

African World-View and the Challenge of Witchcraft

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Abstract

In this paper, we shall study the spiritual and socio-economic implications of witchcraft phenomenon within the framework of traditional African world-view. We shall probe to know whether belief in witchcraft is ontologically rooted in African cosmology, or a mere superstition. The study will expose the destructive impact of witchcraft on human and social development and the need for a reorientation of the psychic-vent of the African. The witchcraft phenomenon constitutes the greatest threat in the life of an African. We cannot continue to argue over the existence or reality of witchcraft when many people have openly confessed involvement in witchcraft.

Key words: African worldview; witchcraft in Africa; epistemology of witchcraft; psychology of witchcraft;

Introduction

Witchcraft is a constant problem in Africa. Africans of all classes, poor and rich, illiterates and the educated classes all have one or two bad experiences to say about witchcraft as a nefarious and destructive spirit that is hindering human and social development in the continent. Africans have unconsciously developed witchcraft mentality -which is a permanent condition of living helplessly in fear, intimidation, mental torture and spiritual insecurity. Witchcraft has not only weakened the social bond, but it has forced the African to embrace pseudo-spirituality and diabolic religious rituals. Spiritual vigilance and protection against witchcraft attack has become a vital aspect of socialization in Africa. The average African child grows with the fear of witchcraft. It cannot be denied that witchcraft accusation has led to breakdown of marriages, communal warfare and irreconcilable enmity between siblings, families and communities.

The success of the witchcraft scourge in Africa is traceable to the spiritualistic nature of the African world-view. The highest ambition of the African is to develop his or her spiritual capabilities to the maximum. Acquisition and usage of spiritual power for good and evil is the highest achievement in the African world-view. The African world-view is not only a religious phenomenon, but is characterized by the quest for spiritual power. Africans are specialists in the manipulation and control of cosmic forces. Mbiti (1969) writes:

There is mystical power which causes people to walk on fire, to lie on thorns or nails, to send curses or harm, including death, from a distance, to change into animals (lycanthropy), to spit on snakes and cause them to split open and die; power to stupefy thieves so that they can be caught red-handed; power to make inanimate objects turn into biologically living creatures... (197,198).

Even with the pervasive influence of witchcraft in African cosmology, scholarly investigation of this problem is far below the magnitude of the problem. Some scholars dismiss belief in witchcraft as mere superstition. In this paper, we shall demonstrate that belief in witchcraft in Africa is a reality. Evidence abound that African people are suffering in various ways from spiritual vulnerability that is associated with witchcraft oppression.

Even though witchcraft is not a peculiar African experience, Africans have every right to expose any problem that is life threatening. All over the continent, Africans do many things to avert witchcraft attack and bondage, "...they wear charms, eat 'medicines' or get them rubbed into their bodies; they consult experts, especially the diviners and medicine men to counteract evil effects of this power... This mystical power is not fiction: whatever it is, it is a reality and one with which African people's have to reckon. Everyone is directly or indirectly affected, for better or for worse... (Mbiti 1969: 197,198).

AFRICAN WORLD-VIEW

African world-view is predominantly a religious phenomenon. It involves a re-linking of nature, man and history to the supernatural (Hesselgrave, 1978: 151). There is a spiritual view of life and almost everything is given a religious interpretation. Imasogie (1986) has given a good picture of spiritual vulnerability in the Africa world-view. "In light of our contention that the African world-view is charged with spiritual forces most of whom are inimical to man....The African tenaciously holds that the so-called physical world has spiritual dimensions replete with spirits and demons. These spiritual forces interact with human mediums for the purpose of carrying out their nefarious desires... the African lives in fear of those demonic forces and the human allies" (79). Pope Paul VI (1968) corroborated this view thus:

The constant and general foundation of African tradition is the spiritual view of life. Here we have more than the so-called "animistic" concept, in the sense given to this term in the history of religions at the end of last century. We have a deeper, broader and more universal concept which considers all living beings and visible nature itself as linked with the world of the invisible and the spirit (8).

