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**Condemned without hearing: An intersectional  
analysis of the practice of branding, banishing, and  
camping of alleged witches in Northern Ghana**

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## **Abstract**

This study is an intersectional analysis of the phenomenon of branding some women as witches and banishing them to live in witches' camps in Northern Ghana. Mostly, elderly women of poor socio-economic backgrounds are the target of witch-hunts. This research investigates how the intersection of gender, socio-economic conditions, and old age contribute to witchcraft accusation and banishment.

Gender, old age, and socio-economic conditions are some of the key factors that influence witchcraft allegation and banishment of suspected witches. I have argued that though each of these key statuses of power influence the process of accusation, decision making in accusation cases, and the experiences of the accused. However, none of these standing alone is enough to explain why women located in these social statuses of power are the target of witchcraft accusation. These statuses of power intersect to either mutually weaken or strengthen each other. How decision is reached regarding the treatment of an accused witch and the experience of an accused witch is dependent on her positioning on these three social categories. Those positioned in better statuses experience accusation differently than those located in lower ones. This shows that the process of marginalization is context specific and the power dynamics involved in each levels of witchcraft accusation are crucial for understanding witchcraft branding and banishment.

## **Keywords**

Accusation, banishment, witchcraft, witches, power, allegation, branding, Northern Ghana.

## **Acronyms**

SSNIT Social Security and National Insurance Trust

SDGs Sustainable Development Goals

# **Condemned without hearing**

## **An intersectional analysis of the practice of branding, banishing, and camping of alleged witches in Northern Ghana**

### **1 Introduction**

This thesis focuses on witchcraft accusation levelled against women and its related violence in the Mamprugu traditional area in the Northern region of Ghana. Witchcraft beliefs are part and parcel of the everyday life of members of the Mamprugu traditional area. Women who are believed to practice it are often put through varied experiences which results from the multiple statuses of power they occupy in their community and the society at large. This research seeks to unveil how the intersection of gender, socio-economic status and age of women influence witchcraft accusation and the differences in experience of alleged witches. In an attempt to answer this question, intersectionality and power are employed as theoretical frameworks to underpin the study and ethnographic orientation adopted as the methodological strategy.

The thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter one consists of the background to the study, the problem, literature review, and research questions. Chapter two is made up of theoretical framework and methodological strategies used in the study. Chapter three presents the findings and analysis whiles chapter four crowns it up with concluding remarks.

The focus of this chapter is the background to the study and consists of five main sections. These include the introduction, contextual background of the research, a statement of the problem, and research questions and objectives.

#### **1.1 Contextual background**

Witchcraft beliefs has not disappeared as a result of modernization as was predicted regarding the Developing World in the 1960s and 1970s (Cimpric 2010:9). The belief in witchcraft is still common in Ghana and other parts of Africa (Mgbako and Glenn 2011, Quarmyne 2010). Adinkrah and Adhikari (2014) contend that witchcraft belief cuts across ethnic and socio-economic rungs of the society. This belief affects the way elderly women who are perceived to be witches are treated or positioned in society (Adinkrah and Adhikari 2014:314-315, ActionAid 2013:3, MacDougall 2011, Stromberg 2011:2). Possessing witchcraft capacity itself seems not to be a problem. The problem arises with the allegation and the treatment meted out to the alleged witches. An alleged witch could be stoned to death, beaten, exiled, or banished to live in a witches' camp (Adinkrah and Adhikari 2014, Mgbako and Glenn 2011, Drucker-Brown 1993).

The Gambaga witches' camp is one of such camps. It is said to be the oldest in the Northern region of Ghana, being in existence since the 19th century and a home to several women (Stromberg 2011:4-7). It is headed and supervised by the chief of Gambaga who is believed to possess the means of neutralizing the powers of witches (Drucker-Brown 1993). The camp is made of several small huts constructed of mud and thatch. The camp is in the middle of the Gambaga town but the appearance of the place can immediately suggest a community of the marginalized and might paint a picture of the experience of the vulnerability. The inmates of the Gambaga camp pick sheanuts, and firewood for sale and help farmers during harvesting time to take food items in return as strategies for survival (ActionAid 2013, Drucker-Brown 1993, MacDougall 2011:1).

The idea that is common from both anthropological scholarship, (Drucker-Brown 1993, Goody 1970) and contemporary literature in development studies, sociology, feminism, and Human rights and law, (ActionAid 2013, Adinkrah and Adhikari 2014, Mgbako and Glenn 2011, Quarmpyne 2010) suggest that witchcraft accusation is a gendered practice and that there is a bias towards women as a group. Quarmpyne (2010:482-483) for instance, argues that "witchcraft accusations not only discriminate against women in Sub-Saharan Africa, they also have the effect of disenfranchising women within their communities". According to Professor Dzodzi "the camps are a dramatic manifestation of the status of women in Ghana" (ActionAid 2013:8). The use of 'witches' (female) but not 'wizards' (male) almost universally across the literature indicates that women are usually the target of witchcraft accusations. There is also an indication that women are victims of male violence probably because of the privileged position men hold and their dominance over women in society. Accusation may not necessarily come from only men but men, especially those in relative powerful positions in a given community, are those that make final decisions in the trial process of alleged witches. The differences in treatment of those accused of witchcraft or who get accused reflect inequality between women and men as well as inequality among women, reflecting dominant power relations in society marked by gender, age, and socio-economic background.

Aged women in rural communities in Northern Ghana are vulnerable to the economic hardships prevalent in that part of the country (Ghana Statistical Service 2013:130-131). This is due to the dependence on peasant farming which they usually do not at old age due failing strengths. Yet, the extended family that used to play the role of a welfare system— institution that provided social, financial, and even psychological assistance to elderly members who were threatened by economic deprivation, disability, and social isolation in the Ghanaian communities— has been destroyed by the advent of modernization and urbanization (Kumado and Gockel 2003). Sossou and Yotiba (2015) posit that because of the decline in reliance on the extended family for social and financial support, elderly women have become increasingly vulnerable to poverty, physical and emotional abuse. There has been a shift away from dependence on the extended family due to its failure to support its members,

towards institutionalized social security systems provided by the state (Kumado and Gockel 2003). However, the Ghanaian social security system does not cater for the aged who have not been employed in the formal public sector or private sector. The main public social security scheme in operation in Ghana is the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) pension scheme. The scheme covers only workers in the private and public sector (SSNIT. 2017). People engaged in other sources of livelihoods such as subsistence farming and petty-trading are left out. This situation makes old age precarious for many, especially those who do not have children in position to take care of them. This seems to be another push factor for movement to the camp because even if they are not banished, they may be neglected.

## 1.2 Research problem statement

Differences and similarities among women regarding socio-economic conditions, age, and other social relations of power exist in any social order. These differences and similarities are very important factors and deserve consideration when making efforts towards women emancipation and empowerment and analysing issues that affect women. These factors influence how different women are treated or positioned differently in different contexts. In Ghana, mostly aged women of the Mamprugu traditional area often face witchcraft accusations and sometimes are banished from their communities into camps within which they are exposed to poor conditions of living. However, different positioning in the social ladder by virtue of ones' socio-economic condition, gender and age and their interaction with each other within a given community allow some women to escape accusation or when accused at all, escape banishment. Witchcraft accusation and its related violence are not peculiar to the members of the Mamprugu traditional in Ghana. The belief in witchcraft and accusation are prevalent in other communities and regions in Ghana however, banishment of suspected witches is dominant among the Mole-Dagbani ethnic group of the Northern region of Ghana in recent times given that all the witches' camps are located in the three traditional areas (Mamprugu, Dagbon, and Nanumba) that constitute it (Amatenstein 2006).

The issue of witchcraft allegation and witch camping are age-old practices in the Northern Region of Ghana. Though, this practice is not peculiar to the Northern Region of Ghana, it is of interest to me because of my familiarity with the people, their practices, language, believes, and social organization. It is a practice by which women perceived to be practicing sorcery are accused of witchcraft. Accusers usually demand that the suspected witch proves her innocence and be cleansed if found guilty. The accusation and cleansing process is characterized by emotional trauma, physical pain as some are beaten or stoned (Mgbako and Glenn 2011:389-390, Quarmyne 2010:482-483). Accused women may be banished or flee from their communities to live in camps (ActionAid 2013). Reports have it that about 5000 to 8000 women have been forced to leave their homes for witches' camps in Northern Ghana

(Quarmyne 2010:482). Banishing women to live in camps has several implications on the accused person's property and sources of livelihoods. Property may be lost and economic opportunities limited. There are six camps in the Northern Region of Ghana in which about thousand (1000) women and seven hundred (700) children<sup>1</sup> live (MacDougall 2011:1). Drucker-Brown (1993) outlined some reasons for sending the 'witches' to the Gambaga witches camp in 1960s. The camp served as a remand where accused persons were kept while the chief sought information to settle the dispute. As the women lived in the camp they provided labour for the chief (custodian of the witchcraft neutralizing shrine). Also, keeping non-Mamprusis in the camp was some sort of exercise of public relation asserting that the Mamprusis were not perturbed in the face of witchcraft thereby asserting their authority over the non-Mamprusis in the Kingdom (Drucker-Brown 1993).

In recent times however, many scholars and activist view the practice of branding of women as witches and banishment as a gendered injustice perpetrated against women who are socially and economically marginalized. Elderly women, mostly very poor, and or widowed constitute the largest number of people who are accused of witchcraft (Adinkrah and Adhikari 2014:317-318). Determining who is a witch and providing justice is supposedly dependent on the posture of a dying fowl used in the ritualistic trial process (ActionAid 2013:3, Amatenstein 2006, Baba 2013:83). But as this thesis will show in chapter three, section 3.2.1 and section 3.2.2 in pages 21-26, the claim that "justice is dependent on the posture of a dying fowl" is not entirely true. The accusation of women is dependent more on socio-economic factors that intersect with the identity and social positioning of the accused in relation to the accuser. It is only to the passive observer that the ceremony corresponds to actuality. This practice violates the fundamental human rights of the women and several clauses of the 1992 constitution of Ghana (MacDougall 2011). In 2011 when government of Ghana attempted to abolish the camps, it was met with fierce resistance from civil society organization and non-governmental organization (ActionAid 2013, Baba 2013). Old age, socio-economic conditions, and gender seem to be implicated in the levelling of accusation, banishing elderly women from their communities to witches' camps. This calls for further investigation of how the intersections of these statuses of power influence accusation and banishment. This research seeks to investigate how the intersection of age, socio-economic conditions, and gender contribute to the branding and banishing of women perceived to be witches.

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<sup>1</sup> Their own children, grandchildren and even children of their relatives sent along to live with the accused in the camps.

