

Witchcraft, Violence and Mediation in Africa: A comparative study of Ghana and Cameroon

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Abstract

This thesis explores the question of how witchcraft-related violence may be best addressed through the discipline of political science. This comparative analysis seeks to investigate the effectiveness of four actors mediation efforts: the state, religious organizations, NGOs and traditional authorities. Based on an extensive inter-disciplinary literature review and fieldwork conducted in Ghana and Cameroon, this thesis views witchcraft as a form of power and through this analysis presents two inter-related conclusions. The first conclusion argues that no actor is currently able to successfully address witchcraft-related violence or reduce the sense of spiritual insecurity which is associated with violence due to logical constraints. This is seen primarily in the inability of the state, many religions and NGOs to acknowledge the reality of witchcraft or address experiences of witchcraft which reflect the needs of those seeking redress. Where actors may share these experiences or reality, as in the case of traditional authorities, their ability is often seen as being limited by or in conflict with other actors. The second conclusion addresses this conflict by framing the logics of witchcraft and contemporary liberalism, seen in the state and NGO interventions, as a site of contention and debate; one which not only affects witchcraft-related violence in West Africa, but which also contributes to the construction of this phenomenon in academia and international discourse.

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Chapter One – Introduction: Waking from the Fantasy of Western Reality

I was living in South La, a neighbourhood in Accra, Ghana, only feet away from the Gulf of Guinea. From my bedroom window, through steel bars and over a white wall topped with shards of green glass, broken beer bottles laid into the concrete, I could see the ocean. Behind the wall of the compound was a soccer field, dusty and pock marked, beyond that, a line of small houses, five of them, built out of recycled materials. From there, the shore fell steeply, at least five feet, onto a thin line of beach where refuse from the ocean rolled in and remained in long arcs. I rarely walked on the beach, a bit weary of the drove of pigs which could be found snuffling and snorting through the piles of waste.

This day I was walking on the beach looking for sea dollars or shells, something to bring home and decorate with. As I walked I noticed children playing on the beach, working on cartwheels and throwing stones into the waves. For the first time it struck me that I had not yet seen a child playing with sea shells or searching the sand as I was for a perfect, unbroken shell. After returning home to the compound where I lived, I asked a friend why these small marvels were ignored. I was immediately corrected. They aren't ignored, I was told, they are avoided. Sea shells are known to have contained curses and it may be that some still contain remnants of witchcraft. Children know from a young age to avoid sea shells at all cost.

The subject of witchcraft had always been on the periphery of my life and interests, from fairy tales to movies, TV and the adolescent phase of occult dabbling. However it had never become a consuming reality until I lived and worked in Osu, Accra, in 2008. A few months into my eight-month internship with the NGO HelpAge Ghana, I arrived at work to find the office in a tense silence around the radio. Isaac¹, the driver, Rebekah, the secretary, and Isaiah, the other project officer, were listening intently to the report as I approached. Unable to decipher the shouts and static, I asked for a summary of events so far. Isaiah pulled himself away from the yelling to explain: A man had been found to be cheating on his wife, who, in retaliation, went to a fetish priest and had the husband cursed and turned into a woman. The man was currently in a taxi at Danquah circle on his way to the hospital to be surgically returned to his proper manhood.

Intrigued, I drew a chair over and joined the huddle. However, after an hour of listening to the call-in reports of the people who were swarming the circle, hoping to glimpse the man/woman in what was now full and growing gridlock, consisting of details such as whether or not braids could be seen through the rear window (conflicting calls came in) and which taxi number people thought it was (unclear), I became less interested and hoped to get the day started. Unfortunately, the project I was working on required Isaiah's assistance. In trying to persuade him to move away from the radio, I was expressing a scepticism that was expected. Isaiah took me aside and explained that “things like this happen here”, I had to be understanding.

After five hours of waiting in the office, the accounts becoming less detailed and in my view, less credible, I left the office in a huff. If I wasn't going to work here, I might as well go home and get something else done. I began walking back through Osu towards South La, passing first the open market next door to my office. I looked over the low wall and noticed the mountains of tomatoes unattended, wooden stalls piled and alone. Where was everyone? I walked into the covered central area and found a crowd around the loudest radio. I walked further to the main road, which was nearly empty. A few taxis were on the side, doors open and radios blaring. All the way home, people could only be found in small groups, listening and discussing the event of the day. The city, as far as I could tell, had ground to a halt.

I arrived at my compound and for the first time in my life felt truly lost, unattached, isolated,

¹ I have used pseudonyms for these former co-workers.

singular and alone. This was not the first time I had encountered witchcraft in my work. Just a week earlier I had conducted a program evaluation survey with every Adopt-A-Gran recipient and met a bedridden and blind woman who had not been receiving her arranged meals. It took a few days to find the delivery boy who admitted that he was too afraid to bring the woman food because he thought she was a witch. In a few weeks' time, I would be travelling to the Northern Region to conduct an assessment of the witch camps² there. But somehow, this was just the work I was there to do; I hadn't reflected critically on myself, my role there and more ultimately, my complete disconnect from the reality being lived around me.

I was completely unprepared.

I had left Ottawa two weeks after being offered the position with HelpAge Ghana during an interview for a posting with HelpAge Canada. I had hoped to be working with isolated seniors in my own community, but without even thinking had jumped at the opportunity to work overseas. Before I left, I was aware of some of the witchcraft stories that had made international news over the years. When I was thirteen I read a report on the witch camps at my aunt and uncle's house in Thunder Bay. During my undergraduate studies at Concordia, I read Adam Ashforth's *Witchcraft, Violence and Democracy in South Africa* and was enthralled but allowed other work and interests to slowly crowd it out.

Even the experiences throughout my life; being given a tarot deck as a child (which I had with me in my room in South La); going to the psychic fair with my foster parents to have my past lives read; having friends who practised Wicca; and myself from a young age, being drawn to symbol and ritual and constructing little altars all over our apartment; nothing had prepared me for this. I realized I had never thought of magic, witchcraft, the occult, the supernatural, as a reality. I had been accustomed to its marginalized position in my life and society, playing with a passing interest and relying on doubt or running to scepticism when uncertainties arose. Now I found myself with nowhere to go. Witchcraft was the dominant reality and I was the alien.

I had so many questions: How could these realities be so separate? How do they coexist and through what mechanisms are they hierarchized? How is knowledge of these realities formed? What are the power relations underlying them? What is the relationship between witchcraft and the hegemonizing reality of Western modernity and the continuing imperial project to form the world in people's minds and imaginations? I had never considered my own society to be without supernatural beliefs³, however, I had also never considered a reality where supernatural beliefs dominate.

This is how my own obsession with witchcraft began.

Witchcraft, violence and mediation in sub-Saharan Africa

In the greater majority of the world, the threat of witchcraft is a daily reality, where people live within a state of spiritual insecurity, vulnerable to psychic attack from those around them. In a world of witches, the threat of harm cannot be limited by either time nor space. For those who live outside of the reality of witchcraft, this very real and contemporary phenomenon is most visible in reports of various

² Witch camps are a phenomenon which occur in many countries in West Africa. These camps are generally on the outskirts of a town or village which has been identified as a safe haven for accused witches. When an individual is accused of witchcraft in their home and subject to banishment or forced to flee for fear of torture or murder, they may travel to a known witch camp for protection.

³ As noted by Legare & Gelman (2008) "there is no society that we are aware of that wholly excludes supernatural beliefs. Even within highly educated, industrialized modern communities, at least some individuals endorse supernatural beliefs, ranging from God, to ghosts, to astrology" (608).

forms of witchcraft-related violence. From the public in South Africa, where students of a high school determined the source of their classmates emotional disturbances to be the work of witches and convened with their village elders to accuse two elderly women who were then set “ablaze on a sport ground” (Hedge 2007), to the private in Ghana, where 72 year-old Ama Hemmah was tortured and set on fire by a local pastor whose sister had invited Ama into her home (Ocloo 2010), violence against accused witches is prevalent across Africa. As is ritual murder, evidenced in the past years by news reports regarding albino murders in Tanzania and Burundi, highlighting the risk to albino children who are sold or kidnapped for use of their body parts, deemed to bring one luck (BBC 2009), or the raid on hospital in Nigeria where trafficked girls between the ages of 15 and 17 were imprisoned and impregnated to produce babies for sale for use in witchcraft rituals (BBC 2011).

Though such violence is often sensationalized in media and presented in terms and language which persuades us to view these acts as shocking or appalling, for those who live amongst witches, mob justice as it is called in Ghana, or jungle justice in Cameroon, is often viewed as the last defence against a world which is increasingly uncontrolled and uncontrollable. What is to be done with individuals who have themselves confessed to being witches? From the man who contested a court in Malawi defending his right not only to believe in and practice, but also teach witchcraft (Mponda 2011), to a woman in South Africa who claimed to have magically infected several community members with HIV and accurately predicted their deaths within three months' time (Petrus 2011), to children in the Democratic Republic of Congo who confess in great detail of having eaten human flesh and convened with witches (de Boeck 2009), the perception of danger is more complex than simple dismissal. Further, witchcraft-related violence is also multifaceted.

For example, in Ghana, witchcraft-related violence was frequently defined by respondents who participated in my field research as verbal or physical attacks against women and men who have been accused of witchcraft. However, some respondents also defined witchcraft-related violence as the act of attacking another through supernatural means, a definition which was consistently voiced in Cameroon. Individuals who live among witches, in interviews and in discussion, therefore present a dilemma in defining violence: What is violent and what is necessary and just retribution or protection? Acts which may seem to be violent to those outside the logic of witchcraft may be preventive or protective in nature. As well, violence was defined by some respondents in Ghana and Cameroon as being relevant only between human beings, which witches are not. The question can be extended to various forms of violence, including ritual murder, exorcisms and deliverance healing, witch cleansing and ordeals. In some instances, ritual murder was not seen a violent, but rather benign or beneficial, as it is assumed that the intention is not to cause the individual who is sacrificed harm, but to ensure productivity, where wealth generated by the act will benefit others' in the long run. In the case of ordeals, accused individuals may undergo torturous rituals in order to cleanse themselves of witchcraft power or of the stain of witchcraft accusation in order to reduce their own and others insecurity. Though many ordeals involve pain, the exaction of this is not seen as violent as it is applied first to a witch who after surviving the ordeals may again be considered part of human society.

An initial aim of this research project was to problematize the correlation made between witchcraft belief and violence and to investigate whether these two concepts are mutually constitutive. I began with the question of how can witchcraft-related violence be assessed in African contexts? From this first question I hoped to investigate the potential for mediating witchcraft-related violence. Unfortunately, as with every other aspect of the research, the complex and amorphous reality of witchcraft confounds any easy conclusion. Witches are driven to cause harm and do violence, therefore as long as they exist, violence will be bound to them. Yet, in many societies, there have been means to for mediating the threat of witchcraft attack which are non-violent, though some have been abandoned and others may prove to be irretrievable. Despite this, it remains one of the main focuses of this work:

to address the problematique of witchcraft-related violence in an effort to assess opportunities for addressing and mitigating spiritual insecurity towards reducing instances of witchcraft violence of all kinds.

As a political scientist, the second question that came to mind, was how witchcraft might be understood in terms of the political. Part of my reasoning behind this question was my interest and intent in taking the challenges put forth by Adam Ashforth (2005) and Dirk Kohnert (2007) seriously. These authors have both persuasively argued the need to understand witchcraft-related violence in respect to the political landscape of African states. In this approach, witchcraft is investigated as a fundamentally non-Western concept of power, which translates into a unique conception of the political, including the nature of morality, justice, the state and society. Overall, this investigation has led to me to conclude that the Western construction of witchcraft-related violence in Africa may be best understood as a continuation of the colonizing mission which sought to alter African realities. In this case, the Western perception of reality, dominated by modernity, the liberal state and capitalism, is in conflict for hegemonic status with the pervasive and elusive reality of witchcraft. Much as these paradigms continue to attempt to alter reality around the world, including the West, where plurality of thought and alternative perceptions of reality continues to exist and are also marginalized by liberal and state discourse. In terms of witchcraft, this focus reveals a discursive point of conflict where what is at stake is the most essential ability of Africans to imagine and perceive their own world.

Following this same path of critical reflection, the next question that came to mind was how political science understands witchcraft-related violence, witchcraft and, by extension, the African political landscape. Conversely, it was important to me to consider what were the possible impacts of witchcraft belief and witchcraft-related violence in African politics, from both the perspective of Western political science and from the logic of witchcraft itself. This approach to this subject, and in many ways, the subject itself, also sought to address and challenge many assumptions and limitations in political science theory. Throughout my work, I maintained a critical perspective towards theories which are applied in comparative politics when assessing political institutions and issues in Africa. The consistent theme across this analysis and my own conclusions focus on the limitations of political science theories in understanding realities which exist outside, alongside and within Western political conceptions of reality. Overall, following my previous conclusion, I have come to view this limitation as the final bastion of the Enlightenment project which propelled colonization, a process and project which is often viewed in the past tense. However, through this research I have been compelled to continue to investigate this power dynamic as witchcraft appears to be an incredibly resilient epistemology that challenges the hegemonic reality of the modern liberal capitalist state, which continues to seek to dominate the very ability to imagine reality and ultimately homogenize the imaginations of the world.

These conclusions reflect the analysis conducted of four main actors who seek to intervene in and address witchcraft-related violence. The state, NGOs, religious organizations and traditional authorities were assessed in their capacity to respond to the spiritual insecurity and violence associated with witchcraft. I argue that of these four actors, the state, NGOs and religious organizations are all unsuccessful in addressing witchcraft-related violence because they are made intolerant to the complexity of the problem by their own modern logic and embedded imperatives to conform the world to their version of reality. Traditional authorities, in my view, present the most potential for mediating and reducing witchcraft-related violence, however, these actors are limited by the modern institution of the state and further diminished by the modernist and individualizing discourses of NGOs and the most prominent religious organizations. As a consequence of this, I argue that there is no simple solution to witchcraft-related violence.

Instead of looking to individuals actors, my approach focuses on the role of power and the

power relations embedded in the discourses of these actors. Witchcraft here is understood as a form of power and the attempted interventions by other actors are analyzed in similar terms. On a more theoretical level, through this approach I argue that witchcraft reveals important and often ignored power relations, not only within societies, but also between them. For example, the very discourse of witchcraft-related violence as a problem which must be solved through outside intervention may be seen as a conflict of power, where the modern world seeks to assert its dominant view of reality over another. Therefore I argue that the discourse and actions of the state, NGOs and religious organizations towards witchcraft-related violence reveals witchcraft not as a problem, but as a point of entry for control, conformity and ultimately, the complete transformation of African realities.

Sub-Saharan Africa in Comparative Politics

Since beginning this project, I have been asked to justify the reasoning behind my researching witchcraft-related violence as a subject within political science. This is a question I frequently encounter within my university and received in the field. Though I will address this question in the following chapters, it is important to contextualize the subject of witchcraft-related violence within comparative politics. Though a small number of authors have considered the subject in their work (e.g. political scientists Bryceson, Jonsson & Sherrington 2010; and a number of anthropologists such as Green 2005; Niehaus 2001) looking at the usual subjects of comparative politics it is understandable that witchcraft appears to be out of place. In the study of the sub-Saharan region of Africa in particular, comparative politics focuses heavily on issues of the post-colony, including democratization, resource conflicts and the “resource curse”, ethnicity and identity conflicts and corruption. Understanding how the region is approached in comparative politics will allow for a greater understanding of how witchcraft and witchcraft-related violence fits into this field and underlies these issues. Most notably, this work will look critically at the construction and discourse of witchcraft in Africa as a “problem” in Western discourses, particularly those which seek to intervene through development and rights-based approaches. Therefore it is, in my view, important to provide an overview of the foundation of this approach to the region of Africa as a subject of study, one which is frequently dominated by a discourse of crisis, and in particular, a crisis of the state system.

A useful and thorough example of the discourse of Africa in crisis is found in Lyman's (2007) analysis, where the author presents a brief synopsis of the state of affairs from the perspective of American interests. Here Lyman begins noting that “Africa has been thought of primarily as an object of humanitarian concern”, whether one is looking at debt relief efforts or violent conflicts such as Darfur (Lyman 2007: ix). He continues to stress the importance of Africa to America as “the scene of major competition for access to its natural resources” at a time when the United States must look outside the Middle East for oil, or for its “rising in importance in the war on terror.”, where “an extensive network of terrorist cells” have been discovered and where weak states, identity conflict and humanitarian disaster make states such as Somalia “vulnerable to future infiltration” and therefore problems for America (Lyman 2007: ix-xi). Next, Lyman stresses that Africa is “at the centre of worldwide concerns over global health” as it is the “epicentre of the AIDS pandemic” (Lyman 2007: xi). Finally, he notes that though African countries, in recent years, have “taken several steps to strengthen electoral democracy, economic policies, good governance, and the reduction of conflict” the continent's “democratic trend is nevertheless fragile” (Lyman 2007: xi). In conclusion, and as a summary of the most consistent and limiting condition underlying the condition of African states, Lyman argues that “[a]t the center of all Africa's issues and challenges lies the persistence of poverty” (Lyman 2007: xi-xiv).

Throughout his text, Lyman is making a persuasive and impassioned case for the prioritization of Africa as a region in American foreign policy. However, the language used in this seemingly positive effort is continuously under-laid with terms and examples that are highly connotative of urgency, emergency and crisis. From his summary, Lyman is clearly depicting a region on the brink: Africa is beset with problems, conflicts, and crises. However, each is presented as an opportunity for change, improvement and ultimately, intervention. In the end, Lyman has undermined his opening statement and intention of moving away from the depiction of Africa as an object of humanitarian concern. Instead, Lyman has simply re-framed this imperative to intervene for the betterment of Africa, from one which is based on humanitarianism, to another which is equally in peril and need of assistance, but which may be aided through the rationale of American national interest. However, Lyman's inability to fully escape the idea of "Africa" as a problem to be solved is understandable in the context of political science. Studies in the field tend to focus on problem-solving oriented approaches and theories, and these applied to a region which is commonly constructed and depicted as fragile, failing or challenged makes for a pessimistic discourse in need of unpacking. Though this section will focus on framing Africa in comparative politics, the issue of Africa as a place of crisis, and witchcraft related-violence as a problem, will be addressed.

Looking at comparative politics, Africa as a region of study, is heavily focused on researching and resolving problems which limit the consolidation or success of the African state. First and foremost among these is the question of democracy and democratization. Democratization in the mainstream of comparative politics, and democracy as a goal within in Western academia, has become a naturalized regime type. In the field of comparative politics, analysis and debate focus on the question of regime type with the collective assumption that democracy is inherently superior than possible alternatives: non-democratic. Thus, the question of the transition is one which is effectively unidirectional: how can democracies be maintained and prevented from falling into non-democratic rule? How can and how do non-democracies become democracies? In these discussions, the value of democratic regimes themselves are rarely discussed, instead the intricacies of democracies are compared to other democracies to determine which is more stable. Non-democratic regimes are considered in the context of instability, and focus on how transitions to democracy are prevented. What varies most in research on regime types is not the normative assumptions underpinning the authors analysis, but the causal factors which may or may not determine the possibility and nature of regime transitions. In the study of democratic and non-democratic regimes, scholars differ regarding their emphasis on the role of structures, institutions and actors in determining the direction of the regime, whether through continuity or transition. However, looking closely at the prominent debates occurring, it is evident that there is little discussion as to who demands, defines and determines what democracy means. Further, many authors fail to acknowledge their own participation in a normative debate regarding, not only the ideal state, but also values of continuity versus change, stability versus dissent and overall, a strong statist bias.

The question of democracy is however, much more complex and increasing acknowledgement is being given to the problem of defining democracy. Here the competing conceptions are substantive and procedural democracy. Procedural democracy is understood to be limited to the processes of multiparty elections, while substantive democracy is a broader philosophical and theoretical debate regarding the social meaning and processes of democracy, engaging issues of equality and social and economic security as well. As argued by Ake in 1993, the Western model of liberal democracy as the procedure of elections fails to be relevant for many Africans because "Africans do not separate political democracy from economic democracy" (Ake 1993: 421). Rather, many Africans, as it is impossible to speak for all, view democracy in substantive terms, seeking greater equality and improved social and economic rights, including social services and greater benefits for the collective

rather than the individual, as assumed in liberal democratic process⁴ (Ake 1993). In short, democracy as it is understood outside of the unique liberal democratic model which developed in 16th century England within a specific political landscape along with capitalism (Wood 1999), or the democracies theorized in academia, may not be the same democracy/ies many people within sub-Saharan African states seek or expect of their state. More problematically, understanding the African state itself as a continuing project.

Further, the question of democratization in sub-Saharan Africa may be contextualized in the history of the region, where state formation, where it occurred in pre-colonial times, “was very different from what defines a state today” (Thomson 2010: 10). As has been argued by the previous authors, these differences remained in place in the colonial and post-colonial states, thereby undermining the classical Western academic definition of the state, as purported most canonically by Weber. Weber defined the state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory” (1). Weber continues to define politics in terms of the efforts to “influence the distribution of power, either among state or among groups within a state” (Weber 1946: 1). Thus, the state is “a relation of men dominating men” supported by legitimacy and obedience to authority, founded upon “unimaginably ancient” habits of conformity, “personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation” and the “virtue of the belief in the validity of legal statute and functional 'competence' based on rationality created by *rules*” (Weber 1946: 1-2). As for how the modern state arises, Weber envisions this process to be uniform as:

Everywhere the development of the modern state is initiated through the action of the prince. He paves the way for the expropriation of the autonomous and 'private' bearers of executive power who stand beside him, of those who in their own right possess the means of administration, warfare, and financial organization, as well as politically usable goods of all sorts. The whole process is a complete parallel to the development of the capitalist enterprise through gradual expropriation of the independent producers. In the end, the modern state controls the total means of political organization, which actually come together under a single head: No single official personally owns the money he pays out, or the buildings, stores, tools, and war machines he controls. (Weber 1946: 3)

This image of the evolution of the modern state may be comfortably combined with the critical analysis of Tilly who characterizes the rise of the state system through the analogy of racketeering in his text “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime” (1985). In Tilly's view, the state began as a protection racket, wherein European feudal leaders sought protection taxes from their population to fund war efforts to amass and centralize their own power, thereby creating the insecurity they promised to protect populations from. The violent nature of the state then appears contradictory to the aims of liberal democracy, as noted by Lumumba-Kasongo who question the assumption that democracy is

⁴ Ake further elaborates on the fundamental differences regarding perceptions of participation between Western liberal models and African demands noting; “[l]iberal democracy offers a form of political participation which is markedly different from and arguably inferior to the African concept of participation. For the African, especially the rural dweller, participation is linked to communality. Africans do not generally see themselves as self-regarding atomized beings in essentially competitive and potentially conflicting interaction with others. Rather, their consciousness is directed towards belonging to an organic whole. The point is to find one's station and duty in life, not to assert one's interests and claims rights over others. People participate not because they are individuals whose interests are different and need to be asserted, but because they are part of an interconnected whole. Participation rests not on the assumption of individualism and conflicting interests, but on the social nature of human beings. Related to this, the African concept of participation is as much a matter of taking part as of sharing the rewards and burdens of community membership. It does not simply enjoin abstract rights, but secures concrete benefits. In addition, traditional African sense, participation is quite unlike the Western notion of the occasional opportunity to choose, affirm or dissent. It is rather the active involvement in a process, that of setting goals and making decision. More often than not, it is the involvement in the process rather than the acceptability of the end decision, which satisfied the need to participate.” (Ake 1993: 243)

good, arguing instead that the “philosophical meanings of democracy have been historically constrained and contradicted by the power of the state” (Lumumba-Kasongo 2005: 1). In this regard, the substantive definition of democracy as providing greater social and economic equality is undermined by the centralizing imperative of the state. Lumumba-Kasongo notes that liberal democracy, as a “product of western political thought and the evolution of western societies”, has been shaped and redefined by “struggles outside the West” (Lumumba-Kasongo 2005: 7). However, even the author acknowledges that many of the fundamental principles of liberal democracy cannot be overcome. Individualism, for example, is a concept that is not present in many African cosmologies, as despite incredible diversity, in many African societies “[p]olitically and psychologically, an individual vote has more meaning in relationship to others” (Lumumba-Kasongo 2007: 15). Despite these important critiques, the author remains positive about liberal democracy, arguing as many do that African states have simply not reached the full breadth of its exercise and therefore the partial and dysfunctional outcomes have led to significant flaws in African democracies.

However, a more fundamental problem may exist, in that the liberal democratic system of rule is not intended to meet the goals of ending poverty and inequality, but rather to protect property and enshrine the rights of the individual over the collective. In short, just as the question of whether the state system should function in African polities must be posed, the question of why democracy does not function as many would like it to may also be seen as leading to a critique of not only these ideologies and logics, but also critiques of the fundamental biases embedded in comparative political analyses of Africa. Since the founding of the discipline of political science and the subsequent definition of comparative politics as a field, which is concerned with the domestic content of states, and as a method, employing small to large case comparisons, a strong bias has dominated the outlook of the discipline. The world it has sought to study has often been viewed through an uncritical cultural, and I would say, cosmological bias, in which the hegemonic discourse of the modern liberal state has dominated analyses, either being implemented as a given or contested through alternative ideologies which submit to shared logics of the state and the political. Overall, what is often studied is not the world of African politics, but rather the world of Western political thought as applied to African states and societies.

The result of this common limitation in scope and subject is that the field of comparative politics has yet to begin to penetrate and explore the non-Western political realities of African politics and the political. Instead, this endeavour has been left to the field of anthropology, which seeks to understand societies from within and without significant comparison or emphasis on the political. However, when anthropological studies identify clear political issues and conflicts within their cases, comparative politics in this instance, and political science in general, have often neglected to accept responsibility for investigating these issues. More importantly, when subjects which are often seen to be foreign in nature are addressed, they are not explored with the anthropological sensitivity and necessity of “taking African epistemologies seriously”, as Ellis and ter Haar (2007) stressed in their bridging text on religion and politics in Africa. Rather, Western realities of the political and politics are superimposed on African polities, negating the epistemologies that exist there, often silencing alternate views which frustrate, alter and/or fascinate Western political systems, ideas and institutions which themselves are taken for granted.

A more complete critique is presented by Chabal in his analysis of politics in Africa, where he argues that standard methodologies have reached their limits and a new approach is required for looking at politics indirectly, “through an investigation of how it is played out in ... key areas of human existence” (Chabal 2009: x). Chabal questions whether it is suitable to consider Africa as a region which may be assessed through political theory. According to Chabal, engaging in a “political theory of Africa’ is necessarily to take up the issue of comparative politics” - that the use of theory reflects the “attempt to conceptualise the evolution of politics in Western societies” and that “any attempt to

develop a political theory to make sense of other societies is necessarily an attempt to compare the West and the non-West.” (Chabal 2009: 3). In order to avoid exoticizing Africa, Western academics have cursed themselves according to Chabal, by thinking it necessary to “seek ... confirmation of the theories we employ ... in the analysis of our own societies” (Chabal 2009: 16). As a result, many Western academics have been dissuaded from addressing issues that are not present in their own societies, and for which there are not corresponding theories or epistemologies.

Despite the reluctance of Western political scientists to address certain topics in African politics, these topics remain relevant to politics and political theory in the African region. Among these issues, Chabal notes the importance of “the spiritual world” in African politics (Chabal 2009: 67). As the author notes “in crude terms: political *science* does not do 'voodoo'. Unfortunately for political scientists, 'voodoo' does politics” (Chabal 2009: 66). Chabal voices a view which a small number of other academics such as Ashforth, Ellis, Geschiere, Kohnert, Niehaus and ter Haar have stressed: political science is “virtually silent” on the subject of the spiritual world in Africa, thus neglecting “a whole area of cultural and socio-political action” that “ought to be an integral part of any serious political theory of the continent” (Chabal 2009: 75-76). As this work will explore, the reasons for this, both positive and negative, are numerous.

Looking at Witchcraft

Witchcraft is, above all else, a marginalized reality. Like some other areas of human experience and reality, such as aliens, UFOs and cryptozoology, witchcraft is often considered as a “non-object” in its relation to sciences and the state, “something that is not just unidentified but unseen and thus ignored” (Wendt & Duvall 2008: 610). In their article *Sovereignty and the UFO*, Wendt and Duvall attempt to unpack the taboo of UFOs, and in so doing theorize an “epistemology of ignorance” in the words of Nancy Tuana, or “the production of (un)knowledge” in their own words (Wendt & Duvall 2008: 611). In this way, the exclusion and erasure of UFOs, or witchcraft, from scientific and state discourses which invert the conceptual devices of rationality or power demonstrates an effort to critique the assumptions underlying this omission: that dissenting thought does not exist. Though the exclusion of witchcraft from political analyses is itself problematic, the inclusion of witchcraft also presents a number of conundrums.

As noted by Ciekawy and Geschiere (1998), there is a “revitalized” interest in witchcraft in the field of anthropology, which presents the danger of “exoticizing Africa” (Ciekawy & Geschiere 1998: 1). However, a more pressing problem underlies this risk: understanding witchcraft in terms of or in relation to the West's interests and logics, in this case modernity (Ciekawy & Geschiere 1998: 2). In much of the literature looking at witchcraft an assumed dichotomy is often presented between witchcraft and modernity. This view, advanced by key anthropologists such as Jean and John Comaroff, seeks to situate “African witchcraft *within* modernity, global capitalism and state structures”, reducing witchcraft beliefs to “icons of local-global interactions and processes.” (Rutherford 1999: 91). Rutherford, addressing this oversight, argues that more attention and greater critical reflexivity are required “concerning the genealogy of current representations of African witchcraft” (Rutherford 1999: 91). Most importantly, Rutherford cautions that:

By neglecting their own positioning within the anthropological project of proving the ultimate rationality of non-Western practices and beliefs (e.g. Asad, 1993; Fabian, 1983), these current studies downplay their own interventions in the highly contested moral and political field regarding African witchcraft. Although they attend perspicaciously to the moral fields surrounding the topic within diverse local African communities, they tend to minimize the

differing public discourses concerning African witchcraft (coming from government officials, church leaders, journalists, anthropologists, to name but a few) and the various projects of which they are a part which, in turn, articulate with the social identities and power relations within the 'locale' discussed. Knowledge of witches is very much tied to strategies of authority for all commentators. (Rutherford 1999: 92)

In this way, an uncritical approach to witchcraft, as a subject of study, becomes a “positive object” which “needs to be explicated through 'our' terms”, without sufficient acknowledgement of the “contested moral field of the phenomena in which 'we' too participate” (Rutherford 1999: 105). While it is not enough to simply state that it is my intention is to be, at the very least, reflective, and hopefully, responsible, in my participation in constructing not only witchcraft, but also aspects of the broader “Africa”, I am aware that this work may contribute the sensationalizing and exoticizing of this subject through and throughout this study. It is therefore my aim to remain critical throughout and actively seek to avoid the pitfalls of “juju journalism” (Shaw 2003) and to monitor the language and descriptions of this work closely, employing terms and words used by interviewees and informants to convey key concepts and insights into witchcraft in African societies. (A more severe and ominous concern regarding this work's role in supporting the hegemony of Western thought will be explored in greater detail throughout.)

Though witchcraft is not a uniquely African reality, the disproportionate attention given to African witchcraft phenomenon in Western academia may be seen as demonstrative of the imagined reality of this region in the Western imagination. In his work, Chabal (2009) addresses this motivations underlying this anomaly, asking whether “questions that are more acute about Africa than about other areas” are so posed “not because Africa is *effectively* different but because *we* tend to approach it more differently” (117). An example of the domination of modern thought in Western academia is reflected in the common willingness to overlook marginalized realities in its own backyard include the neglect that Ufology or conspiracy communities face in academia and in political science in particular. Aside from a few key studies, such as Jodi Dean's 1998 text *Aliens in America*, and the more recent compilation by Harry G. West and Todd Sanders (2003), *Transparency and Conspiracy*, there has been insufficient investigation into the potential the political implications of these marginalized realities.

Another aspect of Western reality which is overlooked is the existence of the Wiccan religion and other aspects often subsumed under the umbrella term of New Age beliefs or practices. Neo-Pagan and Wiccan communities represent a growing movement whose previously assumed “fad” status has been disproved (Rabinovitch 2002: vii). Though these movements do not share the characteristics of witchcraft belief in African societies, they nonetheless demonstrate the pervasiveness of belief in witches, the power of the supernatural and in the invisible world. While it may be argued that witchcraft beliefs in the West may be differentiated from those in the rest of the world, this argument is also problematic. Taking Canada as an example, in the past four years a number of cases of witchcraft have been brought to the court system. In one case, a woman was charged with defrauding a criminal lawyer of more than one hundred thousand dollars for the service of channelling his deceased sister (CBC 2009). In 2010, a man was charged with fraud after “pretending to be a witch” (CBC 2010). In a series of incidences, a man was charged with posing as a witch in an effort to defraud individuals across Ontario and Quebec (CBC 2012). Most recently in December 2012, a number of women were charged with using witchcraft to facilitate theft in a “scam” which involved suggesting to individuals that they were victims of curses which could be lifted by the “fraudsters”, who instead lifted the victims valuables (CBC 2012).

Though the language of these cases suggests scepticism to the point of derision in the eyes of the media and law enforcement officials interviewed, it remains that the belief in witchcraft which made these crimes possible exists. Witchcraft as a belief seems in this respect to be a global reality

which is marginalized to varying degrees by Western discourse. The pervasiveness of this belief is often seen to be in part due to its ability to explain “contingent events [in ways] unequalled by rationalism, religion or political ideology” (Behringer 2004: 2):

fantasies of witchcraft, it seems, are not just strongly related to social or cultural features of society, but to individual and collective fears and hopes anchored in the human subconscious. In a Freudian sense they represent – like nightmares – a cultural *Id*, as opposed to the cultural super-egos of religion or rationalism (Behringer 2004: 3)

In this way, witchcraft is in some way “relevant for all mankind” and may be argued as constituting “a *universal* phenomenon” (Behringer 2004: 3). From his analysis, Behringer concludes that accident, rather than witchcraft, as explanations for misfortune, must be equally considered as “a social or cultural construct” (Behringer 2004: 24). This upsetting and upending of the Western political understanding of witchcraft as an irrational curio at best or a dangerous and backward threat to modernity at worst is essential to this work. The framing of witchcraft as a universal norm allows for the comparative framing of the Western modernizing project to be understood as it is seen here: a minority vision of the world (seen and unseen, and therefore non-existent) as it should be, seeking hegemony and domination over all other realities, which struggle in response to refute, mediate or selectively allow aspects of this project while managing undeniable social, political and economic changes in the visible world around them.

A consequence of this view is that witchcraft and other supernatural phenomenon cannot be so easily dismissed as “illusion or delusion” or those things which are “foreign, strange, troubling, dangerous, wrong, threatening, [or] false” (Wiener 2003: 129-130). Instead, these beliefs, which are founded in human societies, are better understood as relations of power which are neither bound to certain localities (Africa) or times (pre-modernity), but which are universally significant and “potentially subversive” (Wiener 2003: 137). Rather than demonstrating the rationality of the European colonial project in Africa, the resilience and importance of witchcraft belief instead exposes its limitations. Witchcraft is not, therefore, some “ghostly product of the project of modernity” set in simple opposition to this (Wiener 2003: 140), but is a reality within which modernity is considered and which effectively escapes domestication within Western rational thought (White 2000: 84).

What is Witchcraft?

Defining witchcraft is a difficult task as it is ultimately the effort to define that which is unknown and which cannot be known with any certainty. Across the vast body of literature on witchcraft in Africa, when it does not simply deride the belief, there are a multitude of definitions, concepts and terms for the phenomenon which vary around the theme of obscurity, leading authors to combine, confuse and contrast terms used to describe that which is outside of our understanding of the world. Investigating the realm of witchcraft is therefore a study of the unknowable: witchcraft is defined by that which we see and experience of the greater thing that cannot be understood; it is an intangible power permeating our reality. Only witches themselves know the how and why of witchcraft. Others, such as healers and those with spiritual power, may use applications, such as *nyele* or oil which when applied to one's eyes allows for one's sight to be extended into the world of witches, to see the invisible world that exists within, yet beyond, the visible. However, this only allows for observation; the observer is still unable to participate in or examine the intricacies of witchcraft which are held in secret by its initiates.

Despite this, in order to study and discuss the subject and to try to understand the complexities of witchcraft and the political, a conceptual understanding of witchcraft is required. Though it is a

highly debated and connotative word, witchcraft has remained, throughout the research process, the most useful word for describing the precise phenomenon being investigated. From the early stage of applying to the University of Ottawa, to the field in Ghana and Cameroon, and in my final analysis, witchcraft, when discretely defined, is the clearest communicator in expressing the supernatural ability of an individual to cause harm to another. Here, supernatural is defined as that which is beyond the knowledge of science, a problematic opposition whose relation to witchcraft will be explored further in the following chapters. Though it will be stressed here that the use of this word is not intended to indicate that witchcraft is not part of the natural world, i.e. beyond nature, but rather beyond the observable manifestations of nature.

In the field, I did not present my working definition of witchcraft to interviewees or informants. Instead, the first question posed to each individual was for an explanation of their understanding of witchcraft. In Ghana, respondents varied in the wording of their explanations or descriptions of witchcraft. However the common theme of causing harm was present in every reply. Though some viewed witchcraft with ambiguity, stating that supernatural power could be used for good too, these views were in the minority and in one group discussion led to an argument which ended with one respondent leaving in anger. In a particularly evocative description, one traditional healer pointed to his doorway where wind was blowing a long curtain in waves; witchcraft, he said, is what moves the curtain but cannot be seen.

A common word used by respondents in Ghana is the term “spiritual”. In some cases, witches were referred to as spirits, having lost their status of human being in the process of accepting or allowing a nefarious spirit to enter them. This spirit, or power, is often seen as being integral to human existence, something that has always been and is always “with us”. On the other hand, spiritual is also used to refer to healers and diviners, who employ their powers in the aid of others. Witches, as a genderless term, are however unambiguously evil. In the words and views of all respondents, witches aim only to destroy. In all accounts, witches in Ghana fly by night, leaving their bodies behind and travelling through the world to meet other witches and prey on human flesh. Fear of witches is widespread and the insidious nature of witchcraft means that no one is safe. As related by one informant, the effect of a witchcraft attack may be as subtle as feeling uncomfortable in one's own skin, as a friend did only a few days before dying. In this instance, a protective mother was taken to the chief for trial or beating after uttering the ominous warning of “you'll see” after warning the boy to stop pursuing her daughter. In Ghana, this is a well-known expression used by witches to curse someone. Thus from breath to death, witchcraft is a haunting juggernaut.

In Cameroon, respondents described witchcraft with surprising consistency. Though the descriptions and details of witchcraft varied to some degree, whether a science, metaphysical or mystical practice, the intent of witchcraft is understood as being overwhelmingly evil. In interviews the word *nuire*, or to harm, was present in every representation of witchcraft activity and in the motivations of witches. When speaking of beneficial applications of spiritual abilities, respondents in Cameroon were careful to differentiate between the “black witchcraft” which in Africa remains in the invisible world and is always harmful, and the “white witchcraft” of whites and Europeans which is visible and which allows for progress. This dichotomy was prevalent in Cameroon, where whites were seen to have come to Africa to strip the population not only of their resources, but also of their ability to create and interrelate positively through the supernatural. Whites then returned to Europe to benefit greatly from their own power which was supplemented by Africa's, while Africa was left in darkness with only negative power remaining.

Though this understanding of witchcraft seems dire, some respondents felt that witchcraft could be used positively, to heal or to create good. In this respect, witchcraft is a power which may be reclaimed by individuals for the benefit of others, though the association of these power with the label

of witch, often expressed during my fieldwork with a tone of suspicion by informants in Cameroon, may be particular to West Africa. The importance of motivation and intention underlying this view is essential to understanding what appears to many to be ambiguity or contradiction in witchcraft belief, as it highlights the anti-social nature of witchcraft understood as harm. Witches who act for the benefit of others and are not motivated by selfish intentions may be seen as employing supernatural power positively, and most importantly, in a legitimate way. On the other hand, witches who do not use this power to benefit others, but only to indulge themselves, are employing supernatural power illegitimately. Importantly, neither use redeems the witch completely. Considering the ability witchcraft bestows upon an individual, the power to kill another with a thought, the ability to move across the visible and invisible worlds freely, into people's homes, dreams and lives, and the ability to fly across the world in seconds, transform any object to one's need and to evade the controls of society at all turns, this is no small matter.

In Ghana and Cameroon, respondents struggled to define a significant and threatening power that is not understood as in political science theory as the ability to control another, but rather a power that allows one to control and affect the world around them in ways that others cannot. In both cases, individuals who seek to draw upon this well of supernatural ability are uniformly suspect. To set oneself above another is in all cases an anti-social act. What remains to be seen is whether the individual will try to redeem this act by using this power to benefit others, or whether the witch will condemn themselves by using this power for their own selfish gain. The most common and most base act of witches, the consumption of human flesh, is an extreme offence, where the witch indulges in a desire for meat at the ultimate cost of human life. This level of decadence and selfishness is held in great disdain and speaks to understandings of the responsible use of power in African epistemologies.

Overall, definitions of witchcraft provided in the field were consistent with the definitions used by many authors who study the subject and whose works informed the initial research phases of this project. That said, there are remain a number of points of clarification and elaboration in defining what is part of the wider witchcraft phenomenon and what is not. The following section will review a number of assumptions and findings regarding correlating aspects of witchcraft in sub-Saharan Africa in general and Ghana and Cameroon in particular. In addition to this, I will explain some of the omissions I employed in the research process and in my work. In particular, I define witchcraft as a non-religious phenomenon, reject feminist approaches and their analysis and outline my decision to include children in the research. These explanations are followed by a brief review of the key works framing the problem of witchcraft-related violence in Africa.

Witchcraft Phenomenon

Beginning from the understanding of witchcraft as an act of harm and the witch as “an archetype of evil, an antisocial menace who betrays the bonds and the values of the community” (Bever 2000: 575), it is not immediately clear what the scope of this nefarious act entails. To begin, witchcraft cannot be described as a superstition, as it is not a unitary assumption of causality, such as walking under a ladder causing bad luck. Witchcraft is much more comprehensive, relating to human actions, intentions and experiences of the world. Thus witchcraft is a reality (Amadou 2010), part of the world that actually exists, is experienced and, though not seen, is evidenced in its outcomes. Witchcraft must therefore be understood as an aspect of the daily lives of people which looms behind every subject (Amadou 2010). The manifestations of this reality vary greatly and are often open to the interpretation of the individuals experiencing or witnessing them. However, there are many ideas regarding witchcraft which are widely held and shared.

The first question may be how one becomes a witch. Accounts of this process vary across a spectrum: on one end, witchcraft powers may be inherent in individuals, and it is the choice of an individual to develop these abilities or leave them dormant (Geschiere 1997). On the other, these power may be foreign to the body and must be acquired or passed on, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. In the latter, witchcraft powers may be passed from an individual to another, with or without their knowledge or consent, hereditarily, through an infecting medium, such as food, commonly palm oil, or through supernatural means, such as initiation in the invisible world in dreams. In Cameroon, respondents noted that children and infants are particularly vulnerable to involuntary initiation, as witches may enter through the umbilical cord of a newborn or trick children easily with food and favours.

Though witches have the power, individually and collectively, to create significant destruction, the primary targets of witchcraft attack are those who are closest to the witch: the immediate family. In witchcraft, there are no rules of engagement: parents may kill children, one another, or extended family members. The same is understood for children, who may attack their parents, siblings or relatives. Intimacy, in this reality, is the greatest risk, as the witch is able to harm those closest to them with the greatest effect. This idea of vulnerability to those with whom one lives is easily understood: the people we are closest to know us best and from this, know best how to harm us. This is also the ultimate betrayal as we invest the highest levels of trust to those in our lives, making their offences against us all the more unforgivable. In this respect, witches are the purest manifestation of the anti-social, they are that which makes all communality suspect, uncertain and unsettled. In addition to the direct harms of death, illness and misfortune they may bestow (Amadou 2010), witches upset the very idea of society, sowing seeds of disorder and distrust.

Witchcraft attacks against society itself also vary, though many are manifest in the intention to limit or disrupt the reproduction of social relations. These attacks are often directed through individuals, for example, targeting the human capacity to reproduce sexually, leading to sterility, miscarriages and high levels of mortality in new mothers and newborns (Amadou 2010). In Ghana and Cameroon respondents and informants stressed the importance of being constantly vigilant against witches when pregnant and in the first months after birth. One informant who was of European origin spoke of his Ghanaian wife's concern when expecting their first child. At first he had difficulty understanding her sense of insecurity, providing examples such as her reluctance to sit outside a restaurant or her avoidance of strangers in public, even refusing to go shopping in the later months. However, as he noted, after living in Ghana for many years, he came to understand the how real the fear of witchcraft is and how fertile women are seen as tempting targets.

In Cameroon, the same fear was expressed regarding newborns and children. As well, many examples were given of instances where witches sought to directly block development in villages. In one example witnessed by three respondents, a construction site nearby was vandalized nightly by witches who wanted to prevent the building of a modern home. If completed, this home would symbolize the advancement of the village towards modernity, something witches hate and fear. Each night the witches moved giant boulders, one or two tons in weight, onto the site and each day the construction crew had to use heavy equipment to remove them, delaying the laying of the foundation. In another example a respondent described a bridge which was funded and built by foreign donors in his village only to be found demolished the day after completion. When I asked why the witches had destroyed the bridge, the respondent replied that they hated development because when development finally comes to Cameroon, it means that they will no longer exist.

Though, as will be seen shortly, witch is often thought to refer to women in particular, there is no inherent gender of witchcraft. In Ghana and Cameroon, some respondents felt that witches were more commonly women. However, when asked to clarify, this view was often supplemented by the

caveat that women are more often victims of accusations, thus more frequently associated with witchcraft. Though some individuals did argue that women are predisposed to seek and engage in witchcraft this was not a consistent view. Before unpacking this view, however, a brief description of the witch may be useful. Witches in literature and in the field are often described as having unusual appearances, such as red eyes and physical deformities or behavioural indicators, such as being quarrelsome or misanthropic (Amadou 2010). Though in Ghana many of the visible indicators of being a witch are associated with advanced age, this is not the case in Cameroon, where children are equally suspect.

Sanctions against witches have varied over time and are often seen to correspond to the sense of anxiety regarding the threat of witchcraft or the severity of the offence committed. Rehabilitation is possible, and in Ghana in particular, religious organizations and traditional authorities are seen to be responsible for this process. Witches may be absolved through confession, cleansing ceremonies or ordeals so long as the witch is devoted to living in the visible world. In churches, witches may repent and accept Jesus as their saviour and be delivered or exorcised of their witchcraft powers. In both instances, witches who betray their promise and seek to return to the invisible world will die immediately as a result. This is an implicit condition of rehabilitation. In some cases where witches do not die spontaneously, it is also understood that it is acceptable for the individuals to ensure that the witch is put to death to ensure that further harm is prevented.

The killing of accused witches is seen much more prominently in Ghana than in Cameroon. In Ghana, accused witches are subjected to ridicule, ostracism, assault and torture, exile and murder. A witch's property may be seized by family members and social privileges such as access to communal foods, water and land may be limited. As there are no formal means for addressing witchcraft attacks or suspicions in Ghana, the progression of suspicion to accusation is rapid and often severe. Unlike in Cameroon, reports and accounts of murdered witches are common in Ghanaian media and frequently recounted by individuals. In Cameroon, however, suspicion rather than accusation is more commonly encountered. As a result of this, the indirect social consequences of suspicion are much more developed and diffuse. Suspected witches will be treated with hostility until a clear accusation is made, at which time they may be taken to a traditional, religious or state authority for punishment. In Cameroon, accused witches may be accosted or assaulted before being brought to a commissariat or barracks, where the police or military will formally charge them with witchcraft. When there is adequate evidence to forward charges, witches are brought to trial and may be sentenced from two to ten years in prison if found guilty.

An element of witchcraft phenomenon that is often seen as being ambiguous or contradictory is the role of traditional healers, diviners, fetish priests and other spiritual people in mitigating, managing and even employing witchcraft powers. Though other supernatural actors are understood to be drawing on the same source of supernatural power as witches, a number of conditions alter the nature of their relation to the world of the invisible. For example, healers and diviners must use assisting devices in accessing the supernatural. These rituals or aids are not only required but are also visible and performed transparently, and therefore open to the judgement and dis/approval of others. Witches, however, are able to move between worlds without aids and without any others knowing, because it is in effect, their world. For healers and diviners, the invisible world, while accessible to them, is not their own, and as a result of this, presents a danger to them, one which they accept in order to serve and aid others.

This power is also available to others who are willing to develop their skill. In multiple interviews in Ghana and Cameroon, I was asked by healers and diviners whether I was interested in visiting the world of witches myself. I always answered evasively and sought to delay answering the question until later in the interview, though it never came up again. In each case, in response to my uncertainty, the weight of this proposal was stressed: people have gone mad and lost themselves

between worlds, unable to differentiate the visible world from the invisible, losing touch with both realities and never recovering their place in either. In this way, spiritual people face significant risks on all sides in their effort to serve others. They are at risk in the invisible world as well as the visible, where their knowledge of the supernatural makes them vulnerable to suspicion of its misuse. In Cameroon, the word “charlatan” is often used to connote suspicion that a healer or diviner is not legitimately empowered by the supernatural, though it may equally be used to denote concern that a healer or diviner is suspected of being a witch. When these suspicions mount, healers, diviners and fetish priests may all become perceived threats and may be accused of witchcraft. It is therefore essential that the work of traditional healers remain accessible, or at least observable, to those who solicit their services.

Though witches operate in obscurity, their world is not completely unknown or unimagined. Much of the information regarding the world of witches remains rumour, though some information has been learned from the confessions of reformed witches, who have spoken or written in detail about their activities. As with almost all aspects of witchcraft, there is little certainty regarding these details, and many speak alternately with conviction and doubt, not wanting to seem too knowledgeable of witchcraft but also wanting to understand the terrifying and seductive world of the invisible. The world of witches is often described on the surface as a modern paradise. Glittering highrises, paved streets full of expensive cars, the skies full of planes ferrying witches from one country to another in a second and prestigious restaurants serving meals of human flesh. In one account, the witch village which appeared each night beside the village in which the respondent lived for a time was called “Little London”, here witches enjoyed all the benefits and comforts available to Londoners overseas.

Unlike their behaviour in the visible world, witches are not anti-social in the invisible world. Rather, witches are highly organized and operate in groups and societies, into which they have been initiated and to which they are bound and obligated. These groups may be highly cooperative and hierarchically arranged, with elder witches in command (Amadou 2010). These societies through norms and rules assure that witches comply with certain expectations such as secrecy, continued commitment to the group, and providing adequate resources to be shared among the group, often in the form of human flesh. These organizations are not without conflict and witches may punish others transgressions. In a case brought to a Commissariat in Cameroon, a young man was found hanging on a power line in a village hours from his own. When he was brought in for questioning the young man recounted the story of how he had been thrown from a witch plane by another witch because a dispute had erupted regarding the portioning of dead man's flesh. In more severe cases, witches may be killed for betraying their oaths or failing to fulfil their obligations.

That witches are able to associate in the invisible world along similar, though admittedly somewhat depraved, norms and values as those in the visible, does not seem to instill any sense of hope or compassion in respondents and informants. Rather, it seems that the fact that witches are able to act socially though choose not to is only more reprehensible and damning. In this light, witches are unforgivable characters whose actions are on some level, whether intentional or out of ignorance of the actions and its contradiction, culpable and accountable. Whether an infant or an elderly person, the witch abuses their supernatural power to harm others, individuals and collectives, deconstructing norms of social cohesion and creating a state of relations which is constantly in flux. What is most disturbing is that witches do not require arms (Amadou 2010) or institutions or any form of greater organization to create this disorder, and worse, they do not even have to exist to create this harm, fear of witches alone is sufficient to foster tension and turn insecurity towards hostility.

Though witchcraft is often researched as a belief, rather than a reality, this work does not accept the definition of witchcraft as a religion or religious phenomenon. This is because witchcraft does not share any of the characteristics of religion. Witchcraft does not involve ideas of transcendence, it is not

the act of any deity or god-like being nor is it enshrined in any text or doctrine around which institutions or organizations are formed. Drawing on an analogy from Western cultures, to say that witchcraft is a religion or religious is analogous to saying that ghosts are a religion. Witchcraft, like ghosts, appear in various religious texts, often addressed as a form of possession by a nefarious being, such as a djinn in Islam or the Devil in Christianity, however, it does not exist in religious reality alone. Rather, witchcraft may be best understood as a part of the spiritual world which may be addressed by various religions. This is a particular misunderstanding in Western academia on religious practices of ancestor worship and on African traditional religions. While ancestors and African deities may be appealed to for assistance in managing witchcraft, witchcraft itself is not a practice of these religions.

The reasons behind the frequent associations of witchcraft and religion are many. The first is an ethnocentric bias based in the history of witchcraft in the Western world. Though witchcraft is a reality to be found in the South Pacific, Asia, the Americas, Africa and to a lesser degree, Europe, research into these regions is commonly conducted from a Western perspective and is therefore often informed by the particular history of witch hunts in Europe and North America (Stein & Stein 2008; van Eck Duymaer van Twist 2009). In common representations of these witch hunts, women were victims of religious zeal and “subjected to various forms of 'diagnoses' to verify whether they were witches” (van Eck Duymaer van Twist 2009: 14) in an effort to root out the Devil and triumph in a war of good against evil. Though many historians have critiqued this religious characterization of the European witch trials, which have been more convincingly studied as politically, rather than religiously, motivated, it remains a common basis of comparison.

Second, many Western authors in an effort to address another aspect of ethnocentrism and to redress critiques which have been made by African authors, identify witchcraft as a religious belief in order to avoid the appearance of denigrating African epistemologies. This mistake reflects another historical dimension, that of the history of anthropological works in Africa, which have been justifiably critiqued for dismissing or ridiculing African traditional religions and beliefs. Though the intention to avoid insult is commendable, it is not reason enough to overlook important questions and to evade debate. The distinction between witchcraft and religion has been well documented in other studies in sub-Saharan Africa (Ranger 2006; Giles 2006) and was present and confirmed in my own fieldwork. For example, when I told an interviewee that the agency funding my research had rejected the use of the term witchcraft and instead replaced it with “traditional beliefs” on its website, the interviewee was incensed. He noted that while traditional beliefs are many, witchcraft is present in every tribe, in every area, regardless of the traditions practised by different people. In his view, traditions was too general, whereas witchcraft is very specific.

Therefore, in defining witchcraft as a non-religious phenomenon I am risking insulting those who may feel that to deny the reality of witchcraft the status of religion is to dismiss or devalue it. In response to this view, I would argue that religion is not the only means through which to connote that a spiritual concept is taken seriously, nor is it a status which should be sought for such concepts, beliefs or realities. Rather, it is my view that this debate is itself a reflection of the conceptual weaknesses and epistemological shortcomings of the field of political science. In my definition of witchcraft as non-religious I am openly critiquing the inability of political science to conceive of witchcraft and other supernatural and marginalized realities as independently valuable and important subjects of study. To relinquish and adopt the term religious would be neglectful and lazy in this respect, as I would be relying on an ill-suited catch-all term to justify my relation of witchcraft to political science, and in doing so, passively concede that it does not belong under any other, more “rational”⁵ terminology. As

⁵ The use of the word rational is not to suggest that religion itself is irrational but to challenge the compartmentalization of religion in political science as though it is particular or homogeneous phenomenon. In this way, religion is studied from a distance, removing the problem of addressing the rational or irrational question, though it remains the figurative

witchcraft is here a contested (by the West) and contesting (against the West) reality, it would be misleading to refer to it as religious.

As well, a number of elements that are often associated or conflated with witchcraft will not be included in the analysis of this work. The first of these is possession. Possession is understood as a cross-cultural phenomenon which is “informed and constrained by recurrent features of evolved human cognition” (Cohen 2008: 103). Possession is in this view “a complex series of patterns of thinking and behaviours”, which may be addressed through exorcism and to which misfortune and illness may be attributed (Cohen 2008: 105). Possession, unlike witchcraft, uniformly involves the “intrusion of a spirit into a person's body” (Cohen 2008: 108). Thus for possession this criteria is sufficient and necessary, and while possession may be present in witchcraft, it is neither sufficient nor necessary. When witchcraft is a possessing spirit, it not only negates the status and essence of being human, the individual becomes a witch. In possession, the individual remains present and is seen as being passive rather than absent during or erased by the possession (Cohen 2008). In the case of witchcraft, exorcism, deliverance or healing does not remove the witch, it can only remove the power of the witch, who must resist seeking the power in the future and who will remain stained with the association of witchcraft. Thus, while there are “parallels with pathogenic possession and with notions about contamination” (Cohen 2008: 120) between possession and witchcraft, they remain differentiated phenomenon.

Another element of the supernatural which is not included in this work's understanding and use of the term witchcraft are various forms of cults or secret societies which exist or are assumed to exist across sub-Saharan Africa. Though this category will be addressed further in the case of Cameroon, many cults and secret societies have been assumed to be associated with witchcraft, though this is not necessarily the case. While cult leaders and members have stated that they use or employ witchcraft, these groups cannot be considered to be similar to the groups of witches which operate in the invisible world. This is most obviously because these groups are understood to operate in the visible world. Though some cult members may have supernatural powers, such as the ability to transform into animals, as is well documented in the case of leopard or crocodile cults (Ellis 2000), these cults were not formed with the intent to use witchcraft and cause harm. Even when these groups committed acts of ritual murder, these murders were committed in the visible world as physical acts. Though these murders, like other supernatural acts committed by cults and secret societies, sought to influence the invisible world, and may have even empowered group members to move temporarily into the invisible, they were not invisible or supernatural acts themselves. Unlike witches, cult members and secret societies must rely on some aid or ritual to traverse the boundary between worlds. Though cults may be dangerous and seen to pose a significant threat to society, cult members remain for the most part, human beings who may be dealt with in the visible realm. Witchcraft, however, is a much more elusive and intangible threat.

Witchcraft-related violence

Originally, like all sound political science projects, this research was conceived of as addressing a specific problem: the problem of witchcraft-related violence. In the literature available, witchcraft-related violence is defined as various forms of harm committed against individuals, commonly women, who are accused of being witches, however a number of additional acts are also included in this term, such as violations of person's physical integrity, emotional well-being and often involving dispossession of their property. Most often the subtext, and too often the text itself, frames these acts of

elephant in the room.

violence as baseless and irrational abuses of human rights and dignity. As witchcraft cannot exist, the social, economic and physical harm that is enacted upon those who are accused are seen as a problem. More recently, this problem has reached such levels of frequency and severity in sub-Saharan Africa that it may be described as bordering on crisis, though these may be regionally defined or contained.

One example of this crisis response is the recent media coverage of albino killings in Tanzania in 2012. The news of the murder and mutilation of albino children reached international press and caused a brief furor, during which the international rights community was both shocked and outraged, leading to international pressure on the Tanzanian government to act. Though the government in the end grudgingly investigated the murders, sentencing a number of men to death (an act which was also condemned by other rights organizations), the flurry of international coverage failed to investigate the phenomenon in any depth. Had media or human rights actors taken the time to investigate the issue more closely, they may have encountered the critique that what they were investigating was not witchcraft-related violence at all.

Though many reports cited the body parts were used for witchcraft purposes (BBC 2012), the more accurate representation of these acts is that they were intended for rituals uses, the aims of which were to make people wealthier or more successful in life. In interviews in Ghana, where I began my field research, it became quickly evident that ritual murder was not seen as a form of witchcraft, nor was it necessarily a form of violence. I had begun with the assumption that witchcraft-related violence would include accusations, ritual murder, and departing with the broad majority of academic texts, the use of witchcraft to attack another. Therefore, I chose to include supernatural violence in my working definition. I was not long in the field before it became clear that there are two understandings of witchcraft-related violence: attacks against accused witches and attacks by witches against people.

In respect to the first aspect, attacks against accused witches, it was clear that respondents were using the term with me in recognition of my being Western. In groups discussion, violence was never used between respondents to describe attacks on accused witches. Rather, in a group discussion in Ghana, two men discussed their part in having to put an accused witch to death without referring to violence or force at all. Instead, the two men recounted that after a mutual friend dreamt of a female neighbour biting him on the arm and woke to find teeth marks in his flesh, they confronted the woman and demanded a confession. In their retelling, the woman refused to confess and confronted with the evidence of the teeth marks they were compelled to lynch the woman, a term connoting wider participation and invoking ideals of mob justice. In Cameroon, only one respondent answered the question of what their understanding of witchcraft-related violence was by invoking the two aspects present in Ghana. In all other interviews and discussions in Cameroon, interviewees and informants defined witchcraft-related violence as the act of a witch attacking an individual, and in some cases, attacking other witches, leading to eruptions of violence in a village or city.

Thus, the construction of witchcraft-related violence as a problem which affects women, rather than men, who are falsely accused of witchcraft and punished for this act must be understood as a Western construction which has been propagated in Ghana by international non-governmental organizations, and subsequently though less effectively by the state, but which has yet to permeate private discourses of witchcraft in Cameroon where these actors are not yet engaged in the issue. The problem of witchcraft-related violence, understood as the continuing or increasing instance of witches attacking individuals is not without debate, as one fetish priest in Ghana argued that there is no problem, except for the problem of people not knowing how to approach and be with witches and work with them for their mutual protection and benefit. However, this second aspect is the predominant understanding and use of the term violence in regards to witchcraft.

It is important to address why witchcraft attack is rarely defined in Western literature as a form of violence. The most obvious reason for this is the immediate rejection of witchcraft attack as an

experience altogether. Though significant works have been written and entire theories developed around ideas of symbolic, institutional or structural violence, the question of invisible violence remains largely unexplored (Riches 1991). Though Riches concludes in his work that witchcraft falls outside his definition of violence as “contested physical harm” (Riches 1991: 292), as it would fall outside my own, it is nonetheless the case that for those who participated in this research, witchcraft is a form of physical, as much as it is metaphysical, harm.

In pre-colonial times redressing supernatural violence was the responsibility of traditional authorities, who were empowered to judge accusations and mete out punishments to the accusers or accused. Penalties ranged from fines to exile or death. During the colonial period, many European administrators sought to eliminate witchcraft trials and colonial powers officially outlawed all witchcraft-related practices, including those intended to mediate violence or provide protection, such as healing and divination. The British Witchcraft Ordinance laws led to increased anxiety as people found themselves without spiritual protection amid an atmosphere of state scepticism in which witches were able to operate and proliferate without limitation. As a result, in the colonial and post-colonial periods, witchcraft-related violence was seen as increasing and the frequency of witch hunts as escalating. Unfortunately, it remains difficult to judge the veracity of this perception as instances of witchcraft-related violence have not been consistently defined or measured over time. Additionally, the perceived rise in witchcraft-related violence must also be considered in relation to the conception of the phenomenon both as an illegal act and as an act of violence, two conditions which are relatively recent in comparison to reality of witchcraft itself.

Though it is difficult to measure witchcraft-related violence, some manifestations are more easily defined and may be more easily quantified. For example, instances of genital shrinking⁶, a phenomenon which has struck West Africa in two waves, the first in the late 1990s and the second in the early 2000s saw 56 cases reported in new media across seven African countries in the latest wave (Afi Dzokoto & Adams 2005). The phenomenon, which is characterized by the supernatural shrinking or theft of one's sexual organs by witches, ended “abruptly” in both cases once arrests were made of the people who were advancing public accusations, rather than those accused (Afi Dzokoto & Adams 2005: 54). As is the case with many public accusations of theft, the genital shrinking accusations led to the immediate identification of an accused who was then captured by individuals in the vicinity and beaten by the crowd (Afi Dzokoto & Adams 2005). In the recent history of this phenomenon, there have been 36 reported murders by mobs across West Africa, though this is assumed to be lower than the actual number of murders as many may have been unreported or reported as non-witchcraft-related violence (Afi Dzokoto & Adams 2005).

An aspect of witchcraft-related violence which is difficult to measure is the assumed gendered nature of the phenomenon. Here it is important to keep in mind the differentiation between suspicion, accusations and violence, as well as the distinction between the two definitions of violence as attacks against witches and attacks by witches. In my research, I did not begin with the assumption that witchcraft itself is gendered and in my analysis this view was confirmed by interviewees and informants understandings, experiences and descriptions of witchcraft and witchcraft-related violence. The key point of disagreement that I have with interpreting witchcraft as gendered is that this conceptualization negates witchcraft as it exists in reality, by denying that every individual is equally capable of drawing on supernatural power against any other individual, regardless of sex or gender. More problematically, as a political scientist, I am concerned by the placing of blame on witchcraft belief, which is almost always viewed sceptically, and thereby obfuscating what I see to be more fundamental cause of gendered violence surrounding witchcraft: the gendered power relations which

⁶ Genital shrinking is a phenomenon which shares many characteristics with the Asian phenomenon of koro, where the genitals of an individual are understood to be shrinking or inverting (Afi Dzokoto & Adams 2005; Mather 2005)

exist within societies and through which witchcraft belief is enacted. In short, it is not witchcraft belief that is gendered, but rather, the societies which enact violence (of all kinds) against one sex more frequently than another.

It is as a result of gendered relations, not witchcraft, that women may be more vulnerable to witchcraft-related violence in the form of accusations than men. While the gendered character of accusations in some societies is an important characteristics of witchcraft-related violence, it is not a defining one. When witchcraft is understood as causing harm to another through supernatural means, there is no specific or inherent gender dimension therein. However, feminist works which have looked at witchcraft-related violence have prioritized accusations and few have sought to define witchcraft, as it is often assumed to be a false belief, at best, or an expression of false consciousness at its worst. As a result of these biases, feminist analyses of witchcraft-related violence have produced questionable conclusions.

In his work on “witchcleansing” Auslander (1993) applied gender in his analysis of changing social relations to demonstrate how young men instrumentalized witchcraft discourse to argue for the dispossession of elders, and in particular women, who were seen as “hoarding” wealth (182). Auslander in his analysis demonstrated how witchcraft was used as a justification to construct propertied women as social barriers in an effort to legitimize restraining womens ability to actively participate in the economy. Understanding that witchcraft is a reality for many, as well as discourse which may be used towards various ends, is an important distinction. By problematizing witchcraft discourse, Auslander highlighted the political and social uses of witchcraft belief, which like any belief or idea, may be employed by individuals or groups to advance or restrain a change in power relations.

Without these important caveats, feminist analyses risk being essentializing and sensational. For example, Badoe (2005) in her work on the witch camps of Northern Ghana stressed that among “over a thousand people” in the camps, “only thirteen were men” (40). Thus, Badoe concludes that witchcraft is “inevitably a study of gender and sexuality” (Badoe 2005: 40). Badoe continues to construct women in the camps as those who “challenged or transgressed the gender regimes in the patrilineal, patrilocal, polygynous communities from which they hailed in northern Ghana” (Badoe 2005: 49-50).

First among the problems with Badoe's analysis which pertains to one of nine witch camps in the region, Gambaga, is that women in the witch camps come from a multitude of communities across northern Ghana, Burkina Faso and Togo. Whether all the locations of origins of these women consistently conform to the same set of gender relations is not only unlikely, but overlooked. Further, Badoe denies the importance of suspicion in witchcraft phenomenon, as many more people, of both sexes, are likely subject to various forms of ostracism and hostility than are present in the camps. Further, Badoe fails to investigate the frequency of attacks against men and women in the communities of origin, thus leading to an assumed correlation between the one's presence in the camps and the nature of accusations in the region. Finally, Badoe, fails to consider the uncomfortable facet of belief within the region and the complicated agency of all individuals in constructing and enacting this belief.

Though it is admittedly uncomfortable to acknowledge, witchcraft belief within many African societies is a communally constructed reality in which individuals are active participants. In order to approach this issue clearly, it may help to begin from the understanding of witchcraft as a shared reality which individuals are socialized to participate in, but from which they may equally opt-out. In my own field research, a number of respondents addressed witchcraft belief as part of their society, but a part in which they do not participate. In all but one instance, these respondents identified as Christian, often Jehovah's Witness, a denomination that does not permit belief in the occult. These respondents consider themselves immune to witchcraft and equally, other Ghanaians or Cameroonians who were asked to confirm this view often agreed. In this logic, those who do not believe in witchcraft are not only immune to supernatural attack, they are also exempt from suspicion and accusation. In order to be a

witch or be vulnerable to attack, one must live in the world of witches. This is also the reason, frequently cited, and which I encountered in the field, as to why whites are thought to be immune to witchcraft attack: whites do not believe in and are ignorant towards witchcraft.

In interviews and in discussion, Ghanaians and Cameroonians stressed the role of adults in informing their early understanding of witchcraft. In many cases, interviewees and informants noted that their mothers in particular warned them against the favours of elderly women at early ages and throughout their lives. In discussion with an accused witch in the one of the witch camps of northern Ghana, the woman expressed that as she was not herself a witch, there may be others who have been wrongly suspected, casting doubt on her own participation in the rumours and gossip which fuelled accusations in her own village. This notion hints at the uneasy realization that one has participated in the construction of witchcraft belief and violence to which one is now victim.

Thus, the agentless woman as victim, depicted in Badoe's text is both an essentializing and reductionist understanding of a much more complicated and difficult position vis-a-vis witchcraft. This parsimonious conclusion is also limited in its failing to speak to the experiences of women and men who confess to being and are professed witches and who refuse to denounce the practice. While these confessions are often dismissed as false consciousness, where authors such as Badstuebner (2003) argue that women have been brainwashed or traumatized to the point of delusion, they remain a problem for any researcher who aims to take witchcraft belief seriously. Though the views I am expressing may be critiqued as "depoliticized", as Federici (2002) has argued of many journalistic and academic accounts which are "detached" and "exhibiting little outrage over the horrific destiny that so many of the accused have met", they should not be misunderstood as lacking "sympathy for the women, men and children who have been murdered" (Federici 2002: 24-25).

Rather it is to say that it is important to resist simplification for the sake of self-righteousness. It is also to argue against the assumption made by Federici that feminist interventions are the only means capable and dedicated to "better understanding the conditions that produce witch hunts and to building a constituency of human rights activists and social justice groups committed to ending the persecutions" (Federici 2002: 25). Moving away from this arrogant and self-congratulatory call to arms, this research aims to balance the understanding that while the gendered nature of accusations in some societies is important to understanding witchcraft-related violence, it is not the whole picture and therefore not the central focus of this work. In cases where gender is a relevant dimension, it will be spoken to and assessed. In addition, allowing oneself to be limited by one mode of analysis risks preventing study of additional dimensions; in this case, it is essential not to dismiss the important element of age in determining one's vulnerability to accusation.

In the witch camp in Kukuo, in northern Ghana, there is a significant number of accused males who are, unlike many accused women, consistently elderly. In order to explain this seeming aberration, it is important to consider the position of the elderly in Ghanaian societies. The weak, defined as those who are socially isolated and without strong family ties, are, according to one interviewee, always most vulnerable to accusations because they are least likely to have family to defend them and their position in the community. Among those who are socially weak in the structures of many Ghanaian societies are women and the elderly. Elder rights in Ghana has received much attention in recent years, as many authors have written about witchcraft-related violence against older persons, and women in particular. As individuals age, they are often increasingly socially isolated, a condition which worsens when their partners pass away, leaving them dependent on families who are less and less "inclined to care for their elders", and leading to cases of abandonment (Ferreira 2004: 19). Thus widows and widowers alike are particularly vulnerable to accusations which may be seen as being motivated in part by conflicts over property or inheritance (Ferreira 2004).

While elders are at greater risk of violence in Ghana, it is children who are increasingly at risk

of accusation in much central Africa and in Cameroon in particular (Cimpric 2010; Sabuni 2007). Again economic motivations are often advanced in an effort to explain accusations against children, citing loss of one's mother, separation or divorce and polygamy as fuelling accusations (Cahn 2006). However, it has also been noted that churches, as well as families, are active participants in the construction of children as witches (Cahn 2006; de Boeck 2009). Overall, there is little evidence that economic factors fuel accusations and historical documents provide evidence that this phenomenon is not a recent development (Meyer 1995; Opoku 1978). Further, some authors such as de Boeck (2009) contest the conclusion that child accusations are an economic response to the burden of parenthood in poverty, noting that there are many factors behind this advancing trend, including the instrumentalization of witchcraft discourse by children as a means to “challenge parents, public authority and the established order” (de Boeck 2009: 143).

In addition, child accusations as a response to extreme poverty cannot easily explain instances of accusations and killing seen within African diasporas. In a study commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills in London, United Kingdom, the researcher and author, Stobart, found that families expressed real fear of their own children and were “terrified of him or her” and felt when a child witch is present in the family “that everything is under threat – even their lives” (Stobart 2006: 5). In addition, Stobart found, as other authors looking at child accusations in African societies have found, that “gender does not appear to play a significant role” (Stobart 2006: 10). In cases of child accusations, there are no camps for child witches, as a result, those who survive the accusation are left to fend for themselves on the streets.

The “Problem”-atique of witchcraft-related violence

The headlines which accompany witchcraft-related articles may not always be clearly identifiable at first. For example, BBC articles on the Nigerian raid of a “baby farm” (“Nigeria 'baby farm' girls rescued by Abia state police”, BBC 2011) or “baby factory” (“Nigeria 'baby factory' raided in Imo state”, BBC 2013) may not be immediately read as the production of infants for sale and use in rituals. Similarly, the means by which many trafficked or confined women are coerced is also through the threat of witchcraft. As in the case of an international trafficker arrested in the UK in 2012, women and children who were trafficked had photos, hair and fingernail clippings taken from them to be used in curses that would kill them if they were to seek aid or flee (“Osezua Oselase used witchcraft on trafficked girls”, BBC 2012). While these are international examples, articles pertaining to the trafficking of human body parts also appear frequently in national presses in Ghana and Cameroon. In a recent example in Cameroon, a routine search instituted to reduce poaching found human flesh where officers expected to find elephant parts, which was intended for sale on the fetish market (“Cameroun: des braconniers arrêtés en possession de chair humaine”, RFI 2012).

In addition to the more obvious headlines of witch burnings and murder which appear monthly in the international press, looking more closely into the content of articles, it is almost weekly that witchcraft and witchcraft-related violence appears in global media sources. The frequency and intensity of some cases, such as the recent burning death of an accused teacher in Papua New Guinea, the images of which were widely published, generating an international outcry (“Woman burned alive for 'sorcery' in Papua New Guinea”, BBC 2013), has led to an increased sense of need to end all forms of violence related to witchcraft belief. In the case of Papua New Guinea, the attention and outrage that the public murder of 20 year-old Kepari Leniata drew, as well as the event of subsequent murders by beheading, moved the government to repeal their Sorcery Act (“Papua New Guinea prime minister to repeal sorcery act”, BBC 2013). Though this may be seen as a positive outcome of increased attention and

reporting of witchcraft-related acts, which are often characterized as barbaric, horrific, and based in falsehoods, it is a very limited view of this phenomenon. The banning of witchcraft accusations may seem to many to be a reasonable response to increasing violence. However evidence demonstrates that addressing witchcraft-related violence is not so simple. Neither legal intervention nor education initiatives have any long-term impact on the witchcraft-related violence (Green 2005; Golooba-Mutebi 2005; Kohnert 2007).

Rather than seeking to simply repress a phenomenon that is often approached from a position of scepticism and disgust, it may be more instructive to seek to understand the complexities of witchcraft-related violence and to attempt to disentangle witchcraft belief and witchcraft-related violence in order to investigate the possibility of addressing witchcraft attack non-violently. This is the central focus of this work: to assess the opportunities for addressing and mitigating spiritual insecurity and experiences of witchcraft-related violence, thereby contributing to the effort to reduce instances of violence of all kinds. My work has been inspired in part by my own experiences in Ghana, but it has been mostly notably motivated and shaped by the challenges put forth by Adam Ashforth (2005) and Dirk Kohnert (2007) who have called upon the discipline of political science to acknowledge the need to understand witchcraft-related violence in respect to the political landscape of African states and to develop a more complex and representative political analysis of witchcraft in Africa. In responding to these persuasive appeals, it is my goal to investigate witchcraft as a fundamentally non-Western representation of power, which translates into unique conceptions of the political, including the nature of morality, justice, the state and the relation of the individual vis-a-vis the collective. Overall, this work seeks to test the hypothesis presented by Kohnert, that the solution to witchcraft-related violence may only be found within the logic of witchcraft itself and not, as many assumed, within the interventions of the West.

Framing “Witchcraft, Violence and Mediation”

In *Witchcraft, Violence and Democracy in South Africa*, Adam Ashforth directly questions the implications of the “witchcraft paradigm” for such political concepts as democratic governance, the rule of law, human rights, security and justice (Ashforth 2002, 2005a, 2005b). As argued by Ashforth and Dirk Kohnert (2007), the reality of witchcraft belief and witchcraft-related violence have serious repercussions for the realm of politics in Africa. To date, analyses of African politics, economics, policy and development have largely failed to incorporate the threat and danger posed by witchcraft, instead basing analyses on “Eurocentric assumptions” and culturally based conceptions of the political (Kohnert 2007: 35; Schatzberg 2006). Though many researchers have endeavoured to incorporate witchcraft belief within their research on African states or societies, such as Isak Niehaus, Diane Ciekawy and Cyprian Fisiy, the study of the African witchcraft beliefs in terms of their implications for the field of political science remains largely unexplored (Ciekawy & Geschiere 1998).

As noted earlier, the problem of witchcraft-related violence has rarely been addressed in political science studies. Though the subject of witchcraft-related violence is becoming more prominent in anthropological works and in media reports, it has failed to draw the attention of the discipline. This is due in part to the sceptical approach of disbelief in witchcraft which dominates political science and effectively negates experiences of witchcraft in African contexts, as well as the supremacy of theoretical frameworks which emphasize Western understandings of power and focus on the state and society as the main actors in politics (to the exclusion of supernatural actors such as witches). In political science itself there is also the marginalization of the study of African politics which may also be seen as a barrier to knowledge of witchcraft belief. Despite being neglected in political studies, for many academics who study witchcraft in African societies, from the fields of anthropology, law and

health, the questions and conflicts associated with witchcraft belief can and must be understood, at least in part, in terms of the political. This perspective into both witchcraft belief and witchcraft-related violence is not only essential for the work of scholars in other fields but also for political scientists as it may be argued that the incomplete successes or complete failures of Western and international interventions in Africa, from the imposition of the state system to development programs and projects, may be the result, in part, of a failure to acknowledge and incorporate the reality of witchcraft belief. Most importantly, as evidence suggests, the continued and increasing instances of witchcraft-related violence may also be in part the product of these same processes of ignorance and imposition.

Unfortunately, the problem of witchcraft-related violence itself is extremely difficult to measure in terms of a scale, a barrier which many authors delicately sidestep. In terms of numbers, the ability to determine the rates of incidence of witchcraft-related violence is significantly limited by numerous factors such as diverse definitions of witchcraft-related violence, a lack of (or limited use of) recorded data and the general low priority given to the issue of witchcraft-related violence by the state, which is often treated instead under legal terminology as harassment, assault or murder. Despite these limitations, some authors have endeavoured to provide quantitative data in their research. For example, Simeon Mesaki notes that in Tanzania, between the years of 1970 and 1984, 3,693 accused witches were murdered (Mesaki 2009b). Beyond this, however, Mesaki is only able to speculate from less reliable media reports that the rate of violence has continued, if not increased (Mesaki 2009). Remarkably, these numbers do not include ritual murder or instances of death which are considered the result of witchcraft attack. Though exact figures are unavailable or have yet to be calculated, a consensus does exist among authors that instances of witchcraft-related violence are increasing to levels which Africans themselves identify as unprecedented (Geschiere 1997; Niehaus 2001; Ashforth 2002; Smith 2008).

In their attempts to highlight the prevalence of witchcraft-related violence, a number of studies conducted by anthropologists have employed a political analysis in understanding the implications of witchcraft belief, whereas others have actively undertaken the study of witchcraft as political, and the political as supernatural. Examples of this are focused around the concept of power, central to both politics and witchcraft. Power, Ellis and ter Haar argue, is at the “heart of the matter”, as the source of all power beyond the basic physical capability of an individual is believed to be drawn from the supernatural realm (2007: 390). The influence of this belief on political concepts such as authority and legitimacy is significant, at times making witchcraft a political instrument used to “attain, maintain, contest and resist power” (Kiernan 2006: 10; Ellis & ter Haar 2007). As a result, power is concentrated in the possession of those who are willing to engage the supernatural or evoke the evil of witchcraft, fostering insecurity and distrust within political systems and societies, leading to poor cohesion and adversarial relations which divide families, reducing participation and, in some extreme cases, leading to the abandonment of entire villages (Golooba-Mutebi 2005; Thomas 2007).

In order to more fully understand such complex relations, a political conception of witchcraft must be investigated. As noted by Ellis and ter Haar, current models of academic study are predicated on the assumption of a “structural distinction between the visible or material world and the invisible”, which does not reflect African epistemologies (2007: 385). Following this same observation, Nyamnjoh argues that African epistemologies of witchcraft are not dominated by physical evidence, but rather emphasize a more holistic experience of reality; one where truth is consensually determined, rather than the result of “artificial disqualification, dismemberment or atomization” (2001: 29). Such views, which call for greater appreciation of African epistemologies are contrary to dominant discourses of development, modernization and Western-modelled progress which seek to eradicate witchcraft beliefs and practices through education and legal intervention.

Unfortunately, as noted earlier, evidence suggests that witchcraft suppression efforts play an

important role in entrenching the belief in witchcraft (Green 2005). State interventions, based in colonial anti-witchcraft legislation, rather than decreasing insecurity foster the impression that state institutions and authorities are eager to protect witches, by implementing protections of the accused individual and punishing witch killers, thereby undermining the security of the people witches threaten (Golooba-Mutebi 2005; Kohnert 2007). However, this does not necessarily lead to the common conclusion that witchcraft violence is beyond redress and witchcraft belief should be eradicated.

Rather, in place of seeking to repress belief in the supernatural and witchcraft, this research argues for a more in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of witchcraft-related violence towards the development of a means resolving issues of violence and insecurity. As noted by Afi Dzotoko and Adams (2005), efforts to address accusations which target the very real distress experienced by those who live under threat are much more effective than incarceration or punishment. Whereas many African states ban witchcraft accusations in an effort to deter individuals from making their suspicions public, potentially leading to violent acts of revenge and certainly affecting the reputation of the accused, accusations might also be seen as a point of productive intervention where individuals may be able to identify and diffuse interpersonal conflicts.

In the case of witchcraft, where many acts are seen as unforgivable, it remains to be seen whether punishments meted are not amenable to some form of mediation. Looking back at the historical practices of witchcraft divination which was used to determine an person's guilt and the non-violent neutralization of witch powers through healing which removed the threat of witchcraft, it is arguable that processes of violence such as “instant justice” (Afi Dzotoko & Adams 2005: 71) may be reduced through mediation efforts. In particular, traditional authorities are seen to be important mediators. However, traditional mechanisms which once existed in some societies have been eroded by colonialism, state intervention and international development programs which act to de-legitimize the spiritual importance of traditional authorities in the region. Therefore, the question of how witchcraft-related violence might be mediated in the contemporary context remained. This led me to the initial research question of: *How can witchcraft violence be assessed in African contexts?*

Witchcraft as a worldview requires access to a continuous cycle of deconstruction and reconstruction of social relations of power and morality, the outcomes of which are determined by an individuals' changing needs and motivations. It may be that this anti-institutional facet of witchcraft belief limits the ability to understand this phenomenon, in the same way that it may also be part of the “widespread failures of democratisation” as the liberal state, like Western political theory, has been unable to “formally encompass” this shifting spiritual realm of power and morality (Ellis & ter Haar 2004: 107). From current literature and research available, there are four main approaches to witchcraft-related violence: through state intervention, religious intervention, private or market-based services and community mediation (Geschiere 1997; Meyer 1998; Rutherford 1999; Niehaus 2001; Diwan 2004; Ashforth 2005; Englund 2007; de Boeck 2009).