The second fundamental element of the African world-view is the primacy of the group as the basis for identity and survival. Mbiti (1970) has commented on the communal nature of African traditional society and insisted that traditional religions are not primarily for the individual, but a communal affair, and that to be human is to belong to the community, which involves "...participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundations, his context of security, his kinships and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence" (1,2).

A foundational aspect of the African world-view is the ontological unity of cosmic forces. In Africa, religion is understood ontologically- that is, as pertaining to existence or being. Life itself is an organic whole, with one thing integrally related to every other. There is no clear demarcation between the sacred and the profane, which is typical of traditional Euro-centric Christianity. Phelps (1990) has rightly observed that African-rooted logic is a disunited process by which the mind tends to seek the unity of opposites "... God is found in the midst of community activity as well as in quiet moments of solitude. Life is not complete without the unity of male and female. The rhythm of life requires activity and rest, laughter and mourning, thought and emotion" (334).

Africans have a peculiar concept of time. Time for the African is the eternal present, the past and present are now. There is no concept of the future, since it has not yet occurred. This concept of time has influenced the African understanding of human life, death, and immortality. Death in Africa is a transition to glorious existence in the spirit world. Death moves a person to that existence where, if the living remember him and perform the proper rituals he will achieve a "collective immortality" with his forebears. According to Udobata Onunwa the universe in the African world-view is conceived of in a cyclical order of succession - symbolizing harmony, persistence and dynamism. Time in Africa is measured differently. "It is reckoned in non- abstract terms. The Greek word *kronos* which is related to linear measurement of time does not appropriately apply in Africa. It is rather the word *kairos* (season) - which appropriately describes cyclical order of events" (Onunwa 1990: 43)

African religious traditions emphasize belief in the ancestors. Ancestors are the "living dead", who exercise great influence, if remembered by their kinfolk. Africans do not worship their ancestors. Ancestors are held in great respect and revered memory. On the centrality of ancestral spirits in Africa communal life and religiosity, Phelps (1990) wrote: "The spirit of the ancestors is a vital part of the African concept of the community, in which the collective power of all members of the community-the living and the "living dead" energizes and pervades the daily life of everyone. Those ancestors who exhibited special moral virtue and strength in life are held up as spiritual guides for the living" (335). Another fundamental element of African world-view is that religion is anthropocentric. The welfare and survival of man is paramount. Man must exist to be religious. The *homo religiosus* may not worship a deity that is either anti-man, or inhuman.

What is Witchcraft?

The term witchcraft refers to the use of supernatural power for harmful purposes. In popular English usage, witchcraft is synonymous with sorcery; contemporary anthropologists now distinguish between witchcraft as: "... an inherent mysterious power of certain weird, aberrant persons and sorcery, as the work of ordinary persons using deliberate techniques and external means familiar to other adult members of the community" (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1975: 895).

The word "witchcraft" is derived from the middle English word *wicchehafte* and the Anglo Saxon *wiccecraft*. It is a compound noun from "craft" and "witch". Originally, craft means skill, power, strength and force. Semantically, the word "witch" is synonymous with the Latin *vincere* which means "to conquer" (Mbuy, 1992: 18). Another possible derivative for "witch" is the old English word *wicca*, which is analogous with the middle low German *wicken* which means "to conjure". The Swedish word *vicka* means "to move to and fro" (Collins English Dictionary 1979: 164).

In modern usage, "witch" is the root word of "witchcraft" and the designation for the female initiates. Their male counterparts are called "wizards". While witches operate through a compulsive power, or spirit possession, the

sorcerer is moved through an elemental diabolic bent. Hill and Buckler writes: "Belief in witches-individuals who could mysteriously injure other people, for instance by causing them to become blind or impotent, and which could harm animals, for example, by preventing cows from giving milk- dates back to the dawn of time" (493).

