

## 5.0 CHAPTER FIVE: 'PRAYER AND HEALING' MINISTRY

### 5.1 Introduction: A Biography of Martha Sabo

Martha Chibakhi Jumma Sabo (henceforth, Martha Sabo) was born on 15 September 1965 in Wukari. Her parents were adherents of African Traditional Religion in which she was brought up.<sup>1</sup> Interaction with many respondents revealed that Martha's extended family practise *Jôn shon* (spirit medium). Martha's paternal grandfather, who raised her father, Zikenyu, practised *Jôn shon*. In Jukun society, it is believed that spirit mediumistic practice is virtually inherited through blood kinship. Families that possess this medium have the ability to publicly expose and expel evildoers, especially witches, wizards, thieves and other related evildoers from the society. Among the Jukun, the *Jôn shon* families are regarded as seers and diviners. They are feared and respected because they possess superior power and no evil is hidden [in the perception of Jukun primal religiosity] before them.<sup>2</sup>

Martha has very little education. Her biodata<sup>3</sup> reveals that she attended primary school only up to Grade Four at Tsokundi, beginning in 1975. She abandoned school to care for her mother on her sickbed. She married twice in 1985 and 1991, both times as the second wife.<sup>4</sup> She divorced twice and is still a divorcee. She was traumatised because of her marital experiences and attributes her life experiences to bewitchment probably from her rivals resulting in instability in her married life. Her trauma led to startling dreams, visions and trances as well as sicknesses. Martha's experience is similar to that of Eric Bikubi, a Congolese based in the UK who had diverse dreams of being pursued by his siblings.<sup>5</sup> It is also similar to the experience of Mary Joseph, a leader of the anti-witchcraft movement in Eggonland [discussed later under anti-witchcraft movements] who married and passed

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<sup>1</sup> Martha Sabo, Handwritten biography, no date.

<sup>2</sup> Samaila Sabo Hinkon, Interview, 14 February 2010, Sohwa-Wukari; Habila Saidu Hinkon, Interview, 16 February 2010, Wukari.

<sup>3</sup> Martha Sabo, Handwritten biography, no date.

<sup>4</sup> Martha was married to Danladi Angyu at Kakhi on 20 April 1985 and gave birth to one child, and divorced him. She later married Tanko Aganya at Kamberi on 23 April 1991, gave birth to three children, and then divorced him. Adapted from Martha Sabo's Handwritten biography; Martha C.J. Sabo, Interview, 15 February 2011, Wukari; John Caleb, Interview, 3 March 2011, Wukari.

<sup>5</sup> Topping, 'Eric Bikubi: Murderer with a "Profound and Disturbing Belief" in Witchcraft', *The Guardian* [online], 1 March 2012. Accessed 19 August 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/mar/01/witchcraft-trial-eric-bikubi-profile>.

through traumatic experiences.<sup>6</sup> One thread that links the three personalities is their obsession with witchcraft and their effort to deal with it.

In Martha's narrative,<sup>7</sup> the changing phases of her difficult life experiences started in late 2005 when her dreams and visions were said to have been renewed: 'God was calling me to be His instrument, a healer', she claimed. In my interaction with her, she seemed to stress vividly that her old spirits' dreams and visions were being gradually transformed by the 'Holy Spirit' and empowering her to engage in expelling witches in the society. It is difficult to differentiate her new construction of witchcraft from her former religion. It is possible that she is still obsessed with her mediumistic heritage but tries to colour it with the Christian faith.

Martha's religious background derived from the spirit mediumistic extended family which shaped her thought even in the new faith. In her ministry [as this study seeks to reveal later], she employs some pre-Christian healing techniques. Martha's tendencies are similar to Andrew Walls' assertion that people's new religious life is not completely disconnected from their old religious life under the impact of the Christian faith. However, the new religious life does not only develop further from the old, but also re-shapes it and takes on new signs, symbols and innovations.<sup>8</sup> Abraham Kuyper, a neo-Calvinist, illustrated this with the grafting of the new plant onto the old shoot, which thereby transforms it anew. In his words,

Wherever the Scripture speaks of a *renewal*, it is never meant that a new *power* should originate, or new *state of being* should arise, but simply that a new shoot springs from the root of creation itself, that of this new shoot a graft is entered upon the old tree, and that in this way the entire plant is renewed and completed.<sup>9</sup>

Both Walls and Kuyper stress the renewal of the old faith by the new. It is true that for some people who are genuinely renewed and connected to the new faith, the sway of the new force (Holy Spirit) is strong and transforms the old force for godly tasks. However, this seemed not strictly applicable in Martha's case. For her old mediumistic life, it seemed, still had a strong

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<sup>6</sup> Umar Habila Dadem Danfulani, 'Exorcising Witchcraft: The Return of the gods in the New religious Movements on the Jos Plateau and the Benue Regions of Nigeria', *African Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 391 (April 1999), pp.167-193 (177-179).

<sup>7</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 12 October 2009, Wukari.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew F. Walls, 'African Christianity in the History of Religion', *Studies in World Christianity*, Vol. 2, No.1 (1996), pp.183-203; see also, Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books/Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 2002), pp.116-135.

<sup>9</sup> Abraham Kuyper Sr., *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p.428.

grip on her beliefs and practices. The continuous apprehension and fear of bad dreams and startling visions attributed to witchcraft causation were among other factors that motivated her to join the Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria (CRCN) Puje in March 2006. According to her, this was to guard her against threats in her life experiences and give her the opportunity to do God's work. She believed that doing so would halt the trauma generated by witches.<sup>10</sup> She interpreted her experiences as an indication of what God wanted her to do: expose and expel witches.

Moreover, she is motivated by the gospel she has been hearing from the *Kungiyar Asubanci* (Hausa: meaning, 'the church early morning evangelism team'). She joined the evangelistic team. Yet she felt that she needed to be mentored in her new faith to build on a good foundation in this spiritual journey. Thus, in April 2006, she went and stayed with John Caleb, a minister with the CRCN and co-founder of 'Dekker Recovery Ministry' for counselling, prayers and discipleship. She stressed that sometimes during the early morning devotions, 'the Spirit' would lead her to lay hands on her children and others around her.<sup>11</sup> While still under Caleb's mentorship, she joined the catechism class for baptism and was baptised on 8 October 2006 by Rev Bulus Danjuma Oded at CRCN Puje, Wukari.<sup>12</sup>

At the time, the dreams and visions continued to manifest in her life. Caleb, seeing her initial *charisma*, often assigned her to pray for clients. On some occasions, such people either received healing instantly or later.<sup>13</sup> These were the preliminary grounds that motivated her ministry pursuits.

## **5.2 Witchcraft, an Age-long Social Problem**

What this ministry attempts to address – exorcism of witchcraft – had been a serious social problem in Africa and beyond for centuries. It is important to first trace the historical antecedents of this social problem.

Witchcraft is a social reality that affects many people and has spiritual, psychological, philosophical, ecological, economic and theological dimensions. Witchcraft in Europe in the

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<sup>10</sup> Martha Sabo, Handwritten biography, no date.

<sup>11</sup> John Caleb, Interview, 22 October 2009, CLTC Wukari; Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 15 February 2011, Wukari.

<sup>12</sup> Martha Sabo, Handwritten biography, no date.

<sup>13</sup> Martha Sabo, Handwritten biography, no date.

15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was considered diabolical and heretical. The clerical and state authorities instigated the killing of ‘witches’ and ‘wizards’. For example, Pope Gregory IX authorised the killing of ‘witches’. Many were tried, stoned to death, drowned, and others burnt at stake. The Catholic Church at the time justified its action with biblical passages which seemingly suggest the elimination of ‘witches’ and ‘wizards’ (Deut.18:11-12; Exod. 22:18; Gal. 5:20; Acts 8:9; 31:6; Rev. 21:8; 22:15).<sup>14</sup> Reading the cited passages from various versions, one will understand that ‘witches’ or ‘wizards’ are mediums, sorcerers, spiritists, among others. Witchcraft has been a prevailing belief in African cultures and has continually posed social problems in African societies. The elusiveness and complexity of the belief is the underlying cause of untold grief in African societies.

The Western observers were the first to study witchcraft phenomena such as famine, social change, oppression, economic distress, interpersonal problems, personal psychological problems, unconscious hostility, anxiety and paranoia. However, the Western observers paid less attention to the supernatural dimension of witchcraft phenomena because they could not explain African religious experience without prejudice, assumption and presuppositions.

Following Evans-Pritchard’s study of witchcraft among the Azande of Congo,<sup>15</sup> the phenomenon of witchcraft has become one of the main concerns of Western observers. Silvia Federici traces one of the major antecedents of witchcraft belief and scourge in Africa to the liberal restructuring of the economy within the fabric of social life. She maintains that the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) and trade liberalisation programmes introduced in Africa in the 1980s and 1990s by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) made African labour become more competitive on the world market. This shifted from being a path of economic development to a destabilisation of African communities and a weakening of reproductive systems.<sup>16</sup> SAP created massive unemployment, devalued the local currency and placed basic commodities out of reach of most people; it gutted public services so that

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<sup>14</sup> George Rosen, ‘Psychotherapy in the Social Process I: A Study of the Persecution of Witches in Europe as a Contribution to the Understanding of Mass Delusion and Psychic Epidemics’, *Journal of Health and Human Behaviour*, Vol.1, No. 3 (Autumn 1960), pp.200-211; Uwen Essia, ‘The Social Economy of Child Witch Labelling in Nigeria: The Case of Akwa Ibom State’, *Science Journal of Psychology* (2012), pp.1-11 (1, 6). Accessed 4 July 2013, <http://www.freepdf.org/pdf/The-Social-economy-62572988.html>; Umar Habila Dadem Danfulani, ‘Power Encounter in African Worlds: Witchcraft, Oracles and Healing in Nigeria’ a Commissioned Paper Presented at the second NABIS Annual Northern Zonal Conference held in Theological College of northern Nigeria (TCNN) Bukuru, Jos, 28-29 February 2008, pp.1-26 (16).

<sup>15</sup> Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937).

<sup>16</sup> Silvia Federici, ‘Women, Witch-Hunting and Enclosures in Africa Today’, *Sozial Geschichte*, Vol. 3 (2010), pp.10-27 (15).

the effects had been traumatic. People could hardly provide for their families and communities. Inequalities increased and mortality rates rose. People were trying to identify and comprehend why some were progressing while others were retrogressing. These created suspicions where the few wealthy people started fearing being bewitched by the poor. The poor on the other hand were seeing the wealthy as products of evil arts.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of these beliefs, Western observers and early missionaries were optimistic that this superstitious belief would be dispelled with modernity. For example, Geoffrey Parrinder argues that ‘an enlightened religion, education, medicine and better social and racial conditions will help to dispel witchcraft beliefs’.<sup>18</sup> Although Christianity, an enlightened religion, has grown in Africa, belief in witchcraft has survived and even been revived. The concept of witchcraft has shifted from being ‘tradition’ to become ‘modernity’. Western observers base their examination on the framework of the European situation. Yet there are apparently sharp differences: Africans stress the reality of ‘spirits’ but Western observers, through the impact of the Enlightenment perception, ignore it.

First, in Africa, the witchcraft issue seems to have developed from below, as a response to breakdown in the family social structure. Second, in Europe, beliefs and accusations associated with witchcraft were eventually terminated with human progress, enlightenment and religious impact. In Africa, however, evil has been mostly defined in association with the scourge of witchcraft and is still crucial.

While Western observers and a few African scholars in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century perceived witchcraft to be figments of the imagination, delirious superstition, fictitious, mere conjecture and practically nonsensical,<sup>19</sup> there were, on the other hand, varieties of anti-witchcraft

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<sup>17</sup> Jane Parish, ‘From the Body to the Wallet: Conceptualising Akan Witchcraft at Home and Abroad’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropology Institute*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2000), pp.487-501; Peter Geschiere and Francis Nyamnjoh, ‘Witchcraft in the Politics of Belonging’, *African Studies Review*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (1998), pp.69-91; William van Binsbergen, ‘Witchcraft in Modern Africa as Visualized Boundary Conditions of the Kinship Order’, in George Clement Bond and Diane M. Ciekawy (eds.), *Witchcraft Dialogues: Anthropology and Philosophical Exchanges*, Athens (Ohio: n.p., 2007), pp.212-262.

<sup>18</sup> G.C. Parrinder, *Witchcraft: A Critical Study of the Belief in Witchcraft from the Records of Witch-hunting in Europe Yesterday and Africa Today* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958), pp. 202-203. UNICEF April 2010 ‘Studies on Witchcraft’ issue also shares this view. See Cimpric, ‘Children Accused of Witchcraft’, p.9. Accessed 5 July 2013, [freepdfb.org/pdf/children-accused-of-witchcraft-78458510.html](http://freepdfb.org/pdf/children-accused-of-witchcraft-78458510.html).

<sup>19</sup> Aleksandra Cimpric, ‘Children Accused of Witchcraft: An Anthropological Study of Contemporary Practices in Africa’ (UNICEF WCARO, Dakar April 2010), pp.1-55 (pp.1, 8, 18). Accessed 5 July 2013, [freepdfb.org/pdf/children-accused-of-witchcraft-78458510.html](http://freepdfb.org/pdf/children-accused-of-witchcraft-78458510.html); Leo Igwe, ‘Child Witch Killings and Africans’. Accessed 17 April 2013, <http://www.randi.org/site/index.php/swift-blog/2000-child-witch-killings-and-africans.html>; J. Akin Omoyajowo, ‘What is Witchcraft?’ in E.A. Ade Adegbola (ed.), *Traditional Religion in West Africa* (Ibadan: Sefe r, 1998), pp.317-336.

movements (exorcist activities) which dominated the African continent, claiming to have the ability to adjure witchcraft. In-between the extremes of ‘superstitious beliefs’ and ‘adjuration of witchcraft’, the colonial regime endeavoured to suppress the belief in the reality of witchcraft because of consequent social chaos. Still, anti-witchcraft movements re-emerged in the African Indigenous Churches (AICs) and mission-founded churches. Where one movement expended itself, another of similar nature sprang up with a larger following. For example, the ‘Heart-Sowing and Sewing Mission’ (like other ministries within the movement) includes in its weekly programmes acts of exorcism commonly referred to as ‘spiritual warfare’. This is explicitly a prototype of the earlier anti-witchcraft movements.

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Western observers did not focus too much on proscribing the belief in witchcraft but rather emphasised the lasting social impact on individual ‘witches’ in their families and society. Western observers re-examined their view on witchcraft as not only superstition but also the consequent social impact on the vulnerable. After World War II, in the 1950s and 1960s, the discourse about witchcraft was strong within the Anglo-Saxon world.<sup>20</sup> By the 1990s, the witchcraft issue became more complex and dynamic, cutting across social stresses and strains within the family social structure. It extended beyond kith and kin.<sup>21</sup>

It seems that Western observers’ discourse about witchcraft has tended to focus more on the social aspects and less on mystical causality because there are no objective criteria by which to discern its operation. Margaret Field, one of the sympathetic Western observers, noted that ‘Its [that is, witchcraft] distinctive feature is that there is no palpable apparatus connected with it, no rites, no ceremonies, incantations, or invocations that the witch has to perform. It is simply projected at the will of the mind.’<sup>22</sup> In other words, there was no concrete or visible object (e.g., charms, amulets, talismans, etc.) connected with witchcraft like that of medicine men, herbalists, mediums and other African medical practitioners. Since the practice is virtually a mystery yet to be uncovered, it may be true that in the spirit world, ‘witches’ or ‘wizards’ use incantations, words, rituals and other spiritual objects to inflict harm on their victim. They may also manipulate the so-called physical objects and animals in the spiritual realm. In that case, as they project the object in the spiritual realm, it simultaneously

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<sup>20</sup> Cimpric, ‘Children Accused of Witchcraft’, pp.8-9.

<sup>21</sup> Cimpric, ‘Children Accused of Witchcraft’, pp.9-12.

<sup>22</sup> Margaret J. Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), p.135.

translates to harmful effects on the purported victim. However, it is common knowledge that Western observers generally ‘belittle and despise the whole idea of mystical power’.<sup>23</sup>

Western observers and a few African scholars doubt the idea of witchcraft and have been making efforts to proscribe belief in it. This is because evils, social stresses and economic strains are always personified as the handiwork of witches. When people are unable to cope with the stresses and strains of modern economy, rising costs of living, uncontrolled frustration due to unstable traditional socio-economic order, which in turn result in neurotic disorder, they are quick to attribute them to witchcraft causations. These always led to hatred, jealousy, envy, rivalry, vengeance and quarrels among close social relations.<sup>24</sup> Evil acts are not generally caused by witches and are not identical with witchcraft. This is not to deny the fact that ‘some evil spirits’ may ‘work behind witchcraft’.<sup>25</sup>

Another issue that scholars vehemently denounce is the heightened negative publicity in the mass media of people (even children) confessing to heinous crimes in stories and pictures of medicine men or spiritists exorcising witches and the ill-handling of suspected witches by anti-witchcraft movement groups.<sup>26</sup>

On the other level, Africans and Charismatics, in particular, the emerging deliverance ministries with extreme Christian beliefs across Africa tend to believe that witchcraft is experiential, real and dynamic.<sup>27</sup> They inexplicably intensify the belief and accusations of alleged witches. This issue is widely documented in the media, as well as read and viewed across the world. For example, the documentary, ‘Saving Africa’s Witch Children’ (2008),<sup>28</sup> first broadcast on 12 November 2008, highlights the role that a self-styled exorcist, Helen Ukpabio, the prophetess of the 150-branch Liberty Gospel Church, played a vital role in spreading belief in child witches in the Niger Delta region, in south-eastern Nigeria. In 1999, she produced a film called ‘End of the Wicked’ which tells in graphic detail how children are

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<sup>23</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books/Doubleday & Company, 1969), p.253.

<sup>24</sup> Igwe, ‘Child Witch Killings and Africans’; Danfulani, ‘Power Encounter in African Worlds’, pp.10-23.

<sup>25</sup> Omoyajowo, ‘What is Witchcraft?’, p.319; Igwe, ‘Child Witch Killings and Africans’; Danfulani, ‘Power Encounter in African Worlds’, pp.10-23.

<sup>26</sup> T.N.O. Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: African Universities Press, 1987), pp.152-153.