### 1.3 Literature review

#### *Anthropological studies of witchcraft in the Northern Region of Ghana*

Witchcraft as a belief as embedded in the Ghanaian culture and among the ethnic groups of Northern Ghana in particular has attracted the interest of anthropologists. Anthropologists like Drucker-Brown and Goody have done extensive work on the belief in witchcraft among the Manprusis and the Gonjas of Northern Ghana respectively. They agree that capital execution and banishment were punishment for women found guilty of witchcraft. E. Goody (1970) posits that Gonja chiefs were known to be ‘witches’ themselves and could confiscate the property of accused witches, sell them as slaves, or even marry the witches if they wanted. Both scholars suggest a bias towards women regarding treatment. While men might not be accused at all of witchcraft, women, depending on their position on the social ladder within their communities and beyond could be accused (Drucker-Brown 1993, Goody 1970). Thus, men are excluded from accusation by the mere fact of being men whereas women are treated by their communities in a complex manner.

Drucker- Brown (1993) asserts that in the 1960s, among the Mamprusis, calamities and deaths were not attributed to the work of witches but almost universally to ancestors and some distant divinity. According to her, it was deemed a shame for a Mamprusi woman to be accused and so they were not sent to the Gambaga witches camp. She was told that “it would be shameful for Mamprusi woman to be publicly branded a witch” (Drucker-Brown 1993: 537). It was members of other tribes in the Mamprusi Kingdom that constituted the inmates of the camp. However, this changed in the 1990s when Mamprusis became the majority in the camp because witchcraft was then seen as an enterprise where witches did not necessarily have to kill their victims but sold their souls to accumulate wealth and this became the background of the talk of witchcraft:

Rather than consuming their victims, witches are now seen as trapping, storing, and eventually selling them for money. The need for cash, and the fact that women are trading to accumulate it, is the background of most talk of witchcraft” (Drucker-Brown 1993:540).

With this view of witchcraft, one might be tempted to suggest that current transformation of gender roles where women are now working hard to be self-dependent may constitutes a basis for their accusation. Also, she states that royals were never accused of witchcraft openly nor their deaths attributed to the activities of witches (Drucker-Brown 1993:534). It was not allowed among the Mamprusi people to accuse a royal publicly. Thus, Mamprusis as group respected their women by not branding them witches publicly and members of royal families were accorded some amount of respect with regard to witchcraft accusation regardless of whether they were rich or poor. This is the case currently among the Mamprusi people and other members of the Mamprugu traditional area and indicates that social position in a community influences accusation.

## ***Witchcraft accusation, banishment, camping as violence against women***

The issue of witchcraft accusation is discussed as elderly women rights problem in research findings, reports both from government and NGOs, articles in the media and film documentaries. In recent times, existing literature on witchcraft and witch camping have emphasized the direct violence and the human rights implication of witchcraft accusations. Sossou and Yogtiba (2015) for instance, consider witch camping as abuse and neglect of elderly women. Even though recognizing the protection provided by witches' camps, they argue that inmates of the camps are deprived of their fundamental human rights and live in conditions that compromises their worth and dignity. Quarmyne (2010:483) asserts that the women usually accused are poor and in addition to their poverty, they are physically abandoned, abused and as such neglected materially and financially by their kinsmen. According to Adinkrah and Adhikari (2014), the practice of witchcraft accusation is a gendered injustice yet there is no specific law in Ghana that prohibits it. Whereas this is true, it is more complex than being gendered because not all men are excluded from accusation by virtue of being men nor are all women accused based on their gender as the findings of this research indicates. MacDougall (2011) have argued that the practice of witchcraft accusation and banishment of alleged witches to live in camps constitute a violation of their fundamental human rights. Crampton (2013:209) is of the view that a better approach to handling witchcraft allegation is to address destructive accusation as a type of elder abuse which impacts women disproportionately instead of emphasizing it as a form of aged women's rights issue. Witchcraft accusation indeed is violence against elderly women but, beyond being elderly, there are other factors that condition the susceptibility of elder some women to accusation because not all elderly women get accused.

## ***Socio-demographic features of alleged witches***

Studies conducted in Nepal and Ghana by Adinkrah and Adhikari (2014:317) outlined certain socio-demographic characteristic of persons usually accused of witchcraft. Widowhood, illiteracy, poverty, disabilities, and rural settlements are factors that influence allegation of witchcraft. Adinkrah (2004:345) revealed poverty and old age as factors that make women more vulnerable to accusation. According to Adinkrah and Adhikari (2014:317-318)<sup>2</sup>, the likelihood of widows to be accused is higher than that of a married women or singles which they attribute to the absence of the husband and older son to provide protection for them. Mere presence of a husband or an elder son might guarantee protection against accusation. A survey conducted by ActionAid in Kukuo witches' camp in 2008 revealed that more than 70% of the accused was widows (ActionAid 2013:8). This confirms the findings of

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<sup>2</sup> See Adinkrah and Adhikari (2014:317-318), under the section: The socio-demographic characteristics of alleged witches and wizards

Drucker-Brown's fieldwork in the Gambaga camp in the 60s and 90s. She reports that the inmates of the camp were mostly widows and in their middle ages usually banished from their villages (Drucker-Brown 1993). Adinkrah and Adhikari (2014:317-318) also point out that members of lower caste are susceptible to witchcraft allegation than those of higher caste. This, they argue emanates from their social and economic marginalization. Regarding spatial aspects, witchcraft accusation is common among rural settlers than urban dwellers (Adinkrah and Adhikari 2014:317). This may be informed by the "unequal incorporation of villages and regions into the capitalist market systems" which Crampton (2013:201) argues could be linked to the "social tension" that forms the basis of witchcraft allegation. I agree with this assertion because it is in line with the results of this study.

### ***Women as witches***

From literature available across Africa, women make the majority of suspected witches, and are mostly the target of witchcraft accusation (Gehman 1989:81, Quarmyne 2010:478). Nottingham (1959:5) in Gehman 1989:81 recorded that when the British Colonial Government made efforts to "suppress witchcraft among the Akamba people of Kenya", 1800 women as against 150 men gave in their objects of witchcraft. Scholars have suggested reasons with respect to women's vulnerability to witchcraft accusations and its associated violence. Some scholars have argued that the greater vulnerability of females to witchcraft allegation and its related violence is a sign of female subordination and male domination which is a feature of patriarchal social structure. It is speculated that men use witchcraft accusation as a threat to women and to assert their dominance over women and upholding their privileged status in society (Adinkrah 2004:346).

Thus, witchcraft accusation is a tool used to ensure women's subordination and submission to men. Badoe (2010:49-50) seems to equally suggest that efforts to uphold the patriarchal order characterized by women's subjection to men is the reason for witchcraft accusation and banishment of women who transgress or challenge the order. This is in line (ActionAid 2013:8) view that accusation is a "convenient excuse for the cruel treatment of women who are poor, excluded, different, or seen to be challenging the status quo". Adinkrah argues that the "gendered nature of witchcraft beliefs, accusation, and related violence all appear to be expressive of the more generalized gender hierarchy that exists within the society at large" (Adinkrah 2004:347). Adinkrah's argument makes a lot of sense since the issue of discrimination against females is not seen in witchcraft allegation alone.

Drawing from the discussions above, it is clear that social relations of power are crucial for the understanding of witchcraft accusation in the Mamprugu Kingdom of Northern Ghana. This assertion is of interest to this study.

## ***Globalization and witchcraft accusation in Africa in contemporary times***

Economic globalization has not been spared in feminist scholarship in the quest to find reasons for the unprecedented increase of witchcraft related violence against women in the 1980s and 1990s in Africa. Federici (2013) have argued that the witch hunting is a global issue and is part of a worldwide trend of rising violence against women and should be seen in the context of problems in the process of social reproduction that came along with the capitalist economies.

Witch-hunts must be understood in the context of the deep crisis in the process of social reproduction that liberalization and globalization of African economies have produced as they have undermined local economies, devalued women's social status, and generated intense conflict between young and old, women and men, over the use of crucial economic resources (Federici 2013:23).

The fear of witchcraft was not a major issue until in the 1980s and 1990s with the advent of debt crisis, structural adjustment, and currency devaluation that many African countries suffered (Federici 2013). This accord Drucker-Brown's 1960s studies which revealed that the Mamprusis were not perturbed by the activities of witches and that witches were rarely sent to exile until the 1980s (Drucker-Brown 1993). Several motives behind witchcraft accusations have been identified. A charge can result in economic competition. It is also considered as a levelling mechanism employed to protect communal values against too much accretion of wealth. For Federici a more convincing explanation is rather that witchcraft allegation is a "response to the social crises that globalization and neo-liberal restructuring of Africa's political economies have produced" (Federici 2013:23). I agree also with this assertion as some of the cases in this study emanated from economic conditions which affects witchcraft allegation in ways.<sup>3</sup>

### **1.4 Research questions**

To understand the differences in experience of violence against women branded as witches, this research will try to provide an answer to the following question:

#### ***Main question***

How does the intersection of gender, age, and socio-economic conditions, contribute to the branding of some women as witches and the practice of banishment?

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<sup>3</sup> See the cases of Sapagbil and Samatabila under the section; the process of accusation in chapter 3.

### ***Sub-questions***

1. How does the process of accusation occur?
2. Who are the major decision makers in accusation? Who (in terms of their positioning in the community, etc.) contributes to the accusation?
3. What are the experiences of alleged witches amidst accusation?

### **1.5 Objective**

The objective of this research is to investigate how the social positions of women influence discrimination against them in the context of witchcraft allegation and banishment of alleged witches.

## 2 Theoretical framework and methodological strategies

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the theoretical approaches and methodological strategies are discussed. It is divided into two main sections. Section one presents the theoretical perspectives and section two consist of the methodological strategies.

### 2.2 Theoretical framework

Power and intersectionality are the theoretical approaches adopted in this research. The concepts are served as tools for analyses and for helping to answer the research questions. The choice of intersectionality is stemmed from the conceptualization of the research question. Since the research is inspecting how the intersections of factors of power relations, it is quite ordinary then to elaborate on this concept and understand how different scholars conceptualize it. The second concept is power. The power one has determines to a large extent the level of the exercise of one's agency in decision making. Certain power structures in society may favor some and disadvantage others in social relations. Below is a brief discussion of the concepts in an aim to expand the discussion along the way.

#### *Power relations*

In real life situation, every social relations and institutions in some way involve power and should be understood as such. How people relate in a given society is determined by the relative strengths and weakness of the actors involved. Yet, due to the pervasiveness of the concept in social systems it has no agreed upon definition (Barbalet 1985:532). Weber defines power as cited in (Barbalet 1985:532) as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests”. Foucault, whose conceptualization of power is adopted to underpin this study, rejects this notion of power.