THEORIES ON THE ORIGINS OF WITCHCRAFT

The first enigma in the theories of witchcraft is the proposition that witches are unconscious of their evil deeds. Some scholars are of the opinion that witches are slavishly addicted to evil actions. The first argument to justify this proposition is that witches take delight in harming their friends, neighbors, school mates or close relatives. The idea is that a normal person cannot harm people who are useful to him. Margaret Murray, a British Egyptologist has identified witches of Western Europe to be the remnants of a once popular religion that was put off by Christianity. Murray's view is generally rejected as unfounded by many scholars. British historian H. R. Trevor - Roper sees witches as a progression of the "demonology" which medieval Christianity nurtured out of peasant superstitions.

Bronislaw Malinowski has also said that magic (including sorcery) are institutionalized "substitute activity" when people fail to avenge their enemies, or when it is glaring that normal survival is an impossibility because of technological inadequacies (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1975: 897). Offiong (1991) in his *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Magic and the Social Order among the Ibibio of Nigeria*, traced the prevalence of witchcraft in Africa to the disintegration of traditional structures and systems occasioned by European conquest and forceful occupation of Africa (58). Absolute poverty has heightened the fear of the African on witchcraft. Poverty is interpreted as the outcome of witchcraft persecution. Business failure, poor harvest, epidemic and natural disasters are attributable to witchcraft.

The Existence and Reality of Witchcraft

Witches and wizards are human beings who have developed their spiritual potentials to the highest realm of functionality. Witchcraft is the art, or skill, which enable the possessor to manipulate the spiritual universe through preternatural powers. Behaviorally, witches are vindictive, oppressive, capricious and sadistic. Witchcraft is a complex combination of various negative elemental forces. Witches and wizards have spiritual advantages over their victims. It is the highest display of man's primal spiritual potentiality. Scholars are divided on the existence and reality of witchcraft. Evans- Pritchard (1937), a British anthropologist in a study of Azande insisted that witches do not exist: "Witchcraft is an imaginary offence because it is impossible. A witch cannot do what he is supposed to do and has in fact no real existence" (21). In his answer to the question, "Do witches exist? Idowu (1970), the first indigenous Nigerian professor of religion and late patriarch of Methodist Church of Nigeria asserted thus:

In Africa today it is 'real' that the majority of the people believe that there are witches and there is witchcraft. Witches and witchcraft are sufficiently real as to cause untold suffering and an innumerable death... witchcraft is an urgent and very harassing reality; it is a diabolical, soul-enslaving presence... I will assert categorically that there are witches in Africa; that they are as real as are the murderers, poisoners, and other categories of evil workers, overt or surreptitious... (9).

Sogolo (1993) has faulted Evans-Pritchard and Idowu for ignoring Winch's caution against the use of notions such as "existence" and "reality" outside cultural contexts (100). He argued that witchcraft is immune to any objective, or scientific investigation: "The point has been made that witchcraft is not parasitic on science or that it is not a kind of science... One of the points often raised is that scientific explanations are incompatible with witchcraft claims and that the former excludes the latter because science accords with reality" (1993:101). Sogolo (1993) is emphatic on the futility of using scientific methodology to unravel the mystery of witchcraft: "As a metaphysical phenomenon, the ontological status of witchcraft is not within the bounds of human reasoning. In other words, whether witches exist in reality or they do not is not a question that can be settled by the exercise of the human intellect. Also by their very conceptions, witches as metaphysical entities are not subject to any form of scientific investigation (93).

Sogolo (1993) posited that witchcraft belief in Africa have the following characteristics:

1. Witches are capable of turning themselves into other bodily forms; they can change into animals (birds, leopards, snakes, etc).
2. Witches can fly at night in their various incarnates, they can travel great distances instantaneously.
3. Witches can turn themselves into disembodied spirit forms, able to kill or harm a victim while their bodies remain in bed.
4. The acts of witches are always evil and destructive; they cause the death of people, make men impotent and women barren (99).

