

UIT

THE ARCTIC
UNIVERSITY
OF NORWAY

Faculty of Humanities, and Social Science and Education

BETWEEN ALIENATION AND BELONGING IN NORTHERN GHANA

The voices of the women in the Gambaga 'witchcamp'

Larry Ibrahim Mohammed

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By

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Cover Photo: Random pictures from the Kpakorafon in Gambaga

Photos taken by: Larry Ibrahim Mohammed

DEDICATION

To my parents:

Who continue to support me every stage of my life

To my precious wife:

Whose love and support all the years we have met is priceless.

To my daughters Naeema and Radiya:

Who endured my absence from home

To all lovers of peace and advocates of social justice:

There is light at the end of the tunnel

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ABSTRACT

While there have been numerous scholarly works on witchcraft beliefs, that of the phenomenon of ‘witchcamps’ are rare. In recent times, Ghana has come under the spotlight for being home to six settlements dedicated to sheltering ‘witches. These settlements are community-led initiatives that provide shelter for people accused of witchcraft. These ‘witchcamps’ are seen as a form of prisons where the rights of its inhabitant are curtailed. With its disproportionate number of women, various Governments have interpreted this phenomenon as a dent on the country’s image and they have variously signaled disbandment of the ‘camps’. However, the women in these so-called camps have protested the government’s intentions, claiming that it will jeopardize their safety.

The focus of my research is the Gambaga ‘witchcamp’. The methodology of this research is situated within the field of indigenous studies. It employs a post-colonial indigenous research paradigm which amongst other things, give prominence to the value systems, community beliefs and experiences of marginalized people. This study is the result of six weeks of fieldwork conducted in Ghana in the summer of 2019. During my fieldwork, I variously stayed in Gambaga, Accra and Tamale gathering data. I conducted interviews with some of the women accused of witchcraft, spoke a spiritual diviner and some members of the Gambaga community. Also, this study drew on archival materials in order to have an idea of how traditional values have been resilient in the lives of the local people.

My study interrogates three problems. Firstly, to understand the processes and events leading to a person settling in the witchcamp. Secondly, to find out reason was to find out the significance of the settlement to the local people. Finally, this study investigates why women formed the majority of those in the witchcamp.

The finding shows that contrary to public misconceptions, the so-called ‘witchcamp’ in Gambaga provides shelter and security to the women. The processes leading to an accused person settling in the witchcamp reveals a body of traditional and local conception of witchcraft belief. Finally, the study found out that while witches can be both men and women, accusations of witchcraft have typically been influenced by local conception of gender. Thus, a woman based on her ‘sex’ stood a greater risk of been accused of witchcraft.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

ABBREVIATIONS

GHP-	Go Home Project
NGO-	Non-Governmental Organization
ATR-	African Traditional Religion
PRAAD-	Public Records and Archival Administration Department

English is the official Language in Ghana. However, within rural Ghana local languages are very much used in domestic setting. Despite the fact that there several ethnic groups within the Gambaga district, the Mampruli language is widely spoken as the lingua franca. The following words in Mampruli and Hausa language, appear in italics throughout my thesis. I have provided proximate literal translation

GLOSSARY:

<i>Kpakorafon</i>	lit. ‘elderly women’s settlement’
<i>Soo</i>	lit. ‘witchcraft’ (or the practices of <i>Sonya</i>)
<i>Sonya</i>	lit. ‘witch’ (gender neutral)
<i>Sooba</i>	lit. ‘witches’ (gender neutral)
<i>Soa-doo</i>	lit. ‘wizard’ (or male counterpart to <i>Sonya</i>)
<i>Nosi-pohabu</i>	lit ‘Fowl divination ceremony to find out an accused witch
<i>Nyulisugi</i>	lit ‘Purification rites for an accused person to leave the Kpakorafon
<i>Gambarrana</i>	<i>lit</i> “Chief Priest of the Mamprusi people/Also chief of Gambaga.
<i>Mampruli</i>	<i>lit</i> The language of the Mamprusi people
Mamprusi	lit ‘Name of Ethnic Group/ Also refers to the territory under Mamprusi
<i>Bugara</i>	<i>lit</i> ‘Traditional/spiritual Diviner

Hausa terms

<i>Maeta</i>	lit. ‘witchcraft’
<i>Maaye</i>	lit. ‘witch’

Chapter one Introduction

“Until the lions have their own historians the tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter.”¹

1.1 General Introduction

As a young boy growing up in Nima a suburb of Accra in the late 1990s, the words ‘witchcraft’ (*maeta*) and ‘witch’ (*maaye*) were some of the early deposits in my vocabulary bank. My neighborhood called *Zongo*, consisted of people from different parts of Ghana and West Africa who have migrated to settle in Accra the capital of Ghana. Even though we all belonged to different ethnic groups, the Hausa language acted as our *lingua franca*. I lived in a large compound house with relatives and other neighbours. Yet one often hears *maaye* uttered in most cases as a pejorative in neighborhood disputes mostly among women. At the same time for the young ones like myself, we often utilize the same *maaye* in name-calling of our friends and age mates in appreciation of their spectacular talent and abilities. Thus, I grew up with the term ‘witchcraft’ having a double meaning in my mind.

Despite the double meaning which the word ‘witchcraft’ evokes for me, there was not a time I heard or saw anyone abused or maimed because they were called a witch. However, in November 2010, a 72-year old woman who was accused of witchcraft in a suburb of Accra was burned to death. The news shocked many and travelled far and wide through the international media such as the BBC and the Guardian reporting on the torture, confession and death of the accused witch.² Similar stories about witchcraft accusations have been reported in Papua New Guinea and many parts of Africa.³

¹ A southern Ghana proverb from the Akyem Ethnic Group.

² BBC, *Shock in Ghana over gruesome death of ‘witch’* (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-11848536>) 26th November 2010; The *Guardian*, *Ghanaian woman burned to death for being a ‘witch’*, 2010 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/29/ghanaian-woman-burned-death-witch>)

³ DailyMail, “Brutal Witch Hunt Bring Terror for Papua New Guinea”, 2019,

These reportage and other scholarly publications⁴ on both historical and contemporary witchcraft have stirred up contentious debates for two reasons. The first reason is on the nature of violence and fatalities which accompany witchcraft accusations. The other reason relates to how the topic of witchcraft has been conceived to be a symptom of a lack of development. Some publications writing from a different ontological and epistemological perspective do not see the plausibility of studying the phenomenon of witchcraft, arguing that modern scientific methods are not receptive to witchcraft ‘beliefs’ as they are non-factual.⁵ The net effect of this has been to ignore an introspective study of the values, practices and institutions about conceptions of witchcraft in different societies in a non-sensational manner.

Currently, there are no official laws for witchcraft trials in the law courts of Ghana. Indeed, Article 26(2) of the 1992 constitution of Ghana mentions that “*all customary practices which dehumanize or are injurious to the physical and mental well-being of a person are prohibited.*”⁶ Consequently, the State does not condone any case of witchcraft accusations as this cannot be proven in the law courts. Despite the democratic system of government which has made apparent a distinction between the traditional system of governance and secular democratic system there exists a phenomenon of ‘witchcamps.’

A ‘witchcamp’ is a settlement within a community where people accused of witchcraft live together. Depending on the circumstances of accusation, migration to the ‘witchcamp’ can be coerced or voluntary. There are currently six⁷ of these ‘witchcamps’ serving as homes for about

4 Golden, R. M., Satan in Europe: The Geography of Witch Hunts in B.P. LeVack (ed.) New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology, 6 Vol ii Witchcraft in Continental Europe (New York, 2001) 2-33; Roper, “Witch Craze : Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany”,2004,1919-23; Drucker-Brown S. Mamprusi Witcraft, subversion and Changing Gender Relations Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, Vol. 63 No. 4 (1993), pp. 531-549 Cambridge university Press; ActionAid Condemned without Trial; Women and witchcraft in Ghana London, September 2012

5 Roper, “Witch Craze : Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany”,2004,19

6 The 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution of Ghana, Article 26(2)

7 They are the Gambaga, Kuku, Gnani, Bonyanse, Nabuli and Kpatinga.

800 women and 500 children all located in northern Ghana.⁸ On the whole while the ‘witchcamps’ provide a safe haven for people accused of witchcraft. Some however see it as a form of exile.⁹

In 2011, the Government of Ghana declared it would close the ‘witchcamps.’¹⁰ It feared that their presence acted as a launchpad for witchcraft accusations driving people out of their communities. The majority of women who form about 90 per cent of the total population of the ‘camps’ have mounted resistance and called for improved conditions in the ‘camps’.¹¹ A symbolic act which emphasizes that shutting down the ‘camps’ is at best likened to curing the symptoms of a disease without necessary curing its cause. The focus of this thesis is on the ‘witchcamp’ in Gambaga’. It aims to shed lights on traditional belief systems, processes and events leading to resettling in the Gambaga ‘witchcamp’. The thesis also examines the relationship between accusations of witchcraft and gender.

In this chapter, I will provide a brief background to my study and outline my research questions. I will also explain my choice of situating this research within the field of indigenous studies.

1.2 The people of Gambaga and the ‘witchcamp’

Gambaga is one of the historical places in Ghana. It served as the capital of the Northern Territories during the British colonial Administration in 1897, before it moved to Tamale in 1907.¹² Apart from its political significance, Gambaga is also regarded as the spiritual sanctuary of the Mamprusi people. The Gambarrana (The Chief Priest) of the Mamprusi resides in Gambaga as the custodian of the Mamprusi deity. The Mamprusi; an ethnic group who founded the Mamprugu Kingdom in the 15th century, politically and militarily subdued the local indigenous tribes.¹³ Indigenous tribes such the Kusasi, Bimboba, Komba amongst others are all categorized as tribes living under the

⁸ ActionAid, “Condemned without Trial; Women and Witchcraft in Ghana”,2012,3

⁹ ActionAid, “Condemned without Trial; Women and Witchcraft in Ghana”,2012,5

¹⁰ ActionAid, “Condemned without Trial; Women and Witchcraft in Ghana”,2012,53

¹¹ ActionAid, “Condemned without Trial; Women and Witchcraft in Ghana”,2012,3

¹² Brukum, “The Northern Territories of the Gold Coast under British Colonial Rule, 1897-1956: A Study in Political Change”,1997,

¹³ Brukum, “Ethnic Conflict in Northern Ghana, 1980-1999: An Appraisal”,2000,131-47

traditional chieftaincy authority of the Mamprusi. The *Nayiri* (King of Mamprusi) is the head of Mamprugu Traditional Council¹⁴ and resides in Nalerigu a town about 8 kilometres from Gambaga.

The administrative district of Gambaga in the North Eastern Region of Ghana stretches over a territory of about 1660sq km, with a population of about 142,896 and 143 communities.¹⁵ With the exception of Gambaga township, Nalerigu and Langbinsi that have a population of at least 5000 people, the other communities account for 70 percent of the population and are mainly rural and dispersed. The people of Gambaga are traditionally farmers. Agriculture is the mainstay in Gambaga employing about 86 percent of the population. They cultivate yam, millet, sweet potatoes and millet and sorghum. Men mainly do farm with the women doing light labour during planting and harvesting. In the entire district of Gambaga, the Mamprusi account for about 58.8% of the population. Other tribes living under the district include the Konkomba, the Frafra, the Builsa and Bimoba. Mampruli, the language of the Mamprusi is widely spoken as the common language.

The social and cosmological landscape of the people of Gambaga accept the prevalence of *soo* (witchcraft). The Mamprusi in general, believe that a *sonya* (witch) could transform themselves into nocturnal beings to cause harm to people. According to Drucker-Brown, *Sooba* (witches) could also turn their victims into vegetables or bush meat and sell their souls for money.¹⁶ Also, *Sooba* are held capable of devouring (*wobri*) the souls of their victims.¹⁷ Public divinations were conducted in pre-colonial Mamprusi to find the cause of death of a relative.¹⁸ It was customary for a divination to be conducted three days after the death of a kinsman.¹⁹ In southern Ghana, the practice of ascertaining the cause of death was also practised amongst the Akans in southern

¹⁴ Mamprugu represents the original kingdom of Mamprusi. In modern times it covers the whole of North Eastern Region of Ghana. Other ethnic groups aside are considered part of the Mamprusi Kingdom

¹⁵ UNDPGhana, "East Mamprusi District Human Development Report 2011", 2011,

¹⁶ Drucker-Brown, "Mamprusi Witchcraft: Subversion and Changing Gender Relations", 1993,

¹⁷ Alhassan, "Interview with Amisu in Gambaga", 18 August 2019,

¹⁸ Adm./11/1/521: A short Essay on the History and Customs of the Mamprusi

¹⁹ Adm./11/1/521: A short Essay on the History and Customs of the Mamprusi

Ghana. Through the corpse-carrying divination, the deceased is shrouded in white and carried around the community. It was believed that if the death was caused by witchcraft, the corpse would guide the carriers to those responsible.²⁰ In a broader interpretation, these practices are akin to a form of post-mortem. Once conducted, it provides the family of the deceased a closure as they could seek spiritual retribution if the death were not from natural causes.

Physical violence amounting to torture are a common narration of witchcraft accusations across the globe. In European witchcraft trials for example torture was used to seek confessions from people accused of witchcraft. Indeed, as witchcraft was deemed as a crime incapable of been proven, legal procedures in Europe in the 16th century accepted torture as a way of seeking confessions.²¹ Confessions were referred to as the ‘queen of proof.’²² It is instructive to note that the acts of violence and torture is by no means a European monopoly. Gambia, Kenya and South Africa are some of the countries where violence has been meted out to women and children on witchcraft allegations.²³ In Ghana, there are communities who beat and injure people the accused of witchcraft. Many of these victims in the northern sector of Ghana have had to run away for their dear lives.

However, in Gambaga town, there is an elaborate system of traditional practices and rituals to determine once guilt or innocence without getting violent. A person accused as *sonya* must first submit themselves to a public divination ritual (*nosi-pohabu*) to determine their guilt or innocence. The fowl ritual as it also called, involves the killing of a fowl and allowing its final resting position to determine the outcome of the ‘trial’. A person found guilty can be disempowered from their *soo* in order to reunite with their families. However, some families who bring their relatives for the

²⁰ Gray, “The Politics of Policing Anti-Witchcraft Movements in Colonial Ghana”,2005,149-58 34

²¹ Willumsen, “Witches of the North: Scotland and Finnmark”,2013,

²² Durston, “Witchcraft and Witch Trials : A History of English Witchcraft and Its Legal Perspectives, 1542 to 1736”,2000,391

²³ Balsvik, “Religious Beliefs and Witches in Contemporary Africa”,2013,

‘trial’ reject accepting the accused, forcing them to stay in the ‘witchcamp’. (Find detailed discussion of the fowl ritual in chapter four).

The Gambaga ‘witchcamp’ like five others have been described variously in a negative light. They have been called ‘witches’ colony’²⁴ and the inhabitants referred to variously as ‘inmates’ and ‘outcast.’²⁵ The word ‘witchcamp’ itself projects the place in a negative light. ‘Witchcamp’ evokes an imagery of discomfort, squalor and lack of freedom. From my observation and interaction with my research participants the negative labels do not do justice to the real situation on the ground. In Gambaga, the name *Kpakorafon* (elderly women’s settlement) is used for the settlement housing those accused of *soo*. In order to represent the voice of the community, i will in my discussions use *Kpakorafon* as opposed to ‘witchcamp’. The word *Kpakora* (elderly women) is euphemistic title for the women residing there. This does not mean that only elderly women are found there. From my interaction with women, most of them have settled there for a couple of decades, indicating they were much younger from when they first arrived. The women I interviewed were industrious, full of wits with immense grace to their guests. As a matter of fact, some of the amenities available in the *Kpakorafon* such as the boreholes, a water storage, solar lamps have become a source of envy for many of the host communities. This is however not to suggest that the significance of the *Kpakorafon* only lies in its amenities. My thesis explores the voices of a cross section of the community regarding the spiritual and social value of the *Kpakorafon*.

1.3 Research Problem

Two main issues dominate the discussion of the *Kpakorafon* and accusations of *soo* which makes this study imperative. The first is about the spiritual divination ceremony for determining a *sonya*. The process has been criticized as unscientific, crude and lame. Yaaba Badoe for example declared that without the government’s intervention to disband the *Kpakorafon*, the fate of women will be

²⁴ Nangpaak, “The Gambaga “Witches” Colony: Its Artistic and Other Cultural Life”,2007,116

²⁵ Badoe, “The Witches of Gambaga: The Travails of a Group of 160 Women Accused of Witchcraft in Northern Ghana. Yaba Badoe, Reports.(Documentary)”,2011,64

decided “as it has always been over the past 100 years by the way a chicken dies.”²⁶ Observations from Badoe invariably paint the picture of a community and its people who have submitted themselves to a ceremony for decades if not a century without any form of a rationale. This calls for a methodological examination of what voices are presented when research is conducted.

The second issue regarding accusation of witchcraft is the gender dimension of witch accusations. In Mamprusi, the word *sonya* is gender-neutral. However, many women more than men have been accused of *soo*. Diane Lyons (1998) and Willumsen observed that women accused of witchcraft do not get the same treatment as men.²⁷ In Finnmark Northern Norway, about four-fifths of those accused and tried for witchcraft in the seventeenth century were women.²⁸ However, majority of those tried of witchcraft amongst the Sami were men because of their role as shamans.²⁹ In northern Ghana despite the fact that majority of the diviners are men, women make the majority of those accused. This study will explore the reason for this.

1.4 Research Questions

In line with indigenous research ethics which encourages the consultation of the researched,³⁰ I collected inputs from my research participants on what they would like me to address in my research. I asked the representative of the Gambarrana and my other research participants what they would like me to address in my research. Each person I spoke with gave me the impression that they would like me to ‘tell their stories.’ I shared my research questions and I had inputs regarding what this research should address. In this light, this research aims to interrogate the following questions:

²⁶ Yaba, “The Witches of Gambaga”, 2011, 55 see also

Inside Ghana’s witchcraft Refugee Camp, (2015) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4wdmPWD9nk> description of trailer video (https://www.amazon.com/dp/B06XKGP262/ref=cm_sw_r_cp_ep_dp_jZUGzbEVNNH49

²⁷ Lyons, “Witchcraft, Gender, Power and Intimate Relations in Mura Compounds in Déla, Northern Cameroon”, 1998, 344-62 Pfister, “Women in Sport - Gender Relations and Future Perspectives I”, 2010, 234-48, Willumsen, “Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials in Scotland and Northern Norway”, 2008, 264

²⁸ Willumsen, “Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials in Scotland and Northern Norway”, 2008, 93

²⁹ Willumsen, “Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials in Scotland and Northern Norway”, 2008, 259

³⁰ Smith, “Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples”, 2012, 175

1. How does an accused *sonya* end up in the Gambaga Kpakorafon?
2. What is the significance of the Kpakorafon to local community of Gambaga?
3. Why are the majority of the people in the Kpakorafon women?

1.5 Indigeneity in the Ghanaian Context

Indigeneity as a theoretical concept applicable to indigenous peoples has been difficult to define. This is due to the different situations of indigeneity across the world. Ethnic groups in the northern part of Ghana are classified under indigenous and invading tribes. Invading tribes like the Mamprusi, the Nanumba Dagomba and the Gonja came to exercise control of over their current territories through what historians describe as ‘wars of conquest’³¹ The minority tribes with a non-centralized system of government are known as the indigenous. Some of the violent ethnic conflicts in northern Ghana were fought along the lines of ‘indigenous’ vs ‘invading ethnic’ groups with the former demanding for recognition and resources. The Guinea Fowl War of 1992 between the indigenous tribe of Konkomba and the invading Nanumba is one of the catastrophic ethnic clashes in Ghana’s history.³²

The United Nations follows the path of some scholars in suggesting a relaxed definition for the word ‘indigenous’.³³ They argue that indigeneity differs from context to content.³⁴ The UN adopted the concept of a ‘working definition’ giving indications and pointers as opposed to a strict definition. According to Saugestad, the working definition by the UN has stood the test of time as it highlights four key criteria. They are a priority in time in place, voluntary perpetuation of cultural

³¹ Anamzoya, “Introduction: Managing Chieftaincy and Ethnic Conflicts in Ghana”,2016,6-32

³² Brukum, “Ethnic Conflict in Northern Ghana, 1980-1999: An Appraisal”,2000,131-47 Mohammed, “Fighting for Peace: Assessing the Role of the Government in the Guinea Fowl War of 1994”,2018,

³³ Dahl, “The Indigenous Space and Marginalized Peoples in the United Nations”,2012, Saugestad, “Contested Images: First Peoples or Marginalized Minorities in Africa”,2001,

³⁴ Dahl, “The Indigenous Space and Marginalized Peoples in the United Nations”,2012,

distinctiveness, experience of subjugation and marginalization and the desire for self-determination.³⁵

However, this criterion when applied to many African contexts generates complexities. Firstly, most African societies share a common experience of colonialism with Indigenous peoples. For example, the Mamprusi Kingdom officially became part of the British Colony in 1907.³⁶ During colonialism, aspects of Mamprusi's cultural distinctiveness clashed with European ideals. Some aspect of traditional beliefs and ceremonies in relation to witchcraft practices were outlawed. For example, the colonial government in 1932 passed the witchcraft and wizard finding order of 1932 to criminalize certain aspects of public divination regarding "witch" finding.³⁷ On the other hand, however, the history of Mamprusi as an invading ethnic group into northern Ghana points to a situation of internal colonialism. On the whole, not all colonized people in Africa are indigenous, especially in the United Nations mainly because of the end to colonial rule.³⁸

1.5.1 Situating my research within Indigenous Studies

Despite the distinction between two forms of colonialism in Ghana above I situate my thesis in the field of indigenous studies. I do this in order to utilize research methodologies which communicate knowledge, from the frame of those whose ways of life have witnessed marginalization. Linda Smith observes that for many indigenous peoples, the word research is looked upon as 'dirty word.'³⁹For Smith, research is inextricably connected to European colonialism.⁴⁰ As a tool for delineating power relations, research has been used to miscommunicate indigenous people's realities. As an indigenous Maori, Smith details in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies* of how

³⁵ Saugestad, "Contested Images: First Peoples or Marginalized Minorities in Africa",2001,5

³⁶ Brukum, "The Northern Territories of the Gold Coast under British Colonial Rule, 1897-1956: A Study in Political Change",1997,

³⁷ Gray, "Witches, Oracles, and Colonial Law: Evolving Anti-Witchcraft Practices in Ghana, 1927-1932",2001,339-63

³⁸ Barume, "Land Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Africa : With Special Focus on Central, Eastern and Southern Africa",2010,

³⁹ Smith, "Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples",2012,1

⁴⁰ Smith, "Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples",2012,1

European imperialism have imparted disciplines of knowledge. Smith's approach to overcoming this power imbalance created through research is to decolonize methodologies to include the perspectives and realities of the researched in a non-judgmental manner. This perspective which hitherto has been ignored due to 'ontological conflicts' has become a core aspect of indigenous knowledge systems. Bagayele Chilisa shares similar experiences of how some western conceptions of knowledge are forcefully projected on former colonized societies with different epistemological and ontological viewpoints.⁴¹

I approach my study of the Kpakorafon, its attendant traditional processes and ceremonies and information communicated to me by the elderly women of Gambaga as a form of indigenous knowledge. According to Chilisa, Indigenusness in the African context is the "traditional norms, social values and mental constructs that guide, organize and regulate the African way of living and how the African makes sense of the world."⁴² Sometimes, indigenous knowledge is used interchangeably with traditional knowledge. These two concepts are used to distinguish between forms of knowing originated by a non-western tradition.⁴³ As a result my research will draw on strategies of Linda Smith and the post-colonial indigenous research paradigm by Bagayele Chilisa.

1.6 Thesis outline

This chapter provided the general background to the Kpakorafon and the people of Gambaga. It also presents the research problems for this study. It finally explains the rationale for choosing to ground this research within an indigenous research paradigm. My thesis is organized in six chapters. Chapter two will present the literature and theoretical framework for the discussion of my research questions. Chapter three has the detailed explanations of my methodology and sources. Drawing from my interviews and archival materials, chapter four and five present and discusses my three research questions. Specifically, chapter four constructs conceptions of *soo* in Mamprusi and how an accused *sonya* arrives in the Kpakorafon. The chapter also discusses the

⁴¹ Chilisa, "Indigenous Research Methodologies",2012,

⁴² Chilisa, "Indigenous Research Methodologies",2012,99

⁴³ Grenier, "Working with Indigenous Knowledge : A Guide for Researchers",1998,98

social status of the Kpakorafon. Chapter five discusses gender and witchcraft accusations. It presents the voices of the elderly women in light of current critical gender discourse. Chapter six provides the highlight of what has been discussed in this thesis while giving my general reflections on my research questions.

Chapter Two: Theory and Literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents literature on the theory and conceptual framework underpinning this thesis. As indicated in my introduction, this research aims at exploring two broad issues. Namely, traditional knowledge systems and the position of women in society. Specifically, this research explores the concept of witchcraft and ‘witchcamps’ in Northern Ghana and to find out why women have been the majority of those accused of witchcraft. Consequently, I employ and present materials from multi-disciplinary concepts in religion, gender, and peace studies towards the discussion of my research questions.

2.2 Indigenous Religions

The African Traditional Religion (ATR), like many Indigenous religions, has been a subject of several anthropological mockeries. Most often, practices and values of these communities have been described from a perspective that robs them of their agency. Earlier anthropologists and historians alike have referred to various traditions of the African society with terms such as ‘animism’, ‘paganism’ and ‘superstition.’⁴⁴ These labels, from a Euro-western point of view, suggests that African societies were not sophisticated enough to have a well-established religious system.