The traditional model of power assumes that power is something one possesses; something centralized and flow top-down and repressive in its exercise. Foucault rejects this notion and proposes that power be viewed as something outside the confines of the state, law or class. He argues that the traditional model of power has failed to capture “the myriad of power relations at the micro level of society” that “make centralized repressive forms of power possible” (Sawicki 1986:21). Foucault's has conceptualized power as exercised rather than possessed, reproductive but not repressive, and bottom-up. Power as exercised place emphasizes on power relations themselves but not the subjects related. For Foucault, if power is not simply repressive either than that

“why would we continue to obey a purely repressive and coercive form of power?” Resorting to the use of force is often an evidence of powerlessness (Sawiwki 1986:21). Thus, this will mean in the context of this study that forcing women accused of witchcraft out their communities shows powerlessness of their accusers and those involved in decision making regarding their accusations. This links us up with the notion that power is productive.

Foucault argues that certain “institutional and cultural practices have produced individuals”. “Disciplinary power is exercised on the body and soul of individuals” simultaneously increasing their power and rendering them more docile. Such practices are effective ways of “normalizing and social control” which involves the division of society by means of “incarceration or institutionalization” commonly experienced in society at large in a crafty manner like the practice of “labeling one another or ourselves as different or abnormal” (Sawiwki 1986:22, Foucault 1990). Foucault has argued that “institutionalized imbalance of power relation between men and women in Western countries” led to the production of knowledge about women more than men (Mills 2003:69). This are useful in understanding how some women of the Manprugu Kingdom are labeled witches (evil women, abnormal) and pushed out of their communities into witches’ camp and the customary practices —patriarchal by nature and probably produced by men— of the Mamprusi and the other tribes within the Mamprugu traditional area allow for women but not both women and men suspected to witches to be labeled and pushed out their communities. This institutionalized power is exercised over bodies and souls of women in this study’s context unquestioned because even women themselves are socialized to believe that men dominance over them is normal.

Foucault’s ‘bottom-up’ analysis of power illustrates ‘how power relations at the micro level of society make possible certain global effects of domination, such as class, power, and patriarchy’ (Sawiwcki, 1991:23). Power is not localized to a particular group of individuals but is everywhere since it is produced at every level of social interaction and emanates from a myriad of levels and great distribution of society (Foucault 1990:10). Foucault’s conceptualization of power is useful for analyzing how power is exercised by all actors involved in witchcraft accusation as well as the relations between the powerful and less powerful in witchcraft accusation. The concept supports intersectionality which aims to illustrate how the intersections of multitude of factors of power condition differences of experience of different women in their accusation.

### ***Intersectionality***

Feminist scholarship notes that not all women have equal possibilities of resisting marginalization. There are differences among women (Samuels and Ross-Sheriff 2008)—and especially class and race and other social categories—and this have been analyzed as most significant. Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) coined the term ‘intersectionality’ to refer to the

interrelatedness of gender, class, and race, and the diversity of experiences among black and white women. The term since been used to stress the point that gender, race, class, or sexuality are interrelated and can mutually make each other either stronger or weaker (Winker and Degele 2011). 'Intersectionality' according to Davis Kathy (2008:68), is the "interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power". Intersectionality stresses the need to consider different axes of oppression and the manner in which different social categories interconnect in relation to the production of social relations and in terms of the lives of individual (Anthias 2013). It acknowledges the inability of gender to be employed as single analytical framework. Samuels and Ross-Sheriff (2008:5) assert that "an intersectionality framework is attentive to multiple levels of analyses: individual, interactional, institutional, cultural, and structural". Individuals are viewed as positioned in multiple status positions which are contradictory and rooted in institutional, cultural, or structural contexts usually multidimensional and fluid (Fabrizio 2007). Intersectionality as a feminist theory emphasizes that gender should be understood in context of power relations enclosed in social categories. Shields posits that reflecting the reality of live, there are multiple categories and no single category is able to describe ones reaction to her environment and vice versa. Thus, gender should be studied in connection with other social categories like race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Shields 2008:303).

Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill 1996 as (quoted in Fabrizio 2007: no page) has identified five basic tenets common to intersectionality approaches. They are conceptualizing gender and race as structures rather than individual characteristics, rejecting the homogeneity of women, acknowledging that intersecting systems of inequality and oppression exist, recognizing the interplay of social structure and human agency, and emphasizing the need for historically specific, local analyses for comprehending intersecting inequalities. In this research, the above assertions are upheld. Whereas race is not a concern in this research, the rest of the assertions are applicable to this research.

Many gender scholars have come to accept that understanding the historical and modern gender relations requires paying attention to the way race, class, and other systems of power intersect with gender (Fabrizio 2007). The concept of intersectionality therefore helps us to understand the overlapping and intersecting of different and multiple categories but not only a single identity. Intersectionality focuses on how systems of inequality intersect thereby highlighting the differences among women rather than just differences between women and men. It views systems of oppression as embedded in power relations (Fabrizio 2007). Gender intersects with other axes of difference, particularly economic conditions, and social status to reinforce historical constructed labels of domination, exploitation, and privilege. The interaction of socio-economic background, age, and gender result in differences in experience of different women in a society. For instance, both men and women could be accused of witchcraft but the relative privileged

position of men in society play to their advantage regarding their ability to defend themselves when accused. Also, even among women, women with strong family and socio-economic backgrounds may be defended and protected and might not end up in witches' camps if even found 'guilty' of possession powers of witchcraft. Therefore, the concept of intersectionality is useful in this respect as it helps us understand what social relations of power are significant for understanding differences and power struggles between women and men, as well as among women, in specific social contexts. For the current research, age, socio-economic conditions of poverty and/or wealth and gender are crucial.

Analyzing the power relation within the camp and in the original communities of the inmates of the camp as well requires the use of these two concepts discussed above. The concepts power and intersectionality can help in exploring violence against women branded as witches. It is important to note however, these concepts reflect modernist, oppositional, dual perspectives on reality, and may have their limits in investigating witchcraft accusation and the practice of banishment of women to the camps. Thus, they are used cautiously.

### **2.3 Methodological strategies and methods of data collection**

This section presents the method, procedures, strategies, techniques that were employed for data collection and analyses. Once research questions and objectives are established, the issue of how to collect and analyze data to answer the questions and how the objective will be achieved leads to the consideration of which research methods, techniques and procedures will be appropriate for a successful research.

#### ***Sources of data***

The main sources of data were primary data collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and mini survey as well as secondary data sought from policy documents, reports of NGOs and news items.

#### ***Ethnographic orientation***

The researcher adopted an ethnography<sup>4</sup> inspired method to allow for an in-depth understanding of life experiences of participants of this research. Ethnography can be traced to Western Anthropology with reference to a descriptive report of a community or cultures not of the West. The term defies

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<sup>4</sup> Ethnography requires at least six months stay in the field for the work to be considered ethnographic. In the context of this research, it only inspired the method used.

a single “standard well-defined meaning” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:1-2). Zina O’Leary (2014:133) defines it as “the study of cultural groups in a bid to understand, describe and interpret a way of life from the point of view of its participants”. It is the study of cultures in a manner that explores the way of life from the research participants’ perspective in order to understand the symbolic world inhabited by people, viewing things the way the participants do, and acquiring meanings which are used for understanding and making sense of the world with the aim of comprehending, unveiling, describing and interpreting behavior and meaning (O’Leary 2013). With an ethnographic approach, data is collected by participating either directly or indirectly in the research participants’ everyday life experiences in their natural setting for a long period, observing their activities and listening to what they say. An ethnographer is guided by the assumptions that the world must be “discovered” and discovering the world is realized by “observing and participating in the natural setting, guided by exploratory orientation” and that research findings should include the “social process observed” and the “social meanings” resulting in them (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:12, Emerson et al. 2011). An ethnographic field research involves the study of groups and people in their natural social and physical surroundings by participating in their normal everyday lives (Emerson et al. 2011). It adopts a qualitative approach for data gathering and analysis.

A number of advantages make an ethnographic orientation very suitable for this research. An ethnographic orientation adopts an epistemological position aiming at understanding a phenomenon in depth from the perspectives of the research participants. This orientation seeks to make meanings of the experiences, perceptions, beliefs, values etcetera of the group studied which are not easily quantifiable (Porta and Keating 2008). An interpretative ethnography offers a process of data generation and an epistemology that helps the researcher to understand human agency in a social and institutional context which is able to address the influence of history (Malkki 2007:27). Since the phenomenon under study involved beliefs, life experiences, gender, and social positions in a community, adopting an ethnographic orientation is best suited for the study.

Also, ethnography makes room for flexibility and a nuance way of conducting fieldwork. Malkki Lissa (2007) argues that ethnographic orientation is open to improvisation by the researcher in the field to handle issues that are encountered in the field. In planning this research, I made room for the unforeseen such that adjustment could be made on the field. For instance, I had an interview guide well written which could be followed religiously but in the field, I realized that allowing participants to tell their story of accusation was most suitable. A story of accusation within thirty to sixty minutes in most interviews covered almost the questions prepared and revealed a lot of information useful for answering the research questions.

Moreover, ethnographic orientation accepts the use of several techniques in the collection and analyses of data. Participant observation is a key method of collecting data employed in conducting an ethnographic research.

Nevertheless, with detailed description, rich, and reflexive interpretation, as a goal, many ethnographers give preference to use several data collection methods (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, O'Leary 2013) which I also used in this research. This research employed in-depth interviews —opened-ended, semi-directed—, participant observation, and survey to help gather rich data for doing meaningful interpretation to make sense of the perceptions, beliefs, values, and experiences of the inmates of the Gambaga witches' camp.

In a point of fact, an ethnography which is at the center of qualitative methods (Porta and Keating 2008) is suitable for conducting research that seeks to provide in-depth understanding of research problems which embraces opinions of the study population. Such approaches are capable of delving into detailed sensitive issues (Laws et al. 2013, Hennink et al. 2011, O'Leary 2013) like violence against women. To find out how social position of women influences their branding as witches and or banishment and ways of dealing with the consequences required an in-depth understanding of the varied experiences and perceptions from their point of view as well as the views of the larger society. Because of these benefits of qualitative methods employed by ethnography, the researcher used the techniques of non-participatory observation to observe the inmates of the camp and their environment and unstructured interviews which allowed for free-flow of information from interviewees. These techniques helped in providing answers to the complex issues that could not be solicited using quantitative techniques.

However, ethnography as used here is a method, an approach that would contribute to the final material produced from the data collected by means of fieldwork. A typical ethnographic research should cover an extended period of field work of at least six months which is not the case here since I had only two months to be in the field. Ethnographic research is used here as a form of social interaction having ethnographic potential to throw more light to how my research groups understand and perceive issues rather than just a means of data gathering (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:16). I therefore disassociates from any claim of being an ethnographer and the final material being purely ethnographic work. Moreover, the techniques adopted here are also employed by all qualitative researchers. Also, reflexivity, positionality which informed the choice of these qualitative research methods is not the domain of only ethnographers. Feminist scholarships embrace this as well. But for the sake of academic argument, quasi-ethnographic approach would be more appropriate. Quasi here has references to the time scale and the level of immersion during the field work (Murtagh 2007).

