sell some of my chicken to buy food. The sales from the chicken is not much, but it helps to do something. At least I won’t go hungry. There is always something to rely on”.

ActionAid and other international organisations consistently approached these “witch camps” with ambivalence. They did not believe in the reality of witchcraft and relied on local employees (who did) to implement their rights-based reintegration projects in local settings while, in the meantime, they provided livelihood support. Louis Dreyfus was different in its approach. It did not get involved in witchcraft matters and was not preoccupied with issues of human rights and justice. Its main concern was in relation to reducing livelihood vulnerabilities, particularly hunger, among the accused women.

The independents

Apart from the well-established NGOs and churches that worked with the accused women, some private individuals also launched programmes to provide material support to the “witch camps”. All of them were former humanitarian workers who had been employed by NGOs and churches that had worked with the accused women. With their experience, they formed self-owned NGOs and used them to seek external funding supposed to be used for the welfare of the accused women.

Mr. Anambra, a middle-aged man who had worked as the leader of the Presbyterian GO Home project in Gambaga for over ten years, was one of these individuals. He told me that during his time in Gambaga, he was responsible for conducting individual case studies into circumstances of accused women who had been banished to Gambaga and to carry out “sensitisation work” to facilitate their return to their original communities. During my fieldwork, Mr. Anambra had relocated to Gushegu where he worked to improve the lives of the accused women at Leli-dabari, but also in other accused women’s settlements. He explained that he left Gambaga because he thought he had helped enough and felt that other settlements should also benefit from his interventions. Mr. Anambra was not around when I visited Gushegu for my fieldwork. He had left for his hometown to visit his family and could only talk to me on the phone. During our conversation, he explained that while he was working for the Presbyterian Church in Gambaga, he came into contact with tourists, researchers and private and state agencies that had visited Gambaga to engage with the accused women. He had worked with ActionAid on its sensitisation programmes, and with Louis Dreyfus on the chicken project. NGOs and researchers especially often gave Mr. Anambra cash or other material gifts for his help, which encouraged him to go it alone.

Mr. Anambra founded an NGO which he simply called “Witch Hunt Project”. He managed this NGO with his wife and one other man whom he identified as his “assistant”. They received funding from many donors and organisations to whom Mr. Anambra had written funding proposals. Mr. Anambra knew how to write these proposals and to whom due to his previous employment. Unlike many other locals who were interested in this kind of work, he knew which kind of organisations were more interested in supporting broad witchcraft campaigns or smaller community entry skills, or sensitisation messages and materials. Mr. Anambra said that he had received support from many sources to help the accused women but would not disclose the names of his sponsors.

Despite being born and bred in northern Ghana, Mr. Anambra's projects looked very much like the ones he used to run for the church; they focused on the women's material needs, training and human rights as well as possible reintegration projects. "My NGO helps to take care of the women's health. We help their children's and grandchildren's education. We pay them visits. We have provided them with training on drama which they perform during reintegration. We also give them chickens to rear", Mr. Anambra disclosed. He admitted that life would be difficult for the accused women if no external support was offered and believed that sensitisation could help reduce their plight. As he explained,

Our people are illiterate and very ignorant. So, they often think that when you are accused of witchcraft you lose your human rights such as the right to live and the right to determine where to stay. Because witchcraft is family-related issue, it is difficult for family members to report cases of witchcraft to police or the court. It will be difficult for someone to come back to the family if the person reports such a case to the police.

In Leli-dabari and Poagnyaankura fonju, Mr. Anambra was a household name among the accused women. Jano, from Leli-dabari, explained that, "Mr. Anambra has been my major source of support especially in times of sickness. When I am sick he pays for my medication and other petty expenses. Sometimes he also gives me food". However, while many of the accused women praised Mr. Anambra's work, some villagers were suspicious that he was financially benefitting too much from his NGO work and that he was not above fiddling the numbers somewhat. Kambondoo said that Mr. Anambra occasionally inflated witch populations to secure more aid and seldom shared this largesse with the accused women. The women remained ignorant of his financial massaging.

In another conversation, Mr. Bani, the then acting Yendi district director of CHRAJ, who had worked with the accused women's settlements for many years, bemoaned the fact that there were many actors like Mr. Anambra who now "worked" with the accused women. He insisted that most of these people were exploiting the "witch camps" for their own benefit and that the exploitation happened on many levels. As a human rights campaigner, he explained,

Exploitation takes place in the camps at many levels; by the *tindana*, community members and NGOs. When organisations are distributing food or other material items to the accused witches, some community members sneak into the camp to benefit from these packages. For example, when an NGO is doing health screening and medication for the accused witches some of the community members sneak in to take part, and it is difficult for the people doing it to know who an accused witch is and who is not. The *tindana*

also exploits the camp inmates materially. When NGOs or the reintegration committee visit the camps to distribute food, the *tindana* sometimes takes the food on behalf of the women but they do not distribute all the food to the women. I had some interactions with some of the women at the Kpatinga witch camp and they indicated that sometimes the *tindana* asks them to make some cash contributions. In the case of Kpatinga, if a market day falls on Friday, it is considered a special day and the *tindana* asks the women to contribute cash for him to buy chicken for sacrifice to the shrine. One way of exploiting the camp is that people seeking funding and other researchers overstate the population of the camps just to raise money for their own things.

Mr. Bani, like other government officials I spoke to, blamed both NGOs and community members for exploiting the accused women. For their part, NGOs, such as ActionAid, also blamed community members and *tindaamba* for exploiting the accused women. The accused women insisted that the *tindana* and other locals were not exploiting them. “For me as a banished person, this place is an asylum. I have not experienced any discrimination or exploitation here since I arrived six years ago. We live peacefully with the *tindana* and his people”, Ayishetu, a resident of Gnani-Tindang, explained. Hawa, my informant in Tindaanzhee, shared a similar feeling, “We get protection here. The *tindana* doesn’t worry us. He comes here often to check on us and see if we are fine. He does not exploit us, and none of the opinion leaders in the community does. We are treated with respect by community members”. Although NGO officials such as Madam Mashina considered the community and *tindana*’s use of the accused women’s labour on their farms as exploitative, the accused women did not regard it as such, a point I elaborate in Chapter 5.

The construction of “camps”

It was clear that institutional actors such as ActionAid, Songtaba and World Vision International as well as independent NGOs working in the accused women’s settlements viewed them as spaces of destitution, deprivation and indignity whose inhabitants needed liberation and empowerment. Their consistent framing of these spaces and their inhabitants in terms of human rights discourses of dispossession, imprisonment, persecution and torture had influenced the construction of these settlements as “camps” – the reason why ActionAid and its collaborators made sustained efforts to disband them. However, the term “camp”, as used by ActionAid and other rights-conscious NGOs, is symbolically inscribed in a specific Western political tradition. Its usage in respect of the accused women’s settlements referenced

universalised notions of human rights violations that often occur in refugee and concentration camps (see Agamben, 1998; Agier, 2011; Fassin, 2013).

According to Giorgio Agamben (1998: 168-169), “The camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule”. In its most basic conceptualisation, the “state of exception” is the “state of being” that is created when the state (or the sovereign) decides to suspend existing rules for some or all of its citizens. This order empowers the state to do what it considers necessary, including suspending or restricting people’s rights and liberties. Typically, in a state of exception where the rights of individuals are stripped, the person is reduced to what Agamben calls *homo sacer*³¹ and is conferred with “bare life”. As Moller (2015) shows, the word “camp” has since Second World War II irrevocably been associated with the genocidal barbarity of the Nazis³².

This framing of “the camp” provides a critical lens to understand why NGOs continued to call the accused women’s settlements “witch camps”. The word conjures up images of human rights abuses and suggest that the NGOs’ own subscription to human rights discourses would overturn the conditions of their existence. By consistently referring to these settlements as “camps”, ActionAid and other NGOs successfully justified their liberation, empowerment and philanthropic work. Their “audience” was not the locals who believed in the reality of witchcraft but those donors who could conjure up comparable “camps” where marginalised people lived a “bare life”; devoid of family or companionship, where access to food and other resources was limited and where freedom of movement was severely constrained.

In contrast to civil society’s framing of the accused women’s settlements as “camps” local employees of ActionAid and other NGOs knew that locals lived apart from the accused women because they wanted to protect themselves from their uncontrolled dark deeds. Despite this knowledge, these local employees implemented NGO programmes that aimed to disband the “camps”. They did this in a context where there were few other well-paying jobs. Although

³¹ In the words of Agamben, the *homo sacer* is the “(sacred man) ...who may be killed and yet not sacrificed. An obscure figure of archaic Roman law, in which human life is included in the juridical order...solely in the form of its exclusion...that is, of its capacity to be killed” (Agamben, 1998: 8). Any person could kill *homo sacer* without being charged of murder since he was dispossessed of all political rights that made his existence legitimate.

³² Hyslop (2011) contends that it is universally accepted that the first concentration camp emerged in 1894 when the Spanish government tried to contain popular insurrections in colonial Cuba. Agamben (1998) argues that the first “camps” to have emerged in human history were established in Europe to contain and control refugees and that the eventual appearance of what came to be known as concentration, extermination and internment camps could only be regarded as offshoots of these early camps.

agriculture was the predominant activity in my research area, young graduates from universities and other tertiary institutions did not consider subsistence farming as befitting enough for their status as *karachi* (educated person). Like me, many young graduates who finished tertiary education dreamed about getting employed in white-collar and well-paying jobs such as NGOs, banks and other “juicy” government departments and agencies. This desire existed in a situation where such prestigious and lucrative jobs were very scarce and difficult to get. Like my friend, Afa Sule, who initially found it difficult to get a “good” job after his training as a social worker, I personally underwent difficult and frustrating job-hunting processes when I returned from the United Kingdom where I studied for a Masters degree. I was relieved when I eventually got a job with BRAVEAURORA (see Chapter 1). Given this scarcity of jobs and the frustrations involved in getting them, young graduates, like Madam Mashina, had to accept jobs offered by NGOs even if they did not agree entirely with their values, missions or set objectives.

Government intervention in the “camps”

The government’s concern with human rights issues in the “witch camps” and its active intervention in their continued existence started after the March 1997 outbreak of a deadly Cerebro-Spinal Meningitis (CSM) epidemic that killed about 542 people in the north of the country (see Chapter 1). The epidemic inspired massive public witch hunts which alarmed feminist organisations and government officials, leading to many police arrests (Adinkrah, 2004). Widespread media publicity of this event attracted local and international attention. In September 1997, *The Weekly Spectator*, a popular national newspaper, “reported that about 200 women suspected to be witches in various communities in the Northern Region were being held in captivity at Gambaga. The paper also reported further that the women were being maltreated in the so-called ‘witches camps’” (Government of Ghana, 1998: 11). According to the government’s reports on “witch camps”, this article alerted government officials to the “problem” of “witch camps”, even though some of them had existed for more than a century (see Chapter 2).

In December 1998, CHRAJ, a state human rights organisation, convened a national stakeholder conference to discuss human rights issues relating to the “witch camps” and the treatment of accused women. The 1998 conference, which was held in Tamale and sponsored by USAID, aimed to deal with this “northern problem” (Government of Ghana, 1998).

Participants at this meeting included representatives of the Muslim and Christian communities, staff of the Presbyterian Church GO Home project, representatives of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), chiefs and other public bodies such as the National Commission for Civil Education (NCCE). The participants discussed, among other themes, the need to reintegrate the accused women and “to devise a comprehensive programme for enhancing public awareness about the rights of persons accused or suspected of witchcraft” (Government of Ghana, 1998: 2).

During fieldwork in Tamale, my conversation with a former deputy minister of women and children’s affairs, Hajia Hawawu Boya Gariba, revealed that there had been no serious parliamentary debate on the accused women’s settlements since the 1998 conference and no significant intervention by government until 2010 when a collaboration between ActionAid and NCCE (a state body responsible for carrying out civic education) led to the facilitation of meetings between Songtaba and host communities (see ActionAid, 2012). The meetings were intended to discuss the plight of the accused women and how they could be helped. Subsequently, in 2011, the ministry in charge of women’s and children’s affairs declared the government’s intention to close down all the “witch camps” by 2012 (Dixon, 2012). This declaration strengthened the collaboration between the government and ActionAid to disband the “camps”.

In 2014, the government extended its pro-poor welfare programme, the LEAP, to the accused women after sustained appeals from ActionAid and Songtaba (Ghana News Agency, 2013). As far as the LEAP programme was concerned, the specific category of people who were supposed to be included were poor families with orphans and vulnerable children, the aged/elderly (65 years and above) and disabled people who could not work (Mutaru, 2013). The accused women qualified as beneficiaries because most were over 65 years old, they were relatively poor, and they were also vulnerable due to their rejection and stigmatisation by society on suspicion of witchcraft. As a cash transfer programme, LEAP was supposed to allow the poor and vulnerable in society to move out of poverty (Mutaru, 2013). The DSW, under the auspices of the gender ministry, was responsible for the administration of the LEAP programme.

The DSW issued identity cards to all beneficiaries of the LEAP programme. While ActionAid relied on the *tindana* to identify qualifying “witches” for its programmes, the DSW asserted that “witches knew themselves” (i.e. people would not identify as a witch to get

benefits from the state). District social welfare officers went to the accused women's settlements and organised meetings where they registered the accused women as potential beneficiaries. The registration consisted of compiling personal details and "poverty profiles" of the accused women, which the district officers then forwarded to DSW headquarters to ratify. Since LEAP benefits were not limited to accused women, other eligible locals in host communities were also registered during these meetings.

Accused women had to show their identity cards at DSW pay points, which were usually manned by DSW officers in communities at designated spots. In Kpatinga, where I witnessed LEAP payments, both accused women and locals gathered at the community market square to receive their cash payments. The accused women were visibly uncomfortable mixing with locals and tried not to make eye contact. They also stood apart, hoping not to attract the opprobrium of their hosts. My friend, Afa Sule, in the company of Kambondoo (together with another employee from the DSW), supervised the LEAP payments. The DSW officers soon realised the apparent discomfort being felt by the accused women and decided to pay them first. Other locals were paid after the accused "witches" had left. Afa Sule pointed out that although locals were not happy that the DSW offered preferential treatment to the accused women, he explained that this category of beneficiaries was very vulnerable and therefore needed special attention.

At the time of my fieldwork, each LEAP beneficiary was entitled to an amount GHc64 (an equivalent of about \$13.50) per month which the DSW paid out every two months. Although an official from Songtaba described the LEAP cash amount as paltry, the accused women regarded it as significant for their survival. At Gnani-Tindang, Samata explained how important the LEAP payments were,

I get some cash grant from the government. Anytime I receive this money it is a great relief for me. I used it to buy food and defray the expenses of my two grandchildren who are with me. They attend school here. So, the money helps me to take care of their educational needs such as books, uniform and sandals. It helps me a lot, and I thank the government for this help.

At Poagnyaankura fonju in Gambaga, Magazia Saanpoaga told me that even though the Presbyterian Church was doing a lot to help her with her children's education, there were some basic expenses that she needed to take care of by herself, and the LEAP payments helped her to do that,

The government gives some cash grants. I used part of these grants to buy food especially during the lean season when it is difficult to get food for the household. But part of the grants is also used to cover the expenses related to the education of my children. The Presbyterian Church helps but there are some basic things I should also do myself such as giving “chop”³³ money to my son to go to school, but also buying books.

As part of their LEAP welfare benefits, accused women were supposed to be registered on the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) and to receive free healthcare services. Not all of the accused women who qualified were beneficiaries of the LEAP cash grants and therefore had no access to the government’s free healthcare. Some of these accused women had made several complaints to the DSW officers when they visited their town, but the complaints only brought assurances of the government’s determination to include all accused women. During my conversation with Magazia Awabu of Kukuo, she talked about her inability to get onto the LEAP beneficiary list,

At this age, I should be getting government support, but I don’t get it unfortunately. Government does not give me the cash grant it gives to others. When I asked the officer, he said he doesn’t know why I have not been captured as a beneficiary. I always ask him when he comes here. He has promised to work on that.