In my work, the third and fourth categories took a distinctly different form in the field. Private or market-based approaches proved to be a narrow interpretation of an individual's appeals to traditional authorities, who may accept payment but where the economic exchange is secondary to the supernatural power of the individual. In terms of community mediation, this category may suggest to the Western reader a process of participation, engagement and empowerment through education initiatives. This was my understanding and bias when working with HelpAge Ghana. In the field, however, it is a very different story. Who constitutes and speaks for the community (in discussion, Jourde 2011), what the interests and needs of the community are and who is best equipped to address these is heavily contested on the ground. Overwhelmingly, in literature and in the field, the power to define these categories is assumed by non-governmental organizations which seek to work with and within “communities” to address witchcraft-related violence. Therefore, in response to the language

encountered in my work, NGOs, as a highly connotative and debated actor, will be used.

As there has yet to be a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of any of these four approaches, I have structured the basic premise of my research towards the goals of beginning to assess which of these interventions is most effective in addressing violence and spiritual insecurity.

The State

The question of whether the modern liberal state is able to reconcile with or incorporate the supernatural has been posed by a number of authors (Diwan 2004; Hund 2004; Geschiere 2006). Most prominently, the judicial systems of African states have been investigated for their effectiveness in trying individuals who have attacked or killed accused witches in South Africa (Hund 2004; Ashforth 2005), Tanzania (Mesaki 2009a) and Zimbabwe (Diwan 2004). As well, the role of law enforcement officials has been addressed in South Africa, stressing the ambiguous position of officers who experience spiritual insecurity that is directly in conflict with their duties according to the law (Ralushai et al. 1996; Ashforth 2005). The effectiveness of the state in trying witches for attacks against communities has also been investigated in the case of Cameroon (Fisiy & Geschiere 1990; Fisiy 1998). In each case study, the authors reviewed court files and where possible judges, court officials, ministers of justice and individuals involved in the case trial were interviewed in order to obtain an understanding of the motivations, interpretations and responses of the individuals involved in the process of state intervention.

To date, it seems that the results from these anthropological and legal studies are relatively consistent. The state is not only poorly equipped to appropriately address witchcraft belief and insecurity, it is also subject to the suspicions and insecurity which engagement with witchcraft discourse necessarily entails. Ironically, it is the power of the state to act which robs it of its legitimacy in acting. As many state leaders are themselves suspected of involvement in witchcraft practices their efforts to implement legal protections against witch killings further undermines the construction of the state as an institution committed to protecting societies.

Religious Intervention

Churches are also prominent actors in the current debates regarding witchcraft belief and witchcraft violence in Africa, however, churches lack ecumenical consistency regarding the threat of witchcraft. Some Christian denominations are sceptical of witchcraft and actively seek to eradicate witchcraft belief within their congregation. This position is starkly contrasted by other denominations, particularly evangelical and Pentecostal churches, which not only express belief in witchcraft, but have also been criticized as having contributed to witchcraft-related violence through practices of charismatic healing and exorcism (Meyer 1998; de Boeck 2009). In particular, Pentecostal churches are noted as being implicated in the increasing occurrence of witchcraft accusations against children in the region (de Boeck 2009; Cimpric 2010).

The role of churches in mediating witchcraft violence has been researched by a number of authors who have found that church interventions in witchcraft belief generally promotes rather than reduces instances of violence (Pfeiffer et al. 2007; Cimpric 2010). Though some churches may be able to offer some protection to individuals against witchcraft attack, the extreme anti-witch discourse of many churches serves to demonize suspected witches (Pfeiffer et al. 2007). Most notably, the emergence of “pastor-prophets” has limited the interest of the state in addressing violence within churches as the ability to mobilize one's congregation is seen to be a political force in its own right (Cimpric 2010: 15). More problematically, the question of church intervention is further complicated by common rumours and suspicions that church leaders are themselves engaged in witchcraft in order to maintain their positions and social status (Ralushai et al. 1996).

Traditional Authorities

The role of traditional authorities, framed as private and market-based approaches to addressing witchcraft-related violence, has been most extensively discussed by the Comaroffs and Geschiere, who frame witchcraft belief within the context of modernity and the increasing commodification of African societies (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999, 2002; Geschiere 1997). This approach is problematic for a number of reasons. In addition to overlooking or diminishing the role of traditional authorities in African societies to relations of commercial capitalism, this approach also frequently constructs these monetary relations as novel, despite commodification being present in many African societies before Western contact and during the slave trade and colonial eras (Shaw 1997, 2001; Niehaus 2001). This approach also suggests that economic relations have replaced traditional authority in the construction of local governance, moving African societies from a spiritual interpretation of authority engaged through acts of reciprocity, towards an economy where skills are bought and sold and where relations of power and responsibility are purely capitalist.

In the field, this view was adamantly refuted by respondents. Instead, the role of chiefs, healers, diviners and fetish priests was described as central figures in mediating spiritual insecurity whose assistance was sought on the basis of need, not financial ability (Natras 2005; Pfeiffer et al. 2007). Notably, in interviews chiefs, healers, diviners and fetish priests, made clear, and other respondents confirmed, that payment for services is not required in all cases, and where it is, the sum provided is insignificant, amounting in most cases to the cost of lunch on the street in Accra, Ghana (5 cedis; \$2 CDN) or the cost of two newspapers in Yaounde, Cameroon (1,000 CFA; \$2 CDN). For both parties, the amount is understood to be a token of thanks⁷, rather than payment, referencing ideas of reciprocity and exchange enacted in the spiritual world, but manifested in the visible world.

NGOs

For many authors community mediation is the most promising way forward in addressing and reducing witchcraft-related violence (Ashforth 2002; Ludsin 2003; Englund 2007). In my own experience with HelpAge Ghana, the work of a local community-based organization the Presbyterian Church's GO Home Project, as well as the work of HelpAge informed and skewed my interpretation of the mediation of witchcraft-related violence in ways which confirmed the optimistic outlook of Western academics. It seemed, from the perspective of a project officer, that the work NGOs in societies in Africa provided the most promising response to this dilemma. This view was quickly deconstructed in my fieldwork where the (obvious) ethnocentrism of NGO approaches became inescapable and the benefits and costs of international intervention were made apparent. In the Ghana and Cameroon, I gained an outside perspective on the work of non-governmental organizations, forcing me to reflect critically on the nature of international intervention, particularly where this intervention is constructed as local or community-based.

Overall, this approach which initially seemed to be the simplest solution was proven to be exactly that: simple. As will be seen in the following chapters, the question of witchcraft is many things,

⁷ As additional context, in Ghana, according to research conducted by WageIndicator on hourly wages, the “median net hourly wage of the total sample is 2,35 Ghanaian Cedi” (Besamusca & Tijdens 2012). This rate includes formal and informal sector wages. Though a similar study has not yet been conducted in Cameroon, WageIndicator.org provides information regarding the guaranteed minimum monthly wage in the country. Using the amount on wage indicator (and applying Cameroonian law regarding maximum working hours per week, set at 40), Cameroonians are only guaranteed a minimum wage of 176.35 CFA per hour. However, I was unable to find reliable figures regarding the average wage, rather than the minimum guaranteed. Despite this, it is notable that the sum exchanged for services is much more significant in Cameroon than Ghana, though both are represented as being symbolic rather than economic.

possibly any- and maybe even every-thing, but it is not is simple.

Theory

Having addressed the question of what categories to use, the following question of: How to theorize witchcraft in African contexts? followed. In order to investigate each of the four intervention types, the state, religious organizations, NGOs and traditional authorities, a theoretical approach must be employed. From the field of Comparative Politics, three methods of study have been identified as possibly applying to the research: these are institutionalism, state-centred approach and society-centred approach. The first, institutionalism, is perhaps a bit of a straw man in respect to witchcraft-related violence. Though each of the four approaches may be understood in terms of institutional logics, culture and governance towards policy development (Peters 1998), the phenomenon of witchcraft itself does not fit comfortably with an institutional interpretation. Witchcraft as a realm of discord may be more accurately deemed anti-institutional.

The remaining methods of state-centred and society-centred study are much more amenable, with state-centred approaches beginning with an assessment of the state and “then working outwards to society” (Peters 1998: 131). Similarly, the ability of the society-centred approach to incorporate non-state actors and interests, such as those of churches and the market, allows for a more inclusive approach. As the state has been found to be at epistemological odds with the parameters of witchcraft belief, I adopt a society-centred analysis which will take into account the importance of power in the governing relations of witchcraft belief and witchcraft-related violence.

In determining the proper theory to apply, I agree with the argument made by Pouliot (2007) regarding research methods: that methods one's method “should be aligned with the researcher's style of reasoning” as this circumscribes “the horizon of thinkable research questions” (360). Part of my work may be accurately described as constructivist; drawing on the premise that reality and knowledge are “mutually constituted” (Pouliot 2007: 360). Therefore, I acknowledge the constructivist bias of my approach to witchcraft where:

constructivism is conceived as a “metatheoretical commitment” based on three tenets: first, that knowledge is socially constructed (an epistemological claim); second, that social reality is constructed (an ontological claim); and third, that knowledge and reality are mutually constitutive (a reflexive claim). Accordingly, the social construction of knowledge and construction of social reality are two sides of the same coin. (Pouliot 2007: 361)

In this way, I do not purport to know “what is 'really real' and what is not” (Pouliot 2007: 363). This does not mean that I “embrace epistemological relativism” (Pouliot 2007: 363) but that I am aware that social facts⁸ “are naturalized by social agents” and that being part this perspective allows one to “develop knowledge about social life while remaining agnostic about reality” (Pouliot 2007: 367). Therefore, my focus is on “what it is that *social agents*, as opposed to analysts take to be real” (Pouliot 2007: 367, author's emphasis). This view of reality, as collectively constituted, appeals to my own ethics which lie in communal anarchism. In both approaches, social reality is constructed by a collective who share ideas and norms which govern their daily actions and behaviours. However, in state systems, social facts and therefore reality, may be institutionalized by centralized or state powers, thereby limiting or negating the ability to individuals to negotiate what is deemed to be the dominant reality.

⁸ Here I am drawing on the definition by Pouliot (2007) which argues that “[social facts] are knowledge that makes social worlds come into being. Ultimately, to know whether a social fact is “really real” makes no analytical difference; the whole point is to observe whether agents take it to be real and to draw the social and political implications that follow.” (363-364)

The question of *How can witchcraft belief be understood in terms of the political* may by this point seem redundant. Unfortunately, it is necessary to justify this interpretation and approach. As argued earlier, witchcraft belief is predominantly considered in contemporary studies to be a traditional relic which is instrumentalized to explain and navigate the social tensions resulting from the transition to modernity. Witchcraft however may not be so easily dismissed as a mere oddity, an expression of backwardness or tradition which has simply managed to date to escape the reason of modernity. As many anthropologists reduce witchcraft belief to a reaction or symbolic rejection of modernity, they replicate modernity's teleological assumptions of reason and development, while rejecting, as modernity would, the validity of a belief in the supernatural (Rutherford 1999). Another similar and/or subtextual interpretation of witchcraft belief which must be critically questioned is the common representation of witchcraft as an impediment to development and progress (Green 2005; Smith 2007).

In place of these, where witchcraft cannot be accepted as a reality lived by many, it may be more respectfully interpreted as a “set of discourses on morality, sociality and humanity: on human frailty” (Moore & Sanders 2001: 20). In this light, witchcraft belief, at its core, is understood to be concerned with the inner nature of humanity. It is through this lens that the actions of an individual against a witch may be understood not only as a form of vengeance or as means to justice, but also as a recognition of the self and a caution against uncontrolled envy and jealousy. Witchcraft violence can therefore not escape highlighting the unequal power relations within a society which motivated the witchcraft act. Thus witchcraft subverts understandings of hierarchy and power and requires these to be reconfigured or reinforced in order to reach greater levels of harmony and cohesion.

Thus, witchcraft belief must be considered as a political phenomenon. In terms of how witchcraft belief can be understood in terms of the political, this question is meant to directly address and encompass relations of power across a spectrum which extends beyond a focus on the state. The political is defined, in the parameters of this research, as relations of power spanning all aspects of society which intersect with witchcraft belief. This is not meant to infer that witchcraft and the state will be ignored, but that this is seen as a separate and distinct question: *What are the impacts of witchcraft belief and witchcraft-related violence in African politics?*

There is significant evidence to suggest that witchcraft belief is not only prevalent in African politics, but that it also participates in defining and determining the nature and expression of African political concepts and practices, altering the Western conception of the function and capacity of the state in African contexts. For example, one may question how witchcraft belief affects the character of Western-defined political concepts such as power, morality, justice, the state and the community. In the context of witchcraft belief, power, as the ability to act over another, is seen in all cases to be derived from the supernatural. Within this logic, one may only gain power over another through the use of witchcraft, an act which is inherently evil and “highly dangerous” (Geschiere 2006: 224). This view of power may be seen to significantly undermine key concepts within Western determinants of the successful modern state and its role in the politics of a community, as well as requiring a counter-balancing act of good in order to be seen as legitimate.

Further, what is the value of a democracy when it is assumed by constituents that the candidates employed supernatural means to gain office, as was widely assumed during Ghana's election in 2000 (Ellis & ter Haar 2004) and again in 2012? A number of authors have suggested that for the model of state politics to be effective the African contexts, it must be significantly altered to reflect African realities (Ake 1993; Hund 2004; Tebbe 2007). This interpretation is a significant departure from Western expectations of the state and the nature of politics in general, and the implications of this view may be far-reaching. Though a thorough investigation of these differences is not the primary focus of the research, an effort was made to investigate and identify these differences within the research settings.

Case study selection

The case studies for the research project were selected based on the criteria of being most different cases. Though Ghana and Cameroon share a number of characteristics in terms of witchcraft belief, instances of witchcraft-related violence and in respect to the actors which are engaged in efforts to address or mediate these, there are a number of important differences which provide for a strong comparative study. Foremost, Ghana is a state which is sceptical of witchcraft belief and therefore its interventions are based upon conceptions of governance and power which may be strongly correlated to Western understandings of the legal-rational state. On the other hand, Cameroon is a state which has clearly and forcibly professed its belief in witchcraft since its independence from colonial rule, thus the state, governance structures, understandings of power and social relations have evolved in the post-colony under a shared reality of the supernatural.

Though Ghana represents an approach to witchcraft belief which is dominant on the continent, this case was not selected at random. This selection was based largely on my own familiarity with the research environment as well as with the context of witchcraft belief and violence in this country. In addition to being the site of the initial conception of the research, as well as a site of familiarity and established research relations, Ghana represented an ideal case from which to base a study of witchcraft in African politics. Ghana provides one of the most standard and complete representations of the witchcraft phenomenon, the characteristics of which include: widespread belief among the population, evidence of high levels of community insecurity, including accusations against children and the elderly, witchcraft violence, in addition to non-violent NGO mediation initiatives, black and grey market witchcraft activity, religious intervention, strong public discourse through media and community-based organizations, and rumours of state involvement in witchcraft activity. As well Ghana, like the majority of African states, has retained colonial-era anti-witchcraft legislation with its original interpretation, thereby affirming its official disbelief in witchcraft and outlawing and suppressing witchcraft accusations and banning all forms of supernatural intervention.

This approach reflects a strong ideological affinity with Western conceptions of the state and politics. Two main elements of this approach must be stressed. The first is the disconnect of the state from society in terms of one another's interpretation of the nature of reality, where the state refuses to accept the existence of witchcraft which many feel threatens their daily security. The second is the state's prioritization of the rights of the individual over those of the collective, choosing to treat its society as individualized though this may not reflect lived experiences in terms of witchcraft threats and redress. Thus, the very real sense of spiritual insecurity experienced in a village or town, posed by an accused witch towards the people living there, is deemed non-existent vis-a-vis the threat posed by a suspicious individual towards the victim of accusation. As a result of these two elements, the state distances itself from the majority of Ghanaian society in its reluctance to acknowledge the threat of witchcraft and protect communities from witchcraft attack, arguably threatening its own legitimacy and effectiveness.

The comparative case of Cameroon has been selected, as noted earlier, for its similarities in respects to the phenomena of witchcraft belief, witchcraft-related violence and efforts to mediate these within society. Thus, the variable of witchcraft is constant with that of Ghana. However, Cameroon has been chosen for its instrumentality as a critical opposition to the representative case of Ghana as the official state position and response towards witchcraft in these cases differs radically from that of Ghana. The state of Cameroon, as noted, acknowledges the reality of witchcraft. This belief has infused governance and politics in the post-colonial state (Nyamnjoh 2001) and may be seen to be at “the

centre of State-building processes” (Rowlands & Warnier 1998: 121). This effort has drawn foremost on the powers of the judiciary (Geschiere 1997; Diwan 2004). Upon gaining independence, Cameroon amended colonial era anti-witchcraft legislation, most fundamentally altering the interpretation of witchcraft from one of scepticism to one of belief, thus redefining witchcraft, once a fraudulent practice, as a criminal offence. This approach may be interpreted as permitting supernatural mediation though it is sought primarily through the state judiciary. Unlike Ghana, Cameroon directly rejects Western scepticism and more openly than any other state employs witchcraft power in order to further consolidate state power (Nyamnjoh 2001).

Thus, the Cameroonian state, unlike many other African states, is notably “inclined to intervene directly” in the realm of witchcraft and in response to witchcraft-related violence, particularly in the effort to protect the individual from witchcraft attack (Geschiere 1997: 169). The main form of this intervention is the arrest, sentencing and imprisonment of accused witches. As a result, significant academic attention has been devoted to the legal and human rights implications of Cameroon's practice of jailing witches who have been accused and found guilty of witchcraft in a court of law (Fisiy 1998, Fisiy & Geschiere 1994; Geschiere 1997, 2006; Diwan 2004). Additionally, the state itself officially deems witchcraft attack to be a threat to the development of Cameroon as a society and a form of subversion employed against the state specifically (Fisiy 1998). Therefore the government of Cameroon relies heavily on the apparatus of the state to mediate this threat (Geschiere 1997: 169).

Through this approach, Cameroon employs the state as an arbiter of the supernatural, providing intervention which aims to protect society, as well as the state, from the threat of witchcraft. In the field, this approach seems to have limited the availability of non-state methods of intervention. Unlike Ghana where there are numerous public actors engaged in addressing witchcraft, protection in Cameroon is predominantly sought by individuals from the state, churches and traditional authorities, though the latter places the individual at risk of exploitation by “charlatans” (Geschiere 1997; Interviews 2013). The result of this has been a recent increase in witchcraft-related violence, which has drawn the criticism of international rights organizations which blame churches and “con-men” for the increasingly prevalent practices of child accusation and exorcism (Cahn 2006; de Boeck 2009)

Fieldwork

Witchcraft, as a study of harm and violence, demanded discretion in determining the appropriate methodology to be applied in the field research. Witchcraft as a topic in African society is widely considered to be a taboo or unsafe subject, extensive discussion or knowledge of which may indicate that a person is intimately familiar with the supernatural and therefore may possibly be a witch (Ralushai *et al.* 1996). Adding to this reluctance within the context of witchcraft itself, research into the subject by Westerners has been characterized, historically, by ridicule, condescension and intolerance towards non-Western views, beliefs and experiences (Kohnert 1996; Ciekawy 1998). This has significantly reduced the willingness of many people to participate in research on the subject.

In recognition of this possible tension, I chose a mixed methodology that allowed for open communication and some sense of confidence between the researcher and the informant. The primary methodologies chosen for the research project were interviewing and ethnographic study. The data collected within the field of research was gathered through direct conversation and in field participant observation. I conducted my fieldwork in Ghana over two and a half months in late 2012. Interviews and ethnography were conducted in Accra, Tamale, Gambaga and across the Greater Accra region. My fieldwork in Cameroon in early 2013 was substantially shorter, lasting one and a half months during which I conducted interviews and ethnography in Yaounde.

The first method employed in my fieldwork was in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews. These interviews were conducted with individuals who had been identified as key actors within the social and political realm of witchcraft belief, violence and mediation. This included state officials, religious leaders, NGO staff, traditional authorities, and victims and perpetrators of witchcraft-related violence. In both Ghana and Cameroon I hired a research assistant who was able to help coordinate interviews and contacts. As well, both assistants encouraged me to further expand my methodology, incorporating discussion groups in each country. These discussions groups allowed for a greater understanding of subtle differences and debates which existed between potential informants in each case.

In choosing an ethnographic approach, my aim in employing this methodology was to access the underlying and overarching context of witchcraft within the case study. From my previous experience in Ghana, discussion of witchcraft was common however the nature of this discussion was highly controlled by taboo and an overwhelming sense of insecurity. Additionally, it was important for me to employ a methodology which neither openly supported witchcraft belief nor fostered suspicions of witchcraft within the interview location, while avoiding alienating informants by directly addressing witchcraft belief or witchcraft-related violence in a conspicuous fashion. It was my view before entering the field that access to witchcraft discourse would require a familiarity within a location that could not be acquired by any other means.

Many of these considerations were in response to the concern that in addressing a violent and threatening subject like witchcraft, it was possible that I would be contributing to an atmosphere of anxiety and hostility. Witchcraft-related violence, like witchcraft belief, is incredibly complex. Despite the pervasiveness of witchcraft belief, it is not, as Andersson (2002) notes, “an all-dominating and inescapable belief” (445); it is better described as a volatile field of contestation and uncertainty. Even within witchcraft belief there is doubt and disbelief, therefore accusations and violence cannot be characterized as unidirectional or fixed as they are in many representations where a clear victim and perpetrator(s) are set in clear opposition. This makes it difficult to typify or predict witchcraft-related violence.

More importantly, witchcraft-related violence must also be cautiously approached as a form of political violence. As acts of witchcraft-related violence exist within a contested field, where competing discourses of power, legitimacy and reality converge, they may be seen as participating in the challenging or entrenching of relations of power. For example, as noted by Green (2005), recent discourses of “universal human rights and individual freedom are increasingly invoked by the better off to opt out of participation in public anti-witchcraft practices” (Green 2005: 248-249). State discourses of witchcraft are probably the most notable example of the use witchcraft belief to justify or legitimate political acts or violence, as state officials may instrumentalize witchcraft to deflect “focus from the political causes of misfortune” (Green 2005: 249).

Even in the non-violent mediation of accusations described by Green (2005) in Tanzania, the “cleansing” practice through which the accuser and the accused are held in equal standing until the witch is identified and then shaved, a process which removes the witches power, multiple layers of power relations are enacted. From the permissive distance maintained by state officials; to the expectation of compliance by the accused, whether they view themselves “as right-bearing individuals whose primary obligations are to... their own moral integrity rather than the security of the community”; to the statement made through shaving “about a collective community responsibility” (Green 2005: 256-257), the enactment of power relations is evident. In Green's view, “witchcraft suppression institutions” enable the “re-establishment of ruptured social relations... restore trust and deal non-violently with conflict” (Green 2005: 257) or in other words, protect the status quo or an idealized version thereof, an important act of power in and of itself.

In each country, I had planned to conduct covert ethnography, where my research interests and intentions would remain hidden from informants. However, as will be discussed later in greater detail, once in the field, I found that covert ethnography was not necessary: people were eager and willing to openly discuss witchcraft without significant concern or hostility. Though some interviewees felt an increased risk from discussing their experiences with or knowledge of witchcraft in detail, none felt that this risk was excessive. Most surprisingly, it was not respondents, interviewees or informants who experienced the greatest sense of risk, it was the research assistants who worked with me who felt they were in danger. For both assistants, researching witchcraft was more dangerous than discussing witchcraft. This view was also shared by interviewees and informants who often stressed the extreme personal risk I was putting myself at to complete my project.

Ghana

Ghana is a parliamentary democracy and is commonly thought to be the first African colony to gain independence, from British colonial rule as the Gold Coast, in 1957 and has since this time seen a number of coups and two to three (this is a currently debated number) electoral transitions. The country is situated on the Gulf of Guinea and shares its borders with Togo to the east, Burkina Faso to the north and Côte d'Ivoire to the west. The population of close to 25 million enjoys relative political stability, significant political freedoms and increasing, though regionally centred and mainly urban, economic growth as Ghana has been recently ranked as a middle-income country. The international reputation of Ghana as a reasonably stable, modern state has supported the development of an immense network of international NGOs (INGOs) and local NGOs which are often subsidiaries of either the state or INGOs.

Witchcraft-related violence in Ghana is commonly portrayed through the now infamous witch camps which are found in the northern region of the country. Though witch camps are not unique to Ghana, as they can also be found in other countries such as Benin, they have received a disproportionate amount of attention from international media and NGOs, leading the government of Ghana to publicly declare its commitment to close these camps permanently. In the camps' depiction as prisons, one important aspect of witchcraft belief in Ghana which is overlooked is migration: the women who inhabit the camps have often travelled great distances to these safe havens, from other regions and some from neighbouring countries. Witchcraft fears in much of Ghana both motivate and limit migration, driving young men and women from home (Grindal 2003) and keeping those who have chosen or been forced to leave home from returning once they have found some success away (Grindal 2003).

For those who cannot or choose not to physically escape witchcraft in their milieu, this social ill and bane of human existence is mainly confronted through gossip and whispered suspicions until a significant event such as an accident, illness or death motivates open accusation. In most instances, a catalyst is required to compel individuals to advance accusations or to take action against an accused witch. However, this catalyst may also be an instantaneous event that is not preceded by a particular suspicion but which is informed by a general sense of spiritual insecurity. In such cases, which share characteristics with the sudden mob lynching of thieves, a person may be suddenly publicly accused and the gathered people may respond swiftly, meting out what is commonly referred to as “instant justice”, where the accused is beaten by the crowd, sometimes to death.

Another common aspect of witchcraft-related violence in Ghana is the trafficking of human body parts for ritual purposes. Despite the concern that I might be unable to access information regarding this covert and illegal practice, it proved to be much more accessible than expected. For example, in a restaurant highlighted in both the Lonely Planet and Bradt travel guides for Ghana as an

expat favourite, I happened to sit at a table beside two individuals engaged in negotiations over the price of human body parts when stopping in for some orange juice one afternoon (Ethnography 14/10/12). The frequency of ritual murder was further confirmed in media analysis and in interviews, where informants from various regions stressed the propensity for individuals from other regions, not their own, to participate in and fuel this practice. In the instances of ritual murder reported during my field work, there was no consistent pattern in the targeting of victims. Gender, age and vocation all varied, including one attack in which a suspected, elderly witch was dismembered.

Another important aspect of witchcraft belief and accusations in Ghana is the view that women are more inclined to engage in witchcraft than men. Adding to this view, two respondents stressed that while women more frequently seek to harm others through witchcraft, it is men who are most dangerous. In one saying, translated by the interviewee, one thousand witches (female) are worth one wizard (male). While this view was shared by a number of interviewees and informants, it must be noted that all were from the northern regions of Ghana, and this was not a view expressed by respondents in the south. Though a full study of regional representations of witchcraft belief and witchcraft-related violence was beyond the scope of this work, where possible, such regional differences will be highlighted.

Cameroon

Cameroon is also on the Gulf of Guinea, though further east and south than Ghana. Cameroon shares its borders with six countries (Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the Republic of Congo) and gained independence incrementally due to the series of colonial claims on the regions which eventually formed Cameroon. Formal independence of united Cameroon came in 1961, since which time the country has been under the direct rule of two leaders, Ahmadou Ahidjo from 1961 to 1982 when Paul Biya took power. The long-standing authoritarian rule of Cameroon has allowed for stability and a strong, though sometimes mismanaged, economy and has generated significant infrastructure for the population of 20 million. Though political freedoms are limited, most notably in this work the freedom to assemble, many social and economic freedoms are permitted.

Incidences of witchcraft-related violence in Cameroon are rarely reported in the media as it is most widely understood to involve the victimization of individuals by witches who are often unknown or unseen. In the cases that are reported, the suspected witch is the focus of the story, which investigates the activities and attacks of the witch and, if available, analyses the confessions made by the witch. In reports concerning such attacks, details regarding the state response feature prominently, emphasizing the response by the local commissariat or police station and relating whether formal charges were advanced against the accused. Though a number of cases were brought to the police or military during my time in the field, much less attention was paid or information given regarding the subsequent legal procedures following these arrests.

The prominent role of the state in addressing witchcraft-related violence in Cameroon differs greatly from Ghana. In Ghana, a sceptical state leaves individuals responsible for their own protection, in a condition of effective self-help. This condition compels individuals to manage their own spiritual insecurity independently, and at times, in ways at odds with the wishes of the state. Though there is not a strong sense of confidence in the ability of the Cameroonian state to deal effectively with witches, as will be seen in the state chapter, the comparative infrequency of jungle justice, as mob action is called in Cameroon, suggests that the willingness of the state to address witchcraft attack has some impact on

the willingness of the public to murder accused witches. While public accusations may, and frequently do, escalate to violence, it is not so certain that this violence will lead to the death of the accused.

Another aspect of witchcraft-related violence which differs in Cameroon is the increasing frequency of child accusations. Though addressed earlier, it is important to stress that this phenomenon is a recent and widespread shift in the conception of the witch in Cameroon. In interviews, respondents themselves expressed shock and dismay at the idea that children were being drawn into witchcraft practice, a form of corruption that is seen to escalate the overall threat of witchcraft in its general attack against the very fabric of society. It is important to note that child accusations do also occur, and are occurring more frequently in Ghana. However, it is in Cameroon that this shift has taken hold and is quickly becoming the most visible form of accusation.

A final and essential difference between witchcraft belief and witchcraft-related violence in Cameroon is the strong association of witches and witchcraft activity with the conspiracy theories regarding secret societies, suspected cults and more recently, homosexuals. In Cameroon, daily articles, casual conversations and whispered rumours successively obsess over the existence and activities of secret societies, such as the Rosicrucians and the Free Masons. From day to day it is nearly impossible to avoid discussing the machinations of these thinly veiled cabals who are in league with witches and homosexuals to undermine the well-being of every individual and citizen in Cameroon. As will be seen in the following chapters, the invisible world in Cameroon is much more crowded and gradient than it is in Ghana, though unlike Ghana, the visible world is much less populated in terms of actors whose aid may be sought in mediating one's own spiritual insecurity.

Outline of chapters

This introduction has sought to provide an overview of approaches to African politics in comparative politics, looking at works on state consolidation and using the topic of democratization to explore the application of Western political theory to the region. This section highlighted some of the problems of applying political theory and began to discuss why the topic of witchcraft is commonly overlooked. Following this, the idea that witchcraft is problematic was explored, first by defining what is and is not witchcraft, by looking at some ethical issues associated with studying this subject, and in stressing my rejection of the view of witchcraft as being defined in terms of modernity. The literature review that followed this aimed to provide an introduction to some key works on witchcraft-related violence and to set the context for the case studies that follow.

In the second chapter, an overview of the supernatural in relation to Western political thought will test the idea that political theory is secular in nature. Following this a summary of anthropological approaches to witchcraft will be provided, leading to the question of how best to approach and conceive of, if not theorize, witchcraft as a phenomenon. The second half of this chapter will focus on the premise that witchcraft may be understood as a form of power. This theoretical approach will then be extended to question the privileging of certain knowledge and realities over others, using cognition as a baseline from which to argue the need for greater equality between perceived realities.

The methodology chapter is a chronological representation of the research process and is split into two very distinct sections: The first will presents the planned field research, looking at anticipated challenges and issues, such as the nature of the sensitivity of the subject, the security of the researched and the researcher, and the methods chosen to ideally balance ethical considerations with the aim of obtaining data. These considerations focus on semi-structured interviews and present my argument for (and some of the debate surrounding) covert ethnographic research. The second half will present the field research as it happened. The interview process will be reviewed, highlighting the role of research

assistants as helping (Cameroon) or hindering (Ghana) the research process, the unexpected expectations of interviewees, particularly regarding formalities, and the openness of respondents. Second, the ethnographic method will be reviewed, stressing the overt nature of the research, though highlighting some choices to keep some elements covert, as well as stressing the differing security conditions between the two settings, which ultimately limited the ethnographic data collected in Cameroon.

The fourth chapter, on the state, will begin by looking at theories of the state and how these are complicated by the introduction of witchcraft belief and phenomenon. In an effort to provide a broader context, this chapter will provide a summary of the history of witchcraft and the state in the African region, looking at colonial approaches to managing witchcraft and the transformation or continuation of these approaches into the contemporary. The second half of this chapter will provide an analysis of findings in Ghana and Cameroon regarding the state as an institution which aims to intervene in and mediate witchcraft phenomenon. The findings of the two cases will be introduced with a brief summary of the state's historical and contemporary approaches to witchcraft.

The fifth chapter on non-governmental and community-based organizations (NGOs, CBOs) will follow the formula of the previous chapter, providing a historical overview of non-governmental organizations and development initiatives in the region. This critical look at the role of international intervention will consider human rights and development and approaches and contrast these with witchcraft phenomenon, in an attempt to assess the applicability of one to the other. Overall, this review will highlight the tendency of NGO interventions to overlook or undervalue witchcraft belief. Findings from Ghana and Cameroon will be discussed and compared, looking in particular at the differing roles of these organizations in each country.

In the sixth chapter the role of religion will be explored, first through a summary of the history of Western religions in the region, stressing the importance of missionaries and evangelism in colonialism, then looking at the contemporary role of churches in Africa. In Ghana and Cameroon a particular focus on the growing evangelical and deliverance movements and the role of Pentecostal churches will dominate the analysis.

The seventh chapter will look at the role of traditional authority in addressing and mediating witchcraft-related violence. A historical overview of the relations between the state (colonial and post-colonial) and traditional authority will precede the explanation of the relationships of chiefs and healers to witchcraft. In the second half of the chapter, the case of Ghana will be introduced with a synopsis of traditional authority in the state, past and present. Cameroon, which has a diverse landscape in regards to traditional authority will also be summarized historically and in the contemporary.

The conclusion will begin by reviewing and summarizing the findings of the field research, though as noted earlier and as will be evidenced throughout, it is difficult to make any certain conclusions about witchcraft. In particular, the view that non-spiritual actors have either limited or non-existent roles in addressing witchcraft will be compared to the ambiguity that dominates the intervention of those that are seen to be spiritually empowered and therefore responsible for addressing witchcraft. Finally, my own conclusions will reflect on my personal experiences and conflicts in studying and researching the subject of witchcraft in Africa from a Western perspective.

Chapter Two – Theories of the Unknown: The usual work of political science and witchcraft

This chapter will look at the argument, introduced in the first chapter, that in terms of studying witchcraft, “[t]he social sciences have a problem” (Schatzberg 2006: 351). The crux of this problem is in assuming that the definitions and uses of concepts such as “power, legitimacy, gender, democracy, state and civil society... are universal” and that they can be applied in cross-cultural contexts with the assumption that “what constitutes 'the political' and the realm of politics” is also universal (Schatzberg 2006: 351-352). In comparisons, as in comparative politics, research is based on the idea that there is a “*one-to-one correspondence* between a concept or practice in another cultures and one in our own” (Tambiah 1990: 123). However, this correspondence is often assumed rather than proven. In the case of witchcraft, there is no clear correspondence in Western political thought, nor can it be argued that witchcraft is necessarily itself a defined and consistent concept. Understanding witchcraft, as much as one can, then becomes an exercise where one must “make room” (Winch 1979: 127) for new categories and concepts.

In his work on the supernatural, Petrus (2006) argues that belief in the supernatural is an aspect of humanity which links all societies, and may therefore be considered a universal concept in itself. However, the supernatural is itself a Western term and concept which must be understood in its historical and political context. Much of this chapter will focus on this proposition, looking at the supernatural in Western political thought and assessing the applicability of political concepts to witchcraft, in particular, presenting the argument that witchcraft and power may be investigated as overlapping concepts. In an effort to take African epistemologies of witchcraft seriously (Ellis 2007), this discussion will progress under the assumption that the supernatural exists in order to overcome the limitations of Western-defined rationalism and recognize the supernatural as a paradigm (Petrus 2006).

An important caveat that must first be addressed is the use of the term witchcraft as a universal concept. As noted in the previous chapter, witchcraft has been defined and confirmed in the field, as indicating the use of supernatural means to cause harm to another. This definition is intended to encapsulate a singular phenomenon in the broader reality of the supernatural, and in so doing, excludes debates and connotations regarding the occult, magic, etc., a long list of concepts which are frequently lumped together as other than rational or scientific. This is not intended to necessarily evade the question of the “genealogy of Western perceptions” of witchcraft in Africa, but more so in acknowledgement of Pels' argument that “in its description by Western outsiders, African witchcraft turns out to be difficult to contain” (Pels 1998: 194).

In the history of the Western use of this word in African contexts, witchcraft has been framed as a political and legal problem which colonial administrators associated with European history (Pels 1998). For Pels, this association served to both distance (in time) and disallow (by demonstrating its irrationality) witchcraft, a term which was used first by missionaries and administrators and then later used by Africans, some of whom after independence sought to combat it. Witchcraft is not a neutral term, but neither is it a term amenable to appropriation by any discourse. Unfortunately for sceptics or those who seek to eradicate witchcraft, they are subject to the same paradox Pels identifies in anthropological studies; that in exposing witchcraft beliefs, they also reveal their existence.

In recognition of the complexities of witchcraft as a term, this chapter will focus on, as suggested by Pels, the power relations of this practice. More specifically, the theoretical analysis that follows will investigate witchcraft as a “theory of human action and individual power”, which may be used to destroy, buttress or subvert “the normative order” (Bond 2001: 133).

Theoretical analyses of witchcraft: from anthropology to political theory

The theoretical foundation of witchcraft as it is currently studied in anthropology focuses largely on the contested and often unexpressed assumptions of modernization. While this approach has inspired considerable debate within the field of anthropology (Englund 1996; Rutherford 1999; Sanders 2003), it has also greatly informed approaches to witchcraft in other disciplines, such as economics (Miguel 2003) and political science (Bryceson 2010). In this approach, witchcraft belief, and violence in particular, is interpreted as a reaction to modernity and the changing social relations embedded in the process of modernization, the complexities of which are constructed as being beyond the comprehension of Africans who must rely instead on the idiom of witchcraft to explain and negotiate these changes.

Among the problems with this approach is the indelicate framing of modernity as the singular project confronted in Africa today. While this approach is often intended to critique the dominance of the Western-based project of modernity, it nevertheless reduces the problematization of modernity as a discourse, that is neither natural nor universal (Moore and Sanders 2001). By constructing a binary opposition between Western modernity and African witchcraft, the diverse discourses which exist within and without these assumed poles are dismissed. As a result, theory applied to witchcraft becomes subject to “monolithic meanings” which obfuscate “specific social and historical settings” and without reflection construct a “master narrative” (of witchcraft) in the effort to reject another (uni-linear progress) (Moore & Sanders 2001: 13).

In an effort to avoid the trap of “theoretical somnambulism” cautioned by Sanders (2003) this chapter will outline the weaknesses of approaching witchcraft through modernity, first by outlining elements of the “witchcraft-critiques-modernity thesis” (348) in works from the discipline of anthropology, then by looking at the limitations of this approach in political thought. The purpose of this analysis is to elaborate my reasoning for rejecting the interpretation of witchcraft as a response to modernity in any form, including globalization and changing regional international economic relations, and focusing instead on the less prominent but more promising approach of understanding witchcraft as a form of power (Florence & Tonda 2000).

Witchcraft and Modernity

In his work on child accusations, de Boeck (2000) situates this phenomenon in reference to the “ruptures of an Africa in transition” (32, my translation). Geschiere (1998), in his work, refers to “modern processes of change” in post-colonial Africa which are interpreted through witchcraft (811). Years later, in another work by Geschiere (2006), Africans continue to use witchcraft discourse to make “sense of the modern changes” around them and to understand the world-market, which also drains “the life-force from the local community” while opening “new horizons for self-promotion and individual ambition” in “frightening and fascinating” ways (61). Geschiere further notes that the link between modernity and witchcraft is more than an academic fad; it is a “conceptual link” that can “help to understand why the witchcraft discourse impregnates and conditions the ways in which people try to cope with the baffling modern changes.” (Geschiere 2006: 61). Wesch describes some of these changes or “experiences of modernity” as including “why [Africans] are poor, subservient, corrupt, dying of AIDS or losing World Cup soccer matches” (Wesch 2007: 4).

These quotes placed together construct an image of Africa as a homogeneous entity which experiences transitions or change in sudden and disruptive waves, mainly colonial and post-colonial. Embedded in this representation is the idea that all aspects of modernity are new and novel, even

baffling, experiences of change which have never been seen before. Capitalism, poverty, corruption, illness, death and even loss in competitions are framed as new experiences for this continent, which we can assume from this depiction has been locked in a static state of traditional existence until the introduction of an alien catalyst, such as the global market system. Whether new or new in its perceived (or assumed) speed, these proposed changes are presented as confounding African societies which, unable to adapt to such a tumultuous shift, must rely on traditional and cultural idioms in order to make sense of the world around them. In this section, a number of particularly confounding aspects of modernity will be explored, including globalization, development, and changing gender roles.

Many anthropologists have cited “the global capitalism unleashed by neoliberalism and the breakdown of the public sphere in postcolonial states” as the cause of the perception among Africans that witchcraft is an increasing problem (Behrend 2007: 42). This correlation is based on the assumption the “incorporation of the domestic economy into the capitalist world economy has ... given people new types of information about consumer spending and the ways in which conspicuous consumption affects personal and private relationships” (Parish 2000: 487). This materialist interpretation seems to present a conflict in which new information is being made available and is affecting relations between people, yet somehow these changes are still not completely understood. In many of these representations it is unclear if Africans are emerging from a state of false consciousness, or moving into another equally misinformed state.

Some authors have argued that the colonial period, as moment of disruption in Africa, has had a greater impact on the “imagination of witchcraft”, noting that representations of commodification in witchcraft pre-date globalization (Bernault 2005: 24, my translation). In particular, Bernault (2005; 2006) stresses the rise in the trade and traffic of human body parts, which was seen in colonial times as well as today and points “to intriguing equations between the human body, money and power” (Bernault 2006: 210). Moore and Sanders (2001), though cautioning against reducing witchcraft beliefs, also stress this correlation, where the global market threatens to turn people into “uncontrolled consumers, or worse still, consumable commodities” (16). The manifestation of the threat of commodification of the person is seen in colonial and postcolonial times in the trade of human body parts and cannibalism, or soul-eating (Schmoll 1993), and the keeping of zombies. (Comaroff & Comaroff 2002). Ironically, these works overlook the most obvious example of the commodification of people in the Western experience of Africa, the slave trade (Shaw 1997), thereby constructing global markets as novel experiences through this omission.

The most elaborate example of the construction of African experiences of modernity, focusing here on economic forces, as previously unknown, is the work of Jean and John Comaroff. In their study of witchcraft belief in South Africa, the Comaroffs posit “millennial capitalism – that odd fusion of the modern and postmodern, of hope and hopelessness, of utility and futility, or promise and its perversions” as the source of “chill desperation” which accompanies “being left out of the promise prosperity” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 283). In order to manage this desperation, South Africans turn to “arcane ideas” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 284), drawing on witchcraft which distills “complex material and social processes into comprehensible human motives” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 286). In their view, “raw inequality” is the source of the “most spirited witch finding” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 288), though there is insufficient empirical evidence to corroborate this impression (Sanders 2003).

What is most remarkable about the Comaroffs writing is the sensationalist language used by the authors in characterizing South Africans responses to “millennial capitalism”, such as their graphic depiction of ritual murder where organs are “cut out while the body is still warm – and best of all, if taken from children under 12”, with “ghastly evidence”, “horrifying accounts” and “tales of butchered bodies” abounding (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 290). In these instances, it is unclear whether the

Comaroffs intend the reader to be shocked and appalled with South Africans actions or the forces which drive them to these: the global capitalist system which looms as an ominous and withholding mystery, a “relentless process that erodes the inalienable humanity of persons and renders them susceptible as never before to the long reach of the market” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999: 291). A common depiction of this erosion is the use of zombies, where individuals produce wealth from the invisible enslavement of others. Niehaus comments on the Comaroffs’ reading of zombies as consequences of globalization, noting that this theoretical framing “does not capture the manner in which zombies elude essentialist interpretations, defy attempts at the unification of meaning, and allow discrepancies between discourse and action.” (Niehaus 2005: 206). Nor does it adequately acknowledge “that in the subjective lived worlds of individuals, zombies are constituted as real” (Niehaus 2005: 194).

Though the Comaroffs note that South Africans are not the first to experience “perplexity at the enigma” of “wealth without work”, Africans are constructed in the modernity thesis as being unable to comprehend these processes without drawing on the supernatural (Comaroff & Comaroff 2002: 782). Much as Taussig (1990) presented this argument about South Americans who fetishized capitalism, the Comaroffs rely on a materialist approach to modernity which frames non-Western experiences in Western terms, thus appropriating the reality of others in order to advance a critique of their own. In so doing, the Comaroffs and other authors employing this approach reduce witchcraft to “modernity’s metaphors” and insist that witchcraft is “*about* modernity, not merely viewed as operating *within* modernity” (Englund 1996: 258-259). As a result of this approach these authors inadvertently construct a representation of witchcraft belief that is wholly Western, in its conception as well as its use. In this way, the critique of the global capitalism is not one which is advanced by Africans, but one which is interpreted, constructed and instrumentalized by Western academics who not only fail to acknowledge but by omission deny that for many Africans the “market-economy is ... a taken-for-granted feature of their lived-in world” (Englund 1996: 260).

A second problematic aspect of modernity which is often framed in terms of witchcraft is the “current stereotype of sorcery as a ‘traditional’ barrier, blocking development and change” (Fisiy & Geschiere 1991: 252). The most concerning outcome of this stereotype is the tendency to overlook the instrumentalization of this dichotomy between witchcraft and development. In her work, Green (2005) highlights how state officials in Tanzania have appropriated witchcraft fears and used these to justify poverty, by blaming witches rather than state policy for inequality. As noted by Dolan (2002), political leaders at all levels may employ witchcraft which is “demonized in public discourse as a relic of a backward past that threatens to undermine national objectives of progress and accumulation” (665). However, this use of discourse, which is representative of complex relations of power and domination, may not be critically questioned. For example, in his study of Kenya, Smith (2008) allows the opposition of development and witchcraft to appear as a natural “parallel”, as both imply “spatial and temporal expansion” and allow “for the extension and multiplication of the person” (Smith 2008: 6). Problematically, Smith also fails to differentiate between state and non-state discourses, positing that “development is largely understood in contrast to witchcraft” (Smith 2008: 8).

Here Kenyans are seen as employing witchcraft in order to “make sense of the inscrutable social, political and economic processes [through] the metaphoric and imaginative dimensions of witchcraft” (Smith 2008: 16). Again, Africans are constructed as being unable to comprehend change and witchcraft, rather than a reality of their lived experiences, is simply a useful metaphor. A major concern with this approach is that the author overlooks an important connection between social, political and economic change, which involves “struggles for power and control” (Dolan 2002: 663), and their connection to witchcraft. In all cases, witchcraft is about power. Though not all expressions of power are necessarily witchcraft, they may be, and it is this potential, for power to be drawn from the

invisible, which links witchcraft and change. In dismissing this central point, authors limit their own interpretation of witchcraft and the political.

These limitations are perhaps most obvious in feminist interpretations of witchcraft as a contestation of changing gender roles. Rather than focusing on the changing power relations in society, and then assessing how witchcraft relates to these through peoples experiences, many feminist authors begin in the reverse with the assumption that witchcraft is a metaphor intended to critique what is then exposed through witchcraft experiences, in this case patriarchy. A primary example of this is Badstuebner's (2003) work in South Africa, which interprets women's witchcraft confessions as covert resistance to "the worrying and growing acceptance of sexual violence against young women as 'normal' ... and to the silence that often accompanies talking about incidents of sexual violence" (Badstuebner 2003: 14). In this study, women are seen to adopt the status of witch through testimony in order to contest their own powerlessness in society. Badstuebner extends this critique, speaking still through South African women, to the "growing insecurities associated with globalization" and even to the influence of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which helped to establish public confessions as "a stand-alone narration of trauma" seated in "South African public consciousness" (Badstuebner 2003: 19). In posting these correlations, Badstuebner overlooks women's beliefs, the history and importance of confession in absolution of witchcraft offences and appropriates witchcraft to advance her own critique of the very real social problem of gender violence, which the women in her study are not intending to address (nor has the author proven that this is their intention).

Again, what is ignored in this analysis is the "changing balance of power" (Drucker-Brown 1993: 531) of gender relations which may underlie increasing violence, whether or not it is related to witchcraft. In Drucker-Brown's (1993) own work, the rise of witchcraft accusations in Northern Ghana is correlated to women's increasing economic power which upsets established male domination of production. A frustrating element of this analysis is the assumption that "economics is the source of women's exploitation by men" (Williams 2010: 254) while failing to emphasize the underlying mechanism of power. However, since these authors have begun from the assumption that witchcraft is not a belief or reality, but a metaphor, it is pointless to investigate power, because this is not really at issue, modernity, globalization and gender are the presumed focus. What then becomes the finding of these investigations is Africans' inability to make sense of the world, and its constant changes, which Western academics are able to interpret for them, looking past witchcraft idioms and revealing the true critique which underlies these, whether it is directed at globalization, development or patriarchy.

Criticism of this approach has been advanced by Moore and Sanders (2003) who suggest that witchcraft is not a metaphor but akin to theory as it is concerned, as theory in social science is, with "value and growth, with consumption and power, and with the impact of the world on the lives of individuals and communities" (Moore & Sanders 2001: 20). Further, Behrend (2007) rejects the metaphorical interpretation of witchcraft phenomenon as a "the contradictory effects of global capitalism and the culture of neoliberalism", which he sees as the "telling a popular liberal tale through 'others'" (43). As Sanders (2003) notes, it is simply "unwise to assume, as the collective weight of the current literature seems to do, that *all* African witchcraft must today be 'about' modernity" (Sanders 2003: 340) or necessarily "personify the conflicts of modernity" (Comaroff in Sanders 2002: 340). In agreement with these criticisms, I do not adopt the question of modernity in relation to witchcraft as a theoretical basis. Unfortunately, in political theory, modernity is not easily avoided. Political theory is steeped in the assumptions of modernity and the works of modern political theorists which may be applied to witchcraft must be unpacked and scrutinized, particularly where political theory and witchcraft converge most apparently: the state. And while witchcraft may not have anything to say about modernity, the discourse of modernity is highly concerned with witchcraft.

Political theory, modernity and witchcraft

The narrative of political thought is one which has largely evolved within the petri dish of the West and Western academia. Though there have been international and cross-cultural exchanges throughout the history of Western political theory there has yet to be such a directed and dominant convergence of political thought and the views of the non-West as that of the modern liberal state project. Founded in the political conceptions of modernity, the modern liberal state in its global dominance continues to encounter new voices and thoughts, and in some cases these thoughts present contradictions within political society, in addition to those paradoxes already embedded in the project of modernity itself. It must be noted here that though I am employing the concept of the discourse of modernity as a whole and coherent unit, it is noted that the project of modernity is extremely complex. For political thinkers such as Talal Asad (2003), the project of modernity is composed of many elements which originate in relations “with the histories of people outside Europe” (13). This point is acknowledged though a caveat is made that while non-Western peoples participated in the relations which brought about the project of modernity, the nature of power within these relations was often disproportional, with the power to construct the identities and character of these relations frequently falling on the side of Western actors.

From this viewpoint the discourse of modernity is treated as a Western dominated project of power relations and knowledge production. In regards to whether the project itself is singular, the views of Asad are again insightful. Modernity, for Asad, is not one project, but rather “a series of interlinked projects” which dominant actors aim to accomplish (13). This project, for Asad, is concerned with “institutionalizing” a set of principles: “conservatism, moral autonomy, democracy, human rights, civil equality, industry, consumerism, freedom of the market – and secularism” through the manipulation of various relations in order to “generate new experiences” (13). A predominant nature of these newly or reconstituted experiences is one of “disenchantment”, in which reality is deemed accessible and myth, magic and the sacred are stripped away (Asad 2003: 13). It is these experiences of disenchantment, of the barren reality of “the modern epoch” (Asad 2003: 13) which many authors in anthropology and political science focus on in their analyses of witchcraft belief. However, the assumption that Western political thought is itself disenchanted must be proven rather than assumed.

Belief in the unseen or intangible is not unique to Africa but rather a global phenomenon. In the dominant Western imagination, the supernatural is commonly manifested in the occult movement of the Victorian era, which continues today in the form of psychic fares, séances and millennial cults which posit the reality of UFOs, crop circles and other New Age spiritualities, interest in which “waxes and waned, but never died out” (Moore & Sanders 2001: 1). Though these beliefs are considered marginal and are marginalized in Western society, they are not minority views. Contrary to the perceptions of political theory, the majority of the world is still enchanted. This is true in Africa where belief in the power of the supernatural is predominant and the threat of witchcraft is a daily reality. The treatment of this subject in political science academia has been greatly affected by the derisiveness with which the rational West looks upon supernatural beliefs. The subject has been either ignored or where considered, enquiry has been “generated from the insensitive position of power” and directed by the “quest for convergence and homogeneity” (Nyamnjoh 2001: 28). Implicit in the dominant literature on witchcraft belief in Africa is the implicit, and sometimes, explicit assumptions “that African societies should reproduce western ideals and institutions regardless of the feasibility or contextual differences” (Nyamnjoh 2001: 28). This criticism is in keeping with the elements of the discourse of modernity, which political theory is heavily implicated in, where only the observable and quantifiable is real, and this tenet is held as objective truth rather than one interest within a complex order. One which

eliminates the supernatural.

Though the separation of the supernatural (imagined, unreal, false) from the natural (concrete, real, true) has been solidified through the project of Enlightenment in the West, the “popular epistemological order” of Africa does not support this dichotomy (Nyamnjoh 2001: 29). Rather, it seeks to link the natural and supernatural, “rational and irrational, objective and subjective, scientific and superstitious, visible and invisible, real and unreal”, making each category a dependent half of a whole (Nyamnjoh 2001: 29). Thus, witchcraft belief presents a conflict with the discourse of modernity and contradicts its construction of reality, positing the truth of reality as consensual whole rather than an atomized imposition (Nyamnjoh 2001: 29). The crux of this conflict lies in the leading structure of the modernity project: the modern liberal state. African states are the inheritors of this foreign political organization which imposes a structural and philosophical logic against witchcraft. While citizens are demanding the state act to protect them against the threat of witchcraft attack, the state is unable to effectively respond as it was neither conceived nor equipped to manage the realm of the supernatural. The result is “the worst possible combination”; while traditional African techniques of resolving witchcraft have been banned and the state is unable to provide an appropriate alternative, leaving witches unpunished while those who attempt to protect themselves are imprisoned (Tebbe 2007: 197).

The inability of the state to redress the lived insecurity of its society has reduced state legitimacy and strained states “democratic commitments to the rule of law, to security of the person, and to an undifferentiated citizenship” (Tebbe 2007: 200). The demands of the collective for protection against the individual places the state in the position of choosing communal rights over those of the individual, further subverting the modernist foundations of the state structure and purpose. These challenges to the discourse of modernity, posed by witchcraft belief, have led to the common categorization of belief as a threat to development (Ellis & ter Haar 2004). This view is not posited by state leaders seeking a scapegoat for failed progress alone, but also by academics, who seek to reduce witchcraft belief to an “explanatory idiom” expressed by those struggling to understand the changing, modernizing world around them (Rutherford 1999: 97). However, this effort to reduce the importance and ultimately eradicate witchcraft belief has met limited success:

Social anthropologists in particular have attempted to explain, or explain away, the existence of witches and witchcraft by focusing on causes and patterns of witchcraft accusations and beliefs in terms of such things as social strain, rapid modernization, domestic and generational conflict, social dislocations, ways of coping with misfortune, pursuits of vendettas and political agendas, myths which mediate contradictions in society, and so on. These explanations have proven unsatisfactory. They leave unearthed the basic, fundamental question of why the idiom of witchcraft (*boloyi*) is used in the first place. It seems that witchcraft must be related to something real in human experience, because it has recurred again and again, in all parts of the world. (Hund 2004: 71)

I argue that these studies cannot accept the idea that what is real in human experience constitutes the foundation of what is real in the world. Witchcraft is not only “related to something real” but is itself a reality, one which political theory is ill-equipped to address.

Reason and the Rise of Secular Thought

The political philosopher Thomas Hobbes is commonly and most popularly associated with his canonical text, *Leviathan*. Though often studied in political science for his contribution to the formation of the sovereign state in political theory, Hobbes as a “transitional figure” in political thought is also representational of a transition towards secularism (Martinich 1992: 336). Concerned with not only the

political, Hobbes was also a religious conservative and a scientific progressive (Martinich 1992). Hobbes' political philosophy sought to introduce and rationalize the separation of science, the state and the church, rejecting medieval conceptions of the study of human nature as the study of God and the source of all things (Martinich 1992). For Hobbes, "the proper study of mankind is man", a path of enquiry which separates the known, observable reality of man, from the unknown, invisible realm of God (Martinich 1992: 90). The supernatural, in his view, is relegated to the realm of the unknown, for what science cannot access and assess is beyond the scope of the study of man:

whereas there is no other felicity of beasts, but the enjoying of their quotidian food, ease, and lusts; as having little, or no foresight of the time to come, for want of observation, and memory of the order, consequence, and dependence of the things they see; man observeth how one event hath been produced by another; and remembereth in them antecedence and consequence; and when he cannot assure himself of the true causes of things, (for the causes of good and evil fortune for the most part are invisible,) he supposes causes of them, either such as his own fancy suggesteth; or trusteth to the authority of other men, such as he thinks to be his friends, and wiser than himself. (Hobbes 1996: 74)

The desire to understand and, if possible through understanding, control the invisible or visible causes of fortune is, for Hobbes, motivated by the natural human condition of fear (Gillespie 2008). In Hobbes' view, the myth of salvation by God was a deception, employed by others for their own advantage (Gillespie 2008). Mankind, abandoned by a non-interventionist God to the stark reality and brutality of the world He created, was therefore compelled to "develop a science that [would] make us masters and possessors of nature and enable us to eliminate the dangers of violent death" (Gillespie 2008: 209). This science, according to Hobbes, should accept "this distant God" and seek to "emulate his power and artifice through the mastery of the causal order of the world" (Gillespie 2008: 254). Hobbes' separation of the natural world from God, God from the state, which lands in the hands of man, and man from the world through science, all reflect the project of modernity in its effort to create new experiences and relations which culminate in the disenchantment of reality and the relegation of the supernatural to the invisible, unknown, and therefore for the modern man, unreal.

However, as the Renaissance era of philosophical thought passed and the later Modern era looked back upon Hobbes' secularism and scientific rationalism, scepticism of the modern agenda was already rising within one of its early malcontents. Though Nietzsche's attention to "the need to overcome the fear of the unknown" is sympathetic to Hobbes' existential concern, Nietzsche sees freedom from fear through the mastery of the self, in the conquering of instinct and the fostering of consciousness, as the ultimate goal (Owen 1994: 33). For Nietzsche, the Western man's reliance on science to master nature emerges in "the reification of consciousness as man's supernatural being and of instinct as man's natural being" (Owen 1994: 54). Thus man is reduced, through fear of the unknown, and modernity has taken with this fear our love of man, "the reverence toward him, the home for him, indeed the will to him" (Nietzsche 1998: 24). It is through this reduction that modernity not only disenchant the world around us, but also disenchant our being, ourselves, to the point that "[w]e are tired of man" (Nietzsche 1998: 24) and disillusioned with this being which we have hollowed and deformed. In order to resist the nihilism of the modern world, the starkness of its stripped reality, man must see and be more.

Modern Myths and the Mythology of Modernity

Though the supernatural has had little place in recent Western political thought, it is suffice to say that the discourse of modernity has failed to successfully eliminate supernatural thought or relegate

it to the invisible, outside the purview of man. Rather, supernatural thought has proven resilient and unpredictable. Ironically in Africa, states which sought to suppress witchcraft practices and belief may be credited with fostering its current proliferation, entrenching belief and normalizing discourse in their efforts to eradicate it (Green 2005). This remarkable phenomenon may be seen as a contradiction to the teleological assumptions of the project of modernity, which claims to create progress and evolution in the relations of those caught up in the construction of its new experiences. According to modernity, as societies evolved:

a number of things allegedly happened: scientific understandings grew; instrumental rationality increased; a secular world view triumphed; 'superstitions' like witchcraft vanished; and people made an ever clearer distinction between facts and fictions, objective Truth and subjective falsehoods. (Moore & Sanders 2001: 2)

It is important here to be reminded of Asad's notion of modernity as a collection of projects which reintroduces the notion of modernity as a "particular cultural dialect" and "deeply cultural project" whose claims of reason and truth are bound to particular discourses which demand explanation (Moore & Sanders 2001: 13). For many Africans, the discourse of scientific rationalism is one which inspires significant impatience (Hund 2004). The modern belief that there is no reality outside observable experience, in its vacancy of the unknown, fails to provide any profound understanding of the reality beyond the waking state, making it "a hopelessly inadequate worldview" ironically assumed to be superior in its sophistication (Hund 2004: 76). Though modernity fails to account for the daily, lived reality of most Africans, it is not prevented from unabashedly denigrating supernatural beliefs, with which it actively competes, rejecting these as primitive (Hund 2004). It may be posited that the project of modernity is compelled by its very nature to reject and eradicate potential alternatives. However, it is also possible that the project itself must be protected from its own inadequacies and inconsistencies (Hund 2004). As argued by Hund (2004), since the era of Enlightenment "humanity has not become much wiser", abandoning the quest for wisdom and instead adopting the goal of controlling nature (77). It is apparent everywhere today, in our natural world as well as in the spiritual, that scientific rationalism "has proven to be a good servant, but a bad master" (Hund 2004: 77).

Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) would agree with this sentiment, noting that on the way to modernity "human beings have discarded meaning" (3). The supernatural here is largely synonymous to Horkheimer and Adorno's understanding of the elements of myth. Where invocation and propitiation of the supernatural predominantly defined in Horkheimer and Adorno's description is correlated to the animation of the outer, natural world, witchcraft represents the invocation and propitiation of the inner, human world. Witchcraft, as a myth, reflects the desire to imitate and propitiate that which is within us, our drives to envy, jealousy, suffering and power, categories of being which Horkheimer and Adorno stress as being beyond the interest of the science which has come to dominate in modernity. In the transition to Enlightenment, we have become estranged from the natural world which we seek to know, to manipulate, as the essence of nature is reduced to domination, a "mere objectivity" (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002: 6). However, this enlightened logic does not reconcile with the "bloody untruth" of magic, where the complex nature of our being is beyond classification or complete knowledge (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002: 6). Rather, it is subverted by myth. Though enlightenment seeks to overcome myth, it is intimately bound to a mythical representation of nature, as the objective, classified, atomized, real and true (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Here Hobbes and Nietzsche are echoed by Horkheimer and Adorno in their view that the aim of modern science to know the world remains part of the existential effort to free humanity from the fear of the "unknown", the predation of uncertainty (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002: 11).

Where myth failed to order the chaos of nature, modernity, through science, aims not only to order nature, but also humanity, imposing upon us the mechanisms of control perfected in the language

of science (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002). As nature is reduced to its observable and quantifiable components, so is the self reduced to the rational being, removed from nature and the unseen, and ready to be “entirely encompassed by civilization”, by modernity (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002: 24). As humanity is distanced from the power of nature and myth, the project of modernity grows, bolstered by the naturalization of the scientific reality generated in our imaginations, which are disciplined and conformed through our reproduction of the myths of modernity themselves (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002). Alienated from the conception of itself as nature, and disavowing the inner nature of the self, the modern being is left to confront the promises of modernity; “social progress, the heightening of material and intellectual forces” as void, and the project of modernity as “madness” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002: 43). As though descending a spiral, the evasion of the unknown returns to the unknown. Equipped with the reason of modernity and enlightened by scientific rationalism, we confront the absurdity of the project of modernity and are unable to address its substance, as reason has deprived us of the ability to address that which is substantive (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002).

In the canonical anthropological text *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, E. Evans-Pritchard (1937) describes the belief in witchcraft as serving an explanatory purpose which provides insight into *why* of human misfortune and suffering: why a misfortune occurred to a particular person at a particular time. Witchcraft belief accepts concrete events, such as illness and death. However it rejects the simplified explanation of these as the result of physical causes alone. In this sense, witchcraft begins by addressing questions of greater depth and resonance, questions which demand “answers of quite a different order to the narrow answers 'science' could provide” (Moore & Sanders 2001: 6). In asking why, rather than simply being unable to understand complexities, Africans are reaching beyond the Western ordered understanding of nature and acknowledging a greater complexity and meaning in the suffering and misfortune of man. However, in confrontation with the secularism of modernity, this feat is greatly frustrated, as is our means for analyzing this approach. Ultimately, political science is left with the question of how might witchcraft belief be understood in terms of the political and how might it inform Western conceptions of the world?

Witchcraft and discourses of morality

Witchcraft in Africa is in this study taken as a reality, though one among many. This interpretation is posited in opposition to those who would reduce witchcraft belief to a symbolic or explanatory idiom, descriptions and categorizations which diminish the depths and considerations of witchcraft belief (Rutherford 1999). Rather than being a response to modernity, or a means of making sense of the shifting social order around it, as many anthropologists would posit, witchcraft belief, at its core, is concerned with the complexities of human experience. As we suffer, we experience envy and jealousy towards those who do better than us, however marginally, and from our inferiority, we foster greed for the power to overcome our limitations. However, power over another, whether as an outlet of our jealousy or in our desire to become as those we envy, can only be attained through witchcraft, and by appealing to that within ourselves which seeks to harm and punish those closest to us for their successes. Within the realm of witchcraft, power is only attainable through the nefarious deeds of the witch, an ability which resides in all of us but which few are willing to make the sacrifices necessary to enact (Ellis & ter Haar 2004). Induction into the secret world of the witch is most often paid with the price of another's life, usually that of a family member or friend. Thus power, and the willingness to access it in order to satisfy one's “baser inclinations” of envy, greed and jealousy, is intimately and inseparably linked to one's willingness to invoke and propitiate that which is most heinous within themselves (Green 2005). The witch, therefore, is the epitome of the immoral uses of power.

Where those who gained greater status through the use of witchcraft were once compelled to compensate society by providing protection from misfortune and or in sharing the wealth of their positions, within the state, this status is guarded against demands for redistribution. For the witches who gained nothing other than morbid satisfaction from their malicious attacks, village hearings were held by the chief (Niehaus 2001). Witch trials were held to determine the validity of accusations and where witches were found guilty, either through confession or divination, witches were sentenced (Geschiere 1997). Punishments meted out to witches ranged in severity from ostracism to death (Ashforth 2005). However, an alternative to punishment also existed and is still practised, along with ostracism and lynching, today: the cleansing or neutralization of a witch's power, often accomplished through healing rituals involving accusers as well as the accused witch, provides a means to redress and reconcile social relations (Green 2005). Regardless of the outcome of the hearing, witchcraft trials provided an opportunity to acknowledge, and in some ways address, the dangers and insecurities of communal life which is fraught with tension, suffering, misfortune, weakness and vulnerability. Today, however, these mechanisms are repressed in most African states by laws retained from the colonial era which outlaw the beliefs and practices of witchcraft, thereby leading to the fomentation of fear and resentment. Without a means to redress the tensions created by power inequities, the ability of individuals to mediate their relations are limited, leading to outbursts of violence characterized by the current proliferation of witch-killings which serve as an inadequate but necessary “catharsis to the community” (Ludsin 2003: 82).

The narrative of the morality in witchcraft is one which shares many parallels with Nietzsche's discussions of good and evil in his genealogy of morality, though the hierarchy of witchcraft must first be turned on its head. Here the collective stands above the witch and it is the witch who is looking up at this master who wields power over them, because the witch is always also a victim of envy. Those who are the victims of the supernatural and spiritual attacks of the witch are repositioned below the witches as the slaves of their domination. Thus it is the collective which is made powerless and “oppressed, downtrodden and overpowered” who says “let us be different from the evil ones, namely good!” (Nietzsche 1998: 26):

And good is everyone who does not do violence, who injures no one, who doesn't attack, who doesn't retaliate, who leaves vengeance to God, who keeps himself concealed, as we do, who avoids all evil, and in general demands very little of life, like us, the patient, humble, righteous (Nietzsche 1998: 26)

For Nietzsche, the slave wills himself to weakness and in doing so constructs his *essence* and reality in the image of this weakness, a representation which depicts his slavery as a “voluntary achievement, something willed, something chosen, a *deed*, a *merit*” (Nietzsche 1998: 26). In order to separate the achievements of the slave from those of the master, a preexisting belief in the “neutral 'subject' with free choice” must exist for Nietzsche, one which is hallowed by the lies of its very construction as free (Nietzsche 1998: 26). Thus the neutral subject of the individual confronted with suffering who turns to the supernatural for relief is condemned as a witch and evil, while those who suffer, though perhaps they may be suffering less, are seen as superior in their choosing to suffer without recourse and are considered above the witch and good. Because all individuals possess the means to witchcraft, whether through possession of witchcraft substance within their being which is activated by their resentment, or through resentment itself which motivates one to engage in witchcraft practice, the moral categories of good and evil are much more mutable and malleable than witchcraft discourse often represents.

Though witches are seen as being weak in their need to employ the power of the supernatural against suffering, the weakness of the witch is one to which we all succumb at times. Just as witchcraft forces us to acknowledge the darker nature of our inner being, it also tells us that in the precarious division of the world into those who are good and those who are evil, any slave may easily become

master. Thus the “terrible millennia-long battle” of good and evil which Nietzsche sees as having been waged on earth will remain, as he predicts, undecided (Nietzsche 1998: 30). The question of witchcraft belief in Africa today may be the most direct example of Nietzsche's prediction that the spiritual nature of the conflict between good and evil may present the most divisive “battleground”, one which is found within us (Nietzsche 1998: 30-31). Thus witchcraft belief informs us of the dangers of our own person, to make us aware of the battle within ourselves between opposing forces of good and evil. It is through this keen knowledge that the actions of a collective against a witch may be understood not only as a form of vengeance or as means to justice, but also as a recognition of the self and a caution against uncontrolled envy and jealousy.

In theory, if each individual is capable of the maliciousness of a witch, acts against witches may be seen as both expressions of superiority and inferiority. As collectives express hatred of the witch through violence against witches, they may also be expressing anger with themselves for harbouring these same emotions and guilt for their role in the suffering of the witch, for having risen over another and for having left them behind. Witchcraft violence can thereby highlight the unequal power relations within a collective which led to the witchcraft act. Thus witchcraft may be seen as subverting understandings of power within a collective and requiring these to be reconfigured and reconstituted. Though in many cases this process leads to the reinforcement of status quo relations within a collective, the process itself presents a potential challenge to the project of modernity, as individuals are equipped through witchcraft belief with a fluid and direct understanding of their relationship to power. Therefore it may be argued that within witchcraft, individuals are empowered and enchanted, and therefore armed with a more complete understanding of their being in the complex world.

For the West, the current experience is quite different as Connolly notes, the will to know the world has transcended the will to see the world, and emerged beyond this as the will to organize it (Connolly 1988). In his view, the more the modern quest for transparency in the world comes to govern the self, the more the self is conformed to the norms, standards and aspirations of modern society (Connolly 1988). However, Connolly notes that the “selfhood” of the modern subject is only possible once the flaws of the subjects' mode of insistence have been exposed (Connolly 1988). However, the process of modernity has bred its own barrier. In the secularism of modernity, man is left insecure and without meaning, as the death of God has deprived him of the transcendental certainty of his reality (Connolly 1988). Therefore the man whose self must be defined is a subject in crisis, whose identity must be reformed in the categories of modernity. Though it has successfully destabilized the identity to the self, making it more malleable, modernity is unable to provide protection or resolution for the spiritual vulnerability of its modern subject, creating instead the conditions for predatory movements, which motivate the subject through resentment and revenge (Connolly 1988).

Here the project of modernity in its effort to expand within Africa has generated, in response to the vulnerability fostered through the suppression of African beliefs and morality, multiple forms of “neo-populist conservatism” (Connolly 1988). The most aggressive of these is the rise of revivalist Pentecostal churches (Meyer 1998), which reflects Connolly's prediction of a turn to fundamentalism in the face of modernity's destabilization of identity (Connolly 1988). However, the rise in Pentecostal churches is strongly correlated to the increasing spiritual insecurity and fear of witchcraft attack, which is in turn fed by the imposition of the norms and structures of the modern, liberal state upon African society (Meyer 1998; Ashforth 2005). As the modern, liberal state exacerbates the threat of witchcraft in its refusal to accept witchcraft belief and in its suppression of witchcraft mediation processes, individuals, particularly women who cannot afford the services of a traditional healer, turn to the protection of the Pentecostal church which promises salvation from the Devil who works through witches (Meyer 1998; Geschiere 2006). Thus, it is through the efforts of the modern, liberal state that the project of modernity fails to disenchant the reality of Africa, and instead works against itself,

entrenching witchcraft belief and reinforcing it as a source of contestation.

This contradiction has placed the state in an uncomfortable predicament. As individuals continue to exercise communal authority to mediate the spiritual security of their milieu, the state is confronted with practices and concepts which are intolerable to its modernist being. As noted by Tebbe (2007), though the liberal state has an “enormous capacity to accommodate African traditions” witchcraft belief may represent an instance where the state is unable to tolerate the vast breadth of witchcraft tradition (185). Though the entirety of witchcraft belief may not be acceptable to the state, Tebbe nonetheless advocates African states acknowledge the reality of witchcraft and “tailor” their policies according to this position (Tebbe 2007: 201). For Tebbe, this proposition may not seem excessively problematic, as a state's abandonment of neutrality towards the question of witchcraft may be reconciled in permissive policies which condone but also constrain witchcraft practice within the limits of a liberal democracy (Tebbe 2007). For a critic of modernity, however, there is reason to doubt that the state is able to “compromise on matters such as public reason, the criterion of reciprocity, and the need for an overlapping consensus” to the degree which Tebbe would propose (Tebbe 2007: 210).

Tebbe, however is not alone in proposing that for the modern state to be successful in Africa, it must be significantly altered to reflect the African reality (Tebbe 2007; Hund 2004; Ake 1993). The current wave of democratization in Africa has played greatly in this debate. Ake (1993) reflects on the early elements of the democratization movement and strongly contests the modern, Western interpretation of democracy as a strategy for popular empowerment. For Ake, international support for democratization, continued in today's rhetoric of good governance, “resides on the universalization of the Western model of society” an imperative which will likely resist the “customizing of democracy” to African reality as this detracts from the aims of the project of modernity and contradicts its desire to become naturalized (Ake 1993: 240). According to Ake, for democracy to be made relevant and sustainable in African society, it must be “radically different” from the liberal vision of democracy, abandoning the idea of political rights and the construction of the individual, and taking into account “concrete economic rights” and the conditions of the whole (Ake 1993: 241).

In Ake's view, Africans do not separate political and economic rights, instead economic development is seen as politically directed development toward the “more evenly distributed” benefit of all (Ake 1993: 241). As a result of this, many Africans are estranged from the logic of the modern liberal state which ensures political but not economic equality and further permits economic inequality according to the assumption that the economy is best unfettered. In addition to this, Ake stresses that the state itself is vested with “the interests of its powerful sponsors”, such as the state elite, Western states and international development agencies, who benefit from economic inequality and who advance the project of modernity, which is naturalized in their norms, identities and relations (Ake 1993: 242).

The “egalitarian implications” of an African interpretation of the state and its purpose in society would drastically alter the structure of the state, possibly to the degree of removing it from the sphere of modernity discourse as many of the central tenets of the state are undone by African social reality (Ake 1993: 242). Within this context, “familiar political assumptions” are questioned (Ake 1993: 243). An example of this is the modern construction of the individual, as an “abstract universalism of legal subjects”, where in African society “there is little individualism”, providing an inadequate base for the political concepts of the legal citizen or for the construction of multiparty competition (Ake 1993: 243). Most problematic for the current trend of democratization is the African conception of political participation:

Liberal democracy offers a form of political participation which is markedly different from and arguably inferior to the African concept of participation. For the African, especially the rural dweller, participation is linked to communality. Africans do not generally see themselves as self-regarding atomized beings in essentially competitive and potentially conflicting interaction with

others. Rather, their consciousness is directed towards belonging to an organic whole. The point is to find one's station and duty in life, not to assert one's interests and claims rights over others. People participate not because they are individuals whose interests are different and need to be asserted, but because they are part of an interconnected whole. Participation rests not on the assumption of individualism and conflicting interests, but on the social nature of human beings. Related to this, the African concept of participation is as much a matter of taking part as of sharing the rewards and burdens of community membership. It does not simply enjoin abstract rights, but secures concrete benefits. In addition, traditional African sense, participation is quite unlike the Western notion of the occasional opportunity to choose, affirm or dissent. It is rather the active involvement in a process, that of setting goals and making decision. More often than not, it is the involvement in the process rather than the acceptability of the end decision, which satisfied the need to participate. (Ake 1993: 243)

This radical ethos of engagement is greatly reflected in the nature of witchcraft belief. The conception of reality as a whole, incorporating the inner being as part of nature, and nature as part of the visible and invisible which surrounds us informs the construction of communal life.

Individuals are part of a whole to which they are also responsible, having received and continuing to receive care, support and protection from the whole, the individual is an essential component, both constructed by and constructing the collective. It is this reliance on the group, this deep interdependence, which also informs the wickedness of witchcraft attacks, as these are seen as threats to the survival of the whole. It is also why resentment and discord within a collective requires acknowledgement and redress, through witchcraft fractures in the harmony of the whole are brought forward and attempts to secure and sustain the health of the whole are made. As witchcraft is intimately linked to the conception and well-being of the collective, collectives themselves must be the ones to respond to the witchcraft threats which exist within, just as each individual within whole must mediate their own inner struggle to overcome the will to power within themselves. Thus the limitations on this moral discourse of power imposed by the modern state frustrate the very survival of a society and exacerbate their uncertainty and insecurity. The culminating result of which is the proliferation of violent acts of retribution, in the most extreme form as witch-killings, as the only means of catharsis left available.

In a political analysis of witchcraft, modernity as an explanatory factors falls away and far from being a cause of witchcraft-related violence, is instead better positioned as a discourse, and in the case of the state or economy, a project, which seeks to form African realities to its own. However, as seen in the previous section, the moral critiques of power embedded in witchcraft complicate modernity's intention to domination. In exposing the dangers of individual power, witchcraft stresses one's responsibility to the collective by demonstrating the need for every individual to guard against conflict, greed, envy and jealousy in their society. More fundamentally, the reality of witchcraft resists the ability of the discourse of modernity to produce a knowledge of power that is void of the supernatural, and in so doing, undermines the secular foundations of Western political thought. Witchcraft, as a pervasive reality, presents an ontological challenge to modern conceptions of what is known or can be known (Azenabor 2006) and how the unknown should be managed (rather than ignored). In this way witchcraft may be understood as a "power discourse", not only implicating the individual who has an "advantage over others" (Bongmba 1998: 180), but also the broader ability to produce knowledge of what is possible and real.

Looking at Power

Exploring witchcraft as a form of power, or "forms of special power" (Stewart & Strathern

2004: xiii), means moving past the idea of witchcraft as symbolic and abandoning “the evolving political language of Africa” which “tends to regard politics as a metaphor for movements in a spirit world rather than vice versa” (Ellis & ter Haar 1998: 186). The invisible world is not an analogy for the world that surrounds us but a distinct reality in which “the proper function of power in Africa” is debated (Ellis & ter Haar 1998: 201). Though this reality confounds the efforts of other discourses, such as modernity, to conform it to their own reality, this does not mean that the invisible world is a response to these. As suggested by Bucher, speaking of Shona beliefs (in Shoko 2011), chiefs, witches and healers are all part of a “philosophy of power” and “subject to one basic notion of 'power'” (280), which is also extended to any person who enters the invisible to gain more power, as many political, economic and religious leaders do. In approaching this philosophy of power from a Western academic perspective, it is important to understand the predominant notions of power in political theory. The following section provides a summary of how power is often employed in political science and how it is applied in studies of witchcraft in Africa. Though political analyses often gravitate towards the state as a central actor, the following sections will demonstrate how witchcraft brings questions of power back to the individual and frames their actions in terms of a greater responsibility to the collective.

Power in Political analyses

Power in political science is understood predominantly from a modern, Western perspective. Drawing on the experiences of European nations and states, political science has come to associate power as synonymous with expressions of domination in the evolution of politics in the West. As a result, non-Western expressions and experiences of power are framed within the rubric of a regional phenomenon, at times creating the impression that power, or more precisely political power, in non-Western regions is anomalous. The dominance of Western epistemologies has led to significant efforts towards homogenization, carrying with them the “assumption that African societies should reproduce Western ideals and institutions regardless of the feasibility or contextual differences” (Nyamnjoh 2001: 28). This view is recognizable in contemporary efforts to understand the structures and institutionalization of political power in Africa. Numerous studies cited in this section aim to diagnose and redress what are seen as limitations in the expression and exercise of political power in Africa. However, notable in these assessments are the continued implication of Western conceptions of power and the political.

The discipline of political studies today remains fixed in a debate regarding the nature of power which is largely conducted in terms of a dichotomy between the prominent theories of Weber and Foucault. However, outside of these central conceptions of power, a complex world exists where these theories are confounded and where cases emerge to which existing theories may not be accurately applied. This is particularly true for African societies where experiences and expressions of power are diverse. As noted by Schatzberg, contemporary political scientists often employ two central assumptions when writing about politics beyond the West: “that definitions and assumptions about power generated in the West will be applicable; and second, that power will be visible and thus subject to empirical observation and measurement” (2001: 39). Further, there has been a lack of interest in attempting to operationalize witchcraft as a form of power, leaving significant gaps in our knowledge of African political experiences and our own ability to theorize and research central concerns of the field where “witchcraft is shown to be integral” (Englund 1996: 257).

As the field of political science, and comparative politics more precisely, finds itself amid calls from other disciplines stressing the need for a strong political engagement with witchcraft in Africa (Ashforth 2005), the field's general reluctance to acknowledge that power and politics are complicated

by witchcraft belief comes into question. For example, there is increasing concern among international actors and researchers regarding the rise of witchcraft-related violence across the continent, which is noted as significantly complicating political aspirations of stability, justice and security (Ashforth 2005, Cimpric 2010, de Boeck 2000, Englund 2007, Green & Mesaki 2005, Kohnert 2007, Palmer 2010, Smith 2008). Despite the importance of witchcraft, where it has been considered in political science, it has taken a secondary role. This section aims to assess the prospect of bringing witchcraft to the forefront of our understanding of power, as a political concept itself, and as an expression of power in African political contexts.

The debate regarding power in political studies is often framed in terms of two polarized conceptions: those of Weber and Foucault. Weber's approach may be summarized as privileging coercion through a structural view of power, wherein power is understood as the ability to influence and direct another to act in a manner they may not otherwise act, thus contributing to the formation of directed political order (Bates 2008). In many cases, this political order is characterized in the "rational-legal" state system (Roitman 1990: 673), drawing on a "single secular source of power", which is equated with "social relations of domination and subordination and with political institutions" (Niehaus 2001: 9). Notably, this view rejects ambiguous sources of power as well as conceptions of power beyond domination and control, such as creative power, which "is about social actions and ideas" (Fleisher & Wynne-Jones 2010: 183).

For many contemporary scholars, the limitations imposed on possible understandings of power as proposed by Weber are corrected by incorporating a view of power which draws upon the works of Foucault. For Foucault, power is neither uniquely instrumental nor coercive, nor is it necessarily institutionalized through social structures, rather power is ubiquitous, permeating social relations to "characterise, and constitute the social body" (Foucault 1980: 93). In this view, relations of power "cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse" (Foucault 1980: 93). Therefore, power cannot be analyzed as a static expression of force, but rather it "must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain" (Foucault 1980: 98). Power and knowledge are interrelated for Foucault, where "[f]ar from preventing knowledge, power produces it" (Foucault 1980: 59).

From this perspective, Foucault does not readily accept the idea that power is "an organ of repression" (Foucault 1980: 90), but instead bound in discourses where power and truth, where "[w]e are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (Foucault 1980: 93). In this way, individuals are not the "point of application" of power, but its vehicles (Foucault 1980: 98). What is important in this concept of power is understanding how power becomes useful and how these advantageous mechanisms produced by power are "incorporated into the social whole" (Foucault 1980: 101). More importantly is the complex relations embedded in these mechanisms which are not wholly repressive, but which "produces things" which are desired such as knowledge and truth (Foucault 1980: 119). Foucault's conception of power then does not necessarily construct the exercise of power as negative, but rather, like in the invisible world, "[p]ower is a-moral, or rather it becomes moral only through application" (Ellis 1999: 274; also West 2005). Witchcraft as the expression of harm is always immoral. In the exercise of invisible power to combat witchcraft, power becomes "an unending series of transcendent and transformative maneuvers, each one moving beyond beyond, countering, inverting, overturning, and/or reversing the one preceding it" (West 2005: 7).