I conducted a mini survey using mainly closed-ended questions. Even though, ethnographic researchers often critique survey as too reductionist, it is a potential data collection tool that should not be dismissed outright (O'Leary 2004:121). I was assisted by the Programs officer of the Presbyterian Go Home project—a non-governmental organization working with the women—to conduct the survey. Questions included those on tribal affiliation, age, and socio-economic status. The survey helped in providing clarity about the demographics —ethnic composition, age range and socio-economic

condition— of the population of the camp and also in establishing rapport and provided me the opportunity to move around in the camp freely since almost all the inmates saw me in their various compounds.

### ***The dilemma of positionality, reflexivity and ethics***

It is prudent to consider positionality and reflexivity when conducting research among a vulnerable and marginalized group such as women accused of witchcraft and banished from their home to live in camps. Positionality as a term refers to the issue of relation of power that exists in the relationship between the researcher and the research participants. Foucault posits that “power operates in the processing of information” into knowledge/ ‘fact’ and therefore sees knowledge as power (Mills 2003:72). Power therefore needs to be acknowledged as a key component of the knowledge production process. Analytical reflexive thinking is required for recognizing power relations that is embedded in research process. Crossa (2012:117) posits that “a researcher’s position in a web of power relations shapes how subjects engage with them and therefore informs all aspects of field research”. Malkki Lissa (2007:23-25) argues that contrary to the standpoint of positivist, the “historical and cultural situatedness” of a researcher can influence how she understands a phenomenon and that it is impossible to take away all traces of subjectivity from the knowledge production process. She argues further that a researcher’s positionality interferes with the understanding of issue that being investigated with the absence of which the information collected is meaningless and not interpreted. Zina O’Leary (2013) opines that social researchers need to accept that their own worldviews makes them subjective. If a researcher’s personality affects what she sees and how she makes meaning of it, then, it is required of a researcher to “hear, see, and appreciate multiple perspectives or realities” for rigorous research (O’Leary 2013:50-51). Therefore, reflecting one’s potential influence on the study process is necessary (Hennink et al. 2011:19). Yet, seeking positionality and at the same time writing about the tensions and anxieties surrounding reflexivity, positionality, and situated knowledges is difficult (Rose 1997).

In arguing for positionality and situatedness of knowledge, I acknowledged that power relations can influence the knowledge production process. My values, beliefs, my training as a social worker and in social justice and being privilege to have a foreign education all have influence on how I view the issue of witchcraft accusation and banishment, how I collected the data, and how the findings are presented. The interaction with all my participants were governed by the principles of respecting the worth and dignity of participants, anonymity, and confidentiality when deemed necessary. The analysis is underpinned by theories and concepts learnt in the MA program. My position as a native of the Mamprugu traditional area, familiarity with the beliefs, customs, and practices as well as my ability to speak the common language spoken in camp and East Mamprusi district at large played a vital role in this research. They helped in securing access to the camp for me

and establishing rapport. The women felt comfortable to share their experiences with me without reservation because they saw me as one of their own. My relative elite background, with a considerable high education from abroad evidenced by the introductory letter from the International Institute of Social Studies helped in securing access to the camp for me, it equally put me in a position where I was mistaken for a person who could help the situation of the women. It was obvious during my visits the hope the women had by my presence. Even several efforts explaining that I was just a student was not enough to erase the hope the women had by presence.

I compensated all the participants to show my appreciation for their time and audience after I was done with the interviews and observation. I gave the money and the list of women interviewed to one the leaders in the camp to be given to them later as she suggested. I did this in recognition of the power structure within the camp and to keep doors opened for later research.

Certain ethical issues were considered due to the sensitive nature of the subject under discussion and nature of my research orientation. The study required delving into people private lives especially the inmates of the camp. Issues of confidentiality, anonymity and the principle of do no harm was considered and upheld. I assured respondents their anonymity and kept information that required confidentiality confidential to avoid doing harm to any of the participants. So, names that are used here are not the real names of the participants of this research. Recalling witchcraft accusation and the experience is traumatizing. I avoided questions that I considered too intimate and those that could evoke emotions and unpleasant memories with care. In cases where participants became too emotional, I terminated the interview. For instance, I terminated interview with Sapagbil when she started crying in narrating her experience of accusation.

I sought permission from the chief of Gambaga under whose authority the women are kept before visiting the camp. I went first with my brother who was an assembly man to greet the chief, explain my mission and seek permission. It is required that in visiting the chief, you give an amount of money to him. I was told that custom demanded that. One is not charged but give depending on her ability. So, this I did on my first visit. After greeting, I was asked about my mission, which I explained to him. I was asked to return later on a day of my choice to be introduced to the other people who mattered as far as the camp was concerned. I returned three days later and was introduced to Madam Ruth who happened to be the project officer of the Presbyterian Go Home project. I presented to her an introductory letter from my school and explained my mission. She led me back to the chief. On our way, she asked if I had “cola” (an amount) for greeting the chief. After she was informed that requirement was met in my earlier visit, she still advised that it was prudent to do it again. So, that was done and I reminded the chief of our discussion on my previous visit. Permission was granted. Before we arrived at the camp, I was informed that the overall leader within the camp was also to be greeted in the same manner as we did with the chief though with a lesser amount. I was introduced to the “Mangazia” (the leader of the inmates), did

what custom required and latter was introduced to four other lieutenants “Mangazias” who represented the Mamprursis, the Bimobas, and Komkombas in the camps.

I assured both inmates and the authorities of the camp that my final report will be a true reflection of the women’s stories and not cooked-up stories that they accused some earlier researchers of documenting about them that made them angry. I equally sought permission from every person I interviewed for recordings. In the process of my interviews, participants were free to attend to other things that required their attention and return to continue from where they stopped.

### ***Personal experience in the field***

My personal experience in the field deserves reporting. Few days after my arrival in Ghana I started preliminary visits to selected sites. I went first to the Gbangu community to identify participants and make appointments with them. Later I visited the Gambarana (priest of the witches finding shrine and owner of the witches’ camp) and asked for permission to the camp. On 3 August, 2017 I went back to Gambaga to start the interviews and observation. It was in the morning and most of the inmates had left for farm and firewood. I was assisted by Madam Ruth in conducting the survey and the rapport building. In the subsequent days I went alone to the camp in the morning through to afternoon then had a break for lunch and went back in the late afternoon through to evening by which time most women had returned from work. During the night I transcribed the interviews I conducted.

I moved from one compound (25 compounds with several rooms in each) to the other chatting with the inmates. Many brought fresh groundnuts from the farm as they returned in the evening and whiles having conversation with them, I ate some of the groundnuts. Some will ask me where I came from and when answered they would start asking for families and people they knew in my home town. This most at times led to extensive conversation not related to my research at all. However, it proved helpful for rapport building. I interviewed ten women in a week and went back to visit my family. Whiles home I transcribed recordings I could not at Gambaga. I went back later and after interviewing five more women saturation was reached and I interviewed the manager of Presbyterian Go Home Project.

After all the interviews I went to Gbangu (site two) to interview the participants I had appointment earlier. Some were very reluctant to speak about the issue. But I had good number of men and women, young and old who agreed to be interviewed. Due to the dislike of associating with witchcraft issues, I resorted to not recording voices. I finally returned home with huge data and working with it proved more difficult than generating it. I would leave the house for the community library to listen to my recordings and field notes from both sites denying my family their deserved attention. All these issues had influence on the writing of this research paper.

### ***Selection of participants and sites***

Participants were selected from the Gambaga witches' camp. I interviewed fifteen inmates of the camp. The participants stay in the camp varied from thirty (30) years to two months and their ages from eighty to twenty-five. Interview questions were centered on their experience of accusation and the accusation process. By the 15<sup>th</sup> person of the inmates of the camp interviewed, saturation was reached. Thus, I no longer had new themes. Data was being repeated. The interviewees selected provided insights into the social values and structures that influence beliefs and practices in communities, as well as women's own life experiences and strategies in coping with their situation. Fifteen people—ordinary people (shop attendants) opinion leaders (clan heads), male and female, educated and uneducated—from the Gbangu community were interviewed. Gbangu is a nearby community to Gambaga where the belief in witchcraft was common. The community was selected based on its record that its accused members were sent for trial at the witch-finding shrine but did not remain in the witches' camp. The interview sessions were more relaxed, with session environments ranging from having somewhat a chat with participants in their rooms, and shops to having an intensive conversation with elderly people resting in their summer hats in their houses. However, informed consent was sought from all participants. I also conducted a survey in the camp. It was intended to cover the entire inmates of the camp (72 at the time of the field work) excluding children. However, it was sixty-two (62) inmates who were accessible during the different times I visited the camp.

The manager and the project officer of Go Home project were my key informants. The Project officer assisted me in gaining access to the camp and in establishing rapport with the inmates of the camp. The Presbyterian Go Home Project is a faith-based non-governmental organization that assists the inmates of the camp with basic necessities such as food items, clothes, and also helps in repatriation and reintegration of banished women who have lived in the camp into their communities. Repatriation involves sending back accused within some few months in camp while reintegration has to do with sending back women who have stayed longer in the camp to their home communities after thorough sensitization of the same and the assurance of the security of the returnee.

### ***Scope, limitations and practical challenges encountered***

The study was conducted only in the Gambaga witches' camp and the Gbangu community due to time constraints. This factor limited the scope of my research since I could not explore the issue under discussion in other camps in the northern region of Ghana for comparative analyses. Also, tracing to some of the communities where the inmates moved from to observe and interview members of such feeding communities of the witches' camp could have produced a richer data given the possibility that I could meet people who have ever made allegation. The feeding communities were scattered all over the district and beyond.

Access to the inmates of the camp was challenging. Journalists and human rights activists in recent times have been investigating such issues and the camp leadership and even inmates are careful about who gets access to the women in the camps. They are skeptical of the intentions and suspicious of strangers around the camp. I was told during my visits that some human rights activist visited the camp and made a false documentary about the experience of the women in the camp. Despite my obtaining permission from the leadership of the camp, some two people who claimed related to the chief on different occasions interrupted my interviews and interrogated me. Except for the proper networking and clear articulation of the intention and purpose of the research I could have been denied access. Even with access granted, I am convinced that genuine information could have been withheld or twisted due to fear of the consequences since the research solicited views on life experience before moving to and in the camp.

However, I possessed some strength that helped in handling the challenge of access to the camp. I could communicate effectively in the main language spoken in the camp by both inmates and leaders. I was familiar with the cultural practices of the Mamprusi people. As a native of the District, I had adequate connection with local elites and gate keepers in the Gambaga community who assisted me to get acceptance by the camp's Lord and dwellers.