What then, is considered a religion? Religion is a difficult term to define. Morton Klass suggests that religion is an:

*instituted process of interaction among the members of that society-and between them and the universe at large as they conceive it to be constituted-which provides them with meaning, coherence, direction, unity, easement and whatever degree of control over events they perceive as possible.*⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1

⁴⁵ Klass, “Ordered Universes : Approaches to the Anthropology of Religion”, 1995, 20

The definition from Klass presents the view that religion can be societal and does not necessarily be a large-scale movement. This view of religion tends to support John S. Mbiti's claim that African Traditional Religion is cultural-specific. Even though Mbiti concedes that while individual ethnic groups have their customs and values, the African Traditional Religion operates under two broad philosophy. Firstly, the African religion permeates every aspect of life.⁴⁶ As a result, Mbiti notes that there is hardly the distinction between the sacred and the secular or the spiritual and the material life.⁴⁷

The second aspect of the assumption underlying the African Traditional Religion is that, religion is not necessarily for the individual but the community.⁴⁸ Indeed, the communal nature of the African religion is by far one of its strongest tenets. The saying "I am because we are, and we are because I am" reflects the collective spirit of African communities.⁴⁹ Thus, ATR, like many other components of the African society, is construed as relational. It thrives on relationships between humans, animals, the universe, and the cosmic order.⁵⁰

Consequently, communal wellbeing has a link with many African rituals and belief systems. This says Mbiti makes Individuals in a community feel obliged to participate in ceremonies, rituals, and festivals of their communities.⁵¹ Relating the extent of the pervasiveness of witchcraft beliefs in Ghana, Jon Kirby, for instance, asserts that the phenomenon of witchcraft “involves more than just the accused witches and their victims; it involves whole communities.”⁵² This is because

⁴⁶ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2

⁴⁷ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2

⁴⁸ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1

⁴⁹ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 204

⁵⁰ Chilisa, *Indigenous research methodologies* 168

⁵¹ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy* 198

⁵² Jon, K *Towards a Christian Response to Witchcraft in Northern Ghana* International Bulletin for Missionary Research Vol 39. (No.Parker, “Witchcraft, Anti-Witchcraft and Trans-Regional Ritual Innovation in Early Colonial Ghana: Sakrabundi and Aberewa, 1889/1910”,2004,393-4201) 20

communities have a set of values, belief systems and institutions which reflects the religious needs of their people. Kirby therefore argues that ‘witchcamps’ are a communal creation.⁵³

2.2.1 Mystic Power, the use of Magic and Witchcraft

Magic and witchcraft are intrinsically linked to mystic power. Mystical power defies scientific explanations but are widely accepted as a real phenomenon in African societies.⁵⁴ According to Mbiti, two opinions within academia regarding mystic power are popular. Firstly, those that discount and dismiss mystic power as unscientific and unreal.⁵⁵ The other view considers the African viewpoints and respects the realities of its people.⁵⁶

Mbiti notes that mystic power itself is not inherently good or bad, it is dependent on how the power is used.⁵⁷ Likewise, there is a distinction between good and evil magic; in that good magic is used for the welfare of the community while evil magic harms others.⁵⁸ Access to these mystical powers is hierarchical and can be acquired from the spirits, living elderly people, or ancestors. Its mode of transmission can be through spoken words or conjuring various non-verbal forms of curses such as dance.

In Africa, cases abound of spectacular instances where mystical power through magic has caused people to walk on fire, send curses to harm people from afar, or spit on snakes to cause them to split open.⁵⁹ J.H Neal, an Englishman and a former colonial investigator in the Gold Coast, recounts numerous experiences with mystical powers, which he formerly discounted.⁶⁰

⁵³ Jon, K *Towards a Christian Response to Witchcraft in Northern Ghana* 20

⁵⁴ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy* 198

⁵⁵ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy* 200

⁵⁶ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy* 200

⁵⁷ Mbiti, “African Religions & Philosophy”, 1969, 197

⁵⁸ Klass, “Ordered Universes : Approaches to the Anthropology of Religion”, 1995, 28

⁵⁹ Mbiti, “African Religions & Philosophy”, 1969, 198

⁶⁰ As an investigator for the colonial government, J.H Neal compiled a memoir which he published in 1966. In J.H Neal *Ju-ju in my life* (London 1966) Neal recounts instances where he came close to tragedies but was saved through some of the amulets and protections he obtained from local traditional diviners.

Witchcraft, another contentious word, is understood differently around the world. Randi Ronning Balsvik, like Mbiti, notes that witchcraft is closely related to the terms magic and sorcery.⁶¹ Balsvik further asserts that witchcraft as a concept “refers to the ability some people have of causing supernatural powers to interfere in the lives of fellow human beings to the detriment of their welfare. The forces are invisible and used to cause bad luck, sickness and even death.”⁶²

Despite such succinct definition, some indigenous scholars critique the use of the term ‘supernatural.’ In most indigenous societies, Klass argues, there is often not a distinction between ‘natural’ as against ‘supernatural.’⁶³ Klass states that the category of ‘supernatural’ limits reality to what the ethnographer believes to be true, thereby limiting its usefulness in a cross-cultural study.⁶⁴ In effect Klass advocates that the use of magic as a form of the ‘supernatural,’ should be interpreted as a strategy of religion akin to prayer or sacrifice.⁶⁵

Mbiti on the other hand, describes witchcraft as all kinds of evil mystic powers employed secretly.⁶⁶ It is the negative energies dispensed from witchcraft, which makes society view whoever practices it as a social misfit. When someone is found to have exercised mystical powers in a wrong way like witchcraft, the person faces 'communal' sanctions. This bring us to another related concept, ‘evil.’

⁶¹ Balsvik, *Religious beliefs and witches in contemporary Africa 2*

⁶² Balsvik, *Religious beliefs and witches in contemporary Africa 2*

⁶³ Klass, M *Ordered Universes Approaches to the Anthropology of Religion 29*

⁶⁴ Klass, “Ordered Universes : Approaches to the Anthropology of Religion”,1995,29

⁶⁵ Klass, “Ordered Universes : Approaches to the Anthropology of Religion”,1995,29

⁶⁶ Mbiti, “African Religions & Philosophy”,1969,198

2.2.2 Moral and Natural Evil

If both traditional priests' divination and witchcraft use the same magic as a form of a religious strategy why then, Russel questions, is an accused witch made to suffer different forms of punishment if they use the same tactics?⁶⁷

In ATR, there is a distinction between *moral evil* and *natural evil*. Moral evil emanates from people's bad characters, which affects the social order of the community.⁶⁸ Some examples of moral evil include exercising bad magic to cause harm to another person or transgressing communal laws or taboos. If someone who commits a moral evil is not punished, it is believed that brings about calamities to the community.⁶⁹ Thus, if one harms anyone in the community, it is as if they hurt the whole community. However, punishment to an act of moral evil is only possible if one is found guilty of a crime and the person is apprehended.

Natural evil, on the other hand, is thought about as a form of retributive justice from higher beings or spiritual artifacts.⁷⁰ In other words, the punishment from natural evil is non-personal. Some of the actions categorized under natural evil include breaking sacred covenants, committing incest and other acts considered to be grave. In Ghana for example, spiritual shrines for anti-witchcraft purposes were present in many towns around southern Ghana. According to John Parker, these anti-witchcraft cults offered charms and amulets as protection like vaccines against witchcraft attacks.⁷¹ As a result, it is believed that the protection could trigger a voluntary confession from

⁶⁷ Russel, Jeffrey *Witchcraft: Conceptions of Witchcraft* in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, vol. 15. M. Eliade, ed. New York: Macmillan, 417. Goody, "Legitimate and Illegitimate Aggression", 1970,

⁶⁸ Mbiti, "African Religions & Philosophy", 1969, 212

⁶⁹ Mbiti, "African Religions & Philosophy", 1969, 212

⁷⁰ Mbiti, "African Religions & Philosophy", 1969, 213

⁷¹ Parker, John. *Witchcraft, Anti-witchcraft and Trans-Regional Ritual Innovation in early colonial Ghana: Sakrabundi and Abrewa, 1889-1910*

an aggressive witch or cause their sanity.⁷² Their affliction will then be seen as a result of a natural evil.

At the community level, however, the punishment for practicing witchcraft falls under the retribution for moral evil. This is because various societies employ different ways of verifying allegations of witchcraft accusations. While the processes used for verification could result in acquittal or banishment, people accused of witchcraft have sometimes suffered from death. Traditional diviners or shamans and, in some cases, community chiefs usually lead these ritual processes. It is therefore not surprising for one to witness an elaborate system of witchcraft trials with local African communities.

Coming back to Russel's question as to why witches use of magic is punished and not a shaman's? Klass explains that the Shaman taps on the good magic for the benefit of the community.⁷³ And this is reflected in helping bewitched people to embrace freedom, helping to cure them averting disasters, and carrying the burdens of the city⁷⁴. Mbiti asserts that in the African Traditional Religion, the concept of a future reward or punishment like hell or paradise in the hereafter is nonexistent.⁷⁵ A reason why those who work against the community welfare must bear the penalties of their actions.

In contemporary times, some of the traditional modes of trial and punishment have come under the microscope for their human rights abuses. Civil societies like action Aid, Amnesty international amongst others have called on modern governments to act towards ending extra-judicial procedures of justice. While some of the practices within African societies have evolved to accommodate changing pressures on tradition, the call to action from many angles demand for it to be done away with. In the case of Gambaga, the issues have been on women's right and also the

⁷² Parker, J. *Witchcraft, Anti-witchcraft and Trans-Regional Ritual Innovation in early colonial Ghana: Sakrabundi and Abrewa, 1889-1910*

⁷³ Klass, M *Ordered Universes Approaches to the Anthropology of Religion* 77

⁷⁴ Klass, M *Ordered Universes Approaches to the Anthropology of Religion* 77

⁷⁵ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*

veracity of traditional divination processes. The case of the Kpakorafon presents interesting revelations and tensions between global pressures and local demands. Chapter four of this thesis will discuss what Kpakorafon mean to the local people of Gambaga.

The next discussion in this chapter will present literature and some theoretical concepts on gender and why women have mostly suffered from accusations of witchcraft.

2.3 Women and the accusations of witchcraft

Several pieces of literature have attempted to explain why women have been most of the accused regarding witchcraft. From my readings, I observed two broad trajectories of why women have faced immense accusations of witchcraft. The first school of thought, which I call the *nature model*, basically ascribes accusation of witchcraft to women because of their natural traits and sex. In Historical Europe, for instance, Liv Helene Willumsen opines that the smooth spread of folklores and stories of fairies about witchcraft resulted in many women confessing to witchcraft.⁷⁶ In her book, Willumsen provides numerous evidences in Northern Scotland of how women have made false testimonies based on stories they have heard from other people. She asserts that women especially those in the category peasant were far more eager to accept and spread hearsays about witchcraft.⁷⁷ In addition, Willumsen highlights European ideas from the doctrine of demonology as a cause for predominance of women during witchcraft trials, as in demonological thought, women were feeble, weak, easy to seduce, and inclined to evil. According to this view, women were an easy prey for the devil, entered into a pact with him.⁷⁸

In an article by Ada Petriczko, Adan Barwinski and Ana-Maria Luca, the authors point out that rebellious women were burnt at the stake for alleged witchcraft activities.⁷⁹ They explain that the

⁷⁶ Willumsen, “Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials in Scotland and Northern Norway”,2008,

⁷⁷ Willumsen, “Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials in Scotland and Northern Norway”,2008,

⁷⁸ Willumsen, “Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials in Scotland and Northern Norway”,2008,

⁷⁹ Petriczko A., Barwinski A., Luca.AM *Witch hunt: Rebellious women, then and now*

women who were accused as a result of their accurate predictions of the weather and for standing up against their neighbours mostly men were seen to be aggrieved.⁸⁰ Indeed, they assert that much of early social theorizing and crusade pitched women against men in order to subordinate women. Citing Heinrich Kramer in his *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of witches) they recounted this quote: "When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil"⁸¹ Esther Goody reinforces this perspective when she argued that the "idealized pattern of gender relation" in Ghana has denied women the possibility of "legitimate expression of aggressive emotions"⁸² To Goody virtuous and cultured women are supposed to be calm and submissive.⁸³

However, the drawback with this school of thought is that it does not adequately explain why some men have also been accused of witchcraft. Even though accused women have been the majority, there are areas in historical Europe where men have been the majority of those persecuted of witchcraft.⁸⁴ Indeed, some of my research participants were of the view that *sonya-doppa* (wizards) were more aggressive.⁸⁵ Thus if witchcraft is seen as a tool for silencing women, it could be as much good for men.

The second school of thought regarding why women are mostly accused relates to what I call the *economic model of empowerment*. Writing on contemporary experiences of women in Gambaga, Susan Drucker-Brown opines that the increasing cases of accused women as witches is the result of changing economic situations.⁸⁶ Drucker-brown explains that women's access to economic opportunities makes them financially independent and this acts as the sources of accusation. While

⁸⁰ Petriczko A., Barwinski A., Luca. *AM Witch hunt: Rebellious women, then and now*

⁸¹ Kramer Heinrich *Malleus Maleficarium* 1(487) cited in Petriczko A., Barwinski A., Luca. *AM Witch hunt: Rebellious women, then and now*

⁸² Goody, Esther N. 1970. 'Legitimate and illegitimate aggression', in M. Douglas (ed.), *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, ASA Monographs, No. 9. London: Tavistock. 212 Goody, "Legitimate and Illegitimate Aggression", 1970,

⁸³ Goody, Esther *Legitimate and illegitimate aggression* Goody, "Legitimate and Illegitimate Aggression", 1970,

⁸⁴ Willumsen, "Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials in Scotland and Northern Norway", 2008,

⁸⁵ Talaata, "Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga", 19 August 2019, Zainab, "Interview with Zainab", 20 August,

⁸⁶ Drucker-Brown, *Mamprusi Witchcraft, subversion and Changing Gender Relations*

this explanation sounds plausible, it does not explain why women since historic times been the majority of those accused.

The economic explanatory model has gained traction in other parts of Africa as well, where women's engagement in economic activities presented a challenge to male dominance. The term '*absentee husbands*' Which has been coined refers to men who are physically present at home but are unable to contribute economically to the upkeep of the house.⁸⁷ The effect of this is seen in tensions of traditional roles where men feel disempowered because of increasing income disparities. The study in Tororo district in Uganda by Akella Zerupa reveals that women's ability to save and engage in trade has endowed them with the economic muscle, which is threatening domestic power relations. As a result, women in Tororo face increasing domestic abuse and pejorative name-calling.⁸⁸

Both the nature and the economic model schools of thought have had support from feminist movements and other international NGOs who have engaged both social and academic campaigns interrogating gender relations in Ghana. Yaba Badoe, a journalist and an ethnographer produced an award-winning documentary on the lives of the Gambaga women. Badoe's documentary captured the stories leading to the women's journey to exile. In another subsequent article published in the *Feminist Africa Journal*, Badoe asserts that the stories of the women interviewed testified to a society where women who are determined, assertive and resistant to male dominance are labeled as witches.⁸⁹ Surprisingly, however, Badoe's interview with the elderly women in Ghana did omit some contentious but crucial information. For example, both the video exposition and the article dwell on the violent aspect of accusations giving little concern to what the women

⁸⁷ Zerupa A. The Untold Realities: Men's reactions to Women's 'Economic Muscle' and the Implications for Poverty Transitions in Rural Uganda in *Gender, Power and Social Transformations* (ed.) Kyomuhendo, G.B et al. Kampala 2014

⁸⁸ Zerupa A. The Untold Realities: Men's reactions to Women's 'Economic Muscle'

⁸⁹ Badoe Y. *Representing witches in contemporary Ghana: challenges and reflections on making the 'witches of Gambaga African Feminist engagement with film* *Feminist Africa* 16: July 2012 African Gender Institute 90

think about the subject of witchcraft and what empowerment meant to the women. My thesis will focus in part to discuss what some of the elderly women think about these omitted topics in Badoe's work.

From the discussions so far, it can be inferred that a number of theorizing regarding why women are accused of witchcraft have normally been because of their sex as females. Either through natural traits or the economic threat they pose to men. This in part has given some credence to why many feminists have taken the issue of witchcraft and witch accusation as a personal crusade. From this observation, two questions become critical to ponder on. Firstly, the question of how the elderly women in Gambaga can be empowered while respecting their agency. Secondly, whether accusations of witchcraft are simply carried out because one is either male or female? The following theoretical discussions will set the tone for the analysis of these questions.

2.4 Foundations; Feminism and the Feminist Fraternity

According to Janet Radcliffe Richards, the fundamental claim by feminists is that “women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex.”⁹⁰ The various struggles by women in the industrialized world especially saw the birth of a movement of women feminist. Feminism as a movement of women has moved through different epochs categorized into the first wave, second wave and so on. These epochs speak to the changing social activism of women for equality starting with the activism for the right of women to exercise their franchise as equal citizens with men.⁹¹ It was also a period were women forcefully asserted that the concept of gender is a social construct claiming that gender differences "was not ordained by nature".⁹² Indeed, they argued, that gender "was mutable and changeable".⁹³ By challenging the concepts of social roles based on sex, early feminists decried a society were both social and cultural institutions gave men advantage over women. Richards puts this bluntly when she reflects that " if you consider the past, there is no

⁹⁰ Richards, “The Sceptical Feminist : A Philosophical Enquiry”,1982,

⁹¹ Whicker, M.L and Kronenfeld, J.J *Sex role Changes* 125

⁹² Whicker, M.L and Kronenfeld, J.J *Sex role Changes* 124

⁹³ Whicker, M.L and Kronenfeld, J.J *Sex role Changes*; 124

doubt at all, that the whole structure of society was designed to keep women entirely in the power of men."⁹⁴

Due to this, liberal feminism has since developed into an ideological frame with a set of strategies and objectives. For lack of space, I will highlight two of the tenets underpinning the feminist ideology in this thesis and present a counterbalancing view from critical feminist perspectives. The First off, a feature of liberal feminism is the conviction in the power of the voices of all women as a catalyst for their liberation. This feature of liberal feminist movements is commonly referred to as the concept of *Sisterhood*.⁹⁵ The concept speaks to the collective aspiration of women to be free from the domination of men and also to provide support for each other in their fight for emancipation. The strength of this vision lies in the collective resolve among women to work together as equals and draw strength from each other's experiences.⁹⁶ In the women's movement the 'equality of all sisters' is a form of solidarity in the fight against the structures of societal domination. Robin Morgan, at one point speaks about the global solidarity amongst women when she envisioned a World-Wide Women's Movement.⁹⁷ A movement which will advocate for the equality of all 'sisters' dwelling on the primacy of their experiences.⁹⁸ Sheila Rowbotham stretches the importance of Sisterhood to argue for the futility of women working in isolation. Rowbotham avers that;

...No woman can stand alone and demand liberation for others because by doing so, she takes away from other women the capacity to organize and speak for themselves. Also, she presents no threat. An individual emancipated' woman is an amusing incongruity, a titillating commodity, easily consumed.⁹⁹

From the quote above, it can be said that liberal feminism in principle, is receptive to the experiences of all women and the urgency of working together for the collective good. However,

⁹⁴ Richards, "The Sceptical Feminist : A Philosophical Enquiry", 1982, 276

⁹⁵ Janet Radcliffe Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist* 28 Richards, "The Sceptical Feminist : A Philosophical Enquiry", 1982,

⁹⁶ Janet Radcliffe Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist* 6

⁹⁷ Morgan, R (ed.) *Sisterhood is Powerful* (New York) 1970

⁹⁸ Morgan, R (ed.) *Sisterhood is Powerful* (New York) 1970

⁹⁹ Rowbotham, Shiela. *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (Harmonsworth) 1974, 12

there have been two main critiques to liberal feminism on the concept of Sisterhood. First, there is a critique from some liberal feminists who assert that the idea when taken too deeply risk running it into challenges.¹⁰⁰ Richards explains that while it is valid that all experiences of women irrespective of their class should be valued, asking that every woman's opinions should matter will hold the feminist movement back.¹⁰¹ The view from Richards is also that the women's movement will be better if they focused on women with 'special' skills' so that they are not lost in favour of the collective voice.¹⁰² The challenge with this point of view is that it gives a sense of priority to those who are thought-about as vocal or educated while ignoring other women who may be less influential.

The second criticism of the concept of Sisterhood has come from critical feminist perspective, namely, post-colonial feminist on the one hand and indigenous feminist on the other. They note with disappointment of how liberal feminism has attempted to silence alternative expressions of women's realities. Oyeronke Oyewumi, views the claim of Sisterhood with suspicion. She accused liberal feminism of *Sisterachy*; the situation where some feminist perspectives weight heavier than others.¹⁰³ Rauna Kuokkanen, also called on liberal feminist to eschew academic and colonial arrogance and to respect other realities in academic discourse.¹⁰⁴ I shall return to the underlying thoughts of post-colonial and indigenous feminist in the next section of this chapter.

Feminism has grown into several strands. Below I will present two critical feminist perspectives which I intend to incorporate in my discussions on what empowerment means to the elderly women of Gambaga living in the Kpakorafon.

¹⁰⁰ Janet Radcliffe Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist* 29

¹⁰¹ Janet Radcliffe Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist* 29

¹⁰² Janet Radcliffe Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist* 30

¹⁰³ Oyewumi, "The Invention of Women", 2014,

¹⁰⁴ Kuokkanen, "Decolonizing Feminism in the North: A Conversation with Rauna Kuokkanen", 2015, 275-81

2.4.1 Gender and Critical Feminist Approaches

It is significant to point out that critical feminist perspectives recognize the essential contributions of liberal feminism in the advancement of women's welfare. Some critical feminist asserts that liberal feminism has taken the discourse of feminism from private spheres to the public arena, giving women a voice and collective purpose.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, though, the strength from liberal feminism in terms of the developments of concepts and theories have posed challenges to other communities who have divergent experiences.¹⁰⁶ The discussions below is on post-colonial and Indigenous perspectives exploring the assumption of the subordination of women as a marginalized category. If women are a marginal category, what options are there for women within African communities who are the majority of those accused of witchcraft.

Post-colonial feminism has challenged how liberal feminist theories ontologically construes 'sex' and 'gender.' Oyeronke Oyewumi, in her *invention of women* notes that sex and gender in liberal feminist discourse were premised on the notion that physical bodies (sex) corresponded with social roles (gender).¹⁰⁷ She called this notion *biological determinism*, which is the conception of a woman "based on body type and elaborated in relation to and in opposition to another category man". Oyewumi further asserts that despite the changing nature of western philosophical thoughts, the 'body' was, for the most part, constant and was the tool for ascribing differences and hierarchies in society.¹⁰⁸ As a result she concludes that "the presence of certain organs determined social positions" in western society.¹⁰⁹ Oyewumi cautions against transposing liberal notions to other societies whose epistemologies differ from liberal feminism.

In another article *Conceptualizing Gender*, Oyewumi notes that

¹⁰⁵ Oyewumi, O *Conceptualizing gender: the Eurocentric foundations of feminist concepts and the challenge of African epistemologies* published (2002) published online and accessible at

<http://awdflibrary.org/handle/123456789/582?show=full>

¹⁰⁶ Oyewumi, "Conceptualizing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concepts and the Challenges of African Epistemologies", 2002, 1

¹⁰⁷ Oyewumi, "The Invention of Women", 2014, 448

¹⁰⁸ Oyewumi, Oyewumi, "The Invention of Women", 2014, 448

¹⁰⁹ Oyewumi, Oyewumi, "The Invention of Women", 2014, 449

"The fact that western gender categories are presented as inherent in nature (of bodies) and operate on a dichotomous, binary opposed male/female, man/woman duality in which the male is assumed to be superior and therefore the defining category, is particularly alien to many African cultures."¹¹⁰

Basing her argument on fundamental difference regarding gender relations, Oyewumi asserts that gender in many African contexts is construed as relational and situational.¹¹¹ Most African societies have an extended and communal system where a web of social relations influence family hierarchy. Drawing on her study amongst the Yoruba in Nigeria, Oyewumi reveals that the primary organizing structure within the family system was based on seniority in terms of relative age. She concludes that the traditional Yoruba family system can be described as non-gendered because "kinship roles and categories are not gender-differentiated."¹¹² For example, the words *Oko* in Yoruba translated as a husband is non-gendered and can be used to refer to both males and females.¹¹³

Kwesi Yankahs exposition of the role of the *Okyeame* (Palace linguist) amongst the Akan people in Ghana crystalizes Oyewumi's point further. In modern times, the *Okyeame* can be likened to the Chief of Staff in western political cultures and it is mostly occupied by men. According to Kwesi Yankah, the *Okyeame* figuratively and traditionally is referred to as the *Ohene Yere*-the Chiefs' wife.¹¹⁴ Yankah asserts that "even in cases where the chief is female, and her Okyeame is male, the Okyeame is still a wife and the (female) chief the husband."¹¹⁵ The Significant of these illustrations is that gender roles transcended 'sex' in some traditional societies. As a result, the role of 'wife' as a category can either be performed by a male or female.