When applied to witchcraft, Foucault is helpful by expanding Weber's narrow definition and questioning how power operates beyond domination and in doing so complicating the relationship between agent and structure (Fleisher & Wynne-Jones 2010: 181). Unfortunately, as noted by Smith,

overextending Foucauldian concepts of power, as advanced by comparative scholars such as Mdembe, Bayart and Chabal and Daloz, has demonstrated “the Eurocentrism of such concepts of biopower or governance, which have evolved as descriptions of Western ideal types which themselves devolve when confronted with everyday practices of power in African societies’ (2008: 243). As well, much of Foucault’s work is itself “explicitly concerned with the development of the nation state, and with the very specific historical trajectory of Western democracy” (Fleisher & Wynne-Jones 2010: 181), thereby reproducing the same cultural limitations and secular notions of Weber’s theory of power. Nonetheless, the foundations of Foucault’s thoughts on power are important in highlighting the ambivalence of supernatural power, which will become important in later analyses.

Another useful aspect of Foucault’s work on power is the concept of discourse and the idea that power produces knowledge, and knowledge produces power. This is an essential departure from the limited view of power as coercion. In historical and contemporary studies of power in Africa, much of the continent is characterized by “diffuse” power relations with “loose control” over “smaller political units [and] short-lived structures” (Platteau 2007: 5). However, the inclusion of the supernatural in these landscapes of coercively weak political relations where expressions of clear domination were few or transitory, a denser and more complex world of power emerges. Beyond the Weberian representation of power in Africa, where power radiates more or less successfully from centres of domination in gradients of grey, the supernatural as a discourse of power colours the picture of power relations from the individual to state level. Despite the insight offered by this approach, the few studies that do employ the supernatural as a discourse of power move beyond the interpretation of the supernatural as an “instrument” (Schatzberg 2000: 32) or metaphor “that Africans use to convey perceptions about politics and political life” (Schatzberg 1993: 446) and “cope with insecurity and uncertainty” (Schatzberg 2006: 357).

In this study of the “political language” of eight states media institutions, Schatzberg includes the supernatural in his examination of the “linguistic exchanges between those who have power, and those who do not” (Schatzberg 1993: 446). This study posits a crucial divide in the construction of power between the West and Africa, where the former is transformative and the latter consumptive (Schatzberg 1993: 446). From this view, Schatzberg constructs the metaphor of “father, family, food” as a moral matrix which is representative of culturally determined expressions of power in Africa (Schatzberg 1993: 450). Within this matrix, the image and language of the father and family are employed to resonate with a culture which draws on idealized visions of authority and behaviour within the family to conceptualize and legitimize power (Schatzberg 1993: 451). Thus the political leader stands in relation to his subjects as a father to his children, implying a number of moral responsibilities and norms which correlate to the structure of the family. The correlation made to consumption is embodied in the role of the father as a provider of material goods to the family, as well as a consumer of these goods.

Here Schatzberg notes the ambiguous connotation of eating, which may be used to refer to material as well as spiritual goods, thus implicating witchcraft. As noted by Schatzberg, eating is a term that is often used to express the assumption that “those who can ‘eat’ materially are able to do so because they can ‘eat’ victims spiritually” (Schatzberg 1993: 448). In this matrix Schatzberg recognizes that power in African societies has “[a] second face” in the spiritual (Schatzberg 1993: 448). While this recognition is devoted considerable attention in Schatzberg’s text, he concludes that power is ultimately understood as parental, though he does allow for its fundamental source to be spiritual, rather than structural (Schatzberg 2001: 59). Schatzberg also ventures so far as to argue that political scientists have avoided the subject of witchcraft due to their discomfort with the idea of the unseen, thereby neglecting the real world of the invisible which “play[s] a role in politics and in shaping political perceptions” and “ha[s] a great deal to do with power” (Schatzberg 2001: 71). Unfortunately, thereafter

Schatzberg proceeds to relegate witchcraft to the level of symbolism, describing it as “a mode of causality”, an instrument “to induce political quiescence” and an “implement of statecraft” which poses a challenge to the development of democracy (Schatzberg 2001: 113, 221).

As few studies take the supernatural or witchcraft seriously, analyses of power relations, where they do not draw directly on Weber's definition of power, focus on what are seen as cultural expressions of power and political organization. These approaches employ an awkward middle ground where cultural is used to replace what would otherwise be termed political in Western milieus and the definition of power remains embedded in Western cultural conceptions though it is often constructed as coming from the culture or African milieu in question. This is particularly problematic in terms of traditional power. Without the possibility of drawing on the invisible, many scholars writing on the power of chiefs rely instead on African cultures, such as the values of gerontocracy and lineage as demonstrated in Reader's text (1998), to explain the power of these institutions. In Reader's historical analysis, the development of agricultural practices brought together peoples who formed communities based on material need. Among these communities, some developed social orders and hierarchies based on lineage, giving “rise to the institution of chieftaincy” (Reader 1998: 258). According to Reader, chiefs were afforded status but little power over a community:

Indeed, as though to counter the frictions likely to arise if authority and power were vested in certain chiefs and lineages and thus flowed vertically, from the few at the top to the majority at the bottom, a system emerged whereby authority and power were spread horizontally throughout the group as a whole, touching every lineage and family. This was the age-grade system: a political substructure uniquely suited to the social and economic conditions of sub-Saharan Africa (Reader 1998: 257).

The age-grade system allowed for power and political life to be divide among groups, with those who progressed successfully through these strata to emerge in the senior-age set as “wise men”, thus establishing “gerontocracy as the dominant form of political organization in sub-Saharan Africa” (Reader 1998: 258). Reader argues that “Africa's gerontocratic form of social and political organization” remains resilient as “it functioned on a basis of compromise not coercion, and was disseminated by a process of consent, not conquest” (Reader 1998: 260). This view of chieftaincy as a political expression of power through consent is greatly contested by a number of works which posit the continuation of chieftainships as a residual institution of colonial rule and thus as a colonial innovation (Lentz 2003: 154). For Lentz, the model of chieftaincy as a form of political power continues to act, as it did in colonial times, as a conduit for the “incorporation of local society into the state”, thereby remaining resilient in its utility to the state (2003: 154).

Similarly, analyses of colonial era replicate the reluctance to incorporate the invisible as a broader conception of power. As a result of this, analyses of the colonial era are commonly limited to expression of power in the visible world. For example, Mamdani's (1996) work on the construction of the citizen and the subject in colonial times directly addresses the question of how power in organized in contemporary Africa, taking into consideration the continent's historical and institutional context. For Mamdani, power in Africa was permanently altered from precolonial times through the homogenization of state formation approaches by colonial actors. The state, as a form of political organization of power, was unified under colonial rule as the conquest state, establishing “decentralized despotism” as the central expression of power in Africa (Mamdani 1996: 48). In the post-colonial era, Mamdani notes that states have maintained this view of power. However disagreement regarding the role of the customary, which remained unresolved through the practice of indirect rule during colonialism, has led to two differing trajectories. On the one hand, some states have sought to preserve the customary “against alien encroachment”, while on the other hand, some states aim to eradicate custom and “embrac[e] a triumphant modernism” (Mamdani 1996: 298).

It is here, in the post-colonial African state, that much of the research conducted in African politics in the sub-field of comparative politics is undertaken. Numerous studies focus on the contemporary African state and efforts towards democratization, good governance, increased stability and development, and seek to address the possible barriers preventing these outcomes. Young (2004) argues that as a product of the colonial state, the elite of the post-colonial state have continued to advance the ideological legacy of their predecessors. Thus the power of the post-colonial state remains vested in the responsibility of the state to civilize “an unlettered citizenry”, thereby constructing power as knowledge borne through an “innate superiority” (Young 2004: 29). In this conception of power, the state becomes the sole bearer and wielder of the power of development, centralizing power and monopolizing political space to ensure “unhindered hegemony” (Young 2004: 34).

From this centralized position of power, the post-colonial state disseminates resources through networks based on client-patron relations, producing patrimonial lines of loyalty which link citizens to the state. According to Young, this configuration of political power persisted until the demands of international financial institutions became unavoidable for state leaders who were then required to reinvent the state according to the pressures of a rising neoliberal order. A feature of this transition in state power is explored by Posner and Young (2007), who note the increasing institutionalization of political power in Africa. According to the findings of their study, Posner and Young argue that power in Africa is increasingly expressed through constitutional norms. Where personal rule or the Big Man paradigm once dominated transitions of state power, this is no longer the case (Posner & Young 2007: 126). Rather, Posner and Young argue that the rising number of democratic transitions between governments in Africa is the “clearest manifestation” of a transformation towards law based (and therefore legitimate) state politics (Posner & Young 2007: 130).

Though Posner and Young provide little insight into the causes of this transformation, the role of international actors may be seen as implied. The discourses of Africa as a political entity on the international stage are diverse. However a frequent construction is of Africa as powerless in the global system and therefore unable to overcome barriers to development without external assistance (Lyman 2007). As a result of this, power within Africa may be seen as the power of external actors within Africa (notably similar to the conception of African expressions of the political and power as formed by the colonial experience seen earlier). From this perspective, people within Africa are seen as being prevented from exercising power due to the constraints placed upon them through poverty, apathy, and intellectual inability (Ninsin 2007). Following this logic, African populations require non-governmental and civil society organizations to speak for them (Ninsin 2007). As a result of this, private interests are able to appropriate political power through the discourse of development (Ninsin 2007), at times even centralizing this appropriated power in foreign actors and ideologies (Mercer *et al.* 2003: 423). As a result of this, scholars have questioned the applicability of political conceptions of power characterized in the state-society dichotomy, or in the institution of civil society, to African societies (Konings 2009).

Looking cumulatively at the studies reviewed here, there remains a significant portion of the world of politics that is left blank. With the exception of Schatzberg, who relegates the supernatural to metaphor, Western knowledge of power in Africa is severely limited when looking only at the visible world. While these studies have successfully addressed power and political expressions of power in the visible world of elite and state structures, they have neglected the questions of agency and the invisible world, thereby omitting consideration of the supernatural in the political and the daily realities lived by a majority of Africans. Thus, dominant Western conceptions of power employed in studies of power in the region have largely failed to comprehensively explain the full range of expressions and experiences of power and the political in African societies and contexts. Though it is unlikely that any theory may successfully encapsulate the complexity of any lived reality, the exclusion of witchcraft from these approaches remains problematic. Studies of power, through a Western lens which relies on modernity

and liberal interpretations of power, may resist acknowledging witchcraft. However, for those who live in a world of witches, the task is not so simple.

In the conception of reality which dominates the Western academics and understandings of power, there is a distinct divide between that which is considered visible or real and that which is invisible and, conversely, nonexistent. Within witchcraft belief, what cannot be seen by one individual does not negate its existence for another person. Though the invisible world cannot always be seen by all, evidence of its existence may be glimpsed from time to time, by various individuals, whose collective experiences come together to establish a clearer understanding of this other world. Thus, truth is a matter of consensus rather than the result of “disqualification, dismemberment or atomization” (Nyamnjoh 2001: 29) as proving or disproving its existence through scientific method would require. As noted by Nyamnjoh, how witchcraft may be understood therefore depends “on one's epistemological assumptions about reality” (Nyamnjoh 2001: 47) as well as one's openness to alternative epistemologies.

Taking witchcraft into consideration therefore requires reflection upon one's epistemological assumptions and the ability to allow for its possible co-existence with other, drastically different worldviews. In Ellis and ter Haar's works on witchcraft and power in African politics, African epistemologies are argued to “have validity, meaning that not only do all people have a right to think about the world in whatever way they choose, but that modes of perception unfamiliar to Western observers may – in theory, at least – be of universal application” (Ellis & ter Haar 2007: 386). In their view, for many people in the world, including the vast majority of sub-Saharan Africa, power has “its ultimate origin in the invisible world” and this belief “has a marked influence on the conduct of the political and on political attributes such as authority and legitimacy” (Ellis & ter Haar 2007: 390). Further, this power is equally accessible to anyone who is willing to draw on this source, thereby posing “a constant threat” to the possibility of establishing a hegemonic ideological order and sustained political stability (Ellis & ter Haar 2004: 88). Political power drawn from the realm of the invisible is also dominated by the same ambivalence which reigns in the unknown (Ellis & ter Haar 2004: 92). Power, therefore, is neither good nor bad, helpful nor harmful, but characterized through personal behaviour in the exercise of the power one has acquired (Heywood 1998).

In this construction of power, authority and legitimacy are gained through the responsible exercise of power and diminished by abuse. Thus power and, by extension, the political use of power are determined by the creative capacity of individuals who are expected to contribute constructively to the lives of those over whom power is held. When this broader conception of power is applied in studies of the political in Africa, the findings are quite different from those where it is not. As found by Fleisher and Wynne-Jones (2010) in their archaeological approach:

Power relations and the construction of authority in African prehistory have often confounded expectations; the diversity of scales and forms has meant that universalizing models developed elsewhere have less analytical utility when applied in this region. The tendency has therefore been to regard manifestations of power among past African societies as particular to that continent, without the capacity to inform understandings of authority and government in other parts of the world. Yet archaeology increasingly deals with non-essentialist conceptions of power, and the incorporation of practice has meant a reorientation of the discipline to focus in 'bottom-up' models, locating power in everyday activity and interaction (McIntosh 1999a; Stahl 2001). This type of approach has long been part of Africanist anthropologies, which have dwelt especially on ritual and on control over the natural world: aspects that have been termed 'creative power', and which are implicated in and constructed through daily activity (Arens and Karp 1989).” (177-178)

In this non-essentialist approach, Fleisher and Wynne-Jones also find that African conceptions of power emphasize the invisible and “tend towards collective rather than coercive means of control”

(2010: 180). Beginning from this vantage point, legitimacy is seen as an ongoing process, performed by individuals and groups, requiring power to be “translated into authority” (Fleisher & Wynne-Jones 2010: 180). Power is not a means to mask the real operation of power, but is “derived from an ability to work upon the natural and supernatural spheres” (Fleisher & Wynne-Jones 2010: 183). This type of creative power is not seen by the authors as an alternative to instrumental power, but as a means for ordering social resources towards a particular goal. Where instrumental power emphasizes capacities, creative power emphasizes “social actions and ideas” (Fleisher & Wynne-Jones 2010: 183). Power in African societies may then be seen as more than a system of coercion and control including the idea of power as an “everyday activity” which is constantly negotiated and renegotiated (Fleisher & Wynne-Jones 2010: 186). In the context of the supernatural, the creative potential of power is determined by the individual who draws on this source. While witches only ever intend to benefit themselves, others may employ invisible powers through socially approved and produced mechanisms which are seen to support the collective.

Chieftaincy and “traditional power” can be understood in this context as an extension of invisible power into the visible world which allows for an individual to draw on the unseen for the benefit of a society (Sanders 2003). Chiefs in precolonial, as well as colonial and post-colonial contexts, were empowered by the invisible realm to “protect the fertility of land and animals, to bring rain for crops, and to protect the community against the evil practiced by witches” (Ludsin 2003: 78). Drawing further on the ambiguity of power, chiefs in precolonial times were also able to sanction ritual murder for the benefit of the village and to call upon the powers of witchcraft to increase their wealth or destroy enemies, practices which are still accepted to some degree today (Ludsin 2003: 78). Management of power also entailed the responsibility of maintaining stability within a society. According to this arrangement, chiefs were required to mediate witchcraft powers between individuals through the settlement of witchcraft accusations, which may have involved the punishment of witches or compensation for those falsely accused (Ludsin 2003).

In the post-colonial state, the role of the chief has been significantly diminished and legally constrained by limitations on their power vis-à-vis the power of the state. Yet, despite efforts to consolidate power in the state, “chieftaincy remains part of the cultural and political landscapes” of Africa (Nyamnjoh 2003: 125). As the legitimacy and authority of chiefly power is derived “from precolonial roots” it is seen by some as a strong competitor to the modern state (Awosom 2003: 101). Some post-colonial leaders have sought to co-opt traditional authorities in an effort to formalize their roles “as upholders of African traditions and resisters of colonial oppression” and increase their legitimacy (Heywood 1998: 144). However, some leaders, like some scholars, fail to account for the complexity of African epistemologies, which resist facile manipulation (Heywood 1998). In attempting to manipulate power which is ultimately tied to the invisible, leaders inevitably invoke “the concept of misuse of power through witchcraft” (Heywood 1998: 154). The gamble here being that leaders must be above their own selfish ends in exercising this power and, where they fail to ensure benefits are shared, are at risk of losing authority and legitimacy in the accusation of witchcraft (Heywood 1998).

Despite the risks to the legitimacy of state leaders and, by extension, the state itself, chieftaincy is often seen as engaged in a zero-sum struggle for power with the state, wherein chiefs are subject “to aggressive demystification” and in danger of being seen as “puppets” of the state (Awosom 2003: 102). Aided by the insight of the invisible as a source of power, the resilience of chieftaincy in African societies is made more accessible (Awosom 2003). Without this understanding the ability of chiefs to resist domination by the state could not be fully appreciated, further complicating the assumed relations and divisions of power, authority, legitimacy and sovereignty in the post-colonial state (Konings 2003, Ray 1998).

State formation and consolidation projects in the post-colonial era are also remarkable for their

efforts to discipline and dominate the invisible. Following the suppression of witchcraft practices and formal mediation through the introduction of Witchcraft Ordinance and Suppression Acts during the colonial period, communities have resorted to “taking justice against witchcraft into their own hands” (Ludsin 2003: 87). As chiefs are no longer able to provide witchcraft mediation services for individuals and risk legal consequences for doing so, the realm of the invisible has become a direct concern for the state which must now manage the violence of witch hunts and instant justice meted out by frustrated societies under siege. In addition to this, the invisible is viewed by many states as a continuing ideological and discursive threat to the project of state formation (Ciekawy 1998). Attempts to suppress witchcraft and extend state power include the prosecution of “practitioners”, those who access the power of the invisible, the policing of rituals, and the construction of the entire invisible world as witchcraft, and therefore completely harmful to the state, development and people (Ciekawy 1998, Smith 2008).

Most problematically, the claims made by states seeking to suppress witchcraft and the invisible are not unfounded. For the state, the invisible cannot be easily addressed as the fundamental logic of the structure of its power and institutions do not acknowledge its existence. Further, witchcraft discourse and the realm of the invisible “[offer] a critique of inequality and the human agents of exploitation where excessive desire for wealth and power, and the fulfillment of one's desire at another person's expense are dominant themes” (Ciekawy 1998:123). The invisible, therefore, advances norms of responsibility, reciprocity and collective accountability which are at odds with the project of the modern state. Thus, this discourse is indirectly recognized by many states' efforts to suppress witchcraft belief as a “powerful social and political resource” and form of resistance over which “common people... struggle to maintain control” (Ciekawy 1990: 126).

The invisible not only threatens the hegemony of the state as the sole legitimate centre of power, it also posits a reality in which the state is inherently incapable of meeting the requirement of providing “personal security” (Bratton 2004: 23). In a world where the visible and invisible are one, justice and security are closely linked to the ability of individuals to mediate the threat of witchcraft. Therefore a number of scholars have addressed the implications of witchcraft for “democratic governance within a modern liberal state” (Ashforth 2005: 11). As noted by Ashforth in his works on South Africa, injustices and spiritual insecurity experienced by the population represent problems which “are not easily sequestered in the institutional categories... [which] are taken for granted in liberal democratic thought” (Ashforth 2005: 11-12). However, Ashforth warns that unless spiritual insecurity is understood “politics in Africa is incomprehensible” and the modern state system likely to remain unstable (Ashforth 2005: 12).

Unfortunately for the project of the modern state in Africa, the conflicting realities of the state and the invisible represents an asymmetrical tension. While the logic of the state is unable to penetrate the logic of witchcraft, the state itself has proven susceptible to the invisible (Ashforth 2005, Geschiere 2006a, Green 2005). States who fail to directly redress spiritual insecurity are often assumed to be protecting witches with whom they are in league and from whom state power is ultimately acquired (Ashforth 2005, Ellis & ter Haar 2004, Kohnert 2003). On the other hand, states which acknowledge witchcraft as a threat and who employ the invisible to protect communities and combat witchcraft become themselves implicated in the “minefield of ambiguity” associated with spiritual power, thus placing the legitimacy of the state at further risk (Geschiere 2006b: 238).

In addition to African states, international actors also face significant limitations working in the world of witches. Due to a long history of colonial ignorance and intolerance towards African beliefs, many Africans are sceptical of Westerners' ability to understand the invisible (Kohnert 1996). This scepticism, paired with Western actors' reluctance to address witchcraft, has made open dialogue on the subject difficult, despite evidence that witchcraft beliefs greatly impact the work of international

institutions, and development agencies in particular (Kohnert 1996). For example, current development models widely presume local participation to be integral to the success of community-based projects. Drawing on this assumption, Golooba-Mutebi stresses the implications of witchcraft belief on participatory models in the African context, where “undercurrents of mistrust, animosity and suspicion” erode the efficacy of development programs (2005: 944). As well, considerations must be given to the centrality of equality in witchcraft discourse, where programs which promote individual rather than collective advancement may provoke suspicions and accusations (Golooba-Mutebi 2005), thus leading to ostracism, harassment, torture, murder, and in some extreme cases, the abandonment of entire villages (Thomas 2007).

From the studies reviewed here, it may be argued that witchcraft and the invisible are integral to understanding power and politics in African societies.

A final note on knowledge and power

Exploitation in the exercise of power is a process which produces violence, in the degradation of the other, perpetuating cycles of harm and often equally violent recourse. Though the Foucauldian interpretation of power encourages us to look away from violence in our societies, focusing instead on knowledge as a mechanism and product of power which we internalize (as much as power is also a product and mechanism of knowledge), it does not eliminate the presence of that violence or the threat of it. Graeber provides a scathing critique of the view that power no longer requires brute force to ensure social control, arguing that while this is a comforting thought for many, it nevertheless remains that should individuals act against the power of the state system, they will be violently repelled and reprimanded. Anarchists' understanding of power, rather than seeking to diminish the role of violence in power, reminds us that power is always a violent and present process (Graeber 2004).

Graeber argues that a theoretical emphasis on power and knowledge is a misnomer, as power in these events shapes ignorance, not knowledge, as power is often used to obfuscate power relations and thereby limit knowledge. An actor such as the state becomes ignorant to the complexity of social arrangements and various experiences of human life, by instituting simplified controls to ensure obedience. This is opposite to egalitarian systems of governance where there is no means to “compel a minority to agree with a majority decision – either because there is no state with a monopoly of coercive force, or because the state has nothing to do with local decision-making” (Graeber 2004: 89).

Nevertheless, the production of knowledge or ignorance is an important consideration here. The power of Western academia to construct knowledge/ignorance of Africa, as a part of the world “which was subjected to outside domination for long periods and whose dependence and marginalization in the contemporary period of globalization is only increasing”, is of great concern (van Binsbergen 2001: 213). Van Binsbergen comments in particular on the academic study of witchcraft in Africa, identifying four trends in research: the first being witchcraft as an example of Africans “fundamentally different modes of thought” in the 1920s to 1940s; the second stressing the rationality of witchcraft belief as a “stable and timeless” institution in African rural society in the 1950s to 1970s; the third focusing on witchcraft as a “symbolic expression” of change in the 1960s to 1980s; and the more recent trend of viewing witchcraft through modernity and globalization (van Binsbergen 2001: 214), which I would argue is combined with the previous trend in today's studies.

In outlining these different approaches, van Binsbergen points to an intriguing outlier, Winch, who argues that witchcraft “comes in where knowledge runs out” (van Binsbergen 2001: 215). Without saying witchcraft is about ignorance, this interpretation, which can be found in many forms in many works, argues that witchcraft is about that which “lies outside the realm of natural science testing” (van Binsbergen 2001: 215). While I agree with this idea, there are very important differences among the

assumptions which might support it. For Werbner, witchcraft is a form of personal knowledge which acknowledges that some things cannot be truly known and that “opaqueness is one of the few sure facts of the human condition” (Werbner 2001: 192). Certainty has no real place in witchcraft knowledge and while belief may be authoritative, it is also provisional, without being “absolute or final” (Werbner 2001: 193).

Werbner allows in his approach for witchcraft belief to remain a form of knowledge, and one which exists outside of Western science. An alternative and potentially dismissive approach to the idea that witchcraft belief exists outside of knowledge, read here as science, is the study of witchcraft in psychology and cognition. These arguments profess to demonstrate that witchcraft belief has no place in the Western reality or knowledge outside of the appropriation of these beliefs to demonstrate the ability of science to explain anything and everything. In psychological and cognition approaches, witchcraft is reduced to scientific explanation, allowing for its existence to be rationalized through, and therefore made acceptable to, Western reality.

In my own experience I have encountered this appropriation as an unconscious act of domination which was expressed as a conscious attempt to demonstrate inclusion and acceptance. In discussion with a number of friends, some of whom work in government, one friend described her experience at a meeting of First Nations chiefs. When another friend asked how the meeting went, she explained that it was very different but interesting. For example, she participated in a smudging, where sacred herbs are burnt and the smoke is used to cleanse and confirm the positive intentions of the individual. However, when explaining the process, my friend felt it necessary to note that the ritual makes sense because the heat of the smoke could actually act as a disinfectant.

Smudging is a ritual I practice in my own life, to cleanse my home and person. I have never felt it necessary to justify this action in terms of Western science but have practised it in the way I was taught by my great-aunt. The value of the ritual, in my view, is not in its scientific validity. To state that the inherent value and true explanation of smudging is rationally sound because it can be scientifically explained not only diminishes the value of ritual, it also subordinates the ritual to a hegemonic logic, eliminating that reality and subsuming the experiences of individuals lived lives into the structures of another belief system. This same process is seen in the arguments made by authors of psychological and cognitive studies of belief in the paranormal or witchcraft.

In the Cognitive Science of Religion, the human brain as a constant is understood to “exhibit a number of functional regularities regarding how they process information” (Barrett 2007: 2). One of these regularities or “mental tools” is the ability to “generate certain kinds of ideas” generally considered to be “intuitive regardless of cultural context” (Barrett 2007: 4). In addition to this, where our intuition is limited, the evolution of the human brain led to certain biases, such as propensities towards counter-intuitive ideas and to seeing “human-like agency” in events around us (Barrett 2007: 6). In psychology, personal experiences form our beliefs and when we have experiences which we misinterpret as paranormal, this may contribute to creating future cognitive biases (French & Wilson 2007). From here, details regarding the ability of believers in the paranormal to judge probability (French & Wilson: 2007; Rogers, Davis & Fisk 2009), adopt intuitive rather than analytic thinking (Rogers, Davis & Fisk 2009), or fail specific logic tests (Barrett 2007, French & Wilson 2007; Rogers, Davis & Fisk 2009) differ yet commonly agree that some scientific understanding of these beliefs is possible.

Alternative approaches attempt to rationalize witchcraft beliefs in terms of human emotional psychology. For example, Sorensen (2006) argues the importance of understanding the “emotional force” underlying ideas of magical rituals, as these entail:

a radical de-emphasis of conventional symbolic meaning and a transformation of the intentionality of the agent performing the action, provoking the employment of alternative hermeneutic strategies based on fundamental cognitive mechanisms (Sorensen 2006: 25-28)

In Quinlan & Quinlan (2007) the study of witchcraft belief as a “hostile 'social cognition'” finds insecurity and mistrust resulting from “[m]aternal unresponsiveness during a sensitive period (birth to seven years of age) is responsible for continuing personal insecurity (Quinlan & Quinlan 2007: 165-166). These authors further correlate hostile intent to others learned through attachment style parenting to the mistrust which fuels witchcraft belief. Witchcraft belief is found, in this study, to be affected by such factors as a father's “sleeping proximity”, instances of “extramarital sex” and a father's involvement with his child (Quinlan & Quinlan 2007: 170).

The idea that unloving African parents, a not unfamiliar and racist stereotype, are responsible for witchcraft belief is also shared by Watt, Watson and Wilson (2007) who stress that an “abusive and traumatic childhood” is “positively correlated with paranormal beliefs” and “most strongly” in the case of traditional beliefs about witchcraft (336-340). These authors stress in particular a “lack of control” or having “authoritarian parents” as being particular contributors (Watt, Watson & Wilson 2007: 336). What is incredibly problematic is the idea that witchcraft belief is the result of dysfunction or abnormality, the result of some trauma or emotional inadequacy. Even in Bever's (2000) text, fear of witchcraft leads to increased stress which in turn causes the aggravation or manifestation of illness in individuals, emotions are used through an obliquely scientific analysis to suggest that witchcraft is a recognition of the ability of individuals to affect others, not through the supernatural, but through feelings.

While many authors may feel, as Sindzingre (1995) does, that cognition allows for the study of witchcraft while refuting “relativism” and “exoticization” (528), these approaches cannot be uncritically lauded. Cognitive and psychological approaches remain methods of a discourse which is inherently hostile to witchcraft belief and when applied, eradicate the possibility of witchcraft as a reality. Whether applied to witchcraft in Africa or to economics on Wall Street (Sindzingre 1995), it remains that cognition is part of a totalizing project and logic in its attempt to explain also appropriates and *explains away* witchcraft. It is important therefore to remain critical of the differences between saying reality is something we make and reality is something science can explain. This is not to say that witchcraft is not a human invention, as stressed by my research assistant in Ghana who argued that should people stop believing in witchcraft, it will just go away “like the wind” (Fieldnotes 20/09/12). Rather it is to stress that Western reality is equally invented and to reject the assessment that one invention is worth more than any other.

Dealing with the philosophical question of what is real? or, what is reality? or, in terms of witchcraft, how can a reality be known? I was forced as a researcher to confront the limitations of conventional research methods in political science. I was not undertaking a project which sought to remain at the level of theory that could be accessed through texts and argument. Nor was I only looking at the empirical or the practical, which could be easily quantified. To further complicate the question of how to begin to address the complex relations of witchcraft, witchcraft-related violence and Western analysis and thought, the subject itself is one which I understood to be sensitive or taboo. How would I begin to approach all of this in the field?

Clarifying Key Concepts Employed or Omitted in this Research

Belief

The terms belief or believe are used as both a noun and a verb. Current debates, largely within the studies of religion, sociology and anthropology, reflect a longer term effort to critically upset the use of 'belief' as an unproblematic concept. I was encouraged to reconsider my use of this word as it reflected the reproduction of an uncritical Western framing of witchcraft that was based on the perception of witchcraft as merely a 'belief'. In this context, belief is used to reduce witchcraft to a

question of cognition, one which is assumed to have succumb to some logical fallacy. Witchcraft, as a belief in this context, reduces witchcraft to a state of irrationality, a lack of reason, and therefore derides witchcraft itself.

An alternative framing is the understanding of witchcraft as a form of action rather than belief. As a form of action, defined by social relations and interaction, witchcraft may be assessed outside of the question of cognition, belief or reality. Most importantly, understanding witchcraft as a form of action prevents one from relegating witchcraft, under the terminology and negative connotation of belief, to the subordination of ontological imperialism.

While I agree with the criticism that Western framings of “belief” have been and are used today to effect acts of 'ontological imperialism', I do not agree that omitting this word and replacing it with an action-oriented interpretation resolves this tension. In regards to the theoretical disposition, content and analysis of this text, belief is not assumed to be false, irrational or lacking in reason. It is also, false to assume that I use this word without any belief in witchcraft myself, and that these “beliefs” cannot be and are not real.

Rather, it is my view that that the veracity of any beliefs is undetermined. Witchcraft, like any alternative belief or worldview, such as reason, is simply a truth claim, not a truth in and of itself. Therefore, the term belief does not, for me, carry the weight of imperialism or reason, or any competing 'belief system', as all these claims are equally true, untrue, false, real, unreal, imagined and lived. This is not to say that every truth claim is treated equally or has equal socio-political power, as this is not the case. Some truth claims have strong dominance over others, employing institutional and structural powers which further privilege these relations. It is simply to say, that I, myself, *believe* there is no inherent hierarchy of reality, truth or belief.

Therefore, belief as a form of relations is not a necessary interpretation, thereby circumventing the rejection of these beliefs as unreal and stealthily camouflaging any ontological imperialist tendencies. Belief is also not reinvented as cognitive function, though this question has been addressed. Witchcraft is real. It is both a reality and part of a multitude of realities which compose the lived and imagined human world (see the following section on reality). Accepting this allows me to look past the need to assert any one truth and adopt a position of uncertainty and indecision. I do not know reality, I only know my own reality. Further, I trust the judgement of others regarding their own reality, as it is experienced and interpreted by them. Therefore, belief is not theoretically informing in my work. Instead, I am looking at ideas, discourse, language and power.

Belief is relevant, however there is not a fixed understanding of belief and belief itself may be shifting, temporary, contradictory and instrumental. Here, the instrumental aspects are important for the discursive practices that are assessed, particularly where Western discourses and interventions of witchcraft are used to connote a cultural aspect, tradition, religious phenomena or other category beyond reality. Though my work critiques this approach, the use of the word belief remains relevant where it is also used by another author or interviewee or respondent. Most commonly, belief is employed in this text as a noun, though at times also a verb. However, it is not used as a philosophical device intended to discredit witchcraft and may be supplemented by the words perception and perceive, think and feel, or knowledge and conviction.

Reality

Some may say that there is one reality and this may be true for them. However, my own experiences have continually contested this assertion. As a result of this, what is real and what is not real have never been a central concern for my person or work. My own ideas regarding reality, knowledge of reality and truth claims concerning a unified or singular reality have been greatly influence by my childhood experiences. Mental illness is common in my mother's family and

throughout my life I have lived and worked with people with mental illness. I am not comparing belief in witchcraft with mental illness in any way, to do so would be extremely ignorant of both. However, growing up in a world where multiple realities could be perceived at once and coexist among one another was greatly affecting of my worldview.

A brief, personal anecdote may help to elucidate my precarious commitment to the notion of reality. When I was about five years old my aunt came to visit. When she arrived she was agitated and very concerned about an injury on her leg. My aunt explained to my mother that she had been bitten on the leg by a giant snake in the subway. To my horror, my mother did not take my aunt's concerns seriously and was incredibly dismissive. To her the story of the snake was not real. As a child, I shared my aunt's concern that the bite might be serious as I was aware that some snakes were poisonous. I began to interrogate my aunt regarding the details of her attack in order to ascertain whether it could have been a rattlesnake that had bitten her, in which case, in my mind, she would need to go to the hospital.

My aunt explained that she had been waiting for the subway to arrive. However, instead of a train, a giant snake appeared and bit her on the leg. When she showed me the bite marks on her calf, they were two pin pricks, barely visible, a few inches from one another. The clearest moment in my memory of this story is when I was looking at the bite mark and in my mind, trying to make the pieces fit together. A snake the size of a train but with fangs only inches apart. In that moment, I was torn between competing realities. My mother's reality suggested that this story was not true. However, my aunt's genuine distress made it impossible for me to be dissuaded from the facts of the story, though I had not yet managed to sort them out.

In this moment, three realities co-existed; my mother's, my aunt's and my own, though the latter was much less clear and rife with uncertainty. Throughout my childhood, instances such as these populated with my reality with other realities, sometimes similarly bizarre, involving bank robbing bears, sometimes macabre and sinister, even dangerous alternatives. From the experiences, I came to privilege uncertainty, a not knowing, and therefore a plurality of realities.

An extreme expression of this view is my scepticism towards the idea of a material reality. Similarly to post-structuralist views, arguments regarding an objective material reality are in my experience, always filtered through individual perception, which cannot be confirmed as a shared experience. A unique exercise I first encountered in a course taught by Professor Miguel de Larrinaga at the University of Ottawa is useful in explaining this view. Students are shown a circle and asked to describe the shape. Inevitably the descriptions used are based on parameters which more accurately describe what the shape is not. It does not have angles. It does not have sides. In essence, students are unconsciously employing another shape to describe the circle.

The exercise of attempting to define an object without referencing another object, which itself is described again reference to the first or possibly a third object, demonstrates the limitations of communication in conveying perceptions of reality while at the same time demonstrating the fundamental power of language, narratives and discourse in constructing a shared social reality. No one thing can be known in and of itself, therefore how things are known and related depends upon the construction of this knowledge through language. Though we may share discourses, narratives and language, the social realities these construct do not necessarily align with our internal worlds. Therefore, while post-structuralism is essential in its critical deconstruction of language, and through language, power, empirical confirmation of the internal impact of these discourses is nearly impossible to attain.

However, the insight brought by this critical turn in political theory is necessary to understanding the construction of reality, and power relations in this reality, through language. Thus, as noted regarding a number of terms in this work, concepts are complex, with long histories of

transformation and fluidity, determined by power and the ability to form and conform perception through language, and as Foucault stressed, knowledge through language, and power through knowledge.

Reality, employed here, is understood as an experience, formed and informed by a multitude of external and internal influences but which is ultimately individual. Realities are as plural as there are people. Thus, reality in this work is not a thing, singular, material or objective. Rather, reality is an exercise or practice, something we enact as a performance externally but experience only in ourselves. Reality and imagination being the most private of spaces. Therefore, whether witchcraft exists in reality, is entirely dependent upon the individual. While some have argued that witchcraft is the reality in Africa, this is an exaggeration and generalization which I do not support. Witchcraft is part of many people's reality in Africa and all parts of the world. However, witchcraft is not universal. It is not an inherent part of human reality as there are many people in Africa, and elsewhere, who do live with witchcraft as part of their reality. Though it may be experienced by people around them, people who do not share the reality of witchcraft have different experiences of this phenomenon. In their reality, witchcraft may be a fantasy, superstition, false belief, or a purely symbolic practice.

Spiritual Insecurity

Spiritual insecurity is a term coined by Adam Ashforth and explored in detail in his 1998 article "Reflections on Spiritual Insecurity in a Modern African City (Soweto)". In this article, Ashforth is looking at "those aspects of insecurity that are not reducible simply to objective conditions of danger" in Soweto, a city which he characterizes as being rife with violence and loss (1998: 39). In this context, according to Ashforth, people experience insecurity at a higher level than many other places leading to greater degrees of personal insecurity, defined as the "exposure to unmanageable dangers, doubts and fears" (Ashforth 1998: 63). However, adding to this insecurity is the danger, doubt and fear caused by supernatural forces, in this instance studied in this article, the threat of a giant snake seeking to destroy people. In order to operationalize this particular experience and insecurity, Ashforth uses the term "spiritual insecurity", which is "the dimension of insecurity in Soweto pertaining to the invisible or unseen forces" and defined as "the condition of danger, doubt, and fear arising from the exposure to the action of unseen forces bent upon causing harm" (Ashforth 1998: 63).

According to Ashforth, witchcraft is the "most pervasive source of spiritual insecurity" in Soweto (Ashforth 1998: 63). In his analysis of this novel concept, Ashforth notes that for him the central question concerning spiritual insecurity is "how the contours of doubt regarding the invisible forces relate to landscapes of anxiety and fear" (Ashforth 1998: 64). As this question is posed towards the end of his article, the investigation of this largely unfolds in his later works, where the concept is used to explore the social and political implications of spiritual insecurity stemming from witchcraft. In regards to the theoretical foundations of the term, Ashforth's most useful contribution is provided at the end of this first article, where he provides the following insight:

the proliferation of interpretive authorities claiming to speak the truth about the action of invisible forces and entities and the inability of any particular form of authority to achieve dominance in making sense of a place where a superfluity of dangers, doubts, and fear engender a pressing need for meaning. The various agencies of authority, such as those embodied in Western institutions, religious organizations, indigenous healers are unable to impose a generalized hegemony of interpretation. At the same time, the prevalence of misfortune stimulates an enormous profusion of interpretive endeavours. (Ashforth 1998: 65)

In this brief exploration of the theoretical implications of spiritual insecurity, Ashforth suggests a critical perspective where security, insecurity and protection are aspects of power relations; security is in effect the power struggles seeking to define and shape reality. Here, Ashforth departs from the liberal

foundation of security established earlier, where the experience of security is profoundly material (objective) and spiritual insecurity is manifest in the unseen world of spirit entities, which we are to understand do not truly exist. Instead, this interpretive orientation demonstrates a theoretical approach to security which goes beyond the common conceptions of the state as the basis of human order and security and as the source of protection through military or police power and the institutional protections of liberal conventions such as rights and the law.

This departure is essential to the critical break with liberal theory, which has been established in this work as being intolerant to witchcraft, therefore making liberal theories of security an impossible foundation for the concept of spiritual insecurity. Most problematically, in terms of witchcraft and spiritual insecurity, is the philosophical foundation of liberal (and conservative) thought which draws on an ontology of violence that assumes an inherent violence in humans based on the classical separation of reason from irrationality. In their work on security and in exploring the political subject of violence, Campbell and Dillon (1993) note that modern reasoning “makes many ambiguous claims” about the relationship between reason and violence:

First, as unconditioned knowledge, it is reason that claims to have discovered the violent determination of the political. Second, and again as unconditioned understanding, reason is advanced as capable of governing violence, subjecting it to the ends of the political subject of violence whatever its ends, and however that subject is defined. And, third, reason is offered as the capacity to realise the constitution of good government determined, instead, by knowledge and law (Campbell & Dillon 1993: 9)

Thus, security and modernity are intertwined through the construction of violence as the founding rationale for political life, and security itself is “the foundational value around which the political subject of violence revolves; from which it derives its teleological structure; and to which it constantly appeals in legitimization of its ordering way”. (Campbell & Dillon 1993: 29). According to Campbell and Dillon, security “furnishes the foundation of the modern political subject” (1993: 29), as it is through security that the individual is bound to the political realm.

For Campbell and Dillon, the politics of security is not a *fait accompli*, but rather is under constant threat from “the very heterogeneity, difference and otherness ... that threatens the knowledgably-secure self-possession which is the ideal of the sovereign subject” (1993: 30). In other words, the modern project to conform the individual through insecurity is a continuously consolidating project which is destabilized by that which “cannot and will not be assimilated into rational thought or practice because it simply always exceeds their categories” (Campbell & Dillon 1993: 30). Here, the critical turn in Ashforth's analysis of insecurity as a form of contestation of reality and the ability to determine and form this reality coincides with Campbell and Dillon's critical security analysis, as Campbell and Dillon note that “[t]he enemy of political modernity is uncertainty and contingency itself” (1993: 30). As witchcraft exits beyond the objective in the unseen, it is quintessentially uncertain.

In critical security studies, security is a discursive practice which is constructed and intended to capture language and imagination and conform these. Some discourses are, as noted by Ashforth, hegemonic and seek to eradicate all discursive alternatives by incorporating these into its linguistic practice. As noted throughout this work, modernity is unable to accommodate plurality. However, witchcraft is capable of coexisting with modernity and therefore resists being captured by modernity. This capacity is reflected in Ashforth's examination of spiritual insecurity which suggests the recognition of security as an imagined process, constructed in reality through discourse. Through this insight, Ashforth bridges witchcraft and critical security studies, which has worked to expand the concept of human security beyond traditional boundaries.

Critical security studies, as well as critical gender, queer and race theories, and migration

studies, have contributed to the appreciation of human vulnerability in the state, reversing the assumption that state is the source of security. In this work, this critical perspective is most obvious in my analysis of the state and NGOs, two actors which support the assumption that security can only come from the state, through democracy, rights, justice and order. However, critical security theories, like anarchism, question the ability of the state to provide security, as this deemed contrary to the fundamental imperatives of the state, which employs violence to maintain inequalities essential to state power and capitalist economics.

Further, critical security theorists have questioned the processes through which the state constructs discourses of security and threat, and employs fear and the promise of protection as a means to extend control and legitimize acts of state violence which would otherwise be deemed impermissible. Ole Waever (1995) theorizes securitization as a speech act, a discursive practice, which constructs a threat and attempts to depoliticize this threat in order to create a supportive social response to acts of exceptionalism. A fitting and recent example is the Global War on Terror which reduced a highly political act of terrorism into an irrational, apolitical hatred of a people, thereby creating a threat which could not be dealt with reasonably and requiring exceptional acts of violence. Exceptionalism, defined by Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer* (1998), is the creation of a crisis that is used to justify exceptions where the state becomes above the law and extends its power through this process, where people are made exceptions to the conventions of citizenship and protections are revoked and all aspects of life are subsumed by the law.

Many of the aspects of securitization are prevalent in witchcraft, where witchcraft is depoliticized in international and state discourses, allowing for the construction of witchcraft as a cultural practice, a traditional belief or a fiction instrumentalized to violate a persons security. In Cameroon, the state adopts the exceptional practice of being able to determine the guilt of accused witches, sentencing many to lengthy jail terms. In both Cameroon and Ghana, though the latter does not formally acknowledge witchcraft as real, the supernatural is used to justify the extension of the state through security responses to witchcraft and education efforts. NGOs and the state, through the securitized discourse of witchcraft, have been able to extend their reach into all aspects of life, through interventions which seek to influence religious, economic, and personal activities, including a persons health and home.

Spiritual insecurity is therefore an important concept that is employed here in contradistinction to conventional concepts of security. Spiritual security reflects a supernatural system and world without law, where violence is removed from human beings and complicated by non-human actors who have no sense of reason or irrationality, but who simply exist outside these constructs. Unlike Ashforth's use of the term, I do not associate spiritual insecurity with that which is invisible, as this could be equally applied to danger, doubts and fears stemming from the state and the economy, both of which present threats to security which are unseen. Similarly, spiritual insecurity in this work is distanced from modern associations of security and repoliticized; security is about power, the reciprocal relation between the ability (power) to construct a threat and provide protection and the empowerment (increased ability) of some by this construction.

Spiritual insecurity is about power and concerns the ability or inability of any person to protect themselves from a harm that is outside of reason but within reality. Most importantly, spiritual insecurity exists within a reality that the state does not determine or control, where the parameters of security and violence are contingent and wherein many authors compete to define truth and meaning. Spiritual insecurity is the ultimate contingency which undoes the process of modern liberal subject formation and upends the philosophical foundations of the political in Western thought.

The West

The use of the terms “the West” and “Western” have been carefully reviewed throughout this work. Theoretically, I tend towards the view that the West is a reified concept which has come to have its own power as a speech act and further, that the concept of the West in various discourses is a relevant construction encountered in various forms throughout my work. Reification, in the theoretical works of the Frankfurt School, describes the process through which people come to be dominated by a concept, concrete or imagine, and through this domination become less complex and human as this concept increasingly determines their social and political world. Reification, in this sense, is the established domination of an institution or logic. In my view, the West and Western are two concepts which have come to dominate and govern social life in many respects. In effect, the West have become a thing, an object, in its own right, erasing agent and action in a discursive reassertion of Western dominance, which is particularly notable since the resurgence of Western military force since 9/11.

Modernity, development, rationality, the state, democracy and capitalism, are a few of the many concepts which, though not uniquely Western, have been captured by Western discourses and transformed into objects which are co-constitutive of the West itself. The reified West, in capturing these concepts, has restricted the meaning, legitimacy and power of these terms; bound them to an association with the West; and, through this association, has gained a self-serving monopoly of these terms, employing them to maintain its discursive dominance. In many instance, my use of the term Western is referring to this construction and connotes the hegemonic power of the West as a thing and object in our world.

Throughout this text, I have specified my use of the West and Western, providing detail as to which discursive object I am addressing. For example, when discussing Western academia, political science, political theory and political concepts, I employ the concept of the West to indicate the long history of a dominant mode of thought and philosophy which began in Ancient Greece and evolved in Europe alongside Christianity, returning to Greek thought throughout to the exclusion or exoticization of other knowledge, philosophies, religions, modes of thought and experiences. This dominance is reflected in the contemporary proliferation of critical theories, such as post-colonialism, feminism, gender, race and queer theory, all of which have worked to identify and deconstruct the dominance of the privileged perspective of the West in academia, which is representative of white, male, Christian, propertied experiences, knowledge and interests.

Similarly, when speaking about actors or institutions, these are qualified by specifying the type of actor or institution (for example, the state or an NGO). Where there is no specification West or Western is generally used within a direct quote or is building on the arguments made by another author and employing this term in order to be consistent. In some instance, the west is used as a cardinal direction, in which case it is rarely capitalizes unless it is convention to do so for a region, as in the case of West Africa. However, the predominant use of the terms the West or Western is in direct acknowledgement of the West as a theoretical construction, concept, and in many discursive forms, a reality. Therefore, the West, in this critical approach, is not only a contested subject but also an aspect of political reality which is assessed as an object of inquiry.

Chapter Three – Into the World of Witches: A method for studying witchcraft

In the previous chapter, I discussed the theoretical considerations of this research project. In this chapter, I will outline the methodological concerns I encountered, beginning with the methodology I proposed to employ in the field during the planning stages of this project. These concerns were based on a number of important points raised in literature on witchcraft and witchcraft-related violence. In many texts, the secretive and guarded responses regarding witchcraft knowledge is considered to be a limitation to accessing information on witchcraft belief and activities. Many authors stress that informants are reluctant to divulge details of the own experiences or knowledge of witchcraft for fear of being labelled witches themselves. The world of witches is also characterized in literature as obscure and distant, the unknown nature of which causes informants emotional distress and insecurity.

The obstacles to access associated with studying witchcraft seemed, from the literature, only to compound and complicate the usual and expected hindrances of conducting field work: finding willing informants, circumnavigating bureaucracies, managing language and communication barriers, remaining conscious of power differentials and maintaining ethical standards, all while dealing with the daily challenges of living overseas in a cross-cultural environment. As a result of this, my methodology was planned around the central theme of contingency: How to deal with uncertainty in the field and ensure that the approved project allowed for adequate flexibility so that I could access the necessary data responsibly and safely. Essentially, my methodology was developed in part to meet the needs of the subject matter and theoretical framework, and in part to ensure that there was some flexibility in the field. In the case that I might be unable to find willing informants through direct solicitation, I would be permitted (by the ethics committee) to solicit key informants, such a children or victims of violence, in specific locations, such as psychiatric hospitals, prisons and deliverance churches.

In addition to the ethical concerns regarding my own participation in this research, as well at the potential impact on informants and their emotional and spiritual security, I was also aware, from my own experience of living in Ghana previously, of the need to scrutinize my own security situation. Being a young female who is perceived as white, conducting field research independently in any country, anywhere in the world, carries with it certain personal risks. From the position of the researcher, it is not difficult to find information and texts on reflexivity and the responsibilities of the researcher towards their research subjects. Overall these sources argue that relations and differentials in power cannot be assumed but they should be reflected upon throughout the entire research process. Looking at my own field work, this important process was coupled with concerns about my own security; however, there was not an excess of information on this subject, or the combined consideration of research subject and researcher security.

Working from the discipline of political science, where the vast majority of research is conducted with elites, institutions or through quantitative analysis, another concern I had was in determining how best to engage non-elite informants. In particular, how to safely and respectfully engage informants in a discussion regarding a subject that causes fear and insecurity, or may relate to experiences of violence. In order to address these elements, I realized it would be best to adopt a multidisciplinary approach. In anthropology, there is what may be considered a prime directive which instructs researchers to create as little impact on their research environment as possible, while learning about the society in question with the least disruption. This seemed to me to be a useful point of correlation with my own work and what I understood to be its particular demands.

As I eventually found in the field, the anthropological approach proved most helpful by encouraging me to be open to the idea of permitting informants to lead me to the information I needed. Rather than relying on the rigidity of political science methods to ensure the right data was collected,

through the incorporation of ethnography, I was somewhat prepared for the unpredictable and informant driven directions my research would take. Overall, despite all my planning and preparation, it remained that I had no idea how to begin to understand witchcraft. Instead, I found myself among people who were eager to show me what I needed to know and who graciously and consciously led me along the path of research I was unable to see myself.

Accessing the Unknown

From the pre-field position it seemed that researching the subject of witchcraft-related violence would require considerable engagement with a number of challenges to accessing data. Due to the delicate nature of the research subject and the potential for conflict within the research environment, I realized I would have to devote considerable attention to the research design to ensure that the methodologies I intended to use were appropriate for the project. I began by outlining some of the considerations particular to the subject of witchcraft, such as the concern of causing respondents emotional distress, their implications in the selection of research methods and, finally, concerns regarding the exercise of the methods. In the end, I chose a mixed methodology: semi-structured interviews and ethnography, in particular, participant observation. The next big question was how to frame the subject of study in the field and what terminology to use in interviews and discussion, two questions which could affect how respondents perceived the research and researcher.

Research into the field of witchcraft belief and more recently, witchcraft-related violence, has followed a consistent trend since the early 1900s, following a pattern of ebb and flow in academic interest. In the early and mid-1900s, research was conducted by anthropologists who sought to support the development of their field through the study of African rationalities embedded in witchcraft belief (Rutherford 1999: 92). These early studies established the terminology of the field carrying with them the bias of early missionaries who associated a plurality of practices with the “strongly pejorative” and “highly contestable” Western language of witchcraft (Fisiy & Geschiere 1991: 252). This early translation of numerous indigenous concepts associated African practices “with a European past (thus distancing it), while burdening it with connotations of femininity (disempowering it) and irrationality (disallowing it)” (Pels 1998: 201). However, as noted by Pels (1998), Africans themselves have come to employ this term widely, particularly in state discourses which seek to combat African witchcraft, a use Westerners now critique in studies as an ethnocentric term, thereby fuelling what may be seen as an ongoing struggle to define and redefine the Self and Other across a wide epistemological divide. As a result of this, any study of witchcraft must “acknowledge its relationship to the colonial project” (Ciekawy 1998:121) and endeavour to remain critically aware of the history of enquiry into the subject, as well as the implications this research may have for future study, while also ensuring that the terminology used is relevant and coherent.

Though use of the term itself remains debated in academic circles (Fisiy & Geschiere 1991), it remains in popular use during surges in interest in the subject, as in the early 1970s, late 1990s, and current scholarship. Also consistent in these studies is a preoccupation with “questions of rationality and modernity” (Ashforth 2005: 111). Embedded in this line of enquiry is the often, but not necessarily, silent assumption that modernization (or civilization in colonial times) would eradicate witchcraft belief and practices (Kohnert 1996). In spite of this view, witchcraft remains “a sociocultural phenomenon of great importance in sub-Saharan Africa” with a large and diverse majority of the population “convinced that witchcraft constitutes a real threat to society in Africa” (Kohnert 1996: 1347). Additionally, “the use of witchcraft and magic in intraelite competition for economic or political power is quite common” (Kohnert 1996: 1349; see also Ellis & ter Haar 2004).

As witchcraft is an integral part of the complex belief systems of many African societies, embedded in relations of power and lived in one's daily experiences, it is understandable that many Africans have been deeply offended by Western scholarship which misconstrues and then advocates the eradication of witchcraft belief (Kohnert 1996). Simplistic conclusions of witchcraft as “false consciousness” or “traditionally minded” practices which must be abandoned, combined with a long history of “blind missionary zeal”, have led many Africans to believe that Westerners are “unable to understand the peculiarities of African magic” (Kohnert 1996: 1351-1353). This view has been compounded by the tendency of many Westerners, and Western media in particular, to treat witchcraft with “ignorance and intolerance” (Kohnert 1996: 1353), thus reducing complex beliefs to sensationalist symbols of backwardness (Shaw 2003). As a result of Western biases, comprehensive research regarding witchcraft belief remains underdeveloped and open discussion of the subject with African informants would likely be a difficult undertaking (Kohnert 1996).

Unfortunately, bridging the “gulf of misunderstanding” that is perceived to exist between Westerners and Africans is only the first of many challenges (Cimpric 2010:1). In addition to being a misunderstood subject, witchcraft is also taboo in many societies. As noted by Ashforth (2005a), “African science is secret knowledge. This secrecy is its essential core. Some have argued that secrecy has been necessary to protect indigenous knowledge from exploitation and denigration by Whites” (217)⁹. Within witchcraft belief, knowledge of witchcraft is held only by those who have been initiated into the practice, therefore demonstrating knowledge of witchcraft “is tantamount to admitting that [one] is a witch”, and by extension implicating one's family and community (Grindal 2003: 48; see also Werbner 2001). Many researchers have noted the reluctance of informants to openly discuss witchcraft, relying instead on “confidential or ‘whispered’ discussions” with select individuals (Grindal 2003: 48; see also Ashforth 2005). As a result of this, the question may be posed whether one can “ever be completely certain when it comes to witchcraft knowledge” (Werbner 2001: 198). In place of certainty, witchcraft beliefs may be characterized as a discourse steeped in ambiguity (Ashforth 1996; Geschiere 1997) which is “difficult to contain” (Pels 1998: 194) and actualized “in ways that are provisional and, while more or less authoritative, do not assume knowledge that is certain, absolute or final” (Werbner 2001: 193).

Witchcraft as a subject of research was understood not only a sensitive, but also an elusive, subject, hidden in subtext and shared in the utmost confidence. Beginning at the most general level of research design, I determined that qualitative, rather than quantitative, methods would be more helpful in accessing data regarding witchcraft-related violence. Though quantitative data, such as police reports and media analysis may be collected and analyzed, I foresaw a number of obvious problems with relying on quantifiable reports. The first is the lack of coherence in terminology and recording used in relation to witchcraft. For example, a ritual murder may be categorized as an accidental death or homicide, an attack against an accused witch may be recorded as assault, and witchcraft attacks themselves are rarely documented (as it is illegal to make witchcraft accusations in many states), except in media where no common standard regarding source information is applied. Additionally, the use of surveys are also limited by a number of factors, mainly the diversity of languages used in the countries of study, as well as low literacy rates among target populations (Simard 1988). Beyond the practical limitations of a quantitative study, access to in-depth understandings of witchcraft experiences would

⁹ The issue of Western appropriation of indigenous knowledge systems is of considerable concern both in this project and in contemporary research, however it is not one I chose to incorporate as a central focus. In terms of witchcraft, biopiracy, a term coined by Shiva (1996) to describe the appropriation of indigenous nature and knowledge, is most evident in the intersection between witchcraft and health. Though the chapter on traditional authorities addresses the role of traditional healers, it does not focus on questions of health, medicine and healing at length. For more information on indigenous knowledge, healing and witchcraft see Ashforth 2002, Bever 2000, Gyasi et al 2011, Owusu 2006 and Tangwa 2007.

not be possible relying on quantitative methods. Witchcraft-related violence is ultimately a personal experience, one which is often understood to be traumatic on both individual and social levels, and as such it must be treated conscientiously.

In researching methodologies addressing sensitive topics, many authors stress the importance of relying on methodologies that “are particularly receptive to sensitivity in research” (Elam & Fenton 2003: 15). Most notably, scholarship on the subject of sensitive research predominantly advocate the importance of employing qualitative interviewing techniques in one's study (Elam & Fenton 2003; Hewitt 2007; Johnson & Macleod Clarke 2003). In the scholarship available on the subject of sensitive topics, largely drawn from the fields of health care and medicine, there is a contemporary debate regarding what may or may not constitute a sensitive topic. As noted by some authors “any research topic, depending on its context, is potentially sensitive” and any informant therefore potentially vulnerable to harm (Johnson & Macleod Clarke 2003: 421; see also Corbin & Morse 2003; Tisdale 2004). However, some themes regarding sensitivity remain constant, such as the potential for a topic to be threatening or harmful to the informant or researcher (Johnson & Macleod Clarke 2003) and in particular topics which involve personal life experiences and “deviant or illegal activities, [which] expose the vested interests of powerful persons or persons engaged in coercive or domineering behaviors, and are of a meaningful religious nature” (Corbin & Morse 2003: 337). The real threat of witchcraft in African societies, as well as experiences of violence in many forms, from ritual murder to accusations and spiritual attack, and the power relations embedded within these may all be interpreted as connoting sensitivity. At the very least, the topic is, as Bleek (1987) notes, “definitely delicate”, requiring acknowledgement of the risk for the subject to elicit and arouse strong emotional responses (Corbin & Morse 2003).

In this sense, almost all informants could be considered members of a vulnerable population. Though many target informants are not classified as vulnerable, this categorization does apply to a number of respondents, such as victims of violence and children. Research involving vulnerable populations has been studied in depth by many scholars in diverse fields such as health studies, anthropology and social work. The definitions used to classify a population as vulnerable have therefore varied among disciplines. Here I will be drawing on the definition provided by Hewitt (2007) whereby a vulnerable population or group is composed of “those that have been characterized as partially or entirely unable to make autonomous decisions”, as well as those whose ability to “comprehend information and/or make voluntary choices” is limited by numerous factors, including “a historical lack of autonomy” (1152). Additionally, the sensitivity of a topic as well as its social context may also define a population as vulnerable (Hewitt 2007).

Though it is important to recognize that many participants may be considered as vulnerable within the research context, this acknowledgement is not intended to be an essentializing or generalizing bias. Rather, the inclusion of vulnerable populations, such as those with mental illness, requires one to be guarded against “overly paternalistic attitudes” which might serve to deny “historically disempowered groups a voice” (Hewitt 2007: 1157). As well, considering that participation in research interviewing would be voluntary, it is important to note that many people who feel unable to safely discuss their experiences generally do not volunteer to be interviewed (Corbin & Morse 2003). More importantly, according to research on interviewing vulnerable populations, participation in interviewing does not cause long-term harm (Corbin & Morse 2003; Spatz Widom & Czaja 2005). Rather, “anecdotal evidence suggests that interview are more beneficial than harmful” (Corbin & Morse 2003: 346) and possible risks of participating in research may be “offset or perceived as worthwhile by other aspects of the research experience” (Spatz Widom & Czaja 2005: 134).

In studies on the subject of witchcraft-related violence much attention has been given to women as a vulnerable population. In gendered analyses of witchcraft-related violence accusations are often

the only recognized form of violence, thus contesting a large body of literature which argues that witchcraft-related violence is not a gendered phenomenon (Ashforth 2005, Geschiere 1997, Kohnert 1996, Niehaus 2001). By focusing only on accusations, researchers such as Badoe (2005) are able to apply feminist analysis in their arguments that “[t]he study of witchcraft is therefore inevitably a study of gender and sexuality, as witches are almost always women in all senses: biologically, socially and culturally” (Badoe 2005: 40). From a gendered lens which looks only at accusations, and in this case, those leading to exile in the Northern witch camps of Ghana, women are seen as most vulnerable when they “do not conform strictly enough with local patriarchal regimes” (Badoe 2005: 50). Badoe concludes this thought by noting that what is most tragic of all regarding accusations is “the extent to which some of these women internalise the fear and loathing of their communities and families” (Badoe 2005: 50). In other words, Badoe sees women's belief in witchcraft as the most tragic aspect of this phenomenon.

Though there are number of problems with this analysis, I will respond only to those which are most important regarding whether or not to classify women as a vulnerable population. First, the focus on accusations fails to account for the equally important elements of suspicion and rumour within a community. In terms of rumour and suspicions, women are no more vulnerable than any other community member (Ashforth 2005, Geschiere 1997, Kohnert 1996, Niehaus 2001). Second, the focus on accusations leading to exile fails to investigate attacks against males in communities and assumes a false correlation with interment in the camps and accusation or suspicion. While men are a small minority in the witch camps of Northern Ghana, this does not indicate that suspicions do not exist or lead to accusations against men. Rather, evidence suggests that men are better equipped socially to mitigate accusations when they are made through repayment or relocation (Rowlands & Warnier 1998).

Finally, feminist analyses of witchcraft-related violence often fail, as Badoe does, to allow for women's belief in witchcraft or the greater complexity of understanding witchcraft attack as a form of violence. There is a strong assumption in feminist works on the subject (Badstuebner 2003; Houde 2010; Izumi 2007; Palmer 2010) that women do not believe in witchcraft; if they do, that this is a condition of false consciousness; and, finally, that witchcraft does not exist for women who have been accused. Instead of being a belief or social reality, witchcraft is seen as an instrument used to maintain patriarchal structures. Ironically, however, women are not seen as members of their society in this respect as they are never considered as participants in the construction of witchcraft belief themselves. This contradiction overlooks the role of women as believing members who participate in the construction of reality and who have throughout their lives contributed to the continuation of witchcraft beliefs and in many cases perpetuated the perception of witches as the older women they are to become.

Thus, the internalization which Badoe refers to is much more complicated than the stark victimization of an agency-deprived woman. What a number of women express, in my interviews in Gambaga in 2007 as well as in Palmer's interviews in 2009 (Palmer 2010), is a struggle with the conundrum of how they may be responsible for an attack they did not intend. For accused individuals with mental illness, this conundrum is even more unsettling. Due to the nature of many mental illnesses, the ability of an individual to accurately recollect and at times control their own thought patterns may be infringed. While madness, as mental illnesses are called in Ghana and Cameroon, is often seen as a result of witchcraft attack, individuals who demonstrate symptoms of mental illness may also generate suspicion. As a result of this, psychiatric wards frequently receive individuals who have been abandoned by family members, either for the protection of the family from the individual, or the individual from the community.

In recognition of this, consideration must be taken regarding the inclusion of informants with mental illness in the interview process. As a researcher, I have the fortunate experience of having

worked in the field of mental health for six years, during which time I received certification in Case Management, Concurrent Disorders (combined addictions and mental health, also known as co-occurring disorders) and Motivational Interviewing with the Canadian Mental Health Association. Therefore the inclusion of informants with mental illness is not uncharted territory. However, reflection is necessary regarding the ability of individuals to consent to their participation in interviews.

It must be stressed here that exhibiting active symptomatology of mental illness does not in itself preclude the ability of an individual to consent to interviews and contribute to the research. As noted by Wirshing *et al.* (1998), “psychiatric symptoms such as hallucinations and delusion do not interfere with competency” in providing informed consent (1510). An individual may experience symptoms related to a mental illness that selectively alter an individual's perception, but these symptoms may not necessarily limit their overall cognitive capacity. Psychosis, for example, commonly relates to specific delusions or thought disorders which may be unrelated to the subject of the research, allowing for an individual to provide important insight on one subject though they express misconceptions regarding another. Thus, many individuals with mental illness are able to consent to interviews, even in times where they are symptomatic.

Another population which may be considered as vulnerable are informants who have been incarcerated for criminal behaviour such as acts of violence against accused witches, which are seen in Ghana and Cameroon, and for acts of violence against individuals through the use of witchcraft, which is seen in Cameroon. Prison facilities in Ghana are not so great a concern as those in Cameroon. Many prisons in Cameroon are notorious for their harsh conditions, where beatings, overcrowding, poor sanitation and violence between inmates are commonly encountered (United States Department of State, 2010). In recognition of the risks posed by the conditions which are found in Cameroon, but which may also be present at lesser degree in Ghana, I realized that interviews could only be safely conducted with individuals who have already served their terms in prison and returned home. Therefore, no interviews would be conducted in formal state prison facilities, a category which excludes witch camps.

The fourth vulnerable population of concern is children. Child witch accusations have been increasing in frequency and number for a number of years. The phenomenon of child accusations is centred around Nigeria, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where tens of thousands of accused children live on the streets (Cahn 2006; Cimpric 2010; de Boeck 2000; Krumova 2010), though the occurrence of child accusations is seen across sub-Saharan Africa as well as internationally (La Fontaine 2009; Stobart 2006). In addition to the possible violence children face during accusations, they are also more frequently coerced into participating in healing or exorcism rituals which may involve forced isolation, fasting, beatings and torture, such as having chilies rubbed in their eyes or nails hammered into their heads (Cimpric 2010; Krumova 2010).

Interviewing children and youth in Ghana and Cameroon required careful consideration. While the marginal position of children must be acknowledged by any researcher, it is also important to remain aware that they are also “changing social actors” (Langevang 2007: 269). Though children are increasingly seen in academia as “the best commentator on their own lives” they remain disproportionately excluded from many aspects of social life and are “not used to being treated as equals” (Langevang 2007: 269). Therefore, the power relations between research and researched, including those which bring the identity of the researcher in a cross-cultural environment into question, “are intensified and need to be reflected upon during the research process” (Langevang 2007: 269). This said, child informants remain specialists in their experience and culture and it is unreasonable to assume even in this case that the researcher “will... be in a position of power at all times” (Langevang 2007: 270).

Nevertheless, in light of the particular vulnerability of children in research, restrictions regarding

the interviewing of children were a condition of my research award with the IDRC and ethics approval and were implemented during the research phase. According to these criteria, no children under the age of fourteen years were to be considered for interviews. Additionally, verbal consent for interviews was also to be sought from the parents, available family members or the guardian of the child wherever possible. Finally, children who would participate in interviews were not to be directly quoted and their identities, as it ended up being in the case of all respondents, were to be kept anonymous at all stages of the project.

Despite all these considerations, questions remained regarding the vulnerabilities and sensitivities of approaching individuals who live under the constant threat of witchcraft attack. The insecurity faced by individuals in sub-Saharan Africa cannot be overstated. The anxiety, distress and potential violence experienced by those who live in a world of witches are very real. The misfortune, illnesses and deaths that befall individuals and communities are tragic events whose burden are only compounded by the intention and malice behind these hardships. Responsible individuals are morally compelled to protect themselves, their families and their communities by taking action against suspected witches. Investigating these tensions presents the risk of heightening them through discussion as well as passively through my own presence and interest in the subject.

In recognition of this risk, which would be higher among non-professional informants, I chose to rely on semi-structured interviews. Unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow for a more adaptable investigation between the research and the researched. Taking on themes of conversation, semi-structured interviews permit an exchange of ideas where the interviewer is able to use more general prompts to solicit information from the interviewee. In this way, semi-structured interviews allow for informants to retain a certain amount of control over the interview content and process (Corbin & Morse 2003) and allow informants “to be experts and to inform the research” (Leech 2002: 668). At the same time, open-ended questions also present an element of unpredictability (Roulston *et al.* 2003). This unpredictability is a welcome aspect as it may allow for impromptu debriefing and clarification when tensions might rise in the interview. In addition to being suited to “recovering subjective meanings” (Pouliot 2007: 369), semi-structured interviews present “a middle ground” between the insight of unstructured interviews and the hypothesis testing ability of closed-ended interviews (Leech 2002: 665). In this respect, semi-structured interviews allow hypothesis testing and qualitative analysis of interview responses (Leech 2002).

As the subject of witchcraft-related violence draws on experiences of conflict, it was important to remain cognisant of how the “research intervention is likely to be perceived” (Mertus 2007: 17). The role of a young, white, female, Western researcher discussing the subject of witchcraft in African contexts itself presents a number of possible barriers, only a handful of which may be identified preemptively. The first of these barriers is accessibility, which will be discussed in regards to the participant observation methodology. As a potential barrier it is important to acknowledge that accessibility not only represents the inability to obtain information, as may be the case, for example, regarding significant details of ritual murder and body trafficking, but also “[i]nterview fatigue” (Malleon *et al.* 2008: 8) which is likely to be encountered in the witch camps where a number of studies have been conducted in the past decade. I expected this to also be the case with religious healing and the exorcism of children which is a relatively recent phenomenon in Cameroon (Cimpric 2010). As a nascent development in West Africa, child accusations have not yet been comprehensively addressed by any field, though partial research has been conducted by individual human rights and anthropological scholars. The other important consideration regarding access is the secrecy or illegality of practices under study, wherein informants retain “the ultimate sanction of withholding information” (Walford 2007: 150).

As it is illegal to practice and accuse individuals of witchcraft in Cameroon and Ghana

respectively, in addition to the social taboos and history of clumsy enquiry into the subject, interviews regarding witchcraft-related violence are likely to produce some false responses. Research into “deliberate misreporting” on sensitive subjects demonstrates that reporting errors tend to be unidirectional: towards “the socially desirable direction” (Tourangeau & Yan 2007: 876). While interviews are susceptible to “deception” and “misleading accounts” (Pouliot 2007: 370), it is arguable that the informant is never under any obligation to tell the truth (Berry 2002). As noted by Berry (2002), informants also have an interest in the data that is collected and how they are perceived in the interview and represented in the final research. Lies, then, are not necessarily representative of invalid data. A researcher “should look at the lying itself”, as it may be an indication of an informant’s “strategy for survival, a code to preserve one’s own and other people’s self-respect” as well as an “escape from embarrassment” (Bleek 1987: 319). In these instances, misinformation reflects and highlights the tensions of the subject under study and may be an indicator to the researcher that the interview technique or question is not appropriate or overly intrusive, and thus “*produc[ing]* the lies in first place” (Bleek 1987: 320, author’s emphasis).

Finally, the nature of witchcraft itself, as a fluid and clandestine phenomenon, does not lend itself “to determinations of truth” (Fujii 2007: 151). As the study of witchcraft-related violence engages the question of people’s beliefs, the value of recording accounts of individual experiences does not “lie in their factual accuracy or objective truths”, but rather “in the meaning that the narrator endows particular events” (Fujii 2007: 151). In this context, all data may be considered valid, “including inaccuracies, fabrications, embellishment, and inventions”, as they are useful in revealing the complexity of one’s experiences and relations in witchcraft phenomena (Fujii 2007: 151).

Indeed, the idea of attempting to ascertain or access, through an effort to attain a truthful or factual response, a single voice of authority on the subject of witchcraft-related violence is counter-intuitive to the phenomenon itself. Though it must be acknowledged that, as an academic study, the research I undertook made me a participant in the “highly contested moral and political field regarding African witchcraft” (Rutherford 1999: 92), there is no defining or unique authority on the subject. As noted by Rutherford (1999), this complexity has been side-stepped by scholarship on witchcraft which has tended to:

minimize the differing public discourses concerning African witchcraft (coming from government officials, church leaders, journalists, anthropologists, to name but a few) and the various projects of which they are a part which, in turn, articulate with the social identities and power relations within the 'locale' discussed. (92)

Despite efforts to advance unproblematic representations of witchcraft, knowledge of witchcraft is “very much tied to strategies of authority for all commentators” (Rutherford 1999: 92). How these strategies of authority are exercised and expressed vary greatly, thus producing responses which address both the position of the informant and the researcher. The question, then, of the researcher’s authority, or performance thereof, must also be considered. Some authors attempt to provide direction regarding the researchers approach, as demonstrated in the debate regarding knowledge of a subject which ranges from little to significant, with a “middle road” where one presents oneself as knowledgeable but less so than the respondent (Leech 2002: 665). However, as noted by Mullings (1999) on her work regarding positionality, many aspects of the interpretation undertaken by the researcher and informant when assessing the other are beyond one’s control. As the author notes from her own experience, not only are personal attributes “notably, gender, and race” in-alterable, “the meanings that these attributes conveyed changed with each person interviewed” (Mullings 1999: 348). The question of authority is thus complicated by a multitude of factors, some of which cannot be controlled and the outcomes of which cannot be foreseen.

In addition to concerns regarding positionality and authority, practical concerns regarding the

social interactions between researcher and informant must be addressed. From my own experience conducting preliminary research on the availability of services for older persons accused of witchcraft in Ghana, I requested an interview with the Medical Director of the Accra Psychiatric Hospital, where many older persons are abandoned by their families, as there are no geriatric units or specialists in the country. In preparing for the interview, I was concerned with assuring that the questions were relevant to my research aims while still being suited to the level of expertise and familiarity the director would have. However, shortly into the informant's first response to my general question regarding older persons' health care in Ghana, the topic of conversation was swiftly redirected by the director towards the subject of HIV/AIDS. As I was interviewing a medical professional, I assumed the director would be more open regarding the subject of older persons sexuality, a topic of considerable taboo. I followed the shift with a prompt regarding concerns older persons may have to various types of exposure, in caring for loved ones as well as through sexual activity. By raising this point, I inadvertently addressed a topic it seemed the director had planned to pursue and the interview quickly descended into an effort by the director to convince me to engage in sexual relations with him, which he argued presented no risk to me regarding HIV/AIDS as the real risk was in "viral load", and his was quite low.

The interview was ended abruptly at the end of this explanation when the director approached me, walking around his desk to sit on the edge of it in front of me, and I quickly exited his office. Though this experience was unlikely to represent the majority of interview experiences I would encounter, it did have notable implications for the collection of useful data. As in the case of the interview at Accra Psychiatric, in addition to having my physical safety threatened, I was unable to access any of the information needed for my research. Though the question of security will be considered in greater detail later, the element of positionality and the question of one's moral views may be addressed here. In some scholarship regarding harassment in the field, authors recommend that female researchers "leave the impression that they are married or at least in a relationship back home to deflect some of the almost *inevitable sexual solicitation*" (de Walt & de Walt 2002: 41, emphasis added; see also Goldstein 2009; Presser 2009; Schwander-Sievers 2009). In my view this approach not only condones such *unwanted* sexual solicitation, it also limits the relevance of discussing the inappropriateness of such advances, which are a form of harassment, in the field and in academia. In addition to this normalizing of harassment, contributing to the bias in social science research that risk exists mainly for informants engaged in research acts to further limit important discussions regarding researcher safety in the field.

In undertaking the task of applying for ethical approval, the bias towards informant safety to the complete exclusion of consideration for researcher safety is made quite stark. In addition to the question of ethical conduct in qualitative interviewing being one of indeterminacy and moral ambiguity (Hewitt 2007)¹⁰, researchers themselves are unable to determine in advance the vulnerabilities and ethical requirements which may be encountered in the field (Tisdale 2004). While researchers are able to prepare for "obvious" vulnerabilities, on the part of their informants as well as for themselves, ethical conduct requires "ongoing reflection" and decision-making throughout the research process (Tisdale 2004: 26). An example of a foreseeable ethical conflict in my research was how to deal with incidences of violence which might occur within the research setting. In particular, how should I respond to witnessing violence against an accused witch or the harmful exorcism of a child? Though these possible circumstances were unlikely to be encountered in the interview process, they were a

¹⁰ As Hewitt notes, "[i]t is difficult, however, to define ethical conduct in the context of qualitative interviewing in advance, as moral questions can arise at any time during the research process, being determined by changing levels of competence, types of disclosure, and the unintended consequences of growing emotional intimacy. From study design to data collection and publication, ethical conduct is not fixed, but needs to be continually responsive to personal, social, and contextual constructions (Aita & Richer, 2005; Goodwin, Pope, Mort & Smith, 2003)." (2007: 1151)

possible occurrence within the intended interview environments, such as prisons, hospitals, and healing churches. Tisdale (2004) acknowledges the possible complexity wherein a “critical ethnographer can feel unethical when he or she takes no action to correct a social problems” (26) though this may be in direct conflict “with their role as data collector” (Johnson & Macleod Clarke 2003: 428). “Being ethical” in research, therefore, is a complex endeavour, which requires one to not only prepare for engagement with informants who may be “limited by the power of societal prejudices and social institutions” but also for an engagement with “our own ethical convictions” (Tisdale 2004: 30).

Though abandonment of the “do no harm” principle may not be as essential as Tisdale suggests (2004: 30), I decided a more comprehensive investigation of this rule was required. In recent research seeking to expand the application of this principle, a number of authors have investigated the impact of interviewing sensitive topics on the researchers well-being (Corbin & Morse 2003; Dickson-Swift *et al.* 2008). A primary concern from the field is that of emotional fatigue, which is rarely planned for yet a common outcome for interviewers working with sensitive topics (Dickson-Swift *et al.* 2008; Corbin & Morse 2003). Though many scholarly fields, including political studies, consider “emotions to be the anathema to academic research”, qualitative interviews necessarily engage both a researcher's “emotional and cognitive functions” (Dickson-Swift *et al.* 2009: 63-64). Often overlooked, even in the promotion of an objective analysis, is the emotional work of the researcher in the “management of self” (Dickson-Swift *et al.* 2009: 69). In repeated “face-to-face” encounters, particularly those regarding sensitive and traumatic topics which demand controlled emotional responses, emotional exhaustion is more likely, thus requiring the researcher to consider the scheduling, setting and time allotted between interviews (Dickson-Swift *et al.* 2009: 72).

Qualitative interviewing and participant observation are two research methods which, when applied to sensitive topics, expose the researcher to the possibility of “vicarious traumatising” (Dickson-Swift *et al.* 2009: 72). When a researcher begins to “experience the effects of trauma themselves”, through feelings of “exhaustion, guilt, anxiety, disconnection... and social withdrawal” (Dickson-Swift *et al.* 2009: 72-73), the success of the research project as well as the well-being of the researcher are put at risk. Therefore, in selecting qualitative interviewing as a primary research methodology, it is necessary to consider both the benefits as well as the possible risks this methodology entails in the research context. Though qualitative semi-structured interviews are best suited to the sensitive subject of witchcraft-related violence, without adequate preparation and consideration for the well-being of the informant, as well as the researcher (Johnson & Macleod Clarke 2003), the method itself may become an additional challenge, one which is quite unique and different from the challenges posed by participant observation¹¹.

Witchcraft and Ethnography

The subject of witchcraft is one which is commonly considered the domain of anthropological research. From the explorations of Frazer's (1922) *Golden Bough*, to the early work of Evans-Pritchard (1934) among the Zande of Sudan, and onwards, anthropologists have been concerned with documenting the cultural practices and occult realities of societies around the world. More recently, studies have sought to understand not only the worldviews and lived experiences associated with witchcraft, but have expanded their enquiry to consider the intersection of the supernatural with social

¹¹ Werbner highlights the emotional dimension of uncertainty noting that “[s]ometimes, the further anthropological strangers get in that suspension of disbelief, the more uneasy and uncertain they themselves are when moved by their own implication in social situations, by their own overpowering emotions – fear, anger, and hatred. But accounts of that disturbing swing are rare, apart from the exceptional novel (Bowen 1964) or confessional memoir by an anthropologist (Stoller and Olkes 1987).” (Werbner 2001: 191)

relations such as the political in Ashforth (2005) and Niehaus's (2001) work and the economic in studies conducted by Geschiere (2006) and the Comaroffs (2002). The increasing awareness regarding the complex interactions of the supernatural in society has led to important interdisciplinary research. This in turn, and by necessity, has led to a greater diversity of research methods being applied in the field. Through the use of mixed methodology and the expansion of witchcraft enquiry beyond the use of ritual and symbolic practices, a greater understanding of the complexity and power relations embedded in the supernatural has emerged.

Though there have been few studies from the field of political science addressing witchcraft, authors who have undertaken this subject have often been divided regarding which methodologies are most appropriate. For example, a number of studies conducted by human rights advocates such as Cahn (2006) and de Boeck (2009) have relied on interviewing. Others, such as Bryceson *et al.* (2010), combine statistical data with interviewing. However, the most informative and detailed texts are those which look beyond the usual methodologies of political enquiry and combine anthropological approaches with more conventional political research methods. While many authors combine methodologies, such as interviewing and ethnography, there is often a clear distinction made in the weight given to these methods. Notably, Ashforth (2005a), who has studied political science but works in the field of anthropology, places greater emphasis on his ethnographic findings in his text *Witchcraft, Violence and Democracy in South Africa*. Alternatively, authors from the field of political science writing on witchcraft, such as Schatzberg (2001), draw conclusions more directly from their analysis of interviews.

My research aims to place itself more distinctly on the side of political enquiry. However, the importance of ethnographic research cannot be understated. Therefore, I decided to pair semi-structured interviews with ethnography, and more specifically, participant observation. I hoped that during what I planned to be a year of field research I would spend three months in each country conducting ethnographic studies. In Ghana, I selected the capital of the Northern Region, Tamale, as a primary destination. In Cameroon, my second location was to be the capital of the South province, Ebolowa. In both cases, I hoped that over the course of three months a number of day trips would be possible, allowing for a more thorough assessment of the environment and region. As well, each location held a strong association with witchcraft. In the case of Ghana, the Northern Region is considered to be particularly rife with witches. The same is said of the South province in Cameroon.

Though ethnographic studies are commonly conducted over the course of a year or more, with frequent return visits, such anthropological studies are concerned with producing a comprehensive study of a society's culture. In this case, my research is not a study of culture *per se*, but rather of a particular issue within each society, mainly the concern of acquiring spiritual security. As my research subject is much more focused, it seemed that a reduced time in the field would be sufficient. Additionally, unlike many other ethnographic studies, my research drew on data collected through interviewing as well. Therefore, the findings of my ethnographic fieldwork are not intended to stand alone, but are used to corroborate, expand, contradict, and problematize, information gained in interviewing and from a comprehensive literature review.