### 3 Presentation of findings and analysis

#### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I employ intersectionality and power as analytical frames to discuss findings from the observation, interviews and survey conducted in the field. Here, gender<sup>5</sup>, age, and socio-economic conditions are conceptualized as structures rather than individual characteristics. Homogeneity of women is rejected and the overlapping and intersecting of these three key social categories that influence witchcraft allegation and banishment are discussed. This chapter consist of four main sections. The first main section (3.2) presence cases of the processes of accusation and under it are three sub-sections. The second section (3.3) presence major decision makers in accusation and under it are three sub-sections. The third main section (3.4) presence the experience of alleged witches and is made up of two sub-sections. The fourth and final section (3.4) is a summary of the discussions in the chapter.

#### 3.2 The process of accusation

Allegation starts with the suspicion of a relative or a neighbour to be behind a calamity, or misfortunes such as death, sickness, barrenness, accidents of another and even the success of the suspected witch or her children or her generosity. Accusations mostly come from relatives. Suspicion may stem from dreams, and divination and deliverance (exorcism) (Onyinah 2002) process of a person suspected to be a victim of a witch. But under these things are hidden other things that reflects power relations at the individual, family, and community levels. I discuss bellow a number of cases from the field.

##### *The case of Sapagbil*

She was over 75, a widow, a mother of two sons and was two months old in the camp. She was brought to the camp with two other women accused by a self-acclaimed evangelist of bewitching a child of her neighbour. She was a very poor woman who could not even pay 300 Ghana Cedis (about 60 euros) for her release from the camp after her trial. She narrated her story to me when I asked what brought her to the camp:

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<sup>5</sup> Scott defines gender as a basic element of social relationships which has its basis on the perception of differences between the sexes and equally a fundamental approach of symbolizing power relations. See (Scott 1986), a summary available at <https://acuriouswanderer.wordpress.com/2013/01/25/gender-a-useful-category-of-historical-analysis/>

My neighbour's child was sick....He said his son's sickness was caused by me. I asked him how he managed to know that and he said a pastor told him. I told them, I am not a witch. I have children and grandchildren; if I were a witch I could bewitch one of them. We were sent to the chief of Gare the following day. I denied. Then the chief said if that was the case, we should be sent to Gambaga for trial. When my fowl was slaughtered, it flapped its wings and laid flat on its back. They asked the son of the chief of Gare. Whose fowl is that? He said it was mine. I was asked to pay 300 Ghana cedis and go home. Where do I get the money to pay? My child is sick. Poverty is the reason why I am here. It is not because I am a witch<sup>6</sup>.

The chief of Gare is the traditional head of their village. Around him are the elders/members of his cabinet who assist him in judging cases brought to traditional court. The rest of the members of the village form his subjects. They are made up of various clans (cluster of household related by ties of blood). The evangelist, a religious leader by virtue of his spiritual position and his being a man was very influential in the accusation. His accomplices; the father of the supposed victim of witchcraft and three others were all men. Though the accused and accusers were all subjects, the mere fact that the accusers were men, and relatively younger than Sapagbil proved fruitful for their success in getting the poor woman sent out of the community.

The evangelist told Sapagbil's neighbour that his child's sickness was caused by Sapagbil and other two women. Their families were informed and then they were first sent to the chief of their community and were later sent to Yeliwongo, a border town in Burkina Faso for trial where they went through untold suffering in the hands of a witch doctor. The so called evangelist and his accomplices brought them back on June 9, 2017 to the chief of their community and told him they were confirmed witches. According to the women, the chief tried to defend them and kept them in his palace but gave up when pressure and threats of killing them by the accusers became unbearable for him he released them to be sent to the Gambaga witches' camp for another trial. At Gambaga, Sapagbil was proved innocent by the trial process.

The trial involves the slaughter of fowls presented to the priest by both the accused and the accuser. I was told the accuser would say; "I am the one making allegation. If my allegation is false let my fowl not be accepted". Then the fowl is slaughtered. Then the accused would also say; "I am not a witch, let the shrine prove me innocent by accepting my fowl". Acceptance is determined by the posture of the fowl when it flaps its wings as it struggle to die. When it finally lies flat on its back dead with its wings spread upwards then the accused is innocent. But when it lies on its breast facing downward, then the accused is guilty. It follows therefore that determining a witch is solely by the posture of the dying fowl used for the ceremony. A partial observer might conclude so.

Putting the positioning of the dying fowl in context, the final positioning of the fowl could be altered since human beings are involved especially if they

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Sapagbil, Gambaga witches' camp (4 August 2017).

have interest in a case. For instance, a fowl that is held longer in the hands of the one who slaughtered it might not be able to flap its wings. Also, given that there is no conflict of interest, the final position the dying fowl finds itself all depends on chance and innocence of guilt determined by this ceremony is questionable. These observations are not baseless. The fact that first trial found her guilty and second proved her innocent says it all. Well, for Sapagbil's case she was lucky in the second trial at Gambaga according to her own words, she was proven innocent. However, others do not get to that level before they are vindicated as the next case will show. Certain power dynamics are crucial for understanding why her case went that far to extent that she was proven innocent yet remained in the camp.

Economically, she and her children were so poor that they could not raise the three hundred Ghana Cedis (300 about 60euros) required for her release from the camp after she was proven innocent. According to her as seen in the quote above it was poverty that sent her to the camp and not that she was a witch. Her socio-economic condition should be seen in context. Being uneducated, she had not been employed in the formal sector but was dependent on peasant farming in her working days but given her age, she was very weak to engage in any meaningful economic venture. Yet, the Ghanaian social security system does not cover people who have not been employed in the formal sector (SSNIT. 2017) and extended family that used to play the social security role had been weakened by modernity (Kumado and Gockel 2003).

Also, this poor old widow had passed her productive years. She was widowed and granted that husbands can protect their wives, she had none. The status of widowhood, poverty, and old age are not peculiar to Sapagbil alone. The results of my survey showed that 76% of the inmates of the camp were above 60 and 80.95 were widows. These accord findings of other studies conducted in the Gambaga witches' camp and in other areas in Ghana (Adinkrah and Adhikari 2014:317-318, ActionAid 2013:8, Drucker-Brown 1993). Her children could be her source of defence yet they were poor. She had passed child bearing and economic productivity and was dependent on others for her survival. The good reason one might provide for her being pushed out of her community is that her community members dodged the responsibility of caring for the vulnerable among them. This has bases. I was told by the project officer of Go Home Project that they considered sending her home but they were not sure of her safety in her community after a visit to her village for that purpose. Also, the chief of her village could have referred the case to the police after realizing that he was not capable of handling the case instead he referred the case to a witch finding shrine cowering to the pressure from the accusers. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that witchcraft allegation is a convenient way of averting the moral guilt of relatives and neighbours for failing to care for the needy among them.

Putting these two observations in context, Crampton (2013) argument is crucial. Crampton (2013) has argued that the "unequal incorporation of villages and regions into the capitalist market systems" could be linked to the "social

tension” that forms the basis of witchcraft allegation (Crampton 2013:201). The case of Sapagbil and all the cases under discussions are cases of women from rural communities/villages in the Mamprugu traditional area all located in the Northern and parts of Upper East regions which are the poorest regions in Ghana. The survey conducted revealed that majority (70%) of the inmates of the camp and their families were engaged in peasant farming. Statistical data available indicates that agricultural households constitute 83.7 % of household in Upper East Region and 87.1 % of these households dwell in rural communities (Ghana Statistical Service 2013:130-131). But given the current environmental degradation and dependence on rain-feed agriculture, crop yield has been declining over the years (Kanchebe Derbile 2013:72). From a rural community coupled with poverty and old age, Sapagbil’s case is pathetic. Her inability to secure the favour of her village’s chief, her failure to pay the 60 euros for her release from the camp, and her sons’ failure to take her from the camp all stemmed from poverty. Had the extended family played its role of providing security for the elderly, she could have been sent home. Had the government provided social security for her or integrated her into the capitalist market because her children could not care for her, she would not have been pushed to the witches’ camp. She could be home. Modernity and economic globalization that promotes individualism has affected all these aspects of her life. Yes, even accessing shrine service is paid for in cash. Her status as an old woman had been weakened further by the economic structures around her. Sapagbil’s poverty, widowhood, gender, and lack of strong connections made her so vulnerable to the accusation and banishment from her village.

### ***Tarimbuni’s story***

Tarimbuni was man of about 70 years old and a head of an influential clan in his community/village. In the summer hut of his house, he narrated a recent case of witchcraft allegation that took place in his clan by one of his brothers:

Just recently I was here when my brother came and told me that his son was sick and the sickness was caused by one of his wives. He said the son was mentioning the names of his first wife and other women. He said he wanted to send his son to Gambarana for healing. I asked him to exercise patience while we seek solution with their family but he insisted and sent his son. We informed the parents of the women. Later Gambarana sent for them. The head of their family asked one of his sons to send them. When they went, they were found guilty. Then Gambarana asked them to collect herbs to heal the boy. They are related to the chief. They paid for them and brought them back<sup>7</sup>.

I investigated further for the characteristics of the women that were involved in this case during my stay in the village. All the three women had relation to the ruling family of the village. Tarimbuni brother’s wife was a middle aged woman (about 45) and a co-wife among five co-wives. The supposed victim was the son of her co-wife (second to her). The chief of the

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Tarimbuni, a head of clan at Gbangu on 27 August 2017

village was the paternal uncle. One of the women was about 50 and a daughter of the chief. She owned a tractor and was still married. The other one was about 60, a widow of another brother of Tarimbuni and a niece to the chief. The accuser on the other hand was the husband of the accused. A husband of five wives, quite out spoken, relatively well off by the village's standards and belonged to a large and influential clan.

Their community is headed by the chief and assisted by sub-chiefs appointed by him. They formed the cabinet and sit on cases brought before them. There were also clan heads some of whom were part of the chief's cabinet unlike Tarimbuni. Due to the respect for traditional authority that still prevailed in the Mamprugu traditional area especially in rural communities, the decision of a chief was highly regarded and could be final.

Here the accused were a combination of women who were economically self-dependent, married, and a widow and all of them were connected to royalty in the village. The accuser was also economically sound per the village's standard measured by his ability to marry five women and able to provide for them and their children. He had some honour by the fact that he was man and husband of five women and father of many children. He was also a member of an influential clan in the village.

Due the power dynamics involved, the case was only reported to his clan head and went straight the Gambaga witch finding shrine bypassing the final authority at the village level. As the quote above indicates, the accused were sent to Gambaga and the witch finding ritualistic ceremony was performed and whatever amount that was involved was paid and they were went home. They only went to answer a charge at the shrine. It did not matter whether they were found guilty or not. They simply paid for the process and went back to their village and the case was closed and only remained a gossip.