¹¹⁰ Oyewumi, *Conceptualizing gender*

¹¹¹ Oyewumi, *Conceptualizing gender* 4

¹¹² Oyewumi, *Conceptualizing gender* 3

¹¹³ Oyewumi, *Conceptualizing gender* 3

¹¹⁴ Yankah, "Speaking for the Chief: Okyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratoryspeaking for the Chief : Okyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory",1995, 89

¹¹⁵ Yankah, K *Speaking for the Chief*: 89Pedersen, "From Female Shamans to Danish Housewives: Colonial Constructions of Gender in Greenland, 1721 to Ca. 1970",2015,282-302

The situational and relational ways of communal and social organization in most formerly colonized societies contrast with the European family systems and values. The result of this has been that colonial officials and missionaries were often taken aback whenever they observed some traditional practices, which was unusual for them. Drawing from Archival materials on the social life of the Inuit Greenlanders in 1700s, Signe Arnfred and Kirsten Bransholm Pedersen present gender conception from an indigenous community's perspective. Arnfred and Bransholm assert that with regards to marriage, Greenland in the 1700s was marked by an immense sexual autonomy among couples.¹¹⁶ Polygamy and the phenomenon of wife-exchange and husband-exchange was prevalent as a way of dealing with daily issues and societal problems.¹¹⁷ As Knud Rasmussen notes:

... it may happen that a young wife has a longing for her family far away. If her husband wants to give in to her, not wanting to go with her on the journey himself, some other man will be found who can take care of her. Thus, the man who stays behind will then leave in the meanwhile his own wife with this other man.¹¹⁸

The practice of partner exchange was seen with suspicion and interpreted as licentious by missionaries working for the Danish Government in Greenland. The nuclear family system, which served as the foundation of most of the western social organization, operated a strict husband-wife monogamy system with the man/husband hierarchically placed at the top.

The theme of a non-binary woman-subordinate and man -superior seems to reverberate in several African literature. The work of Ifi Amadiume *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* contributes to this discussion. Amadiume provides instances amongst the Nnobi people in southeastern Nigeria, where women could 'acquire' wives and therefore become the 'husbands' of those wives.¹¹⁹ Equally, daughters in Nnobi society could also be conceptualized as sons in order to benefit from their father's inheritance.¹²⁰ Amadiume observes further that women could play roles initially

¹¹⁶ Pedersen, "From Female Shamans to Danish Housewives: Colonial Constructions of Gender in Greenland, 1721 to Ca. 1970", 2015, 282-302

¹¹⁷ Arnfred, S & Pedersen, K.P "From Female Shamans to Danish Housewives 289

¹¹⁸ Rasmussen, K. Under Nordenvindens Svøbe, i. *Knud Rasmussen Mindeudgave*, III in Arnfred, S & Pedersen, K.P "From Female Shamans to Danish Housewives 289

¹¹⁹ Amadiume, "Male Daughters, Female Husbands : Gender and Sex in an African Society", 2015,

¹²⁰ Amadiume, "Male Daughters, Female Husbands : Gender and Sex in an African Society", 2015, 93

played by men, and “biological sex did not always correspond to ideological gender”¹²¹. It is significant to point out that even as there is the possibility of cross-gender roles in pre-colonial Nnobi societies, the male category seems to be the storehouse of power. In this case for example daughters have to be imagined as sons before they could inherit their fathers This scenario speaks to the overwhelming diversity within culture and traditions, which necessitates more studies of different communities for critical societal analysis.

Most times, critical feminists, especially those writing from the post-colonial perspective capitalize on historical examples to reinforce the absence of a male/female binary hierarchy. For the casual observer, the changing traditional landscape in these communities does not sustain much of this assertion. Conversely, post-colonial feminist researchers insist on going back to the archives and to read against the grain. Thus, affording them the opportunity to draw on the strengths from the past which have been torpedoed in part through contact with the colonials transposing their value system on local people.¹²²

Post-colonial feminism however, is not only about the past, it also about the present and the future. Indeed, some indigenous feminist scholars see it as a matter of self-determination. Kuokkanen talks about one of the domestic concerns of Sami women in terms of their ability to discuss issues about sexual violence openly.¹²³ The issue of sexual violence is often seen as a taboo which radiates internal censor. Also, indigenous women want to decide what is crucial for them in the discussions regarding feminism. Kuokkanen notes that "a common critique by indigenous women of white liberal feminist is that the exclusive focus on gender discrimination neglects to address the impact of structural violence on women's lives."¹²⁴ By structural violence, Kuokkanen talks about some subtle forms of discrimination which are often overlooked and are not in line with the ideologies of some mainstream feminist. Highlighting one of the concerns of indigenous women, Kuokkanen mentions the interest and the ability of Sami women to speak and teach the Sami

¹²¹ Amadiume, “Male Daughters, Female Husbands : Gender and Sex in an African Society”,2015,93

¹²² Arnfred, S & Pedersen,K.P "From Female Shamans to Danish Housewife 283

¹²³ Kuokkanen, “Decolonizing Feminism in the North: A Conversation with Rauna Kuokkanen”,2015,275-81279

¹²⁴ Kuokkanen, “Decolonizing Feminism in the North: A Conversation with Rauna Kuokkanen”,2015,275-81278

language to their children.¹²⁵ While childrearing and motherhood are considered an empowering tool for indigenous women, some radical liberal feminists have often presented it within the frame of its ideology as a drag on women's freedom and equality.¹²⁶

Considering these alternative realities, 'writing from the margins' helps to unravel what feminism and women empowerment means to different groups of women. Chapter 5 will present the ideas of the elderly women in Gambaga on what they think about these topics.

2.5 Conclusion

This section presented the discussions of witchcraft within the frame of the African Traditional Religion. I presented and discussed the concept of magic and how it relates to witchcraft.

The second aspect of this chapter relates to why women are the most accused of witchcraft. Critical feminist theories and perspectives contend that different situations of women exist around the world. The presentation by mainstream feminists that women are the most abused, suppressed, and repressed by society may not be a one size fit all prescriptions of women conditions.

¹²⁵ Kuokkanen, "Decolonizing Feminism in the North: A Conversation with Rauna Kuokkanen",2015,275-81278

¹²⁶ Richards, "The Sceptical Feminist : A Philosophical Enquiry",1982,29

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter has two main parts. The methodological theory- which espouses my approach and the rationale for working within the Post-colonial Indigenous Research Paradigm. The second part of this chapter discusses my data sources and lastly

Part A Theory

3.2 Post-colonial Indigenous Research Paradigm

Post-Colonial Indigenous Paradigm entails being sensitive to the culture of the researched.¹²⁷ It also involves challenging the researcher to embrace processes that makes access to knowledge that has been previously ignored to be uncovered.¹²⁸ As a paradigm, it is seen as a way of thinking which emanates from the “lived experiences of those whose values and history have been misunderstood by euro western research paradigms.”¹²⁹

Summing from my readings of Bagayele Chilisa, Linda Smith and Shawn Wilson, Post-Colonial Indigenous Research paradigm has three components. Namely, Decolonization, indigenization and recognition of traditional knowledge systems. These three components are influenced by relational ontology, epistemology and axiology. The conception of knowledge systems as relational should therefore, trigger the interest to recover and reinstate knowledge system stems which existed before colonialism. This however, should not signify the adoption of everything traditional or indigenous without question. Post-Colonial Indigenous Research paradigm forms

¹²⁷ Chilisa, “Indigenous Research Methodologies”,2012,

¹²⁸ Chilisa, “Indigenous Research Methodologies”,2012,

¹²⁹ Chilisa, “Indigenous Research Methodologies”,2012,19

part of Critical theory it also encourages us to examine aspects of culture and tradition which are injurious to humans and nature be amended or jettisoned.

Below I will briefly explain the components of the post-colonial indigenous research and show how my thesis plans to incorporate these in my work.

3.3.1 Decolonization

Decolonization as a feature of the Post-colonial paradigm recognizes that aspects of colonized and marginalized communities have been misrepresented in different forms including in the field of research. Thus, decolonization in the context of research focuses on how a research problem is designed to take cognizance of the possible repercussions of research on the researched.¹³⁰

In the Post-Colonial Research Paradigm, decolonization employs two important strategies. Firstly, it entails going back to critically review the negative aspect of what has been said and written about colonized people. Smith calls this the ‘deconstruction’ phase.¹³¹ In going back, marginalized and colonized communities can mourn past and on-going injustices by interrogating distortions of their experiences.¹³²

The second strategy of decolonization within the framework of the Post-Colonial Indigenous Research Paradigm is the ability of former colonized people to retell their stories. This stage of ‘reconstruction’ involves thinking about new ways of writing which recognize different epistemologies. This recognizes the impact of dominant western influence regarding knowledge systems but at the same time offers the confidence of communicating the unique perspectives and worldviews of colonized people. By communicating through their frame, colonized and marginalized people may be engaged in ‘writing from the margins’ yet they are empowered to

¹³⁰ Chilisa, “Indigenous Research Methodologies”,2012,

¹³¹ Smith, “Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples”,2012,

¹³² Smith, “Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples”,2012,

correct past misrepresentations. This correction to past injustices is described by Smith as ‘talking back to power’¹³³

3.3.2 Indigenization

According to Chilisa, indigenization as a process:

involves a critique and resistance to Euro Western methodological imperialism and hegemony as well as a call for adapting of conventional methodologies by including perspectives and methods that draw from indigenous knowledges, languages, metaphors, worldviews, experiences and philosophies of former colonized, historically oppressed and marginalized social groups.¹³⁴

From the definition above, a couple of point stand out. Firstly, indigenization involves recognizing the limitations of ‘established’ research methodology in indigenous research. Additionally, indigenization involves modifying some aspect of established research paradigms within the western system for indigenous research. In this regard, conducting research within the frame of post-colonial indigenous focuses on how some concepts familiar within indigenous epistemologies can be studied. In the case of this thesis, themes related to the conception of witchcraft, spiritual divination processes and gender relations will be explored.

As before mentioned in my introduction, Linda Roper’s difficulty of admitting and interpreting European witchcraft records within the fold of historical writing is something worth reflecting upon.¹³⁵ The conception of Witchcraft in most European societies is widely seen as a matter of ‘belief’. However, the term ‘belief’ when used in religious parlance mostly denotes a phenomenon without factual basis to qualify for a truth.¹³⁶ An indigenizing perspective calls for recognizing different realities which consider the belief systems in the conceptualization of witchcraft as a matter of knowledge as opposed to mere a belief.¹³⁷

¹³³ Smith, “Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples”,2012,

¹³⁴ Chilisa, B. *Indigenous research methodologies* Chilisa, “Indigenous Research Methodologies”,2012,101

¹³⁵ Roper, “Witch Craze : Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany”,2004,19

¹³⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/belief>

¹³⁷ Chilisa, “Indigenous Research Methodologies”,2012,

With this said, I must emphasize that Indigenization in post-colonial paradigm does not suggest the total abdication or jettisoning conventional research methodologies. Indeed, claiming such a stand and a total rejection of methods employed in conventional research procedures may be problematic. This is so because indigenous methodologies still draw on instruments of collecting data such as interviews, review of documents, participant observation amongst others. The crucial point of indigenization therefore is concerned with questions such as how we can employ these vehicles for gathering data to meet the demands of indigenous research. Considering this method could lead to accommodating new theoretical frameworks which hitherto have been unrecognized by conventional research.¹³⁸ Chilisa suggests different interview techniques which fits into indigenous research methods such as the Diviner/Client Construction Story, the focused Life-Story Interview and the philosophical Sagacity approach to interview.¹³⁹I will talk more about how i employed these techniques under my sources.

The point above further reinforces the caution in creating a binary opposition between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems. Martin Nakata for instance envisions a space where both indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge systems could interface.¹⁴⁰ By introducing the term cultural *interface*, Nakata suggests that our perception of the world is very much enriched by our understanding of different knowledge systems as opposed to strict dichotomization.¹⁴¹

3.3.3 Indigenous Knowledge

The final component of the Post-colonial indigenous paradigm is the recognition of traditional knowledge in research. There is no one definition of the concept of traditional knowledge. However, Adrian Grenier highlights some aspects of traditional knowledge as an aggregation of past experiences interlaced with careful observations and a series of trial and error experiments.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Chilisa, "Indigenous Research Methodologies",2012,

¹³⁹ Chilisa, "Indigenous Research Methodologies",2012,211

¹⁴⁰ Nakata, "The Cultural Interface of Islander and Scientific Knowledge",2010,53-57 7-14

¹⁴¹ Nakata, "The Cultural Interface of Islander and Scientific Knowledge",2010,53-578

¹⁴² Grenier, "Working with Indigenous Knowledge : A Guide for Researchers",1998,99

He further explains that the memories of people serve as the storehouse of indigenous knowledge they mostly unwritten.¹⁴³

A feature of indigenous knowledge system is that it is encapsulated in certain vehicles such as language, folklore, legends, stories worship systems, etc. of past marginalized societies. According to Chilisa, these instruments are the bedrock of indigenous knowledge systems which can be drawn to “challenge stereotypes of post-colonial societies”.¹⁴⁴ Some of these stereotypes have been to describe indigenous knowledge systems in negative terms.

The concept of traditional knowledge is sometimes used interchangeably with indigenous knowledge. I intend to employ the use of the term as Grenier and Chilisa synonymously to distinguish between knowledge developed by a given social group or community from the knowledge generated by the western academy and its institution.¹⁴⁵ To narrow the discussions to the African context indigenous knowledge system in Africa, George Sefa’s definition is apt to cite here. According to Sefa, indigenusness may be defined as “knowledge consciousness arising locally and in association with long-term occupancy of a place”.¹⁴⁶ As a result, the knowledge from the local represents how they perceive their world, both in physical and spiritual terms. It must be said regardless that indigenous knowledge systems are not entirely free from criticisms. There is some aspect of indigenous knowledge systems that have come under sharp focus.

Despite these criticisms, traditional knowledge is not a static concept. Over time, aspects of traditional knowledge systems have been modified or ‘updated’ to meet changing communal trends. For example, the alternative to this torture or beatings of an alleged witch could be to allow

¹⁴³ Grenier, “Working with Indigenous Knowledge : A Guide for Researchers”, 1998, 99

¹⁴⁴ Chilisa, Grenier, “Working with Indigenous Knowledge : A Guide for Researchers”, 1998, *Indigenous research methodologies* 100

¹⁴⁵ Grenier, “Working with Indigenous Knowledge : A Guide for Researchers”, 1998,

¹⁴⁶ Sefa Dei, G.J.S. African development: The relevance and implications of “indigenusness.” In G.J. Sefa Dei, B.L. Hall, & D.G. Rosenberg (Eds.), *Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: Multiple readings of our world* Toronto: 2002. University of Toronto Press 72.

the diviner who can determine who a witch is to do so with their rituals. As this ritual has a way of determining who a witch or wizard is there may be no need to exact such harsh treatments.

In this thesis, I employ the concept of traditional knowledge with regards to the belief systems and local knowledge of the practice of witchcraft in terms of how it is acquired and transferred. This thesis also explores the traditional ritual practices related to witchcraft, such as the traditional divination process and its acceptability in Gambaga.

In sum, Indigenous/traditional knowledge systems offer an alternative body of sources for knowledge production which when utilized can lead to the uncovering of previously ignored information seen as inadmissible in conventional research methods

3.4 Positionality

Since research is construed as a term which delineates power relation, locating oneself is seen as one of the cardinal points of an indigenous research methodology.¹⁴⁷ Indigenous peoples have historically had researchers researching their communities with limited space for indigenous perspectives. Research *in* and *with* indigenous topics and peoples have been done in four different frames. Abukari Kwame summarizes these frames as *research on, by, with and for* indigenous peoples.¹⁴⁸ Research *on* represents how earlier researchers carried out their projects within indigenous communities with little appreciation of the agency of indigenous peoples. Research *by, with and for* indigenous peoples is seen as the ideal and ethical way of conducting research within indigenous methodologies. It is seen as an empowering way for both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples embarking on research within indigenous communities with indigenous peoples as co-researchers in the research process. In sum research *by* and research *with* must be

¹⁴⁷ Kovach, M., Carriere, J., Barret, M. J., Montgomery, H., & Gillies, C. *Stories of diverse identity locations in indigenous research*. International Review of Qualitative Research (2013), 6, 487–509.

¹⁴⁸ Abukari K *Reflexivity and the Insider/Outsider discourse in Indigenous Research: my personal experiences* Alter Native 2017 vol 13(4) 220

carried out *for* the interest of indigenous peoples. As a result, positioning oneself allows readers to know from which position of power the researcher enters the research field.

In chapter one, I recounted how I met the words 'witch' and 'witchcraft'. I noted that in my formative years, these words were used in the context of both negative and positive experiences. However, religious belief systems on the notion of witchcraft across Ghana differ. As someone who grew up in the capital Accra, my conception of the phenomenon of witchcraft is not necessarily the same as how residents in Gambaga interpret the phenomenon. While some residents of Gambaga belong to different orthodox religions, neither Islam or Christianity have been successful in displacing the traditional values and practices of the rural folks. Torjer Andreas Olsen points out that in religious studies critical perspectives on the social and cultural aspects of religion are necessary for defining one's position.¹⁴⁹ Although I recognize the prevalence of witchcraft, it does not place my position neatly as an 'insider'. This is because the internal social and cultural aspects of the way of life of the people of Gambaga differs from my urban socialization.

Yet at the same time, I share a connection with the people of Gambaga in several ways. As Ghanaians, our collective culture has been dominated for centuries by colonization. Secondly, despite my urban upbringing, I have an ancestral root in the town of Chamba in Northern Ghana. As a 'Northerner',¹⁵⁰ I relate with ethnic groups in northern Ghana on two levels. Firstly, ethnic groups in Northern Ghana share some similarities regarding their socio-traditional religious belief system. While contemporary social change has been considerable, the deep underlying cultural

¹⁴⁹ Olsen A.T *Responsibility, reciprocity and respect. On the ethics of (self)-representation and advocacy in Indigenous studies* In Anna-Lill Drugge(ed.) *Ethics in Indigenous Research Past Experiences-Future Challenges* (Umea University 2016)Kovach, et al., "Stories of Diverse Identity Locations in Indigenous Research",2013,487-509

¹⁵⁰ In Ghana, people who hail from any part of Northern Ghana are commonly referred to as 'Northerners' despite the fact that the northern area is not homogenous. However, they have a form of a shared settlement patterns and culture.

systems differ little from community to community in Northern Ghana. This is reflected in their kinship patterns, acts of sacrifices amongst others.

The second reason is ethnic groups who identify as indigenous in northern Ghana have a relation solidarity amongst themselves. When I met with some of the elderly women they all related to me differently. I noticed a form of curiosity and interest from elderly women who identified as Konkomba or Bimoba when I introduced myself as Chamba. Although we had different religious affiliation my Chamba background helped in developing some level of trust. While speaking with different people in Gambaga my identity kept shifting. For instance, I met some people in Gambaga who spoke the Hausa language.¹⁵¹ Even though Hausa is not my mother tongue, the ability to communicate with residents of Gambaga who spoke Hausa gave me a sense of an insider perspective as I was able to communicate with them openly without a translator.

Positioning oneself is not always straight forward in research. It is much more complex for one to assume an insider or outsider position. Throughout my fieldwork, my different identities as in my ethnic affiliation, language skills, religion, education and gender have resulted in people relating to me differently. To this end, some call for a de-centering approach to the discourse on positionality.¹⁵² De-centering is construed as an idea that does not focus all attention on the researcher's single identity but rather as a way of avoiding and escaping all kinds of othering.¹⁵³ De-centering recognizes that social identities can both coincide and conflate one another and therefore insisting on a binary identification as an 'insider' or 'outsider' is problematic.¹⁵⁴ In this regard research within the indigenous frames is not only the preserve of those conducting research within

¹⁵¹ The Hausa language is a widely spoken language in Ghana amongst areas with Muslim domination. Historically, traders from Nigeria were used in pre-colonial and colonial era in native courts and as historians due to their ability to write in Arabic. Today, Hausa is one of the local lingua franca around muslim communities in Ghana.

¹⁵² Olsen, A.T., *Privilege, Decentring and the Challenge of Being (Non)Indigenous in the Study of Indigenous Issues*. (2017) 8

¹⁵³ Olsen, *Privilege, Decentring and the Challenge of Being*

¹⁵⁴ Olsen, *Privilege, Decentring and the Challenge of Being* 2

the *research* by the framework but that our different identities should lead us to conduct *a research with and for* indigenous peoples or communities.

3.5 Reflexivity and Ethics

From my discussions above, it becomes apparent that researching within an indigenous framework calls for self-consciousness of the impact our background may have on a study and this calls for our reflexivity. In the process of conducting my fieldwork, I had informed a couple of close family members and friends about my research topic. The various reactions I received were telling. While some advised that I abandon this project idea altogether, some impressed upon me to seek spiritual fortification as an antidote to any possible witchcraft attack that could result from my fieldwork.

Reflexivity as a strategy aims to protect the credibility of the research in two ways. Firstly, as a way of preventing the over-involvement of the researcher's background, ideological biases and perceptions on the research topic.¹⁵⁵ Secondly reflexivity calls for the constant evaluation of our thoughts and feelings as researchers vis-a-vis our relationship with the research participants, acknowledging that the researcher's experiences are not necessarily the same as that of the research participants on a given topic.¹⁵⁶

As a practicing Sufi-Muslim, I have been actively shaped by my Islamic background. This leaves me with the constant reminder of how the practices and teachings of my Islamic faith may conflate with some traditional indigenous rituals relating to witchcraft and the process of resettling accused witches in the elderly women's area. This places on me a huge responsibility on how I write about things I do not philosophically share and relate with because of my education, religion or

¹⁵⁵ Chilisa, *Indigenous research methodologies* 168

¹⁵⁶ Chilisa, *Indigenous research methodologies* 168

socialization. As an educated young man interviewing elderly women, I recognize the potential power relations

Smith observes therefore that reflexivity allows us to either ‘extend knowledge’ or to ‘perpetuate ignorance’.¹⁵⁷ Extending knowledge comes about if one proceeds with their study on indigenous cultures without placing a value judgment on their ways of life. It should be noted however that this does not preclude researchers in indigenous communities from a critical perspective.

¹⁵⁷ Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous* 178

Part B

Sources

3.6 Sources of Data

For this study, two broad sources were utilized towards the Inquiry into the research questions outlined. Both primary and secondary data sources were used for this research. Throughout my data collection, I have used multiple sources of information as a way of enhancing the credibility of my research.

3.7 Primary Sources

This study employed the use of information from the interviews, archives and field notes emanating from my observation and participation in different activities on the field.

3.7.1 Interviews

A purposeful sampling technique was used to ensure that the research participants selected for this study were capable of contributing their expertise to the theme and research questions. As this study aims at giving voice to the researched, my research plan was designed to interview a varied representation of the population of Gambaga. This triangulation of interview respondents was to ensure that I have a holistic view of the people from the community regarding the subject of my inquiry regarding witchcraft.

All the interviews were recorded and lasted between 30-45 minutes. I interviewed eight people in total who fit within four broad categories of the social life of the people of Gambaga. Firstly, I interviewed four women accused of practicing witchcraft who are current residents in the Kpakorafon. Among the women I interviewed was the Chairperson of all the women accused of witchcraft the significance of having the *Magajia* as she is locally referred to was that by her three decades stay in the Kpakorafon, she had become like an institutional memory of the past happenings in the Kpakorafon. Her duty ranges from conflict resolution amongst the women under her care to serving as the mouthpiece of the women-ventilating their grievances to the local chief and other stakeholders.

The other elderly women I interviewed belonged to different ethnic groups and identified themselves as adherents of different religions. I have given code names Laadi, Atani, Talaata and Lariba to the elderly women I interviewed. Even though they had no objections for me using their names for this study, I am unable to do so due to the constraints placed on me by the ethical codes of the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD). The NSD approval to my ethical application stipulated not to disclose the names of the women for safety reasons and also to avoid stigmatization. In indigenous research, most interviewees are recognized as co-researchers producing and sharing their knowledge and for which they should be recognized by name unless they requested to be made anonymous.¹⁵⁸ This brings to sharp focus some of the tensions and areas of conflation between indigenous research procedures and ethics on the one hand and that of the conventional euro-western procedure. All the four elderly women were interviewed in their compounds.

Secondly, I interviewed Amisu Alhassan, son of the Gambarrana¹⁵⁹. My intention going to the field was to interview the Chief himself, however, due to old age and failing health conditions, his son has assumed his father's responsibility. As a first son of his father, Amisu has undergone training to conduct the spiritual divination processes which lead to ascertaining the truth or otherwise of the accusations of witchcraft. Under the supervision of his aged father, he also conducts the final ritual ceremony before any accused witch settle in the Kpakorafon. The position of the spiritual knower is much revered in Gambaga. Indeed, the people of Gambaga believe that a witch or wizard is incapable of attacking anyone in their community. As Amisu informed me; "we do not want anybody to operate in Gambaga, so in the night we go around and anybody (witch or wizard) who comes out we let them back and early morning we call them out and say to them that yesterday what you did we do not want you to do that again."¹⁶⁰ This perception is widely held in Gambaga as I kept hearing the same in my interaction with some of the local people.

¹⁵⁸ Chilisa, B. *Indigenous research methodologies* 207

¹⁵⁹ The local chief and spiritual leader of the people of Gambaga.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Son of Gambarrana Amisu Alhassan, spiritual knower and diviner. Gambaga, August 18th, 2019

This thesis also benefitted from the perspectives of two ordinary residents of Gambaga. I interviewed a local food seller by name Zainab and another merchant who prefers to be known with his Alias 'Borga. Finally, I spoke to Sampson Lar, who serves as the administrator of the Kpakorafon and the Coordinator of the Go Home Project. The Go Home Project is an initiative of the Presbyterian Church in collaboration with other local stakeholders whose main goal is to see the elderly women reunite with their families by going back to their villages. They conduct outreach to neighboring communities bordering Gambaga to educate them against the violence accompanying witchcraft accusations.

The Interviews were conducted in several language. I conducted three interviews in Hausa and English without an interpreter. My interaction with the elderly women and the spiritual knower employed the assistance of a multi lingual interpreter. To allow for flexible flow of interaction, I wrote some questions pertinent to my research questions for the semi-structured interview I conducted. The questions were open-ended, intended to allow my research participants to freely express themselves.