<sup>27</sup> Cimpric, ‘Children Accused of Witchcraft’, pp.3, 15, 33-34; UNICEF ‘The Causes and Prevalence of Accusation of Witchcraft among Children in Akwa Ibom State’ (June 2008), pp.1-31 (5, 7, 16, 23). Accessed 4 July 2013, [freepdfb.org/the-causes-and-prevalence-of-accusation-of-witchcraft-among-children-in-akwa-ibom-state-62572984.html](http://freepdfb.org/the-causes-and-prevalence-of-accusation-of-witchcraft-among-children-in-akwa-ibom-state-62572984.html).

<sup>28</sup> Saving Africa’s Witch Children (2008), A Dispatches Special: Channel 4/HBO. Accessed 31 May 2013, [http://redbelfilms.com/live/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=12&Itemid=18](http://redbelfilms.com/live/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12&Itemid=18).

inducted into covens, eating human flesh and bringing chaos to their families and community.<sup>29</sup> She was accused widely of being the primary instigator of witchcraft accusations and of spreading fear through her films<sup>30</sup> because she used child actors to depict the scenes. Besides, she wrote a book, *Unveiling the Mysteries of Witchcraft*, in which she tells parents how to identify child-witches aged two years and below, from signs like crying and screaming in the night, high fever and deteriorating health conditions.<sup>31</sup>

Information posted in the media revealed that she was one of the wealthiest and most influential evangelical preachers in Nigeria. Moreover, she resents any challenge to her ministry. For example, it is reported that she organised an angry mob who stormed the conference organised in Calabar on ‘Witchcraft and Child Rights’ in July 2009.<sup>32</sup>

Another self-styled pastor, ‘bishop’ Sunday Ulup-Aya at Ibaka, a fishing village in the Niger Delta, is reported to have poisoned and extinguished witches. He is reported to have said that ‘among Akwa Ibomites, 2.3 million witches morph nightly into birds of terror leaving their victims barren, unemployed, deaf, dumb, pauperised, ill, maimed and disoriented.’<sup>33</sup> He makes a fortune conducting exorcisms on children. There is no precise monetary figure but two sources revealed that parents paid up to One Hundred and Seventy Pounds (£170.00)<sup>34</sup> or Four Hundred Thousand Naira (₦400,000.00)<sup>35</sup> for each exorcism. He would hold the accused children captive until the parents paid the agreed amount. He does the exorcisms in two ways: he gives the children a concoction called ‘African Mercury’, a blend of pure alcohol and his own blood.<sup>36</sup> Sometimes he puts drops of the concoction into the children’s eyes or squeezes substances into the eyes and ears of the children.<sup>37</sup> He also instils such fear

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<sup>29</sup> David Harrison, “‘Child-Witches’ of Nigeria Seek Refuge”. Accessed 4 July 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocena/nigeria/3407882/child-witches-of-nigeria-see-refuge.html>.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Child-Witch Branding in Nigeria’. Accessed 31 May 2013, <http://www.worldpulse.com/node/50624>.

<sup>31</sup> UNICEF, ‘The Causes and Prevalence of Accusation of Witchcraft among Children in Akwa Ibom State’ p.7; ‘Saving Africa’s Witch Children (2008) A Dispatches Special: Channel 4/HBO’. Accessed 4 July 2013, [http://redbelfilms.com/live/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=12&Itemid=18](http://redbelfilms.com/live/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12&Itemid=18).

<sup>32</sup> ‘Anti-Witchcraft Conference Attacked by Christian Church Nigeria’; Harrison, “‘Child-Witches’ of Nigeria Seek Refuge”.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Child-Witch Branding in Nigeria’.

<sup>34</sup> Harrison, “‘Child-Witches’ of Nigeria Seek Refuge”.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Angry Witches and Wizards Confront Governor Akpabio’.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Saving Africa’s “Witch” Children’.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Child-Witch Branding in Nigeria’; Harrison, “‘Child-Witches’ of Nigeria Seek Refuge”.

in the children that they admit to being witches,<sup>38</sup> and he parades himself saying he killed one hundred and ten (110) witches.<sup>39</sup>

In Edo State, Nigeria, Omolayo Ojeifo accused her mother, Mrs Itowo Ojeifo, of being responsible for her social distress and economic strains. Having connived with her brother, Taiye Ojeifo, to kill her mother, she persisted and lured her mother to accompany her somewhere. The two siblings, then, killed their mother on 3 July 2013, midway to the farm.<sup>40</sup> They may have been misled by either a traditional priest or self-styled ‘pastors’ to accuse their mother and to commit matricide. The siblings gave no tenable evidence that their mother was a witch. Mrs Ojeifo only became a scapegoat of her daughter’s so-called woes.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the *églises de réveil* (the revivalist churches) take undue advantage to instigate child-witches accusations and at the same time claim to have a solution to the problem of exorcism. Kevani Kanda, a Congo-born Londoner, in her BBC3 documentary,<sup>41</sup> uncovered horrific abuse on children by the revivalists’ pastors who reconstruct, blend and distort the ancient traditions of *kindoki* or witchcraft. They interpreted the social distress and strains of the society, especially the prolonged civil war, as well as poverty and disease as having been caused by *kindoki*. They accused children of being witches, thus causing a deterioration of the family social fabric and economic structures.

The gullible parents believed the exorcists and hounded their children from the family. Many children were roaming the streets in Kinshasa because of some unusual traits attributable to *kindoki* causations. About 50,000 children were held in the churches and tortured, starved, isolated, stretched, pinched and beaten to be exorcised of *kindoki* spirits. The fraudulent

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<sup>38</sup> ‘Saving Africa’s “Witch” Children’.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Saving Africa’s Witch Children: “Bishop” Arrested Features’. Accessed 13 June 2013, <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/articles/saving-africas-witch-children-bishop-arrested>.

<sup>40</sup> Alemma-Ozioruva Aliu, ‘Siblings Commit Matricide in Edo...’ [7 July 2013] *News-Metro*. Accessed 13 July 2013, [http://www.nguardiannews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=12621:siblings-commit-matricide-in-edo-&catid=3:metro&Itemid=558](http://www.nguardiannews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12621:siblings-commit-matricide-in-edo-&catid=3:metro&Itemid=558).

<sup>41</sup> Kevani Kanda, ‘Branded a Witch... My take on the BBC3 Documentary’. Accessed 8 July 2013, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b01swd7g/Branded\\_a\\_Witch/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b01swd7g/Branded_a_Witch/); Gabriel Tate, ‘Branded a Witch’ on BBC3. Accessed 6 July 2013, <http://www.timeout.com/london/tv-reviews/branded-a-witch>; J.T. Eberhard, ‘Children Accused of Witchcraft by the Tens of Thousands in the Congo’. Accessed 31 May 2013, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/wjtd/2013/05/children-accused-of-witchcraft-by-the-tens-of-thousands-in-the-congo/>; <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/articles/469216/20130520/branded-witch-bbc-democratic-republic-congo-kindoki.htm>; ‘Branded a Witch’ Children Accused of Witchcraft BBC Full Documentary 2013. Accessed & Transcribed 8 July 2013, <http://www.thegreatplanet.com/witch-child-channel4-documentary/>; ‘Branded a Witch’, BBC3, *Kindoki and African Witchcraft Belief*. Accessed 4 July 2013, <http://www.thehistorygraduate.wordpress.com/2013/06/04/branded-a-witch-bbc3-kindoki-and-african-witchcraft-belief/>.

'pastors' make large fortunes from legitimising suspicions and accusations, and then claiming to have the solution by exorcising the witch spirits for monetary purposes.<sup>42</sup>

This practice extended to the United Kingdom, especially among the African communities. The horrific abuses and heinous crimes on three children, namely, Victoria Climbié (2000), Child B (2005) and Kristy Bamu (2010), generated high profile attention in the media.<sup>43</sup> Sources accessed reveal that in 2000, Victoria Climbié, an eight-year-old girl from Ivory Coast (now Côte d'Ivoire) was tortured: burnt with cigarettes, tied up for more than 24 hours, hit with bicycle chains, hammers and chicken wire, starved and forced to pray and fast for three days by her guardians, Marie Kouao and Carl Manning. This was because 'a family pastor' accused her of being a witch,<sup>44</sup> an accusation that led to her death in 2000.

In 2005, Child B, a ten-year-old girl from Angola, was starved, beaten, cut with a knife, hit with a belt and shoes, slapped, whipped, had chilli pepper rubbed into her eyes, was bound, placed in a bag and threatened with drowning.<sup>45</sup> Fortunately, she was discovered and saved from death by a street warden.

In 2010, Eric Bikubi and his fiancée, Magalie Bamu, accused Kristy Bamu, a fifteen-year-old boy from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), of witchcraft because he wet his pants. Bikubi punched, kicked and head-butted Kristy, beat him with a metal weight-lifting bar, knocked out his teeth with a hammer, ripped off one of his ears with a pair of pliers, broke

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<sup>42</sup> Richards Hoskins, BBC3 Newsnight: Link between Belief in Spirit Possession, Witchcraft and Religion'. Accessed 6 July 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlvwgVkJpac>; Osborne, 'Branded a Witch on BBC3'; Tate, 'Branded a Witch' on BBC3; Naomi Cahn, 'Poor Children: Child "Witches" and Child Soldiers in Sub-Sahara Africa', *Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law*, Vol. 3 (2006), pp.413-456 (422-424). Accessed 8 July 2013, [freepdfb.org/pdf/poor-children-child-witches-and-child-soldiers-in-subsahara-africa-1536477.html](http://freepdfb.org/pdf/poor-children-child-witches-and-child-soldiers-in-subsahara-africa-1536477.html); Danielle Gram, 'Child Witches and Witch Hunts: New Images of the Occult in the Democratic Republic of Congo', *Harvard Humanitarian Initiative* (April 2011), pp.1-65 (10, 17-23, 29, 39-43). Accessed 4 July 2013, [freepdfb.org/child-witches-and-witch-hunts-new-images-of-occult-in-59730922.html](http://freepdfb.org/child-witches-and-witch-hunts-new-images-of-occult-in-59730922.html).

<sup>43</sup> Eleanor Stobart, 'Child Abuse Linked to Accusation of "Possession" and "Witchcraft"', Research Report by Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2006), pp.1-32. Accessed 4 July 2013, [freepdfb.org/pdf/child-abuse-linked-to-accusation-of-possession-and-witchcraft-34441792](http://freepdfb.org/pdf/child-abuse-linked-to-accusation-of-possession-and-witchcraft-34441792); Justin Bahunga, 'Tackling Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief', pp.14-19. Accessed 4 July 2013, [freepdfb.org/pdf/every-child-journal-safeguarding-tackling-child-abuse-linked-to-faith-or-belief-83104762.html](http://freepdfb.org/pdf/every-child-journal-safeguarding-tackling-child-abuse-linked-to-faith-or-belief-83104762.html).

<sup>44</sup> Louise Hunt, 'Why is Child Abuse Tied to Witchcraft on the Rise?' *The Guardian*, 18 January 2012 [online]. Accessed 31 May 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/jan/18/child-abuse-witchcraft-exorcism-rise>; Oladipo, 'Britain's Witch Children'; 'Kindoki Accusation and Deliverance'.

<sup>45</sup> Hunt, 'Why is Child Abuse Tied to Witchcraft on the Rise?'; 'Kindoki Accusation and Deliverance'; Bahunga, 'Tackling Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief', p.15.

four floor tiles on his head, and then threw him into a bath filled with water where he drowned.<sup>46</sup>

Richard Hoskins, a sociologist in the UK, noted at the BBC3 Newsnight programme that Bikubi, a Congolese, ‘came from a chaotic disorder and malfunctioning family’.<sup>47</sup> Alexandra Topping adds that in Bikubi’s pre-teens, he had dreamt and seen ‘abnormal visions’ of rats and his brothers entering his room and trying to strangle him at night.<sup>48</sup> This experience made Bikubi obsessed with *kindoki* that in the UK, he and Magalie moved from home to home just to safeguard themselves against witchcraft threats. Although his problem may have been brain damage resulting in pseudo-schizophrenic delusions and psychosis, he interpreted his experience as God’s gift to him, ‘the chosen one’, to see and fight witches.<sup>49</sup>

In all three cases in the UK, there was no tenable evidence that proved that the children were witches. It was just a mere branding by pastors, but the parents and guardians consented to the ensuing acts of torture and, in several cases, participated in killing their children. The situation got so out of control that the parents or guardians claimed to be able to detect witches and engaged in exorcising the witch spirits in their children behind closed doors in their homes, without any church oversight. They attributed the cause of their unemployment and other woes to children. This is a reconstruction and distortion of the concept of *kindoki* or witchcraft.<sup>50</sup>

In the UK, the physical, emotional and psychological abuse, victimisation, violence, stigmatisation and discrimination of alleged witches continued to persist due to reconstruction and re-invention of the witchcraft concept by the self-styled pastors among the African communities. The ‘pastors’ always cash in to explain every evil on the basis of

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<sup>46</sup> Bahunga, ‘Tackling Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief’, p.15.

<sup>47</sup> Hoskins, ‘BBC3 Newsnight’.

<sup>48</sup> Alexandra Topping, ‘Eric Bikubi: Murderer with a “Profound and Disturbing Belief” in Witchcraft’, *The Guardian* [online], 1 March 2012. Accessed 19 August 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/mar/01/witchcraft-trial-eric-bikubi-profile>.

<sup>49</sup> Topping, ‘Eric Bikubi: Murderer with a “Profound and Disturbing Belief”’; Hoskins, ‘BBC3 Newsnight’.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Watch Witch Child – Channel4 Documentary (2008) film’; Hoskins, ‘BBC3 Newsnight’; ‘Safeguarding Children’s Rights: Exploring Issues of Witchcraft and Spirit Possession in London African Communities’. Accessed 4 July 2013, [freepdf.org/pdf/safeguarding-childrens-rights-exploring-issues-of-witchcraft-and-spirit-possession-in-london-african-communities-23524035.html](http://freepdf.org/pdf/safeguarding-childrens-rights-exploring-issues-of-witchcraft-and-spirit-possession-in-london-african-communities-23524035.html); Perdeep Gill, ‘Safeguarding Children and Beliefs in Spirit Possession and Witchcraft’. Accessed 4 July 2013, [freepdf.org/pdf/safeguarding-children-and-beleiefs-in-spirit-possession-and-witchcraft-30653968.html](http://freepdf.org/pdf/safeguarding-children-and-beleiefs-in-spirit-possession-and-witchcraft-30653968.html); Stobart, ‘Child Abuse Linked to Accusation of “Possession” and “Witchcraft”’; Bahunga, ‘Tackling Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief’; Oladipo, ‘Britain’s Witch Children’; Hunt, ‘Why is Child Abuse Tied to Witchcraft on the Rise?’; ‘Dispatches: Witch Children in the UK – Channel 4’; ‘Britain’s Witch Children’.

witchcraft and claim that they are capable of divulging and expelling witches just for monetary gains, fame and popularity. The exposure and expulsion of witchcraft is a lucrative business. These issues have been well documented and disseminated in the media: broadcast on television, in news clips and print media; as well as posted online on YouTube and other Internet websites. These all make witchcraft accusation a major socio-cultural problem in African societies. Branding any child a ‘witch’ is psychological abuse and interferes with that child’s right to life.

Western observers, African scholars, traditional African leadership, legal institutions and security agencies all object to confronting, accusing, victimising and lynching of the alleged witches.<sup>51</sup> This is because there is no factual evidence for identifying a witch. There are explicit prohibitions in ‘The Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ and ‘The Convention of the Rights of the Child’ against victimisation and heinous crimes. The aforementioned organisations have altogether affirmed that these practices are infringements of human rights that had been forbidden by law.<sup>52</sup> Articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights seem to indicate that no one has the right to proscribe another person’s belief:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Danfulani, ‘Power Encounter in African Worlds’, pp.1-26.

<sup>52</sup> See ‘The Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ [as adopted by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948], Article 5. Accessed 28 July 2013, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>. See several articles and paragraphs of ‘The Convention of the Rights of the Child’ [as adopted on 20 November 1989 at the United Nations General Assembly, New York]. For example Article 2, paragraph 2 and Article 19, paragraph 1. Accessed 27 July 2013, <http://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/ART/540-860020?OpenDocument>; Danfulani, ‘Power Encounter in African Worlds’, pp.10-23; Gwamna Dogara Je’adayibe, “‘Of Charlatans and Magicians’”: An Understanding of Acts 8:9-25 in the Light of Pentecostal Experience in Nigeria’, a Paper presented at the Theological Education in Africa (TEA) Conference held in Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN) Bukuru, Jos, Nigeria, 8-12 August 2011, pp.1-20 (11-19); McCain, “‘Us and Them’”: Pentecostals and Others Challenging and Learning from Each Other’, p.12.

<sup>53</sup> ‘The Universal Declaration of Human Rights’. Accessed 28 July 2013, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>; Joe Aldred of ‘Churches Together in England’ and Thomas Bikebi of ‘Congolese Churches’, Interview with Richard Hoskins on ‘BBC3 Newsnight’.

In recent times, like many Western observers, Gerrie ter Haar maintains, for instance, that ‘the belief itself does not pose any particular problem’. Haar notes that the ‘killing of alleged witches violates the most basic right of every human being... *It is not the belief that kills them, but the action taken in consequence of belief*’.<sup>54</sup> This perception of ‘belief’ not being a problem but the ‘actions’ may not be accepted by the generality of scholars. This is because it is the belief that usually mutates to branding, accusations, victimisation and ends in extreme violence. If the belief has the potentiality of suspicion and consequent murder, its likelihood of perpetual social implications needs to be critically examined.

Nevertheless, in Africa, the perception of physical abuse on alleged witches and wizards differs significantly from that of Western observers’ infringement on ‘human rights’. Africans consider witchcraft as structurally opposed to social norms.<sup>55</sup> The UNICEF Reports in April 2010 note that in the traditional beliefs, the real victim is the person who suffers the ‘consequences of an act of witchcraft’.<sup>56</sup> In Cameroon, for example, judges tried witches on the grounds of their accusation and so-called confessions. Of course, some of the confessions were obtained by coercion. The alleged witches, in an attempt to avoid perceived horrific abuse and heinous crimes, confessed involuntarily.<sup>57</sup> J. Akin Omoyajowo asserts that some confessions, whether obtained voluntarily or through coercion, are not always genuine. Such confessions are generally startling and inadvertent.<sup>58</sup> The point is that the scientific approach to witchcraft is based on law and human rights. In contrast, the African approach is based on the fact that every person must pay for his or her guilt.