Considering this case, there are a number of observations. Firstly the way the case was handled at the village level is worth looking into. The case was reported to the clan head of the accuser. A decision was arrived to forward the case to Gambaga without any sitting on it at the chief's palace even though a report was sent to the chief. It was only to crave his awareness that his daughters/nephews were accused and the accuser was forwarding the case to a higher authority as long as witchcraft accusation was concerned. I was told the women had previously been accused of turning forty people's souls into millet which was sold in Techiman market and yet it remained a rumour because they had the protection of their father. He would probably not have allowed for his relation to be disgraced had the case been sent to him to judge. As Drucker-Brown (1993:534) has stated, royals of good standing are rarely accused of witchcraft. They are proud of it and claim it is used to protect or pave way for their relatives on the throne against potential contenders. So to avoid any bias in the ruling of the case, the accuser simply bypassed him. The chief could equally prevent his daughters from going for the trial at the shrine but given the influence of the accuser, this had to be negotiated to maintain peace at the

village level because other people probably had been pushed out of the community by himself as witches. On the part of the chief, to avoid being seen as discriminating that could cause conflict in the village, he allowed the relatives only to attend the trial process. But his influence is not limited to the village. The custodian of the witch finding shrine is also the chief of Gambaga and his regard for his fellow chief cannot be underestimated. This explains why the trial process remained a mere ceremony performed at the shrine while they went back home unlike Sapagbil in the previous case.

Secondly, the fact that they had people and material resources home to depend on is crucial for understanding why their experience was different. One of them had a tractor, and was married. So, since the accusation did not come from her own family, she could not be pushed out. She was self-reliant and still had the necessary connections and protection as far as her village was concerned. Even the others who were relatively lower in terms of their economic conditions still could enjoy the protection of their uncle, the chief. So, they stayed in their village without any threats to their security. Their multiple locations in the power structure within their community thus, as women, as royals, sound economically and with all the necessary benefits attached to these status worked together for their favour unlike the cases Sapagbil as discussed above. Even though a woman's location in higher statuses of power may not prevent her from being accused of witchcraft they can prevent the consequences of her accusation.

### ***Witches but not warlocks***

It is common knowledge in the localities involved in this research that alleged warlocks are not treated in the same manner as alleged witches. After reviewing literature on witch camping, I became hesitant about even thinking of witchcraft allegation against men because it was almost absent in previous studies. Also, the fact that there was no single man in the Gambaga witches camp almost made me give up on gender as category for this study. But instead of giving up on thinking about men being accused of witchcraft, I was rather motivated by the absence of suspected warlocks in the camp to ask about it. I inquired from inmates of the camp and participants from Gbangu community.

In my interview with Biisi Naaba he told:

It is a special wisdom that people have. Men have it too. It is believed that wizards slaughter the victims of witchcraft... If a woman meddles in things we men do and are not questioned, she can be accused. If a woman is fond of visiting diviners, or going sacrifice at shrines unaccompanied by male members of her family or her husband, people suspect her and she can be accused.<sup>8</sup>

Bisi Naaba was a man of age 69, and head a household. For him, witchcraft was a special wisdom or ability that some people have. Both men

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Biisi Naaba at Gbangu on (28 August 2017).

and women could have it and practice in whatever field they wanted to. But women's practice of witchcraft was sanctioned unlike that of men. Men practice of witchcraft is not questioned. But when women are suspected of practicing it or its related practices like divination, and making of certain sacrifices unaccompanied by male(s), they get accused of using it for evil.

Warlocks are not accused or if accused at all are not banished. This is not because they belong to better statuses or categories of power than witches either than the mere fact that they are men. Because usually, it is aged males just like their aged female counterparts who are perceived to have this special power. The difference lies in the fact that men benefit from society's assigned hegemonic privileges those men get over women. Kutam asked me rhetorically in an interview with her; "they brought a man three days ago. He was found guilty. Did he remain here? They paid and sent him home. He will be in his own house. Men do come and go"<sup>9</sup>. She revealed that in about thirty years of her stay in the camp she had seen only three men brought to the camp and sent back. See this in the context of the localities involved and the leadership of the camp as well as discourse of masculinity. Men dominate the top of the social ladder as chiefs, priests, and heads of clans and heads of households in the communities and therefore are key decision makers regarding accusation. The Gambaga witches' camp is headed by a man believed to have the means of identifying a witch. It follows that he is a warlock of a higher level than the women yet it is not seen as evil. He lives in his palace and not camping with the 'witches'. Just as E. Goody has revealed about Gonja chiefs (Goody 1970), Mamprusi chiefs are believed to have special powers that enable them lead their communities. In most cases, those who make accusation materialized are men. They are usually in the realms of decision making regarding witchcraft accusation.

With respect to marriage as an institution and its related ideologies, men are favoured over women in witchcraft accusation. Men do not leave their families to live with their wives' families. They live with their own families even after marriage thereby enjoying home support in many things. Women on the other hand are expected to leave their families to join those of their husbands sometimes in different communities either than communities/villages of their paternal homes when they marry. When they are accused of witchcraft they lack support and security men have and as a result are forced to leave.

The discourse of witchcraft is equally important in this analysis. The Manprusi word '*songnya*' has been gendered by dominant discourses. The name 'witches' camp' illustrates this. The section of Gambaga where the alleged witches live is known as *Poakura Fong*' literally meaning '*old women's home or section*' but not witches' camp. The Manprusi word '*songnya*' translated 'witch' is neutral in gender. 'Warlock' which is the English word for a male witch is rarely seen in literature regarding witchcraft. This illustrates how symbols are assigned women in the larger society. Here, a 'witch' is a symbol assigned some women to segregate them from the main stream society by dominant

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Kutam at Gambaga witches' camp on (6 August 2017)

discourses even beyond the study area as Foucault has argued; this power/knowledge is produced by dominant group about the dominated (alleged witches) reinforcing dominance over the dominated (Sawiki 1986). So, here even discourses as seen in activism (human rights and gender advocacy) and research have knowingly or unknowingly contributed to the labelling of women as witches, thus simply reproducing what society sees as knowledge. Thus, discourses, institutions, ideologies are important for understanding why men perceived to be warlocks escape accusation or even if accused at all are rarely banished. Suspected warlocks may share such categories that contribute to accusation—poor socio-economic conditions, old age, with some of their related disadvantages—but the mere fact of being men come with a whole lot of privileges that work for them that most women accused of witchcraft do not have.

So, the power dynamics involved are quite complex and a simple and straight forward answer is inadequate to explain the process. But the context in which the accusations occur is very crucial for understanding the power dynamics. Sapagbil had no option left due to her location in lower statuses of power (poverty, old age, widow) of power. The case of the three reported by Taribuni used their connection and material resources to frustrate the accusation process and stayed in their community secured. Alleged warlocks as seen in the last case might not even be accused or when accused at all escape banishment because of the relative privileges they enjoy by merely being males. Here, gender as a single category of social relation that produces conditions for oppression of women is limited in providing an explanation of women susceptibility to witchcraft allegation.

### **3.3 Major decision makers in witchcraft accusation**

The composition of major decision makers/actors in witchcraft allegation is quite complex based on the information collected from participants of the research. It is a web of both influential and ordinary members of a given community. In most cases of accusation, the accused reports to or is reported to the family head and then to the clan head. Among the Mamprusi people, especially in rural communities, leadership is organised around the family, the clan, and the community/village at large. Let us take case of Gbangu community. In the Gbangu community, the family is the first unit of the community structure. The family is made up of father, mother(s) and children and headed by husbands and assisted by their wives and senior sons if any. A family may consist of the husband, wife or wives and children and extended relations. Various families descending from related ancestors (patrilineal) make the clan. This includes women members who marry outside the clan. The clan is headed by the senior most male person based on age and competence. A typical rural community can have several of these clans and their heads.

The next level of leadership is community leadership composed of the chief, his elders or members of his cabinet, opinion leaders made up of heads of various religious sects in the community and other influential members of

the community, and in recent times the assembly person who represents the community at the district assembly. In terms of decision making at the community level and even beyond this leadership structure is crucial.

Narrowing it down to decision making regarding witchcraft allegation, the family is the first point of call. The accused and the accuser may all belong to the same family or clan. If it is a family member that is making accusation, this is first reported to the head of the family (husband). If at that level solution is not found the matter is reported to the head of the clan. At that level a decision may be taken. A case may from this level go straight to the witch finding shrine or witch doctor depending on the decision arrived at without being reported to the leadership of the community as has been indicated earlier in Tarimbuni's story. A case that is not settled at the level of community leadership may be referred to a witch finding shrine or doctor as the case of Sapagbila indicated above. Some of participants of this research revealed that decisions regarding their movement to the camp were reached at their family level either together with their husbands, and brothers or individually. Whereas others had their decisions made at the clan level or at the level of the community leadership. I have used three cases have to discuss these structures and the actors involved in the decision making process of a witchcraft allegation.

### ***The case of Kayubu***

Kayubu, 70 years old, had been in camp for eight years. She was co-wife and a senior of the two wives of her husband. Given her age she had passed child bearing before she was accused but had six children (all males), very young at the time she was accused they left her due to stigma attached and fear to the southern part of Ghana to fend for themselves. She lamented that having no money and living in another person's house was painful. See excerpt of Kayubu's story bellow:

My husband told me that my co-wife had headache and said it was caused by me. I left his house to my brother's house because my father is no more. I told my brother. He was sick. He said now that I am sick what can I do? I told him I know what to do. I am his senior wife. But since he has said this, it means he is divorcing me like that. I will go to Gambarana. If I were a man I too will have been in my own house. When I was in my father's house no one accused me. I got married and gave birth to my children and became old then I was accused. It is because of I am a woman. If you have no money it is painful<sup>10</sup>.

Kayubu hometown, Mamprusi community is a rural settlement north-east of Gambaga. Her accusers were her own husband and her co-wife. Her accusation had no direct linkage with her community at large but purely a family matter. Her husband supported his younger wife against her. The senior who had given birth ten times and was done with child birth had to go. She told me her co-wife was strong and healthy and living with their husband after

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Kayubu at Gambaga witches' camp on (7 August 2017).

she left. Her brother who could have fought for her was sick. Per her, if her brother had been well and strong at that time, they could have reported the case to the police. She had no money of her own and her children were not gainfully employed and could not defend her but rather left her for Southern part of Ghana for their own survival. She had no one to protect her.

Her co-wife on the other hand was younger, still productive physically and economically and could have children. As such she had the support of her husband. For the husband he had nothing to lose. He already had six children with Kayubu and two with the younger one and was still strong enough to have children with the younger wife. His younger wife could still play her conjugal role as a wife. Above all, customarily, a woman whose bride price is paid cannot claim ownership of a child when she divorces her husband in Kayubu's context. So, basically, Kayubu's husband had nothing to lose by divorcing her.