Omoyajowo (1983) sees witchcraft as a spiritual phenomenon that can hardly stand objective and rigorous scientific inquiry: "It is hard for us to believe that the souls of people could take leave of their bodies to attend a meeting while their bodies remain at home... the behaviors and activities of witches are not verifiable in this mortal world, it is arguable that their power too, is limited to the spiritual world..." (327).

Types of Witchcraft

Two types of witchcraft exist in some African communities. Among the Akan people of Ghana, the good witchcraft is called *bayi pa*, while the bad one is called *bayi boro*. Among the Tiv of Nigeria's middle-belt region of Nigeria, witchcraft is called *tsav*. There are two kinds of *tsav*, the good one and the bad one (Opoku, 1978:140). Crawford (1968) has shown that there are two kinds of witch; there is the nocturnal, malignant and nauseating creature; and there is the sorcerer or practitioner in "bad medicines" (104). Crawford who believed in the existence of witchcraft also said "Belief in witchcraft is an attempt by man to rationalize and understand the malevolent forces of nature and the misfortune of life" (104).

Witchcraft Operations and Meetings

Witchcraft operation is both nocturnal and diurnal. Witches conduct their official meetings from 11 pm to 3 am in market places, village hall, school premises and on top of such trees as iroko, baobab and silk-cotton. Witchcraft meetings are spiritual and there is no research evidence of physical meeting. On the mode of traveling, Omoyajowo (1983) has said that witches go to meetings through various means depending on the locality, while some are said to turn upside down and walk with their feet in the air, others somersault to increase speed. "Some are said to fly naked, having rubbed on their bodies a certain ointment which makes them invisible. Some walk to meetings on spider's webs; some ride on animals like black or white and spotted cats, toads, dogs, rats and bird familiars" (318).

Among the Mende people, there is a belief that witches travel on spiders' webs while on land, in groundnut shells on water, or on winno wing fans in the air. Offiong (1991) asserted that: "Witches leave their physical bodies during sleep. They can even change into rats and eat up crops and can spread diseases among people" (84). Witches and wizards have power of metamorphosis, that is, they are capable of transforming themselves into non-human creatures like snakes, bats, leopards, mosquitoes, crocodiles et cetera. Witches fly as birds in the night. McKay, Hill and Buckler (1987) have this to say: "For centuries, tales had circulated about old women who made nocturnal travels on greased broomsticks to sabbats, or assemblies of witches, where they participated in sexual orgies and feasted on the flesh of infants" (493).

In south-eastern Nigeria, witchcraft can be acquired through any consumable substance. It can be bought at cheap prices. In some communities, giving of witchcraft to another without agreement is deemed to be the highest wickedness which one person can do to another. Possessing of witchcraft spirit is different from witchcraft initiation and full participation in witchcraft activities. The most disturbing dimension of witchcraft is ability to kill a human being which has dominated witchcraft confessions. Omoyajowo (1983) has said that activities of witches are comprehensively against society, hence mischievous and dangerous to progress. Witches according to him practice spiritual cannibalism by feeding on human meat and that victims are often fastened to a tree with a rope round his neck and butchered for witchcraft feast. "Witches may even begin by eating the lungs... They may also cut their meat from the leg and so give the sufferer ulcer. Witches are believed to have special taste for human blood. The effect on the victim whose blood they drain by spiritual means is that he becomes lean and wears away gradually till he finally dies" (320).

Offiong (1991) has affirmed the views of Omoyajowo (1983) on the cannibalistic nature of witchcraft operation: "They can suck the blood of their victims, thereby making the person look dry or suffer from anaemia... They meet at a particular spot where their victims are said to be transformed into various kinds of animals, killed, cooked and eaten. Once this is done, their victims die" (84).