However, some mission-founded churches ‘practically show no belief in witchcraft’.<sup>59</sup> The thought is that it is outside the church domain. All the organisations that frown at witch accusation base their view on the consequent upheavals, disharmony and conflicts in the families.

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<sup>54</sup> Haar (ed.), *Imagining Evil, Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa*, p.9, emphasis mine; Bahunga, ‘Tackling Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief’, p.17; Cimpric, ‘Children Accused of Witchcraft’, p.13; ‘Safeguarding Children’s Rights’.

<sup>55</sup> Danfulani, ‘Power Encounter in African Worlds’, p.16.

<sup>56</sup> Cimpric, ‘Children Accused of Witchcraft’, p.40.

<sup>57</sup> Danfulani, ‘Power Encounter in African Worlds’, p.16.

<sup>58</sup> Omoyajowo, ‘What is Witchcraft?’, pp.321-322.

<sup>59</sup> Omoyajowo, ‘What is Witchcraft?’ p.323.

### 5.3 Anti-Witchcraft Movements

Since the traditional ordeal on the suspected witches seemed not to allay fears and cleanse the witch spirits, another cruel step emerged with the witch-hunters' group in various African societies,<sup>60</sup> aimed at 'smelling-out' or hunting witches, punishing them, cooling them off, counteracting their activities and possibly 'de-witching' their evil spirits.<sup>61</sup> These movements were generally led by traditional priests or priestesses, mediums and medicine men whose approach was to interrogate suspected witches. The movements at the foreground were aimed at cleansing communities by divulging suspected witches and rendering them harmless, often through some form of ritual. These movements have not survived for long because they appear, flourish for a time, and then disappear. Some of them were started by individuals of unusual character who claimed to have a remedy for human suffering. At times the movements were organised by acclaimed bands of exorcists who crossed and re-crossed territories, detecting and exorcising witches. Their strategies include physical abuse and heinous crimes combined to attract and exploit the gullible in the society for rogue monetary purposes.

The anti-witchcraft movements emerged in Africa during the colonial period.<sup>62</sup> Prior to colonial regimes, although Africans believed in the existence of evildoers as the embodiment of evil spirits capable of causing death, the killing of purported 'witches' was not very common.<sup>63</sup> The traditional health practitioners often incite detections because it is a lucrative business to pose as a witch detector. They brand relatives or neighbours as perpetrators of mishaps. In so doing, they fuel the fear and abuse of the alleged witches. In urban areas, men accused industrious women who seemed to compete with them economically as threats to their powers. They brand them as 'witches' who cause psychological abuse and stigma, trauma and discrimination. This was a calculated strategy to prevent them from asserting their

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<sup>60</sup> This movement is described variously as a witch-hunting, witch-finding, anti-witchcraft movement or New Religious Movement.

<sup>61</sup> Haar (ed.), 'Introduction: The Evil Called Witchcraft', *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa* (Trenton, NJ/Asmara ERITREA: Africa World Press, 2007), p.1; Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p.265.

<sup>62</sup> On the rise of anti-witchcraft movements in West Africa during the colonial period, see two of the major sources which both African scholars and Western observers contributed on the scourge of witchcraft beliefs and accusations: Jean Comaroff & John Comaroff (eds.), *Modernity and its Malcontent: Ritual and power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Haar (ed.), *Imagining Evil*.

<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.18-19.

rights.<sup>64</sup> The witch-finders go to villages on their own volition, or are invited by local chiefs to interrogate purported witches, forcing them to submit their tools and consequently face public intimidation.<sup>65</sup>

In the subsequent segment, I will review a few relevant witch-hunting movements as they relate to the apparent practice of this ministry under study. This is because I seek to argue that this ministry [to be discussed] is a prototype of witch-hunting movements across African societies. The review will not be strictly based on their chronological emergence from beginning to the end. I will try to be chronological only with regard to their geographical locations. I have selected a few of such movements from three African zones: Central, East and West Africa.

The *Bamucapi*<sup>66</sup> anti-witchcraft movement emerged in southeast Central Africa, particularly in Malawi, around 1934.<sup>67</sup> The actual origin and founder of the movement are uncertain. However, Audrey I. Richards, who did the earliest study of this movement in Northern Rhodesia, noted that the movement originated from northern Nyasaland where it was started by a mystical figure called Kamwende of Mlanje. The movement later spread to Northern and Southern Rhodesia, and into the Congo colony as well.<sup>68</sup> Emefie Ikenga-Metuh adds that the movement swept through ‘...Zambia and Central Zimbabwe in the mid 1930s’.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Apter, ‘Atinga Revisited: Yoruba Witchcraft and the Cocoa Economy, 1950-1951’, pp.111-128.

<sup>65</sup> This happened in Zambia in the 1990s. In July 1997, 176 witch-finders stormed the Central Province. They visited villages, expropriated the possessions of the alleged ‘witches’, tortured and killed them. Hugo F. Hinfelar, ‘Witch-Hunting in Zambia and International Illegal Trade’, in Gerrie ter Haar (ed.), *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa* (Trenton, NJ/Asmara ERITREA: Africa World Press, 2007), pp.229-246 (233). This is just a tip of the iceberg of what would be revealed about anti-witchcraft movements. Their activities are inhumane because of physical and psychological abuse, as well as extortion of the vulnerable.

<sup>66</sup> *Bamucapi* is derived from a Nyanja word with its local variations: *mcupe*, *mcapi* or *mucapi* all referring to the medicine. See M.G. Marwick, ‘Another Modern Anti-Witchcraft Movement in East Central Africa’, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (April 1950), pp.100-112 (100). The *Bamucapi* itself refers to ‘medicine-vendors’ Offiong, ‘The 1978-79 Akpan Ekwong Anti-Witchcraft Crusade in Nigeria’, p.27.

<sup>67</sup> Omoyajowo, ‘What is Witchcraft?’, pp.323-324.

<sup>68</sup> Audrey I. Richards, ‘A Modern Movement of Witch-Finders’, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (October 1937), pp.448-461 (448); Offiong, ‘The 1978-79 Akpan Ekwong Anti-Witchcraft Crusade in Nigeria’, p.27; ‘Witchcraft In Africa’. Accessed 3 August 2013, <http://archive.catholicherald.co.uk/article/13th-december-1935/3/witchcraft-in-africa>; Mark Auslander, ‘“Open the Wombs”: The Symbolic Politics of Modern Ngoni Witchfinding’ in Comaroff, Jean & John Comaroff (eds.), *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp.167-192 (176).

<sup>69</sup> Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions* (Onitsha, Nigeria: IMICO publishers, 1992), p.165.

Richards records that the *Bamucapi* exorcists toured villages, assembled inhabitants with the consent of the headmen, preached sermons, killed fowls and cooked ritual meals which all partook.<sup>70</sup> Then, they guided men and women to line up separately in single files. One by one, each passed behind the back of the witch-finder, who caught their reflections in a small round mirror. Anyone whose image appeared in the mirror became a purported witch. The suspects were made to surrender their witchcraft 'horns' (*nsengo*, i.e., harmful medicines).<sup>71</sup> The 'horns' were later returned to them containing protective medicine such as charms and pinches of powder sewn up in small bags. Moreover, they detected and divulged those who resented submitting their 'horns', and they were vehemently tortured. After this, *bamucapi* would proceed to give each one a sip of the famous *mcape*, medicine for a cure. The concoction prepared in bottles was able to expel witchcraft spirits, they claimed. The suspects were threatened and warned that anyone who drank the medicine and returned to witchcraft practices would die.

Besides, all purported witches who ran away were 'smelled out' during the follow up by the mystical leader through the beating of a mysterious drum. The purported witches and wizards followed him willy-nilly to the graveyard where their crimes were said to have been finally unmasked.

The basic reason for visiting the graveyard is uncertain. However, a tradition has it that the mystical leader died and rose from the dead, after he had received a revelation and was given secret medicines and power to resist poisons of all kinds.

The *Bamucapi* witch-hunters sold their protective charms against wild beasts and snakes, charms for good luck and success, charms for winning favour from superior, powders for protecting gardens from animal pests and all sorts of danger and misfortune.

The *Bamucapi* movement manipulated mystical powers for monetary gains. The Europeans resented the *Bamucapi* because they compelled alleged witches to drink medicines; they made direct accusation of witches using mirrors; they abused and even murdered suspected

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<sup>70</sup> Richards, 'A Modern Movement of Witch-Finders', pp.450-451.

<sup>71</sup> E.G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (London: Sheldon Press, 1962), p.128.

witches. They were therefore condemned as fraudulent dealers of medicines and charms.<sup>72</sup> This movement was virtually a fraudulent economic enterprise.

In East Africa, the 'Bwanali-Mpulumutsi' anti-witchcraft movement emerged in Nyasaland in 1947 and spread into adjoining territories such as Northern Rhodesia, among others.<sup>73</sup> Like the *Bamucapi*, it claimed to have the ability to eliminate witches and protect potential victims.<sup>74</sup> The common practices were detection of witches, incisions on various parts of the alleged witches' bodies and rubbing medicines into the incisions.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, other medicines were given to both purported witches and non-witches. Again, like the *Bamucapi*, it reconstructed people's mind-set to believe that any suspected witch that returned to witchcraft practice would die.<sup>76</sup> Some suspected witches who escaped from the village later died through the beating of a mysterious drum.<sup>77</sup> However, those who confessed to being witches had medicines administered to them.

The rule was that the medicines would be efficacious on the partakers only if the required rules and taboos were observed. One unique practice of this movement was that they neither made open accusation of witchcraft nor received any payment for their work. From the exorcists' Bible readings, they stressed that they had been endowed with a divine task, and they frequently made reference to moral precepts.<sup>78</sup> This movement on the face of its practices seemed to have some tendencies of genuine aspiration.<sup>79</sup> However, one of the questionable practices of this movement was the beating of a mysterious drum that led to the death of the suspected witches.

The *Munkukusa* anti-witchcraft movement of Lower Zaïre emerged in the 1950s. It was not specifically anti-Christian but it involved confession and the taking of special anti-witchcraft medicine. Those who refused to take part in the ritual were treated as witches.

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<sup>72</sup> Marwick, 'Another Modern Anti-Witchcraft Movement in East Central Africa', pp.111-112.

<sup>73</sup> Marwick, 'Another Modern Anti-Witchcraft Movement in East Central Africa', pp.101-102.

<sup>74</sup> Marwick, 'Another Modern Anti-Witchcraft Movement in East Central Africa', p.111.

<sup>75</sup> Marwick, 'Another Modern Anti-Witchcraft Movement in East Central Africa', p.103.

<sup>76</sup> Marwick, 'Another Modern Anti-Witchcraft Movement in East Central Africa', p.103-104.

<sup>77</sup> Offiong, 'The 1978-79 Akpan Ekwong Anti-Witchcraft Crusade in Nigeria', p.28.

<sup>78</sup> Marwick, 'Another Modern Anti-Witchcraft Movement in East Central Africa', pp.111-112.

<sup>79</sup> Marwick, 'Another Modern Anti-Witchcraft Movement in East Central Africa', p.112.

Many of them faced horrific abuse and heinous crimes, particularly being stoned to death as witches.<sup>80</sup> Ironically, the victimisation was meant to coerce people into buying their medicines. The confessions by the suspected witches were involuntary and devoid of contrition prior to any conviction of guilt. The *Munkukusa* was also a commercial enterprise movement.

In West Africa, the *Aberewa* [Akan Twi: 'old woman'] anti-witchcraft movements of the Gold Coast emerged in Asante in 1906 and spread southward in the Gold Coast. From the documents accessed there are three different but closely connected traditional views about the emergence of *aberewa*: the *Aberewa* died and went to hell, or heaven,<sup>81</sup> or the spirit world<sup>82</sup>. At the entrance to hell, heaven or the spirit world, a strong man met her and refused her entry. He asked her to return to earth because hers was a premature death caused by witchcraft. The unknown man gave her medicine for protection against witchcraft and all other evils and assured her that she would die in her old age. When she revealed this experience, people believed that she was 'God sent' to set society right and destroy the evil of witchcraft.

The *Aberewa* developed directly from an earlier anti-witchcraft movement, the *Sakrabundi*.<sup>83</sup> In the Gold Coast and Asante, the expansion of the colonial cash economy fuelled by the take-off of cocoa export in the 1900s deepened social tension and created economic anxieties. The apprehensions called for the emergence of *aberewa* which was brought to Asante by Osei Kwaku, *asaman* (the priest) whose shrine was located at Wirekye.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> S. Bockie, *Death and Invisible Powers: The World of Kongo Belief* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp.40-61; Wyatt MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), p.99; Brian Morris, *Religion and Anthropology: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.157.

<sup>81</sup> N.V. Asare, a pastor of the Basel Mission at Kumase, reported that the old woman went to hell. Ben Ampofo from Edweso was reported to have found the old woman in the form of a big ball like a head lying down at a certain place. She enjoined him to carry her to his house because she was sent from heaven for humankind. See John Parker, 'Witchcraft, Anti-Witchcraft and trans-Regional Ritual innovation in Early Colonial Ghana: Sakrabundi and Aberewa, 1889-1910', *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2004), pp.393-420 (404-405).

<sup>82</sup> Anshan Li, 'Abirewa: A Religious Movement in the Gold Coast, 1906-1908', *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 20, No.1 (1996), pp.32-52 (33).

<sup>83</sup> The *Sakrabundi* initially started from within *Asantehene* Gyeman Prempeh's domain in the forest zone, and then moved to the northern part of Asante in the 1880s. Its initial practice was killing of purported witches and it also engaged in trial by ordeal. The colonial administration banned it. But the annexation of Prempeh's sovereignty by the British forces in 1896 triggered a widespread sense of dispossession. The dwellers of Kumase perceived that the termination of Prempeh opened the tide of witches. See Parker, 'Witchcraft, Anti-Witchcraft and trans-Regional Ritual innovation in Early Colonial Ghana', pp.393, 397, 406.

<sup>84</sup> Parker, 'Witchcraft, Anti-Witchcraft and Trans-Regional Ritual Innovation in Early Colonial Ghana', p.408.

The initial intention of the *Aberewa* seemed to oppose the killing of witches and trial by ordeal carried out by the preceding *Sakrabundi* movement. The movement reconstructed a slightly different but similar motive. In the first place, it focused on bringing sanctity to life, but within the framework of commercial enterprise. Then, it sold its ritual commodities used against theft, extortion, adultery, excessive litigation due to envy and quarrel across Asante, Gold Coast (now Ghana) colony. The movement promised immunity from all pain and evil spirits. Its members drank a medicinal syrup secretly made from the powder of the root of a certain tree. A long horn was often blown, giving a fearful sound, which was believed to summon all the evil spirits connected with witches from the community.<sup>85</sup>

First, the popularity of the *Aberewa* started dwindling because the respect due to the chiefs was turned over to the *Aberewa* priests. Second, in the *Aberewa* movement, whereas the *abayifo* or ‘female powers’ possessed the power to cleanse witches and reintegrate them in the human society, the *Abrafo*, ‘the executors’, held the *manguro/burogya* or ‘male power’. The *abrafo* killed those who transgressed the new moral code of the re-born community.

The *Aberewa* that used to focus on community-based healing now turned around to uphold the *Sakrabundi* strategy by killing unrepentant witches and other transgressors. It claimed to have been doing so to preserve the life of the later generation against those who intended to damage the lives of others.<sup>86</sup> The colonial administration and missionaries initially supported the movement because it was dealing with criminality and bad behaviour. They later discovered, however, that the movement had been engaging in the quest for fame, power and popularity, committing horrific abuses and heinous crimes. For example, the *Abrafo* mutilated the corpses of purported witches who had been expelled. They killed wealthy individuals and collaborated with Osei Kwaku, while the *asaman* appropriated their property. The *Aberewa* appointed ‘fetish’ men and were more respected and called ‘kings’. The ‘fetish’ men raised the price of the *Aberewa* cult from a few Cowries to Eight Pounds (£8.00). They mobilised powers associated with witchcraft so that there was no dichotomy between witchcraft and anti-witchcraft. Women were subjected to untold humiliation: they were beaten, stripped naked, hooted at in the streets and had pepper inserted into their private parts. Yet others, due to fear of any eventuality, voluntarily submitted and confessed in order

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<sup>85</sup> Li, ‘Abirewa’, p.33.

<sup>86</sup> Parker, ‘Witchcraft, Anti-Witchcraft and Trans-Regional Ritual Innovation in Early Colonial Ghana’, pp.409-410.

to be rid of witchcraft. The *Aberewa* ‘fetish’ men fined them and gave them medicines to ward off their witchcraft.<sup>87</sup>

By 1908, the British government and traditional rulers saw the practice as undermining indigenous authority. The chief Commissioner in the Colonial government suppressed the *Aberewa* movement in Asante Kumasi due to its fanaticism, mutilation of corpses, subversion of chiefly powers and sale of the *Aberewa* cult. The movement was condemned as alien, illegal and subversive to ‘traditional’ tribal authority. It was finally banned in July 1909.<sup>88</sup> Thus, by 1910, the *Aberewa* had ceased to operate as a public phenomenon because of the joint attack by both the colonial government and the traditional rulers.<sup>89</sup> Still, the government could not regulate on the perception in the land that witchcraft was real.

Within a few years, however, another witch-hunting movement called the *Tigare* emerged in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and swept across West Africa between 1914 and the 1950s. This movement sought to meet the religious and psychological issues because sickness, misfortune and death were attributed to witchcraft. Elom Dovlo,<sup>90</sup> Margaret Fields, J.B. Christenson and others have written about this movement. It was influential because, like others, ‘it claims to detect witches, offer protection against witchcraft and evil in general and capable of giving progress and prosperities to its members. *Tigare* shrines ... identified and exorcised witches of their evil power’.<sup>91</sup> This movement drew and attracted both traditional religious believers and Christians alike. Several shrines were raised across the Gold Coast for protection. People drank the prescribed medicines for protection and initiation.

The influence of this movement became a challenge to the evangelical churches of the time. For many lay members and elders of the evangelical churches became ardent members of the movement. It was so chaotic that in 1947, the Christian Council of the Gold Coast reacted against it through *The Christian Way*, a magazine published by the Scottish Mission in an

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<sup>87</sup> Parker, ‘Witchcraft, Anti-Witchcraft and Trans-Regional Ritual Innovation in Early Colonial Ghana’, pp.414-416.