To incorporate elements of indigenous research, my interviews encouraged storytelling where the personal stories and experiences of my research participants regarding the subject of witchcraft and the Kpakprafon could be recounted. My interview approach was conscious of the burden of recounting harsh memories of the stories of the journeys of the elderly women. One of my strategies for dealing with this was to start our conversations with their childhood stories and some pleasant memories in their life. This allowed our conversation to flow and build up gradually before narrating the story of their journeys to the Kpakorafon in Gambaga. Despite this, two of the interviews got emotional. In the case of Laadi, it took a reflection of her favourite childhood song to continue the interview.

My interview with the traditional knower and other residents was targeted at getting them to share spiritual and real-life situations of their experiences of witchcraft as a subject. I also gave them the chance to respond directly to questions on other publications which has been made regarding the spiritual processes and their belief in the phenomenon of witchcraft. In narrating some of the stories

of their encounters with alleged witches, I observed that they normally will keep silent, shaking their heads in contemplation as to whether to proceed or not. When I enquire why the pause, the comments are generally pointed to the thought that, “I may not believe in their stories.”¹⁶¹ Perhaps, this could be from my background, seeing me as someone from Europe, or the Capital, or perhaps having been ‘westernized’. Nevertheless, I encouraged them to speak their truth and made them understand that the focus of my research is influenced by a relational epistemology, recognizing different situations of realities.

3.7.2 Language and the Role of the Interpreter-Accounting for power relations

In indigenous and traditional societies, language is not only a means of communication but also a mechanism for creating, storing and transferring knowledge. As I indicated, three of my interviews were conducted in English and Hausa. The Four elderly women I interviewed belonged to different ethnic groups, namely Mamprusi, Komba, and Bimoba. However, the interviews of these women were conducted in Bimoba (Laadi) and Mamprusi (Atani, Talaata, & Lariba). Mamprusi is widely spoken in Gambaga and neighboring villages and has become like a lingua franca in the North-Eastern Region of Ghana.

My interpreter has about 10 years of experience working with the elderly women in Gambaga. No visitor to Gambaga can literally engage with the women without seeing Sampson. At one point before my official introduction to the Sunday congregation, one of the women had retorted when I wanted to engage in her in conversation. She asked “have you seen Sampson?” Sampson has become not only a son to the elderly women but as someone dedicating his youthful life also serving the welfare of these elderly women.

Allowing Sampson to be my interpreter nevertheless came with the dilemma regarding power relations. And this reflected in two ways. Firstly, as the de-facto coordinator of the elderly women’s area and a man in his thirties he is responsible for coordinating the sharing of food and

¹⁶¹ Interview conducted with Adam Na Madina in Gambaga, August 15th 2019

gift items donated to the women. This had the potential risk of preventing the women from speaking some uncomfortable truths regarding some aspects of living in the Kpakorafon. Secondly, by virtue of his additional role as the preacher in the Sunday church service, his presence came with the potential possibility of the elderly women to withhold some information which I asked regarding traditional worship systems.

Two of the elderly women I interviewed identified as born-again Christians. Indeed, during the interview, some of the women shied away from answering explicitly the questions regarding traditional worship systems. I had asked the elderly women if they recall some memories and experiences of traditional religious practice in their homes when they were growing up. Sometimes they were hesitant in doing so. However, in assuaging this dilemma, Sampson assured them that the questions being asked did not suggest that they were still engaged in some of the practices. I explained also that their response was to help me reconstruct some aspects of traditional religions that were practiced in Ghana. This intervention from Sampson and myself was significant to get them to open up.

Regarding the first dilemma of Sampson's presence preventing some uncomfortable truth, in assuaging my first dilemma, I observed in the course of my interview that Sampson's presence might have had some influence on them regarding what they said, but it did not completely take away their agency and to speak their convictions. For instance, Talaata in answering my questions regarding the efficiency of the traditional ritual believes that the ritual erred in its verdict in admitting her as a witch but had to stay because she did not have a choice. This singular voice of dissent cemented the belief in me that these women cannot be silenced.

3.8 Participation and Observation in the field

I was in Ghana for a period of six weeks for my fieldwork. During my visitation, I spent different periods, in Accra the Capital of Ghana, Tamale, the Northern Regional Capital and Gambaga. My conversations with different people about my thesis have given me different perspectives. For

example, I have interacted with people from the clergy (both Islamic and Christianity) who have given me different perspectives regarding their views about the witchcraft.

Gambaga is about 740kms from Accra. Before traveling from Norway, I was in touch with a friend from my university days at the University of Ghana who grew up in Gambaga but now married and living in Accra. Our plans for going to Gambaga together could not materialize as she had some other engagements. That disturbed my initial plan of conducting my interviews with the elderly women with another woman as my interpreter. However, I was introduced to another contact by name Baba Musah who welcomed and helped me settle for the two weeks duration I spent in Gambaga. Within this period, I slept in a guest house.

According to Wilson, the use of intermediaries in indigenous research serves two functions. Firstly, an intermediary helps to build rapport by placing the researcher within a circle of family, friends and relations.¹⁶² Secondly, the use of an intermediary allows research participants to freely ask questions about the kind of research to be conducted and the reason behind the research.¹⁶³ For instance, during my stay in Gambaga, Baba Musah, a trained teacher by profession and an aspiring local politician introduced me into the community. On one of my visits to his house, he took me around the large compound house, introducing me to his siblings, his uncles and tenants in the house. Any time we walked passed people sitting, we stopped to send them our greetings and then introduced to them.

Teacher Musah as he is affectionately called, introduced me to his circle of friends at his usual 'Base'. A *Base* is a place where people of usually similar age range meet in the later part of the day to while away time and discuss varied issues. It is at these Bases that one can interface with different topics and conversations and debates on any topic and subject. The members of the base Teacher introduced me into normally engage in debates and discussions regarding their life

¹⁶² Wilson S. Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods. Manitoba Canada: (Fernwood 2008) 129

¹⁶³ Wilson S. Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods,2008,129

experiences and stories around the phenomenon of witchcraft. Under a big Nim tree next to the Gambaga Local Authority Primary and Junior High School, I had a form of an evening ritual where I would go and sit and take part in conversations. With time, I found another *Base* of relatively young people who sat around the Kpakorafon. I joined them occasionally for a chat while enjoying a cup of a generously offered brewed Chinese green tea called *Attaya*.

Gambaga can be described as a place where everybody knows somebody. It is easy to identify a guest who is not an original resident. Therefore, getting an introduction is an easy way to get help and to be recognized as a guest of the community. It was through the first *Base* that I got an introduction to Amisu, the son of the Gambarana and Sampson the Coordinator of the Go Home Project.¹⁶⁴ The social network and a web of relations I got entwined with enabled my acceptance and to be connected to relevant people necessary for my data collection.

The residents in the Kpakorafon enjoy some enviable level of security. Any stranger found loitering is easily noticed, reported and escorted out. I was introduced to the elderly women by Sampson. Sampson doubles as the Coordinator of the Go Home Project (GHP) and also the de-factor administrator of the Kpakorafon. On my first Sunday when I visited him at his office, a group of women had begun to converge in a spacious lobby attached to his office for a church service. The lobby had wooden benches arranged in rows from all four corners which served as a sitting place for the women. At the start of the church service, I had counted about 70 women sited and full of energy for the morning. Samson read a Sermon which was followed by praises and worship.

With their invitation, I jumped to the floor participating in the clapping of my hands, singing and dancing and circling a small plastic bowl for depositing cash as offerings. After the service Sampson introduced me to the women sitting in his congregation and informed them about my research topic and objectives. They got the chance to ask questions and to received clarification

¹⁶⁴ The Go Home Project is a brain child of the Presbyterian church of Ghana and other stakeholders working with different communities towards reintegrating the alleged witches.

and gave suggestions and inputs to my research aims and objectives. I also got an introduction to the leadership of the camp including the main Magajia and other sub-magajias.¹⁶⁵

My participation at the Sunday service proved to be significant especially towards my acceptability. Firstly, it made it possible for me to make numerous visits to the Kpakorafon without being seen as an intruder. I was treated as a guest often being engaged with conversations. Through these frequent visits, I had the opportunity to also observe their daily routines and also engaged with some of the children who have traveled from their villages joining their accused grandmothers.

3.9 Archival materials

I used materials from the archives in order to have an idea of the set of religious and cultural values systems recorded in colonial times. Colonial archival information in historical writing serves as a source of reconstructing past historical events which otherwise might not have survived memories of oral tradition. However historical sources contained in the archives have often been critiqued mainly because they were written from an outsider perspective. Thomas Bowditch's work on the Odwira Festival in 1817 is said to have exaggerated accounts of human killings.¹⁶⁶ This according to Law (1985) was to court sympathy for missionary work.

In post-colonial Indigenous research paradigm, the use of archival records aims at going back to relook at what has been written and interpreted by 'outsiders'.¹⁶⁷ While many of what has been recorded and archived had been written under the frame of *research on* local people, there are some colonial accounts documented under the frame of *research with* the local people. In my fieldwork, I visited the national archives under the Public Records and Archival Administration Department (PRAAD) in Accra and also the regional archives PRAAD in Tamale. In reviewing

¹⁶⁵ Apart from the main Magajia who is the overall leader of the elderly women, there are about four other sub-magajias who serve as immediate contact person for women belonging to their ethnic group. All of these ethnic magajias answer to the main Magajia in the elderly women's quarters.

¹⁶⁶ Law R *Human Sacrifices in Pre-colonial West-Africa* African Affairs 84 no. 334 (1985) 60

¹⁶⁷ Chilisa, "Indigenous Research Methodologies", 2012,

the local histories of the different ethnic groups in the Northern Territory of the Gold Coast, I was pleasantly surprised by the depth of humility and respect some of the colonial ethnographers and district commissioners exhibited in their work. Some of the colonial writers were honest to admit the possibilities of the inadequacies of their reports to the Colonial Governor citing language barriers and a relatively short stay with the local people.¹⁶⁸ I find this ethical disclosure very impressive in light of other documented cases of exaggerations by colonial writers.

I observed the presence of ethnographic materials related to the social, religious, economic and legal systems of the local people in the colonial archives. The documents in the archives also contained communication between colonial government officials such as Assistant Commissioners and District Commissioners filing reports of monthly happenings within their districts to the colonial governor in Accra. One importance of these documents is that they provided an overview of the nature of discussions and topics that were discussed at the bureaucratic level.

3.10 Secondary Sources

This study benefits immensely from previous research on a number of topics. A study about the phenomenon of witchcraft cuts across several fields of studies from religion, history, anthropology, gender amongst others. I reviewed both published and unpublished materials as a guide into entering the discussions on my research topic. During my research, I came across two unpublished Master thesis which have been written on the Gnani and the Gambaga witch settlements. Namely Baba Iddrisu's thesis titled "*Experiences of residents in the Gnani witchcamp in Ghana*" and Duut George Nangpaak's thesis titled "*The Gambaga 'witches' Colony: Its artistic and other cultural life*". While my methodological approach to the Inquiry is different from these two, there are some similarities as well as differences in our findings.

¹⁶⁸ Adm./11/1/324 "Essays by Assistant District Commissioners on Tribal History of Mamprusi"1

Also, this thesis reviewed some anthropological films and news documentaries on the ‘witchcamps’ in Ghana. However, one drawback of these films is that to paint a holistic picture of the field, they influence the creation of events that they want to show to their audience outside the natural setting. For instance, in the film titled *Inside Ghana’s Witchcraft Refugee Camp* producers of the film wanted to see how the sendoff rituals were conducted at the Kpatinga settlement so they paid for the ritual materials of one of the elderly women but they did not follow through to see her reintegration home.¹⁶⁹ These present ethical dilemmas to some of these documentaries.

All in all, the secondary materials used for this research such as the news report, documentaries and reports from NGOs provide different bits of information necessary for the analysis of my research questions. Reviewing different scholarly and academic materials in religion, history, anthropology and gender studies make it possible to discuss this topic in a multi-disciplinary lens.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter presented my methodology and methods. My methodology follows the post-colonial indigenous research paradigm theorized by Bagayele Chilisa. It is premised on decolonizing, indigenization and recognition of traditional knowledge. This paradigm gives prominence to the realities of the researched in a non-judgmental manner.

I drew on a wide range of sources. I conducted interviews, participated and observed in some community activities within Gambaga. I also reviewed colonial archival documents in order to understand aspect of traditional life towards a critical examination of change and continuity in traditional belief systems.

¹⁶⁹ Journey Man Pictures *Inside Ghana’s witchcraft Refugee Camp*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4wdmPWD9nk>

Chapter Four: “We are suffering no suffering...” – Accusations of witchcraft and the elderly women’s home of Gambaga.”

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses primarily on the Kpakorafon as the creation of a tradition and the culture of witchcraft practice. I will present a cursory outlook of the traditional belief system regarding witchcraft and then present the Kpakorafon. To crystalize my aspiration of presenting the voices of my research participants in line with indigenous methodologies, I sometimes reproduce verbatim our dialogue to establish a context. For the reason of anonymity, I have chosen an imaginary name for the four elderly women I interviewed from the Kpakorafon. I refer to them variously by Laadi, Atani, Talaata and Lariba. In addition to the elderly women, I spoke to Amisu, first son of the Gambarana, Sampson; the coordinator of the Kpakorafon and Borga and Zainab both resident traders in Gambaga. I present this chapter as a discourse bringing the voices of research participants in a dialogue. I also interlace the stories with historical records which I gathered from colonial archives.

The first part of this chapter looks at how a person accused of *soo*(witchcraft) ends up in the Kpakorafon. I do this by interpreting the stories of my research participants with historical archival records to present the traditional belief systems in Mamprusi. The second part of this chapter zooms into the Kpakorafon and discusses what it means for the local people of Gambaga.

4.2 The Journey for Survival Lessons from the stories of the accused women

The different stories of the women accused as *sooba* (witches) hold essential points worthy of reflections. The stories present nuggets of information regarding peculiar historical traditional processes on religion and social life under traditional systems. While reviewing the different accounts of the stories of the four women, I was struck by the different perspectives they present to the discussion of this research. I have chosen to present the section of the story of Atani on how she came to the Kpakorafon in Gambaga. Her story is compelling in two ways. Firstly, it presents a text-book case of many local accusation stories. Secondly, her story highlights some critical

themes around traditional belief systems which the first part of this chapter will discuss. Atani informed me that when she was accused as *sonya* (witch) she was summoned to the chief's place. But then (she continues.)

Before I was sent to the chief's house I was first sent to the house of the woman who accused me, there I was also sent to *Baama* (Shrine) where I was asked to swear, but I told them that I can't do that and they beat me to the extent that I could not walk. They later took me to the village chief's house and the chief ordered that I should be sent to Gambaga.¹⁷⁰

This short narration from Atani present in broad strokes how someone accused of witchcraft ends up in Gambaga. It captures the theme of torture, oath taking and the transition to Gambaga.

4.3 Historical and Contemporary Witchcraft in Mamprusi

4.3.1 Local conceptions and implications

Witchcraft among the Mamprusi is called *soo*. Translating into "*I see you, you do not see me.*"¹⁷¹ It is also translated as "*someone has seen it.*"¹⁷² Local conceptions of the term *soo*, therefore, refer to one's ability to see the unseen which is under the category of the 'spiritual'. Having the power of *soo* allows one to see through humans and spiritual beings such as dwarfs and fairies, which the naked eyes cannot see. This *soo* also makes it possible for people to read people's future and predict their thoughts and actions.¹⁷³ Indeed, infants with a promising future are not spared of possible attacks when their future is exposed. As a result, historically, newly born infants have been spiritually fortified to safeguard them against evil spirits wielded by witches.¹⁷⁴

As before mentioned in chapter two, *soo* like magic fall under the category of mystical power and is used for good or bad motives. In Gambaga, the Gambarana as the spiritual leader and chief of Gambaga discharges spiritual functions to protect everyone in the community. Through various rituals and sacrifices of maintaining spiritual protocols, he ensures that no *sonya* gatherings take

¹⁷⁰ Atani, Elderly woman. "Oral History Interview with Atani in Gambaga." By Ibrahim M. Larry (17 August 2019)

¹⁷¹ Alhassan, Amisu. "Interview with Amisu in Gambaga." By Ibrahim M. Larry (18 August 2019).

¹⁷² Adam Na Madina, Borga. "Interview with Borga in Gambaga." By Ibrahim M. Larry (16 August 2019).

¹⁷³ Alhassan, "Interview with Amisu in Gambaga", 18 August 2019,

¹⁷⁴ Adm./11/1/324 Essays by Assistant District Commissioners on Tribal History of Mamprusi

place in Gambaga. Even as the current Gambarana is in a frail local custom demands that he teaches his first son to inherit his tutelary spirit. Consequently, the Gambarana has taken the precaution of imparting relevant family traditions to his first son Amisu.

Amisu, calm and unassuming, says very little. He had informed me during one of our meetings that tradition mandates he teaches his other siblings what he learns from their family tradition as the protectors of Gambaga.¹⁷⁵ One of the secrets he has learned as the son of the chief is to spiritually police Gambaga and to exercise good mystic powers. Amongst his cardinal duty is to keep the airspace of Gambaga free of flying *sooba* (*witches*). Despite interviewing him with a translator, occasionally, Amidu gives a direct reply to my question in vernacular English. I asked him:

Ibrahim: So, there is an assumption that you also see *sooba*

Amidu: Yes

Ibrahim: Ok, so you prevent them from operating in Gambaga?

Amidu: Yes, we do not want anybody to operate in Gambaga here, so in the night, we go around and anybody who comes out, we let them back and early morning we call them that yesterday what you did we do not want you to do that again.

Ibrahim: and they agree to it?

Amidu: (Exclaims) Aaah! They agree. In town here (Gambaga) nobody can harm somebody.

Mystic powers, the like exercised by Amisu and his father is a crucial feature of African Traditional Religion. Occurrence and beliefs, such as these, are documented in many parts of Africa. Writing an essay on the history of the Mamprusi, the Assistant District commissioner stationed in Gambaga noted the power of diviners and local medicine men for shapeshifting.¹⁷⁶ Like *sooba* the *bugarana* can turn themselves into lions, leopards, and other animals. Regarding witchcraft, the colonial district commissioner notes that “*fetish men are believed to be able to nullify the evil powers of*

¹⁷⁵ Alhassan, “Interview with Amisu in Gambaga”, 18 August 2019,

¹⁷⁶ Adm./11/324 Essays by Assistant District Commissioner 4

witches with medicines, for which needless to say, there is a great demand."¹⁷⁷ In pre-colonial Mamprusi, for example, the death of a relative must be ascertained whether it emanated from natural or unnatural circumstance. The *Bagaa* (deity) is consulted three days after the funeral of family relation to ensure retribution should they died from unnatural causes.¹⁷⁸ The demand for magical potions from *bugarana* and healers is a common feature of traditional life in Mamprusi. This magical potion enshrouds a patron with mystic powers to see what is unseen to the ordinary eye. Through washing one's face with some herbs, or a sliding a black powdery substance called *Kolli* in the form of an eye-shadow, one can know someone who practices *sonya* just by seeing them or walking pass them.¹⁷⁹

Dreams in Mamprusi is one of the avenues for picking inspiration of both good and evil powers. In this regard, it is common for people to raise alarms of *soo* attack after having some symbolic dreams. People have dreams of family members and neighbours which is interpreted in several forms. Magical potions and herbs which one uses for protection are believed to trigger dreams which warn of an imminent attack by a *sonya*.¹⁸⁰ Dreams as a source of divine knowledge is a feature of many societies who believe in its potential to foretell the future. Amongst the Angami Nagas of India, dreams feature in different daily activities so much so that it is generally regarded as foolish for one to ignore their dreams.¹⁸¹ Michael Heneise notes that in Angami society, it was common for a dreamer to consult elders or people skilled with dream interpretation after an episode of an enigmatic dream.¹⁸²

There are several stories of people who have been accused of *soo* after someone saw them in their dream. Talaata was accused of *soo* after someone in her community dreamt about her. She narrated to me that a man came to her house and "he said his son had a dream about me, and in the dream,

¹⁷⁷ Adm./11/1/324 Essays by Assistant District Commissioner 4

¹⁷⁸ Adm./11/1/521 A short Essay on the History and Customs of the Mamprusi Tribe 68

¹⁷⁹ Adam Na Madina, Borga. "Interview with Borga in Gambaga." By Ibrahim M. Larry (16 August 2019).

¹⁸⁰ Adam Na Madina, "Interview with Borga in Gambaga", 16 August 2019,

¹⁸¹ Heneise, "Making Dreams, Making Relations: Dreaming in Angami Naga Society", 2017, 55-82

¹⁸² Heneise, "Making Dreams, Making Relations: Dreaming in Angami Naga Society", 2017, 55-82 71

I bought *masa* (doughnut) from him and I did not pay him, instead I paid the money to a different person...”¹⁸³Borga asserts that dreams make for an acceptable cause for complain of bewitchment in Gambaga as a way of knowing.¹⁸⁴ However, for the interpretation of a dream to merit any attention it must be made by *bugarana* (spiritual diviner) or anyone the community trust to poses such knowledge.

It is essential to point out, that while dreams give clues to an impending situation, proceeding to wreak havoc and suffering on someone base on a dream calls for close interrogation. It is far too familiar for people to begin an accusation without subjecting their dream to a proper interpretation by those who are empowered to interpret such dreams. Amisu notes that medical conditions of malaria and high fever could also trigger bizarre dreams.¹⁸⁵ As a *bugarana* himself, Amisu thinks that one of his roles is to talk to people when *soo* accusations come to the palace. They advise people not to escalate cases but to push deeper beyond a dream before concluding or beating up people they suspect of spiritually harming them. He noted that “if one is not versed in the art of dream interpretation, they may end up accusing innocent souls and would have killed them before verifying”¹⁸⁶

4.4 Family witchcraft and witchcraft accusation

A feature of the local conception of *soo* in Mamprusi is the idea that *soo* run in the genealogy of individual clans and families. This has two implications. First, it means that if someone is not part of the families that are known to have *soo*, they cannot have access to its mystic power. The second implication is that as the privilege to have *soo* rest with some clans and families, clan members do not need any spiritual intervention to identify a *sonya*. Among Ghanaian ethnic groups, individual families have totems which represent their source of mystic power. Some Mamprusi families have the owl as the symbol of their clan *soo*. If an individual from the clan mistakenly or capriciously

¹⁸³ Atani, “Oral Histroy Interview with Atani in Gambaga”,17 August 2019,

¹⁸⁴ Adam Na Madina, “Interview with Borga in Gambaga”,16 August 2019,

¹⁸⁵ Alhassan, “Interview with Amisu in Gambaga”,18 August 2019,

¹⁸⁶ Alhassan, “Interview with Amisu in Gambaga”,18 August 2019,

killed an owl, it resulted in the death of the family member possessing the *soo*.¹⁸⁷ This form of a kinship between humans and non-humans is shared by some societies in India and Mexico. For example, the concept of a soul co-essence reflects in the ontology of the Naga people. The Nagas believe that an individual's soul also lives in the body of the leopard.¹⁸⁸ As one Nagas narrated "...if anything happened to my leopard in the day, my soul would come and tell me. I would get the same wounds."¹⁸⁹ This phenomenon of soul co-essence amongst the Ao Nagas is inherited either through the paternal or maternal lines.¹⁹⁰

In my interview with Talaata, she recounted how some members of her community lamented: "*we know (Talaata) for a long time, we know her grandmother, we saw her mother they were all not witches. How can she be a witch?*"¹⁹¹ This brings out the point that for one to be a *sonya* they must come from a lineage with such privilege. To forestall arbitrary use of such powers the family deity is consulted to determine the right person to exercise such privilege on behalf of the family. The extended family head will engage in spiritual consultation to arrive at the likely candidate to possess such power.

During my interview with the elderly women, they provided witty responses and stories within which are embedded their local customs and traditions. Their childhood stories are full of memories which specifically provide information about local conception of *soo*. To start without any pre-conceptions, I asked the elderly women what they thought about the existence of *soo*. It is worthy of note that all the four elderly women advised me to take care of myself because *soo* exists. However, their response went beyond a simple yes.

For instance, when I asked Talaata if she believed in *soo* she responded;

¹⁸⁷ Adm./11/1/324 Essays by Assistant District Commissioner 6

¹⁸⁸ J. Jacobs, "The Nagas: Hill Peoples of Northeast India: Society, Culture and the Colonial Encounter", 1998,

¹⁸⁹ J. Jacobs, "The Nagas: Hill Peoples of Northeast India: Society, Culture and the Colonial Encounter", 1998,

¹⁹⁰ Heneise, "The Naga Tiger-Man and the Modern Assemblage of a Myth", 2016, 95

¹⁹¹ Talaata, "Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga", 19 August 2019,

it is a very factual thing that *sooba* exists. But the thing is that it is of families, you cannot not just be going around eating *soo*. When we were young, we used to be cautioned not to eat from some families... even amongst the families who practice it, it is not even everyone in the family who is supposed to acquire *soo*, there are some of them, they go to the oracle to find out and if the oracle says you can become a witch, they give it to you.¹⁹²

Indeed, the point that those who had *soo* were known in the community is expressed severally by my research participants. Laadi recalls that as a child growing up, they had variously been informed to run and hide themselves when they saw someone in the community known as a *sonya*.¹⁹³ Moreover, these known people lived in the same communities, engaged in buying and selling at the market and lived a normal life without any form of harassment. *soo* is regarded as a sacred phenomenon in local communities. It was a taboo for one to engage a non-serious discussion about the topic of *soo*. Names of persons who were known witches or wizards were not to be mentioned with possessing *soo*. In contrast, Talaata laments the changing situations in contemporary times where people are engaged in name-calling and accusations of *soo* without probable cause.