It is generally believed that witches inflict material loss on people. They can cause wasteful and unreasonable expenditure of money. They can manipulate normal people into drunkenness and drug addiction. In

Africa witches are blamed for most of the road traffic accidents, snake bites and barrenness. "They can cause abortion by removing the child from a pregnant woman's womb, and taking it to their nocturnal meetings to feast upon. They can similarly caused impotence in men by removing their testicles (Omoyajowo, 1983: 320).

In England, witches were suspected of causing three deaths- a broken leg, destructive storms and bewitched genitals. Between 1559 and 1736, 1000 witches were killed officially in England. Burns (1973) noted that witchcraft in England was viewed as a voluntary act which involves the selling of one's soul to Satan in exchange for diabolic supernatural powers and that those who acquire such powers have the ability to use it against their neighbors to cause their cattle to get sick and die, cause crops to fail and harm their children. "But the most valuable gifts bestowed by Satan were the power to blind husbands to their wives misconduct or cause women to give birth to idiots or deformed infants" (462).

METAPHYSICS OF WITCHCRAFT

Witchcraft problems have again led scholars to revisit the ancient cosmological puzzle as to the existence of a plurality of universes. "Is the universe unique or are there many universes?" (Munitz 597). The Greek philosopher, Plato had posited that there are two worlds, "the physical world which is an imperfect reflection of the ideal world and the ideal world itself which is the world of forms"(qtd. in Omoregbe 1996: 4). Plato contended that the material universe is only a shadow of the world of forms. Other people have argued that if the universe is conceptually all-inclusive, it is plausible to think of a plurality of universes. This philosophical antinomy is further aggravated by the paradoxical nature of witchcraft phenomena. Nadel has rightly observed that: "Everything connected with witchcraft takes place in a fantasy realm which is, almost *ex hypothesis* intangible and beyond empirical verification. This is shown most clearly in the tenet that it is only the 'shadow souls' of witches which roam about and attack victims, while their bodies remain asleep at home, thus deceiving any ordinary attempts at proving or disproving, these mystic activities" (18).

Confessions of witches have gone a long way to confirm the view that there is a spiritual universe. This invisible world is said to have a profound and unremitting impact upon the visible world. Monastic literatures and patristic theology gives the impression that, the spiritual world is the exclusive domain of demons (Ramsey 26, 27). We are also told that the physical world is governed by the decisions of the spirit world.

Another metaphysical argument connected with witchcraft practice is the problem of mind-body interaction. Great thinkers like Plato, Augustine, Aquinas, and Descartes had posited that the mind is a separate substance, which exist independent of the body. David Hume and Bertrand Russell, vehemently in the spirit of analytic tradition, debunked previous thinkers and postulated that the mind is nothing other than series of perceptions, which succeed each other sequentially. E. Ogieriaixi has stated that "witches exist and the primary instrument they use in achieving their end is the mind" (9). In African human psychology, there is a firm belief that the mind has an influence over the body.

Witches are experts in telepathy. Telepathy or thought transference is the ability to communicate directly from mind to mind. It involves thought reading, or telepathic intrusion of the subconscious of another person through words, images, ideas, sensations, or emotions. Witches are capable of "invading" their enemy's "subconscious" for evil purposes. It was this enigmatic posture of witchcraft phenomenon that led Lucas (1970) to say; "it is absolutely necessary to obtain a greater appreciation of the relation between mind and body in order to explain a fact which has been ascertained in connection with the practice of witchcraft" (333).

Another metaphysical dimension of witchcraft is out-of-the-body experiences, which involves the separation of the soul, or inner spiritual essence. This phenomenon is strangely similar to "soul projection", "astral projection" or "astro-travel". Witches have confessed that they are capable of traveling to distant places through manipulation of the spiritual forces. A witch may travel from Calabar to London in the spirit, while the physical body is lying on the bed. Other related diabolical practices of witchcraft include psychometrics, necromancy, invocation and conjurations. Admittedly, witchcraft claims and confessions are unempirical and illogical, but it is an accepted fact that spiritual experience need not be validated by sense datum to be authentic.