In one of my conversations, the Yendi district social welfare officer of the DSW, who oversaw the disbursement of LEAP benefits to accused women in Gnani-Tindang, explained that the selection process was not arbitrarily done by one individual. According to him, the Department’s software in Accra did technical assessments of potential beneficiaries based on their “poverty profile”. He further explained that since the accused women were not initially targeted and captured as a unique category for automatic assistance, they were being treated by the software as any other applicant whose name was submitted for consideration for the LEAP benefits. He admitted that those who were successfully registered for LEAP sometimes had their payments delayed by the central government, resulting in temporary hardships for the accused women.

³³ In the Ghanaian context, “chop” money refers to the kind of money parents or guardians give to their children for food when going to school.

Frustrated by the delay in the payment of their LEAP benefits, accused women in Leli-dabari turned to public protest in 2016. The DSW registered the protesting accused women on the LEAP programme in 2014. However, for reasons not initially disclosed to the women, their grants remained unpaid until mid-June 2016 when they embarked on the protest. According to Kambondoo, the protest march by the 163 accused women sparked some trepidation among the DSW workers and other government officials at the district assembly. Alarmed by this, the DSW's district officers quickly interceded by following-up with calls to the headquarters who then promised to pay the accused women. Kambondoo indicated that while local government officials and a section of the public described the women's protest as "unnecessary", other locals who empathised with them "praised them for asking for what is due them". During my visit to Leli-dabari, the leader of the accused women, Magazia Azuma, confirmed the protest but indicated that the DSW subsequently paid all accused women who were affected.

Politics and voting rights

During fieldwork, it was curious to note that the accused witches were not just recipients of development and reintegration projects, but they also constituted important voting fodder. In some of these local settlements, the accused showed interest in partisan politics and occasionally discussed political activities that recently took place. Some of the accused women wore party T-shirts, not because they necessarily supported the parties that handed out the T-shirts but because, as Napaga explained, "Some of us here don't have enough clothes. Those who wear it don't do so just to show their political identity. They see it as a necessity; they value it like other ordinary clothes they have. But the locals wear it to show their political affiliation".

In Nabuli, Magazia Wampuli kept her party T-shirt for special occasions such as market days. She wore it to the market to sell *dam* to villagers. For other women, the frequent usage of their political party shirts had rendered them very shabby and were only used to work on the farms. In Gambaga, Magazia Saanpoaga told me that during every election, she and other accused women joined villagers in long queues to vote for their preferred candidates. My research coincided with a tense political moment when Ghanaians were preparing to go to the polls on 7th December 2016 to elect a new president. The accused women occasionally talked about the activities of the two main political parties; the then opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC). They talked about how one of the

contending parliamentary aspirants shared money at one of the political rallies held in the community. On two occasions when I visited Mariama and Napaga, they talked about the political campaigns local politicians had carried out in Gambaga which attracted large crowds of people from neighbouring villages. They also talked about how locals had attempted to influence their decision-making by visiting their compounds to suggest candidates whom they should vote for during the elections.

Local politicians also visited these accused people's settlements every election year to canvass for their votes (see Crampton, 2013), promising better lives after the elections. "Before we vote, they [politicians] are always here to talk to us to support them. We get many gifts from them during this period. But after voting they don't appear here again", said Magazia Saanpoaga. In Gambaga, most of the *poagnyaankura* I interviewed indicated their willingness to vote for the then ruling party (NDC). They had a clear reason for this decision: Ghana's First Lady, Lordina Mahama, the wife of the then sitting president (John Mahama) was one of the few individuals who had provided a large amount of support to the accused women. On several occasions, she had donated maize, rice, oil and second-hand clothing to the women. In one of her previous campaign visits to Gambaga in 2012, one of Mrs. Mahama's campaign team members implored the accused women "to reciprocate the gesture of Mrs. Mahama by voting massively for President John Mahama on December 7th so he could win the elections 'one touch'" (Ghana News Agency, 2012). But what particularly attracted Mariama and other accused women in Poagnyaankura fonɔ to the ruling party was the fact that Lordina Mahama was sponsoring the construction of what locals always described to me as "nice accommodation" in a different location that was meant to house the accused women. Although the women were extremely happy about this project, an official from ActionAid condemned it since, in her view, it amounted to a defeat of their reintegration agenda.

Conclusion

The northern region's "witch camps" have attracted the attention of various government departments, international NGOs and churches, local NGOs and independent churches, each with their own understanding of why these settlements existed and what could be done about them. For the secular organisations involved, what was at stake was a simple case of human rights abuses and poor education. NGOs such as ActionAid and Songtaba that did not acknowledge the reality of witchcraft focused their interventions on sensitisation and

reintegration since they presumed that the existence of the “witch camps” and the sentencing of the accused were due to ignorance and poverty, and therefore amounted to abuse of the accused persons’ rights. This sort of framing and understanding ineluctably triggered civil and social interventions in the so-called “witch camps”: sensitisation, reintegration, disbandment, empowerment.

But organisations such as ActionAid and Songtaba also created local markets that supplied jobs to graduates and allowed locals such as Mr. Anambra to be “entrepreneurial” in his engagement with the “camps”. Although local employees of rights-sensitive NGOs, such as Freeman, fully participated in their implementation of rights-based programmes, at a personal level the women’s resistance to reintegration and disbandment was a legitimate concern. For these local employees, the situation was murkier and more complicated than what ActionAid and other rights campaigners often simply assumed.

The notion of “witch camp” is as contested as the notion of the “witch figure” who inhabited that space. Churches that worked with these settlements offered different perspectives to the understanding of the inhabitants who occupied them. The Catholics acknowledged the reality of witchcraft although they avoided calling what the women had been accused of doing “witchcraft”. Instead, they preferred to frame it in the Biblical language of “evil” or the “work of the Devil” or “Satan”, which assumed the notion of external agency rather than the fault of the accused. Since the Catholic Church framed the accused women as both victims of the Devil as well as people who had been rejected by society, it encouraged the women to attend worship and prayer sessions, but also proffered material support to reduce deprivation. As Protestants, the Presbyterians approached witchcraft with much more “seriousness” than the Catholics precisely because they located responsibility in the individual rather than in outside forces. They not only offered prayers for the accused women but also made attendance to church services compulsory for all accused women who benefited from their material support. In Gambaga, the assistance provided by the Presbyterian Church in terms of procuring animals and other relevant materials for the performance of cleansing rituals indicated the Church’s determination to get the accused women released from the “camp” and reunified with family and friends in their original communities.

The active participation of state agencies such as the ministry for women and children’s affairs, CHRAJ and DOVVSU in the reintegration process demonstrated their subscription to a rights-oriented framework within which the government understood both the situation of the

accused women and the spaces that accommodated them. Although the state's rights-oriented approach did not lead to the promulgation of specific new laws relating to the "witch camps" (or witchcraft in general), it did trigger the extension of welfare benefits to the accused women, ostensibly to reduce the plight of victimhood and deprivation, so conceptualised.

Although the actors involved in the activities of the "witch camps" were many, with diverse ideologies, interests and programmes (pulling the accused women in all directions), their end goal was to "free" the women. However, as I have demonstrated, many of them did not want to be "freed"; they opposed the idea of reintegration. At the heart of the conflict was the issue of the reality of witchcraft; the women and their host and sending communities believed that witchcraft was real while the NGOs such as ActionAid and many others disbelieved the reality of witchcraft. Although the churches also believed that witchcraft was real, their remedies looked very much like the remedies of those NGOs that did not believe in the reality of witchcraft - they worked to disband the camps. Besides this, there was also a marked difference in scale between the internationals who did not believe in witchcraft and the local implementers who did (but who kept quiet about their personal "beliefs" in order not to lose their necessary jobs). These locals were 'caught' in the same network as the internationals.

In framing or depicting the accused women's settlements as places of desolation, repression and indignity, ActionAid and other rights-minded groups sought to liken such spaces to Agamben's refugee or concentration camps (with their implied brutalities). Such framing by ActionAid and its collaborators contributed to sustaining the notion of "camp" in the Ghanaian society – a notion that was inappropriate, at least in the specific local communities that hosted the accused women and amounted to a distortion of local nomenclatures – Tindang, Poagnyaankura fonju – that villagers used to designate such places. As such, the word "camps" directed at these settlements did not exist in "local" cosmology and discourse.

I was not the only person who thought that the accused women were not living in "camps" as portrayed by NGOs. The majority of the accused people I interviewed did not harbour the feeling that they were being "camped". On the contrary, they described themselves as "free" people; they had freedom to work and interact with locals and were also free from travel restrictions. In the next chapter, I will take a closer look at the lived experiences of the accused women; that is, what it means to be accused of witchcraft and to be banished to a new and "strange" land.

CHAPTER 5: Ordinary Lives, Experiences and the Notion of *Songsim* in Accused People's Settlements

The *magazia* (women's leader) of Poagnyaankura fonɲu, Hawa, had died not long before I arrived in Gambaga for fieldwork. Her assistant, Saanpoaga, had been appointed by the *gambarana* (chief of Gambaga and earth priest or ritual custodian for Poagnyaankura fonɲu) to act as the new *magazia*. Magazia Saanpoaga had lived in Poagnyaankura fonɲu since 1997 after she was first driven away from her community, Bumbong, following witchcraft accusations. As she explained on 24 October 2017,

I arrived in Gambaga without any assets apart from my cooking pot and the bucket I used for bathing, and some few bowls for food. I was able to take these few items because I was accused in the night, and my accuser gave me up to the next day morning to leave the village. In the night I took these items and secretly left the house to ensure my safety. When I arrived in Gambaga it was a dry season and there was no farm work for me to do to get food to eat. I had to rely on the sale of firewood and water for my livelihood. I continued this kind of work until the rains arrived. I then began to work for people on their farms to get food for my family [children].

Magazia Saanpoaga was about 39 years old when she first arrived in Gambaga. At the time of our interview, she was 59 years old. She was younger than most of the other accused women with whom I engaged, but she looked frail and physically exhausted. As was the local practice, after she presented herself to the *gambarana* and her stomach was cleansed (see Chapter 3), the *gambarana* handed her over to Magazia Hawa. Without any relatives and no ready accommodation, Saanpoaga spent the first week living with Magazia Hawa, who showed much generosity by sharing with her the little food she had. In appreciation for Hawa's *songsim* (help), Saanpoaga worked for her by cooking, assisting in farm³⁴ work, fetching firewood and sweeping the compound. Because Gambaga had a rehabilitation or reintegration programme (see Chapter 4), the Presbyterian Church and the *gambarana* required Magazia Hawa to provide updates about Saanpoaga's initial acclimatisation status. That is, she was asked to

³⁴ In this thesis, I use the term "farm" instead of "field" because it is more commonly used in the Ghanaian context and represents a better translation of the local Dagbani/Mamprusi equivalent term *puu* (see Drucker-Brown, 1993)

report any observed behaviour regarding, for instance, frequent crying, inability to eat, an attempt to commit suicide or an (un)willingness to mingle with other inhabitants. During our conversation, Magazia Saanpoaga confessed that she refused to eat any food on the day she arrived and cried for two days. She painfully recalled her arrival in in Poagnyaankura fonju,

I cried because I had come to live in a new place and did not know what was in stock for me. I also missed home. I missed my husband's company. So, anytime thoughts of home crossed my mind, then I would start to cry. You see, I could not control my tears anytime I reminded myself that it was my own people who did this to me. Someone in my own house [husband's brother], not an outsider. But after some family members and friends visited me here, I stopped crying. I was happy to see them. I decided to give everything to God.

In my subsequent conversations with Magazia Saanpoaga, she still remembered how her admission to Poagnyaankura fonju had brought her pain, shame and disrespect. During the initial stages of her stay in Poagnyaankura fonju, locals shunned her, and she restricted her movements in the community. "When I first arrived here, nobody told me not to roam in the village apart from a caution from the *gambarana* not to interfere with local matters. But the way the people were looking at me whenever I went outside this place, I felt uncomfortable". In the initial days, villagers pointed fingers at her on the way to the market, avoided the food she cooked, feared the firewood she sold, and shunned her company.

One of Magazia Saanpoaga's two daughters, Najat, had experienced stigmatisation at school. Najat remembered that once her classmate had asked her if she was also staying at *fong'beo* (literally "bad area", in Mampruli). This resulted in a scuffle between the two. After the fight, Magazia Saanpoaga insisted that Najat stay at home for a week. It took the intervention of Najat's classroom teacher to get Najat back to school.

Unlike the cases of other newly arrived accused women whose kinsmen the *gambarana* had asked to build houses for them in the past, Magazia Saanpoaga was admitted just as another accused woman vacated her home. The woman had been reintegrated into her original community after her brother asked the *gambarana* to release her. Magazia Saanpoaga's brother had paid the *gambarana* to secure the vacant house for her.

Today, Magazia Saanpoaga's household looked slightly different. Her two daughters had both left their homes to look after her when they heard through a family friend that she had undergone an operation at the Baptist Medical Centre (BMC) in Nalerigu. After the surgery, a

medical doctor had advised her not to undertake any strenuous physical work. Magazia Saanpoaga's two daughters knew that she was getting old and needed help beyond her recuperation. She told me that the presence of her two daughters had provided her relief as far as domestic chores were concerned. When I suggested to her that she had done more work in the past and probably needed some rest, she responded,

Yes, but I can't stop working because I must eat to survive. I still work on people's farms to get food to eat. I was trained on how to make waist-beads by an NGO [whose name she had forgotten]. So, I make waist-beads and sell to community members and visitors who come to the Gambaga market. I use the proceeds to support what I get by working for people on their farms. Here I also sell firewood.

Like most of the houses in Poagnyaankura fonju, Magazia Saanpoaga's house looked dilapidated and the boundary walls were low enough for passers-by to peep into her compound. Compared to houses belonging to other locals, Magazia Saanpoaga's house was smaller and clearly did not have room for the extended families that lived in these settlements. Apart from the immediately visible social differences, Magazia Saanpoaga's compound, like those of other accused women, had one of Louis Dreyfus's blue wooden hen coops (see Chapter 4). This, more than anything else, delineated the *poagnyaankura's* (old women's) compounds. Like those of other accused women, Magazia Saanpoaga's mud-walled house was plastered with cow dung, which she had to reapply every year after the rains. Her neighbours, who were all accused witches, occasionally provided *songsim* for her to plaster the wall when the rains sloughed off the previous layers. Without any door, animals constantly strayed into her compound to eat the crops that she dried in the sun.

About two hundred metres from Poagnyaankura fonju stood the *gambarana's* palace, from where, locals believed, the *gambarana* and his ancestors monitored the lives of Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women. As the custodian of Poagnyaankura fonju and chief of the community, the *gambarana* had more control over Magazia Saanpoaga and the accused women than any other villager. As was the case with accused women in other settlements, in Gambaga, Magazia Saanpoaga metaphorically regarded the *gambarana* as her "husband" (*vidana*) since he always provided protection and occasionally provided food (see also Chapter 2).

Although Magazia Saanpoaga interacted with the *gambarana* on a regular basis, she, like other accused women, dealt with him cautiously since it was generally known in Gambaga

that he had a bad temper. She visited the house of the *gambarana* every day to greet him and his family and to receive his instructions and messages for the women. Like other accused women, she felt obliged to work on the *gambarana*'s farms because they lived under his spiritual and physical protection. Magazia Saanpoaga's daily contact with the *gambarana* and her position of responsibility drew her closer to the chief than any other accused woman in Poagnyaankura fonju. It meant that Magazia Saanpoaga received food whenever she complained of shortages to the chief. Her closeness to the *gambarana* had also fostered some intimacy between her and the chief's several wives; she received favours from them and could also share her secrets with them. She was highly respected by the accused women and other locals in Gambaga. During our conversation, Magazia Saanpoaga admitted that aside from the support of her two daughters, other accused women fetched water and washed clothes for her, and occasionally donated firewood to show their respect. However, as was the case in other accused women's settlements, Magazia Saanpoaga's position was titular and she often used persuasion, rather than coercion, to achieve compliance with her suggestions.