Why Ethnography

Ethnographic research may be divided according to two distinct approaches. A positivist approach to ethnography employs structured observation to “record physical and verbal behaviour” which is then analyzed according to a known theory (Mulhall 2003: 306). Unstructured observation, alternatively, is “used to understand and interpret cultural behaviour” (Mulhall 2003: 306). Most importantly for this project, unstructured observation “acknowledges the importance of context and the construction of knowledge between researcher and researched” (Mulhall 2003: 306). Thus, ethnography allows for the

researcher not only to confirm that “what people say they do is the same as what they actually do”, it also provides insight into power relations by capturing the context of the research environment (Mulhall 2003: 307). As a researcher, one is “dependent on information from others”, therefore it is important that efforts are made to ensure a greater level of validity of this information (Bleek 1987: 315). Therefore, I saw participant observation as a complement interviews to, where a broader understanding of the issue is obtained by “getting to know informants” (Bleek 1987: 315).

Though it remains somewhat uncommon for ethnographic research to be conducted in the field of political science, the method pairs well with the shared aim of “solving practical problems” (Atkinson & Hammersley 1994: 253). As well, though ethnography is often thought to be the method of anthropologists and sociologists, it cannot be argued that ethnography as a method is “undertaken under the auspices of one epistemological orthodoxy” (Atkinson & Hammersley 1994: 258). Rather, there is increasing interest in applying ethnographic approaches in political science. As Wedeen (2010) notes, many political scholars have come to “celebrate” the disruptiveness of ethnography, which she sees as contrasting traditional aims of generalization (256). Wedeen notes that ethnography is not simply a method of choice for those interested in “ordinary happenings” but a means of analyzing events and ongoing dramas, including the political relevance of witchcraft (Wedeen 2010: 262). Further, comparative politics as a discipline allows for researchers to “navigate between concrete details and conceptual abstractions” to “refine and undermine, negate and create novel explanations about politics” (Wedeen 2010: 264). However, for these goals to be met, Wedeen reminds researchers of the importance of theory, which has been a weakness in many ethnographic studies but which political scientists have many tools to address.

Negotiating Identity, Sincerely.

The question of theory aside, many additional concerns exist within the practice of ethnography which have yet to be resolved and which are under-explored in political science research. The first of these many concerns addressed here is the question of identity. The issue of identity in many cases is associated with considerations regarding access to research sites and data (Mulhall 2003). Much of the literature on this subject focuses on issues such as managing or projecting one’s image, dealing with gatekeepers and facilitating a “smooth entree” (Mulhall 2003: 310). Much of this discussion is concerned primarily with the analytic quality of qualitative research, where it is debated whether one may successfully conduct effective research in and across local contexts (Ryen 2011). In light of much of ethnography’s history, which was heavily dominated by colonial ambitions and biases, there is a clear effort among ethnographers to determine who should study whom, or in broader terms, how to decolonize ethnography as a methodology (Bozalek 2011). For example, it has been argued that only individuals who have experienced oppression are “suitable to critique their own situations” (Bozalek 2011: 472). Counter-arguments to this note that experiences of oppression do not necessarily “lead to a particular consciousness, or to an unmasking of power relations” (Bozalek 2011: 472). Regardless of the conclusions reached, it remains that issues regarding privilege must be confronted by any researcher. Being able to acknowledge and take responsibility of one’s privileges allows one to recognize the consequences of “institutional arrangements” which meet the needs of some but not others (Bozalek 2011: 474) and them problematize these in their own research as I have struggled to do.

In ethnographic studies undertaken by researchers, the struggle to identify and confront one’s privileges is most evident in confessional ethnographies. For example, one ethnographer writes of having to “constantly negotiate [her] positionality through everyday acts”, such as sitting on the floor instead of on a stool offered to guests and generally attempting to politely refuse the “sincere

generosity that people showed a guest” (Sultana 2007: 379). While the reflections presented by the author present an awareness of privilege, it is clear that the author sought to mask or evade rather than confront her privilege wherever possible. Further questions are raised by the assumptions presented in the author’s view of “reverse power relations” in meetings and interviews (Sultana 2007: 379). The idea of privilege in identity cannot be reduced as a unidirectional relationship, but must be problematized in the recognition that privileges and exclusions are much more complex and multifaceted. Notably, Sultana fails to acknowledge the possible offence and overt exercise of her own power involved in rejecting hospitality. Thus, in attempting to distance herself from her privilege, Sultana further stressed her social power by exercising it to unilaterally dismiss offers of welcome and inclusion.

Though many researchers have noted that they are made somewhat uncomfortable by the special treatment they encounter in the field, others such as Graveling (2009) acknowledge the rigidity of some identities ascribed to researchers in the field. As Graveling notes of her identity during ethnographic research in Ghana: “my role was partly decided for me” (Graveling 2009: 4). Graveling notes struggling with these ascribed identities where at times she was “pleased to be directed to participate” as a family members, while in others her “role was was constructed in ways [she] did not desire”, including demonstrations of hospitality which “highlighted [her] status as a stranger” (Graveling 2009: 4). The question Graveling poses from this experience is to what extent one should compromise one’s own principles “in order to understand others better” (Graveling 2009: 6). While some of the ascribed roles and privileges provided Graveling a sense of inclusion and security, others implied vulnerability. In such instances, Graveling, like many other female researchers in field, chose to appear “ignorant or incapable” (Graveling 2009: 10). In this way, a form of privilege or power is still enacted as the ability to navigate and manipulate aspects of one’s identity.

The issue raised here is one which Jackson (2010) refers to as “ethnographic sincerity”. As Jackson notes, “there is ... a politics to building rapport”, upon which ethnographers depend for establishing relations with informants from which reliable data may be collected (Jackson 2010: 284). In the practice of participant observation, the ethnographer aims to “describe a social landscape while simultaneously producing a node of politically charged intercultural contact that is the enabling ethnofiction for anthropological attempts at political interventionism of any sort” (Jackson 2010: 284). Thus, the ethnographer is “always a political actor”, at times going to the length of employing contradictory logics¹² to justify political projects (Jackson 2010: 284). Thus, the ethnographer is not the unit of analysis, rather participant observation is an exploration of “the collision [the ethnographer] is a part of – whether intended or not” (Jackson 2010: 285). Ethnographic sincerity, then, provides a means to question how “the deconstructed identity continues to powerfully/unfairly structure people’s lives”, even after power relations have been laid bare (Jackson 2010: 285).

These questions regarding privilege and exclusion, power and identity, and the negotiation of the roles of the researcher and the researched are central to the process of ethnography. However, they are only partial in their representation of the conflicts which may be encountered in the field. Aside from ascribed identity, there is the question of the personal experiences of the researcher during the research phase. The subject of witchcraft itself forces the researcher to reflect critically on one’s own moral and ethical position regarding belief, instances of violence and the limits of the researcher’s ability to remain respectful to the research environment while staying honest with oneself. During my research, I was expecting to encounter a number of ethical conflicts of my own. I was also aware that it would be

¹²“Karen Fields (2001) goes so far as to argue that anthropologists have double standards when it comes to race, challenging the rationality of what she calls “racecraft” (the mythical and erroneous belief that race is simply biology) while allowing “witchcraft” its cultural/rational legitimacy as a counternarrative of causational possibility. According to Fields, this is a profound contradiction at the core of the anthropological project, one that demands resolution.” (Jackson 2010: 285)

possible and likely that I would encounter additional conflicts in the research environments which I had to respond to conscientiously.

Unfortunately, as noted by Hewitt, it is difficult “to define ethical conduct” in advance, “as moral questions can arise at any time during the research process” (Hewitt 2007: 1151). Ethical conduct, rather than being a plan of action outlined and maintained according to the specifications of one's ethical review board, “is not fixed, but needs to be continually responsive to personal, social and contextual constructions” (Hewitt 2007: 1151). In spite of the best intentions and planning, it is impossible for a researcher to anticipate all contingencies before entering the field (Tisdale 2004). As a result, unexpected circumstances may arise where the researcher encounters ethical conflicts which challenge their “role as data collector” (Johnson & Macleod Clarke 2003: 428; see also Tisdale 2004). “Being ethical”, according to Tisdale, requires continuous reflection where researchers must be willing to “admit (at least to ourselves) the basis of our own ethical convictions because that is what we will use to resolve ethical problems arising during research” (Tisdale 2004: 30).

In the context of witchcraft, anthropologists have expressed concern regarding the “suspension of disbelief” researchers entertain in the field (Werbner 2001: 191). For Werbner, researchers who become immersed in the world of the supernatural are at risk of dulling their own responsiveness to “their own implication in social situations”, allowing for overpowering emotions to direct their responses (2001: 191). In my own research, I expected dis/belief to be both a fine and at times indefinable line, at all times trying to balance my ability to see witchcraft through the violence and victimization of individuals, and yet still being able to see the violence and victimization in witchcraft, all the while never losing sight of either in the effort to remain respectful to others and myself.

As a female researcher, my desire to be conscientious in the field also applied to the question of my own security. Though many authors prefer to assume the gender neutrality of researchers in their writings on ethnography (beyond the basic guidance of falsification) (Green *et al.* 1993), only a few authors have sought to address issues of harassment and safety within the research context directly. Green *et al.* (1993) in their study of female researchers in public health found that while “overt sexual harassment was most likely in public settings”, where researchers felt ill-equipped to respond to harassment as they would in daily life due to feeling “trapped and incapacitated” in their professional roles (Green *et al.* 1993: 631, 632). Further, Green *et al.* found that the sense of “watching your own back” was integral to women's experiences conducting fieldwork, leading female researchers to think strategically at all times, taking into account exits and potential weapons in the interview milieu (Green *et al.* 1993: 632).

Despite these findings, “little attention has been paid to the safety issues that arise during fieldwork on topics or in settings that do not, in and of themselves, present obvious dangers” (Sharp & Kremer 2006: 318). Sharp and Kremer (2006) note that social factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation and disability status may increase the danger to some researchers while not posing any risk to others. For example, Sharp and Kremer note the stress placed on power differentials between researcher and informant where it is assumed that the researcher is inherently more empowered and the informant powerless. However, as female researchers commonly note, male informants often attempt to control the research process, possibly leading to acts of intimidation and violence (Sharp & Kremer 2006). In the most extreme, though not rare cases, female researchers in the field face dangers such as robbery, intimidation, assault and rape (Sharp & Kremer 2006). Some strategies which female researchers have employed are meeting informants only in public places during the day, ensuring knowledge of one's environment, including meeting on major streets and maximizing one's mobility by avoiding being overloaded with heavy equipment (Sharp & Kremer 2006).

Ultimately Sharp and Kremer advise female researchers to trust their instincts in the field, echoing Green *et al.* in their affirmation that the researcher may choose to end their investigations at

any time. Though this strategy is best suited to the interview setting, it remains applicable to ethnographic study. Just as it is possible to terminate an interview, it is possible to leave a locale or country if the researcher is threatened or endangered. Most importantly, female researchers should be reminded that the collection of data does not supersede one's own safety. In my own work, I decided that my personal safety would at all times be placed above the collection of data and the research project. Overall, issues regarding sincerity, personal risk and data collection in the context of participant observation extend beyond inter-personal relations and encompass a fundamental concern regarding power. In the field, as in the subject of witchcraft itself, power remains the focus of my research. Adding silt to the already murky waters of field research was my decision to seek permission to conduct the participant observation covertly, if needed.

The C/Overt Debate

In the debate between covert and overt research, the literature is heavily weighed against covert ethnography. As noted by Lugosi (2006) there is a “legacy of stigmatization” regarding covert research methods, leading to limited investigations and a reduced understanding of the complexities of this undertaking (543). Unfortunately, as a result, much more information is available on the perils of covert research than is available on how it may be more effectively practised. Arguments made against overt research generally stress informants rights to privacy and informed consent, while those for covert research argue that deception may be justified on the basis of utility and the emancipatory possibilities of the research findings (Mulhall 2003: Lauder 2003: Calvey 2008).

Between and within these staunch positions is a more critical perspective which examines consent as a “constant problem” in participant observation, as even in overt research where it is impossible to “inform and obtain consent from everyone who might 'enter' into the field of observation” (Mulhall 2003: 309). As well, it is difficult for researchers to determine in advance what observations may be useful (Mulhall 2003: 309). Thus, the debate between covert and overt research may be more practically viewed as a continuum. For example, a glaring contradiction regarding the right of informants to be informed is represented in the common practice of female researchers disguising themselves as married women (De Walt & De Walt 2002). While this does not negate the informants' awareness of their role in a research project, it does greatly affect the informants' ability to make an informed choice regarding their participation, as they are consenting to the role of a researcher whose identity is being partly disguised.

While some authors recognize that there “is not a clear divide between overt and covert research”, there remains significant resistance to acknowledging that overt research “can never be guaranteed” (Lugosi 2006: 543-544). Thus, efforts to maintain the discrete criteria of covert and overt research continue to construct the debate as binary, though many ethnographers “concede that fieldwork relationships inevitably involve some covertness” (Lugosi 2006: 544). In this regard, a critical concern for ethnographers is not only how to engage with informants, but also how to determine which concealments are “necessary or unavoidable” and “those that represent dangerous or irresponsible moral transgressions” (Lugosi 2006: 558).

Additionally, much literature arguing that covert research is unethical fails to address the problem of how to study deviant, socially isolated, or politically marginalized populations (Lauder 2003) or how to “tailor their data collection methods to the sensitivity of the research topic” (Li 2008: 111). In such instances, Li argues that covert research may “help reveal what lies beneath without altering the nature of reality” (Li 2008: 111). In the case of my own research, arguments against covert research fail to factor the risks presented to the local population and researcher in the event that witchcraft insecurities are heightened by the presence of a researcher studying the subject. As in the case of the regions

identified for study, the presence of a researcher attempting to understand witchcraft violence may not only reinforce perceptions of population members as witches, it may also increase tensions within the local population who are already struggling with violence and insecurity.

Further, the argument that covert research may be conducted ethically if it is followed by a process of debriefing wherein informants and the local populations are provided details of the research project and data, is particularly limited where this data may disseminate or identify suspicious persons within the population, thus possibly leading to acts of ostracism, torture, exile or murder. A debriefing process would not only limit future research possibilities, a concern highlighted by many critics of covert research (Lauder 2003), it could also present significant harm to informants. Thus, as found by Li in her own research experience, “the concealment of the research role should be maintained from start to finish” in order to minimize risk and harm for both the researched and the researcher (Li 2008: 111)

Finally, the critique that some subjects, such as ones as sensitive as witchcraft, are better left to professionals such as investigative journalists and private investigation firms fails to convincingly discount covert research methods (Lauder 2003). Foremost, this argument represents a self-interested position, where the social scientific community’s concern regarding possible criticism is placed before the goal of problem solving and critical social consciousness. As well, in the case of witchcraft-related violence in Africa, journalistic exposés have drawn on both overt and covert methods. Unfortunately, the findings of many of these enquiries have fallen within the critique presented by Lauder, who notes that journalistic endeavours are generally “market-driven, that is they are designed from the perspective that the most sensationalist data are sought” (Lauder 2003: 194). As a result of this, the complexities and contradictions of the subject are frequently overlooked (Lauder 2003). Therefore, as in the case with many sensitive subjects and concerns regarding informant safety and harm, it was my view that covert ethnography would be appropriate for my research.

The decision to conduct covert research required additional consideration concerning anonymity and discretion in the field and after. As noted by Lauder, covert research which guarantees anonymity may be seen as a counterbalance to the right to privacy. Additionally, greater discretion regarding the process of participant observation would require continuous reflection. Approaches to note-taking in the field differ, with some researchers continuously writing detailed notes on site, while others write in seclusion throughout or at the end of the day (Mulhall 2003). In some cases, researchers view note-taking as “secondary to becoming immersed in a culture”, recording sparse notes according to specific events or once they have left the field of study (Mulhall 2003: 311). Though there are obvious pros and cons to each approach, depending on the level of detail and recall desired in the final analysis, it is important in covert research to ensure that notes be taken in private and kept secure.

In the process of applying for ethical approval with the University of Ottawa, anonymity, confidentiality and securing the data collected were central conditions of concern for the review board. In my ethics agreement, the ethics committee stipulated that interviewees would neither be identified nor directly quoted in my work. In addition, all field notes, including interview transcripts, would be hand-written and then transcribed by the researcher into secured electronic documents, after which the original notes would be destroyed. These conditions assured informed and consenting as well as uninformed and non-consenting participants the same protections. They would not be identifiable and their participation could not be misconstrued through potential misuse or misinterpretation of their views.

With my methodologies approved, permission from the ethics review board to proceed received, and funding secured, I left for Accra, Ghana and began the research.

Researching Witchcraft

The first unexpected hurdle in my research was funding. I received a Doctoral Research Award with the International Development Research Centre, “a Canadian Crown corporation established by an act of Parliament in 1970 to help developing countries find solutions to their problems” (IDRC 2013) by supporting researchers who seek to address issues related to development. In my application, as in my research plan, I had outlined a year-long field research program, with six months in Ghana and Cameroon. Given the length of time I expected to be overseas, I was eager to begin and was scheduled to leave in mid-September, leaving three weeks to arrange the funding agreement with the IDRC.

Unfortunately, this did not happen. I landed in Accra with a student line of credit to support my research until I received the award funds from the IDRC. Two and a half months later, I still had not received the funding and had to leave Ghana with the last of my available credit. The process was delayed for a number of reasons. In the first weeks in Ghana I received notice that the funds were being held until I could resolve an important matter regarding my research. However, this had to be done over the phone. When a call was scheduled, I was informed that the IDRC was waiting for my permission to change the title of my research project: the term witchcraft could not appear on their website. I was offered the alternatives of “traditions” or “traditional beliefs”.

Though neither of these terms applied to my work, this was a secondary concern as I was keenly aware that I was on a thin and limited budget until I received the award. I consented to the title change and requested information on when I may receive the funds. It was another four weeks until I received the information forms I had to fill out to release the funds. However, it was clear from the amount and nature of documentation requested that this process was designed under the assumption that the application would be in Canada and at home when completing the paperwork. I requested and received permission to submit the most essential forms first, delaying the less important ones until later, in order to expedite the process.

Unfortunately, the process was further delayed when the finance department took over a week to notify me that I had missed a number on a banking form and was required to correct and resubmit it. All in all, after ten weeks of delays I was left with just enough credit to change my plane ticket, and this was only possible because of a clerical error at the British Airways office in Accra which misinformed the bank as to how much I owed. The error was caught at my stop-over in London, where I was sent to customer service and then waved away by a wonderful attendant who said it was their error not mine, leaving the extra \$400 in fees unpaid.

As I had planned to be in Ghana for six months, then heading straight to Cameroon for another six months, I had ended my lease and given away almost all my possessions. Arriving back in Ottawa, I had four months before I was scheduled and expected to arrive in Cameroon. Though I had received the award days after leaving Ghana, given the substantial increase of cost of living in Ghana since I had been there last, I did not have enough funds for both a ticket (bought with short notice and close to the date) and the continued living costs. Ideally, had I been aware that I would receive the award when I did, I would have left Ghana for Cameroon in order to begin the ethnographic phase there and returned to Canada four months early.

In the end, I decided to remain in Ottawa, giving myself a chance to recover from dysentery and sort out my data, first couch-surfing with friends then in my own apartment, until March 2013, when I departed for Yaounde, Cameroon. Again, the cost of living was much higher than expected and due to a number of additional challenges, I decided to end my field research there after a month and a half. Though I spent much less time than planned in the field, two and half months in Ghana and one and a half in Cameroon rather than six in each, I did complete all my target interviews in each country and as I was to find, access was not a problem. Unexpectedly, I found myself overwhelmed with information

in the field, having to, in both countries, decline interviews and meetings in an effort to prevent myself becoming exhausted as interviews became impromptu focus groups and even the most mundane discussions became public debates. The most important finding of my research proved to be a resounding counterfactual to the idea that I entered the field with: that witchcraft was something people did not want to discuss, much less discuss openly. Witchcraft was on everyone's mind, and just about everyone intended to give me a piece of their mind on the subject.

Ghana

With the help of my friend Isaac, I found and moved into a guesthouse in Osu, Accra. The fact that the guesthouse was in the Christianborg Baptist Church provided my friends and concerned informants some sense of relief regarding my safety and security while in Accra. Some respondents who asked where I was staying expressed confidence in the measures I was taking to ensure I had a minimum of spiritual protection during my stay. For friends, the Church provided them with peace of mind that as long as I was on hallowed ground I was out of harm's way. It also meant that walking home, attention I may have attracted along the way, such as cat calls and hisses of solicitation, would end abruptly as I turned into the Church gate. Concern for my safety and well-being was a constant theme among friends, my research assistant and many informants. Though Ghana is a relatively safe country, the nature of my work greatly increased my risk. Interviews took me to places where foreigners were not often seen, even in Accra.

Visiting chiefs and healers in particular led me along back alleys and deep into zongos (unplanned housing, or slums) of winding and narrow dirt paths, while my visit to a deliverance church in a town I had never visited before involved an impromptu ride to an even more remote location. However, in all my interviews, respondents demonstrated a heightened consciousness of my security, offering spiritual protections, accompaniment between locations and even waiting with me to assist in flagging down trotros (transport vans). These actions served to remind me that though I was perceived as vulnerable in Ghana, due to my being female, foreign and appearing to most as a youth (my age was often estimated between fourteen and seventeen), this increase in risk was often offset by individuals' sense of responsibility as hosts, a burden which I worked to diminish by also demonstrating that I was responsible and aware.

A second practicality which affected my research by limiting the amount of time I was able to stay in the field, was the increasing cost of living in Ghana. When I had lived in Ghana the first time in 2006 and 2007 I was able to rent a small one bedroom house in a compound in South La, Accra for the price I was now paying for a single room with a shared bathroom (without running water). Transportation costs had also increased, where a ticket from Accra to Tamale had cost 18 cedis, the price was now 45 cedis. Fortunately my preference for street foods such as yam, banku and fried rice meant that I was able to avoid expensive restaurants, though imported staples of my vegan diet, such as soy milk, were more costly than local alternatives.

My research began most formally when I discussed my project with a local tour guide who worked with the hotel where I stayed for the first three nights in Accra. He expressed interest in my research and asked directly if he could assist me by arranging an interview with a local chief he knew. As a tour guide, he was extremely enthusiastic about sharing Ghanaian culture with foreigners. In addition, my research presented to him an opportunity to explore the diversity of Ghana through a unique lens. Being a northerner himself, he felt that witchcraft was not only an incredibly important subject of study, it was also one he wanted to know better in order to share with tourists in the future.

Though I had conducted field research before, I had never formally or informally hired a research

assistant. I began to draft a contract that I would propose, outlining payment, hours and offering to include in the timeline a trip to Tamale, his home town. I was no longer staying at the hotel and so arranged to meet him there to discuss the contract. The formality of the situation surprised him and he expressed discomfort with entering into a formal arrangement. In his view, he would rather see if we worked well together before deciding on details such as compensation and schedules. I did not want to be imposing and accepted to work on an informal basis. However, this informality became quickly complicated by our growing friendship which blurred the distinction between employer and employee.

As a research assistant, he expressed little interest in ethical and methodological considerations, focusing more on his personal interests in the subject of witchcraft and in testing and developing his own skills in planning and executing tours of relevant locales and persons. Despite it not being a primary goal for him, he did nonetheless contribute greatly to the process of connecting interviews to the wider context of Ghanaian society. As well, as a northerner in the south, he approached the study with an outsider/insider perspective which enlivened discussions, raised unusual questions a foreigner or local may have overlooked and allowed a glimpse of elements which may have otherwise passed unnoticed as “taken-for-granted culture and social facts that constitute their world” (Pouliot 2007: 370). In the end, his enthusiasm for the research began to act as a hindrance as he sought greater control over the research process, expressing frustration when I would arrange or conduct interviews independently and seeking to direct interviews according to what I saw to be his personal preferences, for example wanting to interview more fetish priests than necessary or neglecting interviews with state officials.

Aside from my own feelings of the research process being stifled, I began to be concerned for his emotional, physical and spiritual well-being two weeks into our work together. He began to express concern regarding a persistent cough and a lump on his leg and was not satisfied by the results of the day we spent at the hospital seeking medical treatment. It was also around this time that he began to recite strange occurrences he had experienced, such as being watched by an older woman on a tro-tro or having trouble sleeping. Despite it being the focus of my research, it took some time for me to put the two together: my research assistant had been bewitched. I broached the subject with him and he requested that we reschedule our trip to Tamale so he could be treated by a traditional healer back home. This treatment lasted longer than expected and after covering the costs of the service, I returned to Accra.

The entire interview process itself took five weeks, during which time I completed twenty-six interviews with state officials, traditional authorities, religious leaders, NGO staff members and target individuals. With a few exceptions, such as some ministries and state organizations, interview requests were granted on the spot and little interest in formalities surrounding confidentiality was expressed by respondents. In most cases, the letter of introduction I presented, outlining the confidentiality agreement and terms of voluntary participation were handed back indifferently, putting me in the position of having to encourage respondents to keep this information, as well as relevant contact details, in case they were needed in the future. With one exception, the interview process began quickly as the informant was openly eager to begin sharing their knowledge or experiences of witchcraft and witchcraft-related violence.

In a few interviews, I was interrupted during note taking by the interviewee who was dismayed that I was not properly recording their responses. These respondents felt that it would have been more appropriate to record, either audio record and in one suggestion, even video document, the interview to ensure I had accurately retained every detail. Other respondents would follow my notes as they spoke, offering spelling corrections or clarification where they felt I was confused. This was extremely helpful in terms of pacing, as it allowed the interviewee to slow their responses or pause if I fell behind. This interest in the research process was evident in most interviews and I received many questions as to how I became involved in the subject, what sort of program would support this research and who was

funding it. I greatly appreciated these questions as they allowed me to provide a level of detail and transparency it would have seemed strange to otherwise offer without solicitation. These questions also allowed me to share my position on the subject with respondents who might not want to be so direct as to ask me what I thought of it.

These positive aspects of the interview process greatly outweighed some of the more difficult situations I encountered. Sexual advances in interviews were not a common problem, due in part to having a male research assistant present to dissuade or pre-empt such advances, as in one interview where a healer's comment about needing a new wife led the research assistant to end the interview. However, this was not the case in public where impromptu discussions of witchcraft with men often departed from the subject of witchcraft after about five minutes towards sexual propositions or marriage proposals. In these instances, advances were made in public locations and were easy to dismiss and walk away from or to mock openly, thus defusing the tension. As with my previous visit to Ghana, I also received attention from women who wanted to be my special friend, as such relations are termed. Though it is much more acceptable for women who are strangers to touch, as it is between men, advances such as hand holding or having one's hair stroked were not aggressive actions and were easy to disengage from.

Other security concerns related to my research proved to be overestimated. Instead, it was simply living in and moving about Ghana that proved to be source of risk. My first night in Accra, already familiar with the neighbourhood and hungry after a long trip, I ventured out in search of fried rice with a friend. On a popular and populated street I was stopped suddenly when a truck of soldiers pulled over abruptly and three soldiers came towards us to search us. I immediately pulled everything out of my pockets and held them up to the light, pulling away from my outstretched arms and stating clearly I had nothing else on my person. The soldiers looked through my friend's wallet, searched his pockets and then returned to their truck and drove off. We debated the possible purpose for the search and in the end concluded that they were looking for drugs to confiscate.

Another incident occurred travelling back from Tamale when the main road from Tamale to Kumasi was closed. Though travel at night is never recommended, the conditions of most roads make the trip much longer, around twelve hours from Accra to Tamale, and schedules are often subject to unexpected changes. As a result, it is difficult to avoid spending some time travelling in the dark. On this trip the bus was stopped to await a police escort as there had been a number of robberies on the road ahead. This was blamed on *galamsey*¹³ mining activities, illegal operations which drew migrant labour who turned to crime when pits became inoperable or closed down. Though the situation was potentially dangerous, most people treated it as an inconvenience rather than a threat, and much of the six-hour wait was spent criticizing the police, miners and greed.

The concern I had entering the field surrounding what Gallagher (2007) terms repellent groups, or in this case, repellent information, proved problematic in a number of interviews. In two interviews, when the killing of witches was advocated with a laughing tone, I had difficulty containing my anger and it is likely that I also failed, as recommended by Huggins & Glebbeek (2009), to conceal it. When interviewing two men who volunteered the information that they had killed a woman accused of witchcraft, the admission was so unexpected that I had little time to reflect and control my reaction. As we were seated in a group on the side of a main street in the neighbourhood of Nima, which is densely populated and quite busy during the afternoon, there was no sense of risk associated with their overt hostility expressed towards the woman. However, I did pause, uncertain of whether to prompt further detail or discussion, allowing another respondent to quickly change the subject. In both cases, I did not want to appear to be accepting of these actions or express false sympathy for them (Presser 2009) and

¹³ *Galamsey* is a term used in Ghana to describe local, artisinal miners, howver it is increasingly used to include illegal mining activities.

felt it most appropriate to be honest that I disapproved of these views.

Of all the interviews and discussions in Ghana, my day spent at a deliverance church was the most challenging and personally affecting. At multiple times throughout the day I felt unsettled and found myself on the verge of tears. The interview process started off with a tone of hostility. Though I had been referred to the deliverance church by the denominations overseeing office, the pastors at the centre were suspicious. In a previous interview, a respondent noted that they had participated previously in research on the subject of witchcraft and were comfortable and familiar with the process involved, even offering to follow up by Skype once I had left the field. However, the church I was referred to had had an extremely negative experience with an American anthropologist who had misused quotes from the pastor, leading him to receive a formal reprimand from the head office.

My arrival at the church, though announced and expected, was therefore not very welcome. I was asked to wait about an hour, during which time the office I was in was used for an exorcism intended to remove evil spirits from the womb of a woman who could not conceive. After this, the head pastor and his understudy sat down to discuss my research. Their central concern was confidentiality, which according to the requirements of my ethical approval, I was able to provide. The pastor and I agreed that the deliverance church/centre would only be referred to as such and that under no terms would the location or names of individuals involved be revealed. The reason for this was also in part to protect individuals who sought healing at the centre, as it accepted both victims of witchcraft and confessed witches for healing.

At the deliverance centre, the pastor provided a tour of the facilities, which were quite impressive. Residents are provided housing in one of the six small villas which lined the compound at the centre of which was a large building with administrative offices, a chapel and prayer rooms and other meeting spaces. My movement about the compound was not restricted and between interviews I wandered about watching the construction of the kitchen or visiting the small shop. However, the interviews I conducted there were quite unsettling and the interviewees were children, just meeting the age restrictions of my funding and ethics criteria. Many of the residents were young and some had been abandoned by their families who did not want them to ever return home. In one interview with a young boy who now lived at the centre permanently and whose school fees were being paid by the church, the respondent noted that the healing prayers were not improving his condition: he continued to have sexual dreams about men.

The respondent had been at the centre for three years already, during which time he had been delivered on numerous occasions, which he spoke of as having been hard and painful. His family, who had returned to assess his progress two years before felt that his lack of improvement demonstrated that he was not simply cursed, but possessed by a witchcraft spirit. The respondent himself expressed concern that prayer had not helped his condition and as a result he continued to suffer, yet he remained convinced that prayer was the only treatment available. I struggled with my own feelings of sympathy for the respondent and had to repress the strong urge to declare my support for same-sex relations, reminding myself that I was far away from Osu and Accra where gay night clubs are in fashion and where non-heterosexual relations are more tolerated.

In other interviews, I was able to respond more candidly and directly to respondents, expressing my opinions and engaging in open debate with people. Following the recommendations of Seidman (2005), I often risked saying what I thought and asked more personal questions. For example, in Tamale, I met a number of times with a man who was widely known and respected as he was to be the next chief and had already been required to take on many responsibilities of the office. However, each time we met to complete the interview, he was extremely intoxicated, which I had been warned of in advance as his alcoholism was well known. Though I was never able to complete and therefore include his interview, my discussions with the respondent were insightful and important to my broader

understanding of traditional authority in Ghana. During a day we spent together he sobered up enough to share his mixed feelings towards the sense of obligation and responsibility he faced in succeeding the ruling chief. Though he was aware that many people had confidence in him, he did not want to become chief. When I asked him directly if he thought he could drink enough to discredit himself and get out of the job, we both laughed and he shook his head no, but said he would try anyway.

Across Ghana this level of familiarity and openness was prevalent. Interviews and ethnographic discussions were overwhelmingly and unexpectedly conversational and unreserved. The ease of access to interviews and the overtness with which people expressed their needs in the interview process as well their opinions regarding the subject contradicted the assumptions I entered the field with and the literature they were based on. The internal conflict I had experienced designing research and the debate of whether to use covert methods was largely irrelevant. In Ghana, it seemed, people were not weary of discussing this taboo subject, rather they were eager and engaged in a lively public debate about it, and welcomed the opportunity to contribute to what many respondents directly identified as important and needed research on the subject. As a result, I was able to conduct my research openly, thereby inviting participants to contribute in its direction.

Cameroon

The main challenges in Cameroon proved to be much different from those in Ghana. Overall, the greatest challenge was negotiating my own security and in determining whether or not I was willing to accept certain risks associated with my planned research. In the end, I decided that I would not continue with the ethnographic portion of the research, nor would I travel far from Yaounde. This decision was in part from my own experiences and physical condition, and in part based on frequent warnings I received from Cameroonians as well as other foreigners. Though I was staying in a gated and guarded building in Bastos, one of the safest neighbourhoods in Yaounde, I was reminded often by my research assistant and host to not allow myself to be falsely comforted and lulled into complacency. In particular, as I was managing an injury to my right hand, which occurred on my second night, as well as a persistent skin infection which developed in the third week and caused fatigue as a symptom, I was often at a physical disadvantage. Despite these concerns, the research process itself was quite successful. This was possible due to the work of my research assistant as well as the incredible response I received from interviewees and informants who were again unexpectedly enthusiastic and eager to participate in the research. Despite my apprehensions about studying witchcraft as a sensitive subject, as well as the warnings in literature on Cameroon and witchcraft, there was again no need for covert methods. Contrary to this, my experience in Cameroon demonstrated the need for research on this subject and people's responses and support for my research further confirmed this.

Before leaving for Yaounde, I was put in contact with a friend of a friend who had been living and working there for six months. Through this contact, I met my research assistant who was working as a personal driver. Having learned from my experience in Ghana, I drafted and proposed a contract for him in which the combined services of transportation and research assistance would be covered. He requested that in addition to this I provide basic training in research methods and an introduction to ethics, a suggestion which I was thrilled to receive. The most important part of our working relationship involved negotiations concerning security. I was aware that driving with a foreigner made his vehicle a target in some parts of the city and I therefore allowed him to determine safer routes or control the locks and windows at his discretion. As well, I promised to abide by the informal curfew imposed on foreigners in Yaounde, which he would often check to see I was following with a phone call before or shortly after sunset.

Despite this frustrating limitation on my mobility, I was able, in two weeks, to complete twenty-six interviews. Again, though I did not anticipate such a response, individuals were always willing to participate and not one request for an interview was refused. Instead of having the expected difficulty in finding willing informants, I would often receive calls from unknown numbers or texts messages with details of arranged interviews which people who had heard of or participated in my research would organize and then inform me of. In some cases, when an interview had been scheduled with an individual, I would arrive to find two or more people who had also been invited by the interviewee ready to participate. One interview, arranged with a chief in Yaounde, became an unplanned focus group in which seven people invited by the chief also participated, including three other chiefs, a matriarch and another female village elder.

During interviews it was also common for interviewees to recommend or suggest other individuals to be interviewed. Again, interviewees would offer to arrange these meetings and when these were in other towns or villages, family members would often be suggested as escorts or hosts. I was often moved and humbled by the welcoming I received from respondents, including one family who made the effort to prepare a number of vegan Cameroonian dishes for me at a Sunday lunch. Even more notable was the interest participants expressed in the research process and my own progress in the field. As well, some informants provided important information regarding potential interviews, such as the discussion I had with a state official whose human rights work frequently put her in contact with accused witches. In her own efforts to investigate the conditions of accused witches in and out of prisons, she found that it was impossible to find anyone willing to even admit they were accused of witchcraft, even if wrongfully so. This information, which became increasingly apparent over the course of my time there, was a helpful warning. In Cameroon, it was too dangerous to seek and identify accused witches.

Even though respondents were willing to discuss witchcraft, their fear of the subject was palpable. In interviews, individuals consistently focused on their personal experiences of witchcraft, relating distressing stories of illness or loss which had affected them, family members or close friends. In all responses, the intense insecurity individuals faced on a daily basis was made clear as was their overwhelming disgust and hatred for witches. This environment of heightened anxiety was often unsettling. Though many respondents stated at some point during their interview that they felt it was important for them to share these experiences and their knowledge of witchcraft, these comments were often expressed with the expectation that my research would someday produce some tangible benefit for those who suffer witches. Respondents often asked me directly to formulate and disseminate recommendations for Cameroonians and their government so that one day witches might be controlled or eradicated.

The extreme state of spiritual insecurity people felt from living in the world of witches was often interrelated to other elements of social tension, including fear of cults and homosexuals. At times, the level of anxiety experienced by interviewees was intermingled with direct hostility towards my person. In some interviews, the view that whites, or specifically, my parents¹⁴, had stolen or corrupted African knowledge of positive witchcraft was framed as a direct accusation. As I am not unaware of the “social and historical factors – especially those associated with race [which] mediate both the meanings of questions that are asked and how those questions are answered” (Dunbar et al. 2003: 132), I did not have any intention to refute these accusations though they represented a clear tension. During one interview with a traditional healer, the interviewee who had been replying, in French, to a question

¹⁴ This particular comment was somewhat frustrating as one of my biological parents is Metis and was removed from her family by social services to be raised in British-descended foster homes, a state action which continues today as part of the continuing assimilation practices in Canada and which I believe contributed in part to the instability of my own family and my being born into state care myself.

about how curses were made switched to English and said, looking at me, that I could answer the question best as I was a witch and more powerful than him. Though the accusation passed the notice of my research assistant, whose English was limited to a few words, the tone of interview was changed and the other participant, who had arranged the meeting, was visibly uneasy.

In Ghana, I often encountered jokes or teasing about my research subject, in which people would ask whether I was studying witchcraft to be a witch or because I was one. I often responded, with a comically ominous tone that I would let them know by the end of the project. I had also been offered the opportunity to see to the world of witches by using *nyele* by a number of healers and priests who would often chortle at the idea of my being afraid of losing myself in the invisible world. These questions were always posed in a laughing way to demonstrate that there was no underlying concern or seriousness. However, in this case, it was clear that the healer meant to identify me as a witch, and by associating me with the knowledge of how to curse someone, was not indicating that my simply being white was the foundation of his suspicion.

The sense of danger I immediately brought my surroundings clearly to mind. The healer had in his right hand a long ritual knife which he had just been using to turn over the contents of a curse contained in a coconut shell, that we were inspecting on the floor between us. Though the interview passed without incident it remained tense and I left feeling a sense of dislocation. The fear I felt in response to the healer's accusation drew me into the fringes of witchcraft reality. Having just witnessed the dissection of a curse found by the healer shortly before the interview, I began to question whether the sense of insecurity I felt might be something more, maybe a growing awareness of another world around me. Could I be a witch and not know it? How could the healer know that at home I read tarot and may be on the fringe of my own society's perception of witch? I began to feel a sense of uncertainty as to what it really was that we had just inspected. Was it simply a collection of items, human hair, coins, a handmade cross, dirt, a locked lock in the fragments of a coconut shell, or a manifestation of a sinister intention, which may or may not be capable of reaching beyond one's person to another?

The idea, far in the back of my mind, as I walked out into the night, one of the few times I was out after sunset conducting an interview, that the curse has been placed by the healer or that he had simply staged its discovery for the interview rang hollow and seemed like a knee-jerk dismissal rather than a reasonable and calming explanation for what I had just seen. It did not help matters that my research assistant was also shaken by the experience and stressed by the task of getting me home safely. On the drive back we discussed our fears in an attempt to defuse them, but in the end, I found myself questioning aloud how people could intend and enact such harm against one another, and how one could ever feel safe when unseen, lethal attacks could come from anywhere and anyone at anytime. For the first time, I realized I was beginning to lose touch with my own reality.

Another indicator that I was beginning to experience emotional fatigue in the field was my increasing inability to deal with the stress of the constant homophobia I encountered in interviews and in discussions. Though interviewees would often cite the correlation between witchcraft and homosexuality in passing, my frustration and tension towards these comments was exacerbated by experiences outside of the interview process. For example, in a Western Union office, waiting for my research assistant to complete a transaction, I watched a middle-aged woman enter the store. My attention was attracted by her long flowing dress which was made of embroidered Chinese silk. It was the novel, to me, combination of African styling with Chinese fabric that caught my eye. However, a man standing across the store took offence and walked over to me, standing between me and the woman, and stared down at me until I averted my gaze. The man remained in place until the woman left and I spent the time between staring at my own feet.

In her work in South America, Goldstein (2009) noted that in order to avoid the negative

association of masculinity and possibly be outed as a lesbian, the author made efforts in her field research to appear more feminine, for example wearing tight jeans and make-up. In Cameroon, I had no idea how to appear less gay and was not willing to guess at how I might do this. When comparing my appearance to other women, other than being white and having a facial piercing, I didn't see any significant difference. Other female students wore jeans and t-shirts and had long hair as I did and many did not wear make-up either. As well, I was not confident that, should a situation escalate, I would be assisted by others. While in Ghana, taking a break from research, I was walking alone midday on a beach in my former neighbourhood of South La when I was approached by a man who was confrontational. The man pushed me repeatedly and kept asking me if I thought I could take him. Within moments two teenagers and two adult men approached to ensure I was not in danger. I understood immediately from the adults postures, that if necessary, they were ready to help defend me. However, one day in Yaounde when I was grabbed by a man who tried to force me to follow him, though the street was crowded people, everyone around us diverted their gaze, if not their attention. I was able to free my hand from the man and walk away quickly, but it was clear that my security was my own responsibility.

That I did not pass as straight in Ghana did not cause me any concern. I was open with my research assistant and friends in Ghana about not being straight and they were aware, as my research assistant in Cameroon was, that I was in a polyamorous relationship with a man in Canada. However, the idea that I could be identified or outed in Cameroon caused me serious concern. In addition to homosexuality being illegal, the overt and hostile homophobia I encountered daily filled me anxiety. On television, in newspapers and in common conversation, the conspiracy theories concerning homosexuals, linking them with cults, witches and other social ills, such as unemployment, incest and child abuse, contained such inconsistencies and absurdities that they bordered on hysteria. This tension, in addition to the general security concerns of mobility and personal safety in the country, led me to abandon the field early as I determined that the ethnographic information I would collect in the remaining time would be sufficient for my research and further data was not worth the associated risks.

The Questions

I drafted my interview questions with the intention of providing interviewees the opportunity to define key concepts and to express their knowledge of witchcraft and witchcraft-related violence in terms of their own experiences. The questions relating to the intervention of specific actors were also intended to allow the respondent room for interpretation, and clarification, when requested, was limited to the information in parenthesis or restating the question.

1. What is witchcraft?
2. Could you describe your understanding or experience of witchcraft-related violence?
3. What is the role of the state (government, ministries) in addressing witchcraft-related violence?
4. What is the role of religious institutions (churches and mosques) in addressing witchcraft-related violence?
5. What is the role of traditional authorities (chiefs, healers) in addressing witchcraft-related violence?
6. What is the role of NGOs (non-governmental organizations) in addressing witchcraft-related violence?
7. How might witchcraft-related violence be best addressed (diminished)?
8. To what extent are witchcraft belief and the political related?

In early interviews in Ghana, the last question posed proved to be problematic. The intention behind the question was to begin a discussion on the subject of witchcraft as a political phenomenon which could then lead to further prompting towards key political concepts such as justice and power. In the first five interviews I conducted the question was consistently interpreted to connote the relationship between witchcraft belief and the government. In every interview, respondents reframed the question and began by stating that the government uses witchcraft even though they profess to be sceptical of its existence. In discussion with my research assistant, it became clear that the question could not be reformulated to access the information I was seeking. The political, in Ghana and as was later confirmed in Cameroon, was not understood as power relations among differing levels, but as the actions of formalized state rule.

The interpretation of political as meaning government- or state-related was a frustrating reminder of the “hegemony of the state in both theory and practice” and the “overwhelming presence of the state as a universal organizing principle” (Zahar 2007: 204), at least in terms of official discourse. However, this was not necessarily the main limiting factor in accessing data. In discussion with my research assistant, we explored his interpretation and understanding of the question and its related concepts. Though we were able to identify his views on a number of concepts, such as democracy being procedurally the same as in the West but socially different in Ghana (because of the use of witchcraft in campaigning and to influence outcomes), it became clear that the conflict was not in determining what was political (i.e. power beyond the state), but in the construction of witchcraft as non-political or anti-politics (Green 2005).

This construction is an essential point as it allows numerous actors to instrumentalize witchcraft belief and fear towards political goals, while obfuscating the power relations embedded therein. State actors, religious leaders, NGOs and traditional authorities, as well as individuals, may all employ witchcraft belief towards political ends without these actions be acknowledged as political acts or acts of power. The discourse of witchcraft as non-political clearly contradicts the interpretation of witchcraft as a form of power; however, when I confronted this distinction in discussion, this contradiction was both acknowledged and sustained by respondents who maintained that witchcraft was a form of power. In the world of witches, then, the conviction that witchcraft is non-political may be characterized as a social fact¹⁵, rather than a reality.

However, due to the dominance of this discourse, I decided to leave out the final question regarding the relationship between witchcraft and the political. In place of this question, I decided to analyze the interview transcripts and ethnographic notes, as well as witchcraft-related films, books and media, including a two-week analysis of the most popular newspapers in Ghana and Cameroon, looking at narrative and discourse through critical discourse methodology. As the data set I intend to analyze is insufficient to constitute a substantial study of witchcraft discourse in the two countries, I use the findings of this analysis as illustrations, rather than conclusions.

Discourse and narrative analysis are not fixed methodologies but a mix of interdisciplinary methods and approaches which interpret the “patterns and commonalities of knowledge and structures” (Wodak 2008: 6) that are communicated through language and context. Critical discourse analysis is an approach which studies “the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resists by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk 2003: 323) and which aims to understand how “a particular social structuring of semiotic difference may become hegemonic, become part of the legitimizing common sense which sustains relations of domination”

¹⁵ Again, I am drawing on the work of Pouliot who notes that “any social fact is brought about by the fact that relevant actors believe it to be real. For example, certain bits of paper are socially constructed as money because we all believe this to be true.” (2007: 373). Though power and politics are understood to be synonymous in much Western political theory, in Ghana and Cameroon, these concepts are distinct and may be unrelated.

(Fairclough 2001: 4). In terms of witchcraft, discourse is important as it includes “representations of how things are and have been, as well as imaginaries – representations of how things might or could or should be.” (Fairclough 2001: 6). In many ways, witchcraft discourse itself characterizes a world where the state is null and powerless, representing a potential point of contestation and confrontation with this hegemonic discourse.

Witchcraft as a field of conflict between discourses, mainly those of the Western modern liberal state whose rationality dictates the non-reality of witchcraft and necessitate its eradication and those of the invisible world, itself an imagined plane, where the power competes for the ability “influence people's minds ... their knowledge-based or opinions” so that these may be altered to indirectly influence people's actions (Van Dijk 2003: 355). As noted by Van Dijk, “controlling discourse is a first major form of power, controlling people's minds is the other fundamental way to reproduce dominance and hegemony” (Van Dijk 2003: 357). In this way, Western discourses do not only seek to eradicate witchcraft, they also aim to supplant this reality and conform the very imagined possibilities of other realities to their own.

In practice, narrative analysis “recognizes that people use stories to make sense of their lives and to present themselves and their experiences to others” and is applied to the “content, form and context” these stories (Frost 2009: 9-10). From an ethnographic perspective, narrative and discourse studies help the researcher conceptualize the “connections between levels and forms of social processes and action” (Oberhuber & Krzyzanowski 2008: 186). Narrative analysis also allows researchers to look at discourses over time the ways “storytellers choose to connect events and make them meaningful for others ... [interpreting] the past rather than reproduc[ing] it” (Reismann 1993: 6). As well, narrative analysis can help the researcher understanding “connections between personal biography and social structure – the personal and political (Reismann 1993: 6).

Post-field Reflections

This reflexive practice, [Rose 1997] argues is bound to fail because of the impossibility of sustaining a unified and coherent gaze at a landscape of power. No researcher is able to occupy the same positionality as those who are the subjects of his/her research, yet the unavoidable distance that this relationship creates is paradoxically the one that researchers seek to overcome through transparent reflexivity. Rose calls for geographers to develop other forms of reflexivity, ones that recognize the extent to which the interview process is often one where both researcher and those who are the subjects of research create versions of themselves that are re-interpreted and re-presented in different ways. In such a situation researchers should [be] able to point out the uncertainties and gaps in interpretation that necessarily accompany the interview process. (Mullings 1999: 348)

Overall, my own efforts to reflect upon my considerations and analysis of power relations in the field have proven to be an immense and ongoing task, the subject of which could merit its own, rightful study. Above all, upon reflection, it is my view that my primary imperative of engaging in the interview process sincerely was, if not always exercised, as at least sustained in a continuous effort. I also found that while one's responsibility must be acknowledged in the field, research participants are neither powerless nor void of agency in the research process. An overly paternalistic approach to the research process not only prevents the researcher from reflecting upon their own insecurity or vulnerability, it also frames the participant as a fixed and homogeneous non-actor. Though this approach clearly contradicts the underlying purpose of interviews, to gain information from specialists in the area of

study, this construction can be found in research methods literature. As well, this approach overlooks the ability of interviewees and informants to prevent this process by withholding information (Walford 2007), and to do so without the researcher's knowledge.

In terms of security concerns for respondents, it was clear across the research process that the perceived benefits of participating in the research greatly outweighed the real or perceived risks. Individuals approached for participation were comfortable refusing to participate in the few cases where this occurred or in requesting further clarification and information where desired. Most notably, the expected reluctance to discuss witchcraft, an assumption made based on ideas of how spiritual insecurity may be experienced and expressed, proved to be unfounded. As part of the rationale for covert ethnographic study was based on the misconception of witchcraft as being taboo, a condition not found in the field, I decided to abandon covert methods. Quite opposite from the anticipated response, interviewees and informants in both countries made statements of support for the research focus, noting that the research was important or that they were amazed that a Westerner would be concerned with the subject. Though some respondents questioned the connection between witchcraft and political science, my reply that in my interpretation both are concerned with power, was met in each instance with laughter and agreement. Overall, these responses confirmed the approach I had taken in the field and supported the logic upon which I based my entire project.

Finally, in terms of personal security in the research process, the nature of the risks encountered proved to be complicated and mainly unforeseen. For my research assistants, the level of spiritual risk they faced proved to be outside of my planning or control. As well, their sense of responsibility towards me, in taking important measures to ensure my safety and expressing concern for my well-being when they were not around to confirm it, was both comforting and concerning for me as a researcher. It was also frustrating at times that many interviewees also supported and encouraged this view by expressing concern regarding my research, citing the subject and field as being too dangerous for a young woman. Though I worked hard to demonstrate my ability to manage my own security, I was never able to decrease their sense of responsibility, nor feel that I had adequately compensated them for their vigilance.

Though as the author of this research, “power [at this stage] is almost uniformly invested” in my position (Mullings 1999: 347), I nevertheless hope to remain reflective of my own responsibilities. As part of my own sense of responsibility towards the people who participated in my research, I hope to do them justice in my use of the information they provided and in representing their experiences and concerns regarding witchcraft and witchcraft-related violence. Though it is a point of ethical conflict for me to continue to work on the issue of witchcraft-related violence, as I have noted elsewhere my apprehension in contributing to Western discourse on the subject of African witchcraft, I do feel a strong sense of responsibility towards everyone who participated in this research and who hoped that this work be completed. For participants who requested copies of my final dissertation, I would hope that they are up to this point, somewhat satisfied with the work. However, heading into the following chapters, which analyze the mediation efforts of the state, NGOs, religious institutions and traditional authorities, opportunity for disagreement will only increase.

Chapter Four – Witches on the Road to Power: Witchcraft and the state in Africa

Entering a military police station in Yaounde in the mid-afternoon, I was unable to identify a front desk or waiting area in a long room with three busy tables and found myself seated with four female soldiers all of whom were chatting casually. The conversation continued some time until it seemed I'd waited long enough in polite silence to be noticed and the soldier sitting across from me asked me what I was doing there. I began to explain that I had come to request an interview regarding my research when the soldier cut in and asked me what my research was about. I hesitated, suddenly aware that the room had gotten quieter. As soon as I had managed to get the words out, the room exploded in laughter. Suddenly an imposing plain clothed officer emerged from a back room and asked me to follow him. In his office, I explained my request and he quickly asked me to ignore the laughter. The soldiers, he said, were just nervous.

This chapter I will explore the role of the state in mediating witchcraft-related violence in Ghana and Cameroon. The chapter begins with an introduction to theories of the state and then considers these in relation to witchcraft, including colonial history and the contemporary state. Though some of the political uses of witchcraft will be explored here, looking at how the state may attempt to instrumentalize witchcraft belief for its own purposes, my analysis mainly focuses on how witchcraft frustrates the state's goals of consolidating power and securing a naturalized legitimacy. In effect, I argue witchcraft prevents the state from becoming an invisible actor in daily life, though this outcome is also a product of the state's embedded logics as much as due, in part, to witchcraft belief.

State efforts to address witchcraft-related violence vary across the continent of Africa and the world. However, two generalizations may be made about the approaches states adopt in addressing this phenomenon: states either refuse to acknowledge the existence of witchcraft and therefore define violence according to legal rationalist assumptions by criminalizing violence against accused witches, or states see witchcraft itself as a crime, according to a supernatural epistemology, and respond by punishing accused witches. In some cases, such as in Malawi where the state is currently investigating which approach is better, a state may alter its official response to witchcraft. However, in both cases, the response taken by the state proves problematic as neither approach successfully resolves the inter-related issues of witchcraft-related violence and spiritual insecurity.

In my research, both through the literature reviewed and in my fieldwork, the state proved to be an ineffective mediator. In Ghana, the state's refusal to acknowledge the existence of witchcraft, rather than reducing belief or violence, exacerbates both, leading to increasing levels of violence and a greater sense of spiritual insecurity among Ghanaians. In Cameroon, the state's response of criminalizing witchcraft practices appears to effect a slight decrease in instances of violence, understood in Western terms as physical attacks against accused witches. This is achieved through the use of prison sentences against accused witches, thereby removing them from threat of attack once they are in custody. However, for Cameroonians, who define witchcraft-related violence as supernatural attack by witches, the arrest and jailing of accused witches fails to decrease their power, which can easily circumnavigate prison walls. On the other hand, potentially innocent individuals are also sent to overcrowded and under-resourced facilities where their lives are again at risk. In both cases, the problem of spiritual insecurity remains unaddressed and, as in Ghana, continues to mount.

Overall, as I will argue in this chapter, these cases demonstrate how the very logic of the state is undermined by witchcraft. Though states continue to attempt to address and even, at times, co-opt witchcraft belief, this effort proves to be counterproductive. Because the state is unable to act upon the supernatural world, and therefore is unable to protect its own citizens from serious threats within its territory, it can never be fully realized as a legitimate institution of rule. Instead, the state in a world of

witches is forced into a logistical trap: the state itself is a powerful institution, however it is only powerful because individuals within the state rely on witchcraft for their power. Thus, the very ability that would allow the state to take action against witchcraft is itself undermined by the assumed source of that power: witchcraft.

Theories of the State

In the field of comparative politics theoretical debates on the state span contemporary concerns from the consolidation of state power to revolution to the failure of states. Ultimately, most scholarship intends to understand the dynamics of in/stability of the state, in short, explaining change or continuity. There are a number of questions preceding this focus which are relevant here, in particular, the question of how, borrowing from Miliband (1973), the state has come to permeate the lives of men, and women, and in effect, encompassed the globe. Looking at African case studies necessitates looking at the post-colonial state and how the political landscape of the region was altered by the colonial experience. Though the details of what constituted a state in history may be debated, the global penetration of the modern state model is a relatively recent development in terms of human history.

As noted by Migdal (1988), the world map changed dramatically between 1947 and 1965, bringing regions of colonial administration and boundaries of empire and state into coherence as unified landscape of independent states. Again, the degree of independence of newly decolonized states may be debated, however, the formalization of states where states may not have existed allowed for the creation of a globally homogenized political system. The end of direct colonial control and the declaration of independence of former colonies signalled the completion of the expansion of the modern state system across the world. In effect, every person, place and thing is effectively subsumed under the representation of the state.

Though states are in effect equally constituted actors, the post-colonial era quickly demonstrated that not all states were actually equal in ability and function. As noted by Migdal and many other authors who work on the post-colony, the most pressing question for comparativists became why some states were weaker than others. Migdal, in his writing, suggests that in the West where the state has a longer history, “we accept the rightness of... a strong state” (Migdal 1988: 15). From many critical perspectives, this is an accurate but layered possibility. What is most misleading about this statement is the implicit sense of consent. The questions of the origin of the modern state and the processes through which power is consolidated is a highly contested subject.

The modern liberal theory of the state relies on the idea and concept of the social contract. As noted earlier in chapter 2, in a very simplistic representation, the social contract was a process by which individuals in anarchy agreed to cede their political autonomy to the state in exchange for essential benefits such as peace and order. The details of who these people were, the processes by which this negotiation occurred and how or what kind of a state existed before the ceding of political autonomy, who it was operated by and what population it represented (if that population had yet to cede control), remain unclear. The main reason these important and contradicting questions remain unanswered is because the social contract is an historical theory. It is a theory of how states evolved which was developed retroactively, not to investigate the history and events of the origins of the modern state, but to justify its existence and profess its necessity.

Critical academics have contested this theory, looking at historical accounts and analyzing relations of power. Charles Tilly (1985), in his work on the origins of the state, provides one of the most persuasive refutations of the social contract theory. Tilly argues that, rather than being a product of the social contract, the state emerged gradually, relying heavily on coercive exploitation which

played a major role in the creation of European states. Tilly uses a contemporary analogy for explaining the processes by which populations came under the control of increasingly centralized powers: the state evolved as a protection racket. In this analogy, early power brokers in Europe offered the local populace protection from neighbouring power brokers, all of whom were seeking to expand and increase their control. In order to provide protection, and fund their expansion, power brokers taxed the populace, creating systems of capital accumulation. This capital accumulation in turn required greater administration by power brokers, who expanded their administrative powers in order to manage the increasing funds and threat.

The cycle of external threat, whether these were justified or not, leading to taxation, capital accumulation, and expansion of administration, in Tilly's view, relied on a symbiotic relationship between the emerging state, the military and the private economy. Together these agents made war against external rivals, built the state by expanding internally and removing power rivals inside, while professing to provide protection in order to justify the extraction of the basic means to fund war and the state. In this way, the early power brokers who became state leaders, the mercenaries who became armies and the private economy which expanded under centralizing power, worked towards the consolidation of direct rule and the expansion of that rule across greater territories.

The importance of controlling space in the consolidation of power and the state is an important and relatively recent insight provided by critical theorists such as Bourdieu. James Scott (1998) looks at the processes of state consolidation of power through the control of space in his text *Seeing Like a State*. In his work, Scott investigates historical processes of expansion, looking at the mechanisms used by states to consolidate power. Two mechanisms in particular, mapping and documentation, expose the processes by which states sought to manage spaces and the people within them. Mapping, and in some cases, reordering, of spaces, facilitated state management, allowing for a clear representation of a territory and, in response, clear use of that space. Scott provides the examples of the creation of main roads which were designed to be large enough for military deployment in the event of rebellion, and the use of street names which were useless to local populations familiar with the area but essential to foreign forces.

Another example is the use of censuses and the identification and documentation of populations. Scott notes that much as space was mapped, so were people, a practice which often initially resisted but eventually forced on populations. Censuses not only provided states with a picture of their population, they also allowed states greater access to this population, exposing their locations and identities, whether ethnic, religious, class or otherwise. In Scott's work, it is through the control of people and places that the state seeks to create a landscape which is standardized and therefore easier to monitor, assess and manage. Moving away from direct control through the threat of violence, whether external or internal, the state, once formed, now seeks to dominate the wider environment of its political space.

This transition from accumulating power to exercising power is addressed by Mara Loveman (2005), who again building on the works of Bourdieu and Waquant addresses the concept of symbolic power. For Loveman, the state, in its rightness, is a symbolic accomplishment, the capacities of which to carry out ideological, economic, political and military functions has moved beyond base force to the exercise of symbolic power. The crux of this power is the ability of the state to operate through the appearance that no power is being wielded, the ability to constitute the state as given (Loveman 2005). In this way, it is not the that rightness of the state is accepted, but that the daily exercise of power of the state has become an unquestioned and often unnoticed aspect of our lived reality.

Through the exercise of symbolic power, the modern state in the West no longer relies on active violence, though this remains a very real threat where the state is contested. Instead of coercion, the state relies on its own normativity and through often unnoticed actions continues to construct itself as

traditional aspect of society. For example, censuses that were once resisted as state intrusions have become commonplace and efforts to reduce or remove them may meet resistance. In this way, censuses have become a tradition of sorts, like the state itself, which though recently invented, act to inculcate certain values or norms of behaviour through repetition (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). The power of the state in the West, then, has become a norm which has been naturalized among the majority, first through force and now through symbolic power.

This critical history of the state in the West differs greatly from the experiences of the post-colonial world. In the European experience, the long history of coercion and control underlying the evolution of the state allowed for a gradual transition towards symbolic power. In the colonial state, power was amassed by force in a much shorter and incredibly violent period of time. In the common question of how to explain the crisis of the African state, these historical determinants are cited as the foundational difference between Western and African states (Young 1994). In Young's view, the operative logic of the colonial state was to create institutions of rule intended to establish and maintain alien hegemony.

In this way, the origin of the modern state in Africa was not in response to external threats and internal control, but rather as extensions of rule for the purposes of extraction and instrumental administration. Many authors have theorized this colonial institutional legacy as being at the centre of the dysfunction or weakness of the African state. In his work on the question, Mamdani (1996) argues that colonial rule, which was only partial due to the limited commitment of colonial powers to their colonies, motivated administrators to maintain customary laws. These customary laws would apply to issues beneath the purview of the colonial state which would apply modern law to citizens where relevant to the needs of the state. In this way, Mamdani argues, the colonial state created parallel systems where individuals were both citizens of a state and subjects of customary powers, which in some cases were invented through colonial interpretation.

This argument raises an important question regarding the reach and penetration of the colonial state. While some authors such as Young (1994) note that it was the limited interest and investment of colonial powers that prevented the eradication of pre-existing political organizations, others such as Boone (1998) argue that the diversity of rural African societies may also be responsible. Boone criticizes the urban bias of theories which focus on the "imported origins of the African state" (Boone 1998: 5). In looking at institutional legacies, administrative habits and ruling elites, Boone argues that an essential piece of the puzzle is being overlooked: the variation in the structure and function of institutions linking the African state to rural societies. In short, according to Boone, the heterogeneous rural political institutions of the colonial states presented significant challenges to administration, creating inconsistency in the penetration of the state system across the region.

Whether colonial powers lacked interest or ability, or both, the legacy of the colonial state is a significant factor in understanding the contemporary African state. The idea of the African state in crisis may be linked to colonial experience, not only in its institutional impact, but also in our understanding of Africa as a place of political disorder, as a place where the modern state has yet to take hold. For example, Bates (2008) presents a picture of a continent at the mercy of "specialists in violence" who choose to protect their wealth through coercion rather than "set weapons aside and to devote their time to the production of wealth and to the enjoyment of leisure" (5). Here, two fictive discourses are in action. The first is the idea of the African state as being a state of anarchy, where one finds "the sinisterly clownish garb of teenage killers in Liberia, the theatrical rage of mobs in Mogadishu, and the dignified suffering of refugees in camps throughout" the region (Bates 2008: 129).

The second is the image of the post-colonial African states as not fully formed, limited or weak, and therefore beset by shocking levels of violence suggests that this violence is not the result of the state, but the result of a lack of state. Underlying these arguments is the assumption that were states to

be fully realized, this violence would disappear. Though this argument supports a strong state, it does not fully acknowledge the lasting violence of the colonial state. As well, this view suggests that many academics expected a modern state to emerge from the colonial state, hence the often asked question of how African states failed and “things fell apart” (Bates 2008).

However, it may not be that “things fell apart”, but that the history of the colonial state, as well as the history of modern state system itself, are histories of violence. It is the violent emergence of the state seen in Tilly that is being witnessed, or in the case of Loveman, the initial accumulation of force before the normalization of the state through symbolic power. Hence, the second fictive discourse that has yet, in many cases, to be confronted: the idea that states do not begin with violence but through some social contract, ending uncertainty and disorder and providing peace and stability.

The very idea of the African state in crisis suggests that the process of conforming populations to the modern state system is itself a peaceful process which African states have been simply unable to achieve. This lack of progress is often blamed on a litany of barriers seen to be unique to the African continent such as ethnicity and the resource curse. Though it has become simple fact for many academics that “ethnicity matters” (Posner 2007) in African states, analyses of ethnicity based on primordial assumptions demonstrate clear inconsistencies in the application of this concept. As noted by Chandra (2006), upon inspection there is no analytical basis for ethnicity as an explanatory idiom for political outcomes. In short, ethnicity does not matter.

Rather than being an explanation for factors such as violence and stability, ethnicity may be better understood as an instrument of state formation. In a historical comparative analysis of three states, Marx (1996) investigates the processes by which states have instrumentalized ideas of identity, race and ethnicity, in order to facilitate the consolidation of state power. In each of the three cases, Marx demonstrates how discourses of race were used at pivotal points in each state's history to create politically advantageous gains. For example, Marx stresses the disenfranchisement and social and political repression of blacks as a means to create greater unity among whites in the Reconstruction following the American civil war. This case is similar to that of South Africa, where white British and Dutch descendents were able to unite against the black majority.

Thus, ethnicity, as a tool of persuasion, has been used by many states in their early consolidation of power and in the creation of clear boundaries of in and out group, hierarchies and in the distribution of resources. In terms of the resource curse, many authors suggest that the abundance of natural resources in African states has led, through various mechanisms, to the durability of authoritarianism. For example, Jensen & Wantchekon (2004) draw a correlation between the resource curse and the objective of democratization in their argument that the curse is precipitates a “lack of transparency and executive discretion in revenue allocation [which] affects electoral outcomes when voters care only about redistribution” (834).

Here themes of patrimonialism and corruption, common concerns in academia addressing African states, are apparent. In their analysis of the resource curse, Luong and Weinthal (2006) note that the resource is not to blame, rather structures of ownership, the strength of institutions and the influence of international or domestic actors are much better indicators of how a resource will be used to generate wealth in a state. If a state enjoys strong institutions, is not dominated by monopolies and has stable internal and external relations, it is more likely that the state will benefit positively from resources and the wealth produced by these more evenly distributed.

However, where state institutions are weak, or in formation, where monopolies exist, as may be seen in early private economies, and where relations with actors inside and outside the state are unstable, resources are more likely to contribute to centralized wealth, and therefore centralized power. These conditions closely parallel the economic relations Tilly described in his model of the emerging and consolidating state. From previous models of the origins of the state, economic development was

essential to the effectiveness of the burgeoning state. That the state is responsible for and measured by its ability to create economic development is a common view today (from Apter 1965 to van de Walle 2001), one which is paralleled by the equally often cited necessity of the state in providing democracy and political order (Bratton 2004).

From this, it appears that in comparative politics, the dominating concern of the African state in crisis is produced by a perspective dominated by the myth of the social contract as the history of the modern state, a myth to which African states do not conform, and as a result, appear to be in crisis. As argued by Bayart (1989), comparisons between African and Western states are banal and produce failing representations of both cases. In the continuing formation of the state in Africa, according to Bayart, the state draws on indigenous foundations and on the re-appropriation of colonial processes and institutions, comparison for which do not exist in Western models.

Though Bayart views the state as neither inevitable nor irreversible, noting that societies in which power is centralized do not hold a monopoly on political innovation, states which are emerging in Africa must be understood on their own terms. According to Bayart, political power in African states must be understood in terms of the indigenous moral cosmologies which inform, in part, the construction and consolidation of the state. In Bayart's work, sorcery is a part of the political landscape and imagination, a reality which many authors have avoided but one which helps inform our understanding of African states and greatly complicates ideas of the African state in crisis.

The State and Witchcraft

The wave of independence which spread across the African continent, ending colonial rule in many newly formalized states, brought with it an optimism that Africans, taking control of their own societies, would finally be able to address their own needs and interests. Among these was the hope that African governments would be willing and able to address “uniquely African problems” (Tebbe 2007: 186). High among these was the problem of witchcraft (Geschiere 2006; Tebbe 2007). The widespread view across the region that colonial governments had been sympathetic to witches, protecting them from justice and intervening against healers and diviners who sought to restrict witches powers, led many to feel that colonial states had allowed witches to proliferate (Geschiere 2006). With the fall of colonial regimes, people expected the situation “to be different in the postcolony: the new government should know what to do about witchcraft” (Geschiere 2006: 221).

This concern remains today, as African states have been unable or unwilling to address the problem of witchcraft-related violence to the satisfaction of many societies. For some states, which are sceptical of witchcraft, addressing witchcraft as a reality contradicts the very logic of the modern liberal state and while it may be argued that liberalism “has enormous capacity to accommodate African traditions” it may be that witchcraft is, perhaps, intolerable (Tebbe 2007: 185). For other states, which accept the reality of witchcraft, managing and controlling the invisible world may still be problematic, as the invisible world operates outside of the tangible reach of the state. In both cases, the injustices and insecurity caused by witchcraft-related violence remain and people continue to “call on government to punish, retaliate, and deter” witchcraft attacks (Tebbe 2007: 188). Where states are unable to manage this threat, they risk losing legitimacy (Ashforth 2006; Tebbe 2007). Thus, while states may not attest to the reality of witchcraft, they are nevertheless vulnerable to its devices of harm. Acknowledgement of this threat has motivated states, both colonial and post-colonial, to address witchcraft in varied ways.

The Colonial State

Colonial administrations relied heavily on their knowledge, whether accurate or not, of indigenous laws and customs in the consolidation of their rule (Berry 1992). As many colonial powers had limited interests in investing in the construction of elaborate and layered state systems, they sought to build their colonial administrations “on a foundation of 'native law and custom'” (Berry 1992: 334). However, as few African societies, apart from those with “established traditions of Islamic scholarship, possessed written bodies of legal and historical knowledge” which could provide this information, alternative sources such as travellers' accounts were relied upon (Berry 1992: 334). Later, these informal accounts were supplemented by more systematic “commissions of enquiry and by professional anthropologists” who were employed by the colonial administrations to collect oral evidence of customs (Berry 1992: 334). However, again, limitations were encountered:

[T]he search for oral tradition was fraught with difficulties. Like scholars who collect oral history, colonial administrators who set out to gather information on local laws and customs were told multiple, often conflicting stories. Whichever version of customary rights and practices an official chose to believe, people were sure to challenge it – both because the past was in fact complex and changing, and because Africans took advantage of officials' interest in tradition to offer evidence favourable to their own interests.

When tensions rose over a particular aspect of colonial policy, the Colonial Office convened commissions of enquiry, both to investigate immediate grievances and to amass information about local customs. Though the work of these commissions often contributed to the emergence of an official orthodoxy concerning 'native law and custom', the evidence they collected was often full of varied and conflicting testimony. (Berry 1992: 334)

As a result of the inability of colonial administrations to capture the cultural realities of the populations they sought to control, early states were unable to effectively manage these realities through colonial institutions. The most common response to witchcraft beliefs and instances of witchcraft-related violence was to completely ban these beliefs and their accompanying practices. Colonial administrations across Africa introduced witchcraft suppression acts and ordinances intended to formally outlaw and, as they hoped, eventually to eradicate witchcraft beliefs. Unfortunately for colonial administrators, ensuring legal measures could be levelled against “the activities of alleged witches” proved to be “impractical if not wholly impossible” (Luongo 2008: 38). As a result, rather than reducing witchcraft-related disorder:

anti-witchcraft legislation instead regularly functioned as an indirect stimulus to violence against alleged witches when the purported victims of witchcraft who were unable to find satisfaction in colonial courts took matters of “justice” into their own hands by killing alleged witches through acts of individual or vigilante violence. (Luongo 2008: 38-39)

In the Gold Coast colony of the British, which would later form the state of Ghana, as in many other colonies, witchcraft suppression legislation forced witchcraft-related activities into secrecy, requiring healers and diviners to operate covertly (Gray 2005). As a result of witchcraft suppression during colonial rule, it is difficult to find reliable historical data pertaining to the levels of witchcraft-related violence during these times (Gray 2005). In the case of Cameroon, whose colonial history implicates multiple empires, including German, French and British, witchcraft suppression legislation was supplemented by French-initiated efforts to “understand and change the mental models” which motivated witchcraft beliefs (Fisiy 1998: 150). These efforts included the eradication of secret societies and intensive education programs directed at women and children (Fisiy 1998).

Addressing witchcraft-related violence was not the only motivation for colonial administrators who sought to eradicate witchcraft belief. More importantly for colonial states, witchcraft belief presented a potential threat to stability of colonial rule. Witchcraft, as a practice of violence beyond the

control of the colonial state, presented a source of both resistance and rebellion. In many cases of resistance to colonial rule as well as in movements which led to independence, witchcraft features as an important tool against oppressive rule (Niehaus 2001; Benjamin 2006).

An example of anti-colonial resistance in present day Kenya provides insight into the nature of colonial insecurities experienced in the face of witchcraft. Among the Mijikenda, military power drew on the use of a magical poison which was unique to their society (Benjamin 2006). The powerful symbolism of this poison, along with the protection of amulets and spells invoked over poison tipped arrows, led Mijikenda resisters against British tripod-mounted machine guns in a successful effort to repel British soldiers (Benjamin 2006). As noted by Benjamin, the success of the Mijikenda's campaign fed colonial fears of the unknown power of the Mijikenda, leading to an eventual withdrawal and the conclusion that the region was "largely ungovernable" (251).

The inability of colonial administrators to address the concerns of populations who were beset by witches was only further compounded by colonial apprehensions towards the invisible. Though some administrators advocated leniency towards African practices aimed at reducing spiritual insecurity, the official approach of colonial states seeking to suppress these practices fostered the perception that colonial leaders were in league with the witches they seemed to protect. At the same time, hostility towards important protective practices, which were seen as posing a threat to the stability of colonial rule, deepened this perception, while further entrenching these very practices and the threat they posed to the state.

The Contemporary State

Modern African states have not fared much better than colonial states in exposing, managing or controlling witchcraft belief or powers. The frequency of witchcraft-related violence has motivated a number of states to review their laws concerning witchcraft (Ellis & ter Haar 2004). In colonial times, laws were implemented to suppress witchcraft practices, often resulting in condemnation of those making witchcraft accusations (Ellis & ter Haar 2004). As a result of this, accusations were dealt with "outside the formal scope of the law and the state" (Ellis & ter Haar 2004: 152). Though some states have repealed witchcraft suppression laws, or modified them to condemn witchcraft attack, many societies continue to mediate the threat of witchcraft attack independently.

In the case of Cameroon, where the colonial era witchcraft suppression ordinance was modified to include witchcraft attack as a punishable offence (Ellis & ter Haar 2004), some authors find that people are "more ready than elsewhere to invoke the State's authority" in order to deal with witchcraft (Fisiy & Geschiere 1994: 324). Studies of witchcraft trials in Cameroon, which will be looked at more in depth later in this chapter, indicate that the state's willingness to engage with witchcraft is responsible for these appeals (Geschiere 1997). However, the state's inclination to involve itself in witchcraft disputes must be understood in broader terms: many state actors "strongly believe that occult forces do undermine government policies and its "hegemonic project"" (Geschiere 1997: 195).

The primary point of interaction between the state and witchcraft is in the court systems. Though the legal systems of African states are modelled on Western judicial processes, which are in direct contradiction to the very foundation of witchcraft, witches are brought to trial (Ellis & ter Haar 2004). These cases highlight a number of initial conflicts between the nature of witchcraft and the philosophical assumptions of the Western legal system:

Witchcraft is a private discourse characterized by gossip and hearsay, that can easily be hidden and malicious, whereas the judicial system properly operates on written rules and adheres to explicit procedures and standards. While witchcraft accusations are highly dependent on

personal relationships, the law is equal for all. Witchcraft discourses address existential problems, whereas law enforcement address concrete offences. Divining cases of witchcraft depends on personal interactions, whereas proof in law has to be factual. People accused of witchcraft are in effect held to be guilty unless proven innocent, which infringes against a basic principle of law. Hearsay evidence is regarded as proof. (Ellis & ter Haar 2004: 153)

For Ellis and ter Haar, the adjudication of witchcraft disputes can only multiply injustices. However, not responding to the concerns of the population, a state risks losing its legitimacy as a provider of protection, as a representative of society's needs and interests and as the sole possessor of the legitimate use of violence.

Witchcraft and the Law

In a comparative analysis of a number of African states addressing the puzzle of resolving state legal norms with popular belief, Diwan (2004) identifies two distinct approaches to witchcraft: scepticism and sentencing. In his analysis, Diwan notes that though both approaches attempt to “integrate different value systems into a coherent rule of law”, neither approach is entirely successful (2004: 351). States, such as Ghana, which are sceptical towards witchcraft accusations and do not officially share witchcraft beliefs dominant among their populations, have largely retained colonial witchcraft ordinances in their original spirit. Those which actively try and sentence accused witches, such as Cameroon, have repealed or reinterpreted inherited laws and actively prosecute witchcraft practices aimed at causing harm.

In both cases, questions regarding the procedural processes of these trials has been subject to some preliminary but essential investigation. Unfortunately for the cases in this study, Ghana has not featured prominently in these studies, while Cameroon has received significant attention and is positioned as a leading exemplar of state interactions with witchcraft. In order to provide a more thorough comparison and greater insight into the experiences of sceptical states, the case of South Africa, which possesses a number of important parallels with Ghana, is discussed in depth by Diwan.

The primary question concerning state efforts to mediate, or in this case, adjudicate, witchcraft disputes and instances of violence, focuses on the process of judicial reasoning in these criminal cases (Diwan 2004). Where a state is sceptical of witchcraft and enacts Western norms of the state legal system, the punishment of individuals who have murdered an alleged witch highlights the conflict between the state and popular norms. Though liberal ideals of the integrity of the individual and individual rights may be upheld, these rulings act to stress the deep division between the state and the societies it rules over.

For Diwan, this conflict reduces the law's effectiveness, reinforcing the idea that the state seeks to protect witches, not people. Additionally, this conflict also illustrates the foreignness of the state, its inability to penetrate and alter the reality of its populace and ultimately, its continuing and limited efforts to establish hegemony. However, the alternative of punishing accused witches opens the state to a host of additional problems. Primary among these is the problem of evidence (Diwan 2004). How does one provide evidence of the invisible world? In cases where witches are tried, authorities must trust that “the possessed person, diviner, or witch doctor” does not have “opportunistic motives” for providing testimonies of “spectral evidence” (Diwan 2004: 360). In his research, Diwan finds that regardless of the official, state legal norms, presiding judges “do not give absolute superiority to such state legal norms” (Diwan 2004: 385). This finding raises the underlying question of belief among state actors.

Sceptical States

In Ghana, British colonial repression of witchcraft beliefs and practices began in 1906 (Olsen 2002). Throughout the colonial period, spiritual practices involving witchcraft belief were subject to repression which sought to limit witch hunting practices associated with cults and shrines, creating disorder and posing potential threats to the power of the state (Gray 2005). The official hostility of the colonial state towards witchcraft beliefs was sustained in the post-independence state, led by Kwame Nkrumah, a Western-educated theologian who placed Christianity at the centre of the project of consolidating the newly independent state.

The scepticism of the Ghanaian state towards witchcraft is shared by other states such as South Africa who also maintained its colonial era witchcraft suppression act. This law prohibits accusations of witchcraft, claims of having witchcraft powers, and the solicitation of witchcraft services. There, as in Ghana, spiritual practices associated with protection or detection of witches are also prohibited. As a result of this, people find themselves in what Tebbe (2007) calls “the worst possible combination”, where:

On the one hand, traditional techniques of resolving witchcraft disputes have been outlawed, while, on the other hand, those seen as committing acts of occult aggression have escaped both governmental and traditional punishment. (197)

In both states, instances of witchcraft-related violence in the form of vigilantism are common. In response to increasing levels of violence in South Africa and the recommendations of the Ralushai Commission, a report produced in 1996 from the investigation of witchcraft-related violence in the country, the government of South Africa is currently reviewing the constitutionality of its witchcraft suppression act. A number of other states, such as Malawi, have followed this lead and are currently investigating the benefits and costs of these colonial era laws.

As witchcraft belief is pervasive across the region, states which are unable to address this concern may appear to be out of touch with reality, or worse, beholden to the former colonial powers whose laws they maintain. Additionally, as noted by Tebbe (2007) and Ashforth (2006), the lack of confidence in the state places serious strain on the democratic legitimacy of these governments, while continuing violence undermines security of the person and ideals of social unity through an erosion of the value of citizenship. Compounding the disconnection experienced by people who are being represented by a state which does not officially believe in witchcraft and therefore does not share their reality is the common knowledge that state actors often do believe in witchcraft and utilize it in their private lives.

Thus, the court systems of these countries appear insincere in their seeming judgement of witchcraft beliefs as irrational fabrications. The criminalization of witchcraft accusations places courts at odd with the moral obligation of pointing out suspected witches and contrary to state efforts to discourage accusations, place suspected and accused witches at greater risk of physical harm (Tebbe 2007). Further, the criminalization of accusation eliminates the possibility for “informal, community-based, extra-judicial dispute resolution mechanisms” which may provide non-violent solutions to witchcraft conflict (Tebbe 2007: 381).

In Ghana, the state has recognized the need for a middle way between vigilantism and the slow and often inaccessible (due to financial constraints) resources of the court system and made efforts to provide access to alternative dispute resolution (ADR). Unfortunately, the availability of these services is limited, largely because of their reliance on larger judicial administrative resources or non-governmental organizations which are found mainly in urban centres. In some regions, access to ADR is provided by individual volunteers who have been trained in mediation and are able to provide a more

expedient and potentially epistemologically relevant response to witchcraft disputes. As noted by Chavunduka (1980), many people who accuse another of witchcraft are not seeking legal rulings on the conflict in question. In this view, accusations reflect social and psychological, not legal, conflicts which may be better addressed through mechanisms which foster discussion and negotiation, rather than provide sanctions. As noted by Pelgrim (2003), many African societies emphasize reconciliation in their legislative processes, whereas Western legal systems focus on punishment and judgement based on impartiality. As will be seen in chapter 4, Chavunduka suggests that traditional court systems, which prioritize social harmony and reconciliatory justice, may be preferable to legal court systems, which provide rulings and where one side is determined to right and the other wrong.

Sentencing States

In studies of African states which prosecute accused witches, authors have identified a number of concerns which frustrate the expectations of Western legal procedure. A primary problem in prosecuting witchcraft cases is the inability to clearly define witchcraft activities and offences. Much as this work struggles to define witchcraft, seeking a medium between academic understandings and uses found in the field, courts struggle to formulate legal definitions of witchcraft and risk alienating societies where these may differ from popular definitions (Mesaki 2009) which are much more mutable and context dependent (Geschiere 2006). As a result, the state becomes “entangled” in the ambiguities of witchcraft, where shifting meanings seem to “block any effort toward control” (Geschiere 2006: 223). By engaging witchcraft directly, the state engages in a conflict of discourses, where lived realities in diverse societies compete with a centralized project which seeks to manage a realm beyond the tangible.

The problem of differing discourses in societies of differing experience, leads to the concern that what is defined as witchcraft may be so vast that there are effectively no limitations on interpretations of events and actions in society and in court. While this concern is often expressed by those who are sceptical of the existence of witchcraft, assuming that genuine belief is non-existent, it remains that where courts which allow for witchcraft belief or which consider belief in witchcraft to be a mitigating factor, they may also be providing the opportunity to defendants to instrumentalize witchcraft discourse and give false testimonies. For example, an accused murderer may simply profess that they believed the victim was a witch in order to escape responsibility or seek a reduced sentence.