Among the Mamprusi people, being a senior wife attracts some privileges but these depend on the husband and or having older sons. A woman who marries to a man first becomes first wife. It is required that the younger wives respect their seniors. Senior wives lead in the sharing of farm produce that is allocated to them together and also take their personal share as seniors. In the Mamprugu kingdom, polygamy—where men marry as many wives as they can—is allowed and very common. In a typical polygamous marriage, the husband heads the family and assisted by the senior wife and elder most sons, if any. These privileges and competition for attention of a husband usually bring about rivalry among co-wives. Both senior and junior wives crave for attention and may resort to anything to attain it. But as this case indicates, junior wives who are younger are usually favoured by their husbands thus making rivalry fierce. The favour the younger wife got from their husband against Kayubu, her senior can be explained by the value that is placed on childbearing and conjugal roles played by a married woman in this context. Accused at age 62, it follows that she could no longer play such roles effectively and her divorce was easy since her children also left in the midst of her accusation. In this case, marriage as an institution and its connection with gender in a patriarchal society, socio-economic status and old age are all crucial for understanding Kayubu's witchcraft allegation. As she said above, had it been in her own house, no one will have accused her. And had she not passed the age of childbirth, she would not have been accused or if she had been accused at all, she might not have been forced to take a decision to leave her own community. Her circumstances pushed her to take the decision of moving out of her community for the camp.

### ***Decision at the clan level***

Consider this example of accusations that Tarimbuni, head of a reputable clan of the Gbangu community regarding their mother. I asked him whether he had had any case of witchcraft accusation in his clan. He replied:

Yes, when our father fell sick and we sent him to a witchdoctor it turned out that it was his second wife who bewitched him. Her own children threatened that if our father died they will kill her. Later our father died. We sat and deliberated on the matter. We decided to keep quiet about it. We did not want to destroy the peace and unity we have in this family by shaming and sending her to the witches' camp.<sup>11</sup>

The accused was a mother of six children, one female and the rest males and the second among three wives of her husband. From observation, her children were relatively influential than the children of her co-wives. Her accusation started at a witch doctor's shrine where her husband was sent for healing. Later the husband passed on. At that point a decision regarding what to do to her was required.

The members of the clan sat and deliberated on it among themselves. The respect for a mother, the unity and cordial relationship among member of the clan were given paramountcy over shaming by banishing her. The decision was not arrived at without considering the power dynamics that were involved. The accused had children who were influential in the clan. Though according the explanation provided by the participant, her children did not openly defend their mother; their refusal to carry out their initial threats meant a lot. Her children position of influence in the clan made pursuing the banishment agenda difficult. Pushing the accusation further could lead to division that could weaken the relative influential position held by the clan in the community. Here, the clan mobilized to resist the accusation and therefore allowed for a different possibility without oppression.

### ***Decision making at the level of community leadership***

The next level where decision could be reached regarding witchcraft accusation is the community leadership involving a chief of a village/community and his council of elders. The case of Sapagbil as discussed above illustrates this.<sup>12</sup> Her case moved straight from the family level to the level of community leadership. The decision at that level was to send her to the witch finding to determine her innocence. At the shrine she was declared innocent but her inability to pay for the witch finding process and the tension in her conditioned her stay in the witches' camp.

What is worth noting here is that usually decision to keep an accused woman or forced her out of her community starts at her family level and decision could be reached right there or at the level of clan leadership without being referred to a community leadership or to witch finding shrine. Cases of witchcraft accusation rarely bypass the clan head but can bypass the community leadership to the witch finding shrine. Sending one to the witch finding shrine is a formality and a convenient way of transferring the

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Tarimbuni at Gbangu on (27 August 2017).

<sup>12</sup> See the case of Sapagbil above under the section captioned: accusation process.

responsibility of convicting accused relatives to the priest of the witch finding shrine because he is deemed to have supernatural power to determine a witch. But taking the responsibility of convicting a supposed witch add to him the responsibility of taking care of the accused under his custody while those who were supposed to take care of their vulnerable member are relieved of that responsibility under the cover of witchcraft allegation. The Manager of Go Home project told me that the chief/priest does not go hunting for witches. Cases were usually brought to him. The women I interviewed told me they were either forced out their communities or brought by their own relations to the camp.

### **3.4 Experience of alleged witches in the midst of accusation**

Women suspected to be witches go through several dehumanizing experiences in their communities. Sometimes they are hooted at, beaten, lynched (Nyabor 2017) threatened. Those who are threatened and lack defence seek refuge in a nearby witches' camp. They leave behind their sources of livelihood for the camps where they faced the challenge of limited economic opportunities. Two cases are considered below:

#### ***The experience of Samatabila***

Samatabila of the Gambaga witches' camp was a 78 years old woman and came from a village east of Gambaga. She belonged to a royal family that was ruling at the time of her accusation. Her brother happened to be the chief of their community and was in a position and willing to defend her. She was engaged in trading in food stuffs and brewing pito (local beer) for sale and had enough to cater for herself and her children and could help others who were in need. She was quite successful in her trade and sale of beer and that led to her accusation. She told me she was accused for trying to survive. Below is an excerpt from the interview:

I was not lazy. I used to trade, and brew pito. People used to come to me for support. There was enough for me and my children. My husband's farm produce was not enough for the family. I could go to the market and provide for the family. It could take a month and no one will go into the ban to fetch food. Hmm! It was because of my struggle to survive that I was accused.<sup>13</sup>

Her own brother was the chief of their community. Her accusers were her marital family members and accused her of selling people's souls for money because she was successful and they were not. These suggest that her accusers were not in any better economic status than her except that they were males, younger than her and had connections. The case was reported to the chief. She told me her brother, the chief of their community after sitting on the case ruled

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Samatabila at Gambaga witches' camp on (4 August 2017)

in her favour and defended her but she opted to leave because of the stigma and to avoid subsequent accusations.

For Samatabila, she had children; she was a member of a royal family ruling at the time of her accusation. Connection wise, she had her own brother at the realm of affairs with the will to fight for her. She was relatively sound economically and played the role of providing for her family successfully. These worked favourably regarding her experience. She had defence and security. She was not beaten. On the other hand, her accusers were male members of her marital family. They were not royals but the mere fact that they were men accorded them some respect in the community. However, they lacked the backing of the chief of their community.

Here, her accusation did not result from vulnerability as the case of Sapagbil has shown above. Her accusation stemmed from the fact that she was quite successful economically and in providing for her family. In her locality, it takes a very hardworking woman to be able to provide for her children and herself without having to depend on her husband as the head and supposed breadwinner of the family. In her context, men are expected to be the breadwinners of their families and failure to live up to expectation indicates their weakness and irresponsibility (Adinkrah 2004:332). She told me her husband went to the ban only when he needed money to buy alcohol but she could supply her family the needed food without his support. Some men are no longer able to play the breadwinning role of their families. This has resulted in the need for women to engage in trading and even farming to meet the capitalist market's demands. This shift has been the basis of some witchcraft accusation as indicated by this case. The observation accord Federici's assertion that "Witch-hunts must be understood in the context of the deep crisis in the process of social reproduction" (Federici 2013:23). Obviously, her husband could not play his role as a husband. The view that hardworking women are susceptible to witchcraft accusation is not illustrated by the case of Samatabila alone. Manduaya of Gbangu village, a middle aged woman buttressed this point when I inquired from her about the things that made women more susceptible to witchcraft accusation. She told me:

It is out of jealousy. When you are rich and people think you do not deserve it, they make accusation to destroy you. They will say; it is money from the sale of people's souls.<sup>14</sup>

Samatabila's struggle to meet the current economic demands —the need for cash for almost everything— on her and the little successes she made were attributed to some supernatural forces and led to her accusation. Everybody have need of cash to cope but since everybody cannot succeed in equal measure, it breeds jealousy. Yet, the economic transformation that calls for the shift in gender roles (Drucker-Brown 1999:547-548) can never and should not be blamed on her because both men and women are victims of the same circumstance which they have no control over. Economic conditions

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Manduaya at Gbangu on (28 August 2017).

contribute to witchcraft accusation differently for different women. For Samatabila her relative economic success was the source of her accusation. But for Sapagbil, her poor socio-economic background influenced her accusation and movement to the camp.

One may ask why Samatabila was living in the camp at all but not in her community since she was self-reliant and had a brother to fight for her. In the interview she revealed to me that she had to make that choice even against her brothers' will to prevent future accusations and for the sake of her children being levelled sons and daughters of a witch. She told me;

Since, I left, many deaths of young men have occurred in the family. This could have been attributed to me but I was not in the village...Now my brothers are proud that I took the decision to come to this camp. They even wish I were home.<sup>15</sup>

For the avoidance of later accusation and the shame, and stigma involved, Samatabila opted to live in the camp. She was one the leaders in the camp at the time of this research. Being able to win the trust of the lord of the camp to become a leader tells us that she was indeed a responsible woman. She visited her hometown anytime she wanted and her brothers were even persuading her to leave the camp for home.

Let me compare Samatabila's experience to that of Kutam.

### ***The experience of Kutam***

Kutam was about 60 and the third oldest resident of the inmates of the camp. She began her story and in about 35 minutes of conversation, she told me of her experience:

My husband's brother accused me of bewitching his daughter. He beat me until I decided to run here. Actually my husband did not say anything. He was the one who was supposed to protect me. He defamed my character... He (accuser) owns him (her husband) and his house. If you live with your brother and he decides to treat your wife badly and you cannot say anything, is he not the owner of your house? I use to give birth and they die. You see, if you do not have anything (child) with a man and yet you are being maltreated, the only option is to leave him....the brother had children. I left the pigs I was keeping<sup>16</sup>.

Her husband's brother accused her and beat her till she ran from her marital home leaving behind her pigs. Her husband who was supposed to defend her could no defend her when she was being maltreated because her husband's brother was in a relatively better position. He had children, economically sound and owned the house Kutam and her husband then lived in. Kutam's husband had none of the above. Kutam had no child with her husband but was relatively younger when she was accused (about 30)

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Samatabila at Gambaga witches' camp on (4 August 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Kutam at Gambaga witches camp on (5 August 2017).

compared to all the inmates of the camp. Because she had no child with her husband and was accommodated by her husband's brother, she had to run when was being beaten. She first ran to her half-brothers. Her only brother then was just a kid. The senior most who could take a meaningful decision regarding her defence did not make any effort to settle the matter. For her, her own people were not ready to welcome her home by the fact that they did nothing to defend her.

Her accuser had children, had a house, economically better than Kutam and her husband. As a man and with children as his social assets, he was better off than Kutam and her husband who had no children. According to the accused, the man in question was rich in material terms, and the children as well as the house he had provided him a higher social status than Kutam and her husband as well as some level of security. Her going did not matter since she had no child (anything in the quote above) with her husband. Her statement suggest that the having children with her husband alone could have been a motivation for her to stay and or for her husband to fight for her. This shows us the value that is placed on having children as a married couple. Thus, children are a power resource for both accusers and the accused. Her husband's dependence on the brother for accommodation alone explains why he could not support his wife when she was accused. To defend her would have meant losing his accommodation. Kutam's relative younger age could not provide her the necessary power because her economic situation and her gender had disadvantaged her. This explains her lack of defence or security.