Arising from the presentation thus far, being a *sonya* alone was not a social crime. What matters is how the powers of *soo* is used. Indeed, for some known family members who have *soo*, it is a prestigious thing for them. Consequently, their function as family *sonya* is found in their role to ward off attacks or exact retribution in protection of their family lineage. Borga related the story of two women; a young lady and another middle-aged woman. The women had a prolonged altercation with the middle-aged woman threatening she will teach the other lady a lesson. They both exchanged angry words during their argument resulting in the middle-aged woman saying; “I will teach you a lesson.” This statement was taken to be a threat of *soo* by the younger lady who retorted to her adversary “you cannot harm me as I also have a witch in my family.” No sooner had she touted her family prestige than their family *sonya* arrived on a motorbike. Borga, who had been sitting nearby said he heard the woman proclaim: “*Mpariba is here if anyone says they are*

¹⁹²Talaata, “Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

¹⁹³ Talaata, “Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

whom they say there are, now Mpariba is here. No one can harm me, if you are a sonya our mother is here” ¹⁹⁴

Following from this we can say that while it is not plausible to attack people for the sake of wielding *soo* powers, it is held that using *soo* powers for retribution purposes is acceptable. In the case of *Mpariba*,¹⁹⁵ she is seen as a holder of justice and this can be interpreted to be the good use of her *soo*. This double meaning of *soo* reinforces one of my childhood notions of the term as indicated in my chapter one. As a young lad, we will refer to anyone skilled with football as a *maaye* especially when they save a team that was losing a game. Thus, it can be argued that *soo* can also be used for the right course.

Another theme emanating from local *soo* practice is that accusations of bewitchment usually comes from family relatives. In the stories narrated to me by the elderly women, three out of the four indicated that those who accused them of *soo* were close family relations. While *soo* accusations usually have been preceded by some form of a threat issued during a quarrel, there are instances where people have been accused without previous confrontations. Like Talaata, Lariba’s accusations emanated from a relative. While a cousin accused Talaata, Lariba on the other hand, was accused by her biological brother without any prior confrontation.

To conclude on the theme of family and *soo*, it must be mentioned that, while access to the mystic power of *soo* is primarily through family heritage, there is the possibility to acquire *soo* on their own volition. Some *bugarana* have provided those who seek *soo* magical potions. However, this mode of acquiring *soo* is not used solely for retribution but also for nefarious purposes. Borga recounted how several episodes of *soo* attacks on him had left him feeling frustrated and with the motivation to acquire *soo*. This took him to a shrine reputed for its anti-witchcraft powers. According to Borga the woman *bugarana* admonished him to be patient and said

¹⁹⁴ Adam Na Madina, “Interview with Borga in Gambaga”, 16 August 2019,

¹⁹⁵ *Mpariba* is a title for paternal untie

do not take the *soo*, if you did, one day it will grow to become the evil associated with other *soo*. It will ask for blood so be patient... I do not want to destroy you. I would have asked you to go to Bawku and get me a nose of an elephant” Borga continued, “if I did that, I would be able to bewitch witches as they bewitch others.”¹⁹⁶

As a result of the possibility to use *soo* acquired through one’s volition in a callous way, different communities have engineered ways of dealing with *soo* accusations. In my next discussion, which follows, I will discuss some of these societal reactions to accusations of *soo*, namely, torture and oath-taking.

4.5 Torture, Physical Violence and Witchcraft,

One of the reasons why the subject of *soo* has gained much attention in current times is the degree of torture which accompanies *soo* accusations. Torture devalues, degrades and dehumanizes a person. Besides, torture in the case *soo* and other cases of mob justice robs the individual the opportunity to defend themselves against any allegations of wrongdoing. Balsvik notes several cases of torture and abuse which have been reported across Africa and Oceania. She notes for example that, between 1994 and 1998, nearly 5000 people in Tanzania died because of witch-hunts.¹⁹⁷ In Chapter One, I alluded to the burning to the death of a 72-year-old woman in 2010 accused of bewitching her relations in the capital of Ghana. Two out of the four elderly women I spoke with in Gambaga suffered from physical violence after their accusations. Indeed, as at the time of conducting my fieldwork, the Kpakorafon had received four new cases of women brought to be resettled. One of the women I saw was visibly shaken with signs of inflictions on her body. Why the torture, I asked Borga.

Borga was philosophical. Firstly, he accepts that inflicting physical violence on those accused of *soo* is not right. He turned my question around while asserting: “but in law if someone kills you they must also be killed... Witches kill spiritually.”¹⁹⁸ The effect of Borga’s position is that a crime

¹⁹⁶ Adam Na Madina, “Interview with Borga in Gambaga”, 16 August 2019,

¹⁹⁷ Balsvik, “Religious Beliefs and Witches in Contemporary Africa”, 2013,

¹⁹⁸ Adam Na Madina, Borga. "Interview with Borga in Gambaga." 16 August 2019

in the spiritual realm should be faced with a real-world punishment. He further asserts that a person who is guilty of *soo* might have killed ten people before being apprehended. While this voice may sound like a lone voice, it is much spoken about by ordinary people who are quick to talk about the unproven cruelties on mostly elderly women.

Sampson, on the other hand, decries the use of torture and harm that accompanies *soo* accusations. As an administrator of the Kpakorafon, he has witnessed and interacted with victims of *soo* torture. In one of his outreaches, engaging with communities to stop driving their elderly women away on *soo* accusations, Sampson came across an incident where a woman was violently assaulted. While engaging with the irate onlookers to stop, an elderly man came to him and cautioned; *“my son, you are too small to be talking about soo.”* He continued his words of advice to Sampson, *“...if you go back, you should start beating them, as soon as you say you will be good to them you are finished.”*¹⁹⁹ Coming back home with the echoes of the voice of the elderly man ringing in his head, Sampson decided to call his father regarding what he had heard. To his surprise, his father confirmed what he had heard saying *“if you are wicked to them, you are good to them. That is how soo exist.”*²⁰⁰ Sampson wonders how he can do that.

These story from Sampson regarding torture presents an inherent dichotomy between good and evil, right and wrong in the metaphysical world. Also, the act of violence in the accusations of *soo* imprints in the minds of those who observe the spectacle. This scenario relates to the concept of performative violence. Mark Juergensmayer assert that performative violence aims to not only *“draw attention to a cause but also to draw those who witness them ...vicariously through images projected by the news media into an experience of reality that the perpetrators want to share.”*²⁰¹ While the torture meted out in a local setting does no target a ‘news media’ it relies on the nature of the oral society to carry and spread images of violence.

¹⁹⁹ Laar, “Interview with Sampson in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

²⁰⁰ Laar, “Interview with Sampson in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

²⁰¹ Juergensmeyer, “Religious Terrorism as Performance Violence”, 2013, 280-92281

Across western Europe, European witchcraft trial in the 16th century accepted torture as a way of seeking witchcraft confession. Through the doctrine of *crimen exceptum*, Denmark for example, permitted torture in witchcraft trials in 1521/1522, as a crime whose conviction was based on confessions.²⁰² According to Liv H. Willumsen *crimen exceptum* was influenced by the binary between ‘God’ and ‘devil’ where a witch departed from the way of God to serve the devil.²⁰³ In the story narrated by Sampson, my interpretation for torture is linked to the idea of one exercising mystic powers in a bad way. However, contemporary processes of ‘witch-trial’ in Gambaga speaks to an alternative to violence. I discuss more of the fowl ritual under item **4.7.1** in the second part of this chapter.

4.6 Local witchcraft trial and Oath-Taking

Pre-colonial Mamprusi had a well-grounded civil and criminal law system to deal with social misfits. Some colonial officers working in the Northern territory of the Gold Coast were surprised by the level of development in local jurisprudence. When the British extended their frontiers of colonial governance to the Gold Coast, they introduced the indirect rule system in 1925. The indirect rule system was introduced to reduce the cost of colonial administration. Indirect rule system had an arrangement such that traditional institutions will be used to govern the local people with some modifications to their customs.²⁰⁴ British common law system was introduced to play complementary laws with traditional conventions. Furthermore, traditional acts which were found to be inconsistent and scientifically inexplicable drew suspicion from the colonial government.

For example, the assistant district commissioner of Gambaga noted surprisingly that despite a structured judicial system, it was not common to call persons to testify as witnesses in the native court. However, I like to interpret this to be the result of the high level of trust and efficacy of the trial processes in native courts. When someone had a case in court they took an oath to tell the

²⁰² Willumsen, “Witches of the North: Scotland and Finnmark”,2013, 153

²⁰³ Willumsen, “Witches of the North: Scotland and Finnmark”,2013,

²⁰⁴ Awedoba, “An Ethnographic Study of Northern Ghanaian Conflicts: Towards a Sustainable Peace”,2009,

truth. To swear an oath in a native court required a person “*to take a pinch of earth between the forefingers and thumb of his right hands.*” While they did that they will then affirm “*All I am going to say about this case is true. If I lie may this product of the earth poison me.*”²⁰⁵ The significance of the oath-taking lies in its potential to encourage peaceful out of court settlement. Also, litigants were also aware of the swift nature of retributive justice from their traditional deity should they peddle falsehood in court. The Mamprusi’s have the proverb which says “*it is better that a man should throw a spear at his fellow than make false accusations against him behind his back.*” This saying is attributed to Attabia, 11th Na of Mamprusi by the British Colonial officer J.K Syme.²⁰⁶ The significance of this proverb lies in a value the Mamprusi people place on truthfulness.

In witchcraft trials and other crimes like arson, theft, adultery and poisoning someone, the accuse who denies the charge of the native court must go through a step further. After the oath, there is a process of testing the guilt or innocence of the accused. In colonial Gambaga, if one denied a charge of the crimes listed, there was the “*option of proving his innocence by taking a ring out of a pot full of boiling shea butter oil, if neither his hand nor the position of his arm immersed in the oil was affected on withdrawal he was let off.*”²⁰⁷ This process speaks to many other instances of awe regarding mystical powers in traditional religion. As mentioned in chapter two, there are several cases in Africa where people chew bottles into their stomach and stab themselves with knives or walk on fire without explicit physical pain or injury. These occurrences seem to defy scientific explanations but at the same time, highlight the ingenuity of different cultures.

It is essential to mention that in the traditional setting of the Mamprusi, the oath-taking process forms the basis for a *prima facie* to be established. In effect, the outcome of taking an oath determines if a case has merit to be heard or discontinued. If one refused to take an oath or was found culpable in the process, the trial continued to seek their confessions before proclaiming a punishment. This process still holds in some rural communities within Northern Ghana. In the

²⁰⁵ Adm./11/1/324 *Essays by Assistant District Commissioners on Tribal History of Mamprusi* 35

²⁰⁶ Syme, J.K.G. *The Kusasi A short History*

²⁰⁷ Adm./11/1/324 *Essays by Assistant District Commissioners on Tribal History of Mamprusi* 36

story of Atani which I narrated in the beginning of the chapter, she disclosed that she was sent to the shrine of *Baama* to swear an oath but she abstained from doing that.

From this narration, we realize that Atani received an order of banishment from her community to be brought to Gambaga. The relevance of a *prima facie* in the case of Atani is seen when she refused to swear by the oath at the shrine in the community. Upon arrival in Gambaga, the *nosi-pohabu* (fowl divination) was held, finding Atani guilty. However, in my interview with Atani she raised some doubts on the fairness of the verdict announced by the Gambarana. (This is discussed more under 4.7.2)

Voices of dissent have a deep root in colonial history. Because of different interpretations and belief systems, the colonial government, the Christian missionary and the local people soon began to clash. The Catholic missionary as one of the early missionary group soon began to clash with traditional authorities. The church objected to their newly African converts in participating in ‘anything pagan’. They condemned the practices of the shrines and ‘fetishes’ as ungodly.²⁰⁸ Overtime a wedge of tension was weaved in the social fabric of the local people. For example, the burgeoning influence of Christianity on the newly converts began to be seen in wives asking for a divorce from their polygamous husbands.²⁰⁹ They demanded divorce ostensibly because in Christianity, the rule is a man for a wife, and this resulted in enormous challenges as to which rule of divorce was going to be followed.

In southern Ghana where witchcraft trials were much documented due to early presence of colonial administration, there are records of local chiefs being fined and summoned for questioning by colonial officials. In September 1937 the Omanhene of Ayeldu, Dan Amuah VI together with 15 others were found guilty of prosecuting witchcraft cases using an outlawed shrine called the

²⁰⁸ Letter to the District Commissioner in Gambaga *Christianity and Native Customs 5th February 1937* by Bishop of Navrongo.

²⁰⁹ Letter from the Catholic Father in Navrongo to the District Commissioner in Gambaga *Christianity and Native Customs 5th February 1937* by Bishop of Navrongo.

Senyagupo.²¹⁰ One Kofi Nyame a Christian convert had filed a complaint to the district commissioner when the native courts accosted his mother over witchcraft allegations. His mother's name had come up as conspirator when one Essie Twiwah confessed to witchcraft practice after going through the oath-taking processes from the shrine. In her testimony to the native court, Essie Twiwah testified:

My name is Essie Twiwah, am of clear and sound mind, I don't suffer from any delirium tremens, I am a witchcraft, as well as Kwesi Gyan... I know them well. I myself testify and verily state before the court that all I have mentioned their names re undoubtedly devils, which means they are all possessing witchcraft. We all go to Chop in the night of human flesh on the top of the Oyan tree at Kwaman...none of them can defy me neither can they deny me. I can bring out to you my chop pot Edzi-dzi-Pakyi, hidden on the ground at the back of my house. I ask Nana to find some medicine to cure me. I beg him so to do. I have killed many people with the rest of the accused.²¹¹

Following these allegations, Essie Tawiah and the rest of the accused were summoned by the native court and charged for "*mischievous and dangerous acts against persons, big and small, their property, work and had made other persons to be sick, through the influence and agency of your witchcraft to which the accused responded by oath Benada*".²¹² During the trial, some of the accused confessed and the tribunal ordered that they be sent to the shrine to be cleansed with local herbs.²¹³ The medicine provided by the shrine exterminates and relieve those who confessed to any powers of witchcraft.

This historical incident narrated above occurred when the colonial government had passed the Witches and the Wizards Finding Order. The witches and wizard finding order prohibited oath-taking processes at the Senya Kupo shrine. In effect, the Chief of Ayeldu was found contravening the law and fined 25 pounds and in default of payment risk being sentenced to three months imprisonment with hard labour.²¹⁴ Similar points of tensions between traditional practices and

²¹⁰ Letter from the Provincial Commissioner to the Colonial Governor *The practice of witch and wizard finding Convictions under Sections 2 of Order in Council No.26 of 1930* 20th September, 1937.

²¹¹ Letter from the Provincial Commissioner to the Colonial Governor *The practice of witch and wizard finding* 2

²¹² Letter from the Provincial Commissioner to the Colonial Governor *The practice of witch and wizard finding* 2

²¹³ Letter from the Provincial Commissioner to the Colonial Governor *The practice of witch and wizard finding* 4

²¹⁴ Letter from the Provincial Commissioner to the Colonial Governor *The practice of witch and wizard finding* 4

colonial directives abound in Gold Coast. However, the scope of this thesis does not permit a detail analysis of the various confessions recorded in native tribunals.

To conclude on the discussions of oath-taking, I observed that oath-taking was an important feature of the native courts both in southern and northern territories of Ghana. Sacrifices and rituals accompanied some of the processes in establishing guilt or otherwise of an accused in native courts. While in some cases the effects of swearing an oath was instantaneous as in proving guilt or otherwise, others abstained from taking an oath while knowing its repercussions.

Now I turn my discussion to the Kpakorafon in Gambaga What is its history? Should the place be disbanded? And what does the place mean to the local people?

Part B

The Kpakorafon- History and Social Organization

4.7 Early Beginnings- The Kpakorafon

The popularity of the Kpakorafon within Northern Ghana transcends the frontiers of Gambaga, warmly embracing neighbouring villages with its sacredness. The news of the settlement and the oracle which reside in the spiritual home of the Mamprusi people has travelled far and near often attracting pilgrims and victims alike. Its visitors have heard about the unique story of the people of Gambaga and throng the place to see what phenomena exist there. On the other hand, victims of communal violence who had to run for their lives present a different story. From *Yonyo*, to *Garu* to *Tolon* and *Naliregu* in the northern territory in Ghana, elderly women most especially have had to resettle, in a new home different from that of their communities. These two opposing realities give a confusing image of the place with various people describing it differently often with negative connotation.

The history of the Kpakorafon provides an adequate background for its evaluation regarding what it means for the local people. I took the oral history of the Kpakorafon from Sampson and Borga while drawing on clues from colonial archival materials which supports the story.

The *Kpakorafon* started in the early 1900s. Its origin is attributed to a story of the Imam of Gambaga. One fateful day, Imam Baba, witnessed a middle-aged woman being hurled and beaten from Naliregu towards Gambaga. The woman, accused as *sonya* had a group of people behind her shouting invectives and curses at her while physically assaulting her. This caught Imam Baba's attention who suspected that the woman was been dragged to a hill around Gambaga to be executed. Colonial records show that if someone committed a capital crime like seducing the wife of the chief, or found to have murdered someone physically or spiritually they faced a capital punishment. They will be sent to local Hill "two miles from Naliregu, close to Gambaga and

thrown into a deep rock hound chasm".²¹⁵ Imams, were much respected in the colonial era as some of them served as scribes and teachers in the royal palaces. He intervened and took the woman home out of pity. This act of goodness attracted the curiosity of the local people who marveled and said "...you were accepting the sooba, let's see what will happen. They will kill you. They will do this..."²¹⁶ A week passed and then a month, yet Imam Baba was well, sound and safe. So, the local people thought that Imam Baba must be wielding some power to keep in check the women accused as witches who were brought to him. With time, the numbers grew more than the Imam could manage himself, and it was at this point that he decided to seek the help of the Gambarana to house them.

Sampson asserts that in the traditional setting, a chief is responsible for whatever activity which happens in the community. If a Chief superintends over good people it strengthens his rule, if they were bad people, it still lay in his power to take care of them and make them better. It was this community feeling which occasioned the Gambarana to dedicate a parcel of land for the accused women to be resettled. Over time, the place came to be known as Kpakorafon translated as the elderly women's' area or settlement.

Today, the Kpakorafon has about 76 women with about 32 children in residence. Most of the women come from villages far and near in the Northern territory of Ghana. The Presbyterian church has adopted the place and appointed a coordinator to facilitate the welfare of the women and lead a project called the Go home project.

4.8 How does an accuse get settled in Gambaga?

It has been over a century since the first woman was accused and tortured on the verge of death before being rescued. Yet, from the story above, we do not know the reason for her accusation. A typical scenario of arriving in Gambaga starts with an accusation from the victim's community.

²¹⁵ Adm./11/1/324 Essays by Assistant District Commissioners on Tribal History of Mamprusi 35

²¹⁶ Laar, "Interview with Sampson in Gambaga", 19 August 2019,

Firstly, they are accused of *soo* usually by a close relative. Secondly, depending on the tradition of the community, an accused person is summoned to the chief's palace to answer queries and allegations. While some communities have a form of a local shrine which ask people to swear an oath as in the case of Atani, others will ask the accused to be sent to the Gambarana for verification. It is significant to note that for communities who have a tradition of oath-taking refusing to swear becomes a basis face banishment. It connotes an acceptance of guilt for which one fears the wrath of the oracle. Thirdly, upon arrival at the Gambaga, the Gamabarrana performs a ritual and a ceremony to confirm if indeed one is guilty of what they have been accused. If they are found guilty, they are given potions to drink to rid them of their powers before they are resettled. On the other hand, if the person is innocent of the charge, they are supposed to be accepted and returned to their community.

Two categories of people reside in the Kpakorafon; those that their community brought following allegations of *soo*. The second category is those who run for their lives for shelter when they fear their lives were in danger. For example, Laadi and Lariba disclosed that they run by themselves to Gambaga after they realized their lives faced imminent danger. Laadi informed me that when her people saw that she could not give birth again and they started accusing her of *soo* making her life uncomfortable.²¹⁷ For her, the only place she could think about was to run to Gambaga.²¹⁸ Both elderly women have heard about the history of Gambaga and the presence of such a place for women facing danger.

Laadi notes that “... *It was as a result of the way my people rejected me that I had to just come to this place...*”²¹⁹ It can be deduced that, aside from it acting as a place receiving people who have been banished from neighboring villages, the Kpakorafon also provides accommodation for people on humanitarian grounds. Sometimes, these journey take several days of walking. Others who had

²¹⁷ Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”,17 August 2019,

²¹⁸ Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”,17 August 2019,

²¹⁹ Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”,17 August 2019,

time to plan their journeys arrived on motorcycle while having their children following up to be with them.

For the majority of the women living there, they have had to come to Gambaga following accusations of *soo* and then brought to undergo the *nosi-pohabu* (fowl divination process) to establish their guilt or innocence. One of the most controversial issues surrounding the Kpakorafon. What is the ceremony and what does it entail?

4.8.1 The Fowl Ritual in Gambaga (Nosi-pohabu)

The *nosi-pohabu* (fowl ritual) to ascertain the status of an accused *sonya* is a public ceremony. It attracts onlookers from the community who throng to the residence of the Gambarana to witness the public “trial”. The Gambarana starts by muttering some incantations, calling on the oracles to intervene in the ritual. As an arbiter in establishing the truth or otherwise of the case, the Gambarana leads the public ritual, holding high up the fowl to everyone gathered to witness the spectacle. Before then, the accused kneels before the shrine, holding the fowl to proclaim *“I stand before you(shrine) to swear that I am not a witch, if I am a witch as alleged on me, this should be proven in the sacrifice of this fowl put before you.”*²²⁰

The head of the fowl is cut, and the fowl is thrown up into the sky to fall. As it falls, it dangles and dazzles for several seconds until it arrives at a complete halt. If the fowl lies on the stomach, it means the accused is guilty and if it lies on its back, then it means the accused is not guilty.²²¹ Recollecting from an episode he had witnessed, Samson says even in the cases where the oracle finds one innocent, *“the Gambarana will be very clear and optimistic that this is what has happened. Asking the crowd gathering observing the ritual; have you all seen it? That would end the matter.”*²²²

²²⁰ Nangpaak, “The Gambaga “Witches” Colony: Its Artistic and Other Cultural Life”,2007,116

²²¹ Alhassan, "Interview with Amisu in Gambaga." 18 August 2019

²²² Laar, “Interview with Sampson in Gambaga”,19 August 2019,

It is significant to note that, there were no known ceremony of killing fowls to determine guilt or otherwise of an accused witch in Gambaga until Imam Baba sought the help of the Gambarana to resettle the women he gave asylum. Sampson observed that, Imam Baba as an Islamic cleric, used the Koran to protect himself from any possible *soo* attack. He housed the women adjourned to the mosque of his house.²²³ According to Sampson, the traditional authority also had to devise an antidote “...that was why they brought in the deity, they started sacrificing to the oracle to get those solutions”.²²⁴

Sampson posits that the *nosi-pohabu* was a purposeful creation of tradition to deal with the specific issues of *soo*. He narrates that Imam Baba, the Islamic cleric who started keeping people accused as *sonya* used his Koran for protection, the Gambarrana had to also fashion out a way to deal with *soo* accusations.²²⁵ This reflects the potential of traditional knowledge systems to be adaptive and regenerative. Indeed, it is argued that traditional knowledge systems provide solutions to peculiar societal problems.²²⁶ The tradition of the people of Gambaga holds that while *soo* entails exercising mystic powers, their deity has a counter-balancing control of such powers.²²⁷

The interpretation of who is guilty and who is not guilty depends on the position the fowl dies. The fowl in many respects symbolizes the conscience of the person facing accusations as if they were in a wrestling bout with the oracle. In that wrestling, there is only one way to be defeated, and that is when one lies flat on the stomach biting the dust. There are generally four possibilities when the fowl is killed. To fall on its breast, fall on its back or fall on either side of the wings. It is noteworthy that in all the four possibilities of determining an accusation, the custom only allows for one probability for guilt. This in modern times can be equated to allowing for enough room for a margin of error, so that when one is pronounced it is assumed to be beyond all reasonable doubt.

²²³ Laar, “Interview with Sampson in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

²²⁴ Laar, “Interview with Sampson in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

²²⁵ Laar, “Interview with Sampson in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

²²⁶ Grenier, “Working with Indigenous Knowledge : A Guide for Researchers”, 1998,

²²⁷ Alhassan, “Interview with Amisu in Gambaga.” 18 August 2019

In Gambaga, there are cases where people who were brought have had their allegations refuted by the deity and exonerated. In situations like this, the person is insulated from any attacks and the Gambarana is sure to proclaim the person innocent. Sampson informed me that he has witnessed several times that if the fowl falls at its back, the Gambarana “*will insist you are not a witch and wherever you want go again fine, as far as he is concerned the person is not sonya.*”²²⁸

For a casual onlooker, this process may be arbitrary and based on chance. Assuming such a casual position, I asked shrugging:

Ibrahim: Do you think that how the fowl falls sometimes is not right? Is it possible that when the fowl falls, it could also have meant something different? Let me take it this way, for example, somebody is brought here, and the oracle says that they are a guilty and the person feels they are not. Is it possible that the oracle could be wrong?

Amisu: It cannot be that what the deity says is not true, because we believe in our deities and what they say, so if they say it is, then that is what it is.

Sampson: How can they say the deity is wrong, because they believe in the deity that what it says is final.

It should be noted that activities of diviners despite their preferring solutions to local concerns is sometimes equated to lack of development. In one of their exchanges, colonial office noted that consultation of soothsayers and ‘fetishes’ “is a definite obstacle to progress”.²²⁹ Claiming that, falling on ‘medicine men’ dissuaded the people from using communal hospitals. This notwithstanding, in current times, there is a general acceptance in Gambaga on the infallibility of the gods and the deity. In the situation when an accused refuses the verdict, the fowl is killed several times to give a fair hearing. Should the accused remain adamant, a mixture of water and herbs is administered to them to drink and that causes them to confess.²³⁰ This water mixture triggers a voluntary confession without the need for physical violence or torture.