While this may seem to be a reasonable concern, the idea that witchcraft as a defence is open to manipulation fails to account for the social norms which place important limitations on popular understandings of witchcraft in a society. Though witchcraft is ubiquitous and unknowable, and its manifestations may differ from one society to another, not every or any act or event may be considered witchcraft. Though murdering a witch is not necessarily a deviation from social norms, in cases where witchcraft belief is a motivating factor, judges would “have to take into consideration the genuineness of a defendant’s belief and the reasonableness of the defendant’s crime according to a reasonable person from the defendant’s community where such witchcraft beliefs remain prevalent” (Diwan 2004: 380). In Diwan’s findings, from an analysis of witchcraft cases throughout the 1980s and 1990s, judges tend towards permitting witchcraft as a provocation “as long as the killing is not premeditated, is sudden and is not based solely on fear” (Diwan 2004: 377).

In Cameroon, the Penal Code of 1967 clearly outlines witchcraft offences in Section 251. Contrary to the case of Ghana, where witchcraft is absent in all forms from the Criminal Code of 1960, Cameroon’s code explicitly prohibits “any act of witchcraft, magic or divination liable to disturb public order or tranquillity, or to harm another person, property or substance” (Cameroon Penal Code 1967).

The section continues to outline the penalties for this offence where those found guilty are punishable with imprisonment for two to ten years and fines of one hundred to five thousand francs. Though the law does not provide for clear definitions of “witchcraft, magic and divination”, it is the sections emphasis on public order and tranquillity which cases the most concern (Fisiy 1998).

Section 251 clearly defines witchcraft as a continuing source of subversion for the state, enshrining the early independence assertion that the liberated African state was ready to confront African issues. From independence, the state of Cameroon has emphasized witchcraft as a threat to the state, arguing that it is both a source of disorder and a barrier to modernization. The dominance of this official discourse is reflect in court files reviewed by Fisiy and Geschiere (1994) who note the frequency of witchcraft cases “triggered by modern elements in the villages” (333). Though this work is critical of the facile correlation between modernity and witchcraft, it is nonetheless evident that state discourses linking modernization and witchcraft have had an impact on forming witchcraft conflicts.

The wording of the Penal Code Section 251 supports the interpretation of witchcraft attack as an attack on one's ability to modernize or develop in its direct inclusion of the protection of property. In Cameroonian cases, and in much of the public discourse, the ability of an individual to create independent wealth is most frequently the focus of spiritual insecurity and witchcraft attack. As a result, growing inequality within villages is often cited as a motivating factor in witchcraft cases. As noted by Fisiy and Geschiere, the majority of claimants in witchcraft cases were “richer farmers, teaches, municipal councillors, party officials” (1994: 333). However, it must be added that it is more likely that cases will be brought to court by those who have the financial resources to pursue lengthy trials and who are already informed of and therefore more likely to take advantage of state resources.

In many states in Africa, access to justice is notoriously hindered by slow court systems. In Cameroon, the courts are often criticized as being ineffective, where cases may take years to reach resolution (Geschiere 2006). For those involved in a case, attending court summons may mean long and costly travel to central towns where, upon their arrival, they may find sessions have been rescheduled or postponed (Geschiere 2006). As noted by Geschiere (2006), witchcraft cases often attract a great deal of attention in villages, leading to an increased sense of disorder and insecurity as lengthy court processes drag on. As witchcraft cases are a matter of life or death, it is understandable that the tension of an unresolved case would be high. It is also important that these cases be accurately judged, as it is intolerable in both cases to send an innocent to prison (Diwan 2004) and to return a known witch home to cause more harm.

In determining guilt in court cases in Cameroon, the problem of spectral evidence is addressed through the courts reliance on the expertise and testimonies of traditional authorities, in particular evidence provided by diviners. Courts may have officially appointed traditional practitioners who provide evidence as needed, as well as the inclusion of individuals who may be involved in a case. Here, diviners provide testimony of their participation in the witchcraft conflict and/or support the court in determining whether the act involved in a case may be considered witchcraft-related and whether an accused is in fact a witch. In some cases, diviners may also bring cases to court when a suspected witch is determined in their private practice to be in possession of witchcraft power (Fisiy & Geschiere 1990).

Instead of resolving the problem of proof, the inclusion of traditional authorities in court cases against witchcraft, particularly those whose powers to provide decisive testimony are derived from the same source of power as the accused witches, further exposes the court to the ambiguities of witchcraft. How might a diviner prove “beyond reasonable doubt” that an accused committed psychic or spiritual attacks unseen to the naked eye? (Geschiere 2006 230). As well, the inclusion of spiritually empowered experts, effectively as supernatural bureaucrats, into the state institutions and apparatus seems to conflict with the state's professed aim of eradicating witchcraft (Geschiere 2006). By incorporating

diviners as key witnesses, courts are inadvertently legitimizing spiritual powers and relying on the invisible world in their battle against witches (Geschiere 2006).

In acknowledgement of this fundamental conflict, courts and diviners have attempted to create a new discourse concerning official traditional practitioners. Diviners and healers which participate in the court system present themselves as “modern figures”, using only the official languages of Cameroon (French and English) in their testimonies, as well as relying on books on occultism, Eastern philosophy and their own formal education (Geschiere 2006). These performative acts demonstrate an intention to define the diviner or healer as part of the modern world, and therefore on the side of the state, and also the people of Cameroon, in their struggle against witchcraft. As noted by Geschiere, some diviners and healers go further to distance themselves from the un-modern association of the invisible world, rejecting the popular language of their roles (*nganga*, *sangoma*, *iyanga*) and adopting instead the title of “doctor” or emphasizing their membership in the government association of traditional healers (2006: 231).

In this way, diviners and healers who participate in state institutions not only attempt to detach themselves from popular understandings of their spiritual powers, they also emphasize their support (or seeming support) of official state discourses and their intention to use their abilities towards state consolidation, not subversion. Thus the court systems and the inclusion of traditional authorities in these systems, plays an important role in the “government's campaign to establish its hegemony” over the realm of the invisible (Fisiy & Geschiere 1990: 148). Unfortunately, as will be seen, though courts may try and convict accused witches, the courts themselves, and by extension the state, remain unable to limit or neutralize witchcraft powers (Geschiere 1997).

As argued by Geschiere (2006), state efforts against witchcraft may be counterproductive in two ways. First, trials serve to emphasize both the presence and danger of witches in society, aggravating fears and insecurities. Second, the sentencing of witches to lengthy terms in prison fails to address the long-term danger posed by the witch as it is often thought that by the time a witch is released, they will have become even more powerful and more dangerous. As prisons in Cameroon are well known for their brutal conditions, including frequent torture, severe overcrowding and lacking the basic necessities of life, surviving a sentence may be thought of as proof of one's resourcefulness and strength. Witches who survive these conditions and return home must be treated as considerable threats. Thus, rather than weakening witchcraft and the population's belief in its power, it may be argued that the intervention of courts can instead reinforce these beliefs and insecurities, at the same time as it exposes the courts and judges to the logic of witchcraft and potentially to conspiracy (Geschiere 1997).

Judges, like many other successful public servants, are subject to the suspicion held by many Cameroonians that they are powerful because they are implicated in witchcraft (Geschiere 2006). Inconsistencies in rulings may appear to the public to be the result of collusion with more or less powerful influences rather than the result of dutifully applied law. More problematically, suspicions may also result from consistency where differing social norms towards confessed witches may be seen as being overlooked by courts which uniformly convict those who are found guilty. For example, in southeastern Cameroon, witches who confess to their crimes are often rehabilitated and re-socialized rather than punished (Diwan 2004). The harsh sentences imposed in courts in the southeastern region depart from these practices and may reduce the willingness of individuals to engage the state in witchcraft conflicts as a result of their “reluctance to accept the new normative orientation that has emerged in postcolonial African law.” (Diwan 2004: 386)

Another problem for the state of Cameroon's official discourse against witchcraft is the common knowledge among the population that members of the state elite are themselves embedded in the invisible world (Fisiy & Geschiere 1990). As noted earlier, in order to hold positions of power in many African societies, individuals must draw on supernatural resources. In Cameroon, this view is much the

same, where state actors rely on witchcraft for protection against possible rivals and as a deterrence against potential attacks from their own village, where their status of *évolué* is assumed to create great jealousy and envy (Fisiy & Geschiere 1990).

The increasing emphasis of the state on witchcraft as a form of subversion to the state, development and modernization, and as a force which undermines “the position of the state elite” (Geschiere 2006: 233), in an environment of suspicion and distrust, may appear to many as a distraction from the guilt of state actors. As in many conspiracy oriented theories, the more suspected parties profess their innocence, the more guilty they appear (West & Sanders 2003). For state institutions such as courts, there seems to be no easy answer. Whereas in sceptical states witchcraft-related violence and responding vigilantism is motivated by a sense that the state is unwilling to address popular concerns, sentencing states which profess a belief in witchcraft ultimately face similarly delegitimizing disorder, as “the modern state is drawn into a terrain where it is not equipped to exercise control” (Geschiere 2006: 237). Though the state wields the instruments of law and the powers of the courts against witchcraft, these efforts, in the end, expose the powerlessness of the state in confronting the invisible (Geschiere 2006).

As will be seen in other chapters, an additional consequence of this inability is the increasing role of alternative sources of protection, notably “the reaffirmation of chief's traditional prerogatives” and the proliferation of Pentecostal churches across the continent (Geschiere 2006: 236-238). For the state, both these sources of protection pose further risk to the consolidation of state power. According to Geschiere, the example of Cameroon provides a persuasive argument against calls by those such as Ludsin, Hund and Ashforth, for the state to recognize witchcraft as a reality. For Geschiere, exposing the state to the ambiguities of witchcraft only further erodes the legitimacy of the state, causing more damage “than if the state had abstained” (Geschiere 2006: 238).

Policing

The problem of witchcraft-related violence in the state system is most commonly and logically (according to the logic of the state) addressed as a criminal issue. In Ghana, harassment, slander, assault, torture or murders resulting from witchcraft attacks are dealt with as criminal matters according to Western legal traditions. Unlike in Cameroon, cases which do not involve an offence outlined in Ghana's criminal code, such as causing an illness or harassing an individual in their dreams, are simply not addressed by the state. However, where cases may produce a conflict recognized by the state, such as a spouse seeking divorce on the grounds that their partner is a witch, these matters will often be investigated first by the police. For example, in northern Ghana, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit often receives cases under the legal definition of domestic dispute or violence which, upon investigation, produce claims of witchcraft attack or witchcraft accusation.

However, as noted earlier, the state's unwillingness to acknowledge the existence of witchcraft leads many Ghanaians to perceive the available institutions as being incapable of addressing witchcraft concerns. The overall lack of confidence in the ability of the Ghanaian state is not seen only in witchcraft cases, but also in cases of theft, where suspected thieves are frequently dealt with upon discovery by the immediate populace. It is not uncommon to find images of lynched thieves in the pages in Ghana's daily newspapers. I have witnessed crowds beating suspected thieves in public places. While vigilantism in Ghana is much more pronounced than in Cameroon, additional forms of better hidden violence occurs in each country. In these cases, families or villages may conceal the existence of abusive practices such as those of deliverance churches or traditional practitioners from the broader public.

In both countries, individuals continue to address their concerns regarding witchcraft outside of the purview of the state. Indeed, in many countries in Africa, vigilantism remains a concern for states and scholars. In his work on vigilantism in Ghana, Adrinkah (2005) notes that this phenomenon is largely fuelled by the perceived incapacity of the formal legal system to maintain order. Further entrenching this practice is the growing acceptability of vigilantism as an appropriate practice, as alternative dispute resolution mechanisms are less and less available (Adrinkah 2005).

For police services, tasked with maintaining law and order at the local level, vigilantism presents a serious problem. For the officers who participated in Adrinkah's study, vigilantism is indeed a response to the lack of protection provided by state agencies. As well, rising crime coupled with a corrupt justice system, including "police corruption and judicial malfeasance", creates a perfect storm for instant justice (Adrinkah 2005: 420). However, officers also cited people's ignorance of the law and proper procedures as a contributing factor (Adrinkah 2005). In this regard, officers, as well as some academics, suggest that public education may help reduce instances of vigilantism, an effort currently underway in Accra where billboards against instant justice may be found along main motorways.

Unfortunately, educating people against instant justice is again not as simple as it may appear. In their study on genital-shrinking violence across West Africa, Afi Dzokoto & Adams (2005) found that zero tolerance messages from law enforcement may help reduce some forms of violence, however, it may also lead to other forms of injustice. In Ghana, in particular, where the state is sceptical of witchcraft, failing to address the distress of those affected by the crimes of witches or thieves, or both in this case, may cause further harm to those suffering from the attack (Afi Dzokoto & Adams 2005). Rather than punishing those participating in the lynching, these authors suggest finding alternative means to address the anxieties and losses experienced by both sides.

As demonstrated by a number of cases, public education efforts aimed at convincing people that witchcraft does not exist meet limited success (Afi Dzokoto & Adams 2005; Green 2005). Though Afi Dzokoto and Adams do advocate for public awareness efforts addressing instant justice specifically, contesting this form of vigilantism serves to remove yet another mechanism of mediating witchcraft-related violence available to people. Without significant improvement in the ability of court systems and the responsiveness of police forces, people would be left with few alternatives. Further, the usefulness of vigilantism is not always lost on state officials who may passively permit or actively support this practice. As in the case of Tanzania, vigilantism is frequently condoned as a cost-saving measure for the state (Fleisher 2000). In effect, the state is saved the trouble of eliminating internal rivals by permitting, either actively or passively, the use of violence by state sanctioned vigilantes. In this example, Tanzanian state officials choose to permit witchcraft-related violence where it serves the interests of the state.

Another significant barrier to effectively addressing witchcraft-related violence through policing is the conundrum that witchcraft beliefs are also held by many African police officers. This contradiction has received significant scholarly attention in South Africa. Again, many of the themes encountered in the application of courts to the problem of witchcraft-related violence are seen in policing. In particular, as South Africa shares the official scepticism of Ghana's legal apparatus, it is a common perception among people that their beliefs and experiences are being ignored by state officials who focus on the visible facts of a crime (Petrus 2011). This problem is exacerbated by South Africa's history. As South Africa was ruled by a white minority under apartheid less than two decades ago, the application of laws seen to be "ethnocentric and Western-biased" act to further alienate people from the state (Petrus 2011: 2).

In Ghana, as in South Africa, there are also cases where, despite state claims to the contrary, accused witches attest to the reality of their power and who confess to using this power to cause others harm. In his research, Petrus encountered such a case where a woman claimed to have infected several

people with HIV and proceeded to accurately predict the time of their deaths. According to Petrus's account, the woman confessed her deeds without coercion or threat of harm and the woman was later put to death by vigilantes. In this case the woman who voluntarily confessed to being a witch would have been seen by her society as a “the real criminal”, not the individuals who participated in her murder, likely including relatives of the people she claimed to have killed (Petrus 2011: 3). In this case, the actions of police officers against the individuals who murdered the self-proclaimed witch may lack legitimacy in eyes of society.

The witchcraft-related crime of ritual murder, one which is viewed ambiguously in both Ghana and Cameroon, is also common in South Africa, where these acts are referred to as muthi murders. As noted earlier, the source of the ambiguity of ritual murder lies in the ability of these practices to create outcomes which are beneficial for society. Though the murders are incredibly violent and may involve dismemberment, sometimes while victims are still alive, and rape where the victims are female, those unaffected by the direct loss of a loved one and/or less at risk of being victimized by these crimes, may view these acts with neutrality. In Petrus's research on muthi murders in South Africa, individuals responding to these crimes stressed their support for the practices of traditional healers whose instructions may have motivated these crimes. For many, traditional healers are important authorities in their societies as they continue to provide necessary spiritual protection to those in need. This however does not mean that these murders are not viewed ambiguously; as in the case of a number of murders that had occurred shortly before I arrived in Cameroon, many people expressed outrage at the lack of action by police which was expressed in media.

Thus, the prosecution of individuals for committing such acts may not always meet agreement in a society. As well, defining ritual murder is not necessarily a simple task as despite its name, ritual murder often lack clear evidence of ritual activity (Petrus 2011). Bodies that are found missing limbs or organs are often assumed by locals to be victims of ritual murder. However, significant incentive exists in police reporting to avoid applying this label. First, as witchcraft is not recognized by the state, these murders have not been identified as witchcraft-related and have remained part of the general crime statistics of the state. As well, reporting ritual murder highlights the existence of these incidences and may draw suspicion from the local population, leading to accusations and witch hunts. Finally, suspicion towards police officers, state officials and successful businessmen as being the primary solicitors of witchcraft powers and therefore the primary customers of ritual murder services may also motivate officers to under report these cases.

As noted by Hooper (2012) clear cases of muthi murder may be deliberately re-categorized to address these concerns and to present the appearance that ritual murder does not occur as frequently as suspected. For example, the death of child found dead in a river was treated as a drowning even though the child's hands were bound and his ears and lips had been removed. In this way, the state's lack of willingness to address witchcraft-related violence in its various forms creates grey areas where police, and later judges, are able to interpret and re-interpret crimes according varying understandings and motivations. In cases where complaints are made without strong physical evidence, such as causing another illness or striking someone with lightning, different understandings of evidence may exist between the law, complainants and police officers in their official capacity (Petrus 2011), though their personal views may differ from their professional responsibilities.

In South Africa and Ghana, police officers are aware of this tension. In a study of the South Africa Police Service, Pelgrim (2003) found that members of the force felt that witchcraft suppression legislation effectively criminalized belief in witchcraft. As a result of this, officers felt that they must lie at work and hide their own beliefs in witchcraft. These police officers find themselves in the difficult position of having to enforce laws which are hostile to their own worldviews and enact these laws against populations with whom they may personally agree, but must officially punish (Pelgrim

2003). Further, police officers, like the population, are also aware of the limitations and costs of the legal system and the excessive delays in the judicial process (Ferreira 2004). In some cases it may be expected that, in addition to personal sentiments against advancing a witchcraft case, officers are also aware that it is possible that these cases will not be resolved in a timely or fair fashion.

The willingness of the state to engage in combating witchcraft appears from this perspective to be a somewhat self-defeating endeavour. The state is not the most appropriate actor to be addressing these concerns (Fisiy 1998), yet it remains that states such as Cameroon are heavily involved and deeply implicated in witchcraft discourse, violence and even witchcraft practices. Even for those states which seek to dismiss witchcraft, populations demand attention whether through vigilantism or appeal. As a result, it seems that states are unable to avoid addressing witchcraft concerns. Conversely, rumours of state involvement in witchcraft-related activities permeate the continent, embroiling states in witchcraft discourse whether they intend to be engaged or not. However, as suggested earlier, underlying the motivations of states to deny or engage witchcraft is a common concern: how to effectively consolidate power when power is contested by an unknowable force?

Political Uses of Witchcraft

As seen earlier in a previous chapter, the epistemological foundations of power in many African societies lie in the invisible world. Power, as the foundation of the political, is therefore supernatural in origin and, by extension, the political is a manifestation of the invisible world (Ellis & ter Haar 2004). Witchcraft, then, is an inherently political activity, the manipulation of which, directly through invocation or indirectly through discourse, becomes a strategic undertaking. In contestations of power, the invisible world may sway outcomes and empower one side over another. For states seeking to formalize their power and entrench the state system within African societies, controlling the invisible is an essential undertaking. Whether states attempt to negate witchcraft through denial of its existence or co-opt witchcraft as an enemy to overcome, witchcraft remains an important political tool.

The awareness of witchcraft as a political tool has motivated states to adopt various tactics in their attempts to consolidate and exercise power. For example, in Kenya, the state has treated witchcraft as a “direct avenue to state power, rather than a challenge to it” (Luongo 2010: 578). In Kenya, during elections, it is not uncommon to find election material accusing competing candidates of using witchcraft, or those who lose seats in government to claim this is the result of voters being “bewitched” (Luongo 2010: 577). Even post-election violence may be blamed on witchcraft, suggesting that rioters were the victims of curses (Luong 2010). From these examples, Luongo traces the discursive practices through which state officials are able to discredit opposition, distract from their own failures and the resulting disorder through an appropriation of witchcraft belief.

This practice, according to Luongo, has a long history in Kenya, where challenges to early colonial and now post-colonial state authority are dismissed or de-legitimized by the state as the product of witchcraft. State officials distance themselves from these practices by emphasizing their modern, educated and Christian worldviews and advancing an official discourse of witchcraft as “anti-modern” and essentially a condition of voluntary primitivism (Luongo 2010: 581). In Cameroon, similar discursive practices associate witchcraft with poverty, the ineffective implementation of policies and the overall inability of Cameroon to develop. The state's co-optation of witchcraft also permits state officials to use the threat of witchcraft to their advantage. A crude example of this being a political candidate who married a Pygmy woman (Pygmies are often thought to be more spiritual and therefore more likely to be witches) and threatened to send witches to eat constituents who did not vote him (Field notes 01/04/13). The candidate was elected.

In Ghana, witchcraft discourse may also be instrumentalized to justify removing politicians from power by retroactively casting witchcraft accusations on their reputation. An example of this may be drawn from the rumours and stories that appeared in Ghanaian media sources and which were supplied the 1966 military coup plotters who ended Nkrumah's reign (Ellis & ter Haar 2004). In these stories, the military, which was supported by the American Central Intelligence Agency sought to discredit Nkrumah with tales of the former president's "special room" where "bloody rituals" were performed (Ellis & ter Haar 2004: 91). These rumours may have served two purposes: in justifying the removal of a murderous leader corrupted by witchcraft whose continue rule would be an offence to the modern state and in demonstrating the formidable power of the military in overcoming a spiritually protected adversary.

As noted by Ellis and ter Haar (2004) in their extensive review of witchcraft and state politics in Africa, politicians must be versed in "a variety of political languages" as their responsibilities may vary from international negotiation to consulting a diviner. Politicians are therefore required to be adaptable to spheres of governance which are commonly regarded in the West as being "virtually incompatible" (Ellis & ter Haar 2004: 69). While it may appear that many state officials adopt the discourse of witchcraft for strategic purposes, it must also be acknowledged that many African heads of state "believe in the power of the invisible world" and rely heavily its protection or performative value in their rule (Ellis & ter Haar 2004: 86). Rumours of a state leader's spiritual power not only legitimizes their ability to rule, they also construct important social connections between the population and the politician. When political elites use witchcraft discourse to mobilize voters and organize constituencies (Ellis & ter Haar 2005) they are not only demonstrating their power, they are also enacting shared social norms regarding the appropriate use of this power.

Even in sceptical states such as Ghana, witchcraft is frequently referred to during elections. During the 2000 general election, Ellis and ter Haar (2005) note that numerous candidates were "alleged to be using *juju*" to secure election. These rumours were persistent during my second time in Ghana leading up to the 2012 presidential election, where stories of witchcraft were rife. In some cases, individuals referred to the long history of witchcraft in office, comparing previous president's records. For example, it is common knowledge that after Rawlings left Osu Castle, the presidential residence in Accra, Kufuor was required to dismantle Rawling's sacrificial chamber in order to build his own. Media sources also abound with accusations, such as the one made by Alhaji Alidu on television and reproduced in print, arguing that Rawling's support of the National Democratic Party, despite being a founding member of the National Patriotic Party, could only be explained through witchcraft (Adeniran 2012). Rawlings, according to Alidu, was "under a spell" and needed the (tongue-in-cheek) prayers of the challenging National Democratic Congress's members (Adeniran 2012: 3).

Similarly, Paul Biya, the long-term President of Cameroon's authoritarian government, is well known for being "particularly interested in esoteric cults" and has been linked through financial transactions to obscure cults such as the Order of the Solar Temple (Ellis & ter Haar 2004: 77). While spiritual power is "indispensable for politicians", it remains that the invisible world is one of incredible danger (Geschiere 1997: 131). Because any person may seek to "communicate with the spirit world and derive power from that source", witchcraft present a "constant threat to the ideological order" of the state and its political stability (Ellis & ter Haar 2004: 88).

Witchcraft as a source of power demonstrates "little respect" for official structures, giving African leaders reason to fear "spiritual power falling under the control of groups or individuals that escape their own influence" (Ellis & ter Haar 2004: 88-89). This fear has motivated many leaders, colonial and post-colonial, to seek to suppress witchcraft beliefs and practices where these have subverted "the state monopoly over legitimate violence" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2004: 189). However, as will be seen in the following section, these efforts are much more than campaigns to regain control

of violence, they are also efforts to effectively control culture (Comaroff & Comaroff 2004), ideology and reality.

Witchcraft as a Challenge to the State

In her study on witchcraft and state formation in Kenya, Ciekawy (1998) looks at how colonial and post-colonial administrations utilized witchcraft discourse. According to her findings, the state employed witchcraft as a “disciplinary technology with five component practices”, which she refers to as “witchcraft technologies of power” (Ciekawy 1998: 120). These five practices are: the state categorization of rituals in order to prosecute practitioners; the policing of rituals by administrative agents; the “creation of a set of ideas and practices about mystical harm”, combining colonial, European and Christian practices that “strategically merges with” local discourse; the construction of “collective moral discourses” among the population, elite and state agents “about ‘the problem of witchcraft’”; and the construction and naming of individuals as witches (Ciekawy 1998: 120).

These practices together form a discourse of power which is “employed by people who have access to particular political and economic resources of the state”, which allow them to exercise a dominating influence on the politics of witchcraft (Ciekawy 1998: 123). The patterns of this power, which Ciekawy identifies, are its tendencies towards the centralization and hierarchicalization of ideas and practices related with witchcraft, an effort which the author notes as having begun with early colonial missionary practices. It makes sense that early colonial efforts were threatened by the belief in witchcraft, as hatred for witches presents a scathing critique of “inequality and the human agents of exploitation where excessive desire for wealth and power, and the fulfillment of one's desire at another person's expense are dominant themes” (Ciekawy 1998:123).

Because of the pervasiveness of these elements of witchcraft, it is important that states attempt to influence these beliefs and where possible, shape “imaginings concerning magical harm” in ways which are more beneficial, or at least less threatening, to the state project (Ciekawy 1998: 132). In order to exert greater control over witchcraft, the state has been required to create stable definitions or understandings of this power. In defining witches, for example, states have constructed rigid and unchanging categorizations where more fluid and contextual ones existed. A consequence of this is the inability of suspected or accused witches to “lose” their identification with witchcraft after confession or trial, thereby preventing individuals who have been neutralized from returning home as they may have in the past (Ciekawy 1998).

In Cameroon, another outcome of the state employing witchcraft discourse, in this case relating to the construction of witchcraft as a threat to public order, is the increasing securitization of society. In Rowlands and Warnier's (1998) study of Cameroon, they found that government campaigns warning of the dangers of witchcraft served to place blame for violence on weak policing, instill a fear of violence and economic crisis among the elite and convince the broader population of the fragility of social order. The logic of these arguments attempts to direct the individual and society to accept the necessity of a strong state presence by indicating that “constant regulation” is required against the reality of witchcraft which is “the destroyer of social order” (Rowlands & Warnier 1998: 131). The fear of witchcraft and the blame placed on witches therefore distracts from the state's role in increasing disorder and violence as it institutes repressive policies while further penetrate social relations in its effort to protect people at risk.

In her conclusion, Ciekawy is pessimistic about the “products of the witchcraft-statecraft dialectic and its potential to legitimate the inhumanity of the state's project”, including in this negative outlook the ways in which “African people, in response to state domination and global forces of

capitalism, use discourses of magical harm to understand, explain, and direct action toward forms of inequality, violence, and disorder” (Ciekawy 1998:134-135). Historical accounts of the state combating witchcraft tend to support Ciekawy's pessimism. In the following brief examples, witchcraft discourses used by the state and those contesting state power have perpetuated conflicts.

Zanzibar

Arnold (2006) analyses a period of conflict in Pemba following the Zanzibar Revolution from 1964 to 1967, during which the government of Zanzibar and traditional authorities were in competition “over the nature of reality” (216). In this time, known as the “Days of Caning”, the government sought to aggressively enforce “a new ideological and literal 'reality'” through policies which targeted traditional authorities, who defined and manipulated the real, and subjected them to public humiliation, torture and death (Arnold 2006: 216). Numerous elders, empowered with spiritual sight, were systematically repressed, though outright prohibition of witchcraft was dismissed as an option due to the government's awareness of its important role in society (Arnold 2006). Today, the government continues to claim authority over the real and has even incorporated some traditional authorities to act as the eyes of the state, thus employing the invisible world in state surveillance practices (Arnold 2006).

Benin

In 1970, Benin's government instituted significant reforms as part of a modernization scheme which “sought to uproot the nation's colonial and neocolonial political and economic infrastructure by eradicating the country's population of witches” (Kahn 2011: 4). The rationale for attacking witches and advancing a state-wide witch hunt was that “feudal” property owners were empowered by witchcraft and used this power to maintain an oppressive hold on the peasant population (Kahn 2011: 4). For the Marxist-Leninist regime, peasants, once freed from the threat of witchcraft violence, would join the “the socialist restructuring of the country” and contribute to the “scientific development of the nation-state” (Kahn 2011: 4-5). As in other cases, the state attempted to construct a binary opposition between witchcraft as anti-modern and the state as modern. In Benin, this effort produced a distinct “politics of exclusion” where people were motivated to alienate or Other themselves from their own beliefs and reject these as part of the state's attempt to police and control disorder (Kahn 2011). As a result, the people of Benin were forced to confront questions of their own belonging in a state which identified their realities and practices as outside of social norms (Kahn 2011).

In defining the witch as a threat to the state, the government unintentionally reinforced the potency of this threat and its ability to contest state sovereignty (Kahn 2011). The state further entrenched the power of witchcraft by employing witch-finders, whose abilities to find witches could only be spiritual. As the witch hunts continued, the ambiguity of the invisible world was inescapable as it became more and more difficult “to distinguish between witches, witch-finders, and state officials” (Kahn 2011: 7-8). Kahn stresses the irony that by the time Kérékou's government fell in 1989, state officials at all levels were “subject to the same witchcraft accusations that they had initially sought to monopolize as a weapon of the state” (Kahn 2011: 25). In terms of discourse, the result of the state's effort to distance itself from witchcraft produced “new hybrid political arrangements antithetical to the original structure of the state's revolutionary project” (Kahn 2011: 25).

Cameroon

The government of Cameroon has long viewed witchcraft as central to the state-building process (Rowlands & Warnier 1998). In 1985, three years after Biya succeeded Ahidjo as President, the government commissioned a study to determine whether or not witchcraft was a “hindrance to

development” (Fisiy 1998: 145). The results of this study concluded, as the state already believed, that witchcraft was a barrier to development and “one of the most serious political issues to be tackled by state authorities” (Rowlands & Warnier 1998: 128). As noted earlier, emphasis was placed on the tension between rural families and urban elites, where jealous villagers limited the ability of “political entrepreneurs” to establish legitimate relations of representation in the villages (Fisiy 1998: 146). The expansion of state power beyond urban centres was therefore subverted by witchcraft which undermined the hegemonic project of the state and drove civil servants away from their postings out of fear of attack (Fisiy 1998; Rowlands & Warnier 1998).

With witchcraft determined to be an open and official (Rowlands & Warnier 1998) hindrance to the state, officials were permitted and increasingly willing to intervene in witchcraft conflicts (Fisiy & Geschiere 1994). Efforts to advance state hegemony “to cover this treacherous field” (Fisiy & Geschiere 1994) led state actors into dispute with traditional authorities (Geschiere 1997). As noted by Geschiere (1997), traditional authorities in some Cameroonian societies play a key role in classifying and controlling the invisible world. State actors' initiatives to co-opt this role, particularly where concerns of social inequality were voiced, brought the association of power and witchcraft to the forefront and drew out people's distrust of any form of power (Geschiere 1997). Geschiere, in his research, found that this “deep mistrust” among the Maka of Cameroon supported the perception that elite power had grown to an unprecedented scale, and has in fact, exceeded acceptable limits (1997: 95).

Adding to this distrust are the “uncertainties of modern politics and state authoritarianism” in Cameroon, where sudden policy shifts and secrecy create an atmosphere supportive of rumour (Geschiere 1997: 200). Despite attempts by the state to direct rumours, they are, like witchcraft, a commons where “the imaginary” escapes state authority (Geschiere 1997: 99). The intense suspicions held by Cameroonians against the Cameroonian state are proof of this. Though witchcraft discourse may be instrumentalized to shift responsibility from the state, in Cameroon the widespread belief that the government is “infested with witches” who have become rich and powerful through the “illegitimate assumption of power” weakens support for the state (Ellis & ter Haar 1998: 198). This belief also reinforces the view that people “must improvise their own defence” against witchcraft (Ellis & ter Haar 1998: 198).

Case Studies

In this section, I will discuss my own experience and findings researching witchcraft-related violence in the field. In fall 2012 and late winter 2013, I made the transition from reading other authors' analyses and findings in the field to engaging people directly on the subject. This brought me back to the world of confusion that I had previously encountered, and forced me to confront my own assumptions about reality. As a researcher, moving from theory into the lives and experiences of participants also meant crossing a threshold; from inaction to interaction. The interviews ranged from lighthearted conversations such as the oddity of the unknown or of uncertainty and innocuous gossip, to the more sinister such as witchcraft paranoia and experiences of personal and spiritual insecurity. In the following sections and chapters where the case studies are considered, I hope to provide an accurate summary of the views expressed by respondents and informants.

Ghana

When the Ghanaian state addresses the issue of witchcraft-related violence, officials tend to

focus on the witch camps in the Northern Region. This emphasis is the result of international attention and intense pressure by international non-governmental organizations calling on the state to address this phenomenon which has received a disproportionate amount of press. As witch camps exist in other countries and are only one manifestation of witchcraft-related violence, their prominence in the global imagination of witchcraft and Africa is notable, and the Ghanaian state has responded to the international pressure which has resulted from this attention. The government has declared its intention to close the witch camps, conceding to the criticisms that they violate human rights standards.

The government of Ghana officially condemns the existence of the witch camps but rarely addresses the issue of witchcraft belief or violence directly. Instead, modern liberal terms are employed, highlighting the conflict between the human rights of the accused and the criminal natures of offences, and the state's obligation to respect and difficulty in dealing with cultural practices. Often, the Northern region is referred to as being of another culture than the state, where traditional practices are maintained by societies which have yet to modernize, particularly in terms of wealth, education and social norms. By focusing on the witch camp phenomenon, state officials downplay important features of witchcraft-related violence which occur outside of the camps and reinforce international and national perceptions of the North as an impoverished, underdeveloped and under-resourced region.

These associations are also common among my non-state respondents who are familiar with and accustomed to discussing the witch camp phenomenon as a feature of witchcraft-related violence in Ghana. However, where respondents raised the issue of the Northern witch camps, they also frequently stressed that there is simply much more witchcraft in the North and as a result witches are much more common. This is one of many regional associations and stereotypes applied across Ghana. For example, respondents from the western and central regions associated easterners with witchcraft and ritual murder, though both are prevalent in all regions.

As well, natural features of the landscape in Ghana may also be associated with witchcraft practices, leading certain areas to be considered rife with witches. A river in the Volta region is rumoured to flow with blood at times, leading to the common perception that people who live near it are more likely to be witches, whether as cause or effect. Other natural features may indicate fewer witches in the region, such as the Tongo Hills in the northeast where accused witches may come to confess their powers to the caves and have them neutralized. These distinctions and popular perceptions, however, are greatly overshadowed by the witch camps, though increasingly the role of deliverance churches has also attracted some attention within and without Ghana.

The following analysis of respondents' views towards the role of the state in mediating witchcraft-related violence in Ghana is separated into four sections. The first presents views of state actors towards their own roles as well as towards the roles of other institutions addressed in this research. The second provides a summary of respondents' support for state engagement and their reasons for this. The third outlines criticisms of the state's involvement in mediating witchcraft-related violence and the final fourth section considers these concerns more broadly and looks at respondents' views on how the state may best proceed.

The state encounters witchcraft-related violence most publicly and probably most frequently through the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice. Known by its acronym, CHRAJ, the Commission was established in 1993 with the intention to investigate complaints of human rights violations, including limitations on freedoms, injustices, corruption, abuse of power and unfair treatment by state officials (Quashigah 2007). More succinctly, as stated on its website, CHRAJ serves to “protect fundamental human rights and ensure good governance” (CHRAJ 2013). The services of the Commission are free and it receives tens of thousands of complaints a year, though the vast majority are dismissed (Quashigah 2007). CHRAJ cannot provide rulings on cases as it does not have judicial authority; however, its decisions in cases may be used in court and contribute as “the

basis for interpretation of constitutional provisions on human rights” (Quashigah 2007: 35-36).

CHRAJ also offers its services nationally and offices are accessible in the main cities of each region with numerous district offices which provide access to rural locations. As a human rights institution, CHRAJ receives numerous witchcraft-related complaints. These complaints are interpreted and categorized by CHRAJ as violence against women, gender-based violence or domestic violence. This emphasis reinforces and reflects the state's disbelief in witchcraft, where the only form of violence possible is false accusations and its resulting consequences. It also notably marginalizes experiences of witchcraft-related violence which fall outside of this definition, as well as accusations experienced by men, which though less frequent, do occur.

CHRAJ¹⁶ considers itself to be at the forefront of the witchcraft problem and credits itself for having brought the issue to the level of popular debate in Ghana. In its work investigating cultural practices which harm older women, CHRAJ identified witchcraft as a primary concern. CHRAJ and the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, identified culture as the most significant barrier to addressing witchcraft-related violence. Therefore working with communities to address this cultural problem is a stated priority of many government institutions (Peacefmonline 2013).

CHRAJ has suggested that the government commission an official investigation into the phenomenon and attempt to assess what witchcraft is, why there are witch camps in the North but not elsewhere, and what can be done to improve the situation. In its time working on the issue, CHRAJ has found that its own information on the subject is incomplete and its education efforts, rather than reducing instances, there has been an increase in cases. This is blamed in part on international factors, in particular accused witches entering Ghana from Togo and the failure of people to abandon their fears and accept the enlightened messages against witchcraft belief.

In CHRAJ's work, the witch camps represent a unique and problematic form of discrimination where women who are uneducated, economically vulnerable and isolated (having no strong family ties) are targeted by false accusations. However, what is stressed as most problematic is that the women who accused are subjected to cultural practices, enacted by people in the Northern region (though also elsewhere, including outside of Ghana) and which bypass the formal legal system. In short, sentencing women as witches is most unjust because it is not ordinary courts determining the sentences of the weak and vulnerable, but ordinary people.

Though CHRAJ recognizes that there are limits to the ability of the courts to address cases of witchcraft accusation. For example, in witchcraft cases, people are reluctant to provide evidence in support of the accused, who may even have difficulty finding a lawyer. Two suggestions were made by CHRAJ in response to this, the first that summary trials may expedite resolution of accusation cases and second that the state should be working beyond legislation. The government, rather than depending on laws alone, should confront the phenomenon of witchcraft-related violence directly.

CHRAJ relies heavily on the 1992 Constitution in its work and points to numerous forms of legislation, including the criminal code, international conventions and laws against domestic violence as evidence that Ghana is legally equipped to fully address the crime of witchcraft accusations. In addition, to complement legal efforts, human rights education, by CHRAJ through cases or presentations, and by other NGOs and state institutions, which are increasingly seeking to educate and sensitize people to the problem of witchcraft-related violence.

CHRAJ views the work of NGOs positively as they provide essential services such as potable water and health insurance registration assistance for the accused. In particular, some NGOs work directly with traditional authorities and negotiate with villages to allow accused witches to return home. There are also a number of government programs which may be directed towards the needs of women

¹⁶ Ghana, State official, 09/10/12

in the witch camps. The Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) program under the Social Welfare Department provides income supplements to vulnerable people. However it has yet to be comprehensively extended to the witch camps inhabitants and many are still unregistered.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development began the LEAP program in 2008¹⁷. The program provides bi-monthly cash instalments to impoverished households, such as those affected by leprosy and accused witches in the witch camps. This program, however, is not intended to be a long-term solution. According to the state official interviewed, the problem of witchcraft-related violence lies outside the scope of the Department of Social Welfare whose mediation services of counselling and psycho-social support would require stronger legislative backing than they currently enjoy in order to be able to contribute productively to ending accusations.

As well, varying forms of ostracism and discrimination related to witchcraft are difficult to target through planned government programming. For example, in one case shared during my interview with CHRAJ¹⁸, a suspected witch and her family were prevented from entering their home when the landlord locked the house while they were out. Stigma remains a pervasive problem, therefore education is necessary to CHRAJ's work. Religious organizations play an important role in educating people, including warnings against accusations in their sermons and in some cases providing mediation services. As well, traditional authorities may contribute to this work by defusing conflicts where the belief in witchcraft cannot be rooted out. In these cases, CHRAJ views chiefs as key stakeholders; where they provide spiritual resolution as well as education on diseases often linked to witchcraft.

However, in cases where a chief is not supportive of CHRAJ policies and participates in banishing accused witches, they will be prosecuted by law. Where chiefs do not support the policies of the state, CHRAJ considers this to be the result of inadequate education, and more specifically, illiteracy. Other traditional authorities are also viewed less favourably, in particular those involved in the banishment or internment of accused witches. CHRAJ views the participation of traditional authorities in the witch camps as exploitative, where they benefit from payments in fowls and other animals, direct payment in cash and from the accused witches labour. As well, traditional authorities are seen to use fear of violent reprisals to keep accused witches in the camps, by convincing them that they will be lynched if they return home. For CHRAJ, chiefs in the camps keep accused witches there and resist the closure of the camps in order to keep the accused under their control.

The most appropriate response to the witchcraft accusations, for CHRAJ, is to involve the police and ensure that instances of violence are investigated. However, CHRAJ acknowledges the limited capacity of the police in Ghana, where it can take months for an incident to be investigated, by which time the evidence has been destroyed. In order to address these delays, the interviewee suggested that District Assemblies may be empowered through by-laws to make arrests and begin this process. This effort would also be complemented by a mediation system, including traditional authorities and CHRAJ, which combines conflict resolution with education. However, again, resources for the sorts of efforts are limited and torn between addressing the issue directly and conducting research to better understand it. In the mean time, CHRAJ has directed its programming to locations which are seen as supply routes for the witch camps. In these areas, CHRAJ works to advance its goals of peaceful society, women's safety and freedom of expression.

Other state officials have differing views on the role of the legal apparatus in addressing witchcraft-related violence. While government employees publicly declare their disapproval of accusations, including the abuses found in some spiritual churches and traditional practices, views on how to address this issue differ. The question of whether or not witchcraft is real and the state's official refusal to address witchcraft directly, looking instead at acts perpetrated in terms of law, led a number

¹⁷ Ghana, State official, 09/10.12

¹⁸ Ghana, State official, 09/10.12

of interviewees to express the opinion that the state is failing in this area. While some churches attempt to address witchcraft, often fuelling violence, and NGOs seek to educate the population, the state appears to at a loss and ill-equipped to resolve the problem.

A fundamental concern, unaddressed by the state but questioned by officials, is how people come to be witches in the first place. A common response in interviews is that people desire advancement yet are unwilling to work towards this goal, seeking shortcuts through the invisible world. Politicians and civil servants are not exempt from this temptation. Though many may be educated and may condemn the actions of traditional authorities, they remain vulnerable to the same fears as others and may even advance accusations and bring their concerns to these authorities.

The root of this conundrum is not lost on state officials who are themselves aware that traditional authorities gain legitimacy through the perception that their power comes from the invisible world. Therefore the opinions expressed by state officials must be considered, in part, as an endorsement of state power. Until people begin to critically question their own perceptions of power, witchcraft and reality, the question of how to resolve these conflict will remain unanswered. However, in the mean time, officials agree that the issue of maltreatment must be dealt with, and in this respect the police are seen to be at the front-line.

The Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU)¹⁹ of the Ghana Police receives witchcraft-related cases directly and from other units. Their work is based on the criminal code, which protects personal safety and property. According to the interviewee, the primary source of witchcraft-related violence is that people do not come to police first, or sometimes at all, and instead appeal to traditional authorities for arbitration or protection. The practices of traditional authorities were viewed by the interviewee as being unscientific and dangerous, posing potential harm to people's health and well-being. Intervention by religious institutions was also seen with equal disdain as the accused may be misled or coerced into confession and then subjected to torture.

NGOs which have worked to educate accused witches of their legal rights and have facilitated exchanges between the camps and police officers are viewed more positively by DOVVSU. The services provided to accused witches in the camps, such as housing, water and school fees for the children who might live with them, are all viewed as important temporary contributions. However, the emphasis made by many NGOs on returning accused witches to their home of origin was seen by the respondent as being limited in scope. In his view, people who have been banished should be encouraged to relocate to any village where the stigma of their accusation is left behind.

Overall in its programs and approach to addressing witchcraft, DOVVSU emphasizes the importance of educating people and relying on the state legal system. According to the respondent, because witchcraft cannot be proven in court, the courts must rule in favour of the accused, therefore the system is already on the side of anyone who is wrongly accused. Therefore, it is a logical conclusion that they should seek legal assistance. However, the respondent noted that where the court may be able to prove that the accused is a witch, it is then lawful and just to punish the witch with death, if the crime is severe enough. Unfortunately, according to DOVVSU people's first response is to seek the assistance of traditional authorities, not the police, even though the police believe they are equipped to deal with these conflicts.

Views outside of the state are much more sceptical of the state's ability to address the problem of witchcraft-related violence. Only one of the respondents interviewed, a traditional healer²⁰, expressed support for the government's stated plan to close the witch camps in the north. The healer supported this plan on the basis that the government could provide accused witches more comfortable living than the camps currently do, providing for their needs and prolonging their lives. The remaining

¹⁹ Ghana, State official, 10/10/12

²⁰ Ghana, Traditional Authority, 18/09/12

respondents expressed sentiments ranging from open laughter to extreme suspicion when questioned about the role of the state in addressing witchcraft-related violence.

One respondent²¹ who works with an NGO that operates in the camps felt that state attention and the distribution of cash and food was a temporary interest aimed at gaining political support in the affected constituencies. The camps were not a state concern but a campaign strategy aimed at increasing the bragging potential of members of parliament and candidates. The lack of action by the state was also seen by the respondent as evidence of this, where state officials are willing to address practices such as *trokosi*²² but not witchcraft.

Efforts by the state to appeal to people's sense of justice were also dismissed by respondents. Because Ghanaian courts will not hear cases of witchcraft attack, only the crime of accusation, the courts are seen as being unwilling or incapable of dealing with important spiritual matters. That individuals must suffer personal loss through witchcraft attack without any formal recourse led some respondents to express disappointment with the state. Police forces are also included in this dissatisfaction as respondents, in particular traditional healers, are aware that police procedures are lengthy and slow. According to some respondents²³, this is a strong motivator for individuals to seek the services of traditional authorities.

In conversation with Ghanaians and in media, it appears to be common knowledge that state officials participate in witchcraft and therefore the state has less incentive to effectively address the problem. Here, the logic trap of witchcraft becomes apparent: the power the state has to act against witchcraft is from the same source of power and this prevents the state from acting against witchcraft, because it would be effectively diminishing its own power base.

When respondents spoke about how to effectively address the problem of witchcraft-related violence, answers were sometimes confused, conflicting and uncertain, even within the replies of individual respondents. The main focus of these exchanges was the witch camps in the north. Many respondents felt that accused witches would be incapable of escaping the stigma of their accusation anywhere in the country and expressed concern for those who may be falsely accused but who would internalize these accusations. One informant²⁴ correlated stigma and shame with the necessity of ensuring one contributes positively to society in order to avoid back biting or gossip which may lead to accusations.

Another respondent, a chief²⁵, stressed the need for people to feel protected and for a spiritual solution to the problem. For him, the closing of the camps would only be possible if the government supported traditional authorities. This collaboration would involve the government financing education and funding traditional authorities who are willing to accept responsibility for the safety of accused witches so long as they do not try to teach others witchcraft.

Religious institutions also expressed scepticism towards the ability of state to mediate witchcraft. One respondent, a Catholic priest²⁶, agreed with the view that witchcraft is rooted in culture and Ghanaians, whether educated or not, are driven to explain their uncertainty in terms of the invisible world and seek traditional assistance. However, the priest also felt that accusations were the product of

²¹ Ghana, Non-Governmental Organization 08/10/12

²² *Trokosi* refers the practice of spiritual slavery found in Ghana whereby young women are determined, either by lineage or possession by a deity, to be destined to serve as aides to priests. This calling may also be a form of punishment for a family members indiscretions. The women are then sent by their family to a shrine to live and work as assistants to the priests there. Their servitude may be a few years or lifelong, and may include sexual as well as domestic and religious services.

²³ Ghana, Non-Governmental Organization 23/10/12; Traditional Authority 20/09/12; State Official 09/10/12

²⁴ Ghana, Fieldnotes 15/09/12

²⁵ Ghana, Traditional Authority, 17/09/12

²⁶ Ghana, Religious Organization, 27/09/12

poverty; Ghanaians lack distraction because they are unemployed and therefore unoccupied, as a result of this they have an excess amount of time to devote to concocting witchcraft accusations. According to the priest, it is the state's responsibility to address the root problem of poverty, however, this would be best addressed through a collaboration with NGOs and traditional authorities.

The view that with greater political, economic and social development, witchcraft-related violence will diminish was also voiced by other respondents. However, these were rarely contextualized in terms of the persisting belief in witchcraft or social norms, which continue to support accusations and vigilantism. Though some respondents felt that it was immoral to punish an accused witch until their power has been proven, others expressed sentiments which support practices of instant justice. One informant²⁷ in particular discussed instant justice as reflecting an important social obligation.

In the informant's experience, a childhood friend had been caught stealing from a store and was then beaten to death by the crowd that formed. The informant expressed sadness that his friend had made poor life choices and felt that his death was a significant loss for his village, yet he supported the lynching²⁸ as the positive action of a society where people look after each other. Because the respondent had warned his friend against stealing and his friend did not listen, people were in their right, in his view, to put his friend to death.

Yet, this same informant, speaking about accused witches, felt that this logic could not be applied as it is much more difficult to determine who is a witch. As well, the informant noted that witches tend to attack those close to them, therefore strangers and those of general acquaintance should not be feared. In sum, the informant believed that thieves who have been caught are thieves, but not all suspected witches are witches. Therefore, according to this uncertainty, the witch camps are for many respondents an unacceptable injustice.

If the accused are not witches, then they should be freed from the camps or provided for by the government until they are able to find a safe home. However, whether or not it is the governments responsibility to determine whether an accused is in fact a witch again presents a conflict. Respondents noted that the state should resolve accusations in court, but as they cannot include traditional authorities in the process, they remain incapable of determining an accused's status. Thus the state remains in conflict with spiritual powers which it cannot possess.

Another possible solution suggested by one informant²⁹ was for the state to banish witchcraft spirits. This would be accomplished by burning every witchcraft spirit (inhabiting a person) to rid Ghana of witchcraft and as a sign that the people of Ghana no longer have faith in these spirits. This action would end the problem of the witch camps by removing the root cause: witchcraft. This suggestion, for a national witch cleansing, reflects the concern shared by many respondents that witchcraft, as a spiritual or supernatural phenomenon, could not be addressed by the legal mechanisms of the state. In Cameroon, this same opinion is widely held, though this scepticism is drawn from a much deeper mistrust of the state and state power.

Cameroon

In Cameroon, witchcraft fears centre on three phenomena, which are linked through the association to the invisible world: cults or secret societies, witches and homosexuals. These three

²⁷ Ghana, Fieldnotes 13/09/12

²⁸ In Ghana, lynching is a term that is used to describe all forms of violence enacted against an individual in a public place when this leads to the victim's death.

²⁹ Ghana, Fieldnotes, 24/09/12

groups populate the visible world yet work together to coordinate the power of the invisible world. In this triumvirate, witches provide the supernatural power that is then wielded by secret societies, such as the Free Masons or Rosicrucians, and homosexuals, in their covert plans to control and ultimately destroy Cameroonian society. It is unclear whether homosexuals are themselves witches or whether they are simply people corrupted by witchcraft, or even possibly simply another form of chaotic actor challenging social norms. Most often in discussion and in media, witches and homosexuals are named independently, suggesting a strong but unclear association. In some research, witches and wizards have been known to engage in homosexual activities, however, this was not emphasized or mentioned in any interviews. Cult members and witches also hold some form of council, though the nature of this is again unclear. References are as general as listing the names, connoting actors who are synonymously against order in Cameroonian society and as specific as pointing to building or naming an organization that is populated by both, and in some cases all three, actors.

The state is thought to be involved in or under the influence of these actors despite its official stance against witchcraft, homosexuality and unapproved civic associations. Though the state tries to accuse witches, there is very little official discussion or state participation in discussions concerning witchcraft and witchcraft-related violence. In the case of witchcraft and homosexuality, other than maintaining laws against these, the government rarely addresses these issues publicly. In rare instances where the state directly addresses public concerns regarding witchcraft, such as the late state response in Yaounde where there was increasing concern regarding ritual murders, the state adopts a position of stern dismissal, asserting that it is in no way associated with these actors (witches, homosexuals or cult) and assuring citizens that there is no conspiracy or corruption motivating their actions or inaction.

During the time I was conducting interviews in Cameroon, international pressure regarding homosexuality mounted as a number of gay rights cases were being decided in the United States. This tension compounded previous pressures placed on African states by Western states and donors to improve their human rights records regarding the rights of homosexuals. In Cameroon, frequent discussions of Western imperialism focused on the sense of resistance among Cameroonians and their desire to defend their own laws and practices. When the US ambassador to Cameroon suggested that growing Western pressure may eventually reach Cameroon, many people were incensed. The subject was debated in magazines and newspapers and became a frequent topic of discussion during my daily activities.

When defending their intolerance for homosexuality, many Cameroonians tend to fall back on the illegality of homosexuality as evidence that is wrong and unacceptable. Though this is a subject of much public debate, state officials rarely contributed publicly to this aspect of witchcraft discourse, whether addressing witches, cults or homosexuals, during my field research. This silence was most notable in light of the panic caused by a sharp increase in ritual murders in Yaounde and the surrounding area from late December 2012 to March 2013. In these few months, frequent reports were made by news media regarding female bodies found raped and mutilated, often having had their lips, breasts, hair and fingers or limbs removed. The victims were largely students, girls between the ages of 13 and 21, who had been travelling home from school by moto-taxi and whose bodies were found within days of their disappearance. By April, an estimated twenty murders had occurred, though varying figures could be found (Nkonlak 2013; La Nouvelle 2013).

Some newspapers issued special editions on the murders with large sections focusing on the individuals who had been arrested and charged, in this case the main suspect was a moto-taxi driver. These reports expressed suspicion regarding the possibility that all of the murders had been committed or organized by the single individual who had been apprehended. A number of theories were circulating at the time, the two most prominent being that there was a single serial killer at work who had yet to be apprehended, the other that a prominent businessman or politician had hired a number of individuals to

commit the murders and had orchestrated the killings for ritual purposes. Despite eight more arrests, the rumour persisted that there were more powerful figures behind these murders whose influence would likely protect them indefinitely.

It is not unreasonable that these correlations be made in any case of ritual murder. However they appeared to me to be particularly poignant in their timing: leading up to the first ever senatorial elections. In the Cameroonian construction of conspiracy, where the state relies heavily on witches for power, it would make sense for people to connect the murders to the elections. The elections themselves took place in April 2013 and preparations for the elections were characterized by a façade of uncertainty as the government frequently announced, changed and re-announced candidate lists. However, Cameroonians seemed to respond to these daily announcements with professed disinterest, as every person I discussed the elections with considered the election process to be irrelevant and the results predetermined. Therefore, little correlation was actually made between the murders and the election, as no new appeal to supernatural powers was required by politicians whose election was already guaranteed.

The general sentiment expressed by Cameroonians towards their government, characterized by their lack of participation or interest in the senatorial elections, is also evident in their views towards the state's involvement in witchcraft-related violence and mediation. Though no one I spoke to voted, or even sought to register to vote, people were nonetheless knowledgeable about the candidates, parties and processes. Electoral information was widely accessible and people were well informed, however there was little desire to engage as a participant in the political process. Like the elections, Cameroonians are well versed in the processes of the state, they simply lack any confidence in it.

Though Cameroonians are not, as one respondent³⁰ put it, very inspired by Cameroonian laws on witchcraft, state officials were generally approving of the state's actions to date. In their responses, state representatives referred to the criminal code as evidence that the state is actively combating witchcraft and often directly employed the language of Section 251, referring to the state's role in ensuring peace and tranquillity in society. One military officer³¹ stressed the importance of the state in protecting the futures of Cameroonians against attack by witches while a police officer³² emphasized the intention of the state to bring peace to victims of witchcraft attack. Notably, during my interview, the police officer I met with was unpersuaded by the existence of witchcraft and felt that this phenomenon was not real. However, he noted his role in responding to the beliefs and harm experienced by citizens and suggested that his work was procedural and his personal views were his own and therefore separate from his professional duty.

This was a notable contrast to the attitudes of the military personnel I met and interviewed. During my interview with the mid-ranking officer mentioned above, it was impressed upon me that the respondent felt not only a professional responsibility, but also a deep personal conviction, in his work against witchcraft. The respondent noted being motivated by his personal experience, religious beliefs and obligation, as well as his duty to the state. Witches, in his view, were the greatest threat to Cameroonian society and it is the responsibility of all people to combat them. I was also strongly encouraged to join this effort by attending the officer's church that weekend in order to learn more about combating witchcraft through prayer and exorcism, which were in his view reliable means of determining a witch's guilt. This was also a concern for other state actors who felt that it was essential

³⁰ Cameroon, Religious Organization 04/2013. Please note that for Cameroon, only the month and year will be provided for interviews. This is intended to ensure a higher level of confidentiality to respondents in Cameroon as their participation and the nature of the views expressed in this research may have more severe repercussions for them than for participants in Ghana.

³¹ Cameroon, State Official, 04/2013

³² Cameroon, State Official, 04/2013

to determine with certainty whether an accused was really a witch. In focusing on the criminal code, which allows for harsh penalties against witches, state respondents also stressed the importance and difficulty of proving that an accused is a witch; some noted that while it is not easy to prove in court that an accused is a witch, it is necessary to do so.

Non-state respondents also consistently responded to the question of the state's role regarding witchcraft-related violence as being centred on the identification, prosecution and imprisonment of witches. In their view, the state's approach to witchcraft was strictly legal and its position was openly against the practice of witchcraft. Notably, many responses were neither positive nor negative towards state intervention, with one exception where one respondent³³ who had been the victim of accusations felt that court actions were an important step against the curse of witchcraft. However, many respondents, including religious leaders, individual victims of witchcraft-related violence and staff members of NGOs, provided a basic summary of state intervention without significant expression or opinion as to the effectiveness of these interventions.

Such responses were not unexpected as direct criticism of the state is potentially dangerous. However, what is most notable about these responses is the accompanying narrative of state involvement in witchcraft activity. The same respondents who expressed perfunctory reviews of state interventions also shared their suspicions regarding these actors. In effect, the state was presented as a duality, where individuals within the state were involved with witchcraft behind the scenes, while the public institution of the state remained rather banal and administrative.

Despite some respondents seeming indifferent to the state's role, many did in other parts of their interviews express concern regarding the question of how to accurately determine whether someone is a witch, including court procedures where proving one's innocence is a significant burden. One NGO worker³⁴ shared the details of a recent incident in which a woman from another town was accused of being a witch in Yaounde. The woman was taken by a mob to the local brigade where individuals testified that they had seen her transform into an animal. The woman was protected by the gendarmerie from the mob that insisted that she be put to death.

A few months after the woman was released she participated in a televised interview explaining that she had been visiting from another city when she was robbed by a hired driver. The woman was embarrassed to have found herself lost and without any money and was uncertain what to do. The woman was seeking an alternative means home when she was identified by some individuals as a suspicious stranger, likely appearing disturbed by her distress, and subsequently accused of witchcraft. The woman's story, once it was aired, gained considerable attention and outpourings of concern and sympathy. In response to the interview, some individuals acknowledged that the woman was innocent and that they wrongfully accused her and had been very close to murdering her. Overall, the story was seen to be an important lesson regarding public accusations and the dangers of jungle justice.

The NGO staff member correlated this story to the organization's visits to prisons where they investigate the conditions and record abuses. The NGO worker noted that public perception of witchcraft is so negative that people who are thought to be witches are under constant threat of harm and possibly death, whether the accusation is true or not. In her own work, the respondent noted difficulty in assisting accused witches as they are unlikely to self-identify. For example, when interviewing inmates in state prisons to determine how they are being treated, no one will identify themselves as a witch. The NGO worker stressed that this is because it is so difficult to prove that someone is a witch, suggesting that it is likely that the inmates they interview are also innocent.

Despite these concerns, accused witches are brought to trial and court proceedings allow for verdicts of guilt based on the testimonies of traditional authorities who are considered expert witnesses.

³³ Cameroon, Victim of witchcraft-related violence, 04/2013

³⁴ Cameroon, Non-Governmental Organization, 04/2013

Two chiefs³⁵ shared their own experiences from a court case where they were asked to testify to the power of witchcraft and demonstrate for the court how a witch may eat a person from the inside out without any visible effects. In their retelling of the court case, the chiefs brought a papaya to the court and left it untouched during a court proceeding. Throughout the day they were asked questions about the nature of witchcraft and activities of witches. However, when they were asked to provide evidence that it is possible to eat a person from the inside, they had a court official cut the papaya in half to reveal that the inside had no seeds, as they had been removed invisibly though the outside had remained intact. The chiefs noted that they had, during the course of the court proceedings, taken the seeds from the inside of the papaya, just as witch takes flesh from the inside of her victim.

This example demonstrated to the court that it was possible to consume someone from the inside, spiritually. However, it also served to demonstrate that the powers to understand, employ and control witchcraft laid outside the ability of the state, with traditional authorities. This perception that the state is incapable of controlling witchcraft was common, in part due to the assumed conspiracy between the state and witches and in part due to the conventional methods the state employs to contain witches, mainly jails that do nothing to curtail their power. As well, every respondent shared the consistent message that prayer is the only truly effective protection against witchcraft. This view may indicate by omission, that the state is not effective in addressing witchcraft. Though respondents were more moderate in their criticisms of the state, in comparison with Ghanaians respondents, it was clear from their responses that most were aware of the current legislation. Only one respondent³⁶ stated that they were unaware of the role played by the state.

Negative views regarding the state's engagement in witchcraft issues reflected a number of concerns. The primary concern was that the state was not an appropriate or capable actor, either because it is itself implicated in cults and witchcraft or because it is unable to address spiritual issues. For respondents who expressed the view that the state relies on witchcraft and therefore would never effectively combat it, the state's willingness to lie about this was reprehensible and delegitimizing. This sense of distrust was also extended to critiques of jail sentences meted out to those found guilty of witchcraft. In the view of some respondents, the state's willingness to imprison witches, who could not be affected by any sentence short of death, proved that legal action was for show and the state does not truly intend to punish those with whom it is in league.

As noted by one traditional healer³⁷, only weak witches may be affected by prison sentences, which may lead to their death. In all other cases, lengthy jail terms fail to actually address the problem of witchcraft. Another victim of witchcraft-related violence³⁸ stressed that the state does not have the right to address the invisible world through physical means, such as incarceration. The respondent felt that instead of addressing the problem, the root causes of witchcraft should be addressed, in this case it would be much more appropriate for the state to focus on reducing poverty as this is the main motivator for individuals in seeking witchcraft power and in becoming witches.

Overall, non-state respondents were suspicious of the state and felt that its involvement in witchcraft at all levels, from district administrators to the resident, meant that the state was incapable of protecting people. Evidence given suggested that state officials were much more concerned with their own protection, returning to their ancestral homes for rituals at key times, such as elections, to seek ritual assistance, than the protection of the average Cameroonian. On the other hand, the spiritual nature of witchcraft is seen as preventing the state from acting against witchcraft, even with honest intentions, because the state is unable to combat the supernatural without the assistance an opposing

³⁵ Cameroon, Traditional Authority 04/2013; Traditional Authority 04/2013

³⁶ Cameroon, Religious Organization, 03/2013

³⁷ Cameroon, Traditional Authority, 04/2013

³⁸ Cameroon, Non-Governmental Organization, 04/2013

spiritual force. The power of God alone, not prison cells, can stop witches from flying in the night.

In one interview, when addressing the role of the state in mediating witchcraft-related violence between individuals, one NGO worker³⁹ whose organization focuses on human rights, stressed that the state provides adequate protections through legislation and conventions. However these are rarely enacted outside of court cases which are both costly and time consuming, taking years to be processed. The NGO therefore aims to apply the rights provided to Cameroonians in their work against witchcraft. Cases which are brought to the NGO are investigated by staff members who visit the homes of those affected in order to begin lengthy mediation processes in which mutually agreed resolutions are sought.

These cases routinely employ state legislation against discrimination and defamation of character as foundations for intervention rather than relying on laws against witchcraft which are seen to be confrontational and ill-suited to mediation in many contexts, such as between a married couple or between a parent and child. The reconciliation process itself, however, departs drastically from the conventions of the state, emphasizing the importance of community, caring and the shared values between parties, with the intention of creating a sense of empathy among the participants. Further, negotiations do not intend to deny that one party may be a witch; instead they focus on positive aspects of the person or their relationship with another party and stress the benefits and assistance they may provide one another. As noted by the worker, though a husband may be convinced that his wife is a witch, it remains that she is a person and someone who he has loved and may love again. This approach departs from the vilification of witches and suggests that witches are not always a threat or harmful, but instead may be lived with, loved and appreciated as individuals.

Finally, prayer and the power of God to transform an individual and rid themselves of witchcraft is also part of the mediation process. When parties have agreed to a negotiated resolution, contracts are drafted and signed by the parties. These processes are legitimized in part by their formalities which mirror state legal procedures and by the expertise of the NGO staff members who are predominantly trained lawyers, who also provide legal assistance where cases are unresolved by mediation and sent to court. However, it is the inclusion of spiritual forces which provides confidence in the process. As noted by a military official, it is only by focusing on God and God alone that witchcraft may be stopped.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the state in Africa is forced to continue to consolidate its power against the supernatural. Because witchcraft as a form of power challenges the fundamental assumptions of the state, the state will never overcome its foreign status and naturalize. As in the colonial era, states are unable to eradicate or monopolize supernatural power and violence in society. Similarly today, some states still rely on violence to control their populations and conform reality to their power. Though some states have moved beyond violence towards symbolic power, as suggested by Loveman, this shift is not yet cemented. Witchcraft-related violence as an expression of the continued belief in witchcraft means that the state itself cannot become given. In other words, it cannot become invisible.

Though Ghana and Cameroon could not be more different in the state's approach to mediating witchcraft-related violence, neither approach is effective in reducing instances of violence or addressing people's experiences of spiritual insecurity. In Ghana, the state is exceptionally ineffective in addressing witchcraft and witchcraft-related violence. This may be in part a result of the state's

³⁹ Cameroon, Non-Governmental Organization, 04/2013

unwillingness to acknowledge the existence of witchcraft as much as it may be the result of the common perception that witchcraft can only be addressed through spiritual means.

The state's reliance on liberal discourse, Western legal norms and modern interventions such as education and social service provision, in particular the view that if people are educated they will know that accusations are false and stop making them, seems to hold little salience for the broader population. The state's direct legal approaches, where available, are biased against witchcraft belief, as in the case of CHRAJ, or are otherwise inaccessible to many, as in the case of the police, who are ill-equipped to provide needed services to rural populations.

The government's plan to close the witch camps in the north, though supported by some, is generally viewed with derision by those who doubt the ability of the state to manage the social and political challenges involved. Closing the witch camps means negotiating with traditional authorities, entire villages, NGOs and the accused women themselves, many of whom do not want to leave the camps. Adding to the erosion of the state's credibility is that no discernible actions have been taken by the state since its decision to close the camps in 2011 while the number of women in camps and the number of camps themselves continues to increase.

Overall, respondents in Ghana were not optimistic about the state's ability, willingness or appropriateness in addressing witchcraft-related violence. Though all respondents expressed the belief that witchcraft is a serious, persistent and growing problem in Ghana, it is clear that the state alone cannot provide a solution.

In Cameroon, though the state professes to be actively combating witchcraft, people's suspicions of the state delegitimizes this official discourse and casts doubt on the actions the state does take. From a discourse analysis perspective, the Cameroonian state appears to employ witchcraft as a political tool, demonstrating an awareness that maintaining, rather than mediating, witchcraft fears is much more useful in ensuring the population is distracted, disengaged from the state and society, while keeping an easy scapegoat for the inadequacies of the state close at hand. Unfortunately for Cameroonians, this does not help reduce their sense of anxiety or insecurity, nor does it help protect people from being subjected to violence and harm, particularly where the current trend targets homosexuals.

Where the state does take action against witchcraft, people lack confidence in the state's ability to act honestly or justly. Overwhelmingly, respondents believe that the state is implicated in witchcraft and unwilling to undo or act against its own source of power in any meaningful way. However, rather than leading to challenges against the state authority, this lack of legitimacy reinforces people's disengagement from politics which is seen as being inherently corrupt. This level of disengagement may be seen to serve the state's interest as the authoritarian regime is able to operate unhindered by society. Where people are not directly constrained by state power and force, their agency is limited by their fear of witchcraft which forces them into the position of managing their own spiritual security through alternative self-help models of intervention. The most prominent example of this being people's reliance on prayer.

Despite the religious history or embedded metaphysical logic of the state, it is not itself a religious institution. The state cannot effect or enter the supernatural no more than it can govern the invisible in the visible world. Therefore, the state fails to effectively address witchcraft-related violence or help remove people from a state of anarchy in terms of their own spiritual insecurity. Citizens cannot be protected by their state as their civic and political rights and guarantees do not extend into the realm of witches. In essence, despite the promises of the state, people remain unprotected and leaderless in a state of disorder and chaos. Thus, the idea of the modern state as a social contract is undone.

When confronted with witchcraft, the foundations of the state are fundamentally altered. Legitimacy and the right to sovereignty no longer comes from the people, who exchange their own

sovereignty for provisions of order and social harmony. Instead, witchcraft reveals the state as being built upon a foundation of bare⁴⁰ and raw power. Whether liberal or authoritarian, the power of the state is suspected to be derived from the supernatural: a fundamental logic which the state cannot escape. Further, witchcraft as a contested form of power implicates a critique of inequality which cannot be ignored. Wherever one seeks to rise above another, the inequality resulting from this must act be redressed through a process of redistribution which benefits others and justifies the initial offence. More problematically, because the state is suspected by many of being empowered by witchcraft, it cannot be trusted to act against witchcraft for the benefit of others. In this logic, the state would never sabotage its own source of power by eliminating this evil, as it is this evil which allows the state to exist.

⁴⁰ This use of the word bare is a conscious reference to Agamben's work *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* which explores the bare life as a process of inclusion by exclusion, in order to suggest a reversal of the sovereigns relation to power. Rather than laying the individual bare by exception, the state itself is laid bare by witchcraft, depriving it of law and power.

Chapter Five – Empowering Witches and the West: NGOs and Witchcraft Intervention

In November 2013, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery visited Ghana in order to investigate child labour, domestic servitude and other traditional practices which may involve slavery conditions (OHCHR 2013). However, before the Special Rapporteur had even arrived in Ghana, criticisms of the visit were already being voiced in the Ghanaian news and online. In a feature article on Ghanaweb.com, one columnist suggested that the visit be used to “shine international light on the menace of witch hunting in the country and in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa” (Igwe 2013). The article continues to stress the need for action against this “traditional practice” through UN involvement which would bring “humanitarian assistance to victims of witchcraft accusation” who are forced to live in camps, which could be adopted “as refugees camps or camps for internally displaced persons” (Igwe 2013). Drawing further on the official language of interventionism, the author suggests that the UN Rapporteur “should discuss with all stakeholders strategies of ending this obnoxious practice” (Igwe 2013). Finally, the article ends with an emphatic demand that “[t]he UN should help make witch hunting history in Africa!” (Igwe 2013).

The tone of derision in this article as well as its direct appeal to the discourse and mechanisms of Western intervention effectively characterizes the focus of this chapter's critique. This article is framed in terms of urgency; there is a short window of time, a one week visit by the UN Rapporteur, in which there is an opportunity to significantly address a current crisis in Ghana. Further, international attention is needed to drastically alter the “obnoxious” traditional norms and practices of these backwards people, who cannot change themselves as there is a “silence” on the subject which must first be broken (Igwe 2013). However, this silence can only be broken by outside intervention which brings with it the order and rationality of human rights⁴¹. In short, the West is needed to bring modernity to these people who are themselves too limited by their culture and traditions to improve on their own.

This chapter focuses on exposing this imperative and logic in the work of NGOs in general, and in addressing witchcraft-related violence in particular. NGOs, as institutions representing the embedded logic of modern interventionism, are themselves agents of modernity and active participants in the contestation of reality in Africa, seeking to transform multiple realities into one world which is coherent with the West. In the past, the civilizing mission captured the imagination of the West and justified foreign domination. Today, NGOs employ equally powerful discourses of development, poverty and need which both reflect and seek to advance power relations and legitimize Western logics above African logics. How we understand NGOs and their reality is important when looking at witchcraft as a critical perspective reveals the discursive mechanisms through which NGOs exclude non-Western realities at the most fundamental levels of thought, logic and imagination. Further, this chapter explores how these discourses are translated into action, focusing on the conflict between NGO and witchcraft realities.

Here witchcraft-related violence is presented, not as a justification for Western intervention and the enlightenment of modernity, but as a demonstration of the very pressing need for the West to fundamentally alter the practices and beliefs of African people. In this chapter I explore this understanding of witchcraft, as an entry point of Western intervention which I argue has strong parallels with the history of colonialism, the civilizing mission and contemporary discourses of modernization. This argument will unfold through a summary of the history of NGOs and their involvement in the

⁴¹ As stressed by Igwe (2013) in his article “[w]itchcraft is a way many people in contemporary Africa interpret misfortune. And Witch hunting is still observed and ‘respected’ as a tradition in Ghana”, connoting irrationality. Further, the author notes that “[w]hen it comes to issues concerning witchcraft, tradition trumps human rights”, indicating that the order is meant to be reversed. .

region of sub-Saharan Africa, before looking at the discursive relationship between NGOs and witchcraft, particularly through development discourse and the phenomenon of the witch camps in Northern Ghana.

In my fieldwork, the cases of Ghana and Cameroon were most different in terms of the role of NGOs in addressing witchcraft-related violence. In Ghana, there are numerous NGOs that aggressively address the problem of witchcraft-related violence. However, though NGOs have contributed to emergence of a public debate on the subject, the projects and programs implemented by these organizations fail to demonstrate a significant decrease in violence or spiritual insecurity. In Cameroon, NGOs have yet to become well established in addressing the issue of witchcraft-related violence, though their presence and activity in the country appears to contribute to insecurity by fostering suspicion towards unknown or unfamiliar associations.

Overall, in this chapter I will highlight my conclusion that NGOs are actors which fail to effectively mediate witchcraft-related violence. Though NGOs, mainly in Ghana, seek to address witchcraft-related violence through education and service delivery, their work is limited by their epistemological bias, which rejects witchcraft belief thereby alienating many of the people they aim to support. It is the embedded logic of NGOs which this conclusion focuses on, as NGOs are understood as actors which contribute to the legitimacy of Western hegemony both in the West and abroad by advancing the discourse of modernity.

Historical Context

The 1990s saw the number of non-governmental organizations operating in sub-Saharan Africa skyrocket⁴² (Gugerty 2010). This proliferation was supported by greater “political liberalization and increased donor funding” which was made available to non-state actors (Gugerty 2010: 1087). An additional condition which attributed to the sharp rise in NGOs is the retrenchment of the welfare state after the 1980s when conservatism in West sought to limit the involvement of the state in addressing social needs, leaving a vacuum which was filled by non-government organizations which began to provide important public services (Gary 1996). This time of growth was not without conflict, as Gugerty notes that the relations between NGOs and many African states were, until recently, characterized by “distrust, cooptation and outright repression” (2010: 1090).

Governments often saw NGOs as being potential opposition to the state, as governments themselves were increasingly burdened by debt and feared that donor support for NGOs “would crowd out funding for public services” (Gugerty 2010: 1091). As well, states felt that NGOs activities and foreign support for them constituted political inference, while on the other hand, donors, effectively confirming this, felt that supporting NGOs was a “key element of their democracy and governance programming strategies” (Gugerty 2010: 1091). Donor funding was in part motivated by Putnam's “emerging theories of social capital and civic engagement” (Gugerty 2010: 1091), which were based on research conducted in the north and south of Italy. In the work by Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti (1994), the strength of a democracy is determined by the strength of horizontal social relations, or civic engagement, in a society. These relations help create the bonds upon which civil society is based, and in turn, civil society ensures a thriving democracy (Putnam et al. 1994).

Though Putnam's work (along with two other authors Leonardi and Nanetti) popularized the

⁴² Gugerty notes in her text that in Kenya the number of NGOs increased from “500 in 1990 to nealy 3,200 in 2004” (2010: 228). According to Christensen (2010, in Ghana, the number of NGOs increased from 80 in 1980, to 900 in 1996. I have been unable to find similar figrues for Cameoron. However, it must be noted that how NGOs are classified or counted is unclear in both available cases.

idea of social capital in comparative politics, it must be noted that this theory is a reproduction of Bourdieu's concept of social capital, but with a less critical interpretation of the role of social capital in society and the state. For Bourdieu, social capital was based on the institutionalization of relations between individual and groups, which though not a negative mechanisms itself, could be used to describe institutional continuity in unequal relations. The liberal optimism of Putnam's social capital reveals a more measured analysis and highlights the potential for critical insights; where NGOs become a complicit and integral part of the larger project to normalize and entrench the modern liberal state in Africa thereby implying "a new form of imperialism" (Mohan 1999: 131).

For Mohan, the very concept of a civil society, advanced by Putnam, is "a normative or 'imagined' process", which represents ideas about what it means to be civilized and how society should be ordered, in particular involving social and political engineering which "seeks to create institutions which promote equivalence and freedom within the logic of the market while leaving fundamental inequalities that market forces unleash relatively uncriticised" (1999:131). The implicit interconnectedness of the concepts of civil society and the state leads Mohan to question if it is meaningful to "think of them as discrete 'realms'" and whether civil society is "a useful analytical category", particularly outside of the Western world as it may be "too ideologically loaded and fails to illuminate critical political processes" (Mohan 1999: 133-134).

From this perspective, the key points of interrogation between the state and civil society are "the shifting process of rule operating" between them and the "ways in which political actors mobilize discourses of civil society, locality and the state and utilise organisations for political gain" (Mohan 1999: 135). Therefore it is most useful to look at the organizations which constitute civil society in an effort to understand the fundamental power relations therein. While Mohan, in his study of NGOs in Africa, creates two distinct categories of NGOs, those from the global North and those from the global South, this distinction is not employed here as even in Mohan's analysis it becomes irrelevant in respect to the ideologically based practices of NGOs.

The idea that NGOs are politically neutral is difficult to defend, as NGOs are commonly acknowledged as actors in the domestic and international political spheres. Despite this acknowledgement, NGOs are rarely associated in comparative politics with the ideological projects they often represent, particularly where these are normative liberal projects, such as development, human rights and democracy. The limited critical reflection on NGOs and their place in global power relations is often further restricted by the perception that they are a recent phenomenon or novel actors. However, looking at the history of NGOs reveals that they are neither contemporary inventions nor impartial actors. Instead, the history of Western involvement in sub-Saharan Africa through non-governmental organizations reveals significant continuity with today.

In their historical analysis of NGOs in Africa, Manji and O'Coill (2002) directly correlate the work of NGOs today, particularly in terms of development, to the role of missionaries and voluntary organizations which cooperated in the colonization of the continent. They argue that the work of NGOs today contributes only marginally to addressing issues such as poverty, while significantly undermining resistance to and emancipation from "economic, social and political oppression" (Manji & O'Coill 2002: 568). The view that charity work or the foundations of the welfare state system in the West were motivated by benevolence alone has been criticized by other authors such as Polanyi (1944) as well Manji and O'Coill who note that colonial philanthropy was also motivated by fear of disorder. Missionaries, like NGOs today, provided important short-term responses to dire inequalities and injustices that might have led to greater social unrest and revolution against the state had their services not been available. In this way, charity work not only helped the poor, "it also served to protect the rich" (Manji & O'Coill 2002: 570).

By creating a minimal sense of reparation to the inequalities and injustices which we have seen

earlier accompany the consolidation of power, missionaries in the past and NGOs today act as an important pressure gauge. In addition to addressing the most pressing needs of people, missionary programs and NGO projects also help provide order and stall social tensions which might threaten the interests of the state and economic elites. An important contemporary example of this is the current trend towards micro-credit loan or micro-finance systems.

Rather than reflecting upon the inherent inequalities of capitalism and capitalist expansion, micro-credit loans act as a short-term solution to poverty and marginalization while incorporating and indoctrinating recipients to the capitalist economic system and logic of the liberal state by formally “connecting local communities with the centers of capital” (Fernando 2003: 69; see also Townsend, Porter & Mawdsley 2004). These programs have been criticized for prioritizing consumption and individual wealth, creating indebtedness and being subject to high interest rates, and for targeting women who are perceived as being more vulnerable to imposed conditions and whose necessary yet unpaid labour is used to support programme operations (Townsend, Porter & Mawdsley 2004).

In addition, micro-credit programmes have been criticized for benefiting the less poor while being “least effective for the poorest” (Townsend, Porter & Mawdsley 2004: 875). When compared to alternative development efforts, micro-credit schemes are found to be less effective in reducing extreme poverty than “labour market and infrastructural measures”, while imposing costs on loan or finance recipients, such as “fees to pay the wages of the NGO staff who manage the programmes” (Townsend, Porter & Mawdsley 2004: 875). Overall, these programs are critiqued for drawing “women, the poor and minorities into mainstream neoliberal living” under the guise of empowerment and poverty reduction (Townsend, Porter & Mawdsley 2004: 876).

Poverty in these cases, rather than being understood as a product of the capitalist system or an accepted inequality of the modern liberal state, is instead a problem which can be managed by the same systems which cause it. In this case, more capitalism will solve the problem of capitalism. Where the state is unwilling or unable to act, non-governmental organizations, which often share the liberal logic of the state, support the state project by providing project-based solutions to these shortcoming. As a result, resistance to the state is reduced by ensuring people's most pressing needs are addressed while further incorporating people into the processes of the state, making the cost of resistance higher. Manji and O'Coill suggest that non-governmental organizations in seeking to end social injustice were initially in competition with nationalist movements which sought to end colonial rule; however, this tension was resolved by NGOs moving towards the discourse of development.

The early missionary discourse of bringing civilization to the world was seen as being tainted with racism requiring organizations to adapt to new standards of operation (Manji & O'Coill 2002). Manji and O'Coill identify two clear phases of this transformation: the first being an administrative shift to “indigenize” organizations by replacing foreign staff with educated locals; and the second of replacing their ideological discourse with a focus on development (2002: 572). The emerging development discourse provided “a more palatable perspective on Africans”, with a vocabulary which replaced the dichotomy of civilized and uncivilized with the more modern developed and developing (Manji & O'Coill 2002: 574). Again, this discourse distracted from the political project of the consolidating the modern liberal state by constructing the problem of poverty as the source of oppression (Manji & O'Coill 2002). Despite the ability of many newly independent states in Africa to make significant improvements in education and health services, development discourses continued to stress the inefficiency of African states (Manji & O'Coill 2002). What was missing in these states, it seems, was not the capacity to provide for basic needs, but rather the ability for “a minority to accumulate profits at the highest rate possible” (Manji & O'Coill 2002: 577).

In other words, there was inadequate “growth”, the hallmark of the successful state in the dominant liberal ideology, and the singular solution to poverty in development discourse (Manji &

O'Coill 2002: 577; Gray 1996). In the logic of development discourse, development is measured in economic growth, which requires certain freedoms, mainly to create unhindered individual wealth, which is then expected to trickle-down and create greater prosperity, which in turn, leads to greater freedom (Manji & O'Coill 2002). In this system, it is the responsibility of states to ensure the conditions for growth, an imperative which is reflected in the focus on good governance which emerged in the 1990s (Manji & O'Coill 2002). With the state ensuring economic growth, its role in providing social services is reduced. In place of the state, NGOs adopt this function, a shift which Manji and O'Coill argues formalizes the role of NGOs in programmes of social control which are intended to "act as palliatives that might minimize the glaring inequalities" that economic policies implemented by the state, such as structural adjustment, might perpetuate (2002: 579).