<sup>88</sup> Parker, ‘Witchcraft, Anti-Witchcraft and Trans-Regional Ritual Innovation in Early Colonial Ghana’, p.417.

<sup>89</sup> Parker, ‘Witchcraft, Anti-Witchcraft and Trans-Regional Ritual Innovation in Early Colonial Ghana’, p.418.

<sup>90</sup> Elom Dovlo, ‘The Church in Africa and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of New Religious Movements and Charismatic Churches’, *Exchange: Journal of Mission and Ecumenical Research*, Vol. 27, No.1 (1998), pp.52-69 (53-54).

<sup>91</sup> Elom Dovlo, ‘Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana’, in Gerrie ter Haar (ed.), *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa* (Trenton, NJ/ Asmara ERITREA: Africa World Press, 2007), pp.67-112 (70).

article entitled *Tigare or Christ?* The movement declined as a result of greed, among other things. This decline also reflected the economic nature of this witch-hunting venture.

The *Atinga* movement (probably derived from *nana Tongo* or *Anatinga*)<sup>92</sup> from the then Gold Coast reached Nigeria via Togoland and Dahomey (now Benin Republic) in the 1950s on invitation by the Yoruba chiefs in south-western Nigeria.<sup>93</sup> According to various documents accessed,<sup>94</sup> the *Atinga* priest usually prepared anti-witchcraft medicine in a big pot (a blend of animal blood, water and kolanuts) and made the suspects drink it. A dance séance was organised and young men and women possessed by the *Atinga*, similarly to the *Bamucapi*, detected purported witches through small handheld mirrors. The accused witches were forced to submit their witchcraft tools. Those who failed to do so suffered horrific abuse and heinous crimes.

Additionally, every accused person was asked to bring a fowl to test whether he or she was innocent or not. The fowl would be half-slaughtered and allowed to run until it eventually died. If it rested upright, the accused was acquitted; if it fell on its face, the accused was found guilty of witchcraft. The accused had to pay additional fines and give bottles of gin. The pieces of kolanuts were abstracted, dried and sold as anti-witchcraft medicine to individual buyers, who were subsequently marked on the forehead with a chalk disc signifying immunity and invincibility to witchcraft attacks.

The colonial government saw these adverse effects of the *Atinga* movement and banned it in 1951. Although the movement claimed to fight witches, under cover it meted out abuse, committed crimes and financially extorted the vulnerable, especially women.

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<sup>92</sup> Omoyajowo, 'What is Witchcraft?', p.324; Offiong, 'The 1978-79 Akpan Ekwong Anti-Witchcraft Crusade in Nigeria', p.28.

<sup>93</sup> Omoyajowo, 'What is Witchcraft?', p.325; see also, Raymond Prince, 'The Yoruba Image of the Witch'. Accessed 4 July 2013, [freepdfb.org/pdf/the-yoruba-image-of-the-witch-by-raymond-prince-md-misc-7294463-html](http://freepdfb.org/pdf/the-yoruba-image-of-the-witch-by-raymond-prince-md-misc-7294463-html); Andrew Apter, 'Atinga Revisited: Yoruba Witchcraft and the Cocoa Economy 1950-1951'; Comaroff & Comaroff (eds.), *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp.111-128; Parker, 'Witchcraft, Anti-Witchcraft and Trans-Regional Ritual Innovation in Early Colonial Ghana: Sakrabundi and Aberewa, 1889-1910', pp.393-394; Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, p.154.

<sup>94</sup> Danfulani, 'Power Encounter in African Worlds', p.17; Apter, 'Atinga Revisited: Yoruba Witchcraft and the Cocoa Economy, 150-1951', pp.111-128; Prince, 'The Yoruba Image of the Witch'; Omoyajowo, 'What is Witchcraft?', pp.324-325, 333.

Another anti-witchcraft movement was started in Uyo (Cross River State capital) in the southeast of Nigeria by Edem Edet Akpan (alias Akpan Ekwong)<sup>95</sup> and spread to Oron among the Ibibio in 1978-79.<sup>96</sup> It identified witches, collected and destroyed their witchery artefacts and administered oaths.<sup>97</sup> According to Daniel Offiong,<sup>98</sup> Ekwong inoculated the *Nka Ukpoto* ('dedicated and fearless ones' or 'lieutenants') with witchcraft serum and made them immune and invincible to any witchcraft attacks. The lieutenants organised themselves and engaged in torturing and lynching purported witches in the villages. They held village chiefs and elders hostage on suspicion of being witches to be expelled by their leader.

The government through its security agencies attempted to control them and declared that whoever was found torturing, lynching and accusing witches and wizards, be 'shot on sight'. But all to no avail. Ekwong and his lieutenants instructed the village dwellers to remain indoors. All those who left the village deliberately were ordered to return home for the witch ordeal. All the community members would assemble at a public square while the lieutenants would go round 'smelling-out' witches. They would tie up the legs and hands of the suspects, rub red pepper powder all over their bodies and pour black ants over them, constantly torturing them until they confessed to being witches. The suspects were expected to 'tell how long they had been practising the art, how many people they had killed, the names of those they killed and why they killed them, what office they held in the witch association'.<sup>99</sup> Some confessed to being witches prior to the arrival of the lieutenants and the subsequent ordeal. Some did so on detection as witches. Others confessed after days of torture. However, some claimed innocence of the accusations and were tortured to death, while others were maimed for life. As a result of the impending stigma and discrimination, one accused person reportedly committed suicide.

Besides, the suspects were asked to disclose publicly the efficacy of the apparatus in their witchcraft, and then surrender them. Among the objects were mini-canoes used for travelling to meetings and for hunting down victims; dirty old lanterns for guarding them on their way; brooms for sweeping their meeting place and attracting money from victims; staffs

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<sup>95</sup> Daniel A. Offiong, 'Social Relations and Witch Beliefs among the IBIBIO of Nigeria', *Journal of Anthropological Research* Vol. 39, No.1 (Spring 1983), pp.81-95 (81).

<sup>96</sup> Offiong, 'The 1978-79 Akpan Ekwong Anti-Witchcraft Crusade in Nigeria', pp.29-32, 38.

<sup>97</sup> Offiong, 'The 1978-79 Akpan Ekwong Anti-Witchcraft Crusade in Nigeria', p.41.

<sup>98</sup> Offiong, 'The 1978-79 Akpan Ekwong Anti-Witchcraft Crusade in Nigeria', pp.31-32; Offiong, 'Social Relations and Witch Beliefs among the IBIBIO of Nigeria', p.81.

<sup>99</sup> Offiong, 'The 1978-79 Akpan Ekwong Anti-Witchcraft Crusade in Nigeria', p.31; Offiong, 'Social Relations and Witch Beliefs among the IBIBIO of Nigeria', p.81.

representing the positions of authority they held; pieces of stone for rendering them heartless once they touched their chest; padlocks for locking women's wombs from bearing offspring or for barrenness.<sup>100</sup>

After surrendering the objects, they were to give a goat, drinks, yams, and pay a certain token of money for practising witchcraft. They were then forced to swear an oath not to return to witchcraft practices. It is said that this oath was lethal to those who tried to return to witchcraft practices. The leader also gave preventive medicines to those who felt they had been bewitched, and those who felt they might be targets.<sup>101</sup>

All chiefs and elders who confessed to being witches were banned from assuming their positions. Young men temporarily took over the leadership.<sup>102</sup> The movement sought to eliminate witches and witchcraft, and protect their potential victims. R.C. Angell argues that Ibibio witch beliefs and associated practices revolved around social tensions.<sup>103</sup> Social strains mutate to hostility leading to suspicions, gossips and accusations of witchcraft. Ekwong was later arrested and charged with murder, torture of people, disturbing the peace and extortion of the vulnerable. However, several lawyers, especially Ibibios, defended and acquitted him free of charge. Ekwong received goats, drinks and yams through the sale of anti-witchcraft medicine. This movement like others targeted economic gain.

The *Yari Maga* anti-witchcraft movement was started by Maga in the western part of the present-day Middle Belt among the Eggon of Nasarawa State in Nigeria. According to Umar H.D. Danfulani,<sup>104</sup> this movement originated between the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Maga claimed that he had received a unique call and was trained by spirits in the spirit world to be a witch-hunter. He used a mechanical-physical type of divination to detect witches and other evildoers. He would often tie a rope to the rafters of his house, and held the other end in his hand or between the toes of his left foot. Each purported witch would say a prayer of innocence. Then, if the gourd moved upward along the taut string, the suspect was acquitted. However, if the gourd failed to move along the string, it indicated that the suspect was guilty.

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<sup>100</sup> Offiong, 'The 1978-79 Akpan Ekwong Anti-Witchcraft Crusade in Nigeria', p.37.

<sup>101</sup> Offiong, 'The 1978-79 Akpan Ekwong Anti-Witchcraft Crusade in Nigeria', p.38.

<sup>102</sup> Offiong, 'Social Relations and Witch Beliefs among the IBIBIO of Nigeria', p.82.

<sup>103</sup> R.C. Angell, 'UNESCO and Social Science Research in Paris in 1950', pp.1-12 (2). Accessed 5 August 2013, <http://books.google.com.gh/books?id...>

<sup>104</sup> Danfulani, 'Exorcising Witchcraft', pp.176-177.

Once the purported witches were detected, Maga would place the leaves of a certain tree by the side of the purported witches' mouths and play music from a radio cassette. Thereafter, the purported witches took off their clothes and began to dance stark naked to the music, as it were, in their guilds. He would, then, proceed to 'de-witch' them only on the payment of some token amounts by the family members.<sup>105</sup> This is explicitly a manipulation of powers, a perpetration of human rights abuse and extortion.

The next anti-witchcraft movement documented by Danfulani<sup>106</sup> in Eggoland is the one started by Mary Joseph in 1989. Mary married twice and suffered much trauma due to a sickness that resulted in madness. This became part of her mysterious call and training because she disappeared for some time before reappearing. On her reappearance, she claimed to have received the power to 'de-witch' people.

Mary used two methods in identifying witches. These were the 'sprinkling' and the 'washing of the face' methods. She first diagnosed the purported witches by sprinkling water on them using locust bean leaves and the witches among them simply took off their clothes and remained stark naked in the public. This amounted to public humiliation, stigmatisation and public intimidation. The second method used set suspected witches in a semi-circle around a bowl of water placed in the centre of the circle. She then warned the group three times, saying, 'If there is any among you who is a witch, let him or her come out'. After this she would wash her face, and then begin to look round to see the face of each of them. She had a group of fierce young 'bullies'. Whenever she discovered 'a witch', she would indicate by pointing at the person. The 'bullies' would then force the accused person to the centre of the circle.

At the end of the identification process, all the accused persons would first have their heads soaked with water from the bowl. Mary would then dip the locust bean leaves into the water and sprinkle it on them, to signify that they were witches. They were eventually forced to make public confessions. The accused were charged between Two Hundred Naira (₦200.00) and Six Hundred Naira (₦600.00) only for exorcism (depending on the intensity of the guilt). Those who resisted confession were forced to take off their clothes and to dance the supposed witches' dance. Some of them out of stigmatisation and traumatisation confessed to being

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<sup>105</sup> Danfulani, 'Power Encounter in African Worlds', pp.17-18.

<sup>106</sup> Danfulani, 'Exorcising Witchcraft', pp.177-179.

witches. They would then pay fines of Nine Hundred Naira (₦900.00) and Five Hundred Naira (₦500.00) for the rites of exorcism.

Several new religious movements dedicated to healing, protection and witchcraft detection emerged successively from Urhoboland in the Niger Delta region. The first two anti-witchcraft movements were the *Ugo* and the *Enuwha* which existed between 1910 and 1911. The former claimed to have the ability to detect witches and other evildoers, and to oppose any form of sin, murder or heinous crimes. Its practices were characterised by vigorous dances, accompanied by drumming and singing which finally led the devotees into frenzied, hysterical behaviour and possession. The possessed devotees would claim to have seen visions of detected witches and warn the perpetrators to confess their acts and other sins committed.<sup>107</sup>

The latter movement, introduced by one Madam Emado, has a similar claim of being able to detect witches and all other evildoers, and to protect and heal its devotees of all ailments. Emado used objects such as the Bible and leather fans as well as Christian songs and dancing in praise of the *Enuwha* spirit.<sup>108</sup> The common ground of both movements was the hybridisation of the older and new religious system. Both movements died out without any tenable evidence.

After this, the *Igbe* movement<sup>109</sup> emerged as a response to the spiritual powers, principalities and malignant forces operating through witches and wizards. The *Igbe* movement was led by three successive leaders, namely, Ubiosia of Urhoboland (1913), Koriga of Ozoro (1915) and Okinedo of Ozoro (1921). The movement was started by Ubiosia who had either unearthed sacred chalk (kaolin) while weeding his farm or received it from an unknown physical agent (believed to be God). The kaolin is believed to be an agent for healing people, seeing visions, detecting witches, speaking in esoteric language and prophesying in a state of frenzy.<sup>110</sup> After Ubiosia, Koriga introduced the *Igbe* movement in Isokoland. He taught that all those who licked the sacred chalk while in the ecstatic state would confess their sins. So, witch suspects (Christians and non-Christians alike) were taken to the *Igbe* shrine for diagnosis. All those

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<sup>107</sup> E. Samson Akama, 'The Emergence of the *Igbe* Cult in Isokoland', in Rosalind I.J. Hackett (ed.), *New Religious Movements in Nigeria* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1987), pp.19-44 (24-25).

<sup>108</sup> Akama, 'The Emergence of the *Igbe* Cult in Isokoland', p.25.

<sup>109</sup> Akama, 'The Emergence of the *Igbe* Cult in Isokoland', pp.25-44.

<sup>110</sup> Akama, 'The Emergence of the *Igbe* Cult in Isokoland', p.26.

convicted were punished by the entire society.<sup>111</sup> Like the *Eni* (water spirit) of Uzere community,<sup>112</sup> the *Igbe* became a means of eliminating witches in Isoko society.

Okinedo in his time developed and spread the movement to almost all parts of Isokoland.<sup>113</sup> Samson Akama gives some details of *Igbe* beliefs.<sup>114</sup> The movement incorporated Christian faith into its beliefs. It believed that the sacred chalk was given by 'God' through the *uku-Igbe* (*Igbe* Chief High Priest) was potent and had the power to heal and protect. All who licked the sacred chalk had to confess their sins or face God's wrath. It denounced traditional divinities and tutelary spirits because God is supreme and universal.

Concerning its practices, members were initiated through the breaking and licking of the sacred chalk. Its intending initiates paid a token amount of Two Naira, Fifty Kobo (₦2.50) and Twenty-Five Kobo (25k), respectively. It rejected traditional and biomedical treatments, relying rather on the sacred chalk. It rejected traditional divination, although for healing and exorcism by the *Uku*, it used seemingly divinatory objects, such as leather fans, mirrors, incense, six-flower perfumes and pomade alongside the Bible. The *Uku* not only claimed the power of clairvoyance, but also invoked and prophesied in esoteric language understood only by *uku* and other *Igbe* initiates.

The beliefs and moral practices of the *Igbe* were said to be potential grounds for the detection and curbing of witchcraft. The problem was that it had varied tendencies of hybridising traditional beliefs and practices with the Christian faith.

The witch-hunters on the face of their practice may have helped curtail evil and intended evil in the society. This may be possible as intended perpetrators were seeing compulsion, harassment, physical abuse and public humiliation meted out to the purported witches. Some might have taken precautions not to fall victim and face similar lifelong stigma, trauma, discrimination, neglect, and abandonment in the family and community. From the prognoses

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<sup>111</sup> Akama, 'The Emergence of the *Igbe* Cult in Isokoland', p.27.

<sup>112</sup> Isoko traditional belief revealed that *Eni* mystically accompanied Uzere as a guiding spirit during migration between 1578-1606 AD from Benin to Isokoland when Uzere was searching for arable farmland and due to havoc being caused by *Ogwara*, a superhuman. *Eni* finally settled in Lake *Eni* near Benin. In Isoko society, several ordeals meted to purported witches seemed ineffective to outlaw witchcraft practices. The community therefore consulted the *Eni* (water spirits) of Uzere community for witch detection and witch trial. The priest of *Eni* would pour the 'sacred' native chalk 'kaolin' powder on the head of the purported witch's forehead; carried by canoe to the centre of the lake; dropped into the water to swim to the shore unaided. If the accused successfully swam to the shore she is acquitted if not would be drowned. Between 1903 and 1908, British government banned it as heinous crime. Akama, 'The Emergence of the *Igbe* Cult in Isokoland', p.21.

<sup>113</sup> Akama, 'The Emergence of the *Igbe* Cult in Isokoland', p.28.

<sup>114</sup> Akama, 'The Emergence of the *Igbe* Cult in Isokoland', p.28-33.

and diagnoses of all the witch-hunts, it is undoubtedly explicit that the ‘fetish’ men manipulated some physical objects and employed malignant mystical forces to abuse and extort the gullible in the society. The underlying targets of the ‘priests’ were fame, to make a name, gain popularity and money. The way of getting the money was to instil fear, confront and harass suspected witches, lifelong victimisation through physical, emotional and psychological abuse. The ‘fetish’ men lynched any suspected witches who resisted the confession to being witches.

Moreover, gender stereotyping is embedded in the society. Only females – and for some decades now, children – have been vulnerable and become the scapegoats of witch accusations. This is as a result of misogyny and patriarchal biases against women. A clear example is that of the *Atinga* witch-hunt movement in Yorubaland. Based on Andrew Apter’s exploration of the link between economy and the hostility of the *Atinga* against Yoruba women (1945-1950), businessmen accused women of witchcraft largely because of their newly found prosperity due to their participation in the cocoa export boom. Apter describes the *Atinga* anti-witchcraft movement as ‘a complicitous assault on female power in its social, economic and ritual domains’.<sup>115</sup> Comaroff and Comaroff add that most women accused of witchcraft have been described as ‘the sirens of selfish desire’<sup>116</sup> using witchcraft to promote their own economic prosperity at the cost of others.