²²⁸ Laar, “Interview with Sampson in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

²²⁹ NRG8/19/7 Points of conflict between native customs and Christian law

²³⁰ Adam Na Madina, “Interview with Borga in Gambaga”, 16 August 2019,

The assumption that traditions and traditional knowledge systems have solutions for societal problems holds true for a cross-section of the people of Gambaga. They acknowledge that while some traditions have in the past given problems, some traditions give life and encourage peaceful coexistence.²³¹ Considering that the average age of the elderly women I interacted with is 60 years, it appears that the pedigree of the deity in Gambaga has endured as one of those traditions which gives life. Indeed, three out of the four elderly women I spoke to mentioned that they had heard about the Kpakorafon while growing up. Testifying to the potency of the deity Lariba observe that *“I believe it works, because I have known about it since I was a young woman and if it was not working, I do not think it would have continued for so many years.”*²³²

4.8.2 Dissent and Accusations of Corruption

Allegations of corruption at the shrine drew my neck down to ask further question. Talaata believes in the potency of the deity to determine cases. However, she holds that the fowl ritual was not fair to their case specifically, thereby contesting the validity of the verdict against her. In responding to the question whether the deity works and what she felt after the verdict was given, she responded:

It is true, it can work very well, sometimes because they might want to manipulate it, if not so, I know and I believe it works. Unless sometimes they get some bribe and they might want to manipulate it. Also, there are so many of us (elderly women) and nobody here has bewitched any of us and nobody can do any wicked thing so I believe it is the work of the deity, because women cannot live together without problems.²³³

Again, Talaata noted that when the *nosi-pohabu* was performed, the fowl *“...started its movements jumping and tossing up and down for a while before finally coming to a halt. I am not a child, when you kill a fowl, it should not be dancing around like that.”*²³⁴

²³¹ Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”, 17 August 2019,

²³² Lariba, “Oral History Interview with Lariba in Gambaga”, 19th August 2019,

²³³ Talaata, “Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

²³⁴ Talaata, “Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

For a native of Gambaga, Borga's disclosure to the question whether the outcomes and processes of the shrine could be influenced give credence to the claim of Atani. Borga notes that "*in Ghana, there is nothing that there is no connection, so sometimes people can also say there was connection in the palace. But yes, they can also allege corruption if they are adamant on accepting the verdict.*"²³⁵ The word *connection* in English is widely used in Ghana to refer to cutting corners or giving out bribe to influence a process.

Atani on the other hand rejects completely that her fowl had kowtowed to the deity which found her guilty. On the whole, I find as revealing the potent agency of the women to speak their minds with regards to fair processes even when in front of people like Sampson. Sampson apart from serving as the administrator of the Kpakorafon supervises the sharing of food items and other donations. He wields power in the eyes of the elderly women, does not send them into silence even when he is the translator. This I reckon, feeds into the hierarchical nature of the African society where social status normally of age determines one's position in society.²³⁶

As usual, corruption without evidence is hard to prove, it remains a wobbling perception. However, the issue of corruption with various *bugarana* has some historical reference. Colonial officers sometimes have had to deal with an unscrupulous *bugarana*. In Southern Ghana, John Parker describes how the shrines of *Abrewa* and *Sakrabundi* in the late 1800s were noted for turning themselves in to "ritual entrepreneurs manipulating the popular dread of witches to accumulate wealth."²³⁷

Writing to the Commissioner of the Northern Territory on the activity of a recalcitrant *bugarana*, the district commissioner of Gambaga complained about the activity of the *Bugiya fetish*. The *bugarana* is said to have occasioned the death of a man and instigated the banishment of the man's

²³⁵ Adam Na Madina, "Interview with Borga in Gambaga", 16 August 2019,

²³⁶ Oyewumi, "The Invention of Women", 2014,

²³⁷ Parker J "Witchcraft, Anti-witchcraft and Trans-Regional Ritual Innovation in early colonial Ghana: Sakrabundi and Abrewa, 1889-1910 *Journal of African History*, 45 (2004) Cambridge University press 415

wife accusing her as *sonya*. No sooner had the woman left the community than the diviner looted the deceased properties.²³⁸ Acting on the report he received, district commissioner subsequently made a journey to Bugiya where he rescued the property from the diviner. He informed the diviner that “while the colonial government had no intention of interfering with local fetishes unless they were harmful,” he will cause the *bugarana* to be criminally prosecuted if a similar event happened again.²³⁹

Drucker-Brown also noted that in the 1960s it was believed that once a witch was resettled in Gambaga she was to be there for life and only be released if she bribed the Chief.²⁴⁰ In 1991 Drucker-Brown learnt from the chief that a woman was free to leave if she found a place to leave, she will then have to pay for his medicine and animal sacrifice for the ancestor shrine. But things have changed from 1991 to date, with a clear process on how someone can leave the place.

Despite the allegations of corruption on traditional practices and processes, the objections are to some specific cases rather than disproving the efficacy of its processes. The processes at Gambaga has over the decades if not a century maintain a tradition which has been highly upheld by its people. Once someone is resettled into the Kpakorafon, they are ushered into a new home.

My next discussion is on how the Kpakorafon is organized and how the elderly women interact with members of the Gambaga society.

4.9 Social relations- The Kpakorafon and the people of Gambaga

Contrary to popular belief that the women who settle in the Kpakorafon are living in isolation, in a form of prison²⁴¹ and regimented lifestyle²⁴², I observed that they were no different from other

²³⁸ Correspondence from District Commissioner to the Commissioner of Northern Territories “Bugiya Fetish” 2nd July 1924

²³⁹ Correspondence from District Commissioner to the Commissioner of Northern Territories “Bugiya Fetish” 2nd July 1924

²⁴⁰ Drucker-Brown, “Mamprusi Witchcraft: Subversion and Changing Gender Relations”, 1993, 537

²⁴¹ Drucker-Brown, “Mamprusi Witchcraft: Subversion and Changing Gender Relations”, 1993,

²⁴² Nangpaak, “The Gambaga “Witches” Colony: Its Artistic and Other Cultural Life”, 2007, 116

women in the Gambaga on the surface. In a prison or camp, there are limits to once movements and social interaction. However, the situation in Gambaga exemplifies a sense of mutual respect between the host community and the women who have come to resettle in the community. One of the reasons for this reality is the general conviction that *sooba* cannot operate or harm anyone in Gambaga. Out of sublime respect to water down on the feeling of stigma, the people in the community do not refer to any of the women directly as *sonya*. Indeed, on one occasion, I had met one of my acquaintance on my way from walking about in Gambaga and he enquired where I was coming from. I replied absent-mindedly that I was coming from the ‘witches’ area and he was quick to reprimand me and entreated me to refer to the place as elderly women’s area.

Due to the mutual respect between native inhabitants and the women in the Kpakorafon, the children from the community usually go around in their compounds to play and provide help to the women. This situation contradicts with some of the memories of the elderly women from their respective communities. As I had narrated earlier, as children, they will typically run away from people they suspected as *sooba* in the community. In Gambaga, the reverse is true. As a boy growing up in Gambaga, Borga recalls that some of his fond memories were from the Kpakorafon. He will go and help the elderly women to cook and eat with them.²⁴³ Borga claims that his interaction with the elderly women provided him with cooking skills. He talks highly about learning to cook one of the local staples called *Tuo Zaafi* from elderly women. The testimony from Laadi supports Borga’s claims. She discloses that “*we are free, no threat from the people of Gambaga, they relate to us very well.*”²⁴⁴

The Kpakorafon has a hierarchical system of leadership with the Gambarana sitting at the top as the ultimate custodian of the settlement. From the Gambarana is his first son who deputizes in his father’s absence. In the Kpakorafon, there is an administrator appointed by the Presbyterian church who coordinates and serves as the link between the outside world and the elderly women. Within

²⁴³ Adam Na Madina, “Interview with Borga in Gambaga”, 16 August 2019,

²⁴⁴ Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”, 17 August 2019,

the women itself are appointed leaders; the head of the women being the *magajia*. The *magajia* performs the role of a leader and an organizer for the women. Sometimes she is contacted by members of the Gambaga community to contract the women for various work. Apart from acting as a liaison officer, she acts as a first point of call for other women when they are in difficulty. In the mornings, it is a common to see other elderly women walk into her compound to send her greetings. The appointment of a *magajia* by the Gambarrana is held as a public event in Gambaga attracting onlookers. According to Duut G. Naangpak, the “*Magazia is decorated with beads and a traditional crown and a smock fabric to look elegant. The cloth is wrapped tightly above her breasts, she is then carried high amidst drumming and praise singing. The peers dance in cheers at their best, each one clapping her hands.*”²⁴⁵ During this ceremony a praise singer from amongst the women sings in honour of the Gambarrana. At one of this ceremony, the praise singer amongst the elderly women is seen joyfully proclaiming “let us praise our chief, the protector of the witches of Gambaga”²⁴⁶

The role of the *magajia* is supported by other sub *magajias* who represent the majority of the ethnic groups located in the Kpakorafon. There is a *magajia* for the Konkomba, Dagomba, Hausa and Mamprusi. For instance, if a new entrant to the Kpakorafon arrives, the *magajia* of her ethnic group will be the one to lead her from the chief’s palace to their hut.

4.9.1 Elderly women and business in Gambaga

One defining characteristic of the social relation between the elderly women in the Kpakorafon and the native people of Gambaga is defined by trade. There is a symbiotic relationship which has developed over time, ensuring a situation where everyone benefits from each other. As I usually walk around in the Kpakorafon observing the surroundings, I saw children of varied ages carrying items on their heads to sell to the elderly women in their compounds. They sell mostly items for breakfast and for laundry. Around the corners and outside of the huts of the elderly women are

²⁴⁵ Nangpaak, “The Gambaga “Witches” Colony: Its Artistic and Other Cultural Life”,2007,116 37

²⁴⁶ Yaba, “The Witches of Gambaga”,2011,55

packed firewood bound together by a thread. It has become a trademark of the elderly women in Gambaga selling firewood to the local people. Consequently, the women serve as a vital chain in the commercial and domestic lives of the local people of Gambaga.

Farming activities by far offer the best example of the interaction between the local people and the elderly women. The Northern Region is known for its large tracts of land which are used for farming purposes. Commercial farming in general in Northern Ghana is manually intensive. Farm procedures and processes depend on having abled bodies to cultivate the lands, sow and care for food crops. In the same vein, farmers who do not have enough people to help them harvest their crops succumb to much losses. The elderly women in Gambaga provide the pool of labour for farming in Gambaga reflected in two ways. Firstly, the elderly women work on the farm of the Gambarrana as a courtesy for sheltering them. Secondly, they provide labour to other household and people engaged in commercial farming.

In an area where agriculture is mainly labor-intensive rather than mechanical, it will appear that the more hands one gets on the farm, the better for their finances. Due to this, the elderly women are in high demand for their labour during the time of planting and harvesting. Before working on anyone's farm they agree on their terms of payment. Whereas in some situation they negotiate only for cash payment, in other instances they bargain on both cash and in-kind payments. Laadi notes that the more they work on people's farms, the more food they have during harvest as they get some of the farm yields. It is common for the elderly women to sell part of their share to members of the community for extra money. While in Gambaga, I have witnessed some of the people from the community coming with mini cargo bikes to purchase food items from them.

Mobile phones have become an important source of communication for the elderly women. It is revealing to find out that the elderly women make and receive business and social calls. Even in Accra, the sight of elderly people holding mobile phones draws curiosity. I was pleasantly surprised to find some of the women with a mobile phone, partly because of the conception I came with Gambaga. One should be able to have some form of income to afford a mobile phone and keep it active. The use of mobile phones by the elderly women help them to connect with their

local partners. Most importantly, mobile phones keep them connected with their family members from their home communities especially their children. In addition to offering labour on the farms, some of the women are artisans. They engage in indigenous forms of plastering using muds as a type of cement and their hands as trowels. This creativity from the elderly women regarding their handy skills is seen around in the Kpakorafon. Some of the huts in the Kpakorafon have various designs inscribed on them. On a casual look, one could imagine that those designs were made for aesthetic purposes. When I enquired about the reason for those designs, I was informed by some of the women that the designs made on the mud hut was to prevent the hut from soaking in too much water from the rains. The danger if that occurred was that the dripping water could lead to the collapse of the hut. To avoid that from happening, designs are made with brooms on the huts to serve as path ways where the rainwater could quickly snake through to the ground. This stands out to me as a way of expressing their ingenuity.

Life in Gambaga for elderly women is not at all without challenges. Despite the warm reception and acceptability, there exist some social ceiling. Laadi observes that the community sometimes see “us as *sooba* and strangers.”²⁴⁷ She refers to these words not in terms of stigmatization but to discrimination reflecting in leadership structures. The elderly women are not consulted in decision making in the Kpakorafon. For instance, the elderly women do not have a say on how food items are distributed in the Kpakorafon. Secondly as strangers, they are not able to access individual land farm lands unless it is for communal use.²⁴⁸ The drawback with this arrangement is that it stifles individual entrepreneurial spirit. Wielding resources is an important part of feeling free and empowered. Perhaps, this situation brings Achebe’s words to mind that “*the mangrove tree dwells in the river but it does not turn into a crocodile.*”²⁴⁹ A counter argument for this discrimination can be viewed as a form of protectionism, limiting what ‘outsiders’ can have access to in the town of Gambaga.

²⁴⁷ Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”, 17 August 2019,

²⁴⁸ Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”, 17 August 2019,

²⁴⁹ Achebe, “Things Fall Apart”, 1992,

4.9.2 Perceptions of slave labour in Gambaga

Nangpaak, Duut George (2007) claims claim that the local people from Gambaga are keen at maintaining the Kpakorafon because the elderly women provide them with free labour.²⁵⁰ Some others assert that because the elderly women are vulnerable they may accept whatever money is given to them for their service.²⁵¹ For Drucker-Brown, not executing witches but rather segregating them was because they provide useful labour.²⁵² To this charge, Borga exclaims “*ooh no! some of the people came here by themselves, how is it our making?*”²⁵³ He asserts that, there are situations were some of the elderly women who do not get a job go to the market and pick up food crumbs from the ground of the market. Borga raises the question whether it was not a good idea to engage in labour rather than to pick food items from the ground? Implying that the Kpakorafon was only there for labour takes away the historical reasoning for its starting, and taking away the agency of the local people to care for their people without exploiting them.

Responding to perceptions of labour wage discrimination, Atani disclosed that they are paid 8cedis (about two dollars) for a day’s work and that “whatever they pay the townspeople is the same amount they pay us, there is nothing like cheating because you live in the Kpakorafon.”²⁵⁴

Another criticism against the local traditional authority is that the Gambarana uses the labour of the elderly women without paying for it. In deed the thoughts amongst some section of the public suggest that by not paying for the labour of the women, the Gambarana is motivated to keep them as his labour ‘slaves’²⁵⁵. However, the palace does not see why it is wrong to work on the Gambarana’s farm who is providing them with shelter.²⁵⁶ There are historical evidence to show that chiefs as result of their positions in the community receive free labour from the community.

²⁵⁰ Nangpaak, “The Gambaga “Witches” Colony: Its Artistic and Other Cultural Life”,2007,116

²⁵¹ ActionAid *Condemned without trial: Women and witchcraft in Ghana* (London 2012)

²⁵² Drucker-Brown, “Mamprusi Witchcraft: Subversion and Changing Gender Relations”,1993,

²⁵³ Adam Na Madina, “Interview with Borga in Gambaga”,16 August 2019,

²⁵⁴ Atani, “Oral Histroy Interview with Atani in Gambaga”,17 August 2019,

²⁵⁵ Yaba, “The Witches of Gambaga”,2011,55

²⁵⁶ Alhassan, “Interview with Amisu in Gambaga”,18 August 2019,

In some communities, a specific day is dedicated for people work on the farm. In one of the colonial correspondences a priest of the Catholic church objected to Christian converts taking part in the compulsory Sunday community labor.²⁵⁷ Amisu notes then that the chief's farm will be done regardless even if the elderly women were not settled in Gambaga.²⁵⁸ Further, the palace is quick to draw on the history of the Kpakorafon as evidence to the genuine intention of traditions to provide solutions to societal problems. There are several activities that the palace is engaged in now to dissuade frequent accusations. For instance, the palace offers counseling to both accused and accusers and encourage them to pursue reconciliation immediately after the ritual. In this case, if one is found guilty, the palace intervenes for a *nyulisugu* to be done. The *nyulisugu* is a ceremony and a process which cleanses an accused from *soo*. Secondly, if a verdict from the deity was non-guilty, the palace ensures that the person is exonerated and taken back.

Why then is the Kpakorafon still operational despite vociferous calls for its closed down? In my next discussion I will discuss what the Kpakorafon mean to the elderly women who have resettled in Gambaga and present the voices of other stakeholders.

4.10 “They should come and close it...”-The Kpakorafon in the eyes of its beholders

In recent times much has been said within the local politics about the future of the various ‘witch homes’ in Northern Ghana. There is a difference of opinion about the issues on the ground. While the majority of the call is for the settlements to be disbanded, very little audience have been given to the women themselves. News reporters, politicians and researchers come to Gambaga to ascertain the situation on the ground. Surprisingly, they rarely ask of the opinion of the elderly women themselves about the status of the Kpakorafon and its significance to them. The net result is that they focus the wrong impressions by projecting the poverty and the difficulty of livelihood around the elderly women. I have seen about three films on the Kpakorafon which I have variously

²⁵⁷ NRG8/19/7 Points of conflict between native customs and Christian law

²⁵⁸ Alhassan, “Interview with Amisu in Gambaga”, 18 August 2019,

referred to in this thesis and none really asked the women's thought on the unending debate on the closure of the Kpakorafon.

To start with, it is important to emphasize that the problem with the existence of the Kpakorafon is not entirely the host community. Indeed, as host community, Gambaga eschews all forms of physical violence and torture meted out to people suspected of *soo*. Again, the point must be made that some of the inhabitants of the Kpakorafon came by themselves asking for favor from the Gambarana to stay under his custody. I have referred to the case of Laadi and Lariba who had to run away from their community to save their dear lives. The problem regarding the debate about the closure of the Kpakorafon is not about the belief in *soo* as outmoded. *Soo* is an inseparable aspect of the social life of Gambaga and its neighbouring communities. The core of the issue then is about how *soo* accusations are handled and treated by the communities. While the town of Gambaga has an established way of determining the guilt or innocence of an accused on the one hand and the power to disempower *soo* of those found guilty other neighbouring communities do not. The critical question therefore is to find out what available solution is there for the communities who bring accused persons to Gambaga to be tested by the deity. I discuss two of the issues here.

The first is that if an accused is brought to Gambaga and are found guilty, the option is to ensure that the person is dis-empowered of their *soo* and taken back home immediately. By doing so, no one will have to stay a life of exile in Gambaga. While this action should arrive naturally, most accused persons after being found guilty do not return to their communities. This is because members of the community who bring the charge against the accuse do not follow through with *nyulisugu* ritual. The *nyulisugu* ritual is what takes away the *soo* of the accused and render them powerless. In recent times, the local traditional council headed by the Gambarana have a policy of a "pre-trial" counseling. The aim of the pre-trial counseling is to intervene to 'repatriate' accused persons back to their families should they be found guilty.

The administrator of the Kpakorafon noted that from January to August 2019 alone, they have sent back about 19 women to their communities after they were found guilty of *soo* practise.²⁵⁹ The Gambarana's palace point to this intervention as their rebuttal to the charge of keeping the women in Gambaga to render labour to the chief. It must be emphasized that the repatriation is not a popular programme for the communities who bring accused persons to Gambaga for the traditional trial. This brings into sharp focus the mischief in some of the *soo* accusations. It must be possible that, when a community believes in the potency of a deity to determine the truth of a *soo* accusation, they must also believe in its power to nullify such bad use of mystic powers.

The second issue related with the communities is that they sometimes refuse the verdict of the deity if it goes against their wish. In a normal circumstance, when the deity exonerates an accused, they are free to go back home and live in peace. Nevertheless, some family members and communities reject the verdict given by the Gambarana altogether. By doing so, they issue and carry out threats on the exonerated person insisting they were still culpable. Even though such occurrence seldom happens now there was a case of this scenario in June 2019. An elderly woman was brought to Gambaga from the neighbouring village of *Zarantinga* for the fowl ritual. The woman was exonerated by the deity and the Gambarana insisted they must be sent back home. However, the community resisted and even threatened the police when they attempted to enforce the orders of the Gambarana.²⁶⁰

As an administrator of the Kpakorafon and doing missionary work, I engaged Sampson on what future he envisions for the Kpakorafon. I asked if tradition in Gambaga was still relevant.

He exclaimed

Sampson: Of course! so much, for me so much, I always sit down and wonder if Gambarana had not taken these people, I don't know where they will be. I have seen instances where we try to intervene to repatriate the person and they realized that the case might become a police case, they kill the person. So, this settlement is really necessary. You see, if we are able to educate the communities very well and there is no problem, it

²⁵⁹ Laar, "Interview with Sampson in Gambaga", 19 August 2019,

²⁶⁰ ModernGhana, "Zaratinga Residents Warn Police for Bringing Back Alleged Witches", 2019,

means that we would be able not to get new ones. And the camp by itself would die off and that would be fine.²⁶¹

For the women who have had to move and resettle in Gambaga, the Kpakorafon transcends traditions, it is about life and death, it is about survival. For these women, they cannot think of any better alternative for their survival than the presence of the Kpakorafon. Indeed, due to the urgency of their situation and because they came by themselves both Laadi and Lariba said they did not go through the ritual. When I asked Laadi what she thinks about the existence of the Kpakorafon, she said *“I think it is very good it exists, for instance if this place were not to be here, many of us will not be alive. I know I would have been dead by now, but because of the existence of this place I am still alive today.”*²⁶² Laadi speaks in the plural terms to project the commonality of her experience with other stories of the women like hers. During my interview with her in her compound, she was surrounded by four other women who listened in to our conversation and interview. This show of support and solidarity among the women crystallizes what Laadi said to the effect that they are united together as sisters based on what brought them together at the Kpakorafon. In a rhetorical tone she asked, *“If I came here by a lorry, and you came by a similar lorry, aren’t we then connected?”*²⁶³ This symbolic expression carries the message of similar stories of hardship which has given them a sense of belonging and solidarity for each other.

The *Magajia* of the elderly women was direct when I presented to her the numerous calls making the airwaves that the Kpakorafon should be disbanded. When I asked her if the place should be closed as it encourages accusations she says that those who call for that *“do not know what they are talking about. Most of the people here do not have anywhere to go. This place has been their home for many years and they will be killed if they return home.”*²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Laar, “Interview with Sampson in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

²⁶² Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”, 17 August 2019,

²⁶³ Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”, 17 August 2019,

²⁶⁴ Lariba, “Oral History Interview with Lariba in Gambaga”, 19th August 2019,

It stands out that apart from the Kpakorafon being a matter of survival, the Kpakorafon offers, shelter and a homely place for the accused women. Granted that the settlement is not all rosy, what matters for the women is a place they can have a peace of mind. In one of the scenes of Yaba Badoes film, *Mma Hawa* one of the elderly women said a prayer to one of her colleagues whose family had accepted to reunite her back home. *Mma Hawa*'s good bye prayer captures profoundly the experiences of the women who run to Gambaga. She prayed:

God our great Chief and owner of everything, Alima was accused of witchcraft, she wept, saying lions and hyenas were about to devour her. The animals chased Alima to the Gambarrana and she said "Father, save me" He agreed to save her. Alima came to our father the Gambarrana with thorns in her feet, our father has removed the thorns and given her sandals. May these sandals protect Alimas's feet in her husbands; house"²⁶⁵

These prayers from *Mma Hawa* paints a vivid picture with symbolic words of the journey of survival for the women who run for shelter. The allusion to removing the thorns in her feet speak to the relieve the Gambarrana offers. Having been brought to Gambaga and left to start a life of exile, some of them have had their children follow them to the Kpakorafon later. The children while in Gambaga, have access to educational and vocational support instituted by the Presbyterian church.

Accommodation and by extension shelter is one of the basic human needs. If one is thrown out from their community mostly by their family members they are left stranded and homeless. This is not to suggest that the Kpakorafon replaces their original home. The extended family system provides the basis for the organization of social life. In this regard, a home is more than having a shelter, it is about family and relations. In the absence of such possibility to be with family members, the alternative seems a considerable solution. Talaata notes this about the Kpakorafon; "*It is better this place exists. Why? I cannot go home, now that I cannot go home, where could I have been?*"²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Yaba, "The Witches of Gambaga",2011,55

²⁶⁶ Talaata, "Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga",19 August 2019,

Another issue which has brought the spot light on the Kpakorafon is the claim that the women there are held against their wish. While it is the case that they wish to resettle back to their home community immediately situations prevent them from doing so. The shrine at Gambaga and its decision on one's guilt or innocence is not akin to the verdict of secular court which has police to enforce imprisonment. The Kpakorafon while serving as a home for people banished for accusations of *soo*, they are not intended to be a prison. Their movement and life are not regimented and policed. Some members of the public erroneously assume that both the processes of resettling in the Kpakorafon and what triggers *soo* accusation from individual communities are the same thing. As I have explained, accusations from communities fuel the exodus to Gambaga. Following from this the processes of Gambaga rather provides solutions for the problems of *soo* accusation which sometimes are fatal. This point is further supported by my interaction with Atani I enquired:

Ibrahim: If somebody says you are being kept here as prisoners, what will you say?