Like many other accused women, Magazia Saanpoaga did not own land in Gambaga. As she told me,

I arrived in a community that was not my own. So, having access to land was difficult. In my original community I did not own any land either. But what happened was that any time it was farming season my husband would cultivate a large piece of land and give me and my other co-wives some portions to plant our crops. But here I did not know anybody when I came. So how could I get such access to land?

Magazia Saanpoaga indicated that unlike the case of the *gambarana*, working for other villagers was a matter of choice and that she could decline any request from locals if she did not feel like working for them. But this rarely happened because her livelihood options were very limited.

Besides farm work, Magazia Saanpoaga traded in firewood. Although selling firewood was common in Gambaga community and both the accused women and other locals took part in the trade, Magazia Saanpoaga was well-known for this trade. She had been selling firewood for almost 20 years, since her arrival in the community. She was also one of the largest firewood suppliers at the Gambaga market. On two occasions, when I went past Magazia Saanpoaga's house to greet her, she stood next to a large heap of firewood stacked in front of her compound, chatting with customers who had come to buy from her.

When I asked Magazia Saanpoaga about her relationships with locals, she insisted that the people of Gambaga were “free” with her and that some locals occasionally came to greet her and eat her food. As she said,

Community members would often request my services without any fear. I go to work for them on their farms. I work together with their family members. I assist them to sow maize, sorghum, beans and peanuts. In the afternoon, their family members will bring food to the farm and we will eat and continue working. Sometimes the people [locals] call me to their homes to help them do some masonry work. I do both plastering and flooring. When I help (*soŋ*) them, they pay me some small monies which I can use to buy food. Sometimes instead of money they give me food because here in Gambaga people don't have money.

Apart from the farm work and the sale of firewood, she also spun cotton thread which she sold to community members and visitors to Poagnyaankura fonɲu. On Gambaga market days, her daughters helped to sell these products in the market. Magazia Saanpoaga explained that part of her market income went to buy her daughters' books and other school materials. She also paid medical expenses from this money but occasionally had to turn to the Presbyterian Church for *songsim* if her income could not cover her medical bills. These had grown alarmingly as Magazia Saanpoaga's health deteriorated. In fact, she told me how the Presbyterian Church had saved her life when it funded a life-saving operation at the BMC in Nalerigu.

At the time of my visit, Magazia Saanpoaga had only six chickens left of the donation from Louis Dreyfus (see Chapter 4). Like other accused women, she had vainly scrambled to protect the chickens from the bad harmattan weather that killed thousands of birds in this part of the country every year. Magazia Saanpoaga was determined to make a success of her chicken farm, although one of her daughters advised against keeping them. “They bring loss to us. We don't really profit from keeping them. We give them corn every day before they go out to scavenge, but they often die, and sometimes they are stolen by people”, she said. Magazia Saanpoaga had received two hen coops from Louis Dreyfus; one for her daughters and the other for her own use. On several occasions, locals had asked her to donate one of the coops to them, but she always declined the request. She explained that locals frequently stole her chickens out of envy. According to her, these thefts mostly occurred at night and they only noticed breakages into the coops the next day.

Magazia Saanpoaga still had a sexual relationship with her husband even though he did not move to Poagnyaankura fonju with her. However, unlike some of the accused women, Magazia Saanpoaga did not have sex with her husband when he visited her. They only had sex when she went home to “greet” people there. She told me that she still loved her husband. She remembered how her first month in Poagnyaankura fonju had been greeted with two love proposals from locals in Gambaga, but she rejected both because she had hoped that she would reunite with her husband one day.

Being a stranger

In my research area, apart from the children or grandchildren who took care of the accused women, only those accused of witchcraft and banished from their villages or those voluntarily fleeing from their origin villages qualified to reside in the accused women’s settlements. In most cases, the *tindana* would only agree to host a banished “witch” if a member of her family (husband, brother, son or any male kin) followed to the shrine to witness witch-testing and stomach cleansing rituals, as the case of Adinpuya showed (see Chapter 3). The *tindaamba* (earth priests) and village chiefs accepted the accused persons into their communities which, in theory, meant that they were accepted by all community members. But the reality was that many accused continued to live as strangers. In the accused people’s settlements, my interlocutors spoke about the unpleasant feelings they had during the initial stages of their arrival and how locals treated them differently from other ordinary community members. “When I first came here, I did not like the environment. I thought I was in a different world because I felt totally ostracised by society. How could I leave my people to come and stay in a place where I felt I was a stranger?... But this place is now my home”, Magazia Safia of Gnani-Tindang told me during a conversation. Unlike Magazia Saanpoaga, Safia did not get a vacant house when she arrived in Gnani. The *tindana* invited her husband and children to come and build a house for her. He allocated a small piece of land on which they built three tiny rooms consisting of her sleeping room, kitchen and another room for her two grand-daughters. Safia’s husband and children left for home after they had finished constructing her accommodation.

Like Magazia Safia, Mama, an accused woman, told me that she felt uncomfortable when she first arrived in Gambaga. “I arrived here in the night. The next day, all the faces I saw were unfamiliar. I was to live with people I did not know”, Mama said. Mama met me in Magazia Saanpoaga’s room when I visited her. She came to offer her greetings. Mama told me

about her experiences in her first days in Poagnyaankura fonju. She remembered how locals avoided the peanuts she had carried to the market to sell. Mama had been to the mosque once to join congregational prayers. “It was my first and last prayer I said in the mosque. Nobody told me not to come there again but the stares alone kept me away”, she said. This happened several years ago. After this incident, Mama prayed a few more times in her room but later decided to convert to Christianity when a member of the Presbyterian Church invited her to join them for worship. During the time of my research, Mama sold sugar at the Gambaga market. “Sometimes ‘market’ [sales] is ok, but many times it’s bad”, she said. When I probed to know if the bad “market” she often encountered was due to her membership of Poagnyaankura fonju, she simply replied, “I don’t know”. Mama told me that she no longer personally experienced discrimination at the hands of villagers, but she complained that the stigmatisation that had greeted her initial arrival in Gambaga had been transferred to her grand-daughter. Like the case of Najat, Mama’s grand-daughter had reported to her that the children at school had mocked her for allegedly being infected with witchcraft.

In many of the accused women’s settlements, the accused told me that they were free to move about in the host villages, but my observations showed something contrary to these assertions. Unlike Kukuo where accused women had the freedom to live in any part of the village, Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women in Gambaga had no such freedom. They could not live in any part of the community apart from Poagnyaankura fonju. The only condition that could overturn this rule was when an accused woman got married to a local. When this happened, the accused woman simply moved to the matrimonial home and lived with other co-wives (in the case of a polygynous man). Magazia Saanpoaga remembered two of these intermarriages. She recalled that Mama and Adamu had both dated and got married to locals in Gambaga. But Mama had been back to Poagnyaankura fonju during my visit. Mama told me that although her local husband trusted and loved her, her co-wife and her children consistently abused her verbally, thus necessitating a divorce and her return,

They refused to eat my food when I cooked and resorted to calling me all kinds of bad names. I frequently fought with her [co-wife] and neighbours always took side with her. One day, one of my co-wife’s daughters who is married and staying somewhere else came to the house and told me that I can’t use my *tim* [medicine] to take over their father’s love from their mother. I was fed up with that marriage. I decided to leave and return to this place because here I have no struggle with anybody.

Unlike in the farming season when accused women often left their settlements to work on local farms, the dry season saw them limiting their movements to the perimeters of their settlements. During the dry season, they seldom ventured outside their settlements except when they needed to attend a hospital, market or village occasions that mattered to them. In Gambaga, my local assistant, Awam, told me that one of the reasons why Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women restricted themselves to their homes was that the *gambarana* often cautioned each accused woman who was freshly admitted to Poagnyaankura fonɲu not to interfere unnecessarily in village matters that did not directly concern them. In Gambaga, as in other villages, locals associated witchcraft with closeness or intimacy (see Chapter 2). Since the accused women knew about the locals' fear of intimacy, they kept their distance from other villagers. But complete segregation was impossible since locals saw the presence of the women as a blessing in disguise – they needed their cheap labour. Drucker-Brown (1993) has suggested that the reason for segregating accused women to Poagnyaankura fonɲu was to allow for access to this cheap labour.

Almost all accused women I interacted with pointed out that they were “free” in the host villages, but the reality was slightly different. The women had been morally compromised as a result of the witchcraft accusations, which impacted on the freedoms they enjoyed in the host villages. There was no village law that explicitly banned the accused women from roaming freely. However, in Poagnyaankura fonɲu, as in other accused women's settlements, Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women confined themselves to their houses at night as a precaution to avoid village suspicions. According to her, the night was associated with the dark deeds of witchcraft and given their background as people who had once been accused, locals might raise suspicions if they saw them walking in the open at night. Therefore, Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women decided to confine themselves to their compounds at night in order to play to local expectations regarding village safety (see Chapter 2).

In one of our conversations, Magazia Saanpoaga remembered that a few years ago, fire had gutted a house belonging to one of the locals at night. This aroused panic in the village and sent men, women and children running to the disaster area to witness and offer help. Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women were curious to see what was happening but were afraid to step outside. She explained that they could have rushed to the scene with buckets of water to help quench the fire as locals had always done, but they feared that their presence there might raise suspicion as locals could easily make a direct connection between the fire's outbreak and

witchcraft. In Gambaga, as in other places, to avoid problems with locals, Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women had to always live on the side of caution.

Apart from being vulnerable to suspicions and distrust, some of the accused women acknowledged the possibility of occasional violent intrusions into their settlements by outsiders. In Gambaga, the *gambarana* often encouraged Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women to report to him people who had attempted to harass them. Magazia Saanpoaga had remained very watchful in the night since many bad things, including suspicious rape cases, happened during this time. Although Magazia Saanpoaga had not personally experienced sexual harassment, she mentioned that on two occasions, screams from some of the accused women had sent their intruders running into the dark without being identified. Because of such experiences, the *gambarana* did not encourage night visits to Poagnyaankura fonju. According to Magazia Saanpoaga, although locals could visit at will and needed no prior permission, “outsiders” did require the consent of the *gambarana*.

Due to such cautious relations with villagers, accused women had to organise their affairs internally. In every accused women’s settlement, the *magazia* occupied a higher social status and commanded more respect than other women. Unlike other accused women who were called by their names, the *magazia* was often addressed by her title. Despite such differences, *magazia* lived in the same type of compound and had the same standard of living as other accused women. In Leli-dabari, for example, Magazia Azuma was very old and could no longer do demanding physical labour. She stayed home to sell water from the Catholic Church’s borehole (see Chapter 4). Unlike Gambaga where the donation of hen coops had given rise to envy between locals and accused women, in Leli-dabari, the accused women told me that the construction of the borehole had not resulted any envious relationships between them and locals since they did not live together. Leli-dabari was located at the outskirts of Gushegu and constituted a village on its own, with minimal interaction between locals and accused women. Although the Catholic Church had constructed the borehole in service of the accused women, the Church required them to pay some token fee (GHc0.20/\$0.04 per gallon) towards maintenance costs. Magazia Azuma made very little money selling water and was poorer than most other women I met in Leli-dabari. The women in the settlement took pity on her and sent plates of food over to her compound whenever they cooked. Magazia Azuma often expressed her gratitude for their *songsim*.

The selective disbursement of the government's LEAP welfare benefits (see Chapter 4) had introduced new economic inequalities among the accused women. Those who received these welfare cash grants used their grants to start petty businesses in the villages. Some used the money to buy staple grains when the prices were low so they could resell it when the prices in the market rose during the dry season. Since locals engaged in similar actions when they could afford it, they were not particularly disgruntled when the accused women stockpiled grain for future gain. In Gambaga, where Magazia Saanpoaga and most of the accused women received LEAP benefits, they had enough money to buy food and could even save for future uncertainties. Some of the women also participated in "financial mutuals" (see Bahre 2002) called *susu* which were geared towards mutual insurance against unforeseen misfortune. The *susu* groups held meetings, at least once a week, to discuss the progress of contributions or payments. Each person contributed GHc5 per week, but payments were often done at bi-monthly meetings.

At Poagnyaankura fonju, a well-known *susu* had been in operation since the LEAP benefits started being paid out. Lamisi, a 60-year old accused woman with four dependents (grand-children), told me that she had been able to save about GHc400 (\$85) from her LEAP cash grants and that this helped her to do many things, including participating in *susu* schemes. She explained *susu* as a kind of economic system in which a group of friends came together periodically to make monetary contributions of a specified amount to save for their own direct use, or to be used to obtain assistance elsewhere (see Adusei & Appiah, 2012 for explanation about women's *susu* schemes in Ghana). During our conversation, she talked about how the LEAP benefits had helped her to take part in the *susu*:

Here I participate in some group livelihood activities with my friends [other accused women]. We do some *susu* contributions and deposit the money with the community bank here. We are about 10 people in the group. Each of us contribute GHc10 [\$2.10] every two weeks and deposit with the bank. When payment is due, an officer from the bank comes here to collect the monies. The bank takes our contributions as collateral security and gives us some microcredit. We get these loans from the bank and pay back with very little interest. With this money you can do any business you want in the community. In my case, it helps me to buy more food and keep. When prices rise, I take to the market and resell for profit. I have bought a sewing machine from this business for one of my grand-daughters.

Susu groups were not unique to Lamisi. Awam explained that other local women in Gambaga who were not accused witches had also organised themselves into similar groups and

that they were also benefitting from the bank's microcredit facility. The *susu* groups were not introduced by development NGOs such as ActionAid. The idea of *susu* was neither new to the accused women nor was it new to other locals in Gambaga. Some of the accused women who spent more than 20 years in Poagnyaankura fonɲu told me that they had practised *susu* in their original communities before their relocation to Gambaga.

Although the accused women frequently told me that locals accorded them respect and did not discriminate against them, the manner in which *susu* schemes were organised put the lie to this assertion. Accused women were never invited to join community *susu* nor did locals ever ask to join accused women's *susu*. In his research on similar financial mutuals, Bahre (2002: 35) showed that trust was central to the formation and continuation of any such group. My interlocutors in Poagnyaankura fonɲu, however, did not use the word trust and explained the separate village and settlement *susu* in terms of familiarity and convenience. Magazia Saanpoaga, for instance, explained that it was prudent and more convenient to deal with people whom one knew very well and frequently interacted with than "those who are not very free with you". By this comment, Magazia Saanpoaga problematised the relationship between the accused women and locals in Gambaga. In other words, although Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women claimed to be "free" with locals, the relationships were not as smooth between the two as they were among locals. So, although they were not openly discriminated against, there were definitely no equal relationships between villagers and accused witches.

It was widely known in Gambaga and other neighbouring communities that Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women worked for the *gambarana* and his family and got food in return. Magazia Saanpoaga and the other women, as well as locals, explained this work relationships as *songsim*, although the human rights officer at CHRAJ in Gambaga had a different opinion about this help. He explained it in terms of exploitation since, in his view, the *gambarana* and other locals who benefitted from the work of the accused women did not pay commensurate compensation. He explained that "these women are exploited to some extent. They provide cheap labour for the chief and his immediate relatives. They sow and harvest the chief's crops at no charge". However, in one of my conversations with Magazia Saanpoaga, she explained what differentiated her and other accused women from other local women in Gambaga. Her explanation underscored the accused women's indebtedness and standing obligations to the *gambarana*,

We are here without our families. The *gambarana* and his household members are our family. He protects us here. So, we work for him like the way we would for our own family. Other women in the village live

with their families. They stay with their husbands and they accompany them to the farm. They sow for them and helped them to harvest. So, you see, they don't owe anybody their labour apart from their families. If they were also living in different communities as banished women without any family, they would work for people to earn something to "keep" themselves.