Women’s economic exploits during the cocoa boom were therefore interpreted as disguised witchcraft. This was based on the perception that men should dominate in capitalism and its expanding power as predetermined by culture and tradition. Ralph Austen describes the economics of witchcraft accusations in terms of ‘a zero sum universe – that is, a world where all profit is gained at someone else’s loss’.<sup>117</sup> R. Harms simplifies it, noting that in the traditional African ‘moral economy’, success is a zero-sum game in which ‘one person’s gain is always offset by another’s loss’.<sup>118</sup> The purported witches were and are mostly victimised, traumatised, stigmatised and discriminated against in the society.

Furthermore, a few anti-witchcraft movements founded by women, such as the *Aberewa* (Gold Coast) and Mary Joseph (Eggonland), for example, used the *Abrafo* or ‘the

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<sup>115</sup> Apter, ‘Atinga Revisited’, p.113.

<sup>116</sup> Comaroff, Jean & John Comaroff (eds.), ‘Introduction’, pp.xxv, xxvii.

<sup>117</sup> Austen, ‘The Moral Economy of Witchcraft’, p.92.

<sup>118</sup> R. Harms, *Games Against Nature: An Eco-Cultural History of the Nunu of Equatorial Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.21.

executors' and the young men or 'bullies', respectively, to harass, confront, compel, victimise and lynch suspected witches.

Studies have shown that witchcraft accusations mostly surface due to already or immediate tension-generation within social relationships. Many scholars buttress this point. E.G. Parrinder succinctly observes that 'it is better not to make enemies since hatred is the constant motive of witchcraft'.<sup>119</sup> J.D. Krige notes that among the Cewa of Zimbabwe, witchcraft takes place 'only where you find stresses and strains in life, where ... there are tensions, actual or potential, between people'.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, E.E. Evans-Pritchard reveals that among the Azande, witches attack people in their immediate vicinity.<sup>121</sup> H. Kuper stresses that among the Bantu of South Africa, witchcraft accusations are expressions of jealousies and hatred between persons in close contact with one another.<sup>122</sup> In other words, witchcraft accusation arises from domestic tensions and jealousies that have grown within close social relations.<sup>123</sup> This is why issues of bewitchment are mostly reported among relatives and neighbours, especially when something goes wrong following a dispute and quarrel.<sup>124</sup> As already noted, in most African societies, traditional leadership declined to divulge the identity of purported witches because it would disturb the peace and harmony of the community.

Some contemporary self-styled faith-healers who claim charismatic gifts as witch-hunters started their ministries as 'warfare movements against witchcraft'. Such self-acclaimed exorcists instigate the spread and growth of witchcraft accusations and consequent abuses and crimes. S. Ottenberg and P. Ottenberg noted that such fraudulent exorcists take advantage of the situation to disintegrate family social structures, create deep fears and apprehension of the personal cause of retrogressive 'life force'.<sup>125</sup> The exorcists often pitch their tents where the mission-founded churches fail to respond adequately, especially on issues of witchcraft. The exorcists are quick to define evil on the basis of witchcraft or other malevolent forces. They use this forum in their attempts to interpret circumstances.

Mission-founded churches, on the other hand, often teach 'Triumphalist Christology', saying that the ministry of Christ had subjected the powers of the malevolent mystical powers. Only

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<sup>119</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, *Witchcraft: European and African* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p.169.

<sup>120</sup> See M.G. Marwick, 'The Social Context of Cewa Witch Beliefs', *Africa*, Vol. 22 (1952), pp.120-135 (122).

<sup>121</sup> Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, pp.105-106.

<sup>122</sup> H. Kuper, *An African Aristocracy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), p.307.

<sup>123</sup> Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, p.167.

<sup>124</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, pp.263-266.

<sup>125</sup> S. Ottenberg & P. Ottenberg, *Cultures and Societies in Africa* (New York: Random House, 1950), p.407.

the Holy Spirit is functional. Gerhardus C. Oosthuizen observed succinctly the early evangelical missionaries' perception about African spirit cosmology. He said *inter alia* that

Witchcraft and sorcery have been largely ignored by the missionaries in Africa because of their deep-seated westernized disposition on these matters. Their highly intellectualized dispositions and the reality of demons [with the exception of Satan] has made them turn a blind eye to these forces, which are considered to be out of bounds to anyone associated with Christianity and thus to be totally ignored, whatever their influence might be.<sup>126</sup>

Charles Kraft captured well this observation after he retired from mission work in Nigeria. He frankly accepted the missionary 'failure' to appreciate 'power consciousness' in Africa. He says:

There seemed to be more visible power in their old ways [primal religion] than in Christianity. As missionaries we had brought an essentially powerless message to a power-conscious people. Christian power did not meet many of their deepest spiritual needs.... God of power portrayed in the Scriptures seemed to have died...<sup>127</sup>

Kraft is not saying that the early evangelical gospel presented in Africa was weak. Rather, that the Western evangelicals did not take cognisance of the African perception of power, nor did they employ the indigenous categories to make the gospel more meaningful to Africans. This would make Africans acknowledge that the old powers are temporary, whereas the new power in the gospel is perpetual. Christian Baëta is right in his appraisal of the apparent missionary failure in Africa. He notes:

The [early evangelical] church did not take account of the traditional beliefs of the people, little effort was made to understand them and to know their basic hopes and fears and traditional yearning for God, and in what way God met this yearning. The church in Africa came into being with prefabricated theology, liturgies and traditions.<sup>128</sup>

The early evangelical Christianity neither adequately interacted with the African concept of power nor prepared indigenous Christian leaders as to how to deal with problems associated with mystical powers. Most of the first- and second-generation ministers of the CRCN are still seeking to control the witchcraft discourse. They seem to believe that witchcraft is real and has not completely disappeared with the growing strength of Christian faith. In fact, their

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<sup>126</sup> Gerhardus C. Oosthuizen, *The Healer-Prophet in Afro-Christian Churches* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), p.120; Gerhardus C. Oosthuizen, *Christianity in Africa* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1968), p.4.

<sup>127</sup> Charles Kraft, *Christianity with Power* (Grand Rapids: Vine Books, 1989), pp.4, 8-9.

<sup>128</sup> Christian G. Baëta, *Christianity in Tropical Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.426.

view is that what believers need is to believe that Christ has defeated Satan and his acolytes during his ministry on earth, and that there is no longer any evil power capable of overcoming them.<sup>129</sup> However, this has not completely eliminated the persistent fear of witchcraft among African Christians.

Moreover, the CRCN leadership always maintains that witchcraft cases are outside her task, she has no concrete moulds of determining the reality since the action is done in secret. The church insists on working with issues that have concrete evidence to determine their genuineness and falsity. In most cases, the leadership quickly tells the complainant and the accused that ‘the church does not treat witchcraft cases because there is no concrete proof for the action. Perhaps, the traditional leadership might likely be of help, go and consult with them’. The church’s ‘Shepherd’s Hand Book’ has no advice on whether or not to discipline a witch culprit or self-confessed witch. The church therefore fails to engage enough to provide adequate and satisfactory answer to witchcraft attacks. The common view still held by the first- and second-generation ministers of the CRCN is that witchcraft has no place within Christian interaction. Any claim to the ability to detect, expose and expel witchcraft is extremist, syncretistic and blasphemous. One thing that still stands out is that the suppression of the beliefs and discourse has never wiped away the belief in witchcraft in the mind-set of its alleged victims.

Both traditional leadership and the church repress divulging ‘witches’. The former believes the reality but fears virulent animosity in the social structure. The latter resists the belief because it considers it an imaginative idea, delirious superstition and nonsensical without tenable evidence.

It is these two extremes that this ministry attempts to bridge. Like other modern exorcists, it is bent on waging warfare against witchcraft as it reconstructs and connects family social disintegration, social stresses and social strains to witchcraft causations. As observed by Danfulani,<sup>130</sup> the conceptualisation of the new religious movements’ warfare against witchcraft is generally embedded in and based on the understanding of the reality and dynamism of African spirit cosmologies.

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<sup>129</sup> Adam M. Eyab, Interview, 17 November 2010, Takum; Emmanuel M. Sumgbadu, Interview, 12 December 2010, Wukari; Nuhu Pamciri, Interview, 16 November 2010, Takum; Aboki, Interview, 12 November 2010.

<sup>130</sup> Danfulani, ‘Power Encounter in Africa Worlds’, p.2.

Martha Sabo's ministry has a similar approach to the contemporary self-styled faith-healers. It attempts to set peoples' mind on the reality of witchcraft by breaking the silence on witchcraft beliefs. This is through exposing and expelling purported witches in the society. It also earns an income by selling elements and objects alleged to deal with all kinds of evil caused by witches and wizards. The ministry gives several basic reasons for this approach: first, to convict the purported witches to repent and confess their sins, and receive God's salvation. Second, to protect the culprit from victimisation, ostracism and lynching. Third, to expose the purported witches, halt their continued nefarious acts and curtail the fears and apprehensions of the victim. Fourth, it will free the victim from living constantly under the caprices of (the alleged) witches. Fifth, it will control the victim who might resort to acquiring 'avenging antidotes' and medicines from the agents of witches: medicine men, herbalists, spirit mediums, sorcerers and other traditional medical practitioners. Ironically, instead of acquiring vengeful elements from witch agents, the clients will purchase 'godly' protective and preventive elements and objects from Martha.

The following segment examines some adverse social impact of witchcraft in the Jukun society and beyond. This is because witchcraft belief and accusation has been causing a deterioration of the social structure. The study examines the procedures and methods of exposing and expelling witches as employed by this ministry. The impact and setbacks of the approach are also discussed.

#### **5.4. Witchcraft, a Disintegration of the Social Structure**

The Jukun, like other ethnic groups across Africa, believe that witchcraft is the underlying cause of (almost) all misfortune and suffering. It is believed that witches perform dreadful feats involving the destruction of human life. The witchcraft leaves the body in the night while the person is sleeping. It is believed that witches operate in company with familiar animals such as snakes, night owls, bats and cats at night. They attack the *dindi* (soul) of a person, causing mishaps. People fear witchcraft as a concrete manifestation of evil.

In the Jukun society, there are historic antecedents to witchcraft belief, as evident in its actions and effects in the pre-colonial and post-colonial eras. A few Jukun indigenes I interacted with who have vast knowledge about witchcraft defined it as 'an act where an

individual exploits evil powers to take away the life-force and/or cause retrogression in the life-force.<sup>131</sup> By ‘taking away the life-force’ here they mean killing or causing death. By ‘retrogressing the life-force’, they mean frustrating people’s progress socially, economically, politically and otherwise.

The Jukun categorise witchcraft into two types: *ko wafen* (meaning, ‘inborn’ or ‘innate’ or ‘hereditary’ witchcraft) and *ko jebu* (meaning ‘fake’ or ‘acquired’ or ‘purchased’ or ‘modernised’ witchcraft). The traditional belief is that *Ko wafen* is transferred automatically from the maternal genes and follows blood kinship lines exclusively.<sup>132</sup> In this case, a person is unconsciously born a witch. This witch always preys on close blood relatives and kin within the extended family. Misty L. Bastian, writing on Igbo beliefs on witchcraft, rightly captures this using a proverb that says, ‘*Amusu adaghi egbu n’iro*’ (literally, ‘A witch does not sting in the open space’).<sup>133</sup> By ‘open space’ she meant that a witch cannot bewitch someone outside the extended family bloodline. E.J. Krigie and J.D. Krigie articulated this while writing about the Cewa of Zimbabwe’s perception of witchcraft. They stressed that witches usually strike those within close contact – relatives, and not strangers.<sup>134</sup>

In contrast, *ko jebu* among the Jukun is mostly acquired. This witchery has no confined borders.<sup>135</sup> The two types of witchcraft differ in their role and power. The *ko wafen* is said to be mostly carnivorous, the so-called ‘eating of human flesh’ and ‘drinking of human blood’,<sup>136</sup> while the *ko jebu* is not.<sup>137</sup> However, among the Jukun today, it is believed that *ko jebu* is becoming more elusive and complex, gradually crossing and re-crossing bloodline

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<sup>131</sup> Fari Gambo, Interview, 28 May 2012, Wukari; Nuhu Useini Adi, Interview, 22 February 2010, CRCN Station Wukari; Bitrus T. Angyunwe, Interview, 10 February 2011, Wukari; James Orume, Interview, 17 February 2011, Wukari; Joel T. Aji, Interview, 9 February 2011, Wukari.

<sup>132</sup> Angyunwe, Interview, 10 February 2011; Aji, Interview, 9 February 2011. But among the Azande, the sons of a male witch inherit their father’s witchcraft, while the daughters of a female witch inherit that of their mother. See Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, p.2.

<sup>133</sup> Misty L. Bastian, ‘Bloodhounds Who Have No Friends: Witchcraft and Locality in the Nigerian Popular Press’, in Jean Comaroff & John L. Comaroff (eds.), *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual Power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp.129-166 (p.134), citing Emezie Ikenga Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion: A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981), p.102.

<sup>134</sup> E.J. Krigie & J.D. Krigie, *The Realm of a Rain Queen* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), pp.263-264.

<sup>135</sup> Angyu, Interview, 18 February 2010; Adi, Interview, 22 February 2010, CRCN Station Wukari; Angyunwe, Interview, 10 February 2011.

<sup>136</sup> This is disputed by some respondents who say that not all those who practise *ko wafen* ‘eat’ and ‘drink’ human flesh and blood. Rather, they claim that some use it to maintain their assets; to safeguard their blood kin from other witchery attacks; to maintain their popularity in the society, among others. It is believed that such ones try to make sure they progress without necessarily tampering with the life-force of others.

<sup>137</sup> Angyu, Interview, 18 February 2010; Adi, Interview, 22 February 2010, CRCN Station.

kinsmen, even touching impersonal aspects such as social, economic and political, including outside ethnic groups.<sup>138</sup>

The Jukun have come to understand that *ko wafen* has somewhat recessed and *ko jebu* has been accessed. Nuhu Adi, a one-time servant under one of the *Aku Uka* in *biéko* (enclosure), captures this aptly when he says that '*ko jebu* is more harmful than *ko wafen*. It causes more fragmentation in social, economic and political harmonies'.<sup>139</sup> Bitrus Angyunwe adds that 'formerly, witches usually killed their blood kith and kin but now they can kill *anyone*'.<sup>140</sup> The Jukun today fear the *ko jebu* more than the *ko wafen*. The Jukun now refer to this witch activity as 'a modernised witch's occult power'.<sup>141</sup> This will be pursued further in the discussion on Patience Nuhu's ministry (Chapter Five). In Jukun society today, many sons and daughters of the soil do not frequently visit their home areas because they are afraid of bewitchment.<sup>142</sup>

So, the concept of witchcraft among the Jukun has been broadened beyond the family, lineage and clan, to include other ethnic groups. It is now all-embracing and multi-faceted. Witches may or may not necessarily have double vision or see in the spirit or 'eat' and 'drink' human flesh and blood; but they may engage in ruining the 'life-force' of people within and outside the extended family. Danfulani describes this *ko jebu* witchcraft as moving from a micro-cosmos to a macro-cosmos.<sup>143</sup> Further, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, writing about witchcraft in general, stress that it is widespread and complex, not only in Africa, but also beyond.<sup>144</sup>

The 'mystery' of witchcraft arises from the fact that it is generally practised in secret. There is no tenable scientific yardstick to determine its existence, but there are usually on-going accusations and counter-accusations within and outside family social structures. One suspects the other to have been bewitching and bringing about setbacks in the life-force and vice

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<sup>138</sup> Gambo, Interview, 31 May 2012; Nuhu Gambo Hinkon & Habila Saidu Hinkon, Interview, 19 February 2011, Wukari.

<sup>139</sup> Adi, Interview, 22 February 2010.

<sup>140</sup> Angyunwe, Interview, 10 February 2011; Gambo, Interview, 31 May 2012.

<sup>141</sup> Patience H.N. Agbu, Interview, 16 February 2012, Jalingo.

<sup>142</sup> Angye, Interview, 9 November 2010. See also Austen, 'The Moral Economy of Witchcraft', p.90.

<sup>143</sup> Danfulani, 'Power Encounter in Africa Worlds', p.8.

<sup>144</sup> Jean Comaroff & John Comaroff, 'Introduction', in Comaroff, Jean & John Comaroff (eds.), *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual Power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.xxvi.

versa.<sup>145</sup> The Jukun urban elite are afraid that their relatives in the villages bewitch them or attack any projects with which they are associated through witchcraft.<sup>146</sup> So they develop the strategy of not coming home but prefer to stay abroad in the townships and not tell anyone the exact nature of their movements whenever they have to visit their villages or hometowns. In fact, some make it a habit of constantly telling lies about their actual movements and leave home suddenly without informing their kith and kin about the exact date and period of departure.

The initial strong belief that witchcraft follows patterns of social relations and interactions within the blood kinship is now declining. The Jukun traditional leadership suppresses any witchcraft discourse in order to halt suspicions, accusations and the breakdown of harmonious social relations in the kinship and beyond. Interaction with a few traditional leaders<sup>147</sup> revealed that some of the things that spread witchcraft action and gossip or the secret whispers in the Jukun society are hatred, envy, greed, selfishness, jealousy, anger, rivalry, competition, vengeance and hearsay. It is worth noting further that the diviners, traditional healers and spirit mediums play a crucial role in the discourse as they claim to have the power to detect and divulge intermittently the alleged personality retrogressing people's life-force. Still, the security agencies and other legal institutions suppress the discourse because it will violate human rights. They usually stand on the claim that 'it is wrong to accuse' someone without concrete proof. This approach appears to spare the culprit while condemning the complainant. Notwithstanding that, suspicion and accusations are constantly traded in secret. The perceived victim would continue to nurse rage and grudges and the rest of the family members (probably innocent) of the purported witches remain potential witches. Therefore, the issue only lies dormant for some time, but flares up whenever a new suspicion arises, such as a sudden death, prolonged illness, bad luck and/or careless talk and action. Suspicion or accusation sometimes would be carried over and not forgotten even to the third and fourth generations. A common Hausa proverb captures this and says, '*Idan maiya ta manta, uwar dya bata manta ba*', meaning, 'If the [female] witch has forgotten, the mother of the daughter [she killed] has not forgotten'.

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<sup>145</sup> See Jean Comaroff & John Comaroff, 'Introduction', p.xxvi.

<sup>146</sup> Gambo, Interview, 28 May 2012; Martha Sabo, Interview, 29 May 2012, Wukari. See Ralph A. Austen, 'The Moral Economy of Witchcraft: An Essay in Comparative History', in Jean Comaroff & John Comaroff (eds.), *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual Power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp.89-110 (90).