*Atani: It is not true, nobody disturbs us here, nobody is punishing us and we are suffering no suffering, may be the person does not know about it.*²⁶⁷

In my interview with Atani, she comes out as someone who misses her original home and yearns to reunite with her family. Indeed, we talked during the interview the core words she kept repeating was “*I want to go home.*” To this end I interpret her expression of “*we are suffering no suffering*” to mean absence of hardships but to deny a form of suffering. In this case, disagreeing with the claim of being held prisoner or mistreated in Gambaga. In fact, various reports of NGOs and statements from some politicians refer to the protest the women themselves have mounted to prevent the Kpakorafon from disbanded.²⁶⁸ Despite the fortitude of the voices of the women

²⁶⁷ Atani, “Oral Histroy Interview with Atani in Gambaga”,17 August 2019,

²⁶⁸ ActionAid *Condemned without trial: Women and witchcraft in; Myjoyonline Government should publish roadmap to disband witches camp-MP demands on International Women's Day* 8th March 2020 (<https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/national/government-should-publish-roadmap-to-disband-witches-camp-mp-demands-on-international-womens-day/>)

regarding the status of the Kpakorafon, it seems the sentiments to close the Kpakorafon is bloated whenever a news documentary is aired. These news documentaries stir up the debate once more when they focus on showing the living conditions of the women living in mud houses and telling about their dire economic hardships. But I reason that what the media focuses on is only scratching the surface of the problem. What has happened over the years is to assume that the elderly women are not capable enough to think about their conditions to warrant their involvement in major decisions to decide their fate. They are portrayed as uneducated and uninformed.

For Amisu the son of the Gambarana my question about what he thinks regarding the call to disband the settlement was received with contempt. He retorts: *Ooh! They should come and close it! The women themselves will tell them not to because if they ask them to go home and they go home and they kill them will they be there? And do they know their villages?*²⁶⁹

In recent times, there seem to be a different approach from the government regarding how they handle the issue of the Kpakorafon. While in the past there have been outburst and threats of shutting the various settlements in the Northern Region as it represents a sign of under-development a modicum of change is beginning to resonate. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and the Office of the First Lady occasionally make donations to the women.²⁷⁰ However, this occasional show of support is not sustainable. There is little to no policy direction and action to address the issues *soo* accusations in rural Ghana. This is in part to avoid contentious discusses of issues such as *soo* which the secular and modern laws of Ghana does not tolerate.

The Kpakorafon in Gambaga enjoys the benevolence of several NGOs and missionary charities in Ghana. The Kpakorafon has become the envy of the community as its compounds are adorned with solar lamps to provide electricity. In a nation where power supply is erratic, the Kpakorafon beams with brightness from afar any time the community goes off due to general power outages.

²⁶⁹ Alhassan, "Interview with Amisu in Gambaga", 18 August 2019,

²⁷⁰ Myjoyonline *First Lady Supports Gambaga witch camp* 24th December 2012. (<https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/first-lady-supports-gambaga-witches-camp/>)

Each compound unit is equipped with a private toilet built by the Presbyterian church and a water storage and borehole built by the Methodist Church. The women seem to be in a world of their own surviving from occasional donations and meagre resources. Their bad economic situation not more than majority of the rural folks in Ghana living on less than two dollars a day.

Despite the relative ease in the life-style and accommodation facilities of the elderly women, the Kpakorafon still lacks a lot. The compound houses are built with mud and roofed with thatch. The effect of the thatch roofing is severely felt at the start of the rainy season leaving their rooms leaking with water. The leadership of the Kpakorafon miss no opportunity to ask for donations and support whenever the opportunity calls for it. The joy of some of the women living with their children and grandchildren seem to be in the fact that those children give them hope. They have these children to school or impress upon them to learn a skill at their new home.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter discussed two of my research questions. Firstly, it constructed the process and the events leading to an accused person resettling in the Kpakorafon. While doing so, the first part of the chapter presented local conceptions of the word *soo*. My presentation also drew on colonial archival material in order to account for how traditional values and belief systems have continued or changed over time. I discussed the conception of *soo* as family heritage. I also looked at how accusations of witchcraft have been followed by torture. I argue that some communities in pre-colonial and contemporary times have a way of determining guilt or innocence of someone accused as *sonya*.

The second part of this chapter relates to the second research question of the significance of the Kpakorafon to the local people of Gambaga. I recounted the story which eventually led to the establishment of the Kpakorafon. I presented the voices of the elderly women and other members of the society in relation some allegations which have variously been made against the settlement. The women responded directly to allegations of slave labour. They also presented their opinion on the current discussion regarding disbandment of the Kpakorafon. This section also discussed the *nosi-pohabu*, its acceptability in the eyes of the local people.

Chapter 5: Gender and Witchcraft Accusations; Voices from Gambaga

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the final research question relating to gender and witchcraft accusations. It presents the voice of my research participants regarding why women have been the majority of those accused of *soo*. Secondly the chapter will discuss their responses in light with current debates on gender perspectives from both liberal and post-colonial feminism. The third part of this thesis presents the effort and the initiative of the Go Home Project.

5.2 Why are Women the Majority of those Accused of Witchcraft?

The name Kpakorafon reflects the gender connotation of the local word. Its translation as the ‘elderly women’s settlement’ points to the dominance of women regarding habitation. For over a century, the name Kpakorafon has been used to describe the settlement since Imam Baba handed over the care of the women he sheltered to the Gambarana. From my interview, three main reasons account for why women have been the majority of those accused of *soo* in Mamprusi. These reasons reflect both biological and social factors. The first point is related to the perception of women’s vulnerability in relation to physical strength. The other reason is seen from the perspective of traditional custom and stereotypes which discourages women from owning their own house. The final reason relates to the perception of women as jealous.

5.2.1 ‘Physical Weakness; Men’s Strength’

To start with the perception of physical strength or the lack thereof is viewed as one of the primary reasons for the disproportionate targeting of women in accusations of *soo*. Out of the seventy-four residents in the Kpakorafon, only one male resides there. The disproportionate representation of ‘sexes’ in the Kpakorafon sometimes begs the question whether there are *sonya-dopa* (wizards) at all.

First, the women I interviewed agree that *sonya-dopa* exist. Raising her fist to emphasize the enormity of her assertion, Talaata declared “...ka *dahpu-gba Mobura binya sonya*”. This figuratively translates to men being ferocious when it comes to ‘devouring’ their victims.²⁷¹ In fact this fierce assertion of *sonya-dopa* is shared by another of my research participants. Zainab also claims that men are *nakosa* (butchers) when it comes to *soo*.

My interview with the elderly women suggests that women are vulnerable to *soo* accusations more than men due to their perceived physical “weakness”. The relative strength of men prevents them from rampant accusations. For Atani, this only shows that society “*thinks we are weak and not because women have ‘soo’ more than men.*”²⁷² The allusion to relative physical strength base on biological difference is further reinforced by Talaata when she laments that “*if a man has ‘soo’, can they bring him here? Even if they want to, they will be scared to try it. As a woman, who will fight for you, even if they say it is you, you have nothing to say.*”²⁷³

It will seem that while perceived lack of physical strength makes women prone to accusations, men’s supposed strength gives them protection. Men in the society are perceived as aggressive so much so that they can harm their accusers. Laadi for example asserts that a man could come out with his gun to shoot his accusers.²⁷⁴ She notes that the disproportionate accusations of women against men is attributed to the point that “*the man is for himself, if you go and call him soa-doo in his house he can come and shoot you, what about us, if someone should accuse you, there is nothing you can do, but if it is a man you cannot tell him in his face that he is soa-doo, he will not leave you...*”²⁷⁵

The fear of being challenged or even physically harmed by a soa-doo is even held amongst some bugarana. In a news documentary produced in Ghana, the traditional diviner in the Kpatinga witch

²⁷¹ Talaata, “Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

²⁷² Atani, “Oral History Interview with Atani in Gambaga”, 17 August 2019,

²⁷³ Talaata, “Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

²⁷⁴ Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”, 17 August 2019,

²⁷⁵ Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”, 17 August 2019,

home said he will not risk his position as the overseer of the place by accepting male witches.²⁷⁶ He fears that his authority may be challenged both physically and spiritually.²⁷⁷ Even as the Kpakorafon in Gambaga does not discriminate, men who are brought there hardly stay in the settlement. They shuttle in and out of the settlement and sometimes relocating to other cities and towns without undergoing the *nyulisugu*.²⁷⁸

The exposition so far points to the perception of physical strength as one of the factors leading to more women being accused and chased out of their homes. The assertion is that women by their relative physical strength compared to men easily become targets of accusation. will return to the *nyulisugu* rites when I discuss the Go home project later in the chapter.

5.2.2 Tradition customs and stereotypes

Some of the women I interviewed spoke about the challenges of women acquiring lands to build their own house. For them cultural norms and stereotypes make it nearly impossible and unrewarding to aspire to have a property of their own. Firstly, there is the difficulty for a woman to acquire a piece of land by herself. Secondly, if a woman manages to circumvent this challenge she is faced with the burden of stereotype. Additionally, marriage conventions in many of the communities within Mamprusi were such that women were obliged to leave the protective environments of their fathers to contend with the uncertainties of the husband's environment. The experience of the women is that polygamous compounds leads to frequent fighting amongst themselves. This is made worse as the women do not have the option of building their own homes should they want to stay apart. When I asked Laruba in our conversation that

Ibrahim: I see a lot of women have been accused as sonya, is there any reason(s) why women are vulnerable to this?

²⁷⁶ Baidoo, "Camps of Bondage," Joy News Documentary (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nU06YI4KHUk>)

²⁷⁷ Baidoo, "Camps of Bondage", 2018, 28:49

²⁷⁸ Alhassan, "Interview with Amisu in Gambaga", 18 August 2019,

*Laruba: The problem is that in my community a woman cannot go and build her own house and stay in it, because of this we have a lot of problems. Our men are mostly the cause of this problems, they marry a lot of women and we will be fighting and accusing each other of soo.*²⁷⁹

To own a house connotes a position of independence and a sense of control of one's life. By managing their own space helps to insulate them against unsubstantiated *soo* claims. According to Talaata, men's ability to own a house gives them some sort of security against unbridled *soo* accusations. She mentions that men unlike women "...have their own house and do whatever they want to in their house, women do not have such possibilities."²⁸⁰

In the pre-colonial times, while women cannot keep a private land, they have an equal right to use the lands for commercial purposes such as farming.²⁸¹ Consequently, it can be argued traditional laws and customs do not equate one's capabilities and abilities to perform a task based on their gender. However, in contemporary times numerous examples exist where women who have been successful in their businesses or build themselves properties have suffered from pejorative name-calling. Their successes are often credited to their *soo*. Laadi narrates her experience which contributed to her taking the decision to resettle in the Kpakorafon. She informed me that:

my husband was very old and weak, he could not work, so I had to take his responsibilities by working and taking care of my children who were also very young at that time. Because I was so hardworking, people could not believe how I was improving our lives that they started accusing me of being a *sonya*.²⁸²

In the film documentary *The witches of Gambaga*, directed and co-produced by Yaba Badoe, the story of Zenabu provide further impetus to local customs and stereotypes with regards to women's ingenuity leading to their accusations as witches. In the film, Zenabu, a widow narrates how family members devised and chased her out of the village for being the only woman living in

²⁷⁹ Lariba, "Oral History Interview with Lariba in Gambaga", 19th August 2019,

²⁸⁰ Talaata, "Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga", 19 August 2019,

²⁸¹ ADM.11/1/824 G.F Mackay *A Short Essay on the History & Customs of the Mamprusi Tribe*

²⁸² Lariba, "Oral History Interview with Lariba in Gambaga", 19th August 2019,

her own house. As a hard-working widow, her community interpreted her dexterity and initiative as evidence of *soo* which subsequently saw her resettling in the Kpakorafon in Gambaga.²⁸³

5.2.3 The ‘Twin Troubles’- Rivalry and Jealousy

Both the men and the elderly women I interviewed mentioned rivalry and jealousy as one of the reasons why women are mostly accused of *soo*. My research participants use the terms rivalry and jealousy interchangeably. Nevertheless, I will like to interpret a subtle form of difference between the two. Rivalry is fuelled by envy as a result of a competition to outshine someone. It is thought that polygyny contributes to rivalry. In 1991 Drucker-Brown observed that an average Mamprusi in Gambaga could have as much as ten wives.²⁸⁴ While polyandry has had the effect of providing respite to the societal demands of labour-intensive agriculture, it had invariably resulted in rivalries between women in the same compound. Talaata noted during our interview that their husbands marry many wives they are left fighting and accusing each other of *soo*.²⁸⁵

Jealousy, on the other hand, has to do with exercising negative emotions of greed and envy to dispossess someone from what they have or their personal qualities. The narrations from my research participants points to dispossessing someone of what they value or what makes them special spiritually. Talaata explained that *“women have a lot of problems and we are the causes, because we have jealousy. Someone will be wearing her new clothes and see it and it strikes you and pains you. But men are not like that. And again, if someone is working hard, you cannot do the same, you feel jealous.”*²⁸⁶

Amisu affirms that jealousy and rivalry among women is precipitated by what women see of the good in others which they lack. He further asserts that women do not have patience to endure the

²⁸³ Yaba, “The Witches of Gambaga”,2011,55

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²⁸⁵ Talaata, “Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga”,19 August 2019,

²⁸⁶ Talaata, “Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga”,19 August 2019,

feeling such the feeling which suggest someone is better off than they are. Amisu notes in vernacular English that:

the reason why most women are accused as sonya is that they have rivals, they jealous each other's children. If they see your children are doing better than their children, they will do everything to destroy your children because they say it is because you are doing well that's why your mother is enjoying so they will kill you and you will realize that their children who are not doing well will rather be alive.²⁸⁷

The imagery painted by Amisu's words is far too often replicated in film drama within Ghana. Local Ghanaian films on *soo* are popular with rural and city folks alike. They feature story plots like the stories of accusations so far discussed. One film which has gained so much popularity is *Kyeiwaa*. The film produced by Danfo B.A comes in seven series detailing how cases of jealousy and rivalry trigger *soo* attacks by women. The film presents detail impressions of how 'witches' device to devour their victims. In Nigeria a similar film produced by Helen Ukpabio titled *The End of the Wicked* made shocking airwaves attracting both commendations and criticisms. These films have produced variously to capture local realities, albeit with some exaggeration for commercial purposes.

Again, in many Ghanaian communities, motherhood and the ability to have children is very much held in high esteem. Women who do not have children of their own fall out of favour with their husband's family. Both rivalry and jealousy are connected to the prestige of motherhood. Society bestows women who have had children of their own much respect over and above others who have not. Atani informs me to my surprise that what triggered here accusation as sonya is related to her having many children. She informed me that her step sister after suffering several miscarriages pointed to her as the cause of her woes. When I enquired why that was so, she contended that "*it could be because of my children that they drove me away. Because I have given birth to nine children, someone might not.*"²⁸⁸ This brought back hard emotions to Atani as she recounted this,

²⁸⁷ Alhassan, "Interview with Amisu in Gambaga", 18 August 2019,

²⁸⁸ Atani, "Oral Histroy Interview with Atani in Gambaga", 17 August 2019,

making us end our interview halfway. She wonders how something of value such as motherhood could at the same time be her nemesis.

Also, rivalry and jealousy are associated with places where women gather. Local events such as outdoorings, weddings and funerals are places thought of as breeding grounds for rivalry and jealousy. According to Borga these gatherings offer instances where even someone's dresses, necklaces and utterances fuel jealousy and rivalry.²⁸⁹ These events and gatherings also serve as recruiting grounds for other women for soo.²⁹⁰ Amisu opines that women's penchant to make and follow their friends make them an easy target for soo. The assertion that where women gather rivalry and jealousy follows is suggested by Amisu. Talaata notes that: "*...there are so many of us (elderly women) here and nobody here has bewitched any of us and nobody can do any wicked thing, so I believe it is the work of the deity, because women cannot live together without any problems.*"²⁹¹

5.3 Discussions on Gender conceptions in Mamprusi

This section presents an analysis of the voices from the elderly women, together with some of my materials from colonial records on gender conceptions in Mamprusi. The discussions contribute to current discussions regarding liberal and post-colonial feminism. My interaction with the elderly women in Gambaga and my observations shows that both liberal and post-colonial feminist expositions reflect in my study of the Kpakorafon.

As before mentioned, post-colonial feminist such as Oyeronke Oyewumi and Ifi Amadiume have argued that gender in most west African societies are relational and situational.²⁹² Both scholars

²⁸⁹ Adam Na Madina, "Interview with Borga in Gambaga", 16 August 2019,

²⁹⁰ Alhassan, "Interview with Amisu in Gambaga", 18 August 2019,

²⁹¹ Talaata, "Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga", 19 August 2019,

²⁹² Amadiume, "Male Daughters, Female Husbands : Gender and Sex in an African Society", 2015, Oyewumi, "The Invention of Women", 2014, Oyewumi, "Conceptualizing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concepts and the Challenges of African Epistemologies", 2002,

refer to the non-binary nature of gender based on sex. The extended family systems in parts of African societies determines hierarchical positions of power based on seniority relative to age.²⁹³ In effect, there are recorded situations where females performed some patriarchal functions.²⁹⁴ For instance, while men mostly occupy the position as chiefs, historically women have also held chieftaincy positions in the Mamprusi Kingdom.²⁹⁵ Writing as a colonial official in the Gold coast, G. F Mackay observed that “*the chiefs of Patia and Sanri have always been women belonging to the King of Mamprusi’s family, they have the same rights and privileges as other chiefs of the tribe.*”²⁹⁶ The example in colonial times where women could become chiefs speak to a society where power is not wielded by one sex. Nevertheless, in contemporary times, there are no known women chiefs amongst the Mamprusi, showing a change in tradition.

Again, for an accused *sonya* in the Kpakorafon to go back home, their traditional rites must be performed with their first-born child present.²⁹⁷ It does not matter whether they were male or female if they were the first child. In the case of final purification process, therefore, seniority relative to age is the determinant factor rather than one’s sex. However, there seems to be a different practise when it comes to inheritance. In colonial Mamprusi, married partners do not inherit each other. If a man died, his inheritance went to the first son.²⁹⁸ In the absence of a male son, the right to inheritance is assumed by the deceased male siblings. If the deceased had no male heirs within the extended family, the rights of inheritance then went to the deceased sisters.

An interpretation of some past structures speaks to a society whose concerns are of equity rather than equality. As G.K Mackay observed, if one inherited someone, “their main duty is to care for all the members of the deceased family in the same manner as in the deceased lifetime, as well as

²⁹³ Oyewumi, “Conceptualizing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concepts and the Challenges of African Epistemologies”, 2002,

²⁹⁴ Oyewumi, “Conceptualizing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concepts and the Challenges of African Epistemologies”, 2002,

²⁹⁵ ADM.11/1/824 G.F Mackay A Short Essay on the History & Customs of the Mamprusi Tribe, 15

²⁹⁶ ADM.11/1/824 G.F Mackay A Short Essay on the History & Customs of the Mamprusi Tribe, 15

²⁹⁷ Lariba, “Oral History Interview with Lariba in Gambaga”, 19th August 2019,

²⁹⁸ ADM.11/1/824 G.F Mackay A Short Essay on the History & Customs of the Mamprusi Tribe, 15

to be responsible for the burial and funeral customs connected in addition to that”²⁹⁹ Also the inheritor of the deceased has to pay for all funeral expenses and assume the liabilities and debts of the deceased as well. The enormity of the task and the conception of the female as relatively physically ‘weaker’ than men may not encourage a woman handling such responsibilities. Thus, as long as the widow and children continue to live in the household their needs are taken care of.

This thinking I suggest, was meant to protect a woman from undue stress and hardships if she was widowed by a man saddled with debt. Not only that but also going through the emotional face of finding out the spiritual cause of her husband’s death. Moreover, if the properties went to a widow or a first-born daughter who was likely to remarry into another household that brought some practical challenges. Other extended family members who were legitimately once under the care of the deceased in a family compound stood the chance of not being taken care of.

It is crucial to note that, while the traditional laws and customs in precolonial Mamprusi is plausible in providing practical solutions to societal arrangements, modern trends tend to put traditions and customs under stress. As before mentioned, the level of trust in precolonial times was so pronounced that people did not need to call witnesses in native courts. This is not the situation now, especially so where structures of the society have changed very much due to processes of the fragmentation of local forms of governance.

In both historic and contemporary Mamprusi, women in a polygyny marriage were ranked differently.³⁰⁰ The first wife acts as the *primus inter pares*, performing supervisory roles over other wives. She distributes domestic duties to other wives and has control over the children of all junior wives. According to Drucker-Brown, this authority of the first wife in relation to other women in the compound is unquestionable.³⁰¹ Again, the status of the man in the eyes of other society regarding prestige is dependent on how the senior wife ensures discipline and order in the

²⁹⁹ ADM.11/1/824 G.F Mackay A Short Essay on the History & Customs of the Mamprusi Tribe, 6

³⁰⁰ Drucker-Brown, “Mamprusi Witchcraft: Subversion and Changing Gender Relations”, 1993, 543

³⁰¹ Drucker-Brown, “Mamprusi Witchcraft: Subversion and Changing Gender Relations”, 1993, 545

compound.³⁰² These roles performed by the senior wife places her above all other women in the compound while clothing her with some patriarchal powers.

Despite instances of situational and gender fluidity in Mamprusi, the voices of the elderly women in the Kpakorafon speaks to the prevalence of discrimination based on ‘sex’. While *soo* is non-gendered, the propensity for someone to be accused, tortured or banished as *sonya* is very high if one was a woman. This apparent body type discrimination feeds into the core arguments of liberal feminism. Janet Redcliff posits that the foundations of liberal feminism is premised on the idea that women suffer systemic societal discriminations based on their sex.³⁰³ These discriminations regarding biological differences in terms of relative physical strength accounting for the increasing accusations of women as *sonya*.

The situation in Mamprusi were elderly women most especially face the likelihood of *soo* accusations contrasts with the Sahuye people in Southern Cote d’Ivoire. Amongst the Sahuye, post-menopausal women played significant power functions in the community. In what is called the Female Genital Power (FGP), elderly women draw on the intrinsic spiritual power of their genitalia to keep their communities safe.³⁰⁴ This reflects in two ways. Firstly, elderly women conduct occasional rituals called Egbiki by stripping naked during the night to prevent evil forces of *soo* operating in the community. Secondly, the ceremony is also performed as a resistance strategy against immoral political power. By the women’s relative age and seniority, they become the living embodiments of the ancestors. Grillo notes that “*these menopausal women become agents who engender power...and assert their prerogatives as the bearers of the supreme moral authority.*”³⁰⁵ It is striking to observe that while post-menopausal women are clothed with mystic power because of their age amongst the Sahuye, the reverse is the case in Mamprusi. Baba Musah Iddrisu notes

³⁰² Drucker-Brown, “Mamprusi Witchcraft: Subversion and Changing Gender Relations”,1993, 545

³⁰³ Richards, “The Sceptical Feminist : A Philosophical Enquiry”,1982,1

³⁰⁴ Laura S, “An Intimate Rebuke”,2018,

³⁰⁵ Laura S, “An Intimate Rebuke”,2018,

that elderly women in Northern Ghana are mostly defenseless and this makes it easier for them to be accused of *soo*.³⁰⁶

However, not only elderly women suffer the brunt of accusations. In fact, a good number of the post-menopausal women living in the Kpakorafon were accused in their prime especially if one considers how many years they have lived in the Kpakorafon. The case of the Sahuye and the Mamprusi points to how even within West Africa culture and tradition is relative.

Again, societal structures in Mamprusi from pre-colonial times prevent a woman based on her 'sex' from owning a land for private purposes such as building a house.³⁰⁷ The effect of these discriminations based on body type has rather affected women in Mamprusi to have control of their lives making them susceptible to frequent *soo* accusations and attack. The women speak about the problems of not able to have control of their own spaces as in a house and if they somehow found a way around that they were stereotyped.

Similar situations like that of the women in Mamprusi leads some liberal feminist to posit that past societal structures were designed to keep women entirely in the power of men.³⁰⁸ If such discriminatory structures must end it will take the collective action of all women. For some liberal feminist who hold feminism as an ideology, radicalism is one strategy for the equality of the sexes.³⁰⁹ The urgency of this call to action, to dismantle structures in society which subordinate women can be seen in the tone of some feminist discourse. Terms such as 'women's emancipation,' 'women slaving,' 'women revolution' amongst others are employed to drive home this urgency. Indeed, some liberal feminist groups have published manifestos detailing their convictions and plans of actions. One such group is the red stocking manifesto, which declares that: "In fighting for our liberation, we will always take the side of women against their oppressors. We will not ask

³⁰⁶ Musah and Universitetet i Bergen, "Life in a Witch Camp : Experiences of Residents in the Gnani Witch Camp in Ghana",2013,

³⁰⁷ ADM.11/1/824 G.F Mackay A Short Essay on the History & Customs of the Mamprusi Tribe

³⁰⁸ Janet Radcliffe Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist : A Philosophical Enquiry*

³⁰⁹ Morgan, "Sisterhood Is Powerful",1970,

what is 'revolutionary' or 'reformist', only what is suitable for women.³¹⁰ The New York Women's Movement in the 1970s also stated they are not concerned with whether anything was 'radical' or 'moral' but mostly concerned with what is right for women.³¹¹

While communities like Gambaga in no small degree maintain some remnants of traditions, situations in pre-colonial times seem to have changed. Women are demanding for the right to own lands and secure their freedom and independent from potential abuse; women are asking for a change in the status quo and a transformation of stereotypes. What are the voices of empowerment and what do the women think about their future.

A critical aspect of finding solutions to the problems of women in Mamprusi must also come from them. This is where self-determination comes in. Rauna Kuokkanen speak about self-determination of indigenous feminism as the struggle for women to confront structures within their cultures which sometimes silences them. I argue that allowing women suffering from internal discriminations must recognize the agency of the women to diagnose and prescribe solutions.