Unlike other local women who depended on their husbands or other male elders in their households for food (see Chapter 2), Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women worked hard to feed themselves and their dependents. This meant that the accused women, unlike other local women, were not selective in the kind of work they did for a living; be it farm-related or off-farm – what they described as more "masculine" work on other farms such as weeding.

In Gambaga and other host communities, local women who were very old did not often go to work on the farms. Their husbands and elder male children cultivated the farms to make food available for them. In contrast, the accused women had to struggle with farm work in their old age. "The women have no choice. They have no family here. They have to struggle like this to get food to eat", a teacher in a local primary school in Gambaga told me.

During my research, two issues kept recurring in the narratives of the accused women: food and health. They needed good healthcare as much as they needed food to survive. At Gambaga, Magazia Saanpoaga was as worried as most other accused women. She always told me that she was approaching death because she was old. Although often said jokingly, I noticed that this topic greatly disturbed Magazia Saanpoaga; she frequently fell ill. Her operation at the BMC underscored her fragility. "Maybe in your next visit to Gambaga you will find out from my colleagues that I am no more [dead]", Magazia Saanpoaga told me during one of our conversations. I jokingly responded, "Magazia, death is not a respecter of age. Anybody can die". "Yes, I know that, but it is mostly the case" [that old people die], she quickly rebutted. "Where is Magazia Hawa? [referring to her predecessor]. She's gone [dead]. She was the oldest amongst us here. Now she is gone and we all still here".

In my subsequent engagement with Magazia Saanpoaga, I noticed that her main concern was not just about aging and dying; she was worried about the absence of proper caretaking by adult family members for old accused women like herself in an environment where all of them lived without their husbands. I had no doubt that Magazia Saanpoaga had a genuine concern because in Poagnyaankura fonju, unlike Gnani-Tindang, no accused woman lived with her husband. The *gambarana* would provide food when Magazia Saanpoaga and the

other *poagnyaankura* worked for him, but not healthcare when they were ill. Other local women depended on their husbands for healthcare. During my visit, the government health insurance cards that were issued to some of the accused women had expired and had not been renewed yet. Those whose cards were still active complained that the insurance did not cover some of the medicines they needed when they visited the clinic and they had to struggle to get them. This problem was, however, not unique to the accused women; it was a general complaint for all subscribers to the national health insurance.

In Gambaga, the accused women told me that the Presbyterian Church sometimes helped them with healthcare-related costs, although this was not guaranteed (see Chapter 4). Magazia Saanpoaga told me about the sad case of the late Magazia Hawa, who failed to get the necessary attention from locals when she was diagnosed with diabetes. “She was very old and sick for a long time. Nobody cared. Her people were not here. We, those around her, tried our best but she was not getting better”, Magazia Saanpoaga lamented. When Magazia Hawa’s illness became critical, the Presbyterian Church arranged for her to be sent to the BMC in Nalerigu where she died.

Like Magazia Saanpoaga, many of the accused women in Poagnyaankura fonju and other settlements had more faith in traditional therapies than in modern biomedicine. In his study of Dagomba’s ambivalence to modern biomedicine, medical anthropologist Bernhard Bierlich (2000: 706) showed that many locals refused injections for specific diseases such as *jogu* (sic - *yoyu*) because they wrongly translated this word into English as “anthrax”. Some locals mistrusted western medicine, preferring traditional remedies that involved ancestors. According to Magazia Saanpoaga, Magazia Hawa might still be alive if she had received better indigenous treatment but because she did not have a husband to arrange this, she had passed on. Unlike other local women, many of the accused women did not have access to local treatment. Most of the women did not have husbands or the kinds of kin that could stand in for husbands, such as lineage elders and heads of extended families (see Chapter 2), to take up such treatment responsibilities. In their current state of *kurginsim* (old age), the neglect by locals in times of illness was a cause of worry to Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women.

A few days after my arrival in Nabuli, one of the accused women, Damu, fell ill. The illness worsened day by day. Her friends in the settlement contributed some money and bought medicine in a local drugstore, but she refused to take it. Damu’s friend told me that Damu had no faith in the ability of the medicine to cure her because her late husband had always treated

her with traditional medicine. When I suggested to the *assambleman* that Damu be taken to the nearest clinic, he replied that there was no money. I agreed to pay for the transport but Damu said she would not go. Damu agreed to see local herbalists but refused treatment in a hospital. She told her friends to send word to her kinsmen about her illness. Like every other accused woman, Damu dreamed of dying in her natal community, not in a foreign land. The Nabuli chief sent an emissary to inform Damu's people to come and help with the treatment. Her kinsmen were delayed and Damu's condition worsened. Locals arranged to take Damu home where she died the next day. Damu's case was pathetic, but not unique. The *magazia* of the accused women in Nabuli told me that Damu's case was just one of the many they had witnessed in the past few years. One of Damu's friends said that although she had pain and suffering during her sickness, she died with dignity. In these villages, locals maintained that it was better to die and be buried by kinsmen in one's own natal village than in a foreign land.

During my fieldwork, locals told me that there had been many instances when accused women died in the host communities because their kinsmen refused or delayed coming for them when they were critically ill. In all these settlements, locals explained that accused women were not treated differently when they died. Villagers might fear them and be suspicious about their activities when they were still alive, but they did not fear their dead bodies. Locals did not consider the accused women's corpses to be imbued with anything (spiritually) special. In all the host communities, villagers buried accused women's corpses in the same cemetery where other locals were buried. According to Magazia Saanpoaga, when an accused woman died, her corpse was buried in the host community in line with the religious faith of the deceased when she was alive. In Gambaga, Reverend Duru, the longest serving official with the local Presbyterian Church who had an intimate working relationship with Poagnyaankura fonngu, explained how death was handled when one of the accused women passed on,

The Presbyterian Church buries those accused witches who die and are Christians, especially if family members are reluctant or delay in coming for the body. After the burial, we will hold a church service for the deceased. If the person is a Muslim, the Muslim community will also handle the burial process in line with Islamic requirements. Usually, after burial, the family members come to take the funeral home to perform. When Magazia Hawa died here, we buried her the Christian way and held prayers for her. But later the family also came and took the funeral home and performed.

Since it was culturally abhorrent in my research area to exhume dead bodies after burial, kinsmen who arrived after the burial of their dead kinsman/woman could not retrieve the

corpse. They could however take the funeral home and perform even if the host community had already performed some preliminary funerary activities. Since *kuli vobu* (taking funeral home) was an essential and required customary practice among people in my research area, people who died outside their natal homes often had their funerals concluded in their natal villages.

While accused women in my research area struggled enormously with getting access to healthcare and food because these resources were traditionally controlled by husbands and lineage heads, accused male witches seemed to have an easier time of it. By virtue of their gender, the *tindana* and other local household heads often gave male witches access to cultivable land. During my research, Gnani-Tindang was the only accused's settlement that accommodated both *sonima* (female witches) and *bukpahinima* (male witches). Here, male accused witches often had access to land for both building and farming purposes. Three of the accused *bukpahinima* I interacted with told me that they not only secured access to land for building purposes, but they had also been given arable land by the host community when they arrived in the village. The men who had been granted these lands were not accused witches. They only relocated to the host community with their accused wives. But since women could not customarily own arable lands in this society, villagers sublet portions of their lands to these men to help them farm and take care of their families.

During my fieldwork, I encountered only one case in Gnani-Tindang where my interlocutor, Wunpini (a male accused witch), had not been given land yet. It transpired that he had recently moved to the settlement after family members had accused him of killing his rich sister with witchcraft. As a recent arrivee, he had been struggling and lived off the magnanimity of the *tindana* and his family. Wunpini talked about his current struggles surviving in the community,

I did not come here with any property. I have nothing here. But my colleagues have chickens and guinea fowls. They have land for farming. I came here not long ago. Because of that I don't have any farm. But chief [*tindana*] has promised to give me land to grow my own crops. I don't even have accommodation on my own. I live with chief in his compound. I work on his farm. I often accompany him to the farm to weed. He also gives me food to eat. When I need cola nuts, I go and tell him and he gives me. Every market day, he gives me GHc5 [\$1.05] to buy whatever I like. He is a great man. He treats me like his family member.

Two days before I completed fieldwork in Gnani-Tindang, Wunpini hinted that he would be travelling to his home town, Gaa, to attend a funeral of a friend who had recently passed away. Friends from his hometown who had come to Gnani market had told him the news. Driven by curiosity, I asked Wunpini if it was safe to visit a village where he had been banished because of the broken trust between himself and the locals there. He responded,

Why not? I can always visit home as many times as I wish. There will only be a problem if they see me come to resettle permanently. They may protest. But if I am just going for a funeral they cannot deny me. My colleagues [other accused witches] do go home for visits and nothing happens.

Like male accused witches, female accused witches could similarly visit their home towns for funerals, weddings and naming ceremonies. It emerged from my interactions with the accused people that they often spent less than a week when they visited home. Among my interlocutors in the accused women's settlements, Sumaya had stayed the longest. She stayed for six days when she visited home to check on her sick mother. But locals complained about her "long stay" in the village, thus necessitating her return to the settlement. As she explained, "I initially planned to stay for two weeks, but I didn't get the chance".

Creating social networks

In the absence of their husbands and other kin-based relations, the accused women relied on different forms of social network to access community resources such as land. Some of them had benefitted from the social networks they had established with villagers through the "help" they provided on local farms. Most villagers referred to such labour not as work or employment but as "help"; a term that depended on more than just exchanging money for time/labour and that implicated social relations based on morality. Village life was smoothed over by this moral economy of *songsim*. It was this moral economy that acted as a glue to local relations; *songsim* depended not only on good deeds but on reciprocity and trust among locals. Relationships built on *songsim* were considered good and desirable and therefore of high social utility, whereas relationships of worker-employer had less social utilitarian value.

One important way by which social networks was created was through the initiation and development of affinal relationships between accused witches and locals. As was the case with Magazia Saanpoaga and Magazia Safia, many of the accused women had brought their

own daughters or, more commonly, grand-daughters, to live with them and to support them in their old age. Locals dated these girls and many of these liaisons resulted in marriages. Once married, the young women moved out of the accused women's settlements and into their husbands' compounds. This spatial move created both economic and social opportunities to the young women's mothers and grandmothers who stayed behind in the accused women's section. Dating and marriages also imposed the obligation of *songsim* on locals towards their new in-laws who were once simply strangers or accused women towards which they had few obligations. Accused women's daughters who got married to locals created opportunities for their mothers to receive *songsim* from locals. Mothers-in-law who were once stigmatised and socially ostracised thus became part of the web of local families and could expect the same amount of respect as other mothers-in-law in the area. Mothers-in-law expected their new sons-in-law to occasionally visit and offer "greetings". According to one of the accused women,

When your son-law is coming to greet you, he doesn't come with empty hands. As a local you [referring to me] are aware that when sons-in-law come to greet their mothers-in-law they bring something in addition to the greetings. In my case I get both money and food from my son-in-law. During harvesting time, he gives me plenty corn and yam because he knows I am old now. I can't do any hard work again.

During my fieldwork in Gnani-Tindang, I met Somua, an accused woman who had fled from Saboba to seek protection from the local *tindana*. She initially arrived in Tindang with her 5-year old grand-daughter. Later, her daughter, Kpanjo, joined them to care for her mother as the grand-daughter was too young to work. Unable to access land for farming, Somua requested GHc200 (\$42) from her younger brother to start a cola nut business. On one market day, while Kpanjo was assisting her mother to sell in the market, a local man came to buy cola. He proposed love to Kpanjo and the two started dating. They got married a year later and Kpanjo moved to the husband's house. Kpanjo's husband was regarded by villagers as one of the most successful people in the community. He was a well-known yam farmer, owned a motorbike, married three wives (including Kpanjo) and had about ten cattle with a Fulani³⁵ friend in another village. Somua quickly benefitted from this union. Kpanjo's husband gave her a piece of land on which she farmed many crops including okra, peanuts and maize. Somua also developed good relationships with her daughter's in-laws and visited them every week.

³⁵ The Fulani people were pastoralists from neighbouring countries who had settled in rural communities and usually accepted cattle from locals for safe-keeping.

She also participated in most of the social and economic activities that took place in Kpanjo's husband's house. Somua explained her integration into her in-laws' family,

I now have family here. Kpanjo's husband and her people are my family. It is just that I don't live in the same house with them, but I am part of them. Whenever they have something important I go to help them. Sometimes they call me to come and help them to sow their crops. During harvesting time, they also call me to help. I help them to fetch water and even go to the bush to fetch firewood for them if there is any occasion there, like funeral or naming ceremony. Less than a year ago, Kpanjo's husband's junior brother did a wedding. I was there to provide help. Kpanjo's husband occasionally comes to greet me and see how I am doing.

During our conversation, Somua told me that she did not experience any stigmatisation from the people of Gnani. She quickly added that this was not the case when she first arrived. She remembered the first encounter she had with locals when she went to the river to fetch water. A boy who stood among his friends on the river-bank pointed at her and called his friends to note the "new witch" in their village. The group laughed and said many rude things about Somua. Although Somua was offended, she ignored them and pretended she did not hear the gossip or see their rudeness. It was particularly painful because they were only children and before she was accused, this kind of thing would never have happened. Children were taught to respect their elders. Somua knew then that she was no longer an elder or an adult worthy of respect.

Somua was among the very few accused women who had access to arable land through affinal networks. This access allowed her to become independent and to produce food for her household. She was better off compared to other accused women and her neighbours could count on her *songsim* when they did not have food. Like other landowners or women who had access to land, she occasionally asked some of her neighbours in the accused women's settlement to help out with the sowing and harvesting of her plot of land and paid them a portion of the harvest. In the accused women's settlements, mutual exchange between the "poor" and the "rich" was a common practice among the women. Although Somua was relatively wealthy, she accepted food from friends and neighbours who cared to share with her food brought to them by their relatives. As she told me, "one doesn't reject gifts from friends even if you are wealthy".

The practice of creating social networks with locals to access vital local resources such as land was germane to all host communities. In Kpatinga, Hindu got access to her farmland

when one of her daughters who had accompanied her to Tindaanzhee married a local farmer. Hindu's son-in-law granted her access to a tract of cultivable land, but she found it difficult to manage the farm once her daughter had moved to her matrimonial home. At the time of my fieldwork, Hindu was living with a young girl, Afi, whom she had brought from her origin village as a foster child. Hindu told me that Afi was dating a "useless" man in the village against her wishes. She described the man as a prolific drunkard who would only ruin the future of her child, although she admitted that Afi's suitor had donated food to her and occasionally provided labour on her farm. Afi was not enrolled in school and often roamed around with her friends after they had finished school. Hindu had complained to the *tindana* twice about Afi's relationship but the *tindana* replied that he had no coercive power to stop the relationship. However, he agreed to invite and talk to the man on Hindu's behalf.

In a few other cases, accused women had access to land not through affinal relationships, but through other social networks and connections. Some accused women had consistently worked for particular families for several years and had developed very intimate relations that allowed them to describe their relations with such homes as *mabihili* (family relations). In Kukuo, I met Amina, an accused woman, who had lived in the community for eight years. She headed a household with four dependents; one was her own son while the remaining three were grand-daughters. Unable to initially secure land, Amina had decided to work for Afa Baba, one of the local farmers and a close neighbour. During our conversation, Amina always referred to her labour for Afa Baba as *songsim*. "Throughout these years", she said, "I have only been providing *songsim* for him. Many times, he asked me to tell him how much he should pay me, but I always tell him that I can't charge because I'm helping". During our chat, Amina disclosed that she had continuously provided *songsim* for Afa Baba and his wife, Abiba, until she decided to request a piece of land in her fourth year, which was granted. Amina told me that she grew many crops on her farmland: peanuts, maize, okra, and pepper. However, she still provided *songsim* for Afa Baba's family. In Kukuo, Amina and other accused women usually worked farmlands alone while in Gambaga the accused women worked in groups. Unlike the *gambarana*, Kukuo's *tindana* wielded less power and locals did not have to request his permission before asking the accused women to work their farms.