For Manji & O'Coill, where NGOs intend to support the emancipation of people from oppression, their work "has inevitably to be in the political domain"; however this may also mean challenging the interests of important donors, states and international organizations (2002: 582). NGOs are commonly perceived as "essential building blocks" for a strong "civil society" which is imagined as an important "countervailing force" against the dysfunctional African state (Gary 1996: 150). How NGOs contest this dysfunction is by supporting the liberal model and cushioning the blow of externally imposed policies such as good governance (Gary 1996). Direct efforts by NGOs to alter relations between the state and society have led to tension between NGOs and African states, with the latter seeking at times to limit the activities of NGOs through bureaucratic regulations (Gary 1996). NGOs have responded to attempts to limit their operation by forming associations, drawing on international links and "keeping a low profile" (Gary 1996: 154).

Another strategy is for NGOs to limit their activities to non-political programmes. Gary (1996) provides the example of Ghana, where NGOs have responded to state pressure by focusing on social rather than political issues. In Ghana, charity work and welfare activities were dominated by churches which remained prominent until the 1980s and 90s when NGOs began to increase in number (Gary 1996). At this time, the government of Ghana under Rawlings was struggling with an economic crisis which the International Monetary Fund addressed through a series of structural adjustment programs, leading to significant social costs (Gary 1996). The government then sought support from NGOs in smoothing the consequences of these adjustments, under the condition that NGOs were not to engage in "explicitly political terrain or overtly transformative and empowering activities" (Gary 1996: 157). In exchange, the government would use "its leverage with bilateral donors" to determine aid distribution, influencing which NGOs get funding (Gary 1996: 159).

Though Ghana as a case is commonly understood to exemplify the co-optation of NGOs (Gary 1996), it may also be argued that NGOs in supporting social service provisions are ensuring the continuity of international influence in African states and society. In more explicit terms, not only have NGOs continued the work of missionaries, though under the guise of a new discourse, development, they are also participating in and supporting continuing colonial influence of African politics and policies. Mercer et al. (2003) raise this concern and argue that the understanding the complex relations of NGOs in Africa requires an examination of the "intersections between knowledge construction about Africa, political action for and in Africa, and the everyday agency of Africans" (Mercer et al. 2003: 419-420). These authors focus their critique on the "complicity between racialised knowledges about Africa" and the political interventions which "seek to 'help' Africans to develop" (Mercer et al. 2003: 420).

What Mercer et al. identify is a continued conception in the West of Africa as an international "trusteeship"; the idea that Africa is dependent on Western guidance and assistance (2003: 420). These authors argue that while Africa has been official decolonized, Western knowledge of Africa remains colonial, limiting the ability of Western actors "to effect more appropriate political engagement with

Africa” (Mercer et al. 2003: 420). Mercer et al. point to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) which was strongly opposed by the African Social Forum in 2002 and criticized as being a reformulation of existing neoliberal relations while failing to address issues of inequality. Underlying the idea of Africa as a trusteeship is the continuing sense of the continent as primitive and child-like in its reliance on traditional culture and its inability to “cope with the onset of modernization” (Mercer et al. 2003: 422). As will be seen later, this discourse is exceptionally evident in NGO constructions of the problem of witchcraft.

As in colonial times, an important part of the discourse of Africa as needing Western intervention is the construction of Africa in crisis, as a place where misery, chaos and brutality are systematic and pervasive (Mercer et al. 2003: 422). Ironically, at times this history of colonialism itself is used to justify imagining Africa in crisis at the same time as it is used to rationalize the need for continued Western intervention as some argue that the damage of the colonial experience must be repaired by Western actors (Mercer et al. 2003). Development, as a modern process, must be managed by “experts’ on behalf of” Africans, whose ability to progress has been stunted by a history of colonialism (Mercer et al. 2004: 423). Further, what constitutes development is also “defined and enunciated by the ‘first world’” and is therefore shaped by Western ideologies and realities (Mercer et al. 2003: 423). Further, this bias reproduces the false analogy between the history of the West and by comparison, the failed history of Africa, which cannot be understood on its own terms, but only through the experiences of the West (Mercer et al. 2003: 424).

Confronting these profound biases in an effort to decolonize one's understanding of Africa, for Mercer et al., involves relinquishing the idea that “‘we’, the enlightened and comfortable intellectuals” are able to decide what “‘is ‘better’ for ‘them’” (2003: 425). This endeavour is greatly complicated by the inter-subjectivity⁴³ of the colonial and post-colonial experiences which make the question of separating African and Western influences impossible, as one cannot simply deny the “mutual construction of societies and subjectivities” (Mercer et al. 2003: 428). Thus, challenging colonial knowledges requires the participation of both “the coloniser and colonised”, in an effort to combat the “epistemological basis of hegemonic thought” (Mercer et al. 2003: 427-428). Without this radical departure from the passive acceptance of dominant discourses of Africa, the continued replication of colonial tropes in new formulations, such as good governance and development, are entrenched in discourse and practice (Mercer et al. 2003: 428).

Part of the construction of Africa as being in need of assistance is the idea that foreign support is needed to bolster Africa's “weak civic organisations”, as civil society is understood to be “missing link between citizens and the state and the prime mover in desired neoliberal economic and political reforms” (Konings 2009: 2). Konings argues that this is an inaccurate depiction of social and political action in Africa as it tends to exclude unorganized demands and associational movements which are seen as being “hostile to civil and liberal democratic norms” (Konings 2009: 3). As noted by Nyamnjoh in Konings, the communal nature of these forms of participation contradict the liberal imperative towards individual rights and freedoms, thereby undermining the foundation for democracy and the modern state (Konings 2009: 4). As a result, these expressions of political participation are ignored, or worse, frowned upon as disorderly, as they fall outside of the usual dichotomies of state and civil society prominent in the West, where civil quite often literally means “with ‘civility’” (Konings 2009: 4).

⁴³ Intersubjectivity is used here as a phenomenological concept which relates to how knowledge is formed. In this case, knowledge of a thing, Africa, can only be conceived in terms of what it is or is not. In order to make this comparison, existing knowledge, of the West for example, is used to create context, thereby implicating knowledge of this other thing (the West) in constructing knowledge of the first thing (Africa), and vice-versa, as the comparison may reinforce or alter knowledge of the compared thing (the West).

In Konings' study of Cameroon, the concept of civil society common to Western academia and discourses of the modern state is largely absent, as political power is increasingly “located outside the political community... and beyond the reach of the democratic control of Cameroonian citizens” (Konings 2009:188). In Cameroon, Konings argues, the legitimacy of the state is not determined by the citizenry, but by “the demands of its external constituency”, as the state's dependence on financial assistance requires it “fall in line” with foreign interests (Konings 2009: 188). As a result of this, civil society organizations which have emerged or gained greater autonomy during the recent period of political liberalization are “usually completely excluded from the decision-making process” (Konings 2009: 188). Additionally, internal constraints have further limited the potential for engagement in political processes, as the government of Cameroon has relied heavily on parastatals and ethno-regional alliances as state/society intermediaries to foster “national unity and political stability and to obviate the need for coercion” (Konings 2009: 189). Despite the introduction of a multiparty system and greater press and associational freedoms, there remains little political participation in the country (Konings 2009).

Despite differing epistemologies, ideologies and experiences of state and society relations, and not intending to set aside the questions of whether either even exist, proponents of NGOs continue to resist criticisms made against these actors. A key supporter of NGOs as important international and national actors is Yarrow (2008) whose work here will be instrumentalized to outline the arguments made in defense of NGOs and who key points will serve as the basis for arguments against these, including other authors criticisms as well as my own. In this way, Yarrow's work will serve as the baseline of the current academic debate regarding the usefulness and dangers of NGOs, in particular, highlighting the epistemological bias of authors such as Yarrow who defend them.

In response to the criticisms levelled by authors such as Chabal and Daloz (1999) and Bayart (1986; 1993) who suggest that NGOs in Africa may be exploitative (where “educated Africans exploit their positions of social privilege for gain”), or Ferguson (2006) who suggests they reinforce elite rule (by naturalizing inequality), or Englund (2006) who suggest that the language of human rights creates the very hierarchies it claims to overcome (by establishing elite and grassroots binaries), Yarrow argues that these authors are overlooking the intentions of NGO workers by focusing only on discourses (Yarrow 2008: 335). Yarrow seeks to remedy this lacuna and respond to these criticisms with his research on Ghanaian NGO workers and activists.

In setting the context for his research, Yarrow characterizes the atmosphere in Ghana as being permeated with “material manifestations and discursive spaces created by development organizations”, as it is “in much of Africa” (Yarrow 2011: 1). This depiction fills the streets of Accra with “brightly coloured hand-stencilled banners”, roadside sign boards announcing NGOs and their various projects, NGO logos standing out on vehicles amid the general congestion and “rickety wooden roadside kiosks” selling newspapers which “boldly proclaim the successes and failures of development projects, feeding off and into widespread public interests about the activities of NGOs and development organizations” (Yarrow 2011: 1)

From my own experiences in Ghana, the first working with one of these colourful NGOs and the second researching NGOs as witchcraft mediators, I do not share Yarrow's vision of a bright world of NGOs capturing people's widespread interest. As well, I fail to share his understanding of discourse as having emerged through “the practices of a relatively elite group of Ghanaian and Western development workers, but form part of a nationally understood lexicon through which a variety of interests are articulated” (Yarrow 2011: 1). Though I agree with the first part, the second indicates that dominant discourses may be appropriated, altered and affected by actors at all levels, an assertion which fails persuade, but which remains relevant throughout his study.

In his work, Yarrow argues that NGO workers have genuine intentions to serve the public good

and though they acknowledge that many of their ideals were not achieved, they were nevertheless motivated by a moral and ethical framework through which they assessed “their own and others’ actions” (Yarrow 2008: 353). Yarrow stresses the importance of historical circumstances in the development of NGOs workers beliefs, interests and motivations and suggests that development organizations are an “integral part of postcolonial African reality” (2011: 2). While Yarrow acknowledges that these motivations are also affected by hegemonic discourses, he nevertheless dismisses this insight in his attempts to assess how NGO workers in Ghana “locate truth and efficacy in relation to their own and others actions” (2011: 2).

By focusing on what NGO workers “express”, in this case the expression of hope, which constitutes a “specific ontological commitment... toward a different and ‘better’ future”, Yarrow obfuscates the role of hegemonic discourses in informing and delimiting this hope (Yarrow 2011: 2). Though Yarrow suggests that this future involves a “plurality of ideological perspectives”, his own admission that development discourse has produced a number of “deleterious consequences” undermines his defence of NGO workers (Yarrow 2011: 2, 5). Most problematically, Yarrow ascribes ignorance to the Ghanaian NGO workers, arguing that their perspectives are “reduced to a reflex of the structural position they occupy” (Yarrow 2011: 5). What Yarrow is effectively saying is that Ghanaian NGO workers are unaware of the ideological project embedded in the development discourse they employ and as such can only be judged for their naive intentions.

This argument demonstrates Yarrow’s limited application of the concept of discourse. Discourse, when it is successfully hegemonic, gains normalcy and becomes a given. It is not that NGO workers are unaware of the neoliberal project embedded in development discourse; instead, they simply accept this discourse without critical reflection because it has gained adequate supremacy to appear normal. Therefore, the language of development used by Ghanaian NGO workers is not “divorced” from the “concrete activities and relationships” they enact, as Yarrow suggests (2011: 5). It is directly informed and formed by “concealed forms of power” which remain relevant and influencing regardless of the NGO workers’ conscious applications and Yarrow’s dismissals (2011: 5).

Yarrow further discounts discourse by arguing that the correlation of the enactment of development discourse by NGO workers with underlying power structures leads to a “hermeneutics of suspicion” which renders all development practice hopeless (2011: 6). Here, Yarrow is suggesting that all development work is “reduced” to the reproduction of inequality, precluding the possibility that people may “actually want to bring about progressive outcome” (Yarrow 2011: 6). This argument again muddies the water of discourse, by conflating ideas of power and ideology with claims that criticisms of development discourse are akin to ascribing false consciousness to NGO workers in Ghana. What Yarrow does not acknowledge is that he is speaking about NGO workers who may share the ideals of the neoliberal ideological project behind development discourse as they are part of the state elite and “self professed socialists” who seek to manipulate the state “for their own political and ideological ends” (Yarrow 2011: 23). To argue that “elite ideology and practice” is not informed by hegemonic discourse, as Yarrow does, is equivalent to suggesting that discourse does not exist. As Yarrow has already accepted that it does, this becomes a contradiction (Yarrow 2011: 9).

What Yarrow cannot overcome in his argument is that his definition of development “as a set of ideas, meanings and practices, whose significance can only be grasped in relation to the people for whom they matter” fails to differentiate Ghanaian NGO workers from Ghanaians and even Africans as a whole (Yarrow 2011: 9). What Yarrow is negating is the power involved in defining these ideas and in determining what matters. It is not every individual Ghanaian who is able to participate in constructing the ideas, meanings and practices of development, though Yarrow seems to suggest that because development is relevant to all Ghanaians (though this is assumed, not demonstrated), they must also be involved somehow in the process of defining development. However, the NGO workers who Yarrow

interviewed are the elite of Ghanaian society, and while this does not necessarily mean that they have the power to define development, it does mean that they are more likely to share the ideological foundations of neoliberal development despite professions to the contrary.

For example, Yarrow suggests that many of the NGO workers are critical of the neoliberal agenda, yet this does not lead “to a wholesale rejection of ‘development’” as they seek to “exploit institutional spaces” where possible, producing tension and compromise which are deemed preferable to “ideologically purist inactivity” (Yarrow 2011: 23). What Yarrow overlooks here is exactly the criticism made of early missionaries and charity work enabling colonial rule: in order to help people, because they are in need, in this case, due to the costs of neoliberal reforms enforced by donors and Western governments, one must work within the state system to smooth these transitions, thus enabling the state to advance policies which produce inequality by diminishing the costs of these policies. At the same time, NGOs working within state institutions may foster the legitimacy of these institutions while further entrenching the role of the state and NGOs in society.

As noted by Yarrow, the first NGOs in Ghana sought to provide basic services, such as water, health and education, and fill the gaps left by the state as its role was reduced through the imposition of “donor-backed state retrenchment” (Yarrow 2011: 32). In addition to remedying some of the most obvious social and economic consequences of structural adjustment policies, these NGOs also sought to take advantage of Western interests in developing civil society organizations (Yarrow 2011) as part of the discourse of the modern state, thus completing the process of ideological capture and formally closing any opportunities for critical resistance. Therefore Yarrow's argument that NGOs should not be conflated with the policies that promote their intervention falls short. Because these very NGOs worked to support the neoliberal policies of structural adjustment, by accepting discourses of development and by filling the responsibilities of providing for basic needs, which unmet may have generated instability in the state, they can be conflated with these policies and hegemonic discourse.

The suggestion that NGO workers face a “paradox” where “the ideological ends often conflict with practical means to bring these about” (Yarrow 2011: 101) does not prove that this paradox exists, but rather demonstrates that the ideological projects are much more aligned than they appear. In order to justify intervening in society for the purposes of delivering development to the population, one must accept the idea of crisis and need constructed by the discourse of development, and rather than contesting the cause of this crisis or need, identify oneself as being better able than another to provide for these needs. This flaw of knowing what is better, what is progressive, is demonstrated in the elite interventions of Ghanaian NGO workers Yarrow seeks to defend. Further, the willingness of NGOs workers to take advantage of the state to build a stronger civil society reinforces their commitment to the modern liberal state system and by extension promotes ideas of civic engagement and democratic stability.

The argument that Ghanaians, whether elite or non-elite, would be better positioned to provide development for Ghana is addressed indirectly by Yarrow's discussion of the local and local knowledge. As noted by Yarrow, “the concept of ‘indigenous knowledge’ has gained increasing currency over the past decade” bringing with it questions regarding participation and engagement (2011: 126). In effect, the idea of the local has sought to contest “‘top-down’ approaches” and question the “Western assumptions with which development workers start” by engaging local perspectives (Yarrow 2011: 126). Further, Yarrow asserts that as “the people who actually face these problems are likely to know most about them, it seems presumptuous to offer prescriptions” (Yarrow 2011: 164). However, Yarrow fails to identify these ideas, the inclusion of the local, engaging and allowing participation, as discursive adaptations which fail to alter or expose hierarchies of power while protecting them with new rationalizations.

The local, as a concept in development, completes a number of important discursive acts which

may be seen as advancing the formalization of hierarchies of power. As part of the state/society binary, the local builds on the assumption that there is a “basic continuity” between the state, civil society and the African societies which these dominate (van Binsbergen 2003: 216). The local homogenizes interests below the state and civil society in assuming that there is a coherent entity that is the local which is both singular and able to express its interest. The local also presupposes that the local is interested in participating in the state or civil society project and needs only to be empowered through inclusion to be part of the processes of the state and civil society. What this participation looks like, its form, purpose and potential, will not be decided by the local, as they remain recipient-participants, rather than co-creators of their own development. In this way, the concept of the local allows civil society and NGOs to penetrate the population through designed participation, thereby subsuming the plurality of interests of the population into a homogenized representation legitimized by the process of engagement and using this to speak on behalf of the population.

What is at issue here, and what is notably overlooked by Yarrow in his optimism towards “development practitioners” (2011: 164), is the fundamental question of power. To say that development and human rights are powerful ideas is to express much more than the persuasive or imagined righteousness of contesting injustice and ending poverty. The power of these ideas to advance the ideological project of the modern liberal state cannot be overlooked. One of the authors Yarrow responds to in his work is Englund (2006), who wrote on the subject of human rights discourse in Malawi. Englund focuses on how the rhetoric of human rights was used by African states who, seeking increased international aid, projected “an image of movement toward democratic consolidation” (2006: 5). At the centre of Englund's study is a critique of human rights discourse as narrowly defined freedoms which “captured the attention of politicians, donors, journalists, and activists” but lacked understanding of the “situation of the impoverished majority”, thereby making “democracy the preoccupation of the privileged few” (Englund 2006: 6).

Englund found that despite frequent use of the concepts of participation and empowerment by human rights workers, the discourse of human rights in Malawi failed to include the rural and urban poor “in defining what freedom, human rights, and democracy might mean in a Malawian context” (Englund 2006: 6). Instead, human rights defined as freedom is built on the assumption of “universal and abstract values” which Englund argues foster elitism and undermine demands for substantive democracy (2006: 9). Englund argues against the view of freedom as a “means of governance”, suggesting instead that freedom, through the discourse of human rights, is a means of control (2006: 9). In order to explain how this discourse has evolved over time, Englund traces its origins to the post-Cold War era when democratization became “a universal concern”, transforming the “official languages inherited from colonial rulers” without abandoning the top-down exercise of power of the colonial era (2006: 48). Civil society, as an essential building block of democracy, was imagined as challenging elite interests from below though in reality, NGOs “tacitly support the state” and are dependent on “complex transnational links for their material and political survival” (Englund 2006: 8).

Englund further his criticisms of human rights discourse and addresses education initiatives undertaken by NGOs in Malawi where the concept of empowerment is instrumentalized to foment the “distinctions between the grassroots and those who [are] privileged enough to spread the message” (2006: 70). In his study of civic education, Englund demonstrates how human rights education programmes, instead of bringing people to discuss these ideals as equals, served to marginalize “people's own insights into their life situations” (Englund 2006: 71). By delimiting the imagined possibilities of freedom, human rights discourse frames and directs people's needs, thereby entrenching the inequity of charity:

Here, as in civic education on human rights, the providers of assistance feel they have something that others lack. Moreover, the objective is not to upset the balance between those

who receive help and those who provide it. Charity differs from structural change, whether by legislation or revolution, in that it presupposes a categorical distinction between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. The former help the latter to sustain themselves, while the distinction itself remains virtually intact. In a similar vein, the civic education project on human rights examined here involved little that would actually have enabled the disadvantaged to lift themselves from their predicament. That this troubling observation was largely unnoticed in Malawi indicated how natural the distinction had become even among human rights advocates. (Englund 2006: 71)

Looking more closely at the concept of human rights, Hopgood (2000) provides useful insight in his critical analysis of the ideological and philosophical foundations of this discourse. Human rights, Hopgood argues, are not morally neutral universals; they are formed and informed by a “a conception of ‘the good life’” which underwrites them (2000: 2). This good life embedded in human rights is based on a “private morality ... tainted by historical reference to various ‘social’ totalising projects, imperialist and totalitarian, which sought to particularise in individuals general moral claims” (Hopgood 2000: 2). In this case, these moral claims are found in the doctrine of liberal theory. For Hopgood, the totalizing projects of liberalism and capitalism come together to form the concept of a global civil society, which provides the “ideological foundation for the political authority of the state under capitalism” by giving the appearance of redressing inequality, while shifting moral questions out of public life and into the private (2000: 4).

In Hopgood's view, human rights discourse enables civil society to act as a space in which individuals are empowered to pursue ideals of public equality while protecting private inequality by relocating questions of what is right to processes and procedures concerned with the individual pursuit of freedoms and personal goals. Human rights, by enshrining the individual in a realm of political and civic freedoms, effectively places the individual above the collective and prioritizes the private over the public (Hopgood 2000: 5). Hopgood notes that, human rights, like “all successful normative institutions”, have come to be seen as “the answer to the very social problems of which they are, in fact, a primary symptom” (2000: 7). Drawing an analogy with Loveman's concept of symbolic power, the ideological power behind human rights has become effectively invisible:

In the West, we now hear the language of rights everywhere: their promotion has become an article of faith within global civil society, and their essential benevolence is beyond question. They under-gird the ‘liberal’ of liberal-democracy, legitimating humanitarian intervention, sustaining pariah status of various non-observing regimes, and privileging freedom, individual rational-choice, and the capacity to realize one's intrinsic, essential self. (Hopgood 2000: 7)

Returning to Englund's criticism of human rights education, the role of NGOs and civil society organizations in disseminating the ideology of the liberal individual is succinctly characterized by Hopgood's observation that “[e]ducation serves to both wipe clean the slate and to replace it with a new lesson” (2000: 18). Human rights discourse, according to Hopgood, in spite of conventions to defend plurality does “not protect identities” but opens “them up for the process of complete transformation” (2000: 21). The good life envisioned in human rights is based on social and cultural norms defined by the West whose “material ascendancy” permits it to transform its will towards homogeneity into practice (Hopgood 2000: 24). That these processes of power operating through human rights discourse appear to many as natural is in Hopgood's view “the true triumph of liberalism not to be seen as a totalising project at all, but as the very antithesis of socially enforced homogeneity, that is, as a return to nature” (2000: 24-25).

The idea that people participate or are engaged in, as opposed to coerced or subjected to, this return to nature is promoted by development and human rights discourses which have moved towards languages of inclusiveness and empowerment. Botchway (2001) addresses these discursive devices and argues that participation “has become a substitute for the structural reforms needed for social changes”

(136). Botchway argues further that participation and empowerment may serve as a means for the state to shirk responsibilities “by dumping them on local areas” which are then forced to struggle with limited choices in managing minimal resources and addressing what is understood as development (2001: 136). For Botchway, empowerment entails more than inclusion as it must also allow for the ability to radically alter social constructions, which he finds impossible in his case study of Northern Ghana where Ghanaians “do not decide what is developmentally relevant and are only allowed to participate in a developmental project without questioning the conditions under which they are allowed to develop” (Botchway 2001: 149).

Participation and empowerment, in addition to linking the local to the state through civil society, also serve to support the continued presence of NGOs in societies through the intersecting concept of sustainability. As noted by Swidler and Watkins (2008), one of the ideals of sustainability is local ownership, where projects “belong to’ the local community” and where this community is responsible for identifying and addressing their needs and interests (1184). Here the assumption that a community is a coherent, homogeneous entity able to express unified needs and interests, through democratic governance, is paired with a self-help approach suggesting “that they should become self-reliant, mobilizing their own energies and resources to solve their own problems” (Swidler & Watkins 2008: 1184).

That local problems exist and are fully detached from the power processes outside of the locality in question is a given of sustainability discourse. In place of allowing for contestations of power relations, the imagined outcome of sustainable development leads to:

profound social transformation by imbuing the members of democratic and self-reliant communities with a “rational, planned sense of personal and social responsibility associated with the virtues of modernity” and empowering them to take control of their own futures (Swidler & Watkins 2008: 1184).

The imperative to negate the structural inequalities of the liberal capitalist system further limits the ability of communities to identify their needs. In Swidler and Watkins research, the authors found that people's basic needs, support for the elderly, poor, children or ill, agriculture inputs, school uniforms or blankets, failed to meet the criteria of sustainability (read self-help). In place of basic necessities, skills training or income-generating activities were prioritized, though these programmes are designed to engage only a few individuals and fail to “mitigate the uncertainty” of people's everyday lives (Swidler & Watkins 2008: 1192).

Central to the critique made by authors towards the work of NGOs is the limited ability of these organizations to confront their own ideological and discursive biases. While this cannot be said of all NGOs, it remains that these actors histories, institutional foundations and discursive practices are implicated in what may be criticized as the continuing colonization of African realities. Further, I would argue, that the role of NGOs in continuing the civilizing mission of the colonial era, to transform the multitudinous realities in African societies to the dominant discourse of the liberal order, is most evident when witchcraft belief and witchcraft-related violence is brought into question. Here, the confrontation between two distinct and disparate realities provides insight into both the activities of NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa and the question of how best to address witchcraft-related violence.

NGOs and Witchcraft

Modernity is not a term often employed by NGOs in their work. Instead, the work of NGOs today is often described through the language of development, empowerment and rights. Looking critically at the goal of development and its use as a justification for intervention, the embedded

imperial relations of classic colonialism and the driving logic of modernity are visible. Through improved education and living conditions, economic empowerment and greater rights protections, societies around the world are becoming more developed. In other words, they are progressing, becoming more modern, being made more civilized, and looking and acting more and more Western. Conversely, these societies are abandoning backwards traditions, ending cultural injustices, advancing technologically and enacting Western constructions of social, political and economic reality.

In the work of NGOs, where social relations are transformed by development, political relations by the advancement of human rights, and economic relations improved through empowerment, witchcraft is the proverbial fly in each ointment. Witches, unlike the modern liberal subject, cannot be brought into the coherent and contained reality of modernity. They cannot be made consumers, stakeholders or citizens. In this way, witchcraft frustrates the performative legitimacy of NGOs by creating obstacles to the implementation of their foreign logic. This section will explore this conflict and further argue that the work of NGOs and the discursive depictions of witchcraft belief and violence are closely linked to ideas of the economy, capitalism and the liberal ideals embedded in the project of modernity.

In *Prisoners of Freedom*, Englund briefly addresses the idea of “occult economies” proposed by Geschiere and the Comaroffs, by cautioning against generalizations which “gloss over the actual range of situations” underlying witchcraft experiences (2006: 173). In this instance, Englund is addressing a moral panic which emerged in response to a series of killings of schoolchildren for ritual purposes and the common correlations made between ritual murder and commodification of the human body. While Englund does not reject the idea that there is a well established trade in human body parts, he argues that parents were most concerned about the safety of their children, not the global economy or contesting neoliberalism.

This appropriation of witchcraft violence and belief to advance one's view was highlighted in the Introduction and Theory chapter. However, here, it is not only academics, but also NGOs who are engaging in the construction of witchcraft-related violence as a place of contestation, and most importantly, intervention. As noted by Englund, in response to the ritual murders in Malawi, individuals sought to punish perpetrators through vigilantism to which human rights NGOs “demonstrated their detachment from popular concerns either by failing to consider the cases at all or by condemning the outbursts of violence as ‘mob justice’” (2006: 175).

The willingness of NGOs to intervene in the realm of witchcraft and to attempt to address instances of witchcraft-related violence has increased in recent times, along with the current wave of academic interest and the perceived and/or constructed sense that witchcraft violence is a growing phenomenon. The response by NGOs in Malawi depicted by Englund is in my view a muted response when compared to the work of some other NGOs addressing witchcraft-related violence, as will be seen in the case of Ghana. Nonetheless it is still an important demonstration of the willingness of NGOs across Africa to engage the realm of witchcraft, whether voluntarily or by necessity, where witchcraft is encountered in the implementation of projects and programmes.

Underlying this increasing engagement is the dialectical relationship between donor perceptions of Africa as a place of disorder and need, and the self-sustaining imperative for NGOs to identify new or continuing crises which require their services and support. Here, international media is key to advancing the perception that witchcraft-related violence is rife in Africa and that African states are generally unable to address the needs of their citizens, thus requiring the intervention of foreign aid actors.

In the past few years weekly examples of media reports highlighting and decrying instances of witchcraft-related violence in Africa, as well as the South Pacific, South Asia and the Middle East, can be found on any of the main international news sites, including the BBC and Al Jazeera. How media

has contributed to popularizing and sensationalizing witchcraft in Africa is beyond the scope of this research. However, an example of this phenomenon is important for understanding the processes by which media, NGOs and even academia contribute to reductionist, incomplete or even unrepresentative understandings of witchcraft-related violence.

The focus of this example is a People & Power exposée on AlJazeera.com entitled “Spirit Child: An investigation into the ritual killing of disabled Ghanaian children deemed to be possessed by evil spirits” (Al Jazeera 2013). This twenty-five minute report follows the filmmaker and primary investigator Anas Aremeyaw Anas in his undercover research turned sting operation. Drawing heavily on the template of common reality TV criminal investigations, such as *Catch a Predator*, Anas poses as the father of a child suspected of possession. He then seeks assistance in ritually killing this child, setting up a series of hidden cameras and using a dummy child as a prop to replace the real child used in the interviews.

During the set-up, Anas notifies and solicits the assistance of local police officers, previously depicted as incompetent and overly lenient, in arresting the traditional healers who have arranged to kill the child. Before the healers administer a poison to the dummy, the police emerge and arrest the two elderly men and Anas films them handcuffed in the back of a police truck. The text which accompanies this video on the Al Jazeera website claims that “[e]very year an unknown number of children – most of them disabled – are murdered in northern Ghana” because it is believed that they are possessed (Al Jazeera 2013). The text continues to inform the reader that the practice of ritual killing is the “consequence of ancient traditions and customs and is shaped by poverty and ignorance in remote and often marginalized communities” and while NGOs have been working for years to advocate and educate the people of northern Ghana in an “attempt to eradicate the practice”, they have achieved “only marginal success” (Al Jazeera 2013). The article stresses that “[w]ell into the 21st century, Ghana's so-called spirit children are still being killed” and strongly endorses the work of Anas, who is “determined to do something to stop this senseless slaughter... and bring [those responsible] to justice” (Al Jazeera 2013).

In the filmmaker's own words, appearing on the site below the video and summary written by Al Jazeera, Anas notes that:

Democracy has no value if it is only limited to occasional ceremonies for power holders. It is worthless if the voiceless are crushed and the perpetrators of atrocities are allowed to continue living their life without suffering any consequences. It certainly cannot exist where freedom and justice, selectively applied, mean that children are killed with impunity. (Anas 2013)

For Anas, combating the killing of spirit children is part of a broader aim. Ending the spirit child phenomenon is part of Ghana's path towards democracy, towards a society where freedom and justice thrive and a world where evil is not permitted “to triumph over good” (Anas 2013). Further down on the website, the video received sixty-three comments as of April 2013, condemning these murders or correlating them to poverty and ignorance. Though one commenter does question what follows from the investigation, none question the veracity of the report itself.

The idea that an unknown number of children are murdered in northern Ghana by their parents due to superstition, poverty or ignorance with little or no state response is sufficient explanation for many. However, four researchers, Denham, Adongo, Freyberg and Hodgson investigated this same phenomenon and published their findings in an article in 2010. These authors found that contrary to popular representations of spirit child cases, “infanticide is not always present” and that “the practice itself is not necessarily an 'important risk factor' or a major community health issue as claimed” (Denham et al. 2010: 609).

In addition to this, the authors found that while rare, spirit-child cases are also decreasing “and that these reductions are a result of improved access to health care and maternal health programs”

(Denham et al. 2010: 614). The exposee on AlJazeera.com failed to address questions of maternal health care, focusing instead on the impunity of child killers and the absence of justice. Produced three years after Denham *et al's* findings, this report painted a picture of senseless slaughter proceeding unabated due to ignorance, a weak state and a lack of democracy. This representation of witchcraft beliefs and witchcraft-related violence are common not only in the media, which informs and is informed by NGO workers and research, donors and the broader international community, they are also present in the publications, media releases and reports of NGOs as well.

The foundation of NGOs' intervention in the realm of witchcraft is through human rights discourse. In practice human rights are considered to be not only international, but universal, in their application. Human rights as an ideal may be understood to transcend all boundaries including state borders, divisions of race, class, geography, even history, in the effort to protect those who are victims of human rights abuses. How these power relations are determined is often unclear: How are rights defined and what rights are prioritized over others? Who decides who is the appropriate defender for others? How are abuses determined and how should they be rectified and rights protected? Who speaks for victims of human rights abuses?

Again, it is beyond the scope of this work to provide a thorough analysis of human rights through a critical lens; however, these questions are relevant here. In the work of many NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa, and those addressing witchcraft-related violence in particular, human rights discourse frequently depicts African women and girls as victims of abuse, lacking education and assertiveness, ignorant of the protections available to them, marginalized by gender inequality and repressed by poverty (Ally 2009; Quarmyne 2011). The necessary response to the abuses entails a veritable transformation of these women's societies "by transforming the rationale behind local community laws and reconciling local laws with regional and international perspectives on human rights" (Quarmyne 2011: 494).

Ally further highlights the importance of "framing"⁴⁴ these interventions in public discourse, stressing the need to rely on workers or cultural activists "located within or around the community ... [who] may not be viewed as a threat to the cultural belief" of witchcraft (2009: 2). The following recommendations stress that it is important "to frame witch hunting as related to place, economic elements, psychosocial motivations and gender power", emphasize "the violence dimension" and to sensitize "[c]ommunity leaders and government officials" to the "violence aspects of witchcraft beliefs" and finally, increasing "female involvement in community decision-making" (Ally 2009: 2).

An example of this framing in action is the work of the Association for Secular Humanism, a Malawian NGO which draws heavily on human rights discourse to advocate the eradication of witchcraft belief. In a publication on witchcraft-related violence in Malawi by the NGOs director George Thindwa and Chilimampungu (2012), the authors begin by defining violence as "behaviour intended to hurt or kill another person" including "economic, social, psychological or sexual" forms of violence (7). Employing this understanding of witchcraft-related violence, the authors surveyed homes in Malawi, finding that seventy-three percent of the households surveyed "did not regard witchcraft as a human rights issue", though twenty-one percent did, with five percent undecided (Chilimampungu & Thindwa 2012: 11).

In their report, the authors included quotes from respondents. Two quotes in particular were

⁴⁴ For Chong and Druckman (2007), in the most general terms, "[f]raming refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue" (104). In communication, frames organize reality, provide meaning and promote particular definitions and interpretations of issues (Chong & Druckman 2007). In short, "[f]rames in communication matter – that is, they affect the attitudes and behaviours of their audiences" (Chong & Druckman 2007: 109). In this case, framing is used to construct and promote a particular course of action for NGO workers addressing witchcraft.

included by the authors to demonstrate that many people in Malawi are inadequately educated about human rights. The first is from a thirteen year old boy who argued that witches are human rights abusers “[b]ecause witches infringe upon the rights of the people they bewitch” (Chilimampunga & Thindwa 2012: 34, original emphasis). The second is from a twenty-six year old man who argued that because witches are not human, they are privy to human rights protections “[b]ecause in witchcraft, there are no rights. It is only people who have rights” (Chilimampunga & Thindwa 2012: 34, original emphasis). The authors respond to these comments, noting that “[t]hese explanations show that most [Focus Group Discussion] participants had little knowledge of what human rights is about” (Chilimampunga & Thindwa 2012: 34).

What is most striking in this response is the overt dismissal and denial of the respondents' views, knowledge and reality, making way for the imposition of a foreign and dominating discourse of knowledge and reality which is privileged by the authors as right, correct, truth. The clear message sent by these authors is that Malawians' understandings of their own personal experiences, beliefs and reality are wrong and need to be corrected. As Englund argued in the case of freedom being used to confine the social, economic and political choices of Malawians in *Prisoners of Freedom*, here human rights discourse confines Malawians' knowledge of witchcraft by defining it as wrong, false and untrue.

Contrary to Chilimampunga and Thindwa's analysis, the participants quoted above do not fail to understand human rights. Rather, their knowledge of human rights is contextualized by their lived reality where witches threaten the ability of individuals to live unhindered by spiritual insecurity and where one's willingness to employ the invisible world against another ends one's membership and privileges in human society. Rather than accepting these perspectives as part of a broader discussion on human rights, they are rejected out of hand by the authors, who fall back on the familiar trope of ignorance and a lack of education often cited by NGOs in response to witchcraft beliefs.

The idea that education will eradicate witchcraft belief and eliminate instances of witchcraft-related violence has been addressed previously. However it is also important here to note that the common response by NGOs that education is needed, in various forms such as informing, educating, sensitizing and advocating, is a pervasive and persistent theme when NGOs address witchcraft. Further, where NGOs are unsuccessful in their endless effort to educate individuals, the ability of individuals to learn may itself be questioned. As noted by Ngong (2012), to claim that education has “not diminished the witchcraft imagination in Africa is to fail to see that educational standards in many African countries still leave much to be desired” (178).

In short, the idea that a foundation for learning must first be established may be presented by NGOs which stress illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure and the burdens of poverty, which limit the ability of people to participate in education and become learning individuals. In these cases, the lack of success of educational efforts is not seen as reflection of the nature of the education itself, as the embedded liberal model is beyond critical reflection, or as a lack of resonance with people's lived realities or experiences. Rather, this view effectively blames social, economic and political conditions for people's ignorance, adding more reason to the presence of NGOs which also seek to remedy these shortcomings.

The construction of witchcraft-related violence as a condition of underdevelopment is not only present in the public discourse of NGOs, it is also supported by academics whose works participate in the process of forming and informing the international framing of witchcraft. In particular, the emphasis on economics seen in anthropological studies and mirrored in many NGO appeals, is central to advancing a liberal capitalist analysis of witchcraft and its relationship to development, as poverty reduction is increasingly advocated as a solution to witchcraft-related violence.

A primary example of this type of analysis is an article written by an economist, Miguel in 2005, which looks at rainfall patterns and instances of witchcraft-related violence in Tanzania over a

period of eleven years. The author correlates rainfall variation to income stability or shocks experienced by sixty-seven villages, finding that there are “twice as many witch murders in years of extreme rainfall as in other years” (Miguel 2005: 1153). These villages are characterized as “poor rural areas” dependent on agriculture where extreme rainfall is “associated with poor harvests and near-famine conditions” (Miguel 2005: 1153). Witch killings are associated by Miguel with economic condition as “most witch killing” occurs in these “poor, rural areas” which rely on agriculture and because most victims in the sample were “from poor households” (Miguel 2005: 1153).

There are a number of problems with the correlations made in this study and the generalization being drawn from them. Miguel acknowledges a number of these, noting that it is difficult to differentiate economic motivation from “alternative socio-cultural explanations”, citing ethnic distribution in region and belief in the supernatural as cultural factors which may complete economic theories (Miguel 2005: 1153). However, the fundamental flaw of the research, which seek to correlate rainfall and witch killing by looking only at one region that is highly dependent on rain, remains overlooked. Miguel has effectively designed his research to confirm his hypotheses, by not looking at regions that are not rainfall dependent, but do experience witch killings, no broader generalization can be made from his work.

Despite this, Miguel continues to make a number of claims correlating witchcraft-related violence and economic conditions. For example, he suggests that state-led “economic reforms” in the 1960s, such as villagisation, also caused an increased in witch killings (Miguel 2005: 1155). As noted earlier, alternative social explanations may also be needed, such as Niehaus (2001) findings that villagisation in South Africa caused considerable tension as villages were forced together and strangers were made neighbours, increasing people's sense of insecurity which then led to more accusations.

However, the author's focus on economic conditions is made paramount and is subtly linked to a broader aim in his discussion of witch killing where he notes that witch killers, in their own false beliefs, are “pursuing justice, a view that runs against both Tanzanian law and international human rights norms” (Miguel 2005: 1156). In citing the numbers of witch murders in Central and Southern Africa, Miguel's economic analysis becomes increasingly focused on the plight of elderly women and young children who, as reported in *The Economist* magazine, have also become “common culprits” of witchcraft and are being “kicked out of their homes or killed by family members following household calamities and negative income shocks” (Miguel 2005: 1156).

Miguel proceeds to provide a more global and historical summary of witchcraft-related violence in India's Bihar province and England, throughout the 16th and 18th centuries, where poverty is cited but not correlated to witch killings in any way, though the author does refer to “gerontocide” in “poor pre-industrial societies” under “acute environmental stress” (Miguel 2005: 1157). The author then suggests that psychological factors and scapegoating and the structuring of gender relations also contribute to witch killings.

In conclusion to this analysis, Miguel makes “public policy” recommendations, all of which address economic insecurity. The first is to improve formal insurance systems “to provide households with better means of smoothing their consumption across years of good and bad rainfall” (Miguel 2005: 1170). The second is to provide elderly women “in the study area with regular pensions, which would transform them from a net household economic liability into an asset, and could help households smooth their consumption” (Miguel 2005: 1170). Unfortunately, the author notes, the Tanzanian state is “too poor to afford a pension scheme... without considerable donor assistance” (Miguel 2005: 1170).

Finally, the author finds that violence against “witches” will continue in Tanzania “as long as most households live in grinding poverty and are unable to insure themselves against large income shocks” (Miguel 2005: 1170). Over the course of his study, Miguel has constructed his research to

confirm a correlation between poverty and witch killings, though the links are not always obvious or made clear. In addition, the author has appealed to human rights norms, suggested international donors for assistance and has concluded that the only means to ending witch killings, despite the additional social and (I would argue) political factors, is poverty reduction.

However, Miguel is not advocating a simple exchange wherein funds are given by the state (supported by international donors) to poor, rural households Tanzania. What Miguel suggests is much more complex: an insurance scheme which households would buy into and then drawn on in times of need, and a pension scheme intended only for elderly women. Most notably, these two initiatives are not intended to directly address witchcraft-related violence, but to “smooth” the “consumption” of households. The connection being made here between economic power and the ability to live free of violence is assumed rather than explained.

For Miguel, greater participation in the capitalist economy, through insurance and pension plans which will support consumption, is the solution to witchcraft-related violence. This idea, that greater economic wealth, in other words, development, is the primary means to improving individual lives is not seen as a means towards further formalizing individuals' participation in the capitalist economy (through insurance) or the liberal state (through pensions). Rather, it is seen as a human rights issue, through the rubric of violence, and the most appropriate response to injustice is to ensure the ability of individuals to control their own lives and choose for themselves, in this case, by better controlling their own consumption.

Miguel's study is an excellent example of how economic growth is represented, despite many missing links, as the solution to creating justice for poor, rural Africans. Inclusion of the phenomenon of witchcraft-related violence itself is almost secondary, as the image of Africa as poor and violent is adequately cemented in Western discourse to support the most spurious correlations. As a result of these assumptions, the idea that poverty causes witchcraft-related violence is easily accepted and widely reproduced by NGOs and academics.

In addition to negating belief, the argument that greater wealth will lead to a decrease in witchcraft-related violence also ignores essential aspects of this phenomenon, the most important being inequality. While there are many aspects of witchcraft which may be associated with wealth, such as ritual murder to ensure economic success, the core commonality across witchcraft beliefs are the motivations behind witchcraft: envy and jealousy towards that which others have but one does not. These emotions are motivated by fundamental inequalities in a society, inequalities which poverty reduction does not necessarily address.

Confronting these inequalities, which may be considered being in part social, economic, and political, as they are based in relations of power, would mean going beyond the policy recommendations made by Miguel, or the witchcraft-related violence programs of NGOs; it would require confronting the processes of power underlying these inequalities. This would mean, at times, questioning the logic of modernity embedded in these works, thereby upending its status as given.

Development Discourse on the Ground

Accusations of witchcraft are a convenient excuse for the cruel treatment of women who are poor, excluded, different, or seen to be challenging the status quo. Very occasionally women who are economically successful and independent are accused, as a way of taking away their wealth and power (ActionAid International 2012: 8)

The above quote from an ActionAid International report titled “Condemned without trial:

Women and Witchcraft in Ghana”, is rich with discursive practice. In this short excerpt, the author draws on multiple layers of Western logic which together construct a situation in which the accused witch is being prevented from exercising their personhood as idealized by the modern liberal subject. Here, the accused is an African woman who is depicted as oppressed and powerless against the instrumentalization of beliefs and traditions which are themselves false, as they are only “a convenient excuse” for perpetrators (possibly imagined as the powerful dominant male who is both rational in his use of power and irrational in his false belief).

Further, the accused's marginalization is the product of either their poverty or individuality from the collective; the accused is somehow different from the whole and therefore punished for this. Most evident is the emphasis on the economic ability of the accused. The accused is kept poor by false belief (which we assumed motivates the “cruel treatment), and worse, is further victimized for attempting to improve their individual lot by challenging the status quo. Here, the status quo for women is powerlessness, the absence of individuality and exclusion from economic enterprise. Therefore, the status quo can only be contested by moving towards Western ideals for this woman as the economically empowered individual.

In this discourse, wealth is the primary source of independence and power, and only individuals, who are unhindered by tradition, irrationality and false belief, may achieve this status. Therefore it is the duty of ActionAid and other NGOs concerned with the well-being of accused witches to ensure this progress is possible. As a result of this logic, ActionAid Ghana's mandate to address poverty reduction is funnelled through initiatives which focus on empowering women and aim to support women in demanding their rights. This empowerment model is two-fold: first, women are empowered within ActionAid by being made full participants in, rather than recipients of, ActionAid programmes. However, the nature of women's participation is both framed and directed by the NGO, to ensure that women are taking the appropriate action to address their needs, which are again defined by ActionAid.

The second notion of empowerment aims to support the women through participation in society as individual citizens, who are encouraged to organize protests, appeal to their local government for support and learn to exercise their civil and political rights. Here, again, participation is defined and guided by Western ideals of the engaged and empowered citizen who ensure their own rights, in particular their right to accumulate wealth. Thus, participation and empowerment remain within the confines of the state and capitalism, advancing the formation of the modern liberal subject, through the frame of aiding vulnerable African women accused of witchcraft.

The highly connotative terminology of empowerment and participation is, today, a powerful framing for hegemonic intervention, particularly in terms of development. However, witchcraft presents a unique challenge to the advancement of this discourse. Golooba-Mutebi (2005) in a study of participation as an evolving practice in development discourse argues that witchcraft further erodes the performance of the participatory approach. While the author acknowledges critiques of participation such as the demand it makes on peoples' time and resources, the “restricted capacity of the poor to pursue their own interests”, and the “assumption of social homogeneity”, the problem of “low-trust, low-cohesion” social relations is much more pressing (Golooba-Mutebi 2005: 938).

For the author, witchcraft accusations flourish in contexts where people are forced together, such as crowded government settlements, and where people are exposed to “new ways of thinking and conduct”, as in the cases of education and labour migration (Golooba-Mutebi 2005: 940). These conditions place stress on already existing “undercurrents of mistrust” in societies where fear of witchcraft “is almost universal” (Golooba-Mutebi 2005: 944).

Belief in witchcraft, the author argues from his case study, leads to the “depletion of trust” which is exacerbated when insecurity rises to suspicion and accusations are made and divisions between those who support or oppose violence emerge (Golooba-Mutebi 2005: 951). In addition to

causing distrust between people who fear witchcraft attacks from others, witchcraft belief also creates the fear of accusation, as expressed by respondents in Golooba-Mutebi's research who felt they could not even trust their own friends as they too "might turn against them were they to be accused (Golooba-Mutebi 2005: 952).

As a result of these deep-seated fears and distrust, efforts which rely on collective action have met limited success, collapsing "amid suspicions and accusations of witchcraft" (Golooba-Mutebi 2005: 953). Most notably, women's groups intended to "pursue common interests" were dissolved in part because of witchcraft allegations as well as suspicions that benefits were being inequitably distributed, as in one case where a group member was accused of making other women's money disappear (Golooba-Mutebi 2005: 953).

Though witchcraft concerns are pervasive, NGOs which advocate participation fail to consider the impact of these beliefs (Golooba-Mutebi 2005), a reflective gap which is most obvious where the NGOs in question are addressing witchcraft belief directly. As noted by Golooba-Mutebi, poverty-reduction efforts inevitably lead to greater economic inequality, as some individuals are supported over others. Therefore where witchcraft concerns are present, poverty reduction efforts are even less likely to be successful.

From Golooba-Mutebi's findings, for NGOs to be more effective in addressing witchcraft concerns, they would be required to challenge and work against inequalities in social relations. This would entail, for many NGOs, a radicalization of their mandates and agendas, as it would require them to be openly critical of power relations which are generally accepted as the status quo. However, in Ghana, the majority of NGOs are "complaint NGOs", as they "do not have the desire to question development agendas or articulate (subversively or openly) alternative visions, whether radical or reformist" (Townsend, Porter & Mawdsley 2004: 873).

As a result of intense competition for donor funding and a widespread "lack of confidence in local ideas", most NGOs in Ghana conform to donor preferences (Townsend, Porter & Mawdsley 2004: 877), as demonstrated by ActionAid Ghana's replication of ActionAid International's representations of the witch camps, in spite of its efforts to represent itself as a national organization. In particular, ActionAid Ghana's emphasis on gender and women's empowerment serves to highlight to foreignness of the NGO in Ghanaian society.

In their study on "gender mainstreaming", a concept which assesses public policy through the lens of gender, Wendoh and Wallace (2005) found that this was "still largely an external concept" in the work of African NGOS (71). Though the concept has been adopted by government and some local NGOs, gender mainstreaming is often perceived to be "for the benefit of donors", as many NGOs themselves feel "that many of the ideas are imposed by those with power over them (their international NGO partners, donors or government)" (Wendoh & Wallace 2005: 71).

Though the core sentiment of the common backlash against gender mainstreaming is the sense that the concept is foreign and threatening, and "a plan to 'usurp men's power'" (Wendoh & Wallace 2005: 72), what is most problematic about reducing criticism of gender to patriarchy is that this response overlooks the impositions being made by NGOs on African women. Not only does gender mainstreaming misunderstand the "essence of African societies", it also fails to "relate to the perceptions and needs" of African women (Wendoh & Wallace 2005: 72-77).

In the gender mainstreaming initiatives, "[o]utsiders, not insiders, define women's needs", outlining for them the conditions of equality "without first listening to them and assessing the realities and constraints of their contexts" (Wendoh & Wallace 2005: 77). For Wendoh and Wallace, NGOs which support gender mainstreaming effectively assume what is appropriate for African women based on a foreign context that "does not necessarily apply or work in another" (2005: 77). As a result of this, NGO workers who may be familiar with local realities may still "try to impose ideas that are alien and

unhelpful” (Wendoh & Wallace 2005: 77).

These same criticisms are made by Akua Anyidoho and Manuh (2010) in their assessment of gender mainstreaming initiatives undertaken by the Government of Ghana's Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC) and ActionAid Ghana. Akua Anyidoho and Manuh point to MOWAC's *National Gender and Children Policy* and its accompanying *Strategic Implementation Plan*, where gender mainstreaming is outlined as the guiding principle for the department and where the concepts of “empowerment”, 'gender equality' and 'gender equity' are used synonymously” (2010: 268). As argued in this chapter, the authors note that in the work of MOWAC “women's disempowerment is described as a lack of economic opportunity”, a perspective echoed in the programmes and organizational culture of ActionAid Ghana (Akua Anyidoho & Manuh 2010: 269)

The authors stress ActionAid Ghana's emphasis on gender equality, which is linked to two other key thematic areas of education and food security and agriculture, has been developed through the findings of ActionAid Ghana's Country Strategy Paper. This paper was “informed by an analysis of Ghanaian economic performance that showed that girls and women are the most deprived with regards to access to agricultural input and fair pricing of agricultural products” and correlated women's exclusion from decision-making to inadequate education (Akua Anyidoho & Manuh 2010: 270).

This characterization of women as “powerless” and “vulnerable” and therefore unable to access resources has motivated (or been used to justify) ActionAid's rights-based approach and focus on women's rights as “essential for sustainable development and poverty reduction” (Akua Anyidoho & Manuh 2010: 270). As a result of this, ActionAid Ghana works to ensure women obtain access to and control over “productive resources such as credit, land, training, and education, by providing opportunities for women to gain power and assert their rights” (Akua Anyidoho & Manuh 2010: 270).

In Ghana, economic empowerment has become the “most dominant programmatic theme” across government and NGO agencies, focusing on reducing constraints to women's access (Akua Anyidoho & Manuh 2010: 271). Unfortunately, this discourse fails to consider “the fact of power in interpersonal, national and global spaces” which cannot be altered by reinforcing discourses, nor does it “account for the fact that even economically advantaged women may be disempowered in some areas” (Akua Anyidoho & Manuh 2010: 271).

Akua Anyidoho & Manuh suggest that in order to avoid addressing fundamental power relations, the emphasis on poor, rural women, “who are assumed to be the worst off”, serves to distract from the fact that “individual women, or even whole communities, no matter how aware of their rights and what is right, may not be equipped to engage power structures effectively” (Akua Anyidoho & Manuh 2010: 271-272). Thus, the discourse of empowerment remains highlight “decontextualized, as there is no focused analysis of the social forces that may prevent certain processes and outcomes” (Akua Anyidoho & Manuh 2010: 272). The result of this discourse is a reduction of realities towards the production of women as “victims to be taken care of, or marginalized groups to be integrated into development, mainly for the sake of the nation”, where processes and relations of power are suppressed and inequalities are framed in terms of welfare and basic needs (Akua Anyidoho & Manuh 2010: 272).

The role of NGOs in advancing the project of modernity may be seen not only in discursive practices such as gender, participation, sustainability and development, it is also present in normalized and highly valued concepts such as human rights, freedom and equality. The history of these projects, bound to the colonial era which sought to transform African realities into a Western liberal model, continues today most dramatically in the encounter between witchcraft and NGOs. In Ghana, this encounter is most visible as NGOs have proliferated in the permissive democracy and general stability of the state and work actively to combat witchcraft-related violence. Alternatively, in Cameroon, the authoritarian nature of the state and heightened distrust of public association has limited NGO expansion and penetration, thus preventing serious engagement with witchcraft.

Case Studies: Ghana

In order to provide greater context for the views shared by respondents in Ghana this section begins with a brief review of NGOs addressing witchcraft-related violence and their approaches to development in Ghana. As noted briefly earlier, NGOs in Ghana are commonly characterized as being complaint. This is in part due to Ghana's long history of being “firmly tied into global agendas”, as one of the first states to “implement a structural adjustment programme” and as a “major recipient of official development assistance” (Porter 2003: 132).

NGOs in Ghana largely operate within the rubric of partnership, another key concept in development which stresses the importance of working with a committed donor, but which also leads to intense competition between NGOs as well as a focusing efforts “upwards towards satisfying donor demands, rather than downwards to the poor” (Porter 2003: 135). Another problem with this approach is the assumption that local NGOs and “community-based organizations” (CBOs) represent local experiences, though many local NGO workers have never experienced living in poverty (Porter 2003: 138).

The view that development NGOs are largely a “donor-created and donor-led system” which acts to convey Western concepts of development and modernity is supported by Porter's research of NGOs in Ghana (2003:141). Mohan (1999) also supports this finding in an analysis of the political tensions created by a development discourse focused on civil society. Here Mohan finds that NGOs which are committed to democracy and economic liberalism, often through the support of the withdrawal of the state from social services provision or through human rights, dominate Ghana's civil society sector (Mohan 1999).

Mohan traces the role of NGOs in supporting the state to Ghana's colonial history where non-state organizations were suppressed and excluded until independence when they were then incorporated and controlled in varying degrees by the state. Mohan also highlights an essential feature of NGO interventions in Ghana, where the northern region, which was left underdeveloped during the colonial era, is today the site of intense focus and it is here that the majority of foreign NGOs operate and concentrate their service delivery, at times contributing to conflict through uneven development in the region, and failing to address poverty elsewhere (Porter & Lyon 2006).

Overall, Mohan finds that efforts to strengthen civil society in Ghana, rather than addressing the needs of the poor, serve to solidify inequality by supporting local elites, whose use “foreign aid and locally generated income as a means of achieving or consolidating their middle-class status” (Mohan, 1999: 148). As the Ghanaian state has established its “own 'non-governmental' organisations”, NGOs outside of the state do not have the opportunity to protest or inform state policies (Mohan 1999: 148). Therefore, rather than being advocates or representatives of the poor, many local NGOs limit “debates about more fundamental structural changes” which may challenge the project of modernity (Mohan 1999: 150).

Looking at one NGO in particular, World Vision International, Labranche (2002) follows this critique through the parallel terminology of Westernization, which is defined by the author as “the propagation of modernity” (83). Here Labranche investigates the impact of World Vision interventions in Ghana on the concept of political legitimacy and in particular the role of traditional authorities in Asante society. Labranche stresses the importance of chiefs as spiritual authorities in Asante and suggests that interventions by World Vision had begun to alter the role of chiefs as protectors towards the role of providers.

By incorporating chiefs into programmes and ensuring they are consulted before projects are

implemented, in an effort to encourage “community involvement”, World Vision has participated in shifting the discourse of political legitimacy among the Asante (Labranche 2002: 87). In Labranche's findings, chiefs are increasingly expected to protect people from the state. In order to fulfil this responsibility, chiefs must be educated and literate, capacities which also ensure development. Finally, as a result of the evangelical foundation of World Vision's interventions, chiefs who have not converted to Christianity are increasingly at odds with Christian Ghanaians who reject the very foundation of the chiefs power, which lies in the invisible world. In place of spiritual power, chiefs must rely on their ability to promote “Western-style development”, as the new standard for “‘good’ governance” (Labranche 2002: 95).

Finally, Labranche found that World Vision's programs and evangelism encouraged young people to view themselves as more westernized, modern and developed, and therefore superior to their uneducated families and elders. Labranche characterizes these views as being part of a new ethic, of “individual equalitarianism based on material performance, which is characteristic of modernity” and which has evolved in part due to World Vision's interventions (Labranche 2002: 92).

Underlying these changes is a transformation of legitimacy and political authority, which Labranche argues is a “westernization of legitimacy” brought about by the intervention of an NGO which “disseminates certain characteristics of modernity, which are then internalized”, transforming values of individuals who find themselves caught between competing discourses (2002: 96). The incorporation of traditional authority into these processes is an important step in legitimizing these interventions, as chiefs provide a link to the community which NGOs seek to penetrate.

Porter and Lyon (2006) note that the community is a concept which “is no longer accepted at face value” and many NGOs and donor discourse have moved towards use of the term “group”, which has a long history in Ghana where “precolonial commercial interests and later colonial administrations [were] reported to be working through traditional authorities and groups based on the chieftaincy system” (250-252). Though independence saw a “decline in government interest in community groups... the emphasis on groups has become more and more pronounced” in recent times (Porter & Lyon 2006: 253).

The focus on groups in Ghana has become so prevalent that some NGOs have come to measure their successes in terms of the number of group members, as opposed to “real improvement in living conditions or participation” (Porter & Lyon 2006: 253). However, as noted earlier by Golooba-Mutebi and complemented by Porter and Lyon, “issues of trust” within groups may be affected by witchcraft belief and are likely to “vary within individual regions between urban and rural areas, and according to wealth, educational level, gender, and past experience of group activities” (Porter & Lyon 2006: 259).

As a result of these and other insensitivities, NGOs are often viewed with mixed feelings in Ghana. Though NGOs are an established part of the political landscape, to the degree that foreigners on the street may be addressed as “NGO” by passersby, concerns remain that NGOs are a continued form of foreign control. This concern was voiced by respondents who made a strong distinction between local and foreign NGOs, though the differentiation is inherently false, as the NGO model itself is foreign and many organizations which are thought to be local, such as HelpAge Ghana and the Presbyterian GO Home Project, as in fact, like ActionAid, local subsidiaries of larger international organizations.

HelpAge Ghana was established in 1988 and is a member of the HelpAge International network of NGOs dedicated to working with disadvantaged older people internationally (Agbenyiga & Huang 2012). HelpAge Ghana's work focuses on elder rights and service provisions intended to improve the quality of life of older people in Ghana. The organization “identifies aging issues as development issues” and aims to become a primary service provider through a rights-based approach (Agbenyiga & Huang 2012: 346). The work of HelpAge builds on the “empowerment movement” and seeks to ensure

“the socioeconomic rights of older people”, while educating older people about their rights and helping them become “informed citizens” (Agbenyiga & Huang 2012: 350-351).

The Presbyterian Gambaga Outreach Home project, more commonly known as GO Home, provides services to accused witches in the Gambaga witch camp. However the primary aim of the project is to negotiate the return and reintegration of women who have been banished from their home. Though accounts of the organizations' success vary, from my time with HelpAge Ghana I was informed by the former director that over five hundred women has be returned home, while half this number was recently reported by a BBC journalist (Whitaker 2012).

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana began working with the Gambaga witch camp in the early 1960s, but it was not until 1994 that the GO Home project was established (Houde 2010). Though the Church sought to curtail the number of women brought to the camps, reintegration became the focus of their work (Houde 2010). When accused witches arrive at Gambaga, they are interviewed by GO Home's staff member in order to compile a profile of the woman, her family, the nature of the accusation and to assess the potential for her return. The village which banished the woman may also be consulted regarding the potential for reintegration, often requiring lengthy negotiations to ensure the woman will not be at risk if she returns.

Despite the efforts of the GO Home project, many accused women, and though not commonly addressed, men, do not return home. This is in part due to the lack of willingness among the accused to return to their villages. As noted by women in Houde's study of the camps, women felt that though the camp was prison-like, they were at least “free”:

Here, I eat whatever food I can, I am free to move and sleep and have no debt. With no husband and no male child, it is hard to buy food and clothes. This is a big worry; I am getting weak and I can't perform right. I can't go back, but I consider myself free here.” (Accused in Houde 2010: 7)

This is a prison. I had my own home and farm and children. Now these are all scattered in other villages – because they accused me. So I have to stay here. I am eating and bathing and I am fine here. If I get old and am not able to care for myself, and my children come for me, I will go. It wouldn't be easy. I would be described as a witch always; the damage is done. I like it here, where there is no trouble” (Accused in Houde 2010: 8)

I've been here fore 10 years now, I'm doing well. My only male relative, my son, is very far away. If he comes to take me, I'll go. If I was to go, I don't think the people in my community would describe me as a witch. The mother of the dead child was later accused herself; now she lives here. We're in the same situation. It's like a prison in a sense, since I can't do my own work in my own house, and I have to leave what I'm doing when the chief orders so. It's not really a camp either. I'm still free.” (Accused in Houde 2010: 8)

In past negotiations with villages leaders and family members of the accused, GO Home, unlike other NGOs, has not directly emphasized education and does not attempt to eradicate witchcraft belief in its interventions. As noted by the former director to Houde (2010), attempts to change people's belief would be counterproductive and may threaten the work of the GO Home project.

Hostility towards intervention by the West, particularly in respect to witchcraft, was a persistent subtext in discussions during my field research. Concern about foreign NGOs was most succinctly expressed by one informant who felt that while witchcraft is declining in Ghana, witchcraft-related violence is a human rights issue that must be addressed, primarily through the closing of the witch

camps⁴⁵. The informant asked me whether I thought Ghana could solve the problem of witchcraft on its own, or whether it needed outside help, to which I responded that I think the solutions were already there in Ghana. The informant agreed but cautioned that NGOs that come from different cultures and attempt to see things in their own way would fail in their interventions.

This conclusion, that NGOs are incapable of overcoming their biases to effectively aid Ghanaians, was also shared by a chief⁴⁶ who expressed frustration with and criticized the human rights discourse of NGOs. Though he acknowledged that human rights are a good idea, it was much more important to find out why witchcraft-related violence was occurring. Because NGOs lacked a foundational knowledge of people's concerns, the chief argued, people tend to dismiss human rights as irrelevant. In place of co-optation, the chief felt that consultation with traditional authorities and elders would be more successful in solving the problem of witchcraft-related violence.

In interviews, representatives of religious institutions were much more supportive of NGOs and their work to address witchcraft-related violence than other respondents. In particular, one religious leader⁴⁷ stressed the role of NGOs in reducing witchcraft belief and changing cultural practices through advocacy efforts and education, including the harmful work of some deliverance churches. The emphasis on education was a common theme, in particular for one religious leader⁴⁸ who noted that a central success of NGO education efforts was to reduce belief in witchcraft, which complemented the work by churches to replace this belief with a strong belief in God.

Overall, state representatives were cautious towards the effectiveness of NGOs in addressing witchcraft-related violence. One state representative⁴⁹ summarized concerns shared by other respondents: though NGOs had taken on the challenge of addressing witchcraft-related violence and, in particular, were championing the cause of closing the witch camps, how this would be done remained unclear.

Though respondents generally expressed support for the intentions of NGOs to improve the living conditions of accused witches, they were unconvinced that NGOs would be able to successfully address the underlying factors involved, such as continued belief in witchcraft, recurring violence and the insecurity experienced in society. Respondents overwhelmingly felt, as one state representative⁵⁰ noted, that NGOs were seeking short-term solutions for a long-term problem, one which has been part of their society for centuries.

In my own interviews with ActionAid Ghana, World Vision International, the Presbyterian Church's Gambaga Outreach (GO) Home project and HelpAge Ghana, respondents were also aware of the complex situations they faced. However, many felt that other actors, such as the state and traditional authorities, were also responsible for the delayed progress in reducing instances of witchcraft-related violence and in closing the witch camps.

ActionAid Ghana⁵¹, as in its publication, focused mainly on women as accused witches and stressed that victims of accusations are weak, fragile and socially and economically vulnerable. ActionAid estimated the number of women in camps to be around eight hundred and suggested that family members sent with women to help care for them should also be considered as victims of human rights abuses such as limited access to education, and numbered them to be about six hundred.

ActionAid expressed the view that the government is foremost responsible for the protection of

⁴⁵ Fieldnotes 06/10/2012

⁴⁶ Ghana, Traditional Authority, 17/09/2012

⁴⁷ Ghana, Religious Organization, 28/09/2012

⁴⁸ Ghana, Religious Organization, 25/09/2012

⁴⁹ Ghana, State Official, 23/10/2012

⁵⁰ Ghana, State Official, 23/10/2012

⁵¹ Ghana, Non-Governmental Organization, 08/10/2012

accused women and should not only provide for the women in the camps, but also prevent additional women being sent to them and ensure that they are closed permanently. Additionally, ActionAid felt that the government, in particular CHRAJ and MOWAC, is responsible for sensitizing the population in the legal rights of individuals and enforcing laws against violence by bringing culprits before courts.

In respect to the work of NGOs, ActionAid felt that NGOs were unfairly adopting the responsibilities of the government by ensuring the basic living conditions and well-being of the women in the camps were being addressed. In response to the view at ActionAid that the organization, like other NGOs, was providing short term solutions to a longer term problem, the focus of their work had recently shifted from services towards empowerment, so that the women in the camps would themselves be able pressure the government for assistance. ActionAid then formed a networked group between the camps which they called *Tigbubtab* (let us support one another), which aims to inform the government of how terrible the conditions in the camps are.

When asked about the work of churches, the respondent noted that they felt that the work of religious institutions was particularly effective in providing human rights education and in providing basic services to the women in the camps at Gambaga and Gnani. An important aspect of this work was the GO Home project's interventions with women at Gambaga where women according to the respondent arrived without hope but were able to find inner peace through the support of the project.

Traditional authorities were viewed less positively by the respondent and it was clearly expressed that chiefs, as the primary stakeholder in accusations, were contributing to the banishment of women by failing to protect them from their neighbours in their villages. While ActionAid acknowledged that traditional and witchcraft beliefs could not be directly contested, it was important for traditional authorities to rely on the state justice system rather than traditional practices in the case of accusation.

Overall, ActionAid stressed the importance of education and economic empowerment for vulnerable women. As the government was identified by the respondent as the actor most directly responsible for ensuring these, the state's lack of commitment to the cause was seen as problematic. As well, the respondent viewed the role of media with concern as the organization had recently dealt with a false report by a journalist who claimed that forty people had been threatened with lynching in Tamale. ActionAid suggested that this inflammatory story was invented to make up for a slow news day.

The article which appeared in local papers, on television and Ghana news sites online, such as GhanaNation.com, described the event in a suburb of Tamale as a “rampage” by “angry youth” who canvassed the neighbourhood with a list of witches suspected for causing the death of young people in the area (GhanaNation.com, 3 October 2012). The article claimed that the youth informed the journalist that they were hoping to stop future deaths and eyewitnesses were claimed to have seen the accused men and women subjected to insult and physical harassment as they were forced to the chief's palace.

The article reported that once at the chief's palace the accused were sent free, narrowly avoiding summary execution, details provided by the one eyewitness who is named and quoted in the article. The article concludes by noting that older persons in the area continue to live in a state of fear as such attacks are part of a “rising trend” (GhanaNation.com, 3 October 2012). When ActionAid investigated these claims and tried to contact the forty people accused, they found no evidence of the event and suggested that the false report was unhelpful and negatively impacted their work.

Though World Vision International⁵² provides services at the witch camps in Gushiegu and Kpatinga, the organization was reluctant to speak of witchcraft and did not view the accused as witches but as marginalized women who were exorcised of their powers and are in need of support. In terms of

⁵² Ghana, Non-Governmental Organization, 08/10.2012

government intervention, World Vision was aware that the government intended to close the camps and felt that the success of this effort hinged on education efforts in the region. The organization was not aware of any religious organizations operating in the witch camps and did not identify itself as a religious organization.

Traditional authorities were also addressed more neutrally by the respondent, who noted that chiefs had provided some support to women. However the respondent noted that the view of the organization that NGOs are the primary actors in ensuring the well-being of the women in the camps. The main of focus of World Visions' work is to ensure people in northern Ghana are educated, as witchcraft belief was correlated by the respondent to illiteracy, and poverty reduction, as economic empowerment would ensure women would not be accused because rich women can't be witches.

For HelpAge Ghana⁵³, witchcraft accusations are a serious issue, in terms of their impact on the rights of older people and their economic livelihood. However, in terms of scope, the problem itself is seen as being quite limited and is not an issue which the organization views as widely applying to Ghana. In terms of the work of other NGOs, HelpAge differentiated between those organizations whose mission it is to address witchcraft-related violence and those that do not care about witchcraft, predominantly those that are not rights based.

HelpAge's official approach to the question of witchcraft is quite pragmatic; the organization acknowledges the existence of witchcraft, but considers violence to be unnecessary in dealing with accused witches and state involvement to be necessary when violence does occur. As noted by the respondent, witchcraft itself is not illegal in Ghana and the act cannot be proven. However, the law does provide protection from libel and abuse and secures the rights of Ghanaians to be free from accusation.

In terms of witchcraft, HelpAge acknowledges that it is both a very real and serious problem in Ghana today. Fear of witchcraft attack is a part of people's daily lives and the personal experiences of staff members confirm the immensity of this threat. However, it is the organizations' view that witchcraft is not uniquely evil, as it may also be used to heal and protect. Ultimately, as noted by the respondent, spiritual power, whether harmful witchcraft or protective sorcery, must be managed by the individual.

The Presbyterian GO Home⁵⁴ project representative shared similar views towards witchcraft belief and witchcraft-related violence, noting that the problem exists, but it is not as serious as many believe. For the GO Home project, witchcraft-related violence cannot be addressed as a human rights issue because the question of justice is not unidirectional, where the accused alone is suffering injustice. Contrary to the approach of the government which emphasizes the human rights abuses of the accused as injustice, villages and families are recognized as enacting a socially accepted form of justice by banishing accused witches.

Rather than focusing on accusations, GO Home works with accused women and their villages to achieve reconciliation and to make peace between or within families. Unlike other NGOs, the GO Home project director works in the camp on a daily basis, thus the relationship between the organization and the women in the camp and their family members, both at the camp and in their home village, is one of great familiarity. As a religious organization, GO Home also works with local churches to provide ecumenical partnership in the camp, where prayers services and spiritual support are available daily.

In GO Home's reintegration efforts, the role of traditional authorities is central and chiefs are consulted before any other village resident or family member. In addition to their influence on public opinion, the willingness of a chief to accept the return of an accused witch is considered to be a

⁵³ Ghana, Non-Governmental Organization, 23/10/2012

⁵⁴ Ghana, Non-Governmental Organization, 09/10.2012

guarantee that the woman will not be harmed once she returns to the village, though all returned women are also visited regularly to ensure their continued safety

In recognition of the very real fear that people experience, for both the accused and home villages, part of the reconciliation process which GO Home facilitates involves periodic visits where individuals are brought to the camp, or accused women to their villages, in order to defuse the sense of anxiety and insecurity for both parties. These efforts are generally successful, though progress towards this point may take time. As noted by the organization, family members may be grieving and angry for some time after the loss that motivated the accusation, and staff members have been threatened with violence and attacked when visiting villages.

In addition to the formal negotiations to return an accused witch, GO Home also secures women's safety by engaging four people who live in proximity to the woman in a loan programme. In exchange for the credit provided by GO Home, these four individuals agree to defend the reputation of the woman, to whom their loan is bound, from gossip. This model has proven effective, as in one case a woman was re-accused and the four loan recipients fought the accusation, preventing the woman's banishment.

Though GO Home does not advance a human rights approach in its efforts to return women to their home villages, the organization advocates and has conducted education initiatives in the region. In particular, health education is seen as essential as it provides people with information that allows them to differentiate illness from witchcraft attack. As well, GO Home has conducted educational workshops in villages where multiple women have been banished or murdered to inform the people of the illegality of their actions. These efforts have targeted chiefs specifically by seeking their commitment to preventing violence in the future.

Cameroon

Unlike Ghana, NGOs in Cameroon lack popular visibility and presence, aside from the rare corners of signage directing drivers through the neighbourhood of Bastos in Yaounde and individual programme sites and offices. Respondents who participated in interviews and informants in general were unable to identify NGOs working on the subject of witchcraft-related violence and those who were able to only identified religious organizations which are affiliated with churches rather than independent organizations. Compared to Ghana there is also a significant dearth of research and information looking at the work of NGOs in Cameroon, with a few exceptions focusing on women's rights, health and medicine and environmental programming, which is a central point of intervention for NGOs in the country.

Cameroon as a site of intervention presents a challenge to outside actors who meet multiple barriers in their efforts to direct development. As noted earlier, the authoritarian nature of the state limits the ability of NGOs to operate as freely in the country as they would in Ghana. Due to the imposing state presence in Cameroon, organizations that hope to work with, or at least with the approval of the government, must be conscious to not upset the state. As a result, few NGOs express open criticism of the state within Cameroonian media and society. Further, the Cameroonian government highly restricts the ability of organizations to both form and operate in Cameroon. As there is a strong sense of distrust towards unknown associations and organizations it would be difficult for many mid-sized NGOs to establish themselves in Cameroon were they to receive permission from the government. Finally, restrictions on assembly and laws against undeclared and government sanction associations limits the ability of NGOs to evolve within Cameroon.

In addition to the state imposed limitations, regional differences present varying challenges. In

one study by Leonhardt (2006) looking at the work of missionaries and NGOs working with the Baka people in south-east Cameroon, the author notes that the political culture of the region was found to be resistant to Western development intervention. Missionaries who sought to engage individuals willing to take a leadership role within villages found that the egalitarian nature of Baka societies prevented this, limiting the ability of the mission to form a group through which to access villages (Leonhardt 2006).

According to the missionaries that participated in Leonhardt's research, their own efforts, as well as those by NGOs and government ministries, focused on initiatives to change the political culture of the Baka, the outcomes of which would also "result in the disappearance of Baka culture altogether" (Leonhardt 2006: 91). Nyamnjoh's (2001) work in Cameroon suggests that the egalitarian nature of many societies in the country may be linked in part to witchcraft belief. Because witches are selfish and do not care for the common good, acting against the majority may be seen as proof that one is involved in the supernatural (Nyamnjoh 2001). Therefore, being asked to take a leadership role and act against the structures of legitimate authority of one's society may also risk suspicion and increase people's resistance to foreign intervention.

I frequently encountered hostility towards the West and Europeans during my field research. A subtext of this tension is the perception that Westerners are in Cameroon to impose something upon the people there. Nyamnjoh (2001) argues that this perception is justified, as Western knowledge of Africa has "been generated from the insensitive position of power and quest for convergence and homogeneity" (28). As a result, Westerners often approach their exchanges in Africa with "the assumption that African societies should reproduce western ideal and institutions regardless of the feasibility of contextual differences" (Nyamnjoh 2001: 28). In my own experience in Cameroon, this perspective was not only prevalent among foreigners I met, but also fervently defended by them when challenged.

As a result, NGOs were not widely supported by respondents in interviews and discussion. Many respondents, including victims of witchcraft-related violence, religious leaders and state representatives⁵⁵, said that they did not know about the role of NGOs in Cameroonian society or in relation to witchcraft-related violence elsewhere. A few respondents⁵⁶ were aware of the work of NGOs and felt that they had a role in supporting society or the state in combating witchcraft, however these interventions were relatively limited and focused on educational rather than more politically oriented goals, such as protecting human rights or decreasing poverty. Suggestions as to how NGOs could address witchcraft included working to dissuade people from becoming witches, denouncing witches for their actions and bringing witches to court. These suggestions were also shared by an NGO worker⁵⁷ who felt that non-governmental organizations should be doing more to eradicate witchcraft.

For others, educational efforts for NGOs were not only seen as unhelpful, as one state representative⁵⁸ noted witches cannot be sensitized (educated), they were also seen as being a potential threat to the security of Cameroonians. As noted earlier, suspicions towards formal associations is prevalent among Cameroonians and, as one state representative⁵⁹ warned, it is impossible to determine whether a public meeting is legitimate or whether it is secretly an initiation ceremony where individuals will be at the mercy of witches. This concern was explained by a chief⁶⁰ who stressed that

⁵⁵ Cameroon, Victims of Witchcraft 04/2013; 04/2013; Religious Organizations 03/2013; 04/2013; State Official 04/2013; 04/2013

⁵⁶ Cameroon, Religious Organization 03/2013; Non-Governmental Organization 04/2013; State Official 04/2013

⁵⁷ Cameroon, Non-Governmental Organization 04/2013

⁵⁸ Cameroon, State Official 04/2013

⁵⁹ Cameroon, State Official 04/2013

⁶⁰ Cameroon, Traditional Authority, 04/2013

while local NGO workers are big people in the city, they do not own homes in or contribute to their own villages because they do not want their village to evolve, signifying in their actions that they are likely witches.

Another common perception among Cameroonian respondents is that Westerners, and therefore NGOs, do not acknowledge the existence of witchcraft and the subject is therefore irrelevant to them. I experienced this disconnect most obviously and ironically in the time I spent with an NGO which worked on the issue of human trafficking in Cameroon. Though the work of the organization involved the traffic of body parts for ritual purposes, none of the staff, foreign or local, viewed their work as being related to witchcraft. In a formal interview with the organization's leading researcher, as well as in informal social discussions, the connection between witchcraft and the work of the NGO was not made. Though the NGO also supported my research by scheduling interviews with additional respondents or in providing important information regarding witchcraft in Cameroon, the contributions made by staff members focused on their personal, rather than professional, experiences.

Overwhelmingly, NGOs in Cameroon are seen by respondents as being responsible for development and human rights. While witchcraft may be strongly correlated to development in public discourse, only two respondents suggested that NGOs could affect witchcraft through their work. One victim of witchcraft-related violence⁶¹ expressed the view that witchcraft is able to flourish in Cameroon because people are unwilling to work together towards development because they are suspicious of one another. Therefore, NGOs are important as they can support the state in reaching the level of development in society at which people will no longer be motivated by inequality to act against each other. The second respondent, a state representative⁶², also felt that development was the solution to witchcraft, as witches proliferated in the conditions of illiteracy, ignorance, poverty and idleness (*oisiveté*).

One national NGO that is committed to human rights and justice in Cameroon frequently encounters witchcraft-related cases yet the organization does not publicize this work. The organization, which focuses on mediation and reconciliation, relies on the formal laws of the state in its effort to ensure the rights of both parties are protected. In dealing with individual cases, the organization does not officially contest witchcraft accusations, as was stressed by both respondents⁶³, as mediators staff members are unable to prove or disprove that an accused is a witch. Instead, the organization focuses on creating dialogue between the parties involved and working towards a negotiation resolution. Unofficially, one staff member remarked that in many cases it is obvious that witchcraft has been used. However the organization as a mediator cannot act against the witch.

Overall, in Cameroon, the absence of NGO intervention is the most remarkable aspect when assessing this form of intervention and mediation. The profound distrust of unknown people and associations makes the potential for successful NGO intervention almost nil. Further, the dominant discursive disconnect between witchcraft and NGOs, which are seen to be related to the West, education, human rights and development, limits the likelihood that NGOs which may encounter or be positioned to address witchcraft are unlikely to be appealed to or adopt this issue. From my field work, I was most impressed by the overwhelming scepticism that NGOs are in Cameroon for their own benefit and not for the benefit of Cameroonian people. This appeared to me as a reasonable assessment as much public awareness of NGO activity focuses on the environment, where local interests are secondary to international concern for resources many Cameroonians see as their own. NGOs as international actors and potential mediators are therefore unlikely contributors to the resolution of witchcraft-related violence.

⁶¹ Cameroon, Victim of Witchcraft, 04/2013

⁶² Cameroon, State Official, 04/2013

⁶³ Cameroon, Non-Governmental Organization 04/2013; 04/2013

Conclusion

This chapter has argued from the critical perspective that NGOs, whether intentionally or not, contribute to hegemonic discourses and help make the liberal state project in Africa more acceptable by applying piecemeal and short-term solutions to the inequalities and inadequacies of the state in the process of consolidation. More contentiously, I have argued that NGOs today represent a continuation of the colonial efforts of early missionaries and charities, as their history reveals the deep ideological and epistemological processes underlying their operations. In short, foreign intervention has progressed from saving souls to protecting rights. However, in either case the rationale remains that non-Africans must do for Africans what they cannot do for themselves. It is because of this foundation of righteousness and superiority that Yarrow's arguments regarding the honest intentions of NGO workers cannot be accepted. Civil society itself must be critically reflected upon as a form of cooptation and conformity to Western standards and expectations, even where such persuasive and powerful concepts as human rights are being used. Ultimately, the question of what can be done must be countered with the uncomfortable reflection that people's willingness to even pose this question implicates the dominance of modernity, a history of colonialism and continued hegemony. When applied to the question of witchcraft, the embedded logic of modernity present in NGOs creates considerable conflict, as values of social harmony professed by NGOs and desired by people on the ground are delivered alongside unwanted expectations and efforts to conform, mould and ultimately, civilize those societies.

Because NGOs are acting within the logic of modernity and influence of the state, it is clear that they are not radical actors seeking fundamental social change. Instead, they are part of a foreign epistemology whose internal beliefs are hegemonic and propelled towards domination through the imperative to construct a unitary and universal reality. However, witchcraft continues to evade this reality as witchcraft beliefs highlight and problematize the inherent inequality of modernity. Despite employing discourses of equality, NGOs are unable to fundamentally contest the foundations of inequality today: the state, capitalism and modernization. Were NGOs to attempt this they would likely lose legitimacy within the state and may be subject to the categorization of illegality and be labelled as protest groups, resistance movements and even as terrorist organizations, as in the case of many radical NGOs.

In Cameroon, the authoritarian regime in place notably limits the ability of NGOs to act and widespread suspicion of associational relations and a justified hostility towards the imposition of foreign realities prevents popular support. However, Ghana demonstrates that even where NGOs are arguably unhindered, their approach remains biased towards externally imposed and organized action. As demonstrated from the successful work of the local GO Home project in Ghana, interventions addressing witchcraft-related violence can only be productive where NGO workers share the reality of the society in which they work thereby allowing people's beliefs, experiences and self-professed, rather than externally identified, needs guide their work. Unfortunately, this approach is impossible for the vast majority of NGOs whose fundamental missions to change these societies "for the better" precludes this level of sophistication in their discourse, programmes and engagement on the ground.

While this conclusion suggests that the only means for NGOs to contribute positively to efforts to address witchcraft-related violence is through a radical paradigm shift among NGOs workers, one which acknowledges and contests the power relations of their discursive practices, this recommendation in practice is not so extreme. From the description of an author whose work with a legal aid clinic in Malawi followed a similar trajectory, allowing people's realities to guide support does not need to appear so radical. In the words of the author, though the law students and NGO workers

attempted to provide legal solutions to the many witchcraft-related cases they encountered, in some cases they were forced “to humbly accept that the power of law is not always enough” (Mgbako 2011).