5.4 Voices of emancipation

I asked the women interviewed in Gambaga what they thought about feminism and what ought to be done for women to live life free of discrimination. My interactions with the women point to two main things. Firstly, the women assert in different voices of the influence of biological difference which comes to them as naturally insurmountable. For some of them, the idea about equality of sexes is non-existent. For example, Atani asserts that “*a woman has no right to be like a man we cannot just match*”³¹² When I enquired further as to what makes men different, her reply was to the effect that even though there are men and women *sooba*, it is only the women who are at the Kpakorafon.³¹³ The reflection of biological difference from the women is indicative of a

³¹⁰ Morgan, R (ed.) *Sisterhood is Powerful* 601

³¹¹ Morgan, R (ed.) *Sisterhood is Powerful* 584

³¹² Atani, “Oral History Interview with Atani in Gambaga”, 17 August 2019,

³¹³ Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”, 17 August 2019,

hierarchical society where ‘sex’ plays a role even within a web of social relations. I asked Laadi what her thoughts were on feminism.

Ibrahim: what do you think about feminism? And what do you think makes you complete as a woman?

Laadi: For me I see myself as a woman because even from creation it is like God has made us weaker, and again if you look at it, where a man can go and fight we cannot do that. If you focus on strength wise, I cannot face someone to fight to redeem myself, but for men, some of these things they can do. That is how I see myself as a woman.”³¹⁴

The claim of a biological difference struck me to interrogate further. In traditional life motherhood is a symbol of strength.³¹⁵ I drew the attention of Laadi on her life as a mother and how motherhood projects her as a strong person. She agreed with me, but added that:

*“what you are saying is true, but the fact that it (sexual difference) is from creation. Even though you as a woman has unique features, you still fall under a man, and that makes it a reality... a woman can give birth and a man cannot but upon all that you still fall under a man.”*³¹⁶

These positions from the women I interviewed point to male privilege in society. Male privilege is thought of as “privileges that men enjoy within a subordinating environment that affects women’s autonomy.”³¹⁷ The biological difference of a man provides him escape from *soo* attack. Even though the women conceded on physical differences.

Further, the elderly women in Gambaga note that tradition acts as a double edge sword with positives and negatives. Talaata argue that while some traditions give life, others give problems and must be done away with.³¹⁸ The elderly women in Gambaga as noted earlier see the challenges of maintaining and building a house as something which limits their independence. Their exposition reflects similarly to the goals of activism of first wave feminist were activist decried

³¹⁴ Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”, 17 August 2019,

³¹⁵ Amadiume, “Male Daughters, Female Husbands : Gender and Sex in an African Society”, 2015,

³¹⁶ Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”, 17 August 2019,

³¹⁷ Musiimenta, “Negotiating Redefined Subordination: Educated Women’s Agency in Marital Relations”, 2014, 290

³¹⁸ Talaata, “Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

their lack of access to properties and voting rights because of sexual difference.³¹⁹ In the case of *soo* accusations and chasing women out of their communities, women's perceived lack of physical strength makes it challenging to prevent any potential attack.

An aspect of the tradition which seem to give life to the women is the *nosi- pohabu* process in Gambaga. Its strength lies in its role to act as an arbiter distinguishing between truth and falsehood, guilty and not guilty. In this regard, Talaata advises communities, to follow laid down procedures and traditions of *soo* verification. This positive part about traditions seem to reflect in Talaata's words when I asked

Ibrahim: What advice do you have for society in terms of our traditional practices in driving people away from their villages?

Talaata: I will tell them that yes someone can accuse you of *soo* but they should follow the process rather than beating you, and even if you come and it happens that you are guilty, they should follow the process to allow you back home so that you can take care of your children rather than leaving you here."³²⁰

The Second theme regarding women's emancipation and freedom in the traditional life seem to point internally to women themselves as the solution to some of their problems. The elderly women recognize that women's behaviour towards themselves have contributed to their harrowing experiences in society. Jealousy and rivalry often come out from the women as one of their formidable threats. Their words point to the direction of the aphorism that 'women are their enemies.' Regarding accusations of *soo* perhaps looking inward is a first step to safeguarding women's freedom. Lariba's advice to women is to "*change their ways of life to stop backbiting and live a better life.*"³²¹ Her statement points into the general claim of the tendency for women to engage in small gossips which fuels neighbouring disputes and contributing to accusations. Talaata decries that hard-working women even attract jealousy from their fellow women. Surprisingly, Talaata concludes that "men are not like that."³²²

³¹⁹ Whicker, M.L and Kronenfeld, J.J *Sex role Changes; Technology, Politics and Policy*

³²⁰ Talaata, "Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga", 19 August 2019,

³²¹ Lariba, "Oral History Interview with Lariba in Gambaga", 19th August 2019,

³²² Talaata, "Oral History Interview with Talaata in Gambaga", 19 August 2019,

My next discussion is on the Go Home Project, a community initiative aimed at resettling the elderly women in the Kpakorafon back to their original communities.

5.5 Uniting to Go Home and The Go Home Project (GHP)

In 1996, the Presbyterian church, one of the lead supporters of the Kpakorafon, started the Go Home Project. The Go Home project aims at reintegrating women who are living in the Kpakorafon back to their home communities. The initiative facilitates dialogue between family and community leaders of the women in the Kpakorafon. Additionally, they conduct public outreach programmes advocating for alternative ways of handling *soo* cases. The proverb from southern Ghana which goes “*if a corn will grow bigger, it starts from germination*” captures the work of the GHP. With a resident population of the Kpakorafon at 292 women in 1998, the GHP successfully integrated about 45 women back to their communities in a single year.³²³ Among other initiatives like the intervention and pre-trial counseling, the current population of the Kpakorafon stands at 75.

The Presbyterian church founded the GHP but has now become a fully integrational initiative drawing membership from a broad spectrum of public life. It has a representative from the Gambarana, the elderly women, representatives from the local council of churches and Islamic cleric. Other members of the board include a representative from the State’s agricultural and social welfare departments. The GHP maintains a small office in the Kpakorafon which is headed by a coordinator and administrator.

Sampson, as the coordinator, informs me that it is a policy of the GHP to agree that *soo* exist. As an individual, he confirms to me that he has had numerous revelations from the elderly women who had shared with him numerous perspectives on *soo*. The admittance to *soo* is a significant part of the community outreaches. It functions like one disclosing their position in research. Sampson notes that “*we do not deny that fact (witches exist). After all, if not so we will not even*

³²³ Nangpaak, “The Gambaga “Witches” Colony: Its Artistic and Other Cultural Life”, 2007, 116-74

*go to the communities again because nobody will like to listen to you if you start by saying you do not believe in witches*³²⁴ To profess solutions to the problems associated with *soo*, they must be on the same understanding with people they aspire to influence.

The process of reintegrating someone back to their community start with the GHP identifying a woman who wants to go home. The initial discussion is done with the Magajia as the leader of the women who submit that request to the coordinator. Once someone has expressed interest to go back home, there are two procedures which follow. The first is the reconciliation dialogue and the second stage is the *Nyulisugu* (purification ritual) from the Gambarana. The reconciliation starts with representatives of the GHP project engaging with the woman who wished to go home on her accusation story and the reasons why they were brought or came to Gambaga. Once they are accustomed to the facts of the case, they establish contact with the relevant people for peace talks. In some of the cases, the dialogue is with family members. On other counts, the reconciliation must be done with the whole community through the chief.

According to the Coordinator of the project, reconciliation talks could last up to about a year. Sometimes logistics at home to aid resettlement are missing, particularly rooms for women and their children. Sampson illustrates the challenge copiously when he said that one of their difficulty is that *“someone has been here for 17 years, 20 years 35 years, even to go back and resettle a problem. They have no rooms again the family is there, but they have no room there again. What will you do, will you go and build a room for them before they go back home?”*³²⁵

The *nyulisugu* for one to go back to their communities is an important step towards acceptability. First, it provides confidence to the family and the community accepting a *sonya* that their lives may not be in danger. Secondly, it helps stem away from the likelihood of stigmatization. While stigmatization will not go away overnight Sampson informed me that women who have undergone

³²⁴ Laar, “Interview with Sampson in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

³²⁵ Laar, “Interview with Sampson in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

the *nyulisugu* (purification rites) have reported good experiences being home.³²⁶ Both the ritual and the reconciliation must be carried with the awareness of the community where an elderly woman is resettling back. Action Aid reports that in 2011, nearly 40 percent of the women who were resettled back to their communities returned to the Kpakorafon.³²⁷

Before a *nyulisugu* is performed, the person who wishes to go back home must provide a sheep, a fowl and some money. While the sheep and fowl are used directly for the processes of the ritual processes, the money goes to the Gambarana. Some have argued that the money paid the Gambarana is payment for housing the women. However, I will like to interpret this as a gesture of appreciation rather than a specific fee of any service. The amount of money which is paid does not match up the cost for rent if they were going to pay for years they have lived. In any event, the *bugarana* performing social and spiritual functions must receive remuneration to cater for their large families. Again, the payment, according to Sampson, serves as a show of commitment from the family of the woman accepting her back home.³²⁸

Despite all the arguments for cash payments to the Gambarana for the *nyulisugu*, the stark rate of poverty does call into question the amount of money the Gambarana asks. I have noted in my last chapter; poverty is endemic in the Northern Region of Ghana with most of the population living on less than two dollars a day. Even though Sampson did not explicitly tell me the amount of money the Gambarana charges, Yaaba Badoe quotes the figure as approximately 80USD.³²⁹ One can imagine how long it will take for people earning within the bracket of two dollars a day to save up to that amount. Sampson tells me that “80% of them are very poor, not poor, very poor” His repetition of very poor shows the extent of how poverty is endemic within the population. For some of the women whose children have gone to the cities for work, they manage to help the

³²⁶ Laar, “Interview with Sampson in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

³²⁷ ActionAid, “Condemned without Trial; Women and Witchcraft in Ghana”, 2012, 11

³²⁸ Laar, “Interview with Sampson in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

³²⁹ *Inside Ghana’s witchcraft Refugee Camp*, (2015) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4wdmPWD9nk> (Also see description of trailer video (https://www.amazon.com/dp/B06XKGP262/ref=cm_sw_r_cp_ep_dp_jZUGzbEVNNH49

situation. But, it remains that majority of the women who want to go home do not have the money for the purification ritual³³⁰

The GHP aside engaging in peace talks with families and communities for the resettlement of the women, their mandate has now expanded to include mobilizing funds to support the *nyulisugu* process. Already, the GHP is strained financially, engaging in outreaches driving to distant neighbouring communities to talk to communities on alternative ways of handling accusations of *soo*. The Gamabarrana representative goes with the GHP team to engage and provide professional education about *soo* and the work of the Gambarana. As most of the people believe in the powers of the oracle, their voice on outreaches is an important step towards changing behaviours. As Sampson notes that accusations of *soo* is not only “about tradition, it is about behaviours”.³³¹

5.6 Conclusion

Chapter five discussed my final research question on why majority of the people in the Kpakorafon are women. I reasoned that answering this question invariably needs to find out why majority of women are accused of *soo*. The response to this question from all my research participants points to both biological and socio-cultural factors. Firstly, many women have moved or have been brought to the Kpakorafon because they argue that their relative ‘weakness’ in strength as compared to men makes it easier for them to be subjected to accusations as *sonya*. Another reason was that women by their ‘nature’ have jealous and rival each other. This nature of women pushes them to seek the mystic power of *soo* in order to destroy each other. Women also accuse each other as *sooba* in conflicts most times without proof.

Again, traditional and cultural practices also account in part to the reason why majority of women end up in the Kpakorafon. Women cannot own lands for private use. They cannot build their own house. This i opine connotes a lack of independence and control of the personal spaces of the

³³⁰ Laar, “Interview with Sampson in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

³³¹ Laar, “Interview with Sampson in Gambaga”, 19 August 2019,

women. As they do not have their own homes live in, their constant interaction with other members of their household hold increases the likelihood of being accused.

The chapter also discussed the implications of the responses to the final research question on theories of gender. The discussions conclude that both liberal and post-colonial conceptions of gender exist in Mamprusi. However, a woman based on her sex is likely to be accused as *sonya*.

Lastly, the chapter also presented the effort of the local community of Gambaga in resettling the women back home. The Go Home Project engages surrounding communities within the district of Gambaga towards the need to alter certain behaviours related to *soo*. They talk against torture and also encourage the communities to use accepted traditional channels of the *nosi-pohabu* and the *Nyulisugu*.

Chapter six: Summary and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the discussions in the preceding chapters of this work. It also presents my reflections on the theoretical and conceptual discussions of the topic of witchcraft and the Kpakorafon. The main objective of this study was to present the realities and voices of my research participants about their beliefs system and ceremonies around *soo* (witchcraft) and gender.

6.2 Chapter Summaries

In chapter one, I provided a synopsis of the pervasiveness of the belief in witchcraft in Ghana. The chapter also presented my topic regarding the Kpakorafon, highlighting the concerns of the Government and why it would want to see the place shut down. The unsuccessful attempt of the government to disband the Kpakorafon mainly because of the activism of the women I argued deserve to be studied. While there have been many publications on witchcraft beliefs, the Kpakorafon has not had much scholarly attention. One way to overcome such a gap is to utilize alternative research approaches which is commodious to presenting the realities of people without a value-judgment on them.

Chapter two of this thesis presented and reviewed the literature on two topics. Firstly, it presented the concept of witchcraft within the framework of African Traditional Religion. It does so by exploring the concept of moral and natural evil. The chapter discusses how the communal nature of some African societies keeps a watchful eye on the behaviors of its members. The chapter also presented literature on why women are mostly accused of witchcraft. I presented both the *nature* and the *economic models* schools of thought regarding accusations of witchcraft. Finally, the chapter discussed feminism as a conceptual framework for empowering women. I presented the theoretical perspectives of both liberal and post-colonial feminism in relation to how gender is constructed.

In chapter three, I presented a detailed account of my methodology and sources. I argued that studying the Kpakorafon and by extension *soo* has to be done within the frame of the local people in a non-judgmental manner. It also involves allowing the local people to respond directly to what has been said regarding their way of life. The second part of the chapter presented my sources. My primary materials for this research were oral interviews, colonial archival materials and my observations from the field.

Chapter four discussed two of my research questions. The First regarding events and processes which leads to an accused *sonya* resettling in the Kpakorafon. Through the oral life histories, I conducted with the elderly women, I presented some of the themes which feature in local conception of *soo*. I discussed the local conception of *soo*. The chapter reveals that while being a *sonya* was not a crime, however, using the mystic power of *soo* for evil purposes was met with aversion. The second part of the chapter presented my data and reflections on the significance of the Kpakorafon to the local community of Gambaga. This chapter also presented the Kpakorafon and the ritual processes around it.

In chapter five, I argued that while *soo* itself was non-gendered, *women* were far more at risk of being accused as *sonya*. I presented the reasons why this scenario is apparent regarding *soo* accusations. Thus, the chapter discusses the third research question on why the overwhelming majority of those living in the Kpakorafon were women. I discussed the responses of my respondent within the lenses of my theoretical concepts of Feminism and gender conceptions. My discussions revealed that while gender conceptions within Mamprusi was fluid, women depending on their social status could perform some patriarchal functions. However, biological and socio-cultural structures conspire to discriminate against women. Lastly, the chapter presented the Go Home Project (GHP), an initiative led by the Presbyterian church of Ghana to resettle accused *sooba* back to their local communities.

6.3 REFLECTIONS AND FINDINGS

Here I present some of my thoughts and reflections on this relating to the Kpakorafon in Gambaga.

6.3.1 The power of labelling

Names matter; the names we give to items and things project different meanings. As I noted in my chapter 1, the word ‘witchcamp’ does little to project the true identity and reflection of the Kpakorafon. In the formative parts of my writing, I had engaged discussions with a very respected person regarding my research. I had said to them that I wanted to analyze the ‘witchcamp’ as a form of an Indigenous African Institution. The reaction was stern as it was enlightening. *‘This is a camp and that is what we know it is’* they said. After this interaction, it dawned on me that indeed names matter. As I have shown in chapter four, social relations between the elderly women and the townspeople is underpinned in a symbiotic interaction. An evidence which refutes the various bad tags of ‘outcast’ ‘inmates’ amongst others. In his study of one of the largest of the settlement, Baba Iddrisu Musah observed that in Gnani, the word “*Pagkpamba fong*” in Dagbani is used. It is also translated as ‘elderly women’s area’³³²

The dangers of bad labelling can be far reaching. In line with this, there have been calls for researchers to think about the implications of their research on their participating communities.³³³In some former colonized societies, ‘labels’ have been used to water down the agency of the local people. Albert Memmi describes this as a “series of negation” where the African is thought of as ‘not fully human’ not ‘civilized’, not capable of having a religion, not literate amongst many others.³³⁴ Some scholars for example have suggested the reason why the Kpakorafon still exist is because it provides cheap labour for the Gambaga township.³³⁵ Assertions does not prioritize the significance of the Kpakorafon in providing a lifeline of safety for those

³³² Musah and Universitetet i Bergen, “Life in a Witch Camp : Experiences of Residents in the Gnani Witch Camp in Ghana”,2013,73

³³³ Smith, “Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples”,2012,1

³³⁴ Memmi, “The Colonizer and the Colonized”,1965,83

³³⁵ Drucker-Brown, “Mamprusi Witchcraft: Subversion and Changing Gender Relations”,1993,

accused of *soo*. Historical examples further illustrate this point³³⁶. In view of such labels, Linda Smith notes that research is not an innocent exercise. She opines that research is sometimes undertaken within a set of political and social conditions.³³⁷

The Kpakorafon is believed to be over century old. Despite the pressures on its image the Kpakorafon has continued to thrive offering shelter to mostly vulnerable women accused of *soo*. Perhaps, this only tells us the extent to which traditional belief systems such as *soo* have thrived making the Kpakorafon in Gambaga and its traditional processes largely remain.

6.3.2 Traditional beliefs, customs and the modern state

The journey of survival of the elderly women in the Kpakorafon speak to the centrality of the theme of *soo* in their social and spiritual life. Even though all the women deny their accusations as *sooba*, they accept *soo* as an existential reality. Similarly, even though two of the elderly women contested the outcome of the *nosi-pohabu* (fowl ritual) they do not jettison its efficacy. I find this instructive in two ways. Firstly, their response offers ethical lessons of reflexivity. While they believe to be victims of some aspect of traditional belief, they do not belie the entirety of its existence. Some publications on the Kpakorafon have often referred to the *nosi-pohabu* and even the belief in *soo* as ‘superstition.’³³⁸ When researchers go into the field with a sense of their reality held as superior to the people they wish to study, it leads to what Jamie Barnes calls ‘ontological closure’.³³⁹ Secondly, In Baba Musah’s study of the elderly women’s area in Gnani, all his

³³⁶ When a group of middle-aged women stood up in revolt against colonial structures in 1929 their actions was labeled as the ‘*Aba women’s riot*.’ However recent works on the Igbo are beginning to contest such labels and replace ‘riots’ with ‘war’ see Barnes, “The Women’s War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria”,2014,366-67

³³⁷ Smith, “Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples”,2012,5

³³⁸ Yaba, “Representing Witches in Contemporary Ghana: Challenges and Reflections on Making the ‘Witches of Gambaga’”,2012,89

³³⁹ Barnes, “The Ontological Implications of Spirit Encounters”,2019,24-46

research participants did not view soo as real.³⁴⁰ This striking contrast further calls for a comparative study of the settlements.

Traditional beliefs systems have often come into conflict with structures of modern state. In cases where Government deems certain practices as abhorrent they have passed legislation in order to criminalize it. The Trokosi system where young girls held in servitude of a shrine for 'crimes' by a member of their family has been outlawed.³⁴¹ With regards to witchcraft, there are no specific statutes like that of Trokosi. However, most cases of witchcraft accusation which have landed in the law court find accusers culpable for defamation.³⁴² In one of the court cases. The court held that allegations of witchcraft could not be proven beyond all reasonable doubt.³⁴³ In Gambaga, the *nosi-pohabu* as a form of trial is highly patronized.³⁴⁴ Despite allegations of corruptions on the process, its efficacy is widely recognized by the people of Gambaga. Its patronage points to its resilience in the wake of numerous pressures. This has left a kind of a double system of seeking redress. One customary with no legal backing and the law courts whose access is beyond the reach of ordinary rural folks.

6.3.3 Towards a unified advocacy for gender empowerment

Gender plays a part in soo accusations in Gambaga. Biological factors such as women's relative physical strength compared to men make them a target of accusation. Again, cultural and traditional factors such as women not being able to acquire a land and build their house projects a lack of independence. While the community accepts that *sonya doppa* also engage in devouring

³⁴⁰ Musah and Universitetet i Bergen, "Life in a Witch Camp : Experiences of Residents in the Gnani Witch Camp in Ghana",2013

³⁴¹ Botchway, "Abolished by Law-Maintained in Practice: The Trokosi as Practiced in Parts of the Republic of Ghana",2008,

³⁴² Adinkrah, "Witchcraft, Witches, and Violence in Ghana",2015,195

³⁴³ Adinkrah, "Witchcraft, Witches, and Violence in Ghana",2015,195

³⁴⁴ Laar, "Interview with Sampson in Gambaga",19 August 2019,

their victims, the disproportionate representation of women in the Kpakorafon highlights the nature of gender discrimination.

I present that the advocacy to end all forms of gender discrimination especially against women is not only for feminist. The history of the Kpakorafon speaks to men allies like Imam Baba who rescued a woman on the verge of her death. The initiative of the Gambarrana who gave out a portion of land as a place of settlement for dejected women also testify that traditions just like gender are mutable.

But there is no doubt that women must be the source of their solution. The conversations with my research participants variously made submissions which suggests that ‘women are their own enemies’. To this I suggest that the concept of sisterhood is imperative in protecting the rights of vulnerable women. Women in most of the cities in Ghana, educated or not have the possibilities of owning private properties. Feminist groups within the bigger cities like Accra have focused their campaigns on economic and political opportunities for women.³⁴⁵ Some of the struggles of the women living in rural Mamprusi seem to be out of their reach. If feminism as an ideology and a philosophical concept will thrive, its success lies in leaving no one behind. Yet at the same time, we must recognize the agency of marginalized women irrespective of their status to offer solutions and contribute to the discussion of women empowerment from their perspectives. Peace Musiimenta details how educated women in Uganda have adopted the strategy of driving from the back seat to disguise the visibility of women’s power in public sphere thrive within a patriarchal society.³⁴⁶ According to Musiimenta, this strategy displays women’s contextual knowledge of “negotiating patriarchal schema intended to subordinate women.”³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ Müller, “Local Knowledge and Gender in Ghana”,2005,

³⁴⁶ Musiimenta, “Negotiating Redefined Subordination: Educated Women’s Agency in Marital Relations”,2014,

³⁴⁷ Musiimenta, “Negotiating Redefined Subordination: Educated Women’s Agency in Marital Relations”,2014,291

6.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis shed slights on three things. Firstly, the traditional belief systems and the processes and events leading to the accusations of *soo*. Secondly, my thesis presented the voices of the local community regarding the significance of the Kpakorafon. This part of the study contributes to the discussions on whether the various witch homes should be disbanded. The third and final question which this research addresses is the relationship between gender and accusations of *soo*. The main reason which points to why women more than men suffer from accusations is related to both biological and socio-cultural structures.

My main observation from this thesis is that while traditional belief systems³⁴⁸ and gender have a very solid academic tradition, regarding concepts and theories, there are not many academic works on phenomenon similar to the Kpakorafon. Perhaps, this makes a case for examining more of such local community initiatives within methodological frameworks which prioritizes the experiences of research communities.³⁴⁹I like to conclude with a song from Laadi. It highlights the importance of sisterhood towards ending gender discriminations. Moments when Laadi feels lonely she thinks about her childhood friends. She sings to them from the compound of her new ‘home’:

*Are you still there
And if you are there
Have you seen me again?
And where do you think I am?
Can you not ask of me?
When you don't see me?
My sisters! where do you think I am?
Can you not look for me?
If you were still asking about me
you would have seen me somewhere
because you don't ask and look for me
That is why I am here
But I promise you that one day
I will not be there again to see you³⁵⁰*

³⁴⁸ Traditional belief systems including that of witchcraft, ritual ceremonies have mostly been discussed under specific concepts in religions, sociology etc.

³⁴⁹ Smith, “Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples”,2012, Wilson, “Research Is Ceremony : Indigenous Research Methods”,2008,

³⁵⁰ Laadi, “Oral History Interview with Laadi in Gambaga”,17 August 2019,

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APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide for Elderly Women

- Ask about a memorable event regarding their childhood which had stayed with them until now.
- What do they think about African Traditional system of worship and culture
- Did they take part in any of the traditional customs or rituals?
- Do those rituals mean anything?
- How did they end up in the camp?
- What were they accused of?
- What does the witch camp mean to them?
- Should it be disbanded?
- Do they believe witchcraft exist?
- Do they have any personal stories to share?
- Why do they think majority of women are accused of witchcraft more than men
- What does women empowerment mean to them?
- How can women nurture and take their freedom in their local context?
- Are they discriminated upon by the people of Gambaga?
- Do they feel safe in the witchcamp?
- Would they like to go home and what does it take for them to go back to their communities?

Interview Guide for other residents of Gambaga town

- What do they think about African Traditional system of worship and culture. Is it relevant in modern times?
- Did they take part in any of the traditional customs or rituals?
- Do those rituals mean anything?
- What does the witch camp mean to them as residents of Gambaga?
- What is the process of admitting women into the camp?
- Should the camp be disbanded?
- Who is a witch?
- How do the witches operate according to local tradition?
- Do we have any concept of black/white witchcraft as far as they are concerned?
- Who determines who a witch is in the community?
- Describe the traditional ritual ceremony to determine who a witch is?
- Do they believe witchcraft exist?
- Do they have any personal stories to share?
- Why do they think majority of women are accused of witchcraft more than men?
- Are there any stories or legends about witchcraft?
- Describe relationship which exist between community and old women accused of witchcraft.
- Are there any tensions regarding social relationship?