The Psychology of Witchcraft

Belief in witchcraft in Africa is so rampant that one can detect a witchcraft mentality in the psyche of the African. Clive Malone avers that the persistence of witchcraft belief can be attributed to the socialization process which gives credence to the formation of witchcraft mentality and that witchcraft causation is an unquestioned and taken-for-granted assumption when there is illness, misfortune and death (376). Belief in witchcraft provides a pseudo-psychological explanation for misfortune. Even lazy people trace their failure to witchcraft attack. It is common knowledge that indecision, or procrastination can cause frustration. People, who find it difficult to accept responsibility for their action, or inaction, rather find it very simple to pass blame on witches. Thus there is an idea of

spiritual manipulation. Since witches are regarded as enemies. Omojayowo (1983) has clearly analyzed the psychology of being bewitched: "... It is very likely that once a sick man is told that a witch is after his blood he will believe that his death is inevitable. He gives up all hope of recovery. And so the will to live, which plays such an important part in recovery from illness, is missing" (331).

Witchcraft mentality is seen as a situation where the fear of witchcraft controls the imagination and thought pattern of the victim. In such a mind-set, no discussion can end without a mention of witchcraft as a diabolic problem. Another dimension of witchcraft mentality is in dreams. Many accusations of witchcraft are based on dreams. Seeing ones enemy in the dream may be interpreted as a confirmation that the person is a witch. Omojayowo (1983) writes on the futility of identifying a witch through dreams:

If you fight with somebody in your dream, you immediately become suspicious of him, believing that he possesses the power of witchcraft. You then begin to take precautionary measures against him and therefore have in your mind a permanent picture of him. This has the quality of bringing him more and more into your dreams and so confirms the suspicion you have already developed about him (333).

Epistemology of Witchcraft

The first, and most intractable epistemological question that deserve our attention is, do witches have knowledge of their action? The second question is, are witches conscious of the evil consequences and impact of their act on society? These two questions are fundamental and inescapable, for the proper analysis of the concept of epistemic justification of the witchcraft phenomenon. Lewis (1946) had asserted "all knowledge is knowledge of someone; and ultimately no one can have any ground for his beliefs which does not lie within his own experience" (236). This study has shown that many witches and wizards have full knowledge and consciousness of their art and actions.

Another epistemological puzzle is the new idea that witchcraft means "wise craft". That is higher knowledge. Proponents of this novel idea are of the opinion that witchcraft is a "superior knowledge" which places the possessor in an advantageous position over novice. Witchcraft therefore is a privileged knowledge. Joseph Ojo Mume (himself a practicing wizard) had debunked claims of repentance and conversion by some witches, "it is difficult to get witchcraft out of a person's system". Mume went on to say that to ask a witch to abandon witchcraft power for Christianity is "akin to asking someone who has acquired education to turn illiterate. Once you acquire any knowledge - education or witchcraft - it is impossible to throw it away" (qtd. in Ironsi 1988: 36, 37).

Witchcraft knowledge is anti-progress and anti-human; it does not make any positive contribution to nation-building and personality development. Ijiomah (1996) has made a strong and indubitable proposition on the moral dimension of knowledge: "Knowledge has a moral dimension in so far as it has significance for human realization or actualization... in a pragmatic sense the quest for knowledge begins at the cradle of problems... every knowledge has an end, the solution of the problem that generated it" (25).

A summary of some witchcraft confessions goes to establish the fact that witchcraft knowledge is not problem-solving. Adopting the presuppositions of A. S. Clayton, Ijiomah (1996) has categorically debunked the view that "Knowledge has nothing to do with the spiritual, valuational and emotional aspects man... (30). He further agreed with Clayton that such a position is a separation of human essences from knowledge and that it is immoral. Ijiomah (1996) classified any knowledge that does not promote social progress, self-actualization and fulfillment as un-knowledge. Knowledge that kills and destroys is "mis-knowledge", because it does not represent excellence.