To illustrate this lesson, the author cites the case of a nine-year old girl who was plagued by nightmares of witches and whose mother was concerned that she was being initiated into witchcraft at night. The author and her team of law students learned that the mother and child were Christians and though the workers were of varying spiritual and non-spiritual views, they “understood that [their] personal beliefs were irrelevant” (Mgbako 2011). The workers suggested a prayer program for the family, involving nightly affirmations and prayer meetings confirming that the girl was not a witch. The workers also participated in these prayers to provide witness that the girl was not a witch, but a child of God (Mgbako 2011). Finally, the workers wrote a “contract” which each member signed in testimony that the child was not a witch (Mgbako 2011).

Though the intervention did not resonate with or reflect the author's, law students' or partner NGOs beliefs, it was relevant to the woman and child who sought their assistance and, up until the author's time of writing, were successful in dispelling the spiritual insecurity experienced by the family (Mgbako 2011). Unfortunately, work of this nature requires a case-by-case, or person-by-person, approach which does not fit easily into the discourse of development or funding applications, which instead advance singularly minded solutions in a world of diverse realities. Further, this level of sensitivity does not fully reflect upon the role of the NGOs as institutions or NGO workers as individuals advancing the colonization of the global imagination.

Chapter Six – Prayer is the Only Protection: Religious Organizations and Witchcraft

The headline of an article appearing on Ghanaweb.com on the 18th of November, 2013, reads “Pastor incites couple to poison son”. In the text that follows the story is briefly explained: The pastor informed the parents who were seeking to uncover the source of the mother's sickness that it was their own 12 year old son who was responsible. The parents then poisoned their son and later the father, attempted to poison himself in an apparent suicide attempt. The pastor and mother were taken into custody and the father was in hospital awaiting discharge and transfer to prison (Ghanaweb.com 2013). This story is not unfamiliar and articles like it appear in Ghanaian and Cameroonian newspapers often though the specifics of the case, such as a pastor advocating or committing crimes of abuse, violence and murder, may vary.

On the Ghanaweb.com site, there were 61 comments on this article as of December 2, 2013, many of these decrying the murder and denouncing the pastor who had advocated it. However, in addition to this, some comments blamed Africans or black people in general for being susceptible to such misdirection. The subject lines of these comments alone (such as “black people are stupid” and the uniquely different “black people are less intelligent”) reflect the stereotypes that Africans or black people are more religious, irrational and ultimately primitive, as stated bluntly by one commentator who wrote: “When would these stupid Africans rise from the stone age into modernity? Primitive fools.” (Ghanaweb.com 2013). Though some comments question the pastor directly, suggesting that he is evil or the Devil incarnate, many more comments suggest that this tragedy is evidence that Ghana is a failed state (Ghanaweb.com 2013). In short, without modernity, and secularism, Ghana will never be able to overcome the ravages of primitive, superstitious thought.

In this chapter I explore the role of religious organizations in addressing witchcraft-related violence. The chapter discusses how religion and witchcraft are represented and understood in relation to one another in order to problematize the hierarchy of some forms of religious thought over others. This discussion then continues to look at what are called African Traditional Religions, leading to the history of colonialism and evangelization which sought to contest these beliefs. Finally, the chapter will look at evangelism and witchcraft in contemporary Africa. In the case studies of Ghana and Cameroon, the role of religion in providing spiritual protection against witchcraft as well as offering an opportunity to sensitize and educate people is counterposed against the unidirectional nature of this information as well as its propagation of fear and insecurity.

As with both the state and NGOs, the colonial history of many religious organizations exposes an externally imposed epistemology and belief system which may be viewed as foreign and hegemonizing. Further, I argue that where religious organizations fail to address witchcraft, they also risk lacking salience for many Africans. However, as with the actors seen so far, acknowledging witchcraft also places religious organizations in the position of contributing to witchcraft belief and, as will be seen in extreme cases, directly encouraging or condoning practices of violence. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude whether religious organizations are helping to mediate witch-related violence or whether they are fostering greater insecurity, which leads to further violence.

Though many religious organizations are seen as helpful in Ghana and prayer is widely considered the only dependable protection in Cameroon, religion is not a guaranteed protection. As respondents noted, witchcraft continues to prey on those whose vigilance wanes for even a moment. For example, in Cameroon, respondents noted that prayer is only an effective protection for an individual while they are praying, as soon as they stop, witches around them may close in. Thus, religion as a mediator of witchcraft attack, serves to perpetuate belief and insecurity by acknowledging witchcraft and attempting to offer a remedy. In this way, witchcraft as both a threat and a belief remains

unchanged.

Representations of religion and witchcraft

A common representation of religion and witchcraft in sub-Saharan Africa found in Western media depicts self-proclaimed pastors and religious leaders who are seen to be manipulating “the poor and uneducated” through religion and fear in order to gain wealth and power. In the case of Helen Ukpabio, a Pentecostal preacher from Nigeria who warns of the dangers of child witches through evangelism and religious videos which can be found on Youtube and which contribute to child accusations (La Fontaine 2009: 121). These stories are part of a larger phenomenon unfolding in Africa: the rapid evangelisation of the continent by fundamentalist Christian denominations and the proliferation of independent churches led by pastors seeking fame and fortune.

Approaching religious organizations through the lens of witchcraft, it is important to understand the discourses and power relations embedded in religious practice in order to understand how some practices become dominant (Deneulin & Rakodi 2010). In the two previous chapters on the state and NGOs, the dominant discourse identified through the concept of modernity can be seen in the interactions, practices and language employed by actors. Religious practices rely on a discourse that emphasizes the transcendental nature of God which is a higher reality than human reality on earth (Deneulin & Rakodi 2010). Because of this central feature of religious belief, religious discourse is often depoliticized and differentiated from discourses of power, such as modernity, which presents itself as secular. Though the concept of modernity today is not widely acknowledged as having Christian roots, religion and modernity are intimately linked.

When the elements of the supernatural in religion are set aside, the power relations of religious practices are revealed to be highly institutional, hierarchical and advancing hegemonizing discourses of reality which share many facets of modernity. As well, centralizing power can not be more evident in the power of God in monotheistic belief systems. Together, these facets demonstrate strong parallels with the core concepts of modernity. In particular, as will be seen in the case of Pentecostalism, many evangelizing religions that are active in Africa today advance the concepts of the individual, capitalism and Western ideals of the good life.

When religion is studied in political science, and in comparative politics especially, it is rarely studied as a form of power or a discourse on power. Religion is not commonly perceived as political, though it shares the characteristics of other forms of institutionalized power subsumed in the political. Instead, religion is approached as a separate and often unified category of belief, often irrational, which is seen to influence the behaviour of actors. This approach, which strips religion itself of power and therefore politics (as courses and texts in “religion and politics” suggest these are separate categories), is itself an indication that secularism is the dominant discourse of these studies. Further, the common idea that there is a correlation between the most developed countries also being the most secular countries speaks to the rejection of religion in modern thought.

Despite these distinctions, it remains that in the West, there is a hierarchy of religious thought, where monotheistic Judeo-Christian religions are seen as being more civilized and moderate in their interpretations of the role of religion in society, particularly where these interpretations support the discourse of secularism which is central to modernity and the consolidation of state power. A contemporary example and exaggeration of this hierarchy is the Western demonization of Islam, which is seen as Other and unmodern, particularly in the willingness of many Muslims to acknowledge the political nature of religion.

Another example of this hierarchy can be found in the language of the PEW research report on

religion in sub-Saharan Africa, where Christianity and Islam are named but “traditional African religious beliefs and practices” are combined into one ill-defined category. Though the report stresses the long history of Western ignorance towards African religions, noting that:

In the past, Westerners sometimes described them as animism, paganism, ancestor worship or simply superstition, but today scholars acknowledge the existence of sophisticated African traditional religions whose primary role is to provide for human well-being in the present as opposed to offering salvation in a future world. (PEW 2009: 6)

the report also notes that these beliefs and practices have not disappeared “[d]espite the dominance of Christianity and Islam” (PEW 2009: 1). In addition, the African traditional religions are later referred to as containing a “number of traditional myths” which “explain the creation and the ordering of the world and provide explanation for contemporary social relationships and norms” and outline “taboos” which “must be countered with ritual acts to re-establish order, harmony and well-being” (PEW 2009: 6).

While these descriptions are part of the context and setting for understanding African traditional religions, including outlining the debate on whether African traditional religion refers to “a multitude of different traditional religions” or “a single faith with local differences” (PEW 2009: 6), the language used highlights some biases regarding African religions. The very use of the term traditional indicates that these religions are not modern, like Western religions such as Christianity, but come from and are informed by experiences and practices from long ago, and are unchanged and unchanging. The wording used to note that these religions “have not disappeared” (PEW 2009: 1), despite the dominance of Christianity and Islam, indicates the assumption that these religions were expected to be supplanted by more contemporary, and therefore more relevant and useful, religions. As well, referring to African religious beliefs as being based in traditional myths, a term not commonly applied to stories found in the Christian Bible nor applied by PEW in regards to Christian or Islamic beliefs, effectively undermines the readers sense that these religions are sophisticated. Other highly connotative words which are also rarely applied to religious beliefs and practices in Christianity such as taboo and ritual acts further the perception and association with African religions and primitive tradition.

Overall, depictions of religion in Africa, like those in the PEW report, perpetuate a perception of Africa as a place where dated practices flourish and where the population is overwhelmingly and irrationally religious, as demonstrated by the PEW finding that in many countries on the continent “roughly nine-in-ten people or more say religion is *very important* in their lives” (PEW 2009: 3). Further, PEW notes in their study that “three-in-ten or more of the people in many countries say they have experienced a divine healing, witnessed the devil being driven out of a person or received a direct revelation from God” (PEW 2009: 13). The report continues to note that many of these “intense religious experiences... are also characteristic of traditional African religions” and “are commonly reported by African Christians who are *not* affiliated with Pentecostal churches” (PEW 2009: 14).

This discrepancy is explained by the finding in the report's introduction that African traditional religions “coexist” with Christian and Islamic beliefs (PEW 2009: 1), indicating that practices that are unusual to Christianity and Islam may be attributed to African religious belief which permeates the highly religious continent. This perception that Africa is more religious than any other continent, a view often supported by American and European scholars, has become hegemonic in that it is employed uncritically as a truth or fact about the region. What is most problematic about the construction of Africa as extremely religious is the frequent and negative connotative association between religion and irrationality, which allows for simplistic correlations, such as violence in Africa being religiously based or motivated.

The idea that religious belief in Africa, though not atypical of global trends in its characteristics, is itself problematic is also shared by many African scholars. One author writing about religious discourse in Ghanaian politics refers to “the context of Africa's seemingly incurable religiosity”

(Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 94), while another Cameroonian author refers to state of “spiritual slavery” threatening the continent (Nonga 2009: 7). This discourse of religion in Africa as threat, though one which is ominous and unclear, is further exaggerated when the question of witchcraft is introduced. As seen in the previous chapter, belief in witchcraft is often interpreted by NGOs as a means to scapegoat or evade responsibility or accountability. This same interpretation is applied to witchcraft belief and religion, where witchcraft is equated with the tendency to “cast human problems in super-naturalistic terms”, which risks “blinding people to their people to their responsibility” as they call on “[t]he 'powers of heaven'... to help deal with problems that often appear to be beyond human wisdom and ability *in Africa*” (Asmoah-Gyadu 2005: 115, emphasis added).

African Religions

In my field research the text that was most often recommended on the subject of African religions was authored by Kofi Asare Opoku in 1978 and focuses on the traditional religion⁶⁴ of West Africa. This text was recommended as the most comprehensive work of the subject, it is taught in universities in West Africa and is considered to be a benchmark for understanding African religious thought and practice. Like many older texts on African religions, Opoku's work provides a generalized introduction and attempts to create a broad representation of the wider region. Today, texts on African religion focus on individual practices and ethnic groups in order to avoid the generalizations of Opoku's work and to provide detailed analyses. Still, Opoku's work provides a useful snapshot of many elements relevant to this chapter, as it has informed contemporary knowledge of African religion and contributed to the cementing of certain concepts and beliefs both pertaining to and contained within African religious thought.

From Opoku's descriptions he viewed religion in Africa as a singular philosophy with varying expressions and practices. For example, Opoku notes that the most important aspect of African religion (singular) is the “widespread belief in God who is known by various local names” (Opoku 1978: 9). This Creator is understood to be a spirit with no image or visible representation from whom all power comes and who possesses power over life and death. This God is also responsible for rewarding and punishing humankind and is likened “to the Overlord of society” (Opoku 1978: 9).

The nature of God is characterized as being mysterious and in some languages he is described as “Unknown” (Opoku 1978). Though Opoku uses the word spirit to define God, the author also suggests that “there are no adequate terms in language for... that which is truly abstract or spiritual” (Opoku 1978: 18). Opoku suggests that the God's invisibility may be “expressed in concrete terms” such as comparing “Him” to the wind as God may be found everywhere (Opoku 1978: 18). Opoku also notes that this African God is often conceived of as a grandfather “who has the last word in a dispute” (Opoku 1978: 26)

In addition to God, ancestral spirits “play a very prominent role in African traditional religion” and are “treated with reverence and awe” (Opoku 1978: 9). Though ancestors are compared to God in terms of their importance, it is unclear how these two actors relate in Opoku's work. When discussed in his text, God and ancestors are addressed separately. Greater detail is provided regarding “supernatural entities and lesser deities” whose power comes from God and who may be helpful or harmful (Opoku 1978: 9).

These “gods or supernatural entities” may be associated with natural spaces where they are

⁶⁴Though the very concept of an African religion itself has been critiqued as “a historically constructed Western discourse”, the term African traditional religion has become “firmly rooted and institutionalized in African discourses”, education and political structures (Amenga-Etego 2011: 3-4).

thought to reside. However this is not the same as the view that animals may be associated with a particular society through a sacred relationship referred to by Opoku as totemism. Unlike God, lesser deities are limited by their functions in the universe and are not omnipresent. Opoku also makes a vague distinction between these divine spirits and “other spirits or mystical powers”, which are associated with ambiguous power to help or hinder people and include “witchcraft, magic and sorcery” (Opoku 1978: 10).

For Opoku, religion “rounds up the totality of African culture” and is so engrained in society, and perhaps people, that “a person does not need any special instruction in religion” (1978: 10). Because religious practice is so prevalent and central to the lives of Africans, people effectively live their religion on a daily basis. Religious leadership is also characterized as diffuse and though some individuals may require training, many leaders are heads of households or family members who are responsible for maintaining relations with ancestors. The main religious leaders identified by Opoku are chiefs and kings who “have a dual role to play in African societies”, as political officials and “religious personages” (Opoku 1978: 12). In Opoku's analysis, kings and chiefs represent their people and act as a “link between the living and the dead” (ancestors) from whom a chief's authority is ultimately derived (Opoku 1978: 52).

In addition to chiefs and kings, a “highly respected” priesthood is open to both men and women who receive a call to begin training where the office is not hereditary (Opoku 1978: 74). A priests' training and service is authenticated when the individual becomes possessed by the deity he will serve. Opoku stresses that unlike magicians “who work independently”, priests are official representatives and part of organized institutions and social organizations which seek to mediate the relations between humankind and deities (1978: 75). Due to the years of training involved in becoming a priest, they also wield greater authority than magicians. As well, priests are chosen by the deities themselves, through possession or strange illnesses, which an individual may refuse and risk insanity or death unless they are able to plead with the deity to be released.

The deities which are discussed as being part of African traditional religion are characterized as much less benevolent than God. Opoku stresses the prominence of ambiguous spirits which are described as “specifically evil” but who are both feared and worshipped for their ability to bring assistance against one's enemies (Opoku 1978: 70). Evil spirits may appear as monsters and be in league with witches and from Opoku's description people are vulnerable to these spirits because of the spiritual aspect of the existence, which is referred to by the author as “*sunsum*” (1978: 96).

Sunsum, according to Opoku, is an Asante term for the intangible component of people which determines their character and intelligence. It is also this part of the person which is able to leave the body during sleep and which is the target of malicious attack in the invisible world, mainly through witchcraft. This intangible or spiritual aspect is also the part of the individual which becomes responsible for witchcraft, though Opoku states that mystical forces which may be tapped by those who have the “knowledge and ability to do so” are “neutral in themselves” but can be employed for evil ends (1978: 140).

Though Opoku does not identify witchcraft as a religious practice, he does include witchcraft as part of African religious thought. Again, this is further complicated when Opoku notes that witchcraft is found in human communities around the world and is in African societies “an accepted reality” (1978: 140). Opoku also suggests, contrary to his earlier distinction of witchcraft as bad and sorcery as good, that “there is good witchcraft” (Opoku 1978: 140):

There is a distinct difference between witchcraft and bad magic or sorcery. In the latter, the magician or sorcerer may prepare a magical substance to kill or injure a person; in the former, however, no such method is used. The victim suffers only when the witch thinks him harm, and this fact about witchcraft has led to its being described as an “imaginary offence”. (Opoku 1978:

The obvious contradictions in Opoku's effort to define witchcraft "as part of the religious heritage in Africa" (1978: 142) reflect the difficulty of attempting to understand witchcraft in religious terms which are highly connotative of value and require moral judgement on the basis of divine guidance, where God is good and what is not Godly, is bad. This effort also highlights the practical limits of attempting to define a phenomenon which is secretive, invisible and unknowable.

Despite the difficulty in knowing witchcraft, Opoku provides a lengthy and thorough explanation of the phenomenon. Witches are invisible as a result of medicines they rub on their bodies and when seen, emit flames from their eyes, nose, mouth, ears and armpits. Witches are able to fly and when they walk, they walk with "their heads on the ground and their feet up" (Opoku 1978: 142). Though earlier descriptions suggested that witchcraft was part of a person through their *sunsum*, Opoku notes that witchcraft is acquired at birth from the mother, though a woman "who is not a witch can still give birth to a witch" (1978: 143). Again it is unclear if witchcraft is inherent or inherited, or both.

Witchcraft, here referred to as an ability rather than a spirit, can also be transferred through a delivery mechanism or medium such as water or food, and knowledge of how to use witchcraft, now an object, may be acquired by purchasing "directions for its use" from vendors (Opoku 1978: 143). Even more confused and confusing is Opoku's assertion that witchcraft can be acquired from devils and demons who "thrust the evil power of witchcraft" on people and force them to commit wrongful acts (Opoku 1978: 144). Though previously absent in Opoku's hierarchy of divine beings, devils and demons appear only in relation to witchcraft and again, only in relation to bad witchcraft, which causes financial loss and the ultimate misfortune of sterility.

Opoku attempts to further clarify the nature of witchcraft by suggesting that it may be "considered a moral theory" which separates a bad person who is anti-social and full of spite (a witch), from good people who are virtuous and kind-hearted "and who are not associated with witchcraft" (1978: 145-146). This moral code influences people's conduct in a society by "spurring them on to show their virtues", while attempting "to suppress their antisocial tendencies" (Opoku 1978: 145-146). This moral interpretation is important for Opoku who suggests that the belief in witchcraft "provides an internal force which contributes to the cohesion and solidarity of the community" by teaching people how to act positively (Opoku 1978: 147).

While Opoku acknowledges many times that witchcraft is "accepted as a reality" in "African society" (1978: 146), it remains uncertain whether he views witchcraft as part of African religion. The frequent separation of "religion and magic" (Opoku 1978: 147) in his text suggests that these are two distinct categories, which do not necessarily act upon the other. Throughout Opoku's descriptions of divine entities and explanation of punishment in African religion, whereby God punishes crimes against the powerless and human society manages morality through reward or penalty in favour of the community, it remains unclear who is responsible for addressing witchcraft.

Much of Opoku's text suggests that witchcraft, while spiritual, is not necessarily religious. Though divine entities, such as spirits, and those that are malicious, such as devils and demons, may impart witchcraft upon humans and or act through them to harm others spiritually, Opoku does not suggest that these entities are able to or responsible for controlling witchcraft in human society. It therefore seems reasonable to assume, as many people do, that human society is responsible for mediating witchcraft, which is part of reality and an aspect of everyday life.

The idea that witchcraft, though part of the spiritual world, is also part of the human world, blurs the lines between what may be considered real and what is considered religious, and therefore divine or transcendental. Graveling (2010) in his research in Ghana advances this deconstruction of religion in Africa further and builds on a respondents' answer to a question he posed about taboos in local religion. The respondent was dismissive of the use of the word and stated "that is not religion, that

is the gods” (Graveling 2010: 31).

Graveling explores the question of religious thought and rejects the assumption that “individuals hold in their heads single, coherent or comprehensive cosmological system which they use to interpret the world, nor that such a system is shared consensually by groups of people” (Graveling 2010: 35). The basic association of African ideas with belief also suggests for Graveling “a Western association”, as beliefs in Africa “may be very different if they exist at all” (Graveling 2010: 36). Drawing on an argument made by Asad (1993), Graveling suggests that religion is not a universal concept, but rather one which is historically specific and which is also the product of discourse.

In regards to witchcraft belief, Graveling argues that it is not important to question whether witchcraft exists, but to determine what witchcraft spirits “are like, how much power they have and how far one can and should interact with them” (2010: 37). Graveling stresses that these questions are the same which are asked about any another person or being with power, such as family and governing authorities, and that they seek to determine how people should act and relate with one another and respond to situations and events.

Unlike most academic approaches to religion which centralize belief, Graveling suggests that people do not “necessarily actively choose to 'believe in' whole religions” to the exclusion of others (2010: 47). Instead of looking at belief, Graveling looks at power and suggests that whether religious or factual, beings or forces exist for people “on a continuous landscape” between reality and non-reality and the concern people must address is “how to manage them” (2010: 47). What Graveling describes would be termed syncretism in more conventional terms bound to Western concepts of religion. However, from the approach of discourse analysis, Graveling suggest that people “live in a range of different 'discourses' simultaneously” and are therefore required to negotiate multiple forms of power, which cannot only be understood as religious and spiritual, but are also secular and physical (Graveling 2010: 47).

Another important consideration is the seemingly obvious separation of that which is intangible and invisible and that which is tangible and observable. In her extensive work on Christianity in Ghana, Meyer (2008) notes that even in representations of spiritual matters, there are concerns regarding the invocation of power. For example, Meyer notes that in the Ghanaian film industry when evil forces are depicted on set, “actors feel spiritually troubled” either in response to playing the roles of witches or in response to props, which though only representations of invisible power, may pose a threat (2008: 100). As a precaution, set designers and directors are careful to use only original materials as well as “the power of prayer” to prevent evil forces from being unleashed (Meyer 2008: 100).

In Meyer's work, and acknowledged by Opoku in his own, the influence of Western religion on African societies is significant. For Opoku, the colonizing mission sought to make Africans Europeans before Christians, therefore requiring them to abandon all traditional customs and cultural practices. Opoku felt that as a result of the civilizing mission African religion was being eroded and may eventually be completely suppressed by Western religion. Meyer's work, however, demonstrates that though Christian culture and religion has become pervasive, there is “a strong process of cross-fertilization between indigenous and Christian ideas” (Meyer 2008: 101). As much of this chapter will also argue, Meyer suggests that it is increasingly difficult to “describe both sides of the encounter in clear, bounded terms” (2010: 101).

Colonialism and Evangelism

In the chapter 4 on the state, the approach of colonial administrations towards witchcraft was dominated by the overt intention to eradicate the belief. This included the elimination of practices

associated with witchcraft, such as witch cults and healing, which were outlawed and forced underground. Similarly, as demonstrated in chapter 5 on NGOs, witchcraft practices related to the treatment of individuals have been historically treated as symptoms of an uneducated (unenlightened) and underdeveloped (primitive) society. Similarly, and with considerable overlap in the case of NGO predecessors, who were also missionaries and evangelists during colonization, witchcraft practices and beliefs were approached with hostility by religious organizations.

Evidence suggests, overwhelmingly, and as will be argued in this chapter and in others, efforts to suppress witchcraft practices, especially those which were intended to mediate witchcraft violence, fostered the perception that witchcraft has become uncontrollable (Luyakula 2010). In particular, churches which sought to eradicate important mechanisms such as divination and healing were seen as ensuring the success of witches (Luyakula 2010). As argued by Luyakula, writing about the experience of people in Congo, early evangelical encounters led many missionaries to view local spiritual practices as demonic. However, due to the social importance of these practices, many were retained and practised clandestinely.

Another consequence of the association made by missionaries between spiritual practices and the fear of the Devil was that many diverse practices were lumped under the general terminology of witchcraft (Luyakula 2010). As a result of this, healing practices, traditional medicines, divination and other spiritual social practices were also condemned as witchcraft by churches which drew on their European understanding of witchcraft, thereby promoting an interpretation of witchcraft as being completely negative (Luyakula 2010). As Luyakula notes, despite efforts by contemporary anthropologists to unpack and contest this false association, Christian churches are bound by the Bible which clearly states God's position against witchcraft in Exodus 22:18: "Thou shall not suffer a witch to live".

Early religious movements against the spiritual and social practices of African societies in the colonial era also had significant political impacts. Though much of the political history of African societies is commonly depicted as being governed by kings and in some places chiefs, Luyakula argues that priests were also important political actors and it was from priests that the very power chiefs and kings held was ultimately derived. Thus, early missionaries not only openly condemned social practices they also sought to correct the political organization of societies which they viewed to be dominated by devil worship (Luyakula 2010).

Kirkaldy provides a similar account of early missionary encounters in South Africa, where witch hunts would occur in response to experiences of illness, misfortune and death. As in many African societies, accused witches were brought to a local authority where appeals would be heard and if the accused was found guilty, sentences of fines, ostracism or death were meted out. Missionaries saw these practices and beliefs as "a particularly powerful example how Satan could work through rulers and ritual specialists" and many were determined to eradicate them (Kirkaldy 2006: 94).

The focus of missionaries' war against the Devil centred on spiritual leaders and specialists who the missionaries saw as being "manifestation of the power of Satan or as arising from superstition and duplicity" (Kirkaldy 2006: 107). According to Kirkaldy, missionaries believed spiritual practitioners were responsible for the persistence of non-Christian beliefs and sought to weaken their power in society so that "progress could be made in weaning people away from enslavement to darkness to rebirth in the 'light' of Christianity" (Kirkaldy 2006: 107).

Churches not only sought to suppress local spiritual, social and political practices, in some cases they also sought to replace them. In Ghana, witch cults and shrines were the focus of missionary efforts to enlighten the people of the Gold Coast. Into the early 1900s, a number of healing cults including the *Aberewa*, *Nana Tonga*, *Tigari* and *Kunde*, remained relevant and operated despite being outlawed (Mohr 2011). These cults provided the services of locating and healing witches through ritual

cleansings banned by colonial authorities “in a context of colonial capitalist expansion, widespread social unrest and rampant witchcraft accusations” and at the height of the Spanish influenza pandemic (Mohr 2011: 64).

Mohr argues that the popularity of healing cults among “young, literate, Christian labour migrants” in particular, led to the establishment of divine healing churches which sought to provide “spiritual therapy” in a “competitive ritual economy” (2011: 69). In his work, Mohr focuses on the work of the Faith Tabernacle which was able to provide legal spiritual services and whose work was supported by the suppression on indigenous healing cults whose inability to operate openly “led to heightened anxiety [and] increased demand for supernatural protection” (Mohr 2011: 79). Adding to the appeal of the Faith Tabernacle was the church's lack of concern for “secular notions of civilization”, which allowed the church to practice “an enchanted Christianity” that included healing supernatural maladies (Mohr 2011: 82).

In Cameroon, the missionary experience varied in accordance with the shifts in colonial rule and administration from German to French and British which led to successive periods of expulsion of certain churches based on the colonizing state's relation to various denominations⁶⁵ (Joseph 1980). Joseph identifies three prominent waves of evangelism which began with Baptist missionaries from the West Indies in 1814 and progressed to the prominence of Presbyterianism and Catholicism during World War I when the colony was annexed and divided by Britain and France. In Cameroon, as in Ghana and the rest of the African colonies, missionaries and the colonial state were engaged in power relations that may be best characterized as ambiguous and complex (de Vries 1998; Joseph 1980). At times, missionaries collaborated with the colonial administrations and at other times contested their policies, particularly where indirect rule permitted customary practices of which the churches disapproved (de Vries 1998; Joseph 1980).

Conflicts frequently emerged where traditional authorities were hostile to conversion and where missionary work “bolstered colonial support” by providing education which challenged the foundations of “traditional” society and eroded their “natural authority” (de Vries 1998: 96). As the entrenchment of missionary movements continued, political power came to be held by “[m]ission-educated politicians rather than traditional authorities” (de Vries 1998: 95).

In addition to this, the introduction of Christianity coincided with an increase in accusations of witchcraft in Cameroon and many people chose to convert in an effort to seek protection from witches (de Vries 1998). However, conversion itself may have fuelled accusations as both converts and non-converts viewed one another's religious differences as the work of evil powers (de Vries 1998). Another schism which emerged as a result of colonial evangelism resulted from missionaries' work in translating the Bible into indigenous languages, thereby enhancing one groups' hegemony over others and breeding resentments which Joseph notes “could be discerned in the post-1945 era of party politics” (1980: 32).

Overall, the impact of colonial evangelism was so significant as to be beyond the scope of this work. However, it remains that social and political relations were greatly altered, as unlike colonial administrators who lived in cities and ruled from afar, missionaries “made it a point to interfere in every facet of the people's social life” (Joseph 1980: 32).

Contemporary Evangelism and Witchcraft

⁶⁵ For example, the French administration brought with it a preference for Catholic churches and missions, while the British administration had closer relations with Presbyterian churches and German colonial administrations with Protestant missions.

As noted by de Vries regarding the colonial era, many missionaries in Africa were themselves African. The same is true today where the majority of religious institutions are led by, if not funded by, African Christians and Muslims, who contribute to the current discourse on witchcraft and witchcraft-related violence in Africa. Through their work in their own congregations and outside of churches in their social work, academic research and popular publications, African Christians are leading the public debate regarding witchcraft and drawing on theological conceptions of good and evil to advance their views of how to understand and address witchcraft.

An important aspect of contemporary discourse in sub-Saharan Africa is deliverance, which aims to address the continuous threat of witchcraft and which has largely replaced anti-witchcraft shrines in providing access to exorcisms (Onyinah 2002). As noted earlier, missionary churches in the early 1900s began to adopt interpretations of Christianity which permitted them to address the demand for spiritual healing required to deal with the threat of witch spirits. In Ghana and elsewhere, Pentecostal churches led this movement and drew on the biblical stories and teachings of the Apostles who provided accounts of Jesus driving demons from the possessed as inspiration in their battle against the forces of darkness.

Deliverance is described by Onyinah (2002) as encompassing a wide range of practices combining African and biblical practices, such as drumming, confessions, repetitive prayer and fasting. Onyinah stresses that the association of witchcraft with demons and demonology contained within the Bible is the result of missionaries' interpretations of African beliefs as evil. As a result of this perspective, ancestral relations are also subject to condemnation and deliverance may be used to sever one's connection with their ancestors.

In many churches which practice deliverance, efforts to eradicate ancestor worship are often part of a larger philosophy which seeks to fundamentally transform people's lives. Many churches openly advocate, and in some cases require, that cultural practices deemed contrary to the word of God be shunned by the congregation. Proscribed activities may vary from celebrating non-Christian holidays to acknowledging the authority of traditional leaders, such as non-Christian chiefs and healers and diviners in particular. People are also discouraged from participating in kinship relations as many churches see these to be a burden on the nuclear family, leading to demands on limited resources and time. The cornerstone of these approaches is the isolation of the individual within the church, and by extension, in their relation to God. As social/cultural and familial relations outside the church are eroded, the individual comes to view the church and their congregation as their family and society. In some cases, a previously shunned family member may only be acknowledged by joining the same church.

This said, the process of in/out group formation related to conversion occurs along a number of trajectories. While some converts to deliverance or evangelical churches actively shun non-converts, family members may also feel that by distancing themselves from their family, culture and society, converts are no longer welcome members of their society. More dramatically, where individuals have chosen conversion over hereditarily or socially prescribed roles, such as enstoolment, individuals may be more formally disowned or ostracized. In discussion and in literature on this rupture, individuals and authors stress the conflict between traditional and modernist views of life.

In his own fieldwork Onyinah also found evidence, which corroborated the hypothesis advanced by Meyer, which suggests that individuals turn to deliverance and Pentecostal churches in order to break with what they view as "traditional life". In Meyer and Onyinah's work, this includes detaching oneself from kinship structures, denouncing witchcraft and becoming modern. Onyinah sees this as a positive expression of plurality in Ghana, where "people are able to express their fears in witchcraft and other life threatening forces and seek protection for them" (2002: 130). However, in this view of deliverance, as freeing one from traditional forces which are "hampering their progress in this

modern world” (Onyinah 2002: 130), Onyinah openly privileges the modernist view while dismissing witchcraft fears and belief as mere scapegoating and ignorance. For Onyinah, these “primitive animistic” beliefs keep Africans in “servile fearfulness and hamper progress” and though deliverance churches may perpetuate these beliefs, their promotion of individualism and modernity should be supported (2002: 132)

Many African scholars and academics similarly endorse the role of religion, and Christian churches in particular, in the fight against witchcraft. It must be noted, however, that these authors are uniformly Christian and the study of witchcraft as well as publications on the subject are overwhelmingly dominated by Christian authors and theologians. In my own review of the literature available on the subject in both Ghana and Cameroon, I was able to find only one text out of about forty which includes a discussion of witchcraft, the above-mentioned work by Opoku, which was not written by a Christian author and which did not advocate conversion or prayer as the solution to all supernatural threats.

While literature on the subject of witchcraft is uniformly religious it is equally accessible as any non-religious literature. The numerous texts I found during my research were available and purchased at various locations, from bus stops to gas stations and even from inside tro-tros which vendors would approach offering descriptions of the works and their prices. The following is a small selection of some of the most popular works of this kind from Ghana and Cameroon. Notably, books were much more widely available on the streets of Ghana at much lower prices than those in Cameroon. As a result, there are few texts in Cameroon which are considered to be popular works on the subject (though significantly more televangelists).

In *Casting Out Demons*, author and “servant of the Lord Jesus Christ” Oduro (2004) explains the importance of deliverance practices and traces these to the works of Jesus in his battle against Satan. The book itself is meant to serve as instruction manual so readers may be able to know about demons and “cast them out with ease” through prayer and the name of Jesus. According to Oduro, there are demons that are witches, therefore when one becomes possessed by these demons, they appear to be a witch. However, it is best to deliver these people so they may be saved and go to heaven. Most importantly, deliverance can only be achieved through Jesus and readers are cautioned against going to “false prophets, fetish priests, jujumen and the like” for help of any kind (Oduro 2004: 63).

Addressing an entirely different but equally pressing concern of Ghanaians in *Juju, Magic and Witchcraft in African Soccer: Myth or Reality?* Reverend Botchway address the use of witchcraft by African football leagues, players and fans in order to ensure their success. In this work, Botchway argues that technical expertise rather than the supernatural will help African football advance. However, this argument is consistently undermined by the author who suggests skills is not enough. In order to ensure success, prayer and the integration of prayer into the sport at all levels is the only guarantee. As will be seen later, the most important point of Botchway's argument is for Africans to move towards “*prosperity theology*” which emphasizes the view that God “blesses the faithful believer with the good things of this life: good health, material and financial prosperity and success” (2009: 222).

The most popular text on witchcraft in Ghana is by the Nigerian “Prophet of God” and Doctorate in Metaphysics Uzorma (1997) who is a self-proclaimed former “Occult Grand Master”. A number of respondents and informants had attended the crusades hosted by the author in Ghana and felt his work was exceptional. Uzorma recounts his experience of rising through the ranks of an interstellar society of witches and wizards, studying in places such as the Gobi Desert and planet Venus with other occult masters until ascending to the status of Grand Master. In his works, Uzorma employs New Age language, referring to spiritual vibrations, trans-dimensional existence, extra-sensory perception and even UFOs, which Uzorma claims are witches.

In this work, Uzorma argues that God is the ultimate authority of a universe which is populated by earthmen and other aliens who are engaged in a flesh and blood battle with demons and witches. According to Uzorma, witches are the agents of Satan and can only be protected against by living in the blood of Jesus Christ and by praying over one's self and home. Additionally, Uzorma warns against a number of conspiracy theories, such as life on Mars and the Bermuda triangle, claiming that these are places dominated by witches and that earthmen should avoid them. In this way the author combines religion, conspiracy and witchcraft.

In Cameroon, similar connections are made through the popular fear of cults and secret societies. In his work, *L'esclavage spirituel et l'emprise sectaire en Afrique: Le cas du Cameroun*, author and theologian Nonga (2009) warns of the work of cults who are taking control of the minds of Africans through meditation, prayer and witchcraft. In the case of Cameroon, homosexuality is also mentioned as a cult phenomenon, though the correlation provided by Nonga is unclear, simply suggesting that as an act of revenge, Satanic cults form networks of homosexuals in Africa and this is somehow related to culture and trade⁶⁶. However, notably departing from the conclusions made in the Ghanaian texts, Nonga addresses churches suspiciously as potential cults themselves, a view which was reflected in interviews and expressed by informants in Cameroon.

In these works and others, Pentecostalism stands out as a primary focal point of contemporary evangelism. It is also a denomination which widely supports the view that witchcraft exists and is a real threat which churches aim to address through prayer, deliverance and exorcism. Meyer, who has written extensively on Pentecostalism in West Africa, who notes that studies on witchcraft and demon beliefs “tend to neglect Christian churches and movements” (1995: 237). In her studies in Ghana, Meyer argues that Pentecostalism serves as a way in which people “look at the changing world and to address both modernity's malcontents and its attraction” (1998: 759). This emphasis on the modern and traditional is also stressed by Pfeiffer *et al.* (2007) who note that Pentecostalism “derives much of its energy from the vilification of traditional healers... and the demonization of traditional African spirituality more broadly” (688).

These transformative intentions of the evangelical movements, the emphasis on the individual and the nuclear family, the imperative to abandon tradition and the goal of personal wealth and prosperity in modernity establish these churches and movements as influential actors. In Meyer's work, the supernatural and politics are acknowledged as “intertwined” and this relationship “raises a host of question about the relationship between religion and politics” in Ghana (1998: 17). Meyer emphasizes that while politicians “use” religion to gain or retain power, instrumentalization alone is an inadequate understanding as power relations are not limited to binaries of domination and resistance (1998: 17). What Meyer suggests instead is the need to examine “the way religious imagery relates to political realities and the form of power struggles take” (1997: 18).

In essence, Meyer is looking at the discursive practices of religion, focusing on Pentecostalism, in the political realm of Ghana where political conflict “appears to be cast in terms of a dialectics of divinization and demonization of power” (1998: 18). For Meyer, Pentecostalism has gained significant popularity due to its ability “to contain the occult” in ways that older missionary churches which do not address witchcraft are unable to (Meyer 1998: 18). The willingness of Pentecostal churches to openly confront and combat the “powers of darkness” not only appeals to those who are struggling against the supernatural, it also demonstrates to a sceptical population that these churches “seek to free politics” from evil “so it can be governed by the Christian God” (Meyer 1998: 18-19).

The salience of this message must be understood in its context. As noted previously, power is

⁶⁶“Le satanisme hexagonal est très peu structuré et les rares associations de cette mouvance se caractérisent plutôt par leurs activités de commerce pornographique. En revanche, un réseau informel de relations homosexuelles se développe en Afrique et attire vers les marges culturelles et commerciales.” (Nonga 2009: 31)

strongly associated with the supernatural and as a result of this, “modern politicians and bureaucrats” are often suspected of drawing their power from the invisible world (Meyer 1998: 19). As Meyer notes, unlike the Western democratic language of power being endowed by “the people”, power in the Ghanaian state is widely believed to be derived “from secret rites in a hidden room” (Meyer 1998: 25). By addressing these rumours, beliefs and discourses of the supernatural in political life, Pentecostal churches, in addition to seeking to fundamentally alter social and familial relations, also challenge the legitimacy of the state.

In Meyer's view, this erosion of legitimacy occurs where politicians are accused of being “immersed in the occult so that democracy becomes a farce”, as it is believed that they are in office because rituals rather than elections (1998: 29). Meyer further notes that at the same time as the democratic validity of the government is challenged, “prayer is presented as an appropriate means of political action” (1998: 29). In this way, Pentecostal churches diminish the state while seeking to supplant it in the lives of individual citizens. Much as the church becomes the centre of an individual's relation to God, it also becomes the mediator between the individual and state, thereby establishing itself as an overtly political actor with which the state must contend.

Another important relationship is that between religion and development initiatives, an area which is gaining increasing attention in academia. Clarke (2006) looks at previously mentioned critiques of “the 'civil society and development' interface” and notes that many of the errors made in studying 'civil society' are also applied to faith-based organizations (FBOs) (836). Clarke notes that the tendency to “depoliticise” civil society is applied to FBOs and research tends to focus “disproportionately on organisations seen as mainstream, liberal or moderate” (2006: 836). In an effort to overcome these limitations, Clarke looks at evangelical, Islamic and Hindu FBOs and attempts to assess their political impacts on the lives of development recipients.

Clarke begins by establishing the dominance of FBOs in development, citing the World Bank's estimate in 2000 that fifty percent of education and health services in sub-Saharan Africa was being delivered by FBOs. However, unlike other NGOs, Clark argues, FBOs “draw on elaborate spiritual and moral values” which are distinct from secular development discourse (2006: 845). This discourse of religious morality, according to Clark, allows FBOs to mobilize individuals who are “otherwise estranged by secular development discourse” into their highly networked and independently funded organizations (2006: 845). As FBOs are also “highly embedded in political contests”, their impact on the state must also be acknowledged, leading Clark to stress the “blurring of church-state boundaries” as a primary challenge (2006: 845).

Religion in Ghana

The role of religion in Ghana and the discursive opposition of tradition versus modernity is the subject of frequent and heated debate (Meyer 1998a). While many Ghanaians are converts of evangelical churches, many others are concerned about the influence and activities of these organizations and reports about the abuses of evangelical churches appear daily in the media. In January 2013, the National Chief Psychiatrist spoke out against the activities of pastors who “brainwashed patients and their relatives with false doctrines” which dissuaded them from seeking the advice of health professionals (Graphic Online, 13 January 2013). In other cases, pastors have been charged with crimes of sexual abuse and assault, often committed against young women and children during private prayer sessions or healing rituals (Abgey 2012; Daily Graphic, 22 September 2012).

As noted by de Witte (2008b), religion plays “a constitutive role in the 'modernisation' and 'democratisation' of the Ghanaian public sphere” (44). In addition to being personally valued, religion

is also seen as a social mechanism of significant importance. The rising role of Pentecostalism in the process of defining Ghana, as noted earlier, also brings with it an increasing focus on the discourse of modernity and the Pentecostalist rejection of tradition as a “primitive thing” (Meyer 1998a: 182). For the Ghanaian state-building process, which has focused since independence on the restoration of culture and heritage through the promotion of traditional festivals and symbols, such as Sankofa⁶⁷, the Pentecostal rejection of all things outside the Word of God acts to contest the state discourse of what it means to be Ghanaian (Meyer 1998a). By rejecting any identities outside of the church, converts are able to focus solely on what it means to be an individual before God.

For individuals who perceive their “social placement” as being burdened or limited by the demands of their society, Pentecostal churches are “attractive” options as they “offer [people] a new individualist ethic which matches their aspirations to achieve power and esteem irrespective of age and origin” (Meyer 1998a: 186). Despite the hostility of these churches towards the state and their efforts to “Christianise” state-building processes, politicians “realize that they need the political support of Pentecostal leaders” and often pander to these influential figures in public (Meyer 1998a: 191; De Witte 2008). As a result of this, African traditions and African traditional religions in Ghana have become “almost absent from urban public space” (De Witte 2008: 695).

In a study on public perceptions of religious involvement in the Ghanaian political process, Yirenkyi (2000) found that views are quite mixed, though overwhelmingly pragmatic. According to Yirenkyi, the laity view the clergy as a class that is “not easily intimidated by any government” and therefore their involvement in political processes is considered genuine, though considerable limits are placed on the ways in which the clergy may be engaged in politics, to the point that conflicting expectations effectively dissuade some religious leaders from engaging in the political arena. Religious actors in Ghana, Yirenkyi finds, are expected to perform the singular function of “political education”, where churches are expected to “prepare Christians for national elections, make them aware of their civil rights, and educate them about government policies and programs” (2000: 332). The opportunities therein to advance one's perception of the state as a battleground between God and the powers of darkness are obvious.

Religion in Cameroon

In Cameroon, the level of suspicion expressed towards any form of association or institution is extended to the churches and mosques and is applied to all denomination equally. Whereas long-established missionary churches in Ghana are generally accepted as institutions of social importance, suspicion and rumours may even be levelled against the Catholic church whose priests are thought to be participants in ritual murder and are believed to have ties to the Rosicrucians and the regime of Paul Biya (Geschiere 1996). In media, the acts of fraudulent pastors and priests are also frequently reported such as the case of an imposter who was plagued by nightmares after stealing from a church to furnish his own ministry (Sylvester 2013), adding to the common perception of charlatanism among self-proclaimed religious leaders

In religious newspapers, such as *L'Effort* published by the Catholic church, prayer is often popularized as the “only defense against the forces of evil” (*L'Effort*, April 2013: 6-7). In a special edition of another paper, the Cameroon Tribune, the role of evangelical churches (*églises de réveil*) in Cameroon was debated with some interviewees citing the assistance of these churches in releasing them from the “chains of witchcraft”, while others felt that the churches sought only to generate wealth

⁶⁷ Sankofa is depicted as a bird looking over its back towards its origin and history, indicating an intention to take the past into the future. This image is seen in architecture, on textiles and is used for decoration throughout Ghana.

through lies (Cameroon Tribune, 2013: 6). As in Ghana, the churches are also often seen as being responsible for increasing instances of witchcraft-related violence, as in the case of a 70-year-old mother who was exiled by her children because their pastor believed that she was a witch (Mbassi-Bikele 2013: 22).

This ambiguity towards the role of religion falls within the distinction between individual and group action. Where prayer is an individual practice, it is widely endorsed, as will be seen in the interview responses. However, where interventions are associational, they are subject to the common suspicion that that churches are linked to cults (Forbinake 2013). Where religious organizations hold power, and the more they do, the more they are associated with the political, and by this association, cults (Nzekoue 2013). Though a secret society may be dominated by the members of a church or other religious organization, these cults are often thought to “blend mainstream Christianity and traditional African beliefs” (Clarke 2006: 843). Thus, the very foundation of these religious organizations and the legitimacy of their relationship to the divine is eroded by rumours and suspicion.

For Geschiere (2006) the rapid rise of Pentecostalism in Cameroon and the willingness of the church to directly intervene in the battle against Satan “seems to have taken away some of the pressures on the state to do something about” the threat of witchcraft and cults (238). Geschiere compares this to Ghana where the state and Pentecostal churches are much more at odds due to the intention of the church in Ghana to develop “a political project that may take over the state” (Geschiere 2006: 238). As will be seen in the next section, there is also an important distinction to be made between the personal relationship to religion and the social.

Case Studies: Ghana

The complex cosmology of witchcraft combined with the syncretic beliefs held by many Ghanaians together lead to an astounding plurality of views regarding the question of how religious organizations may address witchcraft-related violence. In this section, these views will be contextualized in their own belief systems in order to provide a frame of reference for some of the concepts employed by respondents. In an effort to balance clarity and confidentiality, the broadest term for the religious denomination of the respondent will be used.

Two main arguments are advanced by those who are sceptical towards the role of religious organizations in mediating the spiritual threat of witchcraft: the first addressing spiritual power which will be discussed here; and the second, addressing the actions of people, which will be addressed later. The explanation provided by one informant, who identifies as Rastafarian, summarizes the view that religious organizations lack the spiritual power to successfully address witchcraft. In this informants' understanding, witches are not human beings, but spirits. When a witch is killed, the witch's human spirit returns to the Creator and the body to the earth. However, the witch spirit itself is released and will enter another person, often a family member of the deceased. Though prayer is acknowledged as a form of protection, it is only seen to be effective when one is actively praying, leaving one vulnerable throughout the day. In this view, only traditional protections are effective at all times. Though religious actors are recognized as spiritual persons, for some their ability against witchcraft is limited though this does not negate their potential to do good work in the community (Fieldnotes 17/09/12).

The belief that religion is at odds with traditional practices was also expressed by traditional authorities. One traditional healer⁶⁸ argued that between the two ways, the traditional way is stronger though more perilous because by working through the supernatural, traditional healers are also at risk

⁶⁸ Ghana, Traditional Authority, 18/09/2012

of attack by nefarious spirits. A number of chiefs expressed strong views in support of traditional practices as well, with one⁶⁹ suggesting that the work of churches to address witchcraft-related violence will not succeed until pastors consult traditional spiritual powers. One chief⁷⁰ noted that pastors speak of God but witches do not know God. Therefore religion is unable to act alone and though religion talks, people don't mind. Traditional authorities who were supportive of the religious organizations were often themselves self-identified Christian or felt that the work of religious organizations in identifying and exorcising witchcraft spirits was a positive contribution to the overall effort to address the witchcraft systems.

Churches themselves expressed varying views towards their relationship to witchcraft and witchcraft-related violence. The Presbyterian Church of Ghana is one of the oldest established Christian organizations in the country and it is the (sometimes) funder of the GO Home project in Gambaga discussed in the chapter 5. For the representative⁷¹ from the Presbyterian Church, witchcraft is acknowledged as a social belief. However it is abhorred because it fails to contribute to the progress of society and magic is forbidden when it is for non-progressive ends. In this, the Presbyterian church expresses much of the ambiguity commonly applied to witchcraft. Though the Church has worked to address the needs of accused witches, it nonetheless remains convinced of the existence of witchcraft, sometimes as a social phenomenon and sometimes as real spiritual tool or threat.

Witchcraft fears are also seen as having corrupted some Christians churches, particularly those which use exorcism as a means to impress people and draw them to their congregation. For the Presbyterian church, the use of deliverance to attract converts not only contributes to witchcraft fears, it also creates opportunities for violence and excessive abuses, such as chaining people who are suffering from physical or psychological illnesses. Though the work of deliverance centres is often framed as false or manipulative, the Presbyterian church noted that in the Ghanaian context, where syncretism is the norm, some pastors also believe in these traditional practices.

For respondent⁷² from the Catholic church, witchcraft is a known phenomenon which is believed to be part of God's creation. However the church does not view the witch as an actor of evil but rather as a human being who is doing something evil with a God-given talent that is meant to be used for good. In terms of witchcraft-related violence, one priest expressed the view that violence is understood as witchcraft attack and must be taken seriously. As the church is seen as being unable to address witchcraft-related violence alone, the government, which has the upper hand, was identified as the responsible actor for supporting the church, as well as NGOs and educated traditional authorities in combating witchcraft. However, the government is slow to act because they assumed to be in contact with and assisted by witches who are preventing the state from employing witchcraft for good as was accomplished in Europe (leading to advancement and modernity).

The Church of Latter Day Saints in Accra is an example of the modernity associated with Westerners. The Temple complex occupies sprawling, ornate grounds with multiple buildings in the embassy district of the city, with a tower topped with a gold statue at its centre. Unlike other churches, the Mormon complex houses a number of foreigners who are responsible for the administration of the centre, which includes housing for missionaries who contribute to the rapid expansion of this denomination in Ghana.

According to the respondent,⁷³ in the Mormon church, witchcraft is recognized as a cultural belief which must be left behind along with all other practices and beliefs which are violent or which

⁶⁹ Ghana, Traditional Authority, 17/09/2012

⁷⁰ Ghana, Traditional Authority, 17/09/2012

⁷¹ Ghana, Religious Organization, 25/09/2012

⁷² Ghana, Religious Organization, 27/09/2012

⁷³ Ghana, Religious Organization, 28/09/2012

erode the well-being of the family. The church works through education to protect children and families from such cultural aberrations as the preoccupation with evil which exist in all traditional societies. Ultimately, the church aims to support families and eventually societies, in moving away from violent practices and to change human hearts so that they will leave behind cultures of violence and embrace their responsibility towards one another. Though the church has encountered witchcraft in its work, it does not address the issue directly, focusing instead on the broader messages of Mormon philosophy, such as non-violence, the sanctity of the family and fostering caring among humans.

There are numerous Pentecostal churches in Ghana of varying size and organization. Some are established by self-proclaimed pastors whose congregations convene in buildings which were once industrial factories or outlets, while others are part of a large association of church under a unified administration. In my interviews, I sought the participation of a widely known and well-established Pentecostal church with multiple locations across Ghana, the central offices of which were located in Accra. In the views expressed by the respondent⁷⁴, witchcraft is a very real phenomenon which is encountered on a daily basis.

In the respondent's own personal life, witchcraft beliefs had caused significant hardship, where fear of idols and the supernatural led people to overlook curable injury or illness leading to unnecessary deaths. Though the work of witches was also discussed, including the pastors' own experience as a youth witnessing witches convene in a tree. Despite this world of danger, all that is required for protection is the name of Jesus, which witches are unable to stand against and through which demons may be driven out of possessed people. For the church, the government is responsible for leading initiatives against violence, though some may be ineffective as the government is viewed as being ignorant to the needs of people. NGOs are seen as being responsible for sensitization, though no description of this was provided.

For the Pentecostal church, traditional authorities are those who are most at odds with the church and its efforts to combat witchcraft. Here the problem of syncretism was raised as the permissive cause of significant abuses by traditional authorities, including sexual slavery though *trokosi* and trafficking, which employs rituals using women and girls' hair or blood to enforce their silence under penalty of death. In addressing these issues, the pastor requested that I make very clear in my research that the government is not the answer, nor NGOs, but that only the word of God and the power of the gospel can deal decisively with witchcraft. As evidence of this, the pastor noted the historical success of the church in the 1930s and 1940s in eliminating the anti-witch cult *Tigare*.

According to the pastor, a similar imitative is required to address the problem of the witches camps in the north. Though the government and NGOs may be able to disband the camps, people will re-mobilize in another way to address their witchcraft fears and spiritual insecurity. It is here that the Pentecostal church may provide emotional and spiritual support and accept those who have been ostracized into the church for healing. In the view of the church, government and even psychological support services are only superficial aids. For the problem of witchcraft to be addressed, according to the pastor, there is a political solution in which churches must be seriously involved as only they are able to provide the guidance needed. Unfortunately, the respondent did not elaborate on the specific nature of this political solution.

Instead, to support this view, another example was provided of a widow who was educated in the Bible and used this knowledge to fight against widowhood rites⁷⁵ in her region. This woman formed an organization which now has thousands of members, all widows, who are working to change social

⁷⁴ Ghana, Religious Organization, 28/09/2012

⁷⁵ The term widowhood rites in Ghana refers a number of diverse conditions or customs imposed upon widows. These may include dispossession, prohibition from eating certain foods, wearing certain clothes or associating with certain family members.

practices. Though these illustrative anecdotes were intended to provide insight into how the Pentecostal church may be best suited to address witchcraft-related violence, it is notable that they were also framed in terms of efforts which sought to transform traditional or cultural practices where the state was unable, and deemed unfit, to do so. Ultimately, the church advocates prayer as the singular form of action in daily life and this message is pervasive in Ghanaian society, from books on dream interpretation in which every dream is potentially witchcraft and every remedy is prayer, to the blessings of a pastor at a wedding protecting the newlyweds from witches and wizards through Jesus's name.

In this climate of spiritual insecurity and syncretic belief in both the powers of witches and prayer, it is understandable that deliverance churches have become prevalent. Though difficult to identify and frequently hidden, deliverance churches are numerous in Ghana and I had the opportunity to spend a day at a deliverance centre⁷⁶ that was affiliated with an organized church which wished to remain anonymous. The centre itself was unmarked and it was explained that this was to protect those seeking healing from discrimination or potential violence, though in other cases the concealed nature of centres is also used to hide abusive practices and keep them from being exposed.

At the church I was first welcomed by a retired school teacher turned pastor who worked with the church. For the pastor, witchcraft is a phenomenon which is open to significant interpretation and in his own view, it is the act of a human being who is possessed of a spirit which seeks to cause harm. Though the spirit is ill-intentioned, the person who is possessed cannot be treated harmfully, nor can the spirit. The latter must simply be cast out through prayer so that it will move on and the person may begin to heal. During our interview, the pastor invited a young couple into the room in order to demonstrate the process by which demons are cast out through prayer.

The young couple had been married for eight years and was unable to conceive. The pastor noted that while the couple was seeking medical treatment with a gynaecologist at the central hospital, additional support was needed to take the demon off of the woman's womb. The deliverance process began with the pastor praying with the woman who was standing over a mattress with two aides at her side to catch her should she fall. I sat with her husband who prayed and spoke in tongues while the pastor spoke first to the demon on the woman's womb before turning to the corner of the room to speak with an invisible being, presumably the expected child who was waiting to be conceived. At times, it seemed expected that the woman would fall from the prayer. However, she remained standing, and after being joined by her husband in a final prayer, the two were sent home. At the end of the healing the pastor confirmed that the case is not witchcraft, but instead a spirit of misfortune from which the couple must be released.

At the end of the prayer session, we were joined by another pastor who sought to stress that unlike other deliverance centres, this centre does not seek out witches nor advocate violence. Rather the service provided by the church is much more akin to a drop-in centre where people may come for healing and for those whose cases are more severe or prolonged, they may reside at the centre for the time required to recover. The centre also endeavours to ensure confidentiality noting that among a staff of 67, when cases of witchcraft are brought forward a maximum of four staff may be involved, limiting intervention to those who investigate and then deliver the accused or self-identified witch. In this way, the centre views itself as a treatment facility where the spiritual needs of voluntary patients are managed through counselling and prayer.

In the words of the pastors, the goal of the centre is to achieve rehabilitation while maintaining high standards of confidentiality and care, where the person is not treated but rather that which causes them harm is addressed. This point was stressed a number of times before my arrival at the deliverance

⁷⁶ Ghana, Deliverance House 10/2012

centre and once there. The facility itself was quite impressive and had a number of furnished villas for residents alongside a large building which housed a chapel, offices, meetings rooms and a library. I was given a tour by one of the pastors who continued to explain the approach of the church, which did not address witchcraft specifically or disproportionately, but sought to assist in all forms of physical, psychological and spiritual illness or conflict afflicting individuals or families.

Those who seek services at the centre may be recommended by family members or friends within the church and no fees are charged for shelter or prayer. This point was stressed by the leading pastor who was extremely defensive throughout the day seeking to distance himself from other deliverance centres and unapologetically demonstrate the work of his church. In order to prove the work of his centre, the pastor requested that two residents of the centre speak with me to share their own experiences. Though this request infringed upon the condition of voluntary participation, indicating a potential conflict for the interviewee should they refuse, both residents were adamant that they wanted to participate in the interviews even in private discussion which stressed their ability to refuse and my own offer to lie and say they had participated.

The first of the two interviews was with a young woman and student of sociology who stressed that she wanted to share her story with me and with others to show how she had been helped by God. The respondent explained that in Ghana witchcraft accusations are levelled against those who deviate from the norms of society. In her own case, the respondent refused the call of a deity who sought her as successor to the priest serving at its shrine and was afflicted with paralysis that struck at times which strategically affected her education, such as during exams, as a result of her desire to pursue her education and live as a Christian. In her effort to live outside what she identified as her clan system, which would require her to serve the fetish (deity), the respondent found herself host to a conflict between the lesser deity and God, who wanted her to have another purpose in life.

The spiritual affliction she experienced as a result of this metaphysical conflict caused her friends and family to fear her. Because her condition could not be explained openly, and many details were not discovered until she had been delivered, mystery and suspicion surrounded her misfortune. Eventually, the affliction led to accusations of witchcraft and the respondent was ostracized and forced to leave her family and seek the assistance of the centre where she was healed. However, having chosen God and Christianity over her responsibility to serve her family stool as a priestess, the respondent was not able to return home once the accusations have been dispelled.

While the respondent acknowledged the efforts of the government and NGOs to address the physical needs of accused witches, she felt that only God could truly help people. Additionally, the nature of this help could not be confrontational. When discussing traditional authorities, the respondent noted that because of their strong disapproval of witchcraft, traditional authorities were ill-equipped to solve witchcraft issues. This view reflected those expressed by the pastor, who argued that the enemies of God must be loved by those who seek to combat them. The respondent expressed the desire to continue to work with the church in combating witchcraft, suggesting that her continued residency at the centre was not involuntary, though this remained unclear.

The second interview was with a young man who was still undergoing treatment for his affliction. The respondent had been accused of being possessed of a witchcraft spirit and disowned by his family and had been living at the deliverance centre for a year. The witchcraft spirit with which he was possessed manifested itself as bad dreams in which the respondent engaged in sexual activity with other men in familiar environments such as at home or at school. This witchcraft curse was also understood to be result of the respondent's refusal to become a priest for a small god, though it was the respondent's mother who brought him to the centre in order to be delivered.

In his experience, the respondent noted that though he felt safer at the centre and was convinced only God could help him, he was not yet cured. He continued to have sexual dreams about men and

though he had been through a number of deliverances, it was necessary to engage in continuous prayer. When asked about the effectiveness of other actors, such as the state, NGOs and traditional authorities the respondent noted that they are powerless or, in the case of traditional authorities, implicated in witchcraft. Notably, when the respondent was asked about the role of religious organizations, though adamant that prayer would help him, he replied that he was unsure how religious actors may help.

This added to my already significant discomfort and sense that the young man was much more conflicted than he was able to freely express. Before ending the interview, I asked the respondent a number of additional questions regarding his well-being and general interests. However, once the respondent learned that I was not a Christian, he ended the conversation abruptly and left the room. After the interview I was asked by the pastor if the respondent had discussed the nature of witchcraft affliction. I refused to provide this information, so the pastor supplemented the interview noting that the young man is able to predict the future through his dreams and that his deliverances have been violent at times due to the strength of the spirit in him. After this last unsettling addition, I was escorted to the main bus station to return to Accra.

The role of individuals within the larger rubric of religion and within the broader institutions of religious organizations became much clearer after my day at the deliverance centre; where the actors which not only address but also at times drive witchcraft-related violence become perpetrators themselves. In the case of deliverance, the vulnerability of accused people cannot be overstated: they are disowned, homeless and in the case of the two respondents at the deliverance house, below the age of majority. Though the power of God is widely endorsed, the question of how God acts in our world is complicated by the human intermediary. As a result, religious intervention becomes highly political and power may be exercised and abused to the detriment of others.

This difficult dimension was succinctly addressed on a larger scale by an NGO worker in the story of a village where, according to the respondent, people had never heard of witchcraft. It was not until new churches arrived (the village had been predominantly Presbyterian before this) that accusations of witchcraft began and families turned on one another. Again, the subtext of this disruption was framed in terms of younger villagers wanting to be spiritualists who denounce traditional authorities and practices and who are able to advance, unburdened by family expectations.

Cameroon

In Cameroon, views expressed by respondents towards the intervention of religious organisations in mediating witchcraft-related violence uniformly endorsed prayer as the most potent protection against witchcraft. However, this support did not necessarily extend beyond the direct relationship between the individual and God, and many respondents effectively excluded religious organizations, pastors, priests and mallams who were frequently regarded with suspicion. These views were also distributed equally across all respondents, with some religious organisations warning against other churches and parishes and denouncing them as cults.

Among those who supported the work of religious organizations were churches, victims of witchcraft-related violence, state officials and NGO workers, who spoke to the positive work of churches in combating witchcraft and counselling victims of witchcraft-related violence. In particular, respondents stressed that religious organizations do and should educate their congregations about witchcraft, providing important information on how to identify and protect oneself against it and how to avoid witchcraft activity. Though some respondents supported exorcisms, many felt that the work of churches should remain non-violent and endeavour to build peace, prosperity and well-being.

One traditional healer⁷⁷ who supported the work of religious organizations highlighted the role of imams in educating Muslims about witchcraft and warning them against the practice. However this view was not shared by the mallams interviewed in the field. At a mosque⁷⁸, the mallams interviewed felt that witches are dealt with too leniently in Cameroon. In the main office of the mosque, I met with two representatives who spoke very openly and candidly about the lack of decisive action taken against witches in Cameroon. The respondents expressed their preference for the practice of Islamic states, such as Saudi Arabia, which put witches death and felt limited by the law requiring them to bring accused witches to state officials. Instead of appealing to the state, they said laughing, they would not know to deal with witches swiftly, putting them to death the moment suspicions arose

Respondents who viewed religious organizations with suspicion included traditional authorities, state officials and NGO workers. These respondents warned against the dangers of Satanic churches which could not be easily differentiated from legitimate churches because they also employed anti-witchcraft rhetoric in order to draw in victims. One NGO worker⁷⁹ noted that while some churches do good work, others, mainly revivalist churches, are actually cults which create closed congregations to conceal abuses within. This suspicion applied to the practice of churches in eradicating witchcraft. As a result of this pervasive concern regarding the intricacies of unknown associations, organized religious interventions such prayer meetings, exorcisms and related spiritual witch cleansings become suspect. Rather than seeking to remove a witch spirit or heal someone of witchcraft afflictions, these corrupt churches may be employing their spiritual powers to advance the interests of witches and Satan, possibly further empowering the witches they claim to be healing.

In discussion with a number of chiefs and traditional leaders⁸⁰, the view that pastors and priests may also be involved in witchcraft was widely held. Churches in particular were seen to be bastions of cult association, including alliances with the Rosicrucians and Free Masons. Primary among the interests of these cults is the corruption of Cameroonians through homosexuality and witchcraft. Though these respondents also endorsed the power of Jesus' name in driving away evil, it was clearly the responsibility of the individual to ensure this protection, as church leaders could not be trusted.

There was also the singular and notable exception of one respondent, a state official⁸¹, who noted that they were unable to speak to the question because they were not religious. This response stands out as the extreme minority among the remaining interviews. In all but this one interview, respondents emphasized the importance of prayer and the vigilance of the individual. Prayer was consistently presented as the only means for an individual to combat witchcraft. As organized efforts could not be trusted, the individual alone was responsible for protecting themselves and their loved ones.

In a personal account shared by one respondent⁸² outside her workplace, in the parking lot of a petrol station, prayer was the only protection, though often this was not enough to defend oneself against the formidable power of a witch. In her experience, her mother had been the victim of witchcraft attack. A year earlier, her mother had fallen ill and had begun to swell, becoming twice her size and eventually dying from the illness. This attack was launched against her mother by another woman to whom her mother owed a small debt that no one in the family was able to pay in time. Though the family attempted to protect and heal the mother through prayer, the witch who attacked was more powerful. According to the woman, the family continued to use prayer in order to prevent further

⁷⁷ Cameroon, Traditional Authority, 04/2012

⁷⁸ Cameroon, Religious Organization, 04/2013

⁷⁹ Cameroon, Non-Governmental Organization, 04/2013

⁸⁰ Cameroon, Traditional Authorities, 04/2013

⁸¹ Cameroon, State Official, 04/2013

⁸² Cameroon, Victim of Witchcraft, 04/2013

attacks against the family, though the efficacy of this was always in question.

Similarly, the power of prayer may be abused as a device for concealing continued witchcraft activity. In one television report, three young girls had confessed to being witches and having consumed human flesh. According to the girls, they had been recruited at home by elder family members and were sent to their schools to find other children to convert. However, the girls had come forward to seek absolution through prayer. During the news report, the reporters feelings were notably mixed, expressing concern that such young girls had been involved in such heinous crimes as murder and cannibalism, but also, there was a concern that the reporter and the public were being duped by these witches who were using professions of guilt and prayer to conceal their continued activity and possibly nefarious intentions.

The concern that people may falsely employ prayer to protect themselves from suspicion or accusation follows the concern that many new churches are fronts for covens of witches or are in league with Satan. Therefore, while prayer is a form of protection, it is one that cannot be trusted in others. A person can only guarantee that they themselves are truly of God and employing prayer as an honest protection against witches. Further, as noted by some respondents in Ghana as well as in Cameroon, prayer does not provide constant protection against witchcraft. Prayer is only effective while one is praying and while one is with God. As noted by one respondent⁸³, any act outside of God may leave one vulnerable to witchcraft as any minor acts of indiscretion can lead one off the path of righteousness where witches lay in wait.

As in the previous chapter on NGOs, what is most remarkable about my findings in the field in Cameroon when addressing the mediation practices of religious organizations, is the near complete consistency among respondents replies. Almost unanimously, with the exception of one respondent, prayer is the singular protection against witchcraft. This single exception, the police officer mentioned earlier who does not believe in witchcraft, also felt that religious protection was unnecessary as witchcraft did not exist and he himself was not religious. However, in general discussion, in media and newspapers, debates regarding new churches, social responsibility and the role of religion and even legislation limiting the noise pollution from some congregations, inevitably include mention of witchcraft. Religion is seen to be integral to the freeing of individuals from the shackles of witchcraft, as prayer is able to liberate people from the witches in their societies, families and workplaces.

Conclusions

This chapter has argued that religious organizations continue to express, as they did in the past under the guidance of colonizing missions, disdain and hostility towards witchcraft beliefs and practices. When religious organizations are assessed as institutions of power, rather than establishments of belief, the importance of religious discourse towards witchcraft is much more visible. Most importantly, the frequent depoliticization of religion is challenged when witchcraft is considered, not as a competing religious view, but as another form of power. Conflating witchcraft belief with traditional African religions also serves to conceal power relations embedded in this analysis and its discourse. Depoliticizing both religion and witchcraft obfuscates the processes by which African beliefs are defined by the West as problematic, perpetuating simplistic representations of African beliefs and contributing to the repression of these beliefs and their associated practices by drawing on racist representations of primitivism, irrationality and violence. Without careful reflection, religious

⁸³ Cameroon, Victim of Witchcraft, 04/2013

discourses may easily lead one back to the conclusions drawn by early missionaries who sought to deliver Africans from the Devil and bring them from darkness into the light of civilization, because these ideas have never really left Western discourse or imaginations.

In spite of and, in part, because of this underlying confrontation, religious organizations are decisively important actors in terms of witchcraft-related violence, enacting complex and often contested interventions in an effort to mitigate spiritual insecurity of various kinds. Though not all religious organizations seek to address witchcraft-related violence directly, the very nature of religion as a spiritual phenomenon and religious organizations as spiritually oriented institutions binds these concepts, categories and actors to one another. While some churches may endeavour to avoid the subject of witchcraft altogether, religious rhetoric cannot escape speaking to witchcraft beliefs, even unintentionally, any time they address, however distantly, the metaphysical battle between good and evil.

For those religious organizations which seek to address witchcraft directly, either endorsing or denouncing the belief and associated practices, the effect in both cases may be argued to be the same: they are participating in witchcraft discourse, perhaps altering, yet still perpetuating belief. Simply by being actors engaged in the effort to bring the word of God to people (and by consequence of this, drive evil out), religious actors are necessarily involved in the fight against witchcraft. Whether unwittingly so, it remains that religion cannot be separated from witchcraft.

In Ghana, churches actively engage this social responsibility and become willing participants and at times proponents of the political landscape of violence surrounding witchcraft. In Cameroon, distrust and suspicion limits the ability of all actors involved in witchcraft-related violence. Though intervention is widely supported, fear mitigates the levels of both aid and abuse committed by religious organisations. Ultimately, each person is left to deal independently with the responsibility of their protection, often through prayer.

In more theoretical terms, religious organizations reflect part of the continuing project to civilize and modernize African people. In addition to advancing ideals of the liberal subject, in particular the individualization of the self in relation to God, promoted by the Pentecostal churches in particular, organized religions normalize notions of centralized power in the metaphysical as well as the physical and edify the institutionalization of this power in the visible world. In the analogy of God as the epitome of centralized power, far beyond the level of consolidation achieved by many states today, witchcraft continues to contest the naturalization of this power. The existence of witchcraft demonstrates that, for all the power of God, the diffuse nature of power in the supernatural remains beyond control. As a result of this, a state of spiritual anarchy persists.

Though I am not a theologian, I will venture to further the analogy drawn above between God and the state and suggest that free will undoes the Leviathan. As in the state, the myth of the social contract allows the citizen to assume that the state has a legitimate monopoly over violence. In religious doctrine, faith in God protects the individual from the threat of witchcraft, a realm of violence that is not easily managed. However, free will undoes both God and the Leviathan; the imagined reality of individuals and groups cannot be fully captured by these myths; of the rightness of the state and the ultimate power of God. In the end, witchcraft demonstrates that people are responsible for their own protection, as well as the protection of their society as a whole.

Chapter Seven – Accessing the Invisible World: The shared origins of Traditional Authorities and Witches

In the library at the Grand Mosque⁸⁴ in Yaoundé, Cameroon there are three walls of books with full shelves rising at least ten feet high. The spines of these books are embossed with gold Arabic script and I scan them quickly as I follow my host, the resident librarian, towards his desk. We are discussing religious views of magic and witchcraft in Cameroon and he has just asked me if I am familiar with the story of King David and I nod vaguely, trying to recall specific details. When King David rose to power, the librarian explains, he took all the books of magic from his kingdom and hid them under his throne.

I was told this story in order to demonstrate that magic and witchcraft have been banned since ancient times. However, I am left with the impression that King David sought to control rather than ban magic and witchcraft, by claiming monopoly over the supernatural and by centralizing this power in the most concrete place of rule: under his throne. This story is not representative of the relationship between witchcraft and chiefs and kings in Ghana and Cameroon. The role of traditional authorities in both cases does not reflect an approach of competition or control. Instead, traditional authorities as defined and viewed in my fieldwork, are intended to work together to ensure the spiritual security of a society.

This chapter looks at the role of traditional authorities in addressing witchcraft-related violence and spiritual insecurity in Ghana and Cameroon. The chapter will begin with an exploration of the term traditional authority, in order to clarify its use in the case countries and to describe the role of these individuals in their societies in relation to the supernatural. Following this, traditional authorities will be differentiated by their function, such as chief, healer or diviner, in order to define their relationship to witchcraft in greater detail and as context for the case study findings.

Overall, I argue that, according to respondents, traditional authorities present the most potential and greatest opportunity for decreasing witchcraft-related violence in both Ghana and Cameroon. However, in my fieldwork, chiefs often expressed ambivalence towards this responsibility, possibly due to the precarious position this places them in in relation to the state. As well, chiefs may be hesitant to take on the responsibility of mediating such a contentious and complex problem as witchcraft. Further, the ambiguity of traditional healers and diviners places them in an equally precarious situation, where the same spiritual power which allows them to mediate the supernatural exposes them to potential suspicion and possibly accusations of witchcraft. Though it has been suggested in literature and by respondents in my fieldwork that witches were permitted to flourish when traditional authorities powers were eroded by colonialism, the prominence of these actors and this lost balance cannot simply be recovered by returning to the past.

Defining Traditional authority

As noted in the introduction, the use of the term traditional authority intended here differs from the standard definition in political science. Conventionally, traditional authority is employed to connote state recognized and institutionalized power among traditional actors, pertaining almost exclusively to chiefs as they were recognized, or in many cases, constructed during the colonial era. The intricacies of the relationship between the state and traditional authorities will be discussed in greater detail, however

⁸⁴Fieldnotes 29/03/13

it is important to clarify here that the term traditional authority includes non-state actors, healers, diviner and fetish priests. In this sense, authority pertains to state and non-state actors who were identified in interviews by informants as being important leaders, decision-makers and representatives within their society.

In line with the anarchist bias of this work, authority is not recognized as a term pertaining exclusively to the mechanisms or legitimacy of the state. Therefore, chiefs who are enstooled or empowered by a Constitution or elected through public process are not recognized as possessing a more legitimate or recognized form authority than non-state authorities, though a distinction will be made throughout this chapter, highlighting whether an authority's positions is state-based or society-based (viewed by respondents as holding a position of power within their self-identified society).

Though the inclusion of non-state traditional authorities was intended in my research design, it was not until I was in the field that it became clear that the distinctions used in Western political science did not apply to political realities of research participants. When asked to discuss the role of traditional authorities generally, and undefined, respondents spoke of the roles of chiefs and traditional practitioners within their communities. These views were also supported in African literature, such as Botchway's description of traditional authority in African societies. As he notes, traditional society includes "priests, diviners and medicine men" who, among the Ga "originally wielded more power than their chiefs" and who today is seen in African communities "as the 'wise man' of the village or town" and whose office is "respected and held in high honour" (Botchway 2009: 50).

In particular, when addressing the question of witchcraft-related violence, a broader definition of traditional authority is also essential as the "traditional system of arbitration" included diviners and healers (Golooba-Mutebi 2005: 950). As argued previously and as will be examined in greater detail here, it is a common perception that the "breakdown" of this system "opened the door to violence" (Golooba-Mutebi 2005: 950). As colonial and later independent state authorities and churches worked to suppress practices which sought to mediate the threat of witchcraft, people were no longer able to seek the intervention of local leaders who heard cases towards reconciliation or resolution. As a result of this, people feel unprotected and seek to manage their spiritual insecurity independently, leading to instant or jungle justice.

Looking at the history and role of state-based chiefs alone may also be misleading in itself. Chiefs were not uniformly present in the pre-colonial governance structures of Ghana and Cameroon, leading to a patch-work of varying degrees of penetration and acceptance (Geschiere 1996a; Hoffman & Metzorth 2010). Where chiefs were not present, colonial administrations created this position to act as an intermediary under the policy of indirect rule. As a result, some chiefs positions are purely statist; they would not exist without the precedent of colonial intervention and have been institutionalized through the power of the state. As well, the process of recognizing chiefdoms was a highly political process. As noted by Berry (1992) traditional authorities in the Gold Coast (later Ghana) were alternatively abolished and established by British officials who sought to strategically empower or undermine competing societies.

While similar efforts to suppress and control other traditional authorities were much more uniform in the colonial era, which saw the suppression and outlawing of traditional practices, the absence of state institutionalization did not diminish the presence of these actors. In particular, the importance of traditional practitioners in resistance movements and rebellions demonstrates the ability of these actors to define themselves unambiguously in opposition to the state. Unlike some chiefs who relied on the colonial administration or state for legitimacy, traditional practitioners were not bound to state power until much later, when post-independence state leaders sought their support in office. Despite early efforts to eradicate non-state authorities, they remain prevalent in both Ghana and Cameroon. In Ghana, "[t]here are currently 45,000 traditional healers in the country" (Ae-Ngibise et al.

2010: 558-559). In Cameroon, there are an estimated 10,000 traditional healers, with a ratio of 1:700 Cameroonians and greatly outnumbering conventional doctors (1:10,083 Cameroonians) and nurses (1:2,249 Cameroonians) (Bodeker et al. 2005).

In Ghana, the role of the chief in society is defined in the Constitution and is limited to customary or cultural practices; chiefs are not to engage in formal state politics and are not allowed to run for office. However, during election times, some chiefs may host candidates and publicly express their support for one over another. This type of intervention is not strictly illegal, though many Ghanaians question or disapprove of these endorsements. Additionally, some chiefs have been formally “lobbying” the state for increased powers, such as the ability to appoint members to the district assemblies and run for office (Hoffman & Metzroth 2010: 11). Hoffman and Metzroth (2010) suggest that these demands would alter local government, in part by infringing on the authority of assemblies and in part due to the regional differences in chieftaincy powers. These authors note that while some regions have “stable, rigid and power chieftaincy” hierarchies, other chiefs “have very little authority” (Hoffman & Metzroth 2010: 14).

As well, even where chieftaincies may appear more stable, conflicts may emerge. McGadney-Douglass and Ahadzie (2008) refer to the Konkomba or Guinea Fowl War which lasted six months in 1994 and 1995 as “the most notorious... ethnic” conflict in Ghana's history (326). According to the authors, land ownership grievances and “discriminatory practices of chiefs toward chiefless minority groups” caused this conflict (McGadney-Douglass & Ahadzie 2008: 326), though it was also noted in an earlier chapter that the input of external resources by NGOs may also be seen as a contributing factors. During this conflict, which centred around a succession conflict between two gates (families) both seeking to lead after the Yaa Naa's (king chief's) assassination, led to significant destruction, the death of an estimated 35,000 people and displacement of another 200,000 and the loss of at least 42 villages (McGadney-Douglass & Ahadzie 2008: 326).

In Cameroon, Geschiere suggests that “the degree to which chiefs are still supposed to maintains some control over the occult forces ... is a good indication of how rooted their authority is in local society” (1996b: 308). As in Ghana, Geschiere stresses the regional variations in the power of chiefs courts and their ability to exercise authority. More specifically, the role of chiefs in managing the threat of witchcraft also varies, where, according to Geschiere, chiefs in the north and west are vested with a greater degree of authority than those in the south and east. In these regions, chiefs are associated with witchcraft, but are understood to use the supernatural to strengthen their position rather than to protect the populations they serve (Geschiere 1996b).

In areas where “no central authority existed above the village level”, chieftaincies were established by colonial administrations (Geschiere 1996b: 310). In French administered regions, chiefs were often appointed on criteria of having worked with the administration previously, as a soldier, cook or porter, whereas British officials were less selective as the colony was of lesser economic importance than others (Geschiere 1996b). Though these chieftaincies were artificially constructed as “novel powerholders instituted by the state”, they nevertheless came to be incorporated into witchcraft discourse and are today like other chieftaincies in their authority towards the supernatural.

While the intersection of traditional authorities with the state is a continuous theme, this section will attempt to address traditional authorities directly, implicating the state as a secondary actor with which traditional authorities compete and cooperate in the realm of governance. Though I am attempting to avoid repetition, it is important to stress the significance of traditional authorities in relation to witchcraft and in African societies in general. Skalnik (1996) provides an exemplary point of introduction in the assertion that though modern scholars often associate traditional authorities with Western political concepts, “chiefs and kings were not politicians”, political institutions or political systems (111). Skalnik stresses an essential distinction, noting that “we can speak of centralised

decision-making, but decisions of leaders were subject to various rules and limitations imposed by the populations which they were supposed to lead” (1996: 111).

Thus, according to Skalnik, the binding nature of traditional authority is not rooted in an understanding of power as domination, but in “a plurality of authority” (1996: 111) which bestowed legitimacy according to the powerholders ability to represent and enact shared values. Skalnik suggests that the bias in academia, to look at African societies as being “headless”, fails to appreciate the “originality of African institutions” which he argues combined “centralised and uncentralised, state and stateless” features (Skalnik 1996: 112). Overall, Skalnik argues that modern African states may “learn from the democratic principles on which these institutions rest” (Skalnik 1996: 119). However, this interpretation of African institutions may suggest greater continuity and stability than the term institution generally connotes in political science.

As previously addressed in the fourth chapter, interactions between traditional authorities and state institutions are fraught with epistemological impasses, such as a fundamentally incongruous understandings of power and reality. Dzivenu (2008) provides an example of one such impasse in an assessment of the differing approaches of the state and traditional authorities towards the concept of justice. Through an analysis of the processes of chief’s courts in southern Ghana, Dzivenu describes a process which often takes place through seemingly simple procedures which are often held within days of being brought to the court and verdicts may be given in “a day’s sitting” (2008: 25). As noted earlier, in addition to being expeditious, Dzivenu also notes that these courts are more accessible than the state courts, requiring payment of a “small quantity of beer or alcoholic beverages” (2008: 25). Though these procedures may suggest that there is a lack of concern with formal investigations, Dzivenu argues that “the desire for peace and order in society” motivates these proceedings (2008: 25).

In addition, the customary courts of southern Ghana pursue this goal in their administration of justice. Where state courts determine a definitive winner and loser based on an evaluations “of the facts”, possibly permanently souring “the relationships between litigants”, customary courts eschew retributive justice (Dzivenu 2008: 25-26). Instead, chief’s courts seek to settle disputes through the “restoration of social equilibrium” and ensure that both parties may be able to “relate to each other as good neighbours, friends and relatives even after the dispute” (Dzivenu 2008: 26). Though such decision-making may be used to reinforce the status quo in a society, it remains that the fundamental aim of these courts differs from those of the state.

The vast majority of research on the subject of traditional authorities and intervention focuses on the judicial aspects of chiefs positions and, in medical research, on the role of healers in providing health services. More recently researchers have focused on the contributions and limitations of traditional practitioners in post-conflict contexts. In particular, these studies focus on the role of rituals aimed at cleansing or healing an individual seeking reintegration and/or a group seeking to resolve tension. While some authors stress the success of these rituals, as Granjo (2006) does in noting that in Mozambique the “rapid integration of veterans ... is hardly separable from the social effectiveness of cleansing ritual and from their deep accordance with the prevailing local visions about misfortune causality” (277), others are more sceptical.