During my visit to Kukuo, Amina had become fully involved in Afa Baba's family affairs although they lived separately. Amina became a very close friend to Abiba. Abiba now asked Amina to accompany her to funerals and naming ceremonies. They also visited the *moyuni* (bush) together to fetch firewood. The intimacy between the two was inexplicable to

villagers. What had initially started as mere *songsim* had developed into what Amina described as *mabihili*. But now a suspicion had begun to emerge from villagers concerning the relationship between Abiba and Amina. People in the village had two theories about this relationship. In one account, my local assistant suggested that villagers had suspected Abiba of being a witch although she could not be brought before the local shrine for testing and cleansing since no community member had openly accused her or challenged her powers. Her relationship with Amina was therefore explained in terms of Amina's possible "reinfection" with witchcraft and her influence on Abiba. My assistant insisted that other locals were only suspicious, not afraid, of Amina's "reinfection". As my local assistant told me, "she [Amina] can't use the *sotim* [witchcraft power] even if she re-acquires it. Since she has been cleansed, the shrine will strike her dead if she attempts to use it to harm". Regarding the second account, a community elder in Kukuo told me that locals had been gossiping that Afa Baba and Amina were engaged in an amorous relationship and that Afa Baba was hiding their sexual affairs from Abiba. In the week that I was supposed to conclude my fieldwork in Kukuo, Amina travelled to her home town to visit her family. I had the opportunity to engage Abiba in a conversation about her family's relationship with Amina. She did not confirm villagers' speculations. She was aware that Amina often joked and played with her husband, but she merely attributed it to their longstanding relationship that had been established because of the *songsim* that Amina had provided for her family.

Amina was not alone in terms of her alleged involvement in sexual relationships. In Gnani-Tindang, my interlocutors mentioned cases where male accused witches fell in love with local women. Here, I met Wunpini (an accused witch) who lived without his wife. He disclosed that his wife, who was barren, had refused to follow him to this settlement when he was accused of witchcraft. Wunpini had threatened his wife with divorce when she refused to move with him, but she replied that the divorce was long overdue and attributed her infertility to the "work" (witchcraft) of Wunpini. Wunpini told me that he had an intention of marrying a new wife in Gnani but could not tell when this would happen as he did not have enough resources to support it. I personally doubted if Wunpini could get a lover in an environment where everybody knew about his moral crime. I did not hide my doubt from him. But Wumpini told me about two cases where accused men in the community had succeeded in marrying locals. My local assistant in Gnani agreed that cases of intermarriage between local women and accused men existed. He explained that "sometimes some family members are not happy about the marriage, but it still happens especially if they love each other so much".

Making a living

Magazia Safia was the leader of the accused women in Gnani-Tindang when I visited the settlement for fieldwork. Magazia Safia, like most other accused women, had farmed in her original community and could provide food for her own household while her trade in shea-butter oil supplied extra money. She told me that when she first arrived in Gnani-Tindang, she was still strong and was determined to continue farming. However, her expectations were not realised because it was difficult to obtain arable land from the *tindana* while her lack of social connection with other locals closed off that avenue too. She told me that,

When I arrived here, the *tindana* received me well. He allocated a small place for my people to build a house for me, but I didn't have a land to produce my own crops. The *tindana* and his family fed me during my initial days here and I worked for them. But I couldn't continue to rely solely on them for my livelihood. So, I had to continue with my shea-butter business which I used to do at home. I have done this business here for many years. But I have now stopped. As you can see, I am old now. My grand-daughters who are with me here have now taken up the business.

At Kpatinga, when I asked the local *tindana* why the accused women could not have access to land for farming, he told me that,

They come here for protection, to save their lives from the anger of their own people. They are not here to acquire land. If it's about livelihood, the work is there for them to do. Many community people call them to come and help them to do their work. And when they go to help they don't leave them like that. They give them food. You may think they don't have anything, but for some of them if you go into their rooms you will find bags of maize and other crops packed there. If they don't have money they fetch some of these crops and go to the market on market day to sell. Sometimes I personally get *songsim* from them. Some of them bring food to me at home. But I don't force them to do this. They do it because of the way I relate with them.

Without access to land, many accused women had to turn to other sources of income. Magazia Safia produced her shea-butter from the shea-nuts she often fetched from the *moyuni*. She was, however, not the only producer. She competed with other accused women and locals in Gnani. Magazia Safia did not keep proper records of her business activities. Although she told me that she could mention all her creditors and debtors off head, she could not tell me how much she sold on daily or weekly basis. She told me that she often made the most sales on market days. But this trade in shea-nuts was a secondary occupation for Magazia Safia. She

derived her livelihood largely by working other people's farms. By working for locals during the farming season, the accused women were paid in maize, sorghum, peanuts or rice which they could cook and reserve the leftovers for the dry season. They could also sell off part of their food reserves to earn income from which they could meet other basic needs such as healthcare and clothing.

As was the case in other parts of Dagbambaland, in my research area arable land was not sold and unless you were related or married to a land owner, you could not access land (see Chapter 2). This meant that no matter how long an accused woman spent in a host community or how much money she saved, it was not possible to buy arable land.

In Poagnyaankura fonɲu, for example, I encountered a 35-year old mother, Salamatu, who had fled her hometown, Yunyoo, to Gambaga. She arrived in Gambaga barely three months before my fieldwork visit. The *gambarana* had initially placed Salamatu in the care of Magazia Saanpoaga in whose room she had been sleeping since her arrival. Although relatively new in Poagnyaankura fonɲu, Salamatu told me that she had approached the *gambarana* for a piece of cultivable land since she felt she was “strong enough” to own and work a farm. She was, however, not successful in her request as the *gambarana* told her to do as other accused women did, that is, to provide farm labour for locals. Salamatu was constrained in terms of earning a livelihood. She had fled her home without even taking a bowl with her.

Unlike Poagnyaankura fonɲu where I had met relatively “wealthy” accused witches who had enough to eat and who had enough money to save in *susu*, and to invest in grain speculation, the accused women in Leli-dabari were much poorer. Many of them told me that they were not included as beneficiaries of the LEAP programme and that they had to resort to collecting leftover food from the market, especially on Gushegu market days. In Gushegu and Nabuli, the accused women often went to the market with their bowls and brooms and watched to see what food dropped to the ground as traders busily engaged in the sale and purchase of food crops. The accused women swept together the leftover grain, usually corn, and brought it home. No village women did the same. With the help of their children and grand-daughters, the accused women sieved out the debris, cleaned the corn with a bowl of water and cooked it for household consumption. When I met Godia, an accused witch, in Leli-dabari, she was in her 70s but had no child or grandchild living with her. She gave birth to six children, but all had died before their fifth birthday, the reason she was accused and banished to Leli-dabari. She depended largely on the food she collected from the market floor. As she explained,

I feed on this leftover food from the market. But it is not even enough for me. That alone cannot make me survive. So, what I sometimes do is that I help my colleagues and they give me food when they cook. If one of them has peanuts to crack, I go and bring some to my room and crack. After helping them that way, they also help me with food.

In Nabuli, the accused women were as poor as those in Leli-dabari. In both settlements, the women's children and grandchildren were not enrolled in school. In Leli-dabari, I often saw the accused women's grandchildren sit under trees outside the compound to play in the soil. This stood in stark contrast with prevailing conditions in Gushegu town where local parents had enrolled their children in school. The conditions at Leli-dabari were also different from Poagnyaankura fonṅu in Gambaga where I usually saw the *poagnyaankura*'s grandchildren dressed up for school every morning during school week. When I mentioned to Awam the striking differences I had observed between the *poagnyaankura* in Gambaga and those in other accused women's settlements, she explained that the Gambaga "camp" was nationally and internationally more popular than the others and that its inhabitants were lucky in terms of the *songsim* they received from organisations and individual tourists who visited the settlement (see Chapter 4). In Kpatinga, the accused women seemed to be relatively poorer than those in Gambaga but appeared wealthier compared to their counterparts in Nabuli and Leli-dabari. At the time of my research, many of the accused women in Kpatinga (Tindaanzhee) had not been placed on the LEAP programme although many received constant support from kinsmen back home, compared to many of their counterparts in Nabuli and Leli-dabari who seldomly received *songsim* from family members. During fieldwork, many of my interlocutors could not explain why in some accused women's settlements many accused witches continued to receive support from kinsmen, while in other settlements a few got similar support. However, an elder in Kpatinga explained this to me,

In most cases, those who are directly accused by family members don't get support from them any longer. The family abandons them. But if the accusation came not from a family member, the accused witch will still have the support of her family. They won't leave her to face difficulties. They will still give her food. The family will even try to see if they can bring her back.

Everyday life of the "witches"

In Poagnyaankura fonṅu, while interacting with Mariama, an assistant to Magazia Saanpoaga, she told me that, *kpe ti ka sheli niṅ da* (literally "here we have nothing do"). This was not

exactly true. The accused women had a lot to do even when there was no farm work. Mariama and Napaga lived together (see Chapter 1). Mariama did not have any dependents living with her, while Napaga shared a room with her only grand-daughter who was too young (about 6 years old) to work. On a normal day, Mariama and Napaga, like other accused women, woke up early in the morning to start the day's activities; much of it involved cleaning their compound. They did not have a formal timetable for cleaning the house but whoever woke up first, swept the compound. They washed the bowls which they had left the previous night after supper. Each then went out to fetch water to fill the containers they had emptied the previous day. Unlike Tindaanzhee (Kpatinga) and Leli-dabari (Gushegu) where World Vision and the Catholic Church, respectively, provided separate boreholes for the accused women, in other places such as Kukuo, the accused women and other villagers fetched water from the same sources as other villagers. In Kukuo, both the accused women and locals trekked about three kilometres to the Oti river to fetch water. Unlike Mariam and Napaga, most of the inhabitants (like Magazia Saanpoaga) had dependents working for them and did not do petty household chores such as sweeping and dish washing.

After cleaning their compounds and filling their pots with water, the women then started cooking their breakfast which consisted of *koko* (maize porridge). Sometimes they simply warmed the previous night's leftovers. Before leaving for the farms in the morning, the women routinely visited their neighbours to check on their health and to greet them. Although other local women greeted their neighbours, they mostly limited "greetings" to household members. Mariama and Napaga told me that by visiting neighbours in their compounds to "greet", they could find out who was sick and needed attention from them. They often referred serious illness to the *gambarana* or the Presbyterian Church GO Home project staff.

It was not compulsory to greet neighbours and no sanctions were applied if this was not done. But the women explained their daily rounds of greetings in terms of "respect" for each other and as part of *songsim*. Napaga told me that to greet a neighbour was considered as *songsim*. Greetings helped to strengthen social ties and forged economic cooperation since one could not borrow from a neighbour if one failed to frequently greet them.

After the usual greetings, the women left for the farms. In the rainy season, the accused women in the settlements often left their homes at 8:30 am to work on the farms. Like other local women, they often carried empty head-pans (with which they carried firewood and fruits

when returning from the farms) and moved in groups. They chatted and laughed among themselves as they headed to the farms.

In these villages, a day's work was divided into two main sessions. The first part covered the morning time till noon. Locals went home to pray and rest at mid-day, mostly after *azafari* (Muslim mid-day prayers), while the accused women often stayed on to work the farms. The second session usually started after *lahasari* (afternoon Muslim prayer) when locals joined the accused women on the fields to continue the day's work. The second cycle ended at dusk, and I sometimes saw the accused women returning from the farms after dark, carrying head-pans full of firewood.

Mariama and Napaga worked longer hours than other local women who only accompanied their husbands and family members to the fields and often returned before afternoon. Mariama told me that,

They [other local women] can go home and rest if they feel a bit tired, knowing that their husbands are there to work and bring food home. They can even decide to rest at home without going to the farm again, especially after they are done with sowing. They only wait for harvesting time and then they go again to help. But after sowing, we still work every day on the farms until harvesting time. We don't have rest days unless we are ill.

The accused women chose to work through the mid-day break because they needed to impress the villagers that had taken them on. No one wanted to be known as a slacker. The women explained that they needed to provide for their families and that they couldn't rely on husbands as other village women did. Technically, however, the women knew that they could refuse to work for locals, but such a decision would have dire livelihood consequences. Mariama and Napaga, like other accused women, only denied themselves rest by working harder than other local women because they wanted to fill the livelihood gap that had been created as a result of the absence of their husbands and other kinsmen who could provide support.

In Poagnyaankura fonju, when Magazia Saanpoaga and other *poagnyaankura* had come to rest after a day's work, they usually sat in groups of two, three or more to discuss many issues. They discussed issues that transpired at the farm, the activities that they had carried out at the market the previous market day, planned visits to their home villages or what happened during their last visits. They never discussed witchcraft. Neither did they accuse other

inhabitants of the settlement of witchcraft. During her research in Gambaga in the 1960s and 1990s, Drucker-Brown (1993: 533) observed that to publicly “mention witchcraft was to admit an interest” and therefore “the subject was not to be mentioned casually”. During my visit to Gambaga, it appeared that locals’ perception regarding public talk about witchcraft had not changed since Drucker-Brown’s research.

Songsim

During our conversations, Magazia Saanpoaga kept referring to the word *songsim* whenever she needed to explain any philanthropic relationship between the host community or NGOs and the accused women. Through my interactions with Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women, it became clear to me that the notion of *songsim* was very central to everyday life and moral economy of the accused women. It permeated all aspects of their social and economic lives. Roger Blench (2004: 161) translated *songsim* into English as help or helpfulness. Much like Blench, host communities generally used *songsim* to mean “support” or “assistance”. But the notion of *songsim* was as broad as its English equivalent “help”. The term did not always lend itself to a limited, monolithic usage. Although the idea of *songsim* was generically used among the Dagbamba to mean “help” or “assistance”, its everyday or ordinary meaning often changed in a context where the stain of witchcraft characterised relationships. The discourse of *songsim* characterised relationships in different contexts in the host communities: relationships between or among accused women, relationships between accused women and the *tindana*/chiefs, that between accused women and locals, the ones between accused women and kinsmen or friends from their original communities, and last but not least, relationships between the accused women and “caretaker” churches or NGOs.

In these local settlements, when *songsim* was used to describe exchange relationships between accused women, it took the meaning of real reciprocity in the sense used by anthropologists studying small-scale, face-to-face societies (Gouldner, 1960; Sahlins, 1972; Hann, 2006). In discussing exchange and reciprocity, many anthropologists (for example, Gregory, 1982; Sherry, 1983; Sahlins, 1997; Yan, 2005; Hann, 2018) have been influenced by Marcel Mauss's (1966) seminal work, *The Gift*. Far from conceiving the gift as “free”, Mauss emphasised that gift-giving was characterised by a trilogy of relationships: the urge to give, the will to receive and the inherent “spirit of the gift” to return it. To answer the question, “why are gifts reciprocated?”, Mauss turned to the *hau* (inherent spirit of the gift) and presented this

an explanation germane to all societies (see Sahlins, 1997: 71). Unlike Mauss who attributed the desire to reciprocate (i.e. return a gift) to the *hau*, Raymond Firth (1958: 421), quoted in Sahlins (1997: 75), argued that “the main emphasis of the fulfilment of [exchange] obligation lies... in social sanctions – the desire to continue useful relations, maintenance of prestige and power – which do not require any hypothesis of recondite beliefs to explain”. Like Firth, Malinowski underscores the significance of social factors in accounting for reciprocal exchanges rather than “dubious metaphysics” (Hann, 2006: 211). During fieldwork, I noticed that the main concern of every inhabitant in the accused women’s settlement was food security. Those who had enough to eat told me that there was no guarantee that one would not need any help from friends and neighbours. According to them, the uncertainty of what would happen in the future compelled exchange of gifts among the accused.