<sup>147</sup> Gambo, Interview, 31 May 2012; Hinkon, Interview, 14 February 2010.

The Jukun traditional religious worshippers are so obsessed with witchcraft that all misfortunes and death are attributed to the handiwork of witches. Witchcraft is conceived as negative exploitation of the mystical power to cause harm to fellow human beings. It is, therefore, an anti-social act. Like the Ibibio of southeast Nigeria, the Nupe and Gwari in the north central part of Nigeria, among others, the Jukun believe that witches are invisible and morph nightly into different beings leaving the body asleep, while the *dindi* are awake and active, causing heinous crimes and engaging in cannibalism.<sup>148</sup> John Mbiti corroborates this and stresses that witches are ‘people with an inherent power by ... which they can abandon their bodies at night and go to meet with similar people (other witches) or to “suck” or “eat away” the life of their victims’.<sup>149</sup>

Therefore, morphing and exuding of the soul from the body to attack victims seems to a large extent a common belief in African societies. The belief that a witch exudes the *dindi* of a victim and transforms it into a goat, sheep or cow, creates fear and suspicion. This is why health seekers consult traditional health practitioners for charms, amulets and talismans to protect themselves. On some occasions, family members consult prognostics to determine who caused particular misfortunes in the family. However, these same health purveyors exploit the mystical powers for anti-social and harmful activities on vulnerable people, thereby causing untold misfortunes. This means that mystical powers could be positively employed for curative, protective and preventive purposes; but they could equally be exploited to cause harm.

In Jukun society, a perceived witch victim often lodges his complaint with the community leadership for investigation and general warning. These steps are progressively prolonged. They are meant to send a warning to the purported witch that his nefarious activities are known, and so, to desist. If the perpetrator continues to carry out his nefarious acts, the community will come to a communal consensus of taking decisive measures. This is called

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<sup>148</sup> Anonymous Traditional Leader, Personal Communication, 17 February 2011, Wukari; Essia, ‘The Social Economy of Child Witch Labelling in Nigeria’, p.3; Onwumere, ‘The Unending Child Witch Phenomenon in Akwa Ibom’; S.F. Nadel, ‘Witchcraft in Four African Societies: An Essay in Comparison’, *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 54 (1952), pp.18-29 (18-19); Daniel A Offiong, ‘The 1978-79 Akpan Ekwong Anti-Witchcraft Crusade in Nigeria’, *Anthropologica: New Series*, Vol. 24, No.1 (1982), pp.27-42 (30); T.N.O. Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: African University Press, 1987), p.151; John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), p.166; E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (Maryknoll, NJ: Orbis Books, 1975), pp.175-176.

<sup>149</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books/Doubleday & Company, 1969), p.263.

*kāmbō kā nyi* (literally, ‘diagnosing the real personality that is causing harm’). There are four levels besides *noko* (divination). These are *ambo*, *shitin*, exile and trial by ordeal.

1. *Ambo*: The practitioner would dig a deep hole, tie the neck of the suspect while kneeling, lowering his neck over the hole with his hand tied back to back. The rope at the neck is lowered into the hole and the practitioner would cover the hole firmly. The suspect would invoke an oath on himself, asking to be convicted if guilty and set loose if innocent, respectively. The suspect would say: ‘If I am guilty of what I am accused of, let me be convicted; but if I am innocent, let me be vindicated’. If the suspect is innocent, he would rise, and the rope would be removed from the hole smoothly. In contrast, if the suspect is guilty the rope would tie his neck firmly, and he would not be able to rise. There he would be flogged thoroughly, while confessing all evils he committed. Still, he would not be set loose until he pays the fine that would be demanded by the practitioner.

2. *Shitin*: This is always done between midday and evening (12 noon and 3:00 pm) when the heat from the sun is at its highest. The practitioner would fetch water in a calabash and apply various concoctions. The suspect would be asked to wash his face, look directly at the sun and make an effort to open his eyes. If he opens while looking direct to the sun without feeling pain or difficulty, he is innocent. In contrast, if the eyes are glued together and the suspect feels as if he had pepper in his eyes, he is guilty. Just as with the *ambo*, he would be flogged thoroughly while confessing to what he has done and he would not be set loose until he pays the fine assigned by the practitioner.

3. Exile: In the past when the society realised that the alleged witch has been constantly responsible in taking life-force or ruining life-forces, the culprit is banned from the society indefinitely, or sold into slavery.

4. Trial by ordeal: The alleged witch would be forced to either fix the life-force he has been taking or drink poisonous sasswood substance. It is reported that all the accused who drank such substance never survived. Since there was no communal consensus of eliminating the

alleged witch, the traditional trial by ordeal was wisely applied to kill the witch culprits. The colonial officers banned this as it was considered wrong to eliminate lives.<sup>150</sup>

None of the above levels of victimisation and possible murder is capable of eliminating purported witch spirits. Rather, they serve as a deterrent, warning and precautions against evils that would undermine the social norms. Moreover, they are to safeguard life, bring sanity and cordial relations within the extended family and the entire society. They are measures which place both the alleged culprit and purported [even intended] perpetrator in fear of evil. The alleged witch culprits are victimised, ostracised, stigmatised and discriminated against so that the victims would no longer be left under capricious attack of the perpetrators. Whereas the third and fourth measures are no longer practised, the first and second are still in practice. They are characterised by physical abuse and extortion.

From the four procedures, the required confessions are made startlingly and advertently. Beside these, the most heinous contemporary crime is the secret lynching of suspected witches by an organised mob from the clan, extended family or community. Many attacks on ‘witches’ are carried out at night, by groups of vigilantes usually composed of young men and acting undercover. Sometimes the mobs carry out this heinous crime in broad daylight. This is because the traditional authority normally represses accusations and consequent reprisals. In the post-colonial era to date, harassment, torture and lynching of the alleged witch culprits were carried out to cleanse and turn moribund destiny to good destiny.<sup>151</sup> On the other hand, those who perceived that they had been bewitched but did not want to engage in physical violence acquired various ‘avenging antidotes’ against the perpetrators. It was believed that the ‘antidotes’ provided the purported witches with invulnerability, immunity and invincibility. Some of the antidotes were worn as rings on the fingers and others buried at various places in the houses.

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<sup>150</sup> C.K. Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom: An Ethnographical Study of the Jukun-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria* (London: Kegan Paul, 1931), pp.295-296.

<sup>151</sup> Hinkon, Interview, 16 October 2011.

## 5.5 Emergence of the ‘Prayer and Healing’ Ministry

The ‘Prayer and Healing Ministry’ is a prototype of the traditional anti-witchcraft movement. The founder, Martha Sabo, started the movement in late 2006 as a prayer cell in her house within the family after supper. It featured singing praises and prayers. Gradually, conviction, confession and repentance of witch perpetration started emerging. Many from surrounding villages brought their witchcraft problems for expulsion. Evangelistic fervour set in with the intention of exposing and waging warfare on witches. She later mobilised a 15- to 20-strong team of prayer warriors and engaged in village evangelistic campaigns primarily to pray and wage warfare against witches.<sup>152</sup> In the narration of the founder and according to outside information furnished to me, some witches were ‘convicted’ and ‘confessed’ to being witches. The ministry then endeavoured to expel the witchcraft spirits and deliver the victims using various substances. (This will be discussed in detail later under ‘the methods of expulsion of witches’.)

Interviews with the ministry officers raised some issues.<sup>153</sup> The ministry believes that the stern stand of the traditional leadership, legal institutions and security agencies in an attempt to preserve and maintain social harmony has not adequately brought solution. The traditional model of trial by ordeal, which often also results in death, has not adequately proffered any real solution; gossiping and secret whispering tend to harbour evil. Torturing and lynching the alleged witch culprit violate human rights. The traditional leadership often delays in dealing with witchcraft cases due to the fear of being attacked by purported witches.

The ministry perceives that the suspicion of witchcraft is perennial, timeless and cyclical. It flares up whenever an insignificant similar incident surfaces. The suspects are always threatened with ostracism, traumatising and stigmatising, and there are skirmishes by lynch mobs on the alleged witches at various places and times in the society. The victims’ life-force is often taken away and they have been frustrated. The perceived victims in reprisal are acquiring ‘avenging antidotes’ from the agents of witches.

Besides, the ministry perceives that traditional medical practitioners are agents of the witches who can reverse the antidotes against the victims. The ministry thinks that it is hazardous for

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<sup>152</sup> Adapted from the Ministry’s handwritten healing records, no date. Records show that the earliest villages visited were Ndo-Yaku, Kamberi, Nwonkyon, Banyon, Marraraba-Nwonkyon, Bye-za, Kwararafa, Byepyi, Suntai-Donga, Adi, Abise, Joota, Rafin Kada, Wandu, among others.

<sup>153</sup> Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 6 October 2010 & 23 September 2011, Wukari.

the CRCN leadership to refer witchcraft issues to the traditional leadership, as it were, outside its task and domain. Both the witch culprit and witch victims need salvation.

The ministry in its analyses understood that although some misfortunes had their biological causes, cultural, ethical, social and moral misconduct, it believes that these are all forms of evil that could hide behind witchcraft activities, the basic reason being that witches employ physical objects and manipulate mystical forces to cause harm to their victims.<sup>154</sup>

Second, the ministry believed that natural evil was generally caused by God, based on His counsel to draw people back to Himself in recognition of His supremacy. Nevertheless, witches normally hide under these circumstances to take away people's life-force or to diminish the wellbeing of the society.<sup>155</sup>

Third, nightmares have their scientific, social, economic, political and moral causes. But this ministry attributes virtually all nightmares to witchcraft causes.<sup>156</sup> Similarly, in omens some witches disguised themselves into animals, objects or plants to cause discomfort, for example, night owl hooting around the house.<sup>157</sup>

Fourth, socio-economic problems such as drug addiction, alcohol addiction, theft, banditry, armed robbery, demotion, unemployment, retrenchment at work places and madness have their underlying causes, such as lack of good parenting, bad peer group, frequent taking of mind-altering substances and low educational level. Furthermore, the ministry believes that witches, who do not want young people to advance to support their parents, lure the youth into moral misconduct and cause misfortunes.<sup>158</sup> Still, witches can use concoctions and incantations to ruin the civil servant or applicant, among others.<sup>159</sup>

Fifth, although the ministry recognises that sickness comes naturally or due to environmental hazards or biological and moral misconduct, they are all machinations of witchcraft. Moreover, sin or disobedience creates an in-road for witchcraft attacks. This ministry therefore links sin to witchcraft attacks, and sin is considered the major factor that causes

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<sup>154</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 15 February 2011; Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 22 February 2012, Wukari.

<sup>155</sup> Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 22 February 2012.

<sup>156</sup> Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 22 February 2012.

<sup>157</sup> Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 22 February 2012.

<sup>158</sup> Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 22 February 2012.

<sup>159</sup> Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 22 February 2012.

misfortune and suffering in life experiences through social, economic, ethical, cultural, political and moral issues.

From the above, it is explicit that this ministry reconstructs and diffuses the meaning of witchcraft. To the ministry, witchcraft meant any evil, be it moral, natural or sometimes self-inflicted. It follows that an individual is exonerated from self-inflicted circumstances. This also limits God's ability to do things in other ways based on His counsel for humankind. This reinvention is dangerous because environmental change, hygienic conditions, ignorance, failure to keep dietary laws and wilful disobedience are thought of as media through which witches operate. This perception rather deifies and venerates witches, so much that witches are perceived to be capable of manifesting in all things, at all times and in all places. This rather intensifies fears that all evils are personified as witches, leading to suspicion and accusation within the close social relationships.

Having enumerated some of the ministry's perceptions of witchcraft attacks by all things, at all times and in all places, the next step is to discuss the strategies the ministry often used in its attempt to respond to the deep-seated fear of witches in and among its followers.

## **5.6 Exposure and Expulsion of Witches**

### **5.6.1 Procedures**

This ministry has procedures believed to be the prerequisite for effective exposure and expulsion of witches. These are revelation, fasting, diagnosis, repentance and confession of sin. Martha, the leader usually claims the power of clairvoyance. According to her,<sup>160</sup> God has given her the ability to foresee in dreams or visions clients that would be brought to her even before their arrival. Moreover, she claims to have prior knowledge of the type of witchcraft attacks that result in sickness and of how to deal with the situations. However, she notes that she occasionally discerns the situation of the patient in the course of spiritual warfare. She exposes witches whenever 'the Spirit' mandates her to do so. She stresses that in her state of 'spiritual impartation', those already killed by witches [though they still work and

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<sup>160</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 6 October 2010, 15 February & 23 September 2011, Wukari.

walk in the physical realm] would smell like corpses to her.<sup>161</sup> Moreover, in the belief of the leader, whenever she feels or foresees [during ministry programmes] impending witchcraft attacks, she always guides her prayer warriors to raise their hands to ask and receive divine impartation to counter witchcraft attacks. She would be the first to receive the power of the ‘Holy Spirit’, and then transfer it to her co-workers. Whenever that happens, the day would witness a serious spiritual power encounter with witches. In most cases, the witches would be convicted and divulge their intended nefarious plans to take people’s life-force.

It is explicitly clear from her expressions that her mediumistic career still holds great sway in her practices. Although in her reconstructions, she tends to say that the old forces have become obsolete and the new force, the ‘Holy Spirit’, has been activated, the practice of seeing, divulging and expelling witchcraft is strong. This is not to doubt God’s ability to revitalise a seemingly insignificant ministry for His purposeful plan. But the difficulty in her claims is that there is little or no difference in them from the mediumistic practices in which she was raised. Personal communication with a few erstwhile mediums converted to the Christian faith revealed that traditional mediums in Jukun society always engage in clairvoyance, as well as communicating with the spirits of the ancestors and other benevolent spirits. They are diviners of a sort in that they could unveil and expel evildoers in the society.<sup>162</sup> My respondents also added that the mediums in Jukun society are no different from sorcerers and other spiritists in manipulating malevolent mystical powers for their own ends.<sup>163</sup> It is therefore difficult to decipher Martha’s shift from the old sources of ‘spirits’ to the ‘Spirit’, as she claims.

Right from the inception of the ministry, the leader rarely engaged in preaching, probably because of her low educational level. However, from her fragmented records,<sup>164</sup> I have seen some passages that she claims to have received intermittently through revelation and which she gives to an assigned co-worker who leads the exhortation at the ministry meetings before any spiritual engagement.

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<sup>161</sup> Martha Sabo, Martha & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 6 October 2010; Hinkon, Interview, 16 October 2010; Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 5 January 2011, Wukari; Ezekiel Wunuji Shishi, Interview, 7 November 2010, Wukari.

<sup>162</sup> Angyunwe, Interview, 10 February 2010, Wukari; Aji, Interview, 9 February 2011, Wukari.

<sup>163</sup> Angyu, Interview, 18 February 2010, Wukari; Adi, Interview, 22 February 2010, CRCN Station, Wukari.

<sup>164</sup> Handwritten records of revelations, no date.

The ministry frequently engages in fasting at various places and times. This is because of the belief that witches operate everywhere and every time.<sup>165</sup> Fasting is perceived as an intensive petition for God to purge out all evils in the devotee, empower him to have the ability to expose and expel witches, remain under the full control and guidance of the 'Holy Spirit' and open doors of revelation through the 'Holy Spirit'.<sup>166</sup> In the perception of the ministry, there can be no successful godly ministration without fervent fasting. Fasting therefore serves to achieve immunity and invincibility in spiritual warfare. Moreover, in the claims of the ministry, during fasting, 'God' always exposes witches to the devotee. The devotee can see the witches who run away from his sight; whatever one asks, one will receive and whatever the sin committed, it will be forgiven. The ministry cites Psalm 58:1 as its basis, saying that people's needs are met in fasting. Moreover, Jesus and His angels would be very close to the devotee, communing with him.<sup>167</sup> This ministry therefore understands fasting as an agent of consecration, God's response to one's situation and empowerment. Again, the perpetual forgiveness, answered prayers and omnipresence of God during fasting, in particular, can be disputed. This is too simplistic because fasting becomes a way of enforcing a response from God against misfortune, suffering and sickness caused by witchcraft.

Related to the issue of revelation above is diagnosis. According to the leader, once she has the prior knowledge of a witchcraft attack on the patient brought on by face-to-face contact with the victim, 'the Spirit' will register in her mind that 'This is the case I have informed you of earlier'.<sup>168</sup> Here she does not always wait to be told what, how, where and when. Rather, she would go ahead to tell the person his or her problem. Her diagnosis involves eye-to-eye contact and enquiry if she would like to hear more about the client's life story. This is equally true of traditional mediumistic practice in Jukun society where the practitioners receive information from spirits before or during the arrival of clientele. This approach is still used in her 'new' practice. This may be described as a rejuvenated form with 'new' sign and innovation. A diagnosis drawn from mystical powers is crucial among African health practitioners. The African Indigenous Churches' (AICs), prophets and faith healers seemed to have renewed it. Whereas the African health practitioners depend on ancestral spirits and cultic deities in their diagnosis, Martha's ministry (she claims), like the AICs and other faith

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<sup>165</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 15 February 2011.

<sup>166</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 23 September, & 9 October 2011.

<sup>167</sup> Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 22 February 2012.

<sup>168</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 23 September & 9 October 2011.

healers, depends on the discernment of 'the Spirit'. Whereas the sources (spirits) of enquiry for the traditional health practitioners are limited in power, 'the Spirit' is capable of exposing and expelling witches in the society. Here, too, there is no dichotomy between her traditional mediumistic activities and the 'new' practice.

An examination of the procedures stressed by the leader of this ministry seemed to suggest that 'God' works as He wills in different ways. It is equally explicit that the ministry leader finds it difficult to distinguish between 'spontaneous reflections' and 'revelation'. The former may be a flashback or a quick reflection that runs through one's mind. This may be called 'imagination' or 'hallucination' which may not give a long-term result. The latter 'revelation' is a progressive unfolding of God's intention, pointing to long-term implications and results. In a revelation, one meditates and reflects back and forth on the genuineness of the information, admonition and warning received. Here also, receivers do not act quickly or haphazardly until they are gradually convinced of what has been unfolded to them. My personal analysis of Martha's disposition and demeanour as she narrated the so-called mandate for her activity is that it generally hinges more on 'spontaneous reflection' than on 'revelation'. She rushes into action based on a voice she claims she hears without adequately examining it in the light of Scripture. She firmly grasps any hallucination that flashes into her mind, claiming that it is the voice of God. All religious experiences need to be judged or tested carefully. Martha's acclaimed renewal by the Spirit is characteristic of contemporary 'Christian' exorcists across the African continent. They are what I may call modern 'diviners' and 'spiritists'.