In the case of Mozambique, Granjo stresses that rites performed “involving the whole village” provided both individual veterans and the wider social group a “fresh start”, by acting as a “collective welcome, instead of promoting a verbalisation of traumatic events that is considered dangerous both for the person and for community” (Granjo 2006: 277). However, other authors have stressed that the suppression of individuals needs, such as those to verbalize injustice, may limit rather than support resolution (Baines 2007).

In her research, Baines (2007) questions the effectiveness of the processes of reconciliation in northern Uganda where both the conflict and post-conflict contexts may be linked to the supernatural.

Baines approaches the traditional reconciliation process through the experience of a key informant who was a forced member of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and whom the author refers to as Alice. In this case study, Alice has sought the assistance of a number of traditional healers and spirit mediums at significant personal costs and discovered through these consultations that her unexplained and untreatable illness is being caused by her dead sister (Baines 2007). Alice is informed that because she participated in her sister's killing and her sister did not receive proper burial that Alice must buy two goats for a "reconciliation ceremony" in order to lift the curse that has been placed on her (Baines 2007: 94). However, Alice is unable to afford the fees and instead attends "communal rituals ... organized for former LRA combatants and captives by local cultural leaders" (Baines 2007: 94).

The communal ritual was directed by a chief who stressed the importance of reuniting the former captives stating "Even is you killed my father, brother or sister, I need you back. We need you alive and we want you to live in harmony." (Baines 2007: 94). According to Baines, after this ceremony, Alice experienced some relief. However, her condition worsened again with time. Alice then pleaded for assistance from elders, but "found that the elders are more motivated by the income they could generate from such a ceremony than by a desire to help her" (Baines 2007: 95).

Baines argues that Alice's experience demonstrates the limits of traditional approaches to post-conflict contexts. In particular, Baines stresses that "local systems" were severely eroded during the conflict, "raising concerns about the neutrality and capacity of elders and cultural leaders to adapt local approaches to the crimes committed during the conflict" (2007: 97). Notably, Baines criticizes the local approaches, suggesting that the prioritization of peace over justice fails to address the needs of many people, forcing them to seek resolution "through traditional healers and spirit mediums" (2007: 97).

In addition to basing this argument on a dichotomy of traditional authority types, which are not representative of the experiences of and information shared by informants I interviewed and spoke with in West Africa, Baines also remains uncritically bound to a Western conception of justice and a statist understanding of its application. Baines goes on to suggest that customary courts are also unable to address the national scale or hold "mid- and high- level commanders responsible" (2007: 98). Here, Baines is assuming that a uniform system is required across a given territory, the state of Uganda, while dismissing the aim of reconciliation in her emphasis on retribution. Finally, Baines suggests that a lack of "adequate training", weakened authority, poverty and alcoholism further disables "cultural leaders" and "elders" who "are not immune from corruption" (2007: 106). Overall, Baines argues that these "outstanding concerns" suggest that these customary reconciliation efforts may not "meet international justice standards" (2007: 108).

However, the application of "international standards" as being the unspoken desire or need of Ugandans in the post-conflict environment presents itself as being equally problematic as suggesting that customary reconciliation is desired by all Ugandans or Africans. Though I am not advancing this argument, I do maintain that Western conceptions and international standards of justice do fail to address or even consider the spiritual implications of many forms of violence, power and justice relevant to African epistemologies. Alternatively, there is some interest and literature concerning the role of the invisible in generating or sustaining conflicts in Africa, though at times this inquiry also contributes to sensationalism and further exoticization of the continent as a place of violence and irrationality.

Despite the potential pitfalls of associating traditional authorities and conflict, it remains that traditional authorities are and have been of central importance in use of violence and in the war efforts of many societies. In particular, in West Africa, "war and peace" greatly implicate the supernatural, through the use of ritual washing or blessing to ensure the accuracy of weapons or to provide protection (Owusu 2006: 132). At the end of a war, similar rituals, involving cleansing and washing of guilt and the "uniting of former enemies in peace to restore the normal order of life" were also used by elders

(Owusu 2006: 132). As noted earlier, how normal life may be determined in these contexts is an important question; however, it remains that violence between and including the individual and wider society, greatly implicates traditional authority. As noted by Honwana (2003) traditional authorities may contribute to conflict by supporting opposing sides, as many did support independence movements or later helping rebels or the government in civil wars, as much as they may help provide resolution after these conflicts.

Debating traditional authority

Returning to the work of Mamdani (1996) introduced in chapter 1, the question of what constitutes traditional authority remains unresolved. As mentioned, in political science there is a strong bias toward forms of authority and power which are institutionalized by the state and which conform to the logic of the state. Mamdani draws on this same bias in his work, in particular stressing the creation or fomentation of customary practices by the colonial state, which in doing so, “laid the basis for a decentralized despotism” (1996: 48). In Mamdani's view, European rule was “defined by a single-minded and overriding emphasis on the customary” (1996: 50). According to his theory, Mamdani argues that two parallel systems were established as a product of this single-mindedness; a system of chiefs' courts for natives and “a hierarchy of courts cast in the metropolitan mold” for nonnatives (1996: 109).

In the customary system, rights were not a priority; instead courts were concerned with “enforcing custom” (Mamdani 1996: 11). Underlying this purpose, as Mamdani suggests, was an interest by the colonial state to use these courts as a means through which to ensure greater state penetration, expanding the definition of custom to incorporate every aspect of individuals private lives, while expanding the colonial state's authority as the ultimate power behind these courts. Through this argument, Mamdani deconstructs the colonial definition of custom and notes that it is neither a single nor undisputed concept, challenging in particular the colonial emphasis and “privileging” of chieftaincy as an institution of “customary law”, though it was in essence a colonial invention (1996: 122). Here Mamdani returns to his concept of decentralized despotism, noting that though the product of colonial administration, chieftaincies persisted into the post-colonial state system.

Mamdani's analysis, while focusing the brunt of its critique on the colonial cementing of interpreted or invented “traditions”, nevertheless suggests a certain hostility towards traditional institutions in its prescription of abandoning the remnants of these in order to move beyond despotism. This approach, though not necessarily intended to be, supports modernisation theories which advocate abandoning cultural or customary practices for modern institutions and democratization, a perspective which Nyamnjoh (2003) directly contests. For Nyamnjoh, continued insensitivity towards structures such as chieftaincy which are “*assumed* to be primitive, repressive and unchanging character” (2003: 122, author's emphasis). While this seems to be the exact criticism Mamdani is presenting, by suggesting this unchanging character is the product of colonial institutionalization, Nyamnjoh's rebuttal goes further and challenges the contemporary construction of tradition as repressive. Chieftaincy, argues Nyamnjoh, is “seldom credited with the ability to liberate or to work in tune with popular expectations” (Nyamnjoh 2003: 122).

Just as Mamdani cautions against romantic optimism regarding peasant movements without considering the limits of local governance, Nyamnjoh warns against the danger of homogenizing traditional governance through modernist pessimism. Further, Nyamnjoh looks critically upon the historical academic depiction of chiefs and chieftaincy as lacking the “ability to mobilise social and political change” as well as the contemporary arguments, in particular Mamdani's, “for a common

political and legal regime that guarantees equal citizenship for all, and for the abolition of the classification into 'citizens' and 'subjects'" (Nyamnjoh 2003: 122). Despite the criticisms that may be levelled against traditional authorities, Nyamnjoh notes, these have not affected their political importance nor have they been able to "rationalise chieftaincy and its dynamism away" (2003: 123). Using Cameroon as an example, Nyamnjoh argues:

African are far from giving up chieftaincy or from turning it into completely modern institutions. Instead, Africans are simultaneously modernising their traditions and and traditionalising their modernities. No one, it seems, is too much 'citizen' (of the post-colonial state) to be 'subject' (of a chief) at the same time, not even in Southern Africa where westernisation is often claimed to have succeeded the most. Invented, distorted, appropriated or not, chieftaincy remains part of the cultural and political landscapes, but it is constantly negotiated and re-negotiated with new encounters and changing material realities (2003: 125).

Chieftaincies

While it is important to stress, as Geschiere does, that there are "wide differences in how African societies view central figures like chiefs and healers and in how they relate them to occult powers" (2006: 224), it remains that there are some commonalities which may be spoken to in more general terms. Though chieftaincies are "a product of a specific historicity ... for each chiefdom has its own historical unfolding and particularities", chiefs share the "primary role" as "custodians of 'traditional' resources, institutions and values" (Adjaye & Misawa 2006: 1). In particular, chiefs were administrators of justice, and though this responsibility has been eroded, its supernatural foundation remains (Adjaye & Misawa 2006; Mihalik & Cassim 1993).

In Ghana, chiefs are part of a wider system of traditional authorities "with long lists of offices reaching down to the village level, where the formal political system has not yet arrived" (Knierzinger 2011: 5). In many societies, the chief represents the link between people and their ancestors and provides spiritual protection (Nukunya 2003: 70). In this way, chiefs "form a parallel power to the state because... chiefs derive their authority and legitimacy from difference sources" than the state (Ray 1996: 181). Thus, the authority of the chief is a "sacred authority" (Ray 1996: 184) which exists outside the logic of the secular state, leading to "the state to constantly find itself in continuing contact, competition or cooperation with traditional authority over a variety of political issues" (Ray 1996: 185). Ray (1996) suggests that the Ghanaian state has a number of options in addressing and diminishing the power of traditional authorities, including incorporating chiefs in state institutions and redefining or reducing their power through the Constitution.

The feasibility of these strategies however is questionable, as Knierzinger notes that chiefs are "still the most visible political institutions at the village level" due in part to a lack of state penetration and in part "because of their malleability" (2011: 6). This adaptability of chiefs in Ghana was most visibly tested during the fight for and transition to independence, when chiefs were divided between the colonial administration which enshrined their political positions, and independence movements which were hostile towards colonial institutions, and by extension chieftaincies, but which some chiefs supported (Knierzinger 2011; Boafo-Arthur 2003). In post-colonial Ghana, chiefs were banned by the state from participating in party politics and recognition of chiefs no longer came from the government, but from the National House of Chiefs (Knierzinger 2011). In formal terms, the independent state remained hostile towards chiefs, though informally, leaders such as Nkrumah and Rawlings "began to cherish chieftaincy after they had incorporated it into their political system" (Knierzinger 2011: 20).

According to Knierzinger, this approach began to change in the late 1970s when the post-

independence state began to “decay” and NGOs emerged, “hindering meaningful processes of decentralization” (Knierzinger 2011: 21). Ayee (2007) supports this view, noting that since independence there has been little decentralization in Ghana, leaving “the relationship between chiefs and local government ill-defined” (Ayee 2007: 1). Though local government remains largely, albeit informally, dependent on the favour of chieftaincies, appeals by chiefs “to restore one-third representation” have been dismissed due to claims that this would “lead to a lack of democracy and participation” (Ayee 2007: 7). However, as Ayee notes, traditional authorities are still “the last resort in areas where the central government, [district assemblies] and the sub-district structures have failed” (Ayee 2007: 11).

As highlighted previously, the intervention of chiefs is of significant importance in resolving conflicts and ensuring justice. Though chiefs do not rely on laws, according to Western definition, the norms which are employed in chiefs' rulings may be seen as constituting a form of law or rule, “so long as there is a mechanism to ensure that society reacts to their infraction or non-observance irrespective of the nature of this mechanism” (Nukunya 2003: 82). Here, Nukunya is referring to the rules governing offences such as witchcraft, which can only be ruled upon by spiritual authorities and the resolution for which may also invoke the supernatural. However, it may also be argued that chiefs remain a central “peace-building mechanism in Ghana” as the local state presence may be thin on the ground, as in much of Ghana where there is “about 1 police person to 100,000 people” (Addo Sowatey 2005: 120). In this context, chiefs serve as a primary point of intervention for both legal and non-legal tensions, particularly in rural regions (Addo Sowatey 2005).

As a result of the continued status of chiefs in Ghanaian society, politicians are unable to dismiss their importance (Nukunya 2003). As Addo Sowatey notes, “chiefs, unlike the central government, [are present] in every nook and cranny of the country. They are indeed at the heart of local governance” (2005: 131). Thus, the supernatural and intertwined social authority of the chief places this position beyond the direct control of the state, unless the state accepts an erosion of its own legitimacy by contesting their authority and its foundation, as the Ghanaian states does in many ways, not least of which by failing to acknowledge the existence of the supernatural.

Though the spiritual foundation of chieftaincies in Ghana may be seen to act as a buffer between chiefs and the state, a point of tension is created between traditional authority and religious conversion in Ghana. As noted by Atiemo (2006), despite the growing influence of chieftaincies in Ghana, Ghanaians who have converted to evangelical religions may not identify with traditional authorities or wholly reject their spiritual associations, including abstaining from participation in “traditional festivals, community pacification rites, and traditional holy days” (373). Though Atiemo acknowledges the importance of chiefs' “juridical role”, he also criticizes the interventions of some chiefs, arguing that these may violate human rights standards by upholding customs which are contrary to international standards (2006: 376). Despite this, he notes that chiefs' courts remain “the only ones accessible to the majority of the people” (Atiemo 2006: 376).

Throughout the past and current challenges that have emerged to threaten the position of chiefs in Ghana, “chiefs have proved equal to both colonial and post-colonial challenges” (Boafo-Arthur 2003: 127). In a statistical study by Knierzinger, this point is demonstrated quantitative terms. In his study, Knierzinger found that chiefs were perceived as being more trustworthy (53.55% to 28.46%), more caring (42.39% to 28.46%) and more powerful (59.35 to 36.80%) than members of parliament (MPs). Contrary to the perceptions of chieftaincies as being undemocratic, 54.53% of respondents replied that chiefs need “the consent of the people more often” than members of parliament (38.31%) (Knierzinger 2011: 34). Most notably, when asked “Who takes cares of your well-being?”, 42.39% of respondents replied that chiefs did, with only 28.46% choosing MPs (Knierzinger 2011: 34).

In Cameroon, the early colonial state encountered a diverse landscape with some well-

established chieftaincies but also regions where “the dispersed social organization of the local communities” and lack of central authority made subjugation more difficult (Geschiere 1997: 29). As a result, in regions where villages had to be pacified “one by one”, colonial administrators relied heavily on coercion and forced relocation (Geschiere 1997: 29). In regions where societies were “extremely hierarchical well before colonization”, chiefs remain the “nerve centre of local society” (Geschiere 1997: 66). Across these polarities, colonial administrators demonstrated significant hostility towards the supernatural foundations of authority and sought to sever these links wherever possible, an example of which is the French colonial effort to “change the mental models” of Cameroonians through education and the eradication of secret societies (Fisiy 1998: 150).

This early effort to suppress the link between power and the invisible world had, in Geschiere's view, the opposite effect. By repressing “the articulation of interests from below” and concealing “the foundations of power and the reasons for its decisions from the eyes of the population”, colonial administrators “encouraged the association of modern political with the world of witchcraft” (Geschiere 1997: 37). The state consolidation of power continued towards the centre after independence, despite claims by the first president Ahidjo “to draw the basic principles of African democracy” from the chieftaincies, chiefs remained instrumental and peripheral actors (Nyamnjoh 2003: 126). Though some chiefs became part of the political elite, as members of the ruling party or chairmen of parastatals, there remains a tension between the state and chiefs which requires chiefs to negotiate “between modern and customary bases of power, and between the interests of the state and those of their chiefdoms” (Nyamnjoh 2003: 131).

As noted by Nyamnjoh, chiefs “constantly negotiate their positions within the contradictions between the state on the one hand, and in relation to competing expectations within the communities on the other” (Nyamnjoh 2003: 132-133). The central disconnect of this relation is the “aggressive demystification” chiefs have been subjected to and which has increased “[s]ince the introduction of the new multiparty culture in the 1990s” (Awasom 2003: 101). Awasom argues that the process of distancing of chiefs from their supernatural foundations of power has been accelerated by chiefs participation in multiparty politics, as chiefs are increasingly unable to respond to the modern state while maintaining “traditional integrity” (2003: 101-102). Though Awasom characterizes this conflict as being stuck between Scylla and Charybdis, he notes that chiefs' positions are exceptionally resilient as their authority “does not merely emanate from the ballot box, but also from a distant pre-colonial tradition” (Awasom 2003: 120). Therefore, though some may argue that chiefs are “mere puppets of the regime”, they remain the legitimate representatives of many people, as well as potential agitators in areas outside of the state, such as ancestral land rights (Konings 2003: 98).

Healers, Diviners and Priests

As noted earlier, it is uncommon in political science to include healers, diviners and priests as traditional authorities, because the term authority is understood to refer to a position endowed by the state. However, in both literature on witchcraft and in my own field research, healers, diviners and priests have been identified as central actors in many societies and as the primary authorities of the supernatural. Much like chiefs, the source of their power is beyond the state: their legitimacy and authority comes from the invisible world and their role in society is defined by their abilities to mediate this realm as spiritual people.

Also like chiefs, healers, diviners and priests are central to the resolution of conflict. In cases of witchcraft suspicion or accusation, a chief may consult a healer, diviner or priest before coming to a decision or ruling. Conversely, these actors may be consulted as an alternative or preliminary source of

information and resolution before taking the matter to a chief's court. Where there is an unusual event or illness, healers, diviners and priests may be consulted in order to determine whether there is a supernatural cause, and if so, how the situation may be remedied.

Among these actors, there are also differences. Though all are specialists in the supernatural, healers are also specialists in health and traditional medicine who seek to treat illnesses “arising from natural, social, spiritual or psychological disturbances” (Ross 2008: 16). As noted by Ross (2008), while not all healers are able to cure certain conditions, their ministrations have been shown to provide “relief from ailments and reduced anxiety”, as well as “a sense of comfort and relief from pain, depression and despair” (Ross 2008: 18). Further, Ross stresses that healers, unlike many doctors, employ familiar language and concepts with their clients.

Individuals may seek the services of a healer prior to, in addition to, or after Western medical assistance has been sought. In the research reviewed during my own reading there is no clear pattern to how individuals combine these services. Though it is often thought that healers are most active in rural regions, rurality is not a significant determinant of whether an individual seeks the assistance of a healer (Nattrass 2005: 171). As well, Western education in health and medicine has not diminished the perception that some illnesses have a social or spiritual origin (Nattrass 2005). This is in part due to the syncretic nature of views regarding health in African societies and which was also expressed during my field work in Ghana and Cameroon. While people may endorse the view that some illnesses are caused by biological agents, such as bacteria or viruses, for some it remains relevant that the reason this illness has befallen someone remains supernatural (Nattrass 2005).

Divination, and the role of the diviner, is “based on the notion that by the proper manipulation of certain special objects, it is possible to foretell the future, discover the unknown or interpret events” (Nukunya 2003: 62). Healers and priests, as spiritual people, may also be possessed of the powers of divination. However there are those who specialize in this ability and whose services are seen to work in conjunction with others. For example, a diviner may be able to see the cause of an illness (Nukunya 2003), which may then require the services of a healer or priest for resolution.

Where healers are often required to go through lengthy training processes, some diviners may be born with the power to see (Nukunya 2003). However, in all cases the ability of the individual “is credited to the supernatural force behind the oracle” (Nukunya 2003: 64). Similarly, priests and priestesses who may acquire special abilities or knowledge through communication with the deity they serve do not directly enter the invisible world, but are recipients its power. Like healers and diviners, priests and priestesses have the ability to mediate relations of power between the invisible and visible worlds: this is the source of their authority and power.

Priests and priestesses also have a greater degree of transparency associated with their work. Whereas healers may have acquired their abilities through hidden, supernatural means rather than apprenticeship, often requiring the sacrifice of a close family member for consumption by the witches who have indoctrinated them, priests and priestesses learn their art publicly, through a shrine (Geschiere 1996). This association exposes the healer to the possibility of witchcraft accusations (Geschiere 1996), priests and priestesses are often associated with a shrine and/or deity. As it is the power of deity that is at work, there is little reason to suspect the priest or priestess of wrongdoing.

In their work, priests and priestesses may also hear cases which have been brought before a deity for resolution (Nukunya 2003). In these instances, the priest acts as a judge and passes on the rulings of the deity, whose supernatural sanctions cannot be evaded (Nukunya 2003). As noted by Nukunya, the penalties meted out by a deity may serve to compel an individual to comply with a chief's ruling where the chief cannot ensure compliance. Priests may therefore act as enforcers whose supernatural ability guarantees that a culprit is brought to justice (Nukunya 2003: 87).

Healers, diviners and priests do not only serve these important judicial functions, their role in

many African societies as caretakers is the foundation of their authority and position. Because witchcraft attack often manifests in the form of physical, mental or emotional disturbances, these traditional authorities may be seen as the first responders in terms of one's well-being. According to Tabi et al. (2006), approximately 80% of Africans use traditional medicine as part of their personal health care (53). As the foundation of these services is supernatural, there is a complex relationship linking witchcraft, traditional authorities and health as well as a substantial body of literature on the subject.

The role of the healer in many societies, according to Rekdal, was not only to mediate the supernatural, but also to act as a mediator between identities, where they were “travelling healers” or “had a multiethnic clientele” (1999: 463). As a result of their broad appeal, healers became an early point of intervention for the colonial state and for missionaries whose “evangelism was directly threatened by traditional medicine and its mysticism” (Waite 2000: 236). Despite these efforts, including criminalization of their work through witchcraft-suppression legislation, healers remained popular authorities on personal health and social well-being (Waite 2000).

In many countries healers remained suppressed after independence as elites demonstrated a “deep attachment to the European way of doing things and ... uncertainty about what traditional elements should be revived” (Waite 2000: 239). As a result of these concerns, decades passed before governments began to assess the potential of incorporating traditional medicine into health services systems (Waite 2000). Waite (2000) notes Ghana as an exception to this trend, where Nkrumah established the Ghana Psychics and Traditional Healing Association. Though this organization was disbanded after Nkrumah was overthrown, it was reinstated as the Ghana Traditional Healing Association in 1974 (Waite 2000).

Healers, diviners and priests remain prominent actors in Ghana today. In the north, the earth priest known as tindana or tendaana, “is a powerful functionary of considerable authority” (Nukunya 2003: 57). However, some researchers have noted regional and geographic variations in “how traditional medicine is used and for what reasons” (Dick 2010: 6). In some areas Western medicine is well established and has a higher level of “infiltration into the social norms and cultural contexts”, which Dick (2010) argues is the product of having “been there for a longer period of time” (6, 32).

In my field work and in much of the current literature on the subject, traditional and modern medicine are “integral components of the healthcare delivery system in Ghana” (Tabi et al. 2006: 5). These authors stress the affordability and accessibility of healers throughout the country where “the ratio of medical doctors is 1:20 000 and the ratio of traditional healers ... is 1:200” (Tabi et al. 2006: 53), though it must be noted that the government's figures at the time differ significantly, citing 1:400 traditional healers and 1:12 000 doctors (Tsey 1997: 1073).

According to Tabi et al., priests and priestesses are “[t]he most common type of healer”, though the authors' separation of these actors from others is unclear as they note that priests and priestesses use divination and rituals for healing, whereas “sacred healers” employ “prayers, fasting, incantations, herbal medicines, as well as occultism” (2005: 53). While the category of priest remains clearly defined as those empowered by and representing a deity, the category of sacred healer is unclear as it may include priests, diviners and healers, as well as pastors who conducted deliverances and exorcisms.

Regardless of this limitation, Tabi et al. provide useful insight regarding the perceptions of Ghanaians towards these traditional authorities. The authors found that views towards the nature of healers powers differ widely, including inheritance, life experience, God and lesser deities, including “demonic” powers (Tabi et al. 2006: 57). Notably, some participants in their research expressed fear regarding a healers power as “they were unsure of the source” (Tabi et al. 2006: 57). In regards to how Ghanaians decide between modern and traditional medicine, Tabi et al. found that “a combination of forces” influence and shape individual choices, including “religion, finance and economics, education,

advice of family and friends” (Tabi et al. 2006: 57).

The authors of this study conclude that there should be efforts made to “integrate traditional practitioners into the national healthcare delivery system” (Tabi et al. 2006: 57), a recommendation which has been made and undertaken in other countries including Nigeria and South Africa. Notably, there is considerable support for the inclusion of traditional medicine in state health care systems in much of Africa and academia, so much so that Rekdal (1999) warned against unreflective enthusiasm in redeeming the “witch-doctor”.

Among those who express caution, Tsey (1997) notes that current discourse in Ghana assumes the integration of traditional medicine into the formal health care system “*to be a fait accompli*”, despite inadequate understanding of “the social contexts in which knowledge about traditional medicine is passed on from one generation to another” and the possible impact of this integration on current practitioners (1066). For Tsey, two key points are the risk of relying on “incorporation” over “cooperation”, and the creation of a two-tier system where the poor are forced to rely on “obsolete practices” in the name of “traditional medicine” (1073-1074).

In Ghana, this is a particular concern in current research regarding mental health services. Read, Adiibokah and Nyame (2009) note that there are only three psychiatric facilities in Ghana, all of which are in the south and suffer “from overcrowding and understaffing leading to poor quality of care” (Read, Adiibokah & Nyame 2009: 3). These authors suggest that a lack of access to Western psychiatric services is responsible for traditional healers and pastors being the primary mental health caretakers in the country. Despite acknowledging that mental illness is commonly understood as a spiritual concern (Read, Adiibokah & Nyame 2009), these authors fail to correlate the supernatural foundation of mental illness to the spiritual abilities of healers and pastors, thereby contributing to their predominance.

At issue, in academic and media stories regarding mental health in Ghana, are “reports of maltreatment and human rights abuse, including chaining, enforced fasting, and beatings” (Read, Adiibokah & Nyame 2009: 3). Despite being a widespread practice, chaining has received little attention by the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice or local health practitioners (Read, Adiibokah & Nyame 2009). These authors note that this is due in part to the ideals of Ghanaian society which place “the safety and moral integrity of the group” before “the individual rights of the person with mental illness” (Read, Adiibokah & Nyame 2009: 12). As well, the authors found in their research that most informants who had been chained “expressed little resentment towards the healer who had chained them, viewing it as a necessary part of the process of healing and perhaps unavoidable given their disturbed behaviour” (Read, Adiibokah & Nyame 2009: 10). Overall, chaining is commonly perceived as a necessary protection for both the well-being of the symptomatic individual and their caretakers (Read, Adiibokah & Nyame 2009).

In Cameroon, witchcraft remains a prominent concern for many and is considered by some to be “at the heart of the problem of village authority” (Rowlands & Warnier 1998: 121). Despite efforts by the state to eradicate witchcraft and the ambiguous position of traditional healers towards the invisible world, they have remained prominent and their status has improved since independence (Rowlands & Warnier 1998). Though they do not have legal recognition, healers are “less subject to harassment, provided they belong to a regional association controlled by administrative authorities” (Rowlands & Warnier 1998: 128).

Cameroon also has a National Association of Traditional Healers which was established in 1970 and runs “local sections in a number of divisional headquarters” (Rowlands & Warnier 1998: 128). Despite this, healers are not highly visible within Cameroon. Unlike Ghana where there signs can be found directing one to the closest healer, often graphically depicting the illnesses they are able to treat, healers in Cameroon are mainly accessed by word of mouth. An exception to this in Cameroon is fetish priests who sell herbal remedies on the street, as a sort of apothecary. Here, consultations are both brief

and public, therefore diminishing cause for suspicion. Though there has been a small number of individual traditional practitioners who have sought greater visibility, and even celebrity as a witch finder, by seeking to cleanse entire villages, many remain “fairly discreet” (Geschiere 2006: 232).

The reason for this level of discretion may be in part to the perception that “aggressive” healers are seeking status and wealth (Geschiere 2006: 232). During my fieldwork, numerous informants expressed caution regarding “charlatan” healers, and media sources frequently reported crimes committed by self-proclaimed healers and prophets. As noted by Tangwa (2007), Cameroon has “been invaded by all manner of charlatans, quacks and conmen” who contribute to “bogus beliefs that lead some people to commit atrocities such as child rape and ritual murder” (42). Despite this, the ambiguous position of healers is most prominent in Cameroon, where healers “can heal only because (s)he has killed before” (Geschiere 2006: 227).

Case Studies: Ghana

The ambiguity surrounding traditional authorities is present in Ghana but is not as prevalent as in Cameroon. Part of the reason for this may be the long history of centralized power in Ghana, where kings and chiefs were well established before colonization and where many kingdoms remain relevant actors in local governance, continue to inform individuals' identities and are deeply connected to the invisible world. An example of this is a discussion I had with a young man from Northern Ghana who felt it was imperative that I understand the conflicts that occurred in the region in 2002, and which are a continuation of tensions from the previously mentioned Guinea Fowl war (Fieldnotes 15/09/2012).

The violence which flared in 2002 was described by the informant as a division in the Northern community, which drove brother against brother in the search for the truth of who had killed the Yaa Naa. Mobs formed in villages and removed people from their homes and brought them to local police stations where many were jailed. Often these divisions were fuelled by party affiliation as widespread suspicion towards the government's inaction and inability to identify the culprit led many people to suspect conspiracy, a sentiment which continues today.

The informant, whose grandmother was the sister of the Yaa Naa, noted that leading up to the eruption of violence and death of the Yaa Naa, a number of incidents occurred. His own grandmother became ill and could not eat. Unusual accidents befell people, such as an elderly woman who slipped and dropped a water bucket on her leg, breaking it before dying days later. In all these mysterious cases, the accidents or deaths occurred around the time of the Yaa Naa's murder.

However, these rumours of conspiracy and the assassination of the Yaa Naa fail to substantially affect the perception of the Yaa Naa's power. In the informant's retelling of the events leading up to the Yaa Naa's death, the central palace was under attack. Supporters of the king came to the palace and, transforming into wind, were able to pass through police barricades to plead with the king to see reason and leave with them. The king refused, arguing that some of his people had already been killed, therefore he must stay. When his supporters left, they walked through bullets being fired outside and were unharmed.

Shortly after this, the Yaa Naa emerged from the palace to confront his attackers. He appeared first as a great lion, the symbol of his stool. Then he transformed into a python, but still some of his attackers were not deterred and so the Yaa Naa transformed back into a man and announced his death which would close the gates of succession forever. Then the Yaa Naa allowed himself to be killed, choosing to die with his fallen people. Upon succession, his son sent out an open challenge for his father's killers to kill him too, though none has tried.

From this retelling of the resurgence of violence in Northern Ghana, it is clear that the

supernatural foundations of chiefly power remain relevant, at the very least, in the rumours and remembrance of these events. This story parallels others heard during my field work about conflicts between chiefs being expressed in supernatural manifestations, such as a dark cloud of bees above a palace where there is unresolved tension. Thus, despite constitutional limitations on their power, chiefs remain potent actors and continue to wield a power outside of the state's control or ability.

The view that these powers are not only legitimate but also relevant to the mediation of witchcraft was consistently expressed in interviews. Though there are a small number of respondents who expressed both support and caution towards the role of traditional authorities, implicating chiefs as well as healers, diviners and priests, the majority of responses expressed the opinion that they are the most important actors in addressing witchcraft-related violence.

According to one state official⁸⁵, traditional authorities are key to addressing witchcraft-related violence because they appeal to the belief in witchcraft itself. The official felt that traditional authorities, as custodians of the community, should be working to reintegrate accused witches. However, the official noted that chiefs are not able to take accused witches into their own homes, therefore safe havens must be established so that the accused may remain in the community while the process of reintegration unfolds.

One NGO worker⁸⁶ stressed the important role chiefs play, comparing their responsibility towards their community to those of a pastor because chiefs are also expected to provide spiritual protection. The worker noted that some chiefs will bring accusations to shrines and enlist the assistance of priests, though in some cases this may expose the accused to harm. The risk of human rights violation was deemed by the worker to be less in Ghana than other countries such as Tanzania, where chiefs are thought to kill accused witches in order to protect their communities. What was most important from the NGO perspective is education: chiefs must be educated in human rights. The work of the Gambarana (chief of Gambaga witch camp) was noted for his protection of accused witches and continuing involvement in their well-being from their arrival to departure.

The views expressed by chiefs who were interviewed in Ghana were somewhat surprising in their disinterest or dismissal of witchcraft as a pressing concern and the chiefs themselves did not express the same sense of responsibility shared by other informants and respondents. A chief⁸⁷ interviewed in Greater Accra referred to witchcraft as a chewing stick, the subject of much discussion, but rejected the conceptualization of witchcraft as a problem. Rather, what was problematic for the chief was the refusal of individuals to allow traditional interventions to proceed because family members were contesting the validity of the accusations, and by extension, the authority of the community.

This same chief argued that it was not supernatural power, but financial ability, that determined an individual's capacity to mediate witchcraft. According to the chief, to eradicate spirits, financial access to the same spiritual men that government leaders and pastors rely on, and whom NGOs and human rights workers should also work with, are the most powerful people and therefore should be at the forefront of activities against witches. Again, the spiritual ability of the chief is diminished and the role of spiritually empowered authorities, such as healers and diviners, is emphasized.

As another chief⁸⁸ explained, Ghanaians believe that chiefs are spiritual, however, not all chiefs possess the ability to mediate the supernatural. While some chiefs are natural doctors (healers) or diviners, even their rulings on witchcraft may be disregarded as inconclusive and people may demand the intervention of a fetish priest or prophet (elder who sees spiritually) in order to confirm the chief's

⁸⁵ Ghana, State official, 23/10/2012

⁸⁶ Ghana, Non-Governmental Organization, 08/10/2012

⁸⁷ Ghana, Traditional Authority, 24/09/2012

⁸⁸ Ghana, Traditional Authority, 29/09/2012

judgement. The intervention of the chief separated from the support of spiritual actors becomes much more mundane and practical. One respondent⁸⁹ who is positioned to succeed the current chief of Tamale emphasized the role of chiefs in ensuring that accused witches and their families, particularly those in the camps, are not subjected to physical attacks. Instead of ruling on the supernatural aspects, chiefs are responsible for the securing the physical safety of individuals and the hearing of grievances in order to de-escalate conflicts through discussion.

From these perspectives, though chiefs do play an important role in mediating witchcraft accusations and attack in their chiefdom, the ultimate ability to mediate the supernatural side of these conflicts remains with supernatural actors. One informant shared a story highlighting the importance of supernatural intervention (Fieldnotes 15/09/2012). A friend of the informant, from junior high school, had become ill and began to swell. Swelling is a common indication of witchcraft and it was determined that he had been bewitched by an elderly woman who lived in his compound and who often brought him food and water and who brought him to her room at times, demonstrating an unusual and inappropriate liking for him.

The boy's mother brought the older woman before the elders at the palace. The older woman refused to respond to the questions posed to her to the satisfaction of the elders, who believed her to be a witch. The elders then ordered the woman to take the boy to her room and heal him and she did, returning the boy to health. However, some time later, the boy began to swell again. The older woman was then brought to the palace where she was beaten and exiled to Gambaga rather than put to death. Though the informant considered the actions of the elders as necessary in order to avoid killing the woman, noting that elders know how to deal with witches, their inability to neutralize the supernatural power of the witch, having only physical means to deter her, led to her banishment.

Possession of supernatural power and access to the invisible world, even in cases where this is seen to be beneficial, exposes a spiritual person to the potential of suspicion and accusation. For respondents who cautioned that while traditional authorities are central to addressing witchcraft-related violence there remained a concern that the same power which enables their efficacy may also pose a risk. This danger was explained by one informant in an anecdote regarding the work of healers (Fieldnotes 20/09/2012). In this story, the parents of a young boy who had fallen ill was brought to a traditional healer. The healer instructed the parents to keep the child indoors and two days later, the child died. According to the informant, this was evidence that the healer was a witch. The healer did not treat the boy but had him confined and later sacrificed.

The uncertain allegiance of traditional authorities, who may have one foot in the visible world and another in the invisible, is the cause of considerable doubt. One state official⁹⁰ addressed this ambiguity directly, questioning where these actors belong in the effort to reduce witchcraft-related violence. The official saw a clear dilemma for traditional authorities who are empowered by beliefs and practices which are not reflected in the modern state and in state institutions. The crux of this conflict was articulated as enlightenment and education, where chiefs and healers may be educated individuals and would therefore reject the idea of witchcraft. However by the virtue of their own positions in society, as representatives of deities, ancestors or the supernatural, their power is there, in the invisible world, forcing them to confront and acknowledge the existence of witchcraft.

Another chief⁹¹ stressed that chiefs in Ghana do not have mystical power. They are supposed to, but in practice it is an individual choice whether or not to attain “juju”. However, in the city of Kumasi a chief may chosen to be the *nsumakwa-hene*, to be a spiritual chief who knows all about witchcraft. In these cases, the supernatural powers of these chiefs are endorsed as a positive form of witchcraft. This

⁸⁹ Ghana, Traditional Authority, 07/09/2012

⁹⁰ Ghana, State Official, 23/10.2012

⁹¹ Ghana, Traditional Authority, 29/10/2012

same approval was expressed by a religious leader who stressed that there are in fact two forms of witchcraft; the destructive witchcraft which is a distraction, and positive witchcraft which healers employ to remedy illnesses which western medicine cannot.

However, unlike chiefs, there are few clear social norms which regulate the activities of healers and diviners. Rather than being institutions of social and political organization, healers and diviners are independent, their knowledge is hidden and their workings are revealed only to those they treat, and even such cases, only the rituals and substances employed may be seen. The invisible workings of a healers or diviners power remains inaccessible. As one traditional healer⁹² noted, he has the power to help people, make them bulletproof, calm their minds of worry or protect them in their life, he may even know when a request is genuinely needed or not, but he cannot reveal how he knows or accomplishes these things. Only a spiritual person may know how the spiritual world works in the visible.

To dismiss some suspicion, the same healer offered to show me a room of certificates (though it is unclear from where or what kind) in order to demonstrate that he is knowledgeable in the supernatural and not a charlatan. As well, three of the healers whom I interviewed also offered to demonstrate how their spiritual powers operate in the performance of a protection or good luck ritual which all three felt I needed in order to safely conduct my research. When asked what these rituals would entail, one fetish priest⁹³ replied that I would have to see to understand. This level of discretion, or secrecy, was common when speaking to spiritual people, including those who were not traditional practitioners.

Being spiritual, or coming from a spiritual family, seemed for those who spoke of themselves in these terms, as a point of pride. However, when asked for additional information regarding the nature of this power, many said that these things could not be spoken of. One respondent⁹⁴ was willing to discuss the subject in greater detail. In his family, spiritual power was hereditary, a condition which the respondent suggested led to conception of wonderful children. His grandmother, who was a queen mother, passed her powers on to her daughter (his mother) which are intended to protect the family and prevent members from defecting (leaving the family's kinship order and responsibilities). In the event that a family member tries to abandon their relations they will suffer misfortunes, such as the loss of an eye, a twisted back or poverty. The reputation of the family as spiritual people led to an accusation against the respondent's mother. She was brought before a king who was to hear the accusation that she had murdered her husband in order to obtain his property. Family members who brought charges against her were punished, one lost an eye, another was paralysed in an accident and a third died after seeing swords in his dreams. His mother was sent to a witch camp and remained there until her name could be cleared by her family members who fought the accusation and she returned to live in Tamale.

The respondent referred to his description of these events as a terrible secret which carried with it a price; because his mother had passed him these powers and knowledge, his betrayal of this secret required penance. The respondent would have to work to protect himself against this price in order to prevent bad things from happening to him. Despite the risk, the respondent continued to describe the spiritual world, both professing its beneficial qualities and demonstrating his own prowess. According to the respondent, witches rule the world, they are the true caretakers of the community and it is only through accidents that they cause harm, such as a witch getting lost and landing on the wrong house and causing sickness within.

In these cases, witches may be brought to the witch camps where they are held in a type of prison, though their cells are supernatural and therefore superior to those the state may use. In the past,

⁹² Ghana, Traditional Authority, 17/09/2012

⁹³ Ghana, Traditional Authority, 18/09/2012

⁹⁴ Ghana, Victim of Witchcraft, 25/09/2012

witches may have been brought to the river with no name (Kul gu ka yuri) where their power would be removed. However housing developments have since blocked the river, though other natural protections remain, such as spiritual trees or caves. It is these sites and natural shrines which the respondent believes are most beneficial to the effort to eradicate witchcraft-related violence. For the respondent, the government should work to reclaim the country's lost heritage.

Cameroon

In Cameroon, the ambiguity of spiritual power plays a much more prominent role in people's views of traditional authorities and their potential for mediating witchcraft-related violence. Respondents who viewed the role of traditional authorities positively consistently referenced the importance of partnership and cooperation between traditional and modern institutions. One individual respondent⁹⁵ stressed that the work of chiefs is to act as a bridge between the village which is brought together to provide information regarding the accused and the commissariat which will receive the accused from the chief with his testimony of events. This same representation of the chief's responsibilities was presented by a religious leader⁹⁶ and a state official⁹⁷, the latter of which noted that chiefs are able to prove witchcraft case whereas courts are not, therefore they are required to hold a preliminary court in the village and transfer these findings to the state. Additionally, the state official noted that in these circumstances, chiefs are also responsible for maintaining order in the village during an investigation, as they are able to handle the people in their chiefdom.

This respondent provided an important caution regarding the role of traditional authorities, citing the instance of a village which had been destroyed by witchcraft conflict. In this story, a child died as a result of a witchcraft driven accident. When families began to feud regarding the responsibility of the witch, there was no traditional authority to intervene and the conflict escalated until numerous villagers had been murdered as a result of conflicting and contesting accusations. For this respondent, traditional authorities, however present, were essential to preventing such conflicts from becoming violent and uncontrolled. This respondent noted that the presence of such authority does not have to be direct, but simply overseeing as in the case of a village where the traditional authority had erected a towering fetish to remind the people that the final authority over spiritual matters remained in his control.

Another state official⁹⁸ provided more insight into the idea of the chief as a bridge, not between the village and the state, but between the traditional and the modern, in particular bridging traditional forms of authority and the modern administration. Though the official stressed that chiefs may themselves be witches, their position in society, which binds the supernatural, society and the state, is essential. Chiefs are able to intervene in witchcraft, unite society through custom and then act as a link between society and the state, by existing between two modes of administration, authority and power: that of the supernatural and that of the state.

A third state official⁹⁹ presented this same relationship but from a perspective where the authority and agency of the chief is reduced to the role of an auxiliary of the state which manages witchcraft accusations at the community level, relieving the state of this additional responsibility, and which may sanction witches according to traditional rules permitted by the state, namely exile and

⁹⁵ Cameroon, Victim of Witchcraft, 04/2013

⁹⁶ Cameroon, Religious Organization, 03/2012

⁹⁷ Cameroon, State Official, 04/2013

⁹⁸ Cameroon, State Official, 04/2013

⁹⁹ Cameroon, State Official, 04/2013

beatings. Though respondents rarely openly advocated the murder of accused witches, one informant stressed that when a witch is to be put to death, it is the responsibility of the chief to publicly execute the individual before the entire community. However, if this practice occurs in Cameroon, it is not reported in media or widely discussed.

In interviews where traditional authorities were viewed more positively, the term itself was consistently and exclusively applied to chiefs. When respondents spoke of the category of traditional authorities inclusive of healers and diviners, their views became more mixed. As two religious leaders¹⁰⁰ noted, traditional authorities are themselves possessed of witchcraft powers, a distinction that is highly semantic but greatly important as chiefs may be spiritually empowered, but as a rule should never witches themselves. Therefore their role in the fight against witchcraft may go either way: against or with the witches. A third religious leader¹⁰¹ explained this view in greater detail; because chiefs, healers and diviners all associate with witches in order to protect their own positions of power in society, it is unclear whether their actions against witches, particularly executions, are for the benefit of the village or out of their own self-interest.

In this light, traditional authorities may be understood to be in competition with witches as well as other supernaturally empowered actors. The constant uncertainty of their position and power vis-à-vis another spiritual actor requires traditional authorities to adopt a defensive approach. From this perspective, traditional authorities are pressed from both sides: one on hand they are charged with the demands of mitigating the supernatural within their community, which would see them taking matters into their own hands, and on the other, they are expected to conform to the expectations of the state, which requires them by law to pass these concerns on to the police or military. Further, in the supernatural, traditional authorities must constantly consolidate and concentrate their power against potential challengers who would employ the supernatural to harm them and their community. In the visible world, traditional authorities are limited by the state which seeks to erode and co-opt their legitimacy. However, it is this very dilemma which also protects traditional authorities from being subsumed by the state. As one NGO worker¹⁰² noted, traditional authorities want to maintain their power, they do not want to be up-rooted, or in other words, demystified.

The conundrum faced by traditional authorities may be most representative of the witchcraft phenomenon and its resistance to resolution. The very power that allows individuals to mediate witchcraft perpetuates witchcraft practices. This is regardless of the politically constructed nature of that mediators power: even state actors, by their position alone, are necessarily implicated in the supernatural. Were they not, they would not have the ability to govern or act over any other individual, let alone witches. In short, the power to act is to be in the position to be suspect. As one respondent¹⁰³ explained, traditional authorities may be witches because they are in privileged positions; their very abilities to ensure peace and harmony, to judge, and to participate in the political, social and economic administration of society are all only possible through witchcraft practices.

The perception that traditional authorities are witches who pose a serious danger to society was not only expressed by religious leaders who felt that their power came from Satan, but also by one state official¹⁰⁴ who depicted the struggle of power between witches and chiefs as one involving both conflict and compromise. According to the state official, as long as chiefs enjoy a dominant position over the witches in their chieftdom, they will protect these witches. The idea that traditional authorities protect

¹⁰⁰ Cameroon, Religious Organization, 03/2013; 03/2013

¹⁰¹ Cameroon, Religious Organization, 04/2013

¹⁰² Cameroon, Non-Governmental Organization, 04/2013

¹⁰³ Cameroon, Victim of Witchcraft, 04/2013

¹⁰⁴ Cameroon, State Official, 04/2013

witches out of self-interest was also expressed by three individual respondents¹⁰⁵, all of whom were victims of witchcraft-related violence. These respondents stressed that traditional authorities are all witches who support witchcraft activity and are therefore useless to the effort to reduce witchcraft-related violence.

In discussion with traditional authorities, many articulated their concerns regarding witchcraft in terms of their own protection and the protection of their communities. The one point made most commonly by chiefs, healers and diviners was that they are themselves just as vulnerable to witchcraft attack as anyone else, and in some cases, more so, because they must work against this force and therefore are more likely to be targeted. Chiefs, elders and queen mothers all shared their own experiences of being bewitched, seduced by spirits, and tormented in dreams.

One chief shared his experience of being pursued by a water spirit which tricked him into meeting her in a cemetery one night. The chief had been given instructions to meet an official at a certain address only to discover the address had led him to a graveyard where the spirit awaited him in the form of a woman. The chief noted that this memory of the event and his ability to control his actions had been affected by the spirit who would put him to sleep when he became too suspicious or tried to leave. In the end, the chief had sexual relations with the spirit and realizing what he was doing screamed out loud for God to help him. This expression of prayer drove the spirit away and cleared his mind and he was able to return home to recount the terrifying experience to his wife, who confirmed his panic and fear.

The elder who was tormented in dream first found himself having trouble sleeping at night. This disturbance began to escalate and he would be found sleepwalking in his home and later find himself lost in the forest or in other family members houses. His relatives became concerned when his dreams began to take on vivid forms which would pursue him in the night trying to consume him, leading to his flight from bed. He recounted being seen running in his sleep, night after night, and being exhausted the following day. Eventually, the form in his dream became a cousin who had been known to be jealous of him and his leadership role in his community. One night his cousin chased him through his dream into the living room of their aunt's home where they confronted one another and the elder threw a Bible at his cousin, forcing him to flee from his dreams. In his account, the elder admitted to being uncertain as to which parts of the final event were dream and which were real, as many family members also recalled witnessing the conflict but were equally uncertain whether this was in a shared dream state.

The same experience of fear and haunting was shared by a queen mother who felt most vulnerable when giving birth to her children. As a public figure and a new mother, she was at considerable risk from witches who would seek to enter her home and consume her child through its umbilical cord. In order to protect herself and her child, powerful plants were placed at the foot of the doors into her home, preventing witches from crossing over them. Though each noted that they were able to employ minor protections, such as using cassava stalks to fight off witches, a Bible or the name of Jesus to banish demons, these practices were characterized as simple or common sense practices accessible to any person.

Healers and diviners, however, sought to stress the opposite and emphasized the uniqueness of their power by highlighting their supernatural ability. One traditional healer¹⁰⁶ noted that, in the past, healers were able to exercise their spiritual power and knowledge in service of society, but that this has changed since traditional practitioners have begun to seek status and wealth through their work, thereby degrading the practice and leading to the suspicion that all healers are potential charlatans. Another

¹⁰⁵ Cameroon, Victim of Witchcraft, 04/2013; 04/2013; 04/2013

¹⁰⁶ Cameroon, Traditional Authority, 04/2013

healer¹⁰⁷ described how he had dealt with a witch previously, using his powers instead of violence to persuade the witch the end her attack. The witch had been eating a number of people but she denied the acts until she was forced to drink as a sort of truth serum. The witch was then instructed by the healer to release her current victim at which time the witch entered a banana tree and restored the individual by returning his heart, which she had kept hidden, to his body. In this case, the healer openly indicated that he was able to resolve the situation because his spiritual powers were more potent and he was more powerful than the witch.

Another healer¹⁰⁸ sought to clarify that while the power of traditional authorities is sufficient against individual witches, witches are winning the overall battle. In his view, traditional authorities may help to reduce unemployment, protect marriages and essentially work to keep the fabric of society whole, but ultimately witches have the upper hand. This view, also expressed in Ghana, that the erosion of traditional constraints on supernatural power during the colonial period has allowed witches to gain dominance, does not reflect upon the individual ability of traditional authorities but rather is a commentary on structural transformation and impediments in society as a whole. From this perspective, the war against witchcraft may be unwinnable, or at best, at stalemate.

Conclusion

Traditional authorities are a complex category of actors. In political science, the term does not include healers and diviners, reflecting the many cases where traditional authorities were understood only as political figures (chiefs) and themselves established to advance the project of the colonial state. Where traditional authorities did exist, their role in society was significantly transformed by the colonial experiences which were characterized by the Western attempts to define and control their power as a means to penetrate and control localities. Today, this effort continues in various forms, even those which seem to bolster the position of traditional authorities, such as efforts by the state to reclaim or revitalize tradition and culture. Further, efforts by the state to erase the supernatural foundation of their power and the continued dismissal of healers and diviners as leaders or persons of authority, within the state and academia, demonstrates the fixed aim of modernity of overcoming and absorbing these actors.

In Ghana, where attitudes towards positions of power are characterized by less suspicion than those expressed in Cameroon, the role of traditional authorities in mediating witchcraft-related violence is perceived positively. Though there remains some concerns regarding the loyalties of traditional authorities as spiritual actors, their part in addressing witchcraft is seen as being central, if not, essential to effective mediation. Unfortunately, some traditional actors do not feel that this optimism is justified. Rather, chiefs commonly expressed the view that their role is much more mundane and moderate. In Cameroon, where there is extreme suspicion expressed by respondents towards all positions of power in society, chiefs were viewed more cautiously, though still somewhat positively. However, as in Ghana, chiefs in Cameroon do not see themselves as pivotal spiritual actors, but as individuals who are in the same position of vulnerability in regards to the threat of witchcraft, and in some cases, are at greater risk.

Healers and diviners, though more willing than chiefs to intervene to mediate witchcraft and the invisible realm, are also subject to greater suspicion. Here, the logic of witchcraft itself defies resolution. Healers and diviners are only effective against witchcraft because their powers come from the same source and practices as witches. Conversely, because they are empowered by the invisible,

¹⁰⁷ Cameroon, Traditional Authority, 04/2013

¹⁰⁸ Cameroon, Traditional Authority, 04/2013

healers and diviners cannot be fully trusted. Ultimately, this leaves individuals in the lurch of spiritual insecurity, as spiritual actors, witches versus healers, clash in an effective and mutually constitutive stalemate. Both traditional authorities and witches are seen as primordial actors whose heritage, history and being are fundamental components of the contemporary world of Ghana and Cameroon. Where there is power, there is the supernatural in its ambiguity.

However, traditional authorities are actors within society whose spiritual power is legitimized through a redistribution of benefits. These actors, more than any other, are believed by many to provide order, social harmony and protection in relation to the supernatural. Their legitimacy is drawn from socially recognized norms which establish acceptable conditions for centralized power. The power of chiefs, who may be destooled, and healers and diviners, who may be subject to suspicion and accusation, is limited by its susceptibility to critique. Ultimately, these individuals are under scrutiny and when suspicions or concerns arise, they can, though not always easily, be removed and replaced.

Ultimately, traditional authorities are people who use their power to protect society against witchcraft representing a notion and practice of power that is in conflict with modern Western political systems. As a result, these actors are under greater pressures of erosion and co-optation. Modern attempts to subsume traditional authority systems within the logic of modernity are most visible in efforts to construct these actors as stakeholders whose cooperation is necessary in supporting development initiatives, involving collaboration with the state, NGOs and religious organizations. In this way, traditional authorities are used to provide legitimacy while they are further entangled in the advancement of modernity.

Though many traditional authorities are equally strategic and instrumental in their own right, often attempting to make considerable gains through their cooperation or refusal to comply, thereby increasing their negotiating power where compliance is needed, neither the state, NGOs, religious organizations, nor traditional authorities themselves are able to fully control these processes. This is because the very concept of traditional authority cannot be fully co-opted; to do so would result in the creation of a whole other category of authority, or in this case non-authority, as these actors would lose all legitimacy in the transition to modernity. In order to become part of modernity, traditional authorities would have to lose their supernatural powers, thereby becoming mundane and disenchanting, as the political science definition of traditional authority indicates. This would be in direct opposition to the definitions of traditional authority I encountered in the field, where socially approved power and legitimacy is a much more complex and inherently supernatural entity. Yet, where traditional authorities are willing accept the role of primary arbiter of witchcraft they are also most vulnerable to mechanisms of accountability. Witchcraft problematizes power and this conflict is most evident where the supernatural is being used against itself.

Chapter Eight – Flying by Night: Looking for Answers in the Dark

A few months after my leaving the field in Ghana, Action Aid Ghana held a mother's day celebrations at the Ghana and Kukuo witch camps, where the organization re-roofed huts, conducted medical screenings and provided dinner described by one staff member as “a feast of delicious meals, drinks [with] lots of music and dance” (Nuworkpor 2013). In the summary of events appearing on the Action Aid website, the author describes the trip back to Tamale, where the Action Aid workers were “alight reminiscing the hours spent with the old ladies and putting together ideas and plans to provide further support in the future” (Nuworkpor 2013).

However, the celebratory tone of the article changes towards the end as the author reflects upon the spirit of mothers day. Mother's day is a time for children to honour the sacrifices of their moms, who gave them life and cared for them. Here, the author begins to address the question of the family members of the accused women in the camps, asking “[w]here are the numerous children these women brought into the world? How would they be feeling today?” (Nuworkpor 2013). The author then admonishes these children, wondering are they “[r]emorseful that they could not protect their mums? Sad? Indifferent? What happened to the motherly sacrifices these women made for their children? Can family ties be thrown away, just like that?” (Nuworkpor 2013).

Ghanaian news sites who received press releases from Action Aid regarding the mother's day celebrations demonstrate the awareness raising potential of the event (Ghana News Agency, 2013). However, in other news, continued reports covering the murder of accused witches, demonstrates that efforts to improve the conditions of the witch camps fail to provide accused across Ghana protection. As well there is little evidence that fewer women are coming into the camps in northern Ghana, not to mention camps in Benin or Burkina Faso, or any other region which has yet to receive international attention, ire and shaming.

In Yaounde, again a few months after I returned home, the government of Cameroon addressed the series of murders which had occurred just before my arrival. The murders were linked to mototaxis, and the victims were all women who had been paying customers. They were taken to secluded areas, sexually assaulted and murdered before being mutilated, often their lips, hair and breasts removed. Radio trottoir, the phenomenon of street level news, counted eleven murders, all thought to be work of someone or some peoples within the economic or political elites who were using the body parts for witchcraft rituals.

However, in September the Minister of Communications, Issa Tchiroma Bakary, delivered an address to the nation revealing the findings of the official investigation into the “ritual murders”. According to the investigation, there were a confirmed eleven murders in total, which were all committed by hired killers who worked for two businessmen, one of whom has lost his business to bankruptcy. At the time of the address, four men had been arrested, including all of the hired killers and one of the two businessmen. The second was believed to be in hiding in a neighbouring country.

Having addressed the details of the investigation itself, the Minister moved on to formally address the rumours circulating across Cameroon. The Minister began:

Regarding the prejudices and other false allegations widely disseminated here and there on the issue, going to the extent of accusing the Government of carrying out fake investigations or protecting top ranking officials in the administration alleged accused of being the real perpetrators of these evil murders. The outcome of the conducted investigations speak for itself. At this level, the outcome of the investigations totally contradicts the allegations of these prophets of doom, whose intended aim is to cause panic within the populations, install disorder and destabilize our country” (Cameroon Tribune, September 18, 2013).

The Minister continues to assure Cameroonians that the President, Paul Biya, has and continues to work to “ensure the security of his compatriots, to promote good moral values and the emergence of an exemplary Republic in our country” (Cameroon Tribune 2013). Unfortunately, these words of assurance are unlikely to defuse suspicions.

Though the governments efforts to investigate and report the “truth” of the ritual murders in Yaounde, it is more likely that official recognition of the rumours implicating the state elite will only exacerbate fears of collusion. Contrary to its overt intention, this address can only contribute to suspicion and insecurity. More skeptically, Cameroonians may even interpret the content of the address as confirmation of the states involvement and the address itself may be interpreted as a warning to Cameroonians that their government is both knowing and untouchable, so much so, that they may flaunt their own complicity.

Looking back on how this project began, and my own understanding of witchcraft and witchcraft-related violence, the fluidity of my own witchcraft logic surprises me. Reflecting on the government address, the idea that the governments claims of innocence only further exemplifies their culpability, I am brought back to the time when witchcraft astounded me. Years ago, witchcraft surrounded me and I could not even begin to comprehend the complex reality I had found myself within. On the other side of this research project, I have found myself on the very farthest margins of multiple realities, however this time, the uncertainty of my own positionality is an asset. Unfortunately, it makes developing conclusions incredibly difficult.

Through this project, I sought to investigate the problem of witchcraft-related violence from the perspective of a discipline which has largely resisted calls for greater insight into the realm of witchcraft and its relationship with politics in Africa. Though I initially intended to assess key political concepts (such as justice, democracy, and morality) as defined by Western academia within the context of witchcraft belief and violence, I was unable to adequately address this project aim. In the field I found that this investigation would require independent and dedicated study, possibly for each political concept individually, as undertaken by Schaffer (1998) in his study of competing conceptions of democracy in Senegal.

Though these concepts remained relevant in my own fieldwork, their appearance served to further emphasize the lack of consensus among people in their use and expectations regarding these terms. For example, understandings and experiences of justice differed greatly for respondents. For an accused, if they are a witch, justice can no longer be defined by them because they are no longer a part of society. However, if the accused does not know that they are a witch or if they may be falsely accused, what is just oscillates between individual and social determinants as uncertainty allows for contestation of an accusation and potential for negotiation. For those who have been attacked and those who live in fear, justice may be an impractical consideration which is trumped by the need to protect, possibly at any cost.

Further still, how justice is defined differs greatly between individuals. For those who manipulate or instrumentalize the belief justice is much less of a priority than for those who are not trying to capitalize on fear but who are themselves in a state of spiritual insecurity. Finally, doing nothing is also viewed as unacceptable, thereby creating a conundrum where inaction and action may be equally unjust for some, even for the same person. Justice in terms of fairness and equity is simply impossible: there is no semblance of objectivity or truth in witchcraft; there is no certainty beyond a doubt. Therefore, justice cannot be served to all, or even some, as what is just remains a negotiated process. Whether this differs from the Western concept of justice is debatable. What is evident is that the discourses of justice differ, where witchcraft forces tangible and pressing uncertainty regarding this concept into the daily lives of many people.

Though I would have liked to have been able to fully investigate the philosophical foundations

of these key political concepts, my research design was inadequate to permit this. As I was unable to explore these questions in depth, my fieldwork focused on the central question of how witchcraft-related violence may be effectively addressed. In each chapter, as in my interview questions, I have sought to assess the four main actors, state, NGOs, religious organizations and traditional authorities, according to two main criteria: their ability to reduce violence and mediate insecurity. Each institution was assessed through an extensive literature review and through the experiences and views of respondents and informants in the field, allowing for some limited concrete conclusions.

In terms of state interventions, my findings in the field confirmed conclusions drawn in the literature: state institutions are ineffective in addressing witchcraft-related violence or in reducing spiritual insecurity. In Ghana, the state's reluctance to acknowledge witchcraft prevents any state institution from acting against witches to protect Ghanaian society. As a result, the state and society are at odds in terms of perception of reality. The professed ignorance of the state also fails to instill citizens with a greater sense of security as they left unprotected.

In Cameroon, the state's willingness to acknowledge and address witchcraft may contribute to a minimal reduction in violence, as accused witches may be placed in custody and brought to trial. However, it is unclear how many accused are murdered before they are taken in to custody. As well, severe prison conditions and long sentences do not guarantee that accused witches will survive the process of accusation from trial to imprisonment and release. Nor does state intervention decrease levels of insecurity, as suspicions regarding state collusion with witches suggests that witches may be incarcerated in the visible world, while remaining free in the invisible. In both cases, whether out of professed ignorance or assumed alliances, the state's legitimacy is eroded by its inability to successfully address witchcraft.

For NGOs seeking to improve the conditions of accused witches in Ghana, their work is effective in providing needed goods and services. However, education initiatives and media releases fail to significantly address the source of the problem as there is no visible decrease in accusations being made. Also evident in the continuing rate of accusation is the ineffectiveness of NGOs in reducing insecurity, though in Ghana, a possible exception to this is the work of the GO Home project. Through direct and long-term negotiations, including family visits to dispel suspicion and fear on both sides, this program demonstrates the potential for third party mediation in reducing violence after an accusation has been made. However, it must be stressed that GO Home, unlike other NGOs, does not seek to dismiss or eradicate witchcraft belief. Rather, it aims to address the concerns of individuals and collectives on a case by case basis and does so by invitation not on the basis of righteous intervention.

In Cameroon, NGOs are not active in directly or openly addressing witchcraft-related violence. Though many do encounter the phenomenon in their work, few organizations aim to address witchcraft comprehensively. This is likely in part due to the existing suspicion among Cameroonians that NGOs are potentially nefarious associations, thereby increasing insecurity with their very presence. The exception in my fieldwork was one NGO which worked closely with individuals and families in order to resolve conflicts through mediation and alternative dispute resolution, in an effort to find non-judicial solutions for both sides. In this case, the organization, like GO Home, did not seek to dismiss witchcraft beliefs, rather the staff members worked within the realities of their clients, taking their claims at face value. In the cases discussed by this NGO, experiences of insecurity could be effectively addressed and violence could be prevented. Unfortunately, few NGOs adopt this approach in Ghana or Cameroon, advancing instead, a vision of reality which is seen as foreign and insensitive.

Upon reflection, taking into account literature reviewed, my fieldwork and respondents views, I have found that religious organizations hinder rather than help efforts to reduce witchcraft-related violence. Though churches and mosques may be places of education and sensitization, and though priests, pastors and imams may work to mediate witchcraft conflicts within their congregations, the

varying approaches of religious organizations prove problematic. In Ghana and Cameroon, religious organizations which fail to acknowledge witchcraft resonate with converts who do not hold syncretic beliefs, for those who do, witchcraft must be addressed outside of their religion, leading to potentially violent solutions.

In the case of religious organizations which acknowledge witchcraft and seek to educate parishioners against the belief, these efforts risk alienating those whose beliefs or experiences differ. Where an institution may seek to actively intervene in witchcraft, violence is more likely to occur as these interventions often involve personal physical risk, such as deliverance or exorcism which may entail forced fasting and beatings. As well, religious constructions of witchcraft as linked to the Devil diminishes opportunities for witchcraft to be mediated without violence and contributes to a discourse of witchcraft as a fixed and unambiguous evil. This discourse of witchcraft as profoundly demonic also contributes to greater insecurity, as some religious organizations instrumentalize this belief in order to draw converts by capitalizing on their fear.

In Ghana, many religious organizations are working to decrease witchcraft-related violence. However the work of some of their peers is making this an up-hill battle. In Cameroon, though prayers are believed by many to be the best protection against witchcraft, suspicions against organized religion decrease their effectiveness in addressing insecurity. In both countries, religion in terms of individuals' beliefs may help reduce insecurity for some. However, in all cases, religion as an institutionalized belief contributes to both higher levels of violence and insecurity.

Despite starting from a perspective of scepticism, having included traditional authorities more as a residual category from the literature I reviewed before entering the field, I have come to the conclusion that, of all four actors assessed here, traditional authorities are best equipped in addressing both witchcraft-related violence and spiritual insecurity. In Ghana, chiefs are able to provide protection to accused witches with greater legitimacy and efficacy than the state, as their actions do not necessarily contradict social beliefs. Though chiefs may be contributing to witchcraft belief through their intervention, this affirmation also permits further mediation. In Cameroon, chiefs also provide protection to their subjects, however, chiefs' powers have a much stronger association with the state, therefore placing them in a position of greater ambiguity. Because the state is believed to be rife with witches, suspicion regarding its motives and operations can be easily extended to chiefs who appear to be too close to the state.

In Ghana and Cameroon, healers, diviners and fetish priests provide valued insight and protection into witchcraft threats. Though, again as with many other actors, their intervention may contribute to witchcraft belief and more directly to violence when a suspected witch may be named, these actors also present alternative methods of mediating and mitigating spiritual insecurity. Unfortunately, the erosion of these actors' roles in society have significantly decreased their abilities to address violence and insecurity. As mentioned in the previous chapter, though it is impossible to simply return to precolonial conditions, like many respondents in my fieldwork, I argue that these actors have a much larger role to play in addressing witchcraft-related violence than is commonly acknowledged.

From this analysis, I would risk making the general recommendation that future initiatives to address witchcraft-related violence consider these actors as essential to their analysis. However, what this means for Ghana and Cameroon is unclear. In Ghana, the permissive social and political environment has produced a robust debate on the subject of witchcraft. Witchcraft is such a prominent and daily public discussion that one political party leader has openly identified herself as a witch. On December 2, 2013, Akua Donkor, founder and leader of the Ghana Freedom Party announced at a gala event in Accra that she is in fact a witch (Ghanaweb.com 2013). In an interview, she confirmed that if elected, she would use her power to make everything in Ghana free (Ghanaweb.com 2013).

This political risk demonstrates, either extreme shortsightedness on the part of Ms. Donkor, or

more likely, an increasing openness in confronting and discussing witchcraft as a part of the political and social landscape of the country. In my own fieldwork in Ghana, people were eager to discuss and debate witchcraft, looking towards long-term solutions which would benefit all Ghanaians. Unfortunately, in Cameroon, open debate and dissent are stifled, allowing state discourse to dominate public spaces, leaving Cameroonians rumours and *radio trottoir*, where discussions seems to circulate but then stagnate. Without the ability to discuss and debate the intricacies of witchcraft, it is only the most basic information that is widely shared. As a result of this, the subject has failed to advance towards broader considerations. This was most evident in comparing interview responses and field notes from Ghana and Cameroon. In Ghana, respondents and informants presented diverse and competing views on how to address witchcraft. In Cameroon, this diversity was remarkably absent. Despite extreme suspicion and insecurity, Cameroonians were no less eager than Ghanaians to discuss witchcraft, though many felt that the primary need was for more discussion, information and open exchange.

In Ghana, though diverse views make defining witchcraft more difficult, it also makes discussing witchcraft as a social phenomenon more possible, therefore creating an atmosphere conducive to open dialogue and collaboration in working towards resolving the problem of witchcraft-related violence. In Cameroon, such open discussion is not possible as hostility towards assembly and participation in associations or public meetings makes the possibility of engagement even more remote. This does not mean, however, that Cameroonians are any less eager to resolve the problem. Therefore, the question remains of what should be done?

One respondent in Ghana¹⁰⁹ replied to the question of who should lead the effort to address witchcraft-related violence by suggesting at all points this effort should be collaborative. The first task of this effort, the respondent argued, would be to agreeing on a definition of witchcraft. Though subjectively determined, the respondent felt that it was important to begin by delimiting the witch. Is the category inclusive of homosexuals and prostitutes? Is a witch any person outside of the norms of society; how are these defined? Further, with more than a hundred groups with differing beliefs, how could agreement be achieved? In short, the respondent answered the question with another question: where do we start?

Throughout my interviews in Ghana and Cameroon, respondents expressed the view that further research, consultation and discussion was needed to begin to address the question of how to address witchcraft-related violence. Towards the end of the interview process in Ghana, my research assistant offered a summary of his own conclusions. In his view, the government of Ghana should lead the initiative and conduct a thorough study of witchcraft which would talk to all the people and find out how to resolve the problem. For him, there is one solution which will require all of the people of Ghana to reflect upon and work towards this goal, though the details of the solution itself remained vague.

In Cameroon, opinions towards resolution are less optimistic. The role of state is significantly undermined by the culture of conspiracy which dominates popular discourses of witchcraft, in particular, associating the state with secret societies, cults, witches and homosexuals. Though there is a broader consensus in Cameroon than Ghana in terms of defining witchcraft, this has not led to decreased tensions. As well, though evidence in literature and the field suggest that there is less overt violence in Cameroon, it is difficult to determine if this is also a product of suspicion; leading people to deal with witches less publicly and more quietly. As noted in a number of interviews, witches may be ostracized and where available, state intervention is publicly sought, however it is still uncertain how witchcraft is dealt with in most personal experiences.

Additionally, conspiracies theories in Cameroon appear to serve as a means of suppressing

¹⁰⁹ Religious organization 25/09/2012

violence while increasing social tensions and anxieties. Whereas in Ghana witches are largely individual actors, theories in Cameroon construct elaborate networks of invisible and unknown actors who are protected from identification through their own powers of association. As a result, individual actors cannot be as easily identified and confronted. However, this impasse has shifted somewhat with mounting hostility towards homosexuals, who are increasingly targeted through attacks on people and organizations, including incidences of arson of an NGO office and the beating death of LGBT activist Eric Lembembe.

On a more theoretical level, the participation of many actors in this collaboration, whether state-led or otherwise, would require a departure in paradigm and a fundamental transformation of these actors' logics. Most problematically, many actors would be required to abandon their hegemonic logics and discourses in order to engage honestly in this process. In addition to this, suspicion and hostility towards power in Cameroon would further limit such a process, making any directed initiative questionable. In both cases of Ghana and Cameroon, addressing witchcraft openly would force these actors to confront a phenomenon which problematizes the consolidation of power and the entrenchment of inequality.

A further question which may be raised concerns the possible repercussions of allowing traditional authorities to mediate witchcraft-related violence. This question is correct to note that traditional authorities are not themselves egalitarian, non-oppressive, unimposed or unproblematic actors. As an anarchist, I am not in support of centralized power, which often characterizes the role of political authorities such as chiefs. However, as much as this work has already argued, I am also opposed to the colonial, imperial and hegemonic interventions of Western actors, including academics like myself. Therefore, it is my view that Ghanaians and Cameroonians are the best positioned, most informed and most knowledgeable experts regarding witchcraft mediation. Though there is debate and some disagreement between some of the people who have participated in this research, the majority have endorsed the role of traditional authorities in mediating witchcraft-related violence.

Another potential criticism may question why I have devoted so little attention to the issue of justice in my work, focusing instead on power as a basis of analysis. For many, witchcraft-related violence and mediation are concerned first and foremost with justice as witchcraft is a human rights issue, where there is a breakdown of security (where every citizen is protected from the violence by the liberal state in exchange for sovereignty, i.e., the social contract) and justice is made inaccessible. From this perspective, once the damage of witchcraft is done, the main concern becomes how individuals are able to access justice. Traditional authorities are central figures in this process as they provide a forum for justice, where witchcraft is reality, evidence is provided and weighed, and where the rights of the accused and accuser are considered. In this equation, evidence is essential to determining truth and mediating conflict.

However, in my view, the over reliance of this interpretation on the discourses of rights, justice and evidence reflects a liberal bias which is in contradiction to both my interpretation of witchcraft and my findings in the field. Justice and human rights are concepts which rely on the Western principles of legal-rational procedure, where there is a supposed correlation between the rights of the individuals, the validity and truth performance of evidence and where justice is a means of attaining social harmony through reparation. These assumptions overlook numerous problems in terms of witchcraft. Primary among these is the reduction of divination, from a process involving unseen forces, gods and supernatural ability through ritual, to a process comparable to the presenting of evidence in a trial. While divination allows one to see into the invisible world and know some of what cannot be known by all, the processes by which this 'evidence' is attained is entirely unseen and predominantly unknown.

Additionally, the uncritical use of the term justice, which can be understood as a process of truth claim based in morality and privileging of certain experiences and ontologies over others, provides, in

my view, very little insight when looking at witchcraft. The question of what justice is, what it means, and how it may be attained has been a subject of philosophical debate for thousands of years and it is both beyond and outside of the scope of this work. Where justice has been addressed by an interviewee, informant or respondent, it has been included in this text. However, as noted, there were very few instances as the primary concern of individuals who participated in this research was not justice, but protection, security, how to stop witches and how to end witchcraft-related violence.

In my own view, if justice is anything at all, it is not something that is reasoned, but something that is felt. In this regard, justice, like many other aspects of reality is an individual process and therefore beyond singular meaning or manifestation. Mediation in this context is concerned foremost with experiences of insecurity and violence, and understanding and negotiating the processes of power which dominate the liminal spaces and borders between the supernatural and the rational, reasoned world of Western Enlightenment. Mediation here, is about seeking protection from witchcraft and finding peace and spiritual security in a world of witches, the West and our own competing efforts to find truth and define reality.

Witchcraft Discourse and Reality

Whether witchcraft discourse is controlled as in Cameroon or uncontrolled as in Ghana, people continue to live in fear and experience extreme spiritual insecurity and violence. This is because the reality of witchcraft cannot be captured or managed by discursive practices and the productive power of witchcraft is beyond the control of competing power practices. As noted by Soubain (2012), the power of witchcraft lies in its mystery: witchcraft is a secret world which the state cannot penetrate. Therefore, as noted by Niehaus (2001) there is no easy or clear way to address witchcraft or witchcraft-related violence, and nor should there be.

The reality of witchcraft cannot be simply addressed from a Western perspective because witchcraft fundamentally upsets Western thought and theory. It problematizes dominant conceptions of reality and power and challenges these by exposing them in the institutions of the state, the economy, modernity and the project to define Africa. Witchcraft also forces us to confront these by directing our gaze towards inequality, exploitation and injustice, and then pushes us further into discomfort by raising to the surface that which we prefer to suppress, hide or ignore: that our own societies are based on myth and constructed realities; we are not rational beings; we are not disconnected from one another, in fact we are intimately linked and our actions have consequences for others.

In Western thought, the individual is disassociated from the violence their beliefs produce through the construction, reproduction and practice of their person as rational, liberal subjects of the state and capitalism. However, through witchcraft, we may be held responsible for the consequences of our actions and be taken to account for our selfishness and indifference, whether through the apathy of participating daily in exploitative capitalism, excelling in our own individualism and leaving others behind, or giving into jealousy, envy and competition. Not only does witchcraft frustrate the hegemonic power of Enlightenment, exposing one of the last fronts of colonialism today, it also exposes multiple layers of participation in this project.

Popular understandings of the “problem” of witchcraft-related violence remains rooted in the colonial perspective where the “the seeds of lawlessness were sown” through the criminalization and usurpation of African governance structures (Hund 2004: 68). Today, this problem persists in the Western mind as a result of the incomplete control of the post-colonial state over power and reality. However, complete consolidation of the state is not the solution to witchcraft-related violence simply

because it is not possible. Further, Western interventions, including those based in Western logics, such as the state, are unlikely to be successful until the power relations underlying these are confronted and renegotiated.

This same critical reflection upon embedded power and inequality is apparent in the inherent ethical conflict of researching the subject of witchcraft-related violence from a Western perspective. I have struggled with this issue myself and questioned my own contribution to the idea of Africa in crisis. The construction as Africa in the Western gaze as a place of rural poverty, urban chaos, irrational violence and disorder is integral to the conception of Africa as a place of intervention. As a result, I have questioned whether witchcraft-related violence can only be of relevance to the West through the perception of the continuing civilizing mission.

In my research I have attempted to problematize this logic and have argued throughout this work the need to move beyond intervention towards understanding African experiences and epistemologies in their own contexts. However, I must confront the conclusion that it is impossible to investigate the issue of witchcraft-related violence in Africa without contributing in some way to racist stereotypes and power differentials. Though the processes of how people all around the world define realities of threat, violence and insecurity, or how enemies are constructed and actions are taken against them, are all equally invented and real, hierarchies of power privilege some realities over others.

In an oversimplified yet relevant analogy, one could question the difference between terrorism and witchcraft. Terrorism as a term of convenience is diluted and ill-defined, frequently stripped of its political meaning and divorced from the complex contexts, experiences and reality which produces terrorism as a response to and expression of power. Instead, it is reduced to fanaticism, hate, ignorance and opportunism; concepts and terms which are all also applied to the irrationality and manipulation of witchcraft belief. However, unlike witchcraft, terrorism is openly recognized as contesting and challenging power relations between two realities because this acknowledgement allows for the production of different outcomes; making people a threat to be managed through security and force (terrorism) rather than victims of ignorance who must help themselves or be helped into modernity (witchcraft).

In both cases, the construction of the Other, perceptions of security and insecurity and the suppression of realities which complicate Western hegemony and power is evident and exposes continuing relations of imperialism and domination. However, it is in witchcraft that the question of marginalized reality is most prominent. The particular nature of witchcraft upsets the ability of the West or any other competing reality to dominate because the internal logic of witchcraft reality is fluid, mercurial and hidden. Thus, the legitimacy of witchcraft reality cannot be easily removed or replaced. Most importantly, where Western logics are only able to approach witchcraft through intolerance, witchcraft is able to not only penetrate but also transform Western concepts and discourses.

However, in Western theory and academia, the opposite occurs. Witchcraft beliefs are subsumed into Western conceptions of reality and reduced to metaphor, thereby negating the lived experiences and expressed realities of many Africans. As a researcher from the West, I continue to question my own interest in and approach to this subject which has ultimately led to an investigation of domination, not of accuser over accused, but of Western reality over the world. My research has led me to conclude above all else that witchcraft as a subject of study lays bare the continued imperial project of modernity over the Other that is Africa, exposing the moral, economic, political, social and ideological facets of this continuing conflict.

As an academic, I am confronted with my own role in the reproduction of these power relations. As critically and correctly noted by Mavhungu (2000), research on the subject of witchcraft has been of little benefit to “the subject communities in Africa, except to expose them as non-Christian, irrational, backward, and savages that still need to be brought on board the enlightened train of civilization”

(116). As a result of this, I had decided that this work would be my first and last research project on the subject of witchcraft-related violence. Instead I would focus on the thematic of marginalized realities with an interest in applying this closer to home looking at conspiracy cultures in North America.

However, I am also frequently reminded that my own implication in this subject matter is not so simple. In addition to my responsibilities towards those who participated in and supported my research in the field because there is a great demand for recommendations and solutions, I am aware that I am privileged in my ability to do conduct this research. I am not only privileged as an educated Westerner, I also benefit from being Westerner who is less affected by witchcraft. As noted by an African professor who attended a conference presentation of my research, many African scholars are unable to address witchcraft because they are too vulnerable to wade into these murky waters.

Though this professor meant that African academics would be at spiritual risk as my research assistants were, there is a double meaning to this vulnerability. African professors and academics may also be seen as being under extreme pressure to conform to conventional studies to avoid compounding the discrimination they already face. Therefore, the question of the way forward remains unanswered. Western academia is limited in its current approach which reduces witchcraft from a reality to simply a discourse, cultural practice, or idiom through which the complicated world is reduced to an all-encompassing simplicity.

Were Western academia to treat witchcraft as part of reality which must be approached through the internally coherent logic of a theory, some useful insights might be produced, as this work has attempted to provide. As a complex reality, witchcraft cannot be explained or demystified by one theory alone, therefore there is an opportunity for debate and plurality within Western thought. However, these approaches must be willing to accept witchcraft as a reality, or alternatively and complimentary, reality as a social construction. As there is no truth, certainty, falsifiability or objectivity in witchcraft, some theories would have a more limited application than others.

In this analysis I have approached witchcraft as a form of power in African societies and have applied anarchist theory as my grounding assumptions regarding reality, knowledge and power are founded in this tradition. This approach has allowed me to explore the complexities of witchcraft and power including: the power of witches to move between realities and escape the inequality and injustice of the visible world; how witches are able to use this power to cause others suffering which they themselves are removed from; how the power of the individual may be used to coerce the collective; how witchcraft as a form of power must involve compensation in order to be legitimized and seen as productive; and how witchcraft reflects the inherent immorality of the exercise of exceptional power over another.

However, none of these insights support, or are intended to support, conclusions which seek to eradicate or dismiss witchcraft. Instead, an analysis of witchcraft as a form of power demonstrates how witchcraft competes with other forms of power and alternative constructions of reality which seek to dominate and negate witchcraft. Here, Western logics and practices, mainly the liberal state and modernity, have been revealed as competitors seeking hegemony and domination over witchcraft.

Again, it is impossible to draw a simple conclusion as to the outcome of this competition. Witchcraft has proven resilient as it is uncontainable, beyond discipline and fundamentally anti-institutional, and therefore resists mediation or co-optation. However, on the other hand, the state remains vulnerable to the logic of witchcraft. Unlike witchcraft, the state contains internal inconsistencies which cannot be overcome, only reconstructed. For example, the liberal subject requires the illiberal subject, who exists in alterity and whose inequality permits privilege. However, in witchcraft, this same contradiction is unproblematic; witchcraft is not based on a myth of equality, rather it is based on inequality and directly problematizes differential power relations.

Therefore, despite the global dominance of the state and modernity, their position remains

uncertain. The ambiguity of witchcraft as a reality allows it to adapt to new discourses and representations of power in ways that other systems of belief or logics cannot. As noted by Hund (2004) scientific rationalism cannot permit logics such as witchcraft out of the fear that “altered states of consciousness will subvert social structures, induce insanity, or undermine the work ethic of capitalism” (76). This same weakness does not apply to witchcraft.

If witchcraft is intolerable because it is a product of a socially constructed falsehood then the Western world is beholden to confront the possibility that what it claims to be real may also be false. In the same way as the violence and injustice of witchcraft belief must inspire confusion in the liberal subject, the injustice and violence of the modern world may also be considered as social constructions. Within witchcraft, the state, the economy, modernity are all equally revealed as constructs of reality, or realities, which imply violence and injustice.

However, to simply problematize Western systems of power through witchcraft is not in itself a solution to the very real violence and insecurity experienced as a result of witchcraft. What this critical reflection does provide is insight into the question of how witchcraft-related violence can be addressed by demonstrating that this is not the question to ask. The key question is what can be done to moderate the conditions which contribute to and produce witchcraft-related conflicts? From my research, addressing these issues would require a radical shift in power relations in order to address inequality and discord resulting from the disruption of governance structures and social organization systems which were practised according to African epistemologies rather than externally imposed logics.

Despite the success of modernity in altering the landscape of African realities, the century long effort to erase witchcraft belief from the imagined and lived terrain of African peoples continues. Instead of falling away into the realm of forgotten tradition, witches are more powerful than ever. Until African societies are able to regain their ability to govern their supernatural reality, this threat will persist. Therefore, modernity is damned if it does and damned if it doesn't. If Western institutions continue to negate witchcraft, witchcraft will continue to undermine their logic and legitimacy. On the other hand, where Western institutions attempt to co-opt witchcraft, they are subverted by the ambiguity of witchcraft belief which exposes the myths of modernity.

In all cases, witchcraft will continue to resist domination and frustrate the ability of hegemonizing logics to redefine both imagination and reality in African societies. For those living in the world of witches, witchcraft belief and violence both demonstrate a conscious and continuous reflection on the conditions of equality, inequality and power relations within one's society.

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