Accused women who were too old to work and who remained at home to shoo away animals that preyed on absent neighbour’s crops referred to this care as *songsim*. The absent neighbour also understood it as *songsim* and would offer *songsim* in the form of a bowl of cooked food in return. In Kukuo when I first met Humu, I was struck by the use of the word *namboyu* (pity), a catchword locals used to empathise with the accused women. Humu claimed to be 80 years old, was very wrinkled and spoke softly. She could barely do any work and spent her days sitting indoors and receiving greetings from neighbours who cared to check in on her. She lived with Rukayatu, who was also an accused witch. Rukayatu was in her early 50s and was still strong enough to work. Unable to work, Humu always remained at home to look after Rukayatu’s property when she went to work. On her return, Rukayatu shared her food with Humu which she used to supplement the support she received occasionally from her son back home. Occasionally, Humu borrowed money from Rukayatu and promised to pay it back when her son would send money from home. Rukayatu knew that Humu often fulfilled her promises. Although lent items were meant to be returned, among the accused women, as among locals, *pangbu* (lending) was considered by both parties (lender and borrower) as *songsim* since not everybody was willing to lend their property. This kind of real reciprocity governed the relationship between Humu and Rukayatu who understood their own situation as different from other locals and recognised the fact that they had been morally compromised. In this sense, *songsim* worked between Humu and Rukayatu in the same sense it worked when ordinary community members dealt with each other.

In Gambaga, Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women acknowledged the critical protective role the *gambarana* performed in their everyday lives. They were thankful that the

gambarana had accepted to accommodate them in their morally compromised status when their own community people and kinsmen had rejected them. By placing the accused women under the spiritual protection of his ancestors and the physical guard of his family (see Chapter 3), the *gambarana* had asserted his “ownership” over the women. Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women in Poagnyaankura fonju recognised the *gambarana*’s protection as *songsim* and therefore felt indebted to him. In gratitude, they accepted to work for him and his family. Like Poagnyaankura fonju, similar practices held in other witch settlements. In all these places, the accused women were placed under the daily protection of the *tindaamba* and felt “owned” by them. Therefore, rather than assuming that the accused worked for the *tindana* for free, the accused interpreted their labour as a “thank you” homage to the *tindana* for his protection.

By resorting to the moral discourse of *songsim*, locals accepted accused women into their homes to work for them. But *songsim* also created mutual dependencies; while locals relied on the accused women for labour, the accused also got food from locals. For the accused women, unlike other local women, to get food to eat meant that locals had asked them to provide *songsim* on their farms and other domestic projects. But the women accepted less pay for their labour than a local unaccused person would charge because they needed the money and locals knew that they were compromised. For their part, the locals were taking a risk in accepting the women into their midst. Given that abundant labour was available in these settlements, locals who needed extra hands chose to work with accused women who accepted the unwritten conditions associated with the customised meaning of *songsim*. Accused women who were privileged to be invited to provide *songsim* to locals considered themselves “lucky” since that meant security against hunger. In Gambaga, one of the accused women, Susana, framed the labour request from locals this way: “community members help us to get *tuma* [jobs or work] by inviting us to come and help work on their farms. We go to assist them sow and harvest their crops and they also help us by giving us food”. Given their vulnerability and desperation for food, most of the accused women often accepted any compensation locals offered for their work.

When locals asked the accused women to work for them, they [locals] referred to it as *songsim* even though they knew that they had to remunerate the women for their work. Similarly, the accused women talked about their work as *songsim* although they expected compensation either in cash or in other material forms such as food. To not pay or to refuse to give the women food could strain relationships. Such relationship strains occurred more in villages such as Kpatinga, Gushegu and Nabuli where local authorities sited the accused

women's settlements at the outskirts of the communities. This was so because in these communities, interactions between accused women and other villagers were limited due to the geographical distance involved, compared to other places such as Kukuo where the accused women's houses were interspersed with locals' homes, thus blurring geographical distinctions. The limited interactions brought about by geographical distance resulted in loose relationships which could easily break down with the smallest amount of disaffection.

Host communities were often quite ambivalent about the "witches" in their midst. While they accepted that their local *tindana* had the power to cleanse people, this did not completely allay their fears that they were dealing with dangerous people. By accommodating the accused women in their communities, locals had agreed to take risks that other communities refused to take. The locals in these towns were well aware of this and regarded their magnanimous accommodation as *songsim* to the accused women. Knowing that they would not be welcome in other communities, the accused women recognised this special kind of *songsim* on the part of the locals. The moral stain the women carried had patterned exchange relationships in favour of the locals. Accused women therefore worked for locals and accepted compensations that were often defined by what locals could afford rather than the amount of work the women had done or the local rates for such labour. In Gambaga, Gushegu and Kpatinga, some of the accused women claimed that they preferred to work for wages and to negotiate their payments before committing to work on someone's else farms. In Gambaga, for example, Mariama mentioned that locals could pay GHc5 (\$1.05) per day for her labour when other community members who spent similar amounts of time on farms could earn twice that amount. In Nabuli, the accused women told me that locals paid them GHc4 (\$0.84) per day for their labour against the local going rate of GHc6 (\$1.26).

As morally compromised strangers, the accused women knew that the notion of *songsim* applied differently to them and they had accepted it. There were instances where accused women had protested when they were not compensated for their work or when they were offered very paltry sums. In a few cases, such protests broke down relationships between the accused witches and locals. During fieldwork in Nabuli, Kelija, an accused woman, talked about how her relationship with one of the local women had broken down. The woman had gone to the village's accused women's settlement to buy charcoal where she met Kelija. She asked Kelija's *songsim* to produce *dam* (locally made alcoholic beer) which she intended to sell in the market. After the help, the woman reciprocated by giving Kelija some food that she had cooked. The next day, Kelija went back to "greet" the woman. According to Kelija,

“greeting” was the subtlest way of reminding the woman that she was still indebted to her. After four days when Kelija received no signal that the woman would pay her, she openly complained to the woman. When the woman was still reluctant to provide compensation, Kelija reported the matter to the woman’s husband who settled the debt by giving her some money. Although this happened before my visit to Nabuli, the two still harboured some bitterness against one another and Kelija had vowed never to work for any of the woman’s family members. Kelija told me that although both had initially understood the relationship as *songsim*, “but to give me only food to eat after working for her from morning till afternoon was not nice. I thought she would know and do the right thing”.

Like Kelija’s case, in Kpatinga, one of the accused women, Salmong, had severed a relationship with one of the local men who owned a store. Salmong had always passed in front of the man’s house on her way to the market. One day, while she was on her way home from the market, the man gave her sugar worth Fifty Ghana pesewas (GHc0.50), equivalent to \$0.10. According to Salmong, this initiated a relationship that signalled that the two could enlist each other’s *songsim*. Two weeks after the man’s *songsim*, he invited Salmong to *soɲ* (help) harvest his sorghum. Salmong had expected that the man would give her a portion of the harvest or money. However, she was disappointed when the man compensated her three-day work on the farm with only a bowl of sugar, worth GHc10 (\$2). When Salmong complained, the man promised to do something about it but never did. It took the intervention of the *tindana* to get some of the harvest for Salmong. Salmong felt that her remuneration was not commensurate with the amount of work she did. She felt cheated because other locals would have been remunerated much better. During my fieldwork, Salmong told me that their relationship had broken down, and she now felt uncomfortable passing in front of the man’s house to go to the market. The man had stopped responding to her greetings. Feeling insecure, Salmong changed her route to the market to follow a longer one that would avoid any direct contact with the man.

But witchcraft not only restructured the notion of *songsim* in the social and economic relationships between accused women and locals, it also defined the kind of *songsim* that existed between NGOs and churches on the one hand and accused women on the other. In Gambaga, Reverend Duru and some members of the Presbyterian Church I interviewed all accepted the reality of witchcraft (see Chapter 4). But they also believed that the accused women were socially and economically vulnerable and therefore needed both material and spiritual support. Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women in Poagnyaankura fonɲu acknowledged the Presbyterian Church’s support as *songsim* borne out of their morally

compromised status since other locals did not get similar support from the Church. In gratitude to the Church for its *songsim*, most of the accused women accepted Christianity. By providing *songsim* to the accused women, the Presbyterian Church had also made attendance to church compulsory for them on Sundays. During my conversation with Gambaga's chief imam, he bemoaned the failure of the Muslim community to offer *songsim* to the *poagnyaankura*. He, like many local interlocutors, attributed the high visibility of Christianity in Poagnyaankura fonju to the *songsim* the Presbyterian Church had been providing over the years.

Unlike the churches, the notion of *songsim* worked differently with regards to NGOs such as ActionAid, Louis Dreyfus, Songtaba and World Vision International (see Chapter 4) since they did not acknowledge the reality of witchcraft. They saw the accused women as poor victims who were wrongly and ignorantly accused of witchcraft resulting in violations of their rights. Conceived this way, "Development then is the answer, in the form of education and development assistance" (Crampton, 2013: 203). By providing *songsim* to the accused women – donating food and chickens, renovating compounds, supplying water, providing skills training and educating them about their rights – NGOs expected very little in return from the accused women. This was simply a one-way giving relationship (cf. Hunt, 2005) that required of the women to be grateful recipients, not equal participants (fellow Christians). If NGOs, such as ActionAid, expected something from the accused women, it was their cooperation in the implementation of the reintegration project which ActionAid had initiated (see Chapter 4).

Besides the ways in which the idea of witchcraft weighted obligations and relationships between accused women and locals, and between them and NGOs or churches, the reality of witchcraft also redefined social and exchange relationships that existed between accused women and their kinsmen who paid them visits. Although many accused women still received visits from relatives back home, some had complained that relatives had abandoned them. During my interviews with some of the accused women, I noticed that they were unhappy and worried (but not surprised) about the decision of some relatives to withdraw their *songsim* from them. Since the accused women knew that their accusations had rendered them moral criminals to society, they did not expect the social and economic ties with their families to remain as they were before their accusation and banishment.

During my research in Kpatinga, Jahama, an elderly accused woman, told me that she had cursed her own son who abandoned her to go and live in Accra after she was accused and banished from her village. She lamented in a very emotional tone,

All the small things [gifts] I used to receive from him have stopped. He is in Accra. I don't know what he is doing there. He doesn't send anything to me again. He thinks I will harm him if he shares things with me. He has joined the people to tag me as a witch. I have nothing to tell him, but God will pay him back.

Jahama was accused by her own husband for allegedly killing their first son with witchcraft. Apparently, the only surviving son had suspected that the mother would turn her witchcraft on him. This necessitated his migration to the south of the country and his decision to permanently cut any *songsim* he had previously given to the mother. Although the son's behaviour angered Jahama, she was not surprised about it since she concluded that the son was acting on the orders of her husband who had himself refused to pay her a visit since she was banished and had also withdrawn any material support he had hitherto provided.

Contrary to Jahama's case, elderly people were generally accorded much respect because of their age and the wisdom. In Africa generally, and Ghana in particular, the word "old" engendered positive feelings and thoughts (van der Geest, 2002). In his study of the Kwahu of Ghana, anthropologist Sjaak van der Geest (2002: 438) noted that "Old age is regarded as a stage of life in which people reach their full potential, since they have acquired wisdom and experience and are able to guide the young to success in life". Because of these positive attributes, elderly people in Ghanaian society were not only respected and honoured by the young, but they were also said to "enjoy considerable social and political power" (van der Geest, 2002: 438). By virtue of her accusation as a witch, Jahama had lost all the positive attributes and feelings associated with old age. The termination of greetings and gifts by Jahama's son and other relatives was the expensive price she paid for practising witchcraft in a society where it was considered the most grievous crime.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ordinary, everyday lives of the accused witches in northern Ghana. Convicted of witchcraft by their own villages, the accused persons arrived in the accused people's settlements to begin life afresh as strangers; life bereft of immediate companionship and the support of their husbands for most of the women. Many of the accused women who initially arrived traumatised acclimatised and became conversant with the dynamics of everyday life in the "camps". They claimed to live unproblematic lives in the host

villages, but their real everyday encounters with locals were characterised by social and economic markers that drew clear boundaries of autochthony and belonging. Thus, while accused people were theoretically free to move about in the village, in practical terms they were hedged in with unspoken local restrictions and internalised fears. Their seeming acclimatisation to community life masked daily inconveniences and suspicions that undergirded normal life. Knowing that they had been accused of witchcraft and living with the moral stain it had left on them induced vulnerabilities and fear in the accused women. They feared the chief, *tindana* and other locals' talk about their movements, especially if their walks at night or unsolicited attendance of village occasions coincided with accidents in the village. Knowing that they would be the first to be accused, these fears were enough to constrain the accused women's behaviours, movements and activities, and confine them to their own world – the world of accused women's settlements.

As the stories of Magazia Saanpoaga and other accused women showed, to get caught in witchcraft accusations did not only mean the suspension of their right to live in their original communities, it also marked a regime of inclusion and exclusion in the social and economic lives of the communities that hosted them. Unlike other locals, the accused people could not attain the status of a native through long inhabitation, which meant that they were constrained in their inability to secure arable lands for subsistence farming, the principal source of livelihoods in the economies of the host communities. Accused women could, however, enter the local social worlds as mothers-in-law through their foster children and grandchildren which made it possible to access arable land and other community resources in an environment where such access would otherwise be difficult.

As morally compromised strangers with few livelihood options and limited possibilities for integration into the social and economic lives of host villages, the accused participated in the moral and social worlds of these communities by invoking the local notion of *songsim*. However, *songsim* was never value-free in the way it manifested in the day to day lives of the accused women. Its meaning was plain in exchange relationships that were not tainted by witchcraft accusations (such as among accused women); in these relationships, *songsim* simply referred to mutual help between equal individuals. In situations where witchcraft had been proven, its moral stain defined relationships with people who had not been compromised, thus such as between locals and accused women. In these cases, *songsim* worked differently and delineated the accused women as morally compromised strangers. In these cases, the returns on *songsim* were weighted in favour of locals who accepted the risks of allowing known but

supposedly deactivated witches to live in their midst. The accused accepted this “tax” on their economic and social relations with villagers as the price they still paid for their identification as witches. Although many of these accused people pleaded their innocence to these moral crimes, they had resigned themselves to the impossibility of escaping their naming as witches.

In the next chapter, the concluding part of this thesis, I attempt to synthesise the main ideas and arguments in the preceding chapters.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

As Isak Niehaus (2001: 1) pointed out, the “study of witchcraft has always been a staple topic in anthropology”. Its disciplinary essence and epistemological roots are traceable to the seminal works of founding scholars of the discipline including Frazer (1914), Boas (1932), Radcliffe-Brown (1939), Malinowski (1922), Evans-Pritchard (1937) and Mauss (1950). Since the early part of the 20th century, anthropological work on witchcraft has aimed to undermine perceptions that the belief in the reality of witchcraft was irrational and that only the “primitives” could hold such beliefs. Evans-Pritchard (1937; 1976) famously argued that Azande notion of witchcraft is incompatible with western ways of thought, although he disagreed with previous assertions or notions that sought to suggest that witchcraft was prelogical and irrational. He suggested that witchcraft made sense in Azande social life and that “Zande belief in witchcraft in no way contradicts empirical knowledge of cause and effect” (Evans-Pritchard, 1976: 25). While much of the early work on witchcraft was written from a structural-functionalist perspective, anthropologists in 1980s and 1990s began to focus on “modern” trends in the global world and their interface with the “local” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1993; Geschiere, 1997). Anthropologists working on Africa in particular showed that contemporary witchcraft was part and parcel of modernity and that it undergirded talk and explanations about politics, sociality, health and economics (see Drucker-Brown, 1993; Englund, 1996; Geschiere, 1997; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999).

However, many scholars soon noted the problematic way in which “modernity” was being bandied about as a single-strand identity (Appadurai, 1996; Moore & Sanders, 2001). They emphasised that identity was a multiplex issue and that it offered a platform from which to analyse and understand an issue in several ways. As Englund (1994: 259) concurred, “modernity is simply lived in different ways in different places”. Local matters are constantly suffused with global institutions and practices in ways that made some anthropologists insist that we can only talk about “glocalised” contexts (Robertson, 1994).