Witchcraft and Witch-Hunt in History

Belief in witchcraft can be traced among the peoples of ancient Near East. Exorcism and magical powers are ascribed to gods, heroes, and men in ancient literatures of Canaan, Egypt and Mesopotamia. There was a persistent fear of demonic powers and there was a frantic quest for spiritual resistance. Offiong (1991) has observed that earlier prohibition of witchcraft was contained in the code of Hammurabi, the king of Babylon and that witchcraft flourished among the Chaldeans, Egyptians and other oriental peoples: "In ancient world, witches and magicians featured prominently too in the civilization of ancient Greece and Rome... Thus beliefs in witches and sorcerers have been characteristic of all pre-scientific societies" (54).

Mbuy (1992) affirms witchcraft as an existential phenomenon with a long history and avers that between the 15th and 19th centuries, the presence and operation of witchcraft became more visible which led to arrests and executions of witches and wizards. "In the American and Asiatic continents, the phenomenon of witchcraft has been sufficient to either stifle, discourage or fully explain the problem of witchcraft" (18).

In Africa, anti-witchcraft campaign occurred in Nyasaland in 1934. It was led by Kamwende, with full support of young men, the Bamucapi (Medicine-vendors), the crusade which was known as Mcape Anti-Witchcraft Movement spread through Nyasaland, the Rhodesia and the Congo. According to Offiong (1991), on arrival in a particular village the Bamucapi will assemble all the villagers, deliver a sermon and then line them up for a witch finding exercise. With the aid of small mirrors, alleged witches were detected, and given the chance to give up their “horns” or harmful medicines. “If they refused to give them up, the crusaders or Bamucapi proceeded to cure them by giving each one a sip of Mcape medicine. It was claimed that this medicine would cause any witch who returned to his evil practice to die” (61).

Omoyajowo (1983) has corroborated the Bamucapi story with some additional information. According to his report the Bamucapi also sold protective charms and powders to protect the users from witchcraft induced danger and ill-fortune. He further noted that even though the organization was opposed to Christianity, it recorded tremendous success because of their new method of dealing with the problem of witchcraft, “for example, they were young people and sold their mixtures in clean bottles like the modern chemists, and preceded their operations with a sermon about their origin and the potency of their method” (1983:324).

In 1947, another anti-witchcraft movement emerged in Nyasaland. The leader of the group was named Bwanali, assisted by his closest disciple, Mpulumutsi. The movement was later called the Bwanali-Mpulumutsi: On the mission and vision of the movement Offiong (1991) reported that the movement was determined to annihilate and wipe out witchcraft through “the systematic destruction or reform of witches and by the protection of their potential victims” (61).

Immediately after the Second World War, the Nana Tongo or Atinga movement of witch-hunters emerged in Northern Ghana and spread across Togo, Dahomey and Nigeria. Omoyajowo (1983) who personally witnessed the activities of Atinga movement reported that the group prepared a concoction of blood, water and kola nuts that was administered to accused witches and that the group also sold pieces of the nuts to people for protection. The group compelled witches through physical torture to give up their powers, stubborn were made to pay fines to prove their sincerity and innocence.

Usually a fowl was provided by the accused, and the fowl was half-slaughtered and allowed to run about till it died eventually. “It was the way the dead fowl lay that indicated the innocence or guilt of accused. It had to lie facing upwards if the accused was innocent and this was practically impossible. A second trial was allowed on the payment of more fees and bottles of gin. Unyieldingly accused witches were often beaten to death” (325).