Another issue that the 'Prayer and Healing Ministry' stresses is the link between sin and sickness. The ministry teaches that sin opens the door for witches to inflict sickness on people.<sup>169</sup> It seems that the leader of this ministry is prone to make such an overt link because she is still obsessed with the mediumistic view of witchcraft as the major causation of misfortune, suffering and sickness. Demoniac possession is not identical with witchcraft causation.<sup>170</sup> Many factors bring about sickness: environmental hazards such as pollution,

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<sup>169</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 23 September, & 9 October 2011; Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 2 February 2012.

<sup>170</sup> R.T. France, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1985), p.173; John Michel, 'Demon', in Johannes B. Baur (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Biblical Theology* (New York: Crossroad Publication Company, 1981), pp.191-194; Lloyd G. Patterson, 'Healings', in Everett Ferguson, *Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity* (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1990), p.413.

climate change, lack of hygiene and inadequate health facilities, to mention only a few. Therefore, attributing all sickness to witchcraft is not tenable evidence.

Next, the ministry considers repentance and confession as stepping-stones towards effective expulsion. The ministry alludes to many passages that express human depravity as the basis for such a view. For example, 'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'; 'He who says he has no sin is a liar and the truth is not in him'; 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord' (Rom.3:23; 1Jn.1:8; Prov.15:8a). Moreover, the Bible encourages everyone to confess with his mouth (Rom.10:9). Therefore, if a person does not first acknowledge his waywardness and confess his sin, God will not answer his prayers.<sup>171</sup>

On many occasions during my participant-observation, the leader never ventured into expelling so-called evil forces without first insisting that the client acknowledge his or her waywardness, repent, confess conscious and unconscious sins. Various scholars from different fields dispute the procedure of compelling clients to confess. According to J.A. Omoyajowo,<sup>172</sup> some so-called confessions are answers to leading questions; some clients make confessions due to suspicious circumstances, especially any heinous crime they might have committed, and sometimes due to fear. In such situations, the convicted person may make startling confessions just to be vindicated. Omoyajowo adds that a voluntary confession may be due to a neurotic disorder or unusual circumstances such as high fever or dreams of having committed the crime. Indeed, sometimes a voluntary confession is often made unconsciously. This is true of my investigation on three occasions where this ministry engaged in spiritual warfare to expel witch spirits in children. The children did 'confess' while 'convicted' and I recorded the confessions. I later personally interacted with them separately to decipher their experiences and their confessions. They all gave me very different versions of what they had earlier confessed. When I played back what they said, it turned out that they all admitted to being unconscious of what they had confessed. I thought that if really those were genuine confessions, maybe their knowledge in the spiritual realm was confined to the spiritual realm. Hence, they could not recall in the physical the mystical practices they engaged in while in the spiritual realm.

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<sup>171</sup> Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 2 February 2012.

<sup>172</sup> Omoyajowo, 'What is Witchcraft?', pp.321-322, 327, 333-335.

I further consulted a psychiatrist<sup>173</sup> about the scenario and he guided me through ‘therapeutic psychology’. He revealed that research had discovered in children what is called ‘mythomania’ (that is, *pseudologia phantastica*), where children under duress lie and make up fantastic stories. Further, a mythomane may become a ‘demonopath’, claiming to be suffering from demonic possession and generate witch panic. It is relevant to this study to note that mythomanes may lie deliberately and consciously to the detriment of others, whether they are innocent or guilty, and yet their statements are accepted as true confessions. They may create stories derived from socio-cultural contexts. Thus, children who confess to witchcraft influence may actually be victims of mythomania. However, mythomania is not regarded as a sickness among children.

### 5.6.2 Means and Methods

In the main, the ‘Prayer and Healing Ministry’ endeavours to expose and expel ‘witches’. The ministry demonises the use of biomedics and herbal medicines, and diplomatically attracts members to buy its ‘potent’ healing elements that would expel ‘witches’. The term ‘expulsion’ is a noun form of the verb, ‘to expel’ meaning ‘to force out’ and ‘to force to leave by official action’.<sup>174</sup> The ministry has varying means and methods of expelling witches. These are the laying-on of hands; use of the anointing oil; back-to-sender oil and St. Michael oil; use of the handkerchief; necklace; holy water and flogging; aborting ‘spiritual pregnancy’ and invoking imprecatory prayers.

The laying-on of hands to expel witchcraft forces is commonly practised among the AICs, Charismatics and other faith-healing movements. Members of Martha’s ministry believe that the laying-on of hands constitutes a ‘transfer of God’s power from the expeller to adjure all evils implanted in or on the sick by witches’.<sup>175</sup> This practice is conducted occasionally and is allegedly based on the mandate of ‘the Spirit’. The instruction of the ‘Spirit’ always comes through the leader. The leader asserts that if ‘the Spirit’ resists, but one ventures to lay hands, one would either transfer one’s problems to the client or attract the evil forces in the patient

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<sup>173</sup> Joseph Yere, Personal Communication, 10 June 2013, Tetteh Quarshie Memorial Hospital, Mampong-Akuapem.

<sup>174</sup> *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, eleventh edition (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2003), pp.440, 442.

<sup>175</sup> Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 22 February 2012.

to oneself.<sup>176</sup> The ministry co-workers believe that the leader is the purveyor of spiritual power who in turn transfers it to them. From my personal observations, the leader and her co-workers display signs of spiritual impartation, such as hiccups, frenzy and shivering, sweating, hysteria, convulsions, flailing and writhing, as well as speaking in esoteric language as they go into ministration. The leader narrates her experience during an expulsion of witches in the course of laying-on of hands thus:

Often times, once I lay my hand on the sick, I will begin to feel frenzy, shivering, sweating and hysteria and God will open my eyes to see the condition that the sick person is passing through. I will then feel heat and cold alternatively running from my head down to the soles of my feet. Once the Spirit starts manifesting His healing, the sick person and I will simultaneously feel cold descending on us from our head down to the soles of our feet. Feelings of relief and freedom will finally overwhelm us.<sup>177</sup>

The ministry leader has two ways of laying hands on the sick. Once she feels heat in the palm of her hand, she would lay it on the sick. At other times, when she feels heat on her right middle finger, she would place it on the sick. This means that the ‘heat’ she experiences is the sign of the ‘Spirit’s’ impartation that would lead to exorcism. Still, on spiritual warfare days when she takes the lead, she shouts, *Hallelujah!* This is a means of invoking ‘the Spirit’ for the expulsion of evils, to which the adherent responds, *Amen!* This is similar to the Jukun mediumistic practice where shouting ignites spirit possession in the mediums. Here even though Martha is applying the same model, she claims it is a ‘new’ practice. All the aforementioned characteristics are part of the mediumistic manifestations.

When ‘the Spirit’ descends on Martha, all the aforementioned manifestations surface. She would begin to move around laying-on hands, while ushers continue to guide the worshippers to her as the prayer warriors endeavour to complete the deliverance of those convicted. Sometimes the patient in the course of the ecstatic state would start to confess wrong deeds committed. Whenever the leader touches a client, she would mention the specific problem she identified and pray against it. Whoever is touched often falls down, writhes, flails and convulses. The leader would finally conclude the prayer in the name of God the ‘Father, Son

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<sup>176</sup> Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 22 February 2012.

<sup>177</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 23 September 2011.

and Holy Ghost, Amen.’<sup>178</sup> The leader and her co-workers occasionally [during spiritual warfare] expose witches by name. Here are their words:

While in spiritual warfare, ‘the Spirit’ of God usually descends and opens our eyes. We will see people disguised as cows; other times we will see those who are bewitched. Still in such ministration, we will be seeing witches hanging their spiritual needles on their shoulders. As we call on ‘the Holy Ghost’ fire to consume witches, the witches will be coming out of the bodies of the bewitched disguised as flies and chameleons. There and then, ‘the Holy Ghost’ will open our mouth to start exposing the witches by name to the hearing of all worshippers.<sup>179</sup>

The anointing oil is another means of expelling witches. The ministry claims to activate the mandate given in James 5:13-16 to use anointing oil alongside the laying-on of hands to effect healing. The ministry uses the oil in three ways: first, it is taken to emit the venom of poison by witches; it is taken to weaken the venom of ‘spiritual needles’ stuck by witches; barren and impotent persons take it to make them fertile again; women who experience dark blood during menstruation take it to clean their uterus; women who always have irregular menstrual cycles take it to stabilise their cycles; it is taken to solve excruciating stomach ache; mad people can drink it to vomit all the poisons implanted in them. In a second application, the anointing oil is rubbed on the body to turn enemies into friends; it is rubbed on the body to reverse prosperity or peace that is hampered by witches. This will turn business failures to successes; it will turn lack of peace in marital homes to peaceful coexistence; children who usually steal desist from doing so. Third, the smell of the oil can drive away witches responsible for sickness or intend to inflict sickness.<sup>180</sup> Other functions of the oil are as follows: it stops nightmares, reverses unemployment, demotion and the condition of those who lack knowledge.<sup>181</sup> The oil is therefore used as expellant, repellent and antidote. The ministry sells the anointing oil for Two Hundred and Fifty Naira (₦250.00) only.

Another agent used for expelling witches is the ‘back-to-sender’ oil. This oil is used as an agent in waging warfare against witches.<sup>182</sup> Only the leader sprinkles the oil on the congregants. The ministry cites Psalm 35:1 as her basis for using the oil: ‘Contend, O LORD,

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<sup>178</sup> Observation, Wukari, Prayer and Healing Ministry, 23 September 2011 & 15 February 2011.

<sup>179</sup> Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 6 March 2010, Wukari.

<sup>180</sup> Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 22 February 2012, Wukari.

<sup>181</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 23 September 2011.

<sup>182</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 23 September 2011.

with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me'. The ministry interprets the 'contenders' and 'fighters' as witches because they do not want anyone's progress but failures.

On warfare days, the leader usually fetches a small quantity in her palm and sprinkles it on the congregants standing before her. Whenever the oil touches witches, they fall and begin to confess their witchcraft activities and, at the same time, they are released from their witchcraft, and experience the power of 'the Spirit'.<sup>183</sup> This ministry uses oil in a similar way as Benny Hinn. Hinn often 'slays' people in the Spirit by touching them or waving his arm at them. People would then fall down in a faint. The question is: Is this a unique spiritual gift or simply techniques of mesmerism that induce an extraordinary abnormal state? It is nowhere recorded that either Jesus' apostles or the early church elders did such a thing.

The ministry leader also guides her members on how to use the oil in their homes, such as in the confession of sin, calling the name of Jesus and saying, 'I love you' seven times, then saying a prayer using Psalm 35:1-6: 'O God, wherever enemies have gathered: be it at road junctions, shrines, rivers, burial grounds or in herbal houses, making incantations in order to destroy me and my family members, destroy their evil plans! O God, whichever way they plan to halt my blessings, return it back to the sender, in Jesus name, Amen.' After that, the devotee anoints himself with the oil or drops a little quantity into water and bathes with it. The devotee can then rub the oil on the body.<sup>184</sup> The belief is that whenever and wherever witches use one's name for nefarious acts, the negative effect will return to them and the effect on the bewitched victim will be nullified.

The 'back-to-sender' oil therefore serves as an avenging agent against witches to convict them to confess and repent. The ministry sells the oil for Five Hundred Naira (₦500.00) only. The issue is that not every display of power comes from God. Satanic imitations and deceptions are real.<sup>185</sup> Experiences such as trances, seizures, hypnosis, frenzy and hysteria are often cited as proof that God is at work.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 23 September 2011 & 9 October 2011, Wukari.

<sup>184</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 9 October 2011, Wukari; Josephine K. David, Interview, 23 September 2011, Wukari.

<sup>185</sup> John Fullerton MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Oasis international, 1992), p.152.

<sup>186</sup> MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p.153.

The use of St. Michael's oil is another means of expelling witches. The ministry bases its use on Psalms 35 and 91 which both speak of God's security and protection for victims of evil. The devotee must first confess his sin and then pray, saying, 'Jesus, I love you' seven times, then anoint himself, or drink some of the oil, or put a few drops into bath water.<sup>187</sup> It is alleged that anyone who uses the oil correctly and faithfully will see witches face-to-face; once it is rubbed on the body, witches will run away from the sight of the member; if one rubs it all over the body and shares a seat with a witch in church during worship, the witch will be uncomfortable with the smell of the oil. The general belief of the ministry is that not all worshippers in church are genuine. Some still harbour and carry along evil activities such as 'spiritual needles' into the church to harm people. The oil, therefore, gives the user the spiritual eye to see and ward off witches.

The ministry leader buys all the listed oils from the Roman Catholic bookshop. She prays over them to be effective in exposing and expelling 'witches', as they claim. The three oils are however used separately and are believed to be capable of convicting witches.

Holy water is also used to expel witches. The ministry leader collects direct rainwater or buys bottled water (either 0.5 or 1 litre) in the market. She fasts and prays over the water. This water is drunk by victims of 'spiritual needles' to vomit any venom. It can be used for bathing when mixed with two to three bottled-water covers-full. It is believed that the water has power to deal with various ill-health issues or sicknesses generated by witches: madness, cough, typhoid fever, malaria, diabetes, cirrhosis of the liver, hypertension, hernia, epilepsy, lung cancer, ulcer and many more. The poison is believed to pass out through the victim's vomit, urine and faeces.<sup>188</sup> The water is therefore used as an antibiotic. This usage is similar to the traditional African practice where a sick person drinks, washes or sprinkles water or a concoction on the body to exorcise evils in the body.<sup>189</sup> The water serves as a protection against witchcraft threats. The ministry sells the big size (1 litre) bottle of water for Two Hundred Naira (₦200.00) and the medium size (0.5 litres) for One Hundred and Fifty Naira (₦150.00), respectively.

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<sup>187</sup> Martha Sabo and Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 9 October 2011, Wukari; Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 22 February 2012.

<sup>188</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 23 September 2011 & 9 October 2011; Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 22 February 2012.

<sup>189</sup> Ndiokwere Nathaniel, *Prophecy and Revolution* (London: SPCK, 1981), p.278. Interaction with many elderly Jukun traditional medical practitioners confirmed this. Angyu, Interview, 18 February 2010; Adi, Interview, 22 February 2010; Aji, Interview, 9 February 2011; Angyunwe, Interview, 10 February 2011; Orume, Interview, 17 February 2011.

The ministry uses a white handkerchief as a means of expelling witches. In the narration of the leader, she claims to have received this element through revelation. She narrates thus:

While I was sleeping one day, God asked me in a dream to go and buy some white handkerchiefs, offer prayers over them for the expulsion of witches. He mandated me to pass it on to those facing witchcraft problems and He will fight on their behalf. He assured me that once I touch people who are bewitched or witches, they will receive their healing instantly. However, He warned me not to be the first to use them but my immediate brother, Daniel D. Sabo.<sup>190</sup>

Daniel Sabo narrates his experience when he started using the handkerchiefs as follows:

When I received the handkerchief from Martha, I felt the impartation of the Holy Spirit in my entire body, as it were, the heat of fire. All those I touched during the 'warfare day' in the course of spiritual ministration, felt, as it were, an electric shock. They did not know when they fell down and lost consciousness. However, upon reviving, they received their healing.<sup>191</sup>

Martha claims that she was instructed in the dream to buy white handkerchiefs, inscribe the name of her ministry on them and offer prayers. The white handkerchief would be used in addressing diverse ill-health issues perpetrated by witches, when, for example, it is placed under the pillow to deal with a child's headache or frequent nightmares. For the adult, if the nature of the sickness is uncertain, it is placed on the shoulder of the sick person and the leader declares, 'Whatever the situation, let it go, in Jesus' name'. The sick person will start convulsing or shivering until he falls on the ground unconscious. Immediately, the sickness is taken away.

A necklace with a white cross pendant for females is another agent for expelling witches. The necklace is used to reverse stubborn situations and omens. It gives unabated sound sleep. The ministry leader encourages her female members to buy one for the prayer of consecration and to wear it at all times.

In the perception of the ministry, the power of expulsion through the laying-on of hands, the application of the various oils, the use of holy water and the 'white handkerchief', as well as wearing the necklace with the white cross pendant all derived their power and source from Jesus Christ through 'the Spirit'. The tangibles have no exclusive power in themselves except in Jesus Christ. Another perception of the ministry is that the elements are media of power

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<sup>190</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 9 October 2011.

<sup>191</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 9 October 2011.

encounters against witches and other such evil forces. The leader and her co-workers testify that

Whenever witches conspired and planned to come and ruin us, they no longer identify our houses. The proper usage of the revealed elements turned our houses, as it were, surrounded by water and Holy Ghost fire. This equally applies to those who buy and make proper use of the elements in holiness.<sup>192</sup>

Indeed, Martha's explanation may be well articulated. However, the use of the elements in respect of all conditions of ill health places the elements at the forefront of her witch exposure and expulsion process. Most of the members who are unable to buy the elements perceived that offering prayers to the exclusion of the elements might not have adequately addressed their problems.

Nevertheless, the ministry sometimes flogs people suspected to possess strong evil forces that persistently resist submission. This is done to ward off the evil forces.<sup>193</sup> It is also a means of fighting the witchcraft forces and expelling them. The ministry leader claims that in the physical realm, the victim is seen being flogged, but in 'the Spirit', it is the forces that are being flogged. This is also typical of the method of the Celestial Church of Christ which believes that the beating is not done directly on the person, but rather on the offending power.<sup>194</sup> This ministry uses this method on cases of fiercely mad people, witches and occult powers.<sup>195</sup> The leader uses a palm frond broom or banana stalk to flog the convicted witch.<sup>196</sup> Similarly, beating or flogging a patient in the course of exorcism is also done by other self-styled exorcists in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria; by parents and guardians in the DRC as

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<sup>192</sup> Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 9 October 2011 & 22 February 2012.

<sup>193</sup> Observation, Wukari, Prayer and Healing Ministry, 24 June 2008; see also Local Church Minutes dated 8 May 2009, LCCP/55/2009, about Martha's physical methods of warding off evil forces.