The power dynamics involved in the cases of these women make their experiences of accusations different from each other. Whereas, in both the cases above the women live in the camp, their living stemmed from different angles. Kutam's lack of defence stemmed from the fact her accuser was a man and had children as his social capital and rich whiles she had no children and lacked the support of her husband and her family members. These explain why she was beaten and was easily pushed out of her marriage and community for the witches' camp. Samatabila on the other hand, had defence, was economically sound, had the necessary connections and support from her paternal brothers, she was not beaten during her accusation, and could stay in her community if she had wanted.

### 3.5 Conclusions

Firstly, the findings showed gender as a major social category that influences witchcraft accusation. Women's susceptibility to allegation is not due to their gender. However, their vulnerability emanates from the constructed roles and expectations of women and men. Some institutional and structural arrangements locate some women in lower status of power making them experience witchcraft allegation and its associated violence differently than men and other women.

Secondly, socio-economic conditions of women make contribute to witchcraft accusation. Both relative success in economic ventures and poverty make women the target of witchcraft accusation. The differences between the relative well off women and the poor in relation to accusation is that those economically well off are also located in other social categories of higher status of power that work to their advantage amidst accusation whereas the poor women are usually located in other categories of low status of power make their experience of accusation and oppression different.

Thirdly, old age usually coupled with the status of widowhood and poor family backgrounds have proved crucial for the understanding of women's vulnerability to witchcraft branding and exiling. The majority of the women surveyed were widows and attested to being affiliated to and dependant on poor family members and as a result were defenceless when they were accused.

Fourthly, there are three levels of decision making in witchcraft accusation within the accused community thus; the family, the clan, and chief's palace and a decision could be arrived at any level. Before reaching the witch finding shrine at Gambaga at least one of these levels would have made a decision or consulted. And at all these levels, the interactions of all the categories mentioned above influence the decision making process. Having strong connections such as influential children, affiliation to royalty of good standing, being economically self-dependent as well as lack of them influences the final decision regarding accusation. These applies to the process of accusation since it is related to the decision making process.

#### 4 Conclusions

In this study, I attempted to give answers to how the intersection of gender, socio-economic conditions, and age influence the labelling of women as witches and its related violence. In chapter one, I presented the background to the study and the problem, engaged critically with relevant literature and formulated the questions for the research. I asked questions regarding who constitute major decision makers in witchcraft allegation, how the process of accusation occurs, and the experience of alleged witches in the midst of accusation in order to answer the main question.

In chapter two, I employed the concepts intersectionality and power in a bid to make meaning of the data collected from the field. Methodological strategies were also discussed in this chapter. Ethnography inspired the method of data generation. This allowed for the generation of data rich and in-depth enough for detailed analysis and made room for a good degree of reflexivity as well as considerations of power relations in the knowledge production process.

In chapter three, I presented my findings and analysis using the concepts intersectionality and power as analytical tools. Both concepts proved relevant for the study. Intersectionality helped in our understanding of how the locations of some women accused of witchcraft in multiple social categories (gender, socio-economic conditions, and old age) make their experiences of

accusation different than others because the interactions of such multiple identities can mutually strengthen or weaken each other. The concept power helped in making meaning of the decision making process and the process of accusation itself in witchcraft allegation. However, the process of using these concepts to analyse the issue under consideration was complex and dynamic.

Overall, gender, socio-economic conditions, and old age are key factors that influence accusation and related treatment. However, one of these categories or statuses of power considered in this research standing alone is inadequate to explain women's susceptibility to witchcraft allegation and its related violence. Being placed differently in multiple statuses of power makes the experience of allegation and banishment different from one individual to another. Depending on how many of these categories an accused person belongs to and whether they are high or low, she could be less vulnerable, more vulnerable, or not vulnerable at all. The interactions of gender with socio-economic conditions, and age, and their embeddedness in institutions and structures in the accused original communities influence the process of accusation, decision making regarding suspected witches.

Regarding future studies, a useful area of study could be a comparative study of witch-hunts in Ghana and India. This can show whether and how selected categories of power relations are relevant for the analysis of witchcraft accusation cases in different contexts. It can help provide information useful for policies needed to curb the problem and guide lines for their formulation and implementation. Undertaking the study ethnographically is recommended since it will require a good level of immersion in the cultures involve allowing for understanding and making meaning of the beliefs, practices and experiences, and could be an interesting and relishing experience.

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## Appendices

### ***Appendix 1: Questionnaire for inmates of Gambaga witches' camp***

The researcher is a student from the International Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University. The main purpose of this questionnaire is for the analysis of how the intersections of age, socio-economic conditions, social status, and tribal affiliation, and gender contribute to the branding of women as witches and the practice of banishment. The purpose of this research is purely academic and your anonymity is assured. Thank you for your willingness to assist in this research.

Please tick where appropriate

1. Age: .....
2. Sex:  
Female , Male
3. Tribe .....
4. Marital status:  
Single , Married , Divorced , Widowed
5. Educational attainment of respondent:  
Non , Basic , High school , Tertiary
6. Any affiliation to a royal family:  
Yes , No
7. Economic condition of husband or wife if married:  
rich , very rich , poor
8. Number of children: .....
9. Children's employment status:  
Retired , Peasant farming , Petty trading , dress making , others
10. Economic conditions of children:  
rich , very rich , poor
11. Educational attainment of children:  
Basic , High school , Tertiary , Non

## Appendix 2: Interview guide for inmates of camp

BACKGROUND INFORMATION	RESEARCH QUESTIONS
<p>Number of interview:</p> <p>Age:</p> <p>Tribe:</p> <p>Religion:</p> <p>Marital status:</p> <p>Occupation of husband:</p> <p>Number of children:</p> <p>Education of children:</p> <p>Occupation of children:</p>	<p><i>Main question</i></p> <p>How does the intersection of age, socio-economic conditions, social status, and tribal affiliation, and gender contribute to the branding of women as witches and the practice of banishment?</p> <p><i>Sub-questions</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How does the process of accusation occur? Who (in terms of their positioning in the community, etc.,) contributes to the accusation?</li> <li>2. Who are the major decision makers in accusation (in terms of their positioning within the community)?</li> <li>3. What are the experiences of alleged witches amidst accusation?</li> </ol>
<p><i>Opening questions</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can you tell me about the people you live with in this camp? Probe: children, grandchildren, other relatives</li> <li>2. What do you do during a normal day Probe: How often do you leave the house, go for meetings, go to greet, friends etc.</li> <li>3. How often do your relatives pay you visits? Probe: Monthly, yearly,</li> <li>4. When did you come here? Probe: how long have you been here</li> <li>5. What do you do for living here? Probe: working for money, for food etc.</li> </ol> <p><i>Questions about experience before moving to the camp</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. What work were doing you engaged in before you moved to this camp? Probe: were you farming, trading, or a house wife</li> <li>7. Do you have any property back in your community? Probe: house, land, animals</li> <li>8. Can you tell me why you decided or what made you leave your community? Probe: were you forced or you chose to come here</li> <li>9. When you were accused did your relatives try to defend you and how? Probe: husband, siblings, children, report to police etc.</li> <li>10. Who were your accusers, in terms of position in community? Probe: religious leaders, ordinary people, chief, others</li> <li>11. Who were the final decision makers in your banishment?</li> </ol>	

<p>Probe: yourself, chief, priest, etc.</p> <p>12. Were you aware where you could get help to resist your banishment?</p> <p>Probe: police, CHRAJ, Social Welfare department</p> <p><i>Questions on other social relations of power</i></p> <p>13. Do you think your tribe influence your branding?</p> <p>Probe: how</p> <p>Probe: being Mamprusi, Bimoba etc</p> <p>14. Do you think if your family members were influential you could be defended?</p> <p>Probe: rich, well connected, affiliated to sources of power</p> <p>15. Do you think being a woman matters in the accusation and banishment?</p> <p>Probe: how, why</p> <p>16. Did you have any affiliation with a powerful person(s) in your community?</p> <p>Probe: chief, assemble person, a religious leader, a rich person, educated</p> <p>17. Do you know or have heard of other people who were accused but were not banished?</p> <p>Probe: from your community, other places</p> <p>18. What do you think work for those who are accused but are not banished?</p> <p><i>Question regarding experiences in the camp</i></p> <p>19. Do you get any external support?</p> <p>Probe: from whom, what kind</p> <p>21. Do you hope to go back home?</p> <p><i>Closing questions</i></p> <p>22. What do you like about this camp?</p> <p>23. Have you made some friends in the camp and outside the camp?</p>	
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### *Appendix 3: Interview guide for participants of Gbangu community*

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Residence:

Tribe:

Education:

Occupation:

Religion:

#### *Opening questions*

1. What do you do in a normal day?
2. Can you tell me about some interesting moments in this community regarding women?  
Probe: women's gathering festival, community durbar
3. Can you tell me about some of the great moments you had with your grandmothers?
4. How many old women do you have in your family?
5. How do you perceive elderly women?

#### *Questions about witchcraft allegation*

6. How do people generally relate to elderly women in this community?  
Probe: support them, disrespect them, avoid them, accuse them of witchcraft
7. What do you think contribute to witchcraft accusation?  
Probe: old age, poverty, lack of strong family
8. Who usually make allegation of witchcraft?  
Probe: priest, family members, chief, enemies, others
9. Do you think all people suspected of being witches are accused and get banished?  
Probe: men, women, royals, educated, rich, poor
10. Do you think being influential in the community matter in who get accused?  
Probe: affiliation with a royal family, networking
11. Do you think being influential in the community matter in who get banished?
12. Do you think being a woman matter in witchcraft accusation and banishment?  
Probe: men also accused

13. What in your opinion will work for persons accused/ 'found guilty' but do not want to leave in witches' camp?  
Probe: networking, strong families, being rich

14. Who make the final decision in the accusation and banishment?  
Probe: chiefs, priest, family members

15. In what ways can you defend a close relative who is accused of witchcraft?  
Probe: file court suit, report to police

#### *Closing questions*

16. What do you like about elderly women in your family?
17. What would you be doing after this conversation?

***Appendix 4: Profile of participants interviewed***

<b>Pseudo Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Place</b>
Sapagbil	75	Female	Nil	Gambaga witches' camp
Samatabila	78	Famale	Nil	Gambaga witches' camp
Kayubu	70	Famale	Nil	Gambaga witches' camp
Kutam	60	Famale	Nil	Gambaga witches' camp
Manduaya	45	Famale	Trader	Gbangu
Biisi Naaba	69	Male	Farmer	Gbangu
Tarimbuni	70	Male	Farmer	Gbangu
Laar Sampson		Male	Manager	Gambaga witches' camp