Between 1978 to 1979, a new anti-witchcraft movement called *Nka Ukpotio*, led by Edem Edet Akpan (alias Akpan Ekwong), operated effectively in Ibibio land in the then Cross River State of Nigeria. Offiong (1991) who personally witnessed and interviewed the leader of the movement reported that the group gave palm frond (*ekpin*) to a suspected witch, and that next action was to tie the legs and hands of the suspect with a specially treated twine and leave the victim there until he or she had confessed. “Apart from tying the hands and legs, red pepper, referred to as “powder” by the *Nka Ukpotio*, was smeared all over the body of the suspects. Black ants were also poured over them and they were constantly flogged” (66). The activities of *Nka Ukpotio* was eventually checked by security forces who carried out mass arrest of the leaders of the movement including Akpan Ekwong himself who faced criminal charges in court and eventual incarceration.

Witchcraft and Death Penalty

In the history of western civilization, the Babylonians were the first people to view the danger of witchcraft as a serious problem. Babylonians at an earlier date investigated the menace of witchcraft. At Babylon, the punishment for witchcraft was a death sentence publicly executed. Burns has said that if the old Babylonians did not invent witchcraft, they have a reputation as the first “civilized” people to identify witchcraft as serious social problem. Burns went on to say that Babylonian laws invoked the death penalty against witchcraft and that there is evidence that the power of witches was widely feared.

Burns (1973) also attempted to determine the social causation of the fear of witchcraft and attributed the growth of demonology and witchcraft to either the increasing health hazard caused by the climate of the Tigris-Euphrates valley or probably the need for a centralized conquering state to instill fear in its subjects (58). McKay, Hill and Buckler (1987) have also reported that death penalty was the punishment for witchcraft in ancient Mesopotamia and that the people of Mesopotamia were very worried about witchcraft and sorcery. They also pointed out that anyone accused of witchcraft, even if the charges were not investigated was compelled to pass through and ordeal by water and that inside the water the gods were expected to decide the case.

When the accused is thrown into the Euphrates “which was considered the instruments of the gods. A defendant who sank was guilty; a defendant who floated was innocent” (18). In ancient Israel death penalty was

prescribed for witchcraft "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exod. 22:18). The first historic campaign against witchcraft took place in 367 A.D. The Roman Emperor Valerian ordered it. From 13th century, witches and wizards were burnt to death officially by government.

Offiong (1991) has also reported that following the bull of Innocent VIII in 1484, some 300, 000 witches were executed publicly (57). Emigrants to America went with the belief in witchcraft. The laws of New England made witchcraft a capital offence. In 1641, Massachusetts enacted a law, which described witchcraft as covenant with familiar spirit, hence punishable by a death sentence. A similar legislation was promulgated at Connecticut in 1642. New Haven followed suit in 1655, with a new law, which said "if any person be a witch he or she shall be put to death" (57).

Conclusion

Witchcraft is a major problem in Africa which deserves maximum scholarly attention. Many people, including Christians are suffering as victims of witchcraft. Witchcraft is real. African pastors, theologians and philosophers should work together to overcome witchcraft problem. In Pauline theology, these diabolic powers are referred to as "angels", "principalities", "powers" (Romans 8:38; I Cor. 15:24). Even the distinguished German New Testament scholar, Bultmann (1954) admitted the existence of this power and lamented that "the reality in which man finds himself is already one full of conflicts and struggles, a reality which threatens and tempts" (257).

Witchcraft is hindering genuine social and religious progress in Africa. It is not an exaggeration to say that Africa is lagging- behind in socio-economic, and political development, the continent is among the poorest in the world. Spiritual causation can be attributed to the problems of Africa, and it is not wise to rule out the witchcraft factor either to appease scientism, or fit into the Western scientific world-view. It is now glaring that help cannot come to Africa from outside, the hope of technological transfer from Europe, America and even Asia has failed. There is no indication that Africa will likely achieve the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations along with other continents within the targeted period. African scholars should rise up and accept the challenge to confront everything that hinders human and social development in the continent.

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