This study was undertaken in such a context – where the local met the global in many senses (cf. Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999). Until the 1990s, many of the accused women’s settlements in northern Ghana were confined to local areas where the accused witches co-existed with ritual specialists or earth priests (*tindana*), village chiefs and locals, with little interaction with churches, NGOs, human rights movements and governmental agencies. The

post-1990 era, however, saw different forms of interaction between these once-secluded accused women's settlements and a wider world as NGOs and churches started to focus their humanitarian projects on and consolidated their presence in these settlements. The increased humanitarian attention paid to these settlements could largely be attributed to the sensational media reporting on witch hunts in the north and the scandals of women being kept in "camps".

In academic circles, Drucker-Brown (1993) studied Gambaga's "witches' village" in the early 1990s before the many churches, NGOs and human rights movements and government agencies became involved. In the same region, MacGaffey (2013) concentrated on the history and drum chant of the Dagbamba, the dynamics of political succession and the roles of chiefs and *tindaamba* (earth priests) in Dagbambaland generally, as well as the political nuances of land administration and management that historically involved chiefs and *tindaamba*. However, his work remained silent on the media's "witch camps". This thesis is about these so-called "witch camps", and six in particular: Poagnyaankura fonɲu, Leli-dabari, Tindaanzhee, Kukuo, Nabuli and Gnani-Tindang. And unlike many studies that focus on witchcraft as a meta-level discourse to explain political or economic forces (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1993; Geschiere, 1997; Niehaus, 2001; Siegel, 2005) or that focus on victims of witchcraft (Ashforth, 2000; Niehaus, 2010a; 2013; Adinkrah, 2015), this thesis looks at the ordinary lives of people who have been accused and found guilty of practising witchcraft.

Domestic-level structural forces

Dagbamba and Konkomba women held less social and economic power than their men. As local customs demanded, the possession, appropriation and use of arable lands, the bedrock of local livelihoods, were vested in men or more specifically in husbands as heads of families. These men did not just have rights but were also responsible for a household's *moni* (food provided by a household head), healthcare and, more importantly, for protection against any form of harassment and violence which locals imagined to be an ever-present threat. Their absence or death had serious repercussions for women in such households who were exposed to witchcraft gossip and accusations (as was the case with Godia, see Chapter 4) but who also faced disinheritance (illustrated by Magazia Awabu's case, see Chapter 2). Such vulnerabilities were ineluctably connected with notions of intimacy and trust as well as with the structural tensions that existed at the so-called house level.

A number of anthropologists have noted the tense and unstable relationships that often characterised the “the web of kinship” (Fortes, 1949) or “the house” (Geschiere, 1997) in African contexts. Peter Geschiere (1997, 2013) suggested that within Africa, “the house” was an oxymoronic space that incorporated notions of solidarity, peace, wellbeing and trust, but also danger and threat. The intimacy of the family which should ideally provide protection and safety for members of the kin group was ironically often compromised and used to betray kin to outsiders (Geschiere, 2013). Geschiere (2013: xix) then explains kinship “not as a biological given but as an eminently social notion”. In my research area, we can make similar observations about witchcraft and “the house” with reference to polygynous nature of families and other household structural forces among the Dagbamba among whom I did fieldwork. Their patrilineal and polygynous systems, and the fact they favoured the extended family system of residence, coupled with joint and rotational cooking arrangements, had some structural repercussions for women regarding witchcraft rumours and accusations. The system of primogeniture which largely characterised Dagbamba families brought about envy and instigated intense competition among co-wives who strove to push their children in terms of both inheritance and succession to political offices. Locals explained such ambition as a zero-sum game in which the ascendance of one person necessarily meant harm to another. These structural forces negatively impacted on women as they were always the victims of witchcraft accusations associated with such practices. It was therefore unsurprising that during my fieldwork, five of the six accused women’s settlements – Poagnyaankura fonju, Kukuo, Tindaanzhee, Leli-dabari, Nabuli – were all inhabited exclusively by women.

While the people in my research area largely conceived of witchcraft as originating from the intimacy of the family, it was not handled as a family affair. On the contrary, witchcraft accusations and suspicions were handled as community affairs since locals understood it as a threat to an entire village’s social order (see Chapter 2: 61). Witchcraft was the most anti-social act imaginable and showed the absolute moral corruption of those who were accused. For this reason, accused (and proven) witches needed to be banished to protect the group. Banished women often tried to break off relations with kin who had suspected or accused them, but sometimes their husbands and children joined them in fleeing in order to protect their intimate conjugal relationships and to continue to offer protection and support their loved ones.

Once locals regarded *nanima* (chiefs) as principal purveyors of community’s social order, their presence in every village was crucial not only for counteracting the nocturnal

activities of witches to main the existing order but also for helping to mediate village witchcraft cases. Since the Dagbamba conceived their *nanima* as having unlimited powers as owners of the earth and all that inhabited it, the *nanima* exercised unlimited powers at the community level within their areas of jurisdiction. This made it possible to ban any persons whose actions they considered as threat or sabotage to the prevailing village social order, including women accused of witchcraft.

The fact that both the Dagbamba and Konkomba lay legitimate claims to arable lands through family and lineage affiliation also implied that women who were banished to other communities because of witchcraft accusations lost access to the use of any arable land since they lived in the host villages as “strangers” without any genealogical connections to the locals. The combined effects of the absence of husbands and kin and their lack of access to arable land (for female accused) reduced the accused women to “labourers” who earned a large part of their livelihoods by working for local landowners (*tindana*, chief and villagers). Besides the lack of land ownership, the fact that the accused lost their original identity as elderly women who once commanded great respect, and now assumed a master status as society’s prototypical moral criminals unleashed structural, psychological violence on the women. This psychological trauma burdened social life and restricted sociality in host villages even though the accused claimed to live in peace with the host community.

Intimacy led to witchcraft accusations against the weak in society. Women whose husbands died were often vulnerable to accusations, while co-wives who were juniors also rebelled against the privileged status of senior wives by using witchcraft against the latter’s children who were older and better placed to benefit from existing rules regarding primogeniture. Witchcraft accusations led to situations where the accused lost attachment or connection to kinsmen. Consequently, such accusations radically altered newly formed households or families in the host villages where women, against custom, became heads of households. This also resulted in situations where daughters and grand-daughters (and sometimes husbands) moved to join the accused in a place where they were stained by their association with accused women. In the face of such accusations and distrust, the accused turned to new relationships that they made with locals in host communities through marriages and friendships (see Chapter 5: 171-174). But since the accused were already proven guilty of witchcraft, as intimacy with new relations grew and strains or tensions began to emerge, witchcraft accusations rose to the fore (as the case of Mama showed, see Chapter 5: 161). In the face of witchcraft accusations, it was necessary to maintain social distance in order to

restore and preserve social order in the host community, but also to protect the accused from any harm. But as society attempted to create and maintain this distance, the accused faced emotional hardships of not having support and love.

Witchcraft and the *tindana*'s intercession

In my research area *tim* was a subtext to normal life; it was necessary to support the smooth functioning of society and in the wrong hands caused untold harm. The Dagbamba instituted a whole ritual system of shrines (*buya*, sing. *buyli*), managed by the *tindana* to contain the maleficent use of *tim* such as *sotali* (witchcraft) which they recognised as an enormous source of spiritual insecurity. At these specialised shrines, hereditary *tindana*, empowered by their lineage ancestors, tested for the presence and use of *sotali* and cleansed convicted witches of their dark powers. It was the *tindana*'s privileged status as owner of anti-witchcraft medicine and principal agent of the shrine that empowered him to commit the dark powers of convicted witches to the control of shrine ancestors such that they could never use any witchcraft powers which they might reacquire; shrine ancestors killed those who were recalcitrant. While almost every Dagbamba village had a shrine to ensure good rains and fat harvests, success in education and business, fecundity, and to treat illnesses, very few of them specialised in stomach cleansing rituals. Although the Dagbamba had other ritual figures that dealt with issues of witchcraft such as the *jinwara* (witch-finder and healer), *buyli* was considered the most powerful oracle that could cleanse convicted individuals.

Since the people in my research area believed in the efficacy of the powers of the *buyli*, locals in host communities readily accepted accused and convicted women who visited the *buyli* to “wash” their dark powers (*sotim*) believed to be in their stomachs. However, the fact that some locals believed that a witch could hide her powers in the bush on her way to the *buyli* and could retrieve it on her way back home after the cleansing rituals made it extremely difficult for them to fully trust the cleansed witches in their midst. Others were also quite unsure about the feasibility of completely cleansing or “washing” the accused individuals’ stomachs of witchcraft. For them, witchcraft was an ability that once learnt, was difficult to unlearn because a person’s moral being determined their willingness to learn in the first place. Washing could not change this special attribute. This apprehension was often conveyed through the popular Dagbani expression, *ba’yinyaa bi tibri kpang di zaa*, which literally meant a mad dog is never completely healed. Locals, however, took solace in the *tindana*'s assurance that shrine

ancestors were always on standby to strike dead cleansed persons who returned to their old ways.

Since much ambiguity existed around witchcraft and since people seldom talked about it (Drucker-Brown, 1993), people in my research area viewed witchcraft with much apprehension and anxiety. In communities where there was no local *buyli* to deal with witchcraft, locals sent accused people to shrines where the accused could be tested. Once found guilty, these people were expelled, even if they had been “washed”. It appeared, then, that some locals in the sending communities did not trust the powers of the far-away *tindana*, or that they found it very difficult to forget the anti-social acts or moral compromises that these people had committed. This made it hard to trust them in intimate settings.

Once banished, the accused had only a handful of places where they could turn to. Many chose to stay in these settlements that had sprung up around the *buyli* that specialised in witchcraft. In these settlements, the accused women became the *tindana*’s metaphorical wives. As a husband, the *tindana* always provided protection and (sometimes) food, and thus held an important place in the lives of the accused women. Although locals in many of these host villages considered his secular position to be subordinate to the village chief, the *tindana*’s ritual roles were quite unique and could not be usurped by the village chief. While both the *tindana* and the accused women lived on a land officially recognised as “belonging” to the village chief, the women owed their allegiance, first, to the *tindana*, and second, to any others. Without his ritual intercession, the accused women could not be granted permanent residence in the host villages. In his absence or death, villagers would rather send away a fleeing witch seeking clemency than take on a dangerous, morally compromised figure who had the potential of threatening the community social order. The protective role of the *tindana* became manifest in Nabuli where the villagers (including the chief) refused to accept new “witches” who fled to the community for shelter and protection because the *tindana* had died and no replacement had been made (see Chapter 2: 74). It was in this sense that the absence of a *tindana* constituted a huge threat to host villages, but also to “confined” accused individuals whose physical, spiritual and even psychological protection lay with him. Unlike the women, accused men who lived in these settlements were never conceived of as the *tindana*’s metaphorical “wives” since the idea or practice of same-sex marriage was unknown to locals in my research area. These men only provided labour to the *tindana* whenever he needed their help and were more readily thought of as “slaves” of the *buyli*.

To understand the social and economic relationships that existed between the *tindana* and the accused people living in his custody was impossible without an understanding of his ritual and spiritual significance in the women's and the host villages' lives. It was the *tindana*'s monopoly over shrine rituals and his intercessory role in committing the protection of the accused witches to the spiritual dominion of the ancestors that marked him as the most valuable village personality for the accused women, and for which reason they felt eternally indebted to him as a "husband" and a "father".

Far from being an explanatory metaphor for social, political and economic circumstances in my research area, witchcraft was a lived reality. Accusations undermined trust and social cohesion, but witch-testing and identification was also insufficient for the maintenance of social order. Only the intervention of the *tindana* could, to a large extent, restore locals' trusts and make co-existence possible.

Government and NGOs: the rationality paradigm

The influx of NGOs and state agencies in the so-called "witch camps" brought together different actors whose focus centred almost exclusively on issues of human rights and justice. Among these actors, witchcraft accusations were seen as simply not true and masked the violence of patriarchy (Parpart, 1995; Sultana, 2012), the cruelty of unfeeling families and the plight of society's most vulnerable. These organisations needed the cooperation of both the *tindana* and the accused women to undertake their missions, often with the goal to close the "camps" and to reintegrate the women into their origin villages. However, in attempting to realise this, these agencies brought their own views of the world to their interventions; worldviews that excluded the possibility of *tim* or the intercession of ancestors. NGOs such as Songtaba and ActionAid and state institutions (such as CHRAJ) were focused on attaining one cardinal objective; reintegrating the accused women into their original villages. In promoting and pursuing this agenda, these organisations failed to consider the concerns and interests of villagers; that witchcraft was real, and that to avert threats to the social order, the distance (both social and geographical) between accused witches and villagers needed to be widened.

It was clear that NGOs such as ActionAid and some government agencies (notably CHRAJ) had adopted a rationalist perspective on the "camps". For ActionAid and other rights-minded organisations, it was a case of human rights abuse to keep innocent women confined to local spaces and that sensitisation could help erase "traditional" and unscientific beliefs

locals held about witchcraft and banishment. Humanitarianism and human rights concerns provoked ActionAid's/government's intervention in the "camps" which informed the idea to form the Regional Reintegration Committee (RRC) that led the course of sensitisation and reintegration, and closure of the "camps".

In anthropology, a number of scholars have shown how amorphous, contested and problematic the notion of "human rights" is (Englund, 2006; Goodale, 2009; Dembour, 2010; Hoover, 2012). But also how ubiquitous. In this regard, Englund (2000: 579) suggests that for all the political and economic related "modernity" projects that have been introduced to sub-Saharan Africa and which the sub-region has made efforts to achieve, "one appears to have rooted itself in society with particular success. It is the willingness and ability to claim rights". Joe Hoover (2012: 233) noted that "the central tension of human rights is that they propagate a universal and singular human identity on a fragmented political world" – that is, a world made up of many modernities. Hoover (2012: 237) emphasises that human rights are made, not divinely proclaimed and to start with this premise, then, "is to be sceptical of metaphysical deductions of moral norms". While attributing anthropology's marginalisation in the historical development of human rights theory and practice to the discipline's ontological relativist outlook, Mark Goodale (2009: 111) argues that the project of human rights should be vernacularised in the practice of everyday life and that it should be motivated by a "commitment to plural approaches". Englund (2000: 579) similarly calls for relativism and appeals for caution in our approach to issues of human rights when working in specific cultural environments. Rather than advocating a complete rejection of the human rights grand narrative, Englund (2000: 579) calls for a "situational use of different moral ideas".

Few anthropologists worked for ActionAid Ghana, Songtaba or the government and it was clear that these organisations allowed little room for different cultural interventions and moral ideas about witchcraft.

During my fieldwork, these human rights-based organisations had created a local market that supplied local graduates with much-needed jobs. While NGO bosses stayed in Tamale and other big cities, they relied heavily on these graduates to implement their programmes in the "camps". At a personal level, Madam Mashina of ActionAid and other local employees acknowledged the reality of witchcraft and knew that villagers' concerns about the return of known witches to their villages were not baseless. Like me (see Chapter 1: 1-2), many of these NGO workers have experienced witchcraft at close quarters and knew family

members, friends and villagers who had been accused and banished. However, in meetings and interactions with their bosses at ActionAid and Songtaba who maintained a disbelieving attitude towards witchcraft, these young men and women remained silent when their employers described witchcraft accusations as “a convenient excuse for the cruel treatment of women who are poor, excluded, different, or seen to be challenging the status quo...[and] also stem from a lack of recognition or treatment for mental health issues” (ActionAid, 2012: 3, 8). They also stayed silent when “witch camps” were described as “a cruel manifestation of gender inequality and violence against women in Ghana, as well as a denial of the rights of the women and girls who live there” (ActionAid, 2012: 3, 8).

Since local employees, like Madam Mashina, had accepted to work for ActionAid and other rights-conscious organisations, they had to agree with the vision and values of these institutions. In a country where many people decried the level of unemployment and where white-collar jobs were very difficult to get, Mashina and other local employees could not risk losing the well-paying jobs that they had secured. These local employees occupied positions of subservience. It was therefore difficult to express dissenting views regarding local understanding of NGOs’ empowerment of witches and their reintegration into society. Although the local employees actively participated in sensitisation programmes regarding reintegration, they were acutely aware that such undertakings were unsustainable since locals’ ideas about witchcraft and intimacy (or banishment) were strong.

By conflating all discourses and epistemologies around the accused women and their settlements into a human rights agenda, and by designating these local spaces as “camps” containing “bare lives” (Agamben, 1998), NGOs such as ActionAid overlooked the local ways in which these spaces became another “form of life” (Agamben, 2013; Fassin, Wilhelm-Solomon & Segatti, 2017). Interestingly, these new forms of life implied enormous generosity from precisely those people whom the NGOs framed as the accused’s jailors – people who knew that witchcraft was real and who risked the dangers of its unpredictability to provide outcasts with a safe space. Far from the NGOs’ and other civil society’s perception of the accused people’s work on the *tindana*’s farms as exploitation, both the accused people and locals saw the *tindana*’s work as one of enormous magnanimity without which the accused stood the chance of been killed or harmed by sending communities.

Christian churches and witchcraft

In contrast to the secular NGOs and government stances to northern Ghana's "witch camps", all the Christian churches I engaged with maintained that evil existed in the world but not all agreed on the guilt of the accused people in the "witch camps". Some churches acknowledged the possibility that people could bewitch others with the help of satanic forces. Other churches insisted that this was just a local idiom for evil, while yet others saw witchcraft accusations as a sign of incomplete conversion to Christianity. Contrary to the official stance of ActionAid, Songtaba and other development and human rights NGOs, all the Christian churches I engaged with maintained that witchcraft was real although they exhibited different attitudes in terms of how they viewed what was bluntly called "witchcraft".

In Gnani and Gushegu, while the Catholics told me that witchcraft was real, they did not directly refer to it as "witchcraft" and instead spoke of it as "the work of the Devil" or "Satan". Notwithstanding their belief in the work of the devil, the Catholic Church did not carry out any exorcisms to deliver accused witches from their predicament. The Catholic fathers did not undertake any violent exorcisms because they believed that the accused women were like any other persons in society who could be influenced by the Devil to sin and act in anti-social ways. And unlike other Christians who demanded more spiritual work from the accused, the Catholics asserted that the accused only needed to pray to overcome their predicaments. Beyond the exhortation to attend church on Sundays, the Catholic Church did not place any difficult injunctions on the accused women.

Unlike the Catholics, the local Presbyterians spoke of witchcraft as the wilful evil actions of morally compromised people. Situating witchcraft in the sinful actions of individuals, the church's remedy was for the accused to accept Jesus Christ as their saviour in order to achieve salvation. They were much more serious about witchcraft than the Catholics and were insistent on compulsory attendance at worship and prayer sessions, especially on Sundays. In Gambaga, a member of the local Presbyterian GO Home project, Mr. Luuri, told me that, "Here we worship with the women on Wednesdays and Sundays. Whether you are a Muslim or Christian, attendance to worship is compulsory for you". The Presbyterian Church insisted on more intimate relationships between the church and the accused women. Because of the Church's emphasis on intimate relationships with Christ, it paid more attention to Bible

studies and group prayer activities, which its Department of Mission and Evangelism³⁶ was supposed to promote. This led to a more consolidated presence of the church in the “camp” through the establishment of an office for the church’s GO Home project whose activities included Bible studies and prayer sessions with the accused women.

However, while the local Presbyterians recognised the reality of witchcraft, its donor, the Presbyterian Church of Canada had maintained a somewhat ambivalent posture, framing the women as victims, and calling for the promotion of their dignity. They, thus, invested huge resources in the reintegration of the accused women. On its website (see Presbyterian Church Canada, 2012), the Presbyterian Church of Canada made their position on witchcraft manifest,

Though we often think of development in simple concrete terms, dignity and respect for human rights are essential components of sustainable development. By working with the communities to overcome the prejudices that lead to accusations of witchcraft, the women involved in the Gambaga Go Home project are enabled to return home, reclaim their dignity and feel valued by their communities.

The Reverend pastor and members of the local Shalom Baptist Church in Tarikpaa believed in the reality of witchcraft and always encouraged the accused women to accept Christ. While the Catholics did not blame the accused person but insisted that he or she acted on the influence of the Devil, the Baptists thought that the women made a pact with evil forces to bewitch others. To right this wrong, they needed to take responsibility for their actions and ask forgiveness from God/Jesus.

The Baptists were preoccupied with offering food to the accused women whom it regarded as deprived, needy and “fatherless”, a reference to their godless state. Interested in their spiritual well-being, the Church spent a lot of time on preaching and prayers.

In the main, the general idea of the Christian community in relation to the “camps” was the need to provide in the basic needs of the accused witches such as food and clothing to reduce their vulnerability, but also to provide a platform for worship to meet their spiritual needs. All actors in the “camps” - NGOs, churches, government and even members of the host community - agreed that the women needed help and livelihood support. Nonetheless, an

³⁶ The Department of Mission and Evangelism was one of the six main departments of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana whose functions included the following: “Encourage and guide the Bible Study and Prayer Group” (see <https://pcgonline.org/departments-of-mission-and-evangelism/>)

important difference existed between NGOs (such as ActionAid) and churches regarding their conception or interpretation of witchcraft (which determined the type of intervention). The key difference between the NGOs and churches was that the former dismissed the reality of witchcraft and saw it merely as a mask for power relations and exploitation, or as a result of poor education. This was the reason why ActionAid, Songtaba and other rights-conscious organisations turned to universal types of solution: education and teaching on human rights.

Churches, on the other hand, knew that evil existed in the world but disagreed about whether the people living in the “witch camps” were evil or had done evil. Some, like the Catholics, believed that the women were no more sinful than others and that they would find succour in the body of Christ (attending church, being part of a community of fellow Christians). Others, such as the Baptist and the Presbyterians, believed that the women had sinned and that they needed to “wash” themselves of this stain by confessing their moral misdeeds and by accepting Jesus as their saviour. This required a long period of introspection and strong “belief”.

Despite the various shades of intervention made in the “witch camps”, some people were suspicious about the work of Christian churches in an area that had traditionally been Muslim, arguing that the churches were targeting vulnerable communities or populations who would more readily convert because they had become so dependent on the material help that churches provided. But like the NGOs who dismissed the reality of witchcraft, such sceptics overlooked the deep convictions that motivated Christian churches to fight evil in the “camps”, to extend Christian brotherhood to those in need and to offer hope of salvation after life.

In contrast to the benevolent churches, Muslim organisations did not participate in “camp” activities. The lack of organised support for the accused people from the Muslim community was the main concern for the Muslims who thought that Christian intervention worked to their disadvantage. However, some Muslim earth priests (*tindaamba*) fully participated in the “camps” activities. For instance, since Islam was so clear about what was forbidden, local Muslims (including the *tindaamba*) who inhabited a world that was filled with other forces not prescribed in the Koran or other sources of Islamic law, had created parallel institutions to deal with those forces. These local Muslims explained these institutions and actions not in terms of religion but as everyday human actions that had nothing to do with worship but with the maintenance of social relations.

Referencing witchcraft in ordinary life

In my research area, witchcraft accusations impacted hugely on everyday interactions between family members, villagers and lineages. And unlike in other places in Africa where witchcraft accusations often led to violent deaths, here they led to severed family relationships, banishment and the setting up of witches' settlements next to village anti-witchcraft shrines or *buya*. In these places, accused people had to adjust to being strangers in a host village, living with morally compromised others and dealing with the shame of a loss of status and identity. But despite such losses and adjustments, there was social life beyond witchcraft accusations, and social relationships were largely defined or influenced by these accusations.

Several anthropologists have written about the implications of invoking witchcraft and the occult in everyday life (see Wilson, 1951; Evans-Pritchard, 1976; Favret-Saada, 1980; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999; Ashforth, 2000). Evans-Pritchard (1937) found among the Azande that witchcraft was not just a natural philosophy to explain the inexplicable, but it also constituted a system of values which helped to regulate conduct and relationships among people. According to him, witchcraft helped to explain human relationships and activities in a wide range of settings spanning domestic life, agriculture and hunting.

Monica Wilson (1951) argued that witchcraft accusations among the Nyakusa were essentially expressions of conflict and that such accusations were likely to increase if conflicts or tensions became acute in social relationships. Like Wilson, Max Marwick (1952) saw Cewa witchcraft as a "social strain-gauge" that marked or weighted tension points in everyday human relationships and thus helped in processes of social control. Victor Turner (1967) used the concept of "social drama" to illustrate how witchcraft accusations mirrored social processes and human relationships in the daily life of the Ndembu. Clyde Kluckhohn (1970) contended that the Navaho referenced witchcraft in everyday life to make sense of what was otherwise perplexing and disturbing to them, especially in their attempt to explain the dynamics of power relations among themselves. He argued that since Navaho society was both "familistic" and competitively "capitalistic", witchcraft was an idiom to explain immoral accumulation by the "powerful" and to level-off such power differentials (Kluckhohn, 1970: 255; cf. Kluckhohn, 1944).

Several decades after Kluckhohn's observation that the Navaho referenced witchcraft in their daily social life to express disgust about immoral accumulation and to level off power differentials, such arguments were regurgitated in post-1980 and 1990 (see Geschiere, 1997).

Although both Kluckhohn and Geschiere talked about immoral accumulation regarding witchcraft, they wrote from different standpoints; that is, Kluckhohn, unlike Geschiere, saw society as a closed system and wrote from a typical functionalist perspective. In this contemporary literature, Geschiere (1997: 16) conceived witchcraft or the occult as a metaphor that is used to explain power and wealth relationships through both its “levelling” and “accumulative” forces. In his study of witchcraft in Cameroon, Geschiere (1997) argued that the “weak” essentially relied on the power of witchcraft to level out inequalities that existed between them and their wealthy kinsmen or other powerful elites in society. That is, through the idiom of witchcraft, they questioned the moral basis of the privileged positions of the powerful and unusually wealthy “big men” in society.

The central argument in this thesis relates to the patterns of exchange with locals and other actors that characterised the ordinary life of accused witches. Witchcraft accusations certainly marked some important social and economic consequences for people accused and convicted of witchcraft who lived in accused women’s settlements. The first consequence the convicted witches encountered was enormous upheaval: loss of home, identity, family, relationships. Being accused as a witch was anathema to social life. The shame and loss of respect and identity that accompanied these convictions and banishments were enough to reconfigure social and economic relations in fundamental ways. For the most part, the loss of identity and family relationships resulted in hardships in the new place. Life was constrained by the fact that the accused were viewed as morally compromised strangers, not worthy of trust; anti-social, dubious and immoral. It was not simply a case that these morally compromised people were making a new life in a new geographical and social environment, but that this ontological reality disabled sociality and compromised relationships in ordinary life in ways that were very hard to overcome.

The consequences of accusations and banishments were most manifest in commodity or gift exchanges that took place through the local notion of *songsim*. Although *songsim* generally meant “help” or “assistance”, both locals and the accused appropriated this term to their mutual benefit and co-existence. In the host communities where I carried out my study, different social dynamics characterised gift-giving and other exchanges. Gift-giving and exchange relationships among the accused women were similar to those that governed relationships among locals and therefore conformed to normal patterns of exchange. Witchcraft accusations, however, played a key role in exchange processes between the *tindana* and locals on the one hand, and the accused women on the other hand. Since the accused witches were

confined to the custody of the *tindana* who agreed to take on the risk of witchcraft that others (including their kin) had rejected, the accused felt naturally indebted to him and his family and worked on his farm for free. Beyond the *tindana*, the accused people also had unequal exchange relationships with locals in the host communities. The accused often “helped” these locals on their farms, help that was often reciprocated with food, money and other material incentives (e.g. used clothes). While these exchange relationships were never equal, the accused often accepted the paltry compensation that was offered as price they paid for being “witches” and for being allowed to live in the village. By agreeing to live with dangerous social outcasts and morally compromised strangers who had nowhere else to go, locals effectively levied a labour tax on the accused. Neither of the parties explained their relationships in exploitative terms.

The accused women interpreted an invitation from locals to work on their farms and other domestic projects as *songsim* since it guaranteed access to food and money. Despite the very paltry gains that the accused often made from their labour, they received it with gratitude, knowing that their identity had been rebranded by the taint of witchcraft which deserved no mercy from society. Locals admitted that the presence of the accused in their villages was a great relief to them in terms of their work burden. The paltry rewards they received in exchange for their labour apparently informed locals’ perception of the women’s labour as *songsim*. It was the perceptions held by both the locals and the accused about local co-existence and the defining exigencies pertaining to such co-existence that patterned exchange relationships in ways described by rights-sensitive bodies such as CHRAJ and ActionAid as exploitation and as human rights violation.

The influence of accusations in patterning social relations and gift-giving or exchanges also manifested in the dynamics of relationships established between the accused women and Christian churches and NGOs that worked in these settlements. NGOs such as ActionAid, Songtaba and World Vision and government agencies described the existing local dynamics of *songsim* that existed between the accused people and locals as exploitative. Since NGOs did not believe in the reality of witchcraft and conceived of the women as victims of “ignorant beliefs”, they focused on education and liberation efforts. Beyond needing the cooperation of the accused women, NGOs required no material reciprocation on the part of the accused women. This marked the women as passive recipients of aid from these NGOs. The one-way transfers introduced enormously unequal power relations between the accused witches and NGOs such as ActionAid. In the context of such unequal power relations, ActionAid succeeded in forming groups, such as Tigbubtaba (see Chapter 4), for the accused women which sought

to promote ActionAid's reintegration agenda, although most of the accused I spoke to at the personal level rejected the reintegration idea.

Unlike NGOs, churches often required more from the accused women in terms of their commitment to the churches' activities. While all churches working with the accused were concerned about material deprivation in the "camps" and intervened to help the poor women in line with the Biblical exhortation of helping the needy, they demanded of the women to give their lives to Jesus Christ. While the Catholics accepted that the accused women sinned no more than other ordinary beings in society, they simply exhorted the accused to attend church services and participate in prayers, like other locals did. The Presbyterians who appeared to have taken the issue of witchcraft much more seriously demanded the women to commit their whole life to Christ and to accept him as the saviour by regularly attending church services, while the church also made participation in Sunday worship compulsory for all accused witches who received their aid (see Chapter 4: 133). Like the Presbyterians, the Baptists also demanded intimate relationship with Jesus Christ through regular prayer and worship with local Christian community.

Finally, witchcraft accusations and the banishment of accused women to the host villages also reconfigured the exchange patterns that once characterised relationships between the accused women and their "native" families back home. Some of the accused women who moved to the "camp" lost the companionship and material support of their kinsmen. Since many of the witchcraft accusations came from family members, these kinsmen avoided contact with the women by refusing to visit, while at the same time they withdrew the material support they once provided (as the case of Jahama vividly illustrates, see Chapter 5: 165-166). It was not simply that witchcraft accusations had disordered gift-giving relationships in these families, but that it had permanently destroyed all kinds of relationship in ways that were difficult to fathom; the end of trust in families (following witchcraft accusations) meant the end of all kinds of relationships and the possibility that an accused might spend the rest of her life away from the extended family. Those who were accused by non-kin and living in these settlements still maintained some positive relationships with kinsmen back home, but they could never go back to settle permanently on the invitation of their families if other villagers or village authorities did not agree. This was so because their dark deeds caused panic and constituted a social disorder to an entire village and not a particular family.

Post-witchcraft accusations intimacy for the accused was largely confined to other morally compromised people. In this sense, witchcraft was not underneath but very much named and out in the open. This situation led to a compromised sociality that required enormous generosity from the *tindana*, the locals and the accused, as well as the accusers (who did not kill their tormentors). This compromised sociality repatterned the dynamics of social life and reconfigured gift-relationships such that it was possible for all actors in the “camps” to interpret relationships in ways that conformed to their existing worldviews.

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