<sup>194</sup> Jacob Kehinde Olupona, 'The Celestial Church of Christ in Ondo: A Phenomenological Perspective,' in Rosalind I.J. Hackett (ed.), *New Religious Movements in Nigeria* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1987), pp.45-73 (67).

<sup>195</sup> One unique thing about this ministry is that she does not tie mad person before expelling the evil force in him no matter his condition. Rather, the prayer warrior under the guide of the leader, surround the mad person, holding his hands and pray until his or her strength is weaken. Gradually the mad person will join in response to the prayers with the warriors saying 'Amen', 'Amen' as he start returning to his or her consciousness. Observation, Prayer and Healing Ministry, 24 June 2008, 11 October 2009, 23 September & 9 October 2011; see also Local Church Minutes dated 8 May 2009, LCCP/55/2009.

<sup>196</sup> Martha C.J. Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 12 October 2009. See also Local Church Minutes dated 8 May 2009, LCCP/55/2009.

well as African communities in the UK to extract confessions and to drive out evil forces.<sup>197</sup> This method of exorcism seems to have been drawn from the traditional African approach where possessed people were sometimes tied to a stake and thoroughly flogged as a way of casting out demons.<sup>198</sup>

Martha believes, from her ‘personal experience’, that witches often produce spiritual pregnancies. They do this by giving and receiving food or other items in the physical realm. This is similar to the traditional belief among the Akwa Ibomites and shared by DRC nationals that witches can transfer spells through food or any other substance.<sup>199</sup> This ministry further explains that the giver of the food will later have ‘sexual relations’ [if the receiver is a female] with the receiver in the spirit thereby impregnating her. However, no physical eye can see the pregnancy.<sup>200</sup> While in such pregnancy, the initiate will be restricted to a particular diet to keep the pregnancy up to delivery stage. One of the means of aborting the pregnancy is to drink holy water to vomit all she has received and eaten. In the case where the initiate does not vomit, the pubic hair of the initiate must be cut, and she may be possibly violated in an attempt to abort the pregnancy. According to Martha’s explanation, this can happen to a child in her pre-teens. Still in the situation where the witchcraft forces in the initiate appear to resist the abortion, she has to be flogged with a palm frond broom to weaken the hold of the force and to make them submit.<sup>201</sup> The ministry leader cites a particular incident where an eleven-year-old girl was impregnated in the spirit realm. The leader flogged her thoroughly before she eventually submitted. The leader claims to have been guided in such an abortion through revelation.

This interpretation and practice of ‘spiritual pregnancy’ and ‘spiritual abortion’ are Martha’s obsession. Although there may be some mediumistic practices veiled to the non-initiates,

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<sup>197</sup> ‘Witch Child Documentary – Channel4 (2008)’; ‘Dispatches: Return to Africa’s Witch Children Pt.1/5’; ‘Return to Africa’s Witch Children’; Gill, ‘Safeguarding Children and Beliefs in Spirit Possession and Witchcraft’; Stobart, ‘Child Abuse Linked to Accusation of “Possession” and “Witchcraft”’, pp.5, 21, 24; ‘Britain’s Witch Children’; Kanda, ‘Branded a Witch... My take on the BBC3 Documentary’.

<sup>198</sup> Anthony Iffen Umoren, *Jesus and Miracle Healing Today* (Iperu-Remo, Nigeria: The Ambassador Publications, 2000), p.45.

<sup>199</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 12 October 2009; Essia, ‘The Social Economy of Child Witch Labelling in Nigeria’ pp.2-3; ‘Child-Witch Branding in Nigeria’; Cimpric, ‘Children Accused of Witchcraft: An Anthropological Study of Contemporary Practices in Africa’ p.11; UNICEF ‘The Causes and Prevalence of Accusation of Witchcraft among Children in Akwa Ibom State’, p.7; UNICEF, ‘At a Glance: Nigeria-Cases of “Witchcraft” Rising in Parts of West and Central Africa’; J.A. Molina, ‘The Invention of Child Witches in the Democratic Republic of Congo, London: Save the Children’ (2006), p.11. Accessed 31 May 2013, [http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/The Invention of Child Witches%281%291.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/The%20Invention%20of%20Child%20Witches%281%291.pdf).

<sup>200</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 12 October 2009.

<sup>201</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 12 October 2009.

consultation with a few erstwhile mediums revealed that this is a foreign practice. It is possible that she draws it from an unknown source and tries to hybridise it with the Christian faith.

The liturgy of this ministry has some imprecatory prayer items. A few examples are prayers against witch domains where souls are tied; prayers against witches; prayers against any harmful thing deposited in the homes, roads, farms and more. In all the listed items, the demand is ‘Holy Ghost fire consume...!’<sup>202</sup> By ‘consume’, the ministry means that the ‘Holy Spirit’ should convict witches to repent and confess. The fire is to consume the witch forces, but not the witches as personalities.<sup>203</sup> Interaction with the ministry leadership revealed diverse experiences whenever they engaged in these imprecatory utterances. They say *inter alia*:

Whenever we pray saying, ‘Holy Ghost Fire consume...’ we often see [in the spirit] how the ‘fire’ is moving out of our domain and reaching the domains of witches, spreading and consuming their items and substances such as water jars and cooking utensils. Moreover, the ropes that tied souls under the rivers, bridges, trees, and in the mountains will slacken one by one. We will see the witch domains in confusion. All our prayer targets are always seen in the spirit vividly. Normally, before we send the ‘fire’, we used to feel heat within the arena of our operation. But as the ‘fire’ begins to move out, we will start feeling cold all over our entire body within our arena. Whenever the ‘fire’ is consuming the evils in the spirit world, where we are also becomes hot. Sometimes God will open our eyes to see ourselves being surrounded by angels with swords in their hands in our defence against the attack of the witches at the time of the expulsion.<sup>204</sup>

The experience intersperses between sensations of heat and cold alternatively, indicative of the expulsion of the secreted souls from the hands of the witches. The reason is that if the place of their operation is cold, witches might leave their domain and attack them.

The use of elements varied because if one does not work effectively for the client, another might do. So the ministry encourages using varieties to ascertain and maintain the ones that work properly. Nevertheless, the underlying efficacy lies in faith, while upholding holiness after confession and repentance of sin. Essentially, the employment of the above elements, substances and objects as well as other actions are meant for spiritual warfare against witchcraft. The user must first have an encounter with God (revelation) at one level and God

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<sup>202</sup> Adapted from the typescript Liturgy of ‘Prayer and Healing Ministry’.

<sup>203</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 15 February 2011.

<sup>204</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 15 February 2011.

would intervene in concrete (using elements) in human affairs, with the aim to guard against the taking or retrogression of the life-force. C. Peter Wagner, the father of church growth, sees this power encounter as ‘a visible, practical demonstration that Jesus Christ is more powerful than false gods or spirits worshipped or feared by a people group’.<sup>205</sup>

The ministry’s underlying focus is to expose and expel witches using various elements. The ministry leadership argues that the elements are just media through which ‘God’ effects healing by faith in Himself. The problem with the belief and practice of this ministry is the accompaniment of elements in all expulsion methods. It follows that there would be no successful exorcism without the elements. Moreover, the price of the elements doubles or triples the normal selling price. If not because of economic focus, why exorbitant prices, extorting and exploiting the gullible health-seekers? Beyond this, all the healing elements are guarded through dreams. How tenable is it to hold to the fact that it is God’s directive and not from other powers? How long did the leader reflect and meditate on the dreams before executing the said mandate? Are the dreams not connected to her personal obsession and imagination just to earn a living? Admittedly, this is not to denigrate what God can do to save situations, but the way the practices are being carried out called for circumspection.

Although this ministry seeks to wage war against witchcraft, it seems to also carry with it the quest for power, popularity and economic enterprise. Economy and popularity rank the highest. This is because all ‘the healing elements’ are sold at exorbitant prices. The fervour for power and monetary gains had led to trading with the elements to amass wealth. From the entire ‘acclaimed mandate’ of the leader, for instance, there is no single indication of the origin of the mandate to sell the elements meant for ‘exposing’ and ‘expelling’ witchcraft. Today, the so-called ‘power encounters’ have drifted to financial gain. ‘Power’ can be seen from two perspectives: power as God-given or power as acquired from foreign sources, both of which are capable of exhibiting extraordinary actions. However, the anointing oil can now be counterfeited, faked and diluted for monetary gains. These have raised accusations and suspicions today about the genuineness of the emerging faith movements and the efficacy of the elements. One may also argue that Jesus used various substances and elements alongside prayers to heal. Indeed, but Jesus did not at all sell them. Nor did He in any way promote the validity of the elements outside faith and dependence on God as the source of healing. The contemporary use of the elements is not in keeping with their use by Jesus and in the

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<sup>205</sup> Cited in John Wimber, *Power, Evangelism, Signs and Wonders Today* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1986), p.386.

apostolic era. Today, there is little or no interest in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit without the association of the elements.

### **5.7 Impact of the Ministry**

The ministry's impact on the traditional religious leaders is partial because of the shared belief in witchcraft. It is reported that traditional leaders often invite the ministry officers to conduct prayers in their palaces.<sup>206</sup> For instance, when Manu Idi Agbu, the *Abon Acio* (the traditional prime minister, now late) fell sick, the ministry officers went and prayed with him at his invitation. Manu Abe Katakpa, a district head, fell sick and nearly died. He invited them for prayers and his situation was reportedly reversed for good. Manu Bala Dariya, a village head in Wandu, faced socio-economic challenges, especially the incessant fire disasters on his farm produce. The ministry prayed with the family and it is reported that the misfortune did not happen again. Another village head, Agyo Aji Aganya of Kamberi, invited the ministry for prayers in his palace. It was reported that a young man was 'convicted' and 'confessed' his witchcraft activities and brought all his witchcraft tools to be burnt publicly.

The ministry attracts the attention of the traditional leadership because of the conviction of witches and their public confessions. The traditional leadership always appreciates the curtailed witchcraft attacks,<sup>207</sup> since it is believed that witches are the underlying causes of misfortunes, sickness and death. On the other hand, the followers see the prayer home as a haven for solutions to their problems against witchcraft attacks. The members often testify that they have not only been protected and safeguarded, but have also succeeded in their life struggles.<sup>208</sup> The ministry therefore has become the source of positive change and blessing in the life experiences of its members. The followers are always being told that farmland, business places and houses are arenas of witchcraft attacks. That is why, they are told, they always lack bumper harvests, face business failures and lack peace in their homes. The members are therefore encouraged to bring their seedlings, farm soil, and house soil for prayers of consecration. The members would then return the soil taken from the farm and sprinkle it all over their farms to counteract witchcraft menaces and for the land to yield a

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<sup>206</sup> Prayer and Healing Ministry, Group Interview, 6 October 2010, 23 September 2011, 9 October 2011 and 22 February 2012.

<sup>207</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 6 October 2010.

<sup>208</sup> Observation, Wukari, Prayer and Healing Ministry, 12 October 2009 & 21 September 2011.

bountiful harvest. This is usually done in the months of March and April before the start of the rains. The members would return the soil taken from the house to their home for family peace. Prayers over the soil from the business places and houses have no precise timeframe. It is part of the weekly activities. On some occasions, the followers returned with testimonies of bumper harvests, success in businesses and family peace.<sup>209</sup> The ministry insists on bringing soil for prayer because it may not be possible to visit every house and farmland. Many politicians seeking elective positions, applicants seeking job opportunities and civil servants seeking promotions all perceive the ministry as a channel for seeking the face of God in order to break any witchcraft frustrations of their life struggles.

### **5.8 Setbacks in the Ministry**

The ministry later faced diverse setbacks because of the nature of witchcraft exposure, accusation, seemingly negative practices and the failure of the church leadership to regulate them. In fact, the leader faced legal action and church discipline as a result of numerous incidents that led to family break-ups and disturbance of the public peace.

The first setback came from the exposure of purported witches. Martha informed three little children of a purported witch who was allegedly responsible for their unusual character of stealing. The children publicly assaulted the purported witch, claiming that she was responsible for their misconduct. The church leadership called Martha in and warned her against accusations that could lead to stigma, trauma, discrimination and even murder. She turned a deaf ear to their warning and still told another young boy about a vision in which one of his siblings was attempting to bewitch him. Out of fear and apprehension, the boy informed his senior blood brother. The issue caused chaos in the family social structure. The issue was taken to the traditional authority with the intention to go for trial by ordeal. The church leadership intervened, resolved the matter amicably and warned Martha against such further practice.<sup>210</sup> But she did not heed the church's admonition. On the contrary, she stood her ground, insisting that:

If you (the council) want me to stop this ministry given to me by God, close the heavens so that I will no longer have divine impartation. I will then

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<sup>209</sup> Observation, Wukari, Prayer and Healing Ministry, 12 October 2009 & 21 September 2011.

<sup>210</sup> Dawuda Bulus Tanko, Interview, 8 February 2011, CRCN Puje, Wukari.

comply. If not, I will continue to pray, divulge witches and release witch victims from the yoke of witches as far as ‘the Spirit’ continues to impart to me in the ministry. This is because human beings are not meat to be consumed by witches.<sup>211</sup>

Second, Martha accused one Ezekiel Wunuji Shishi, a politician, of attempting to bewitch his nephew in order to retain his elective position. The accused took the matter to the extended family<sup>212</sup> and a day was scheduled for the hearing. The accused perceived a delay in dealing with the matter, so he resorted to legal action. Martha was summoned to appear in court for questioning. However, the family pleaded with both the accused and the court to withdraw the matter for it to be handled within the family. The court agreed, but Martha was made to pay the withdrawal and cancellation costs of the legal action charges.<sup>213</sup>

Third, Martha sexually violated one Ashu Ibrahim, an eleven-year-old-girl whom she claimed to have been ‘spiritually impregnated’. She cut the pubic hair of the girl and inserted her finger into the girl’s vagina and violated her. The girl became insane because of the trauma she went through in the course of the ‘spiritual abortion’. Her parents shouldered the costs of medical attention by the psychiatrists at the Federal Medical Hospital, Jalingo.<sup>214</sup> This violation of human rights created difficulties between the girl’s family and Martha and they threatened to take legal action against her.

Although traditional mediums would rarely divulge their secret practices, consultations with some informed traditional health practitioners reveal that this so-called ‘spiritual abortion’ is foreign to mediumistic practice. They unanimously condemn it as an evil-spirit-disguised action.<sup>215</sup> The church council gradually started questioning the nature of Martha’s Christian religiosity and the sources of her healing power. The church leadership then decided to regulate her practices. The council ordered her to organise and carry out her programmes in the church. She refused, saying, ‘I will first seek the counsel of “the Spirit”’. But she secretly continued her ministry activities outside the church leadership’s oversight. The council further asked her to go back to John Caleb, her mentor and founder of ‘The Dekker Recovery Ministry and Prayer Band’. Her response was that the visions and dreams she had received

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<sup>211</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 23 September 2012.

<sup>212</sup> Ezekiel Wunuji Shishi, Interview, 7 November 2010, Wukari.

<sup>213</sup> Hinkon, Interview, 16 October 2010; Martha C.J. Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 5 January 2011; Ezekiel Wunuji Shishi, Interview, 7 November 2010, Wukari.

<sup>214</sup> Tani Ibrahim, Interview, 4 February 2011, CRCN Puje, Wukari.

<sup>215</sup> Anonymous traditional health practitioners, Interview, 14 February 2010, 26 January 2011 & 28 May 2012, Wukari.

banned her from aligning with John Caleb or taking the ministry to the church. The church had no choice but to place her under discipline in December 2010 because of her stubbornness and subversive practices. In her interpretation, all these harsh actions were taken against her as a result of gender stereotyping, hatred, jealousy and enmity because God had been using her. However, she later realised her stubbornness, confessed and was reinstated into fellowship in June 2011. The church allows her to practice but with strict regulations and close oversight.<sup>216</sup>

The church in its investigation of Martha's life story concluded (on 25 June 2009) that she 'possesses both evil spirit and Holy Spirit' because of the way she practices her so-called healing.<sup>217</sup> The church therefore insisted on four conditions: first, she should re-align with John Caleb and participate in his discipleship class on Mondays at 4:00 pm. Second, the Council asked Joel Tanko Aji (her retired pastor) to observe her spiritual life and her practices in the ministry. Third, she was asked to join the sisters' fellowship of the church on Fridays at 4:00 pm to strengthen her spiritual life. Fourth, she was no longer to retain people in her house for 'in-patient' treatment.<sup>218</sup> The church took these decisive steps because of Martha's unbiblical practices and the numerous accusations about them such as the use of witchcraft, flogging of those said to be in secret societies with palm frond brooms and banana stalks, breakup of homes, and instigating the disturbance of public peace.

## **5.9 Comments and Conclusion**

This ministry argues that exposing purported witches and culprits would convict them to confess their sins, as well as desist and repent from evil. Besides, this action would spare the people's life-force that witches are taking away or retrogressing. The exposure therefore serves as a precaution, deterrent and admonition to those who intend to engage in witchcraft practices. On the other hand, the alleged victims of witches would not go to acquire the so-called 'avenging antidotes' from the vulnerable personalities – agents of witches – who also prey on them. Those who acquire such substances are equally guilty of the same sin committed by the witches.

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<sup>216</sup> Martha Sabo & Daniel D. Sabo, Interview, 15 February 2011.

<sup>217</sup> Local Church Minutes dated 25 June 2009, LCCP/69/2009.

<sup>218</sup> Local Church Minutes dated 8 May 2009, LCCP/55/2009; Local Church Minutes dated 25 June 2009, LCCP/68/2009.

Second, the ministry argues that purported witches are victimised, traumatised, stigmatised and ostracised, while the alleged victims see themselves abandoned under the whims of witches without any security. The ministry believes that witches permeate the society and prey on those who have economic success, political progress and social status. The ministry is developing from traditional African religiosity that we work and exist in the midst of powers that can harm us, especially witchcraft. The ministry therefore cashes in to personalise evil within the framework of witchcraft causations. This has caused untold breakdown in the family social structure, leaving supposed witches with long-term trauma, stigma, discrimination, abandonment and neglect in the family and community; it has also created hatred, suspicion, envy, jealousy, enmity and disintegration in the social structure.

One of the major problems with the contemporary practices of ‘power encounter’ by the emerging deliverance ministries is the genuineness of their acclaimed source – the Holy Spirit. K. Neil Foster & Paul L. King observe that it is possible that people use a seemingly biblical approach to bind and loose from another ‘Jesus’ who is not God Almighty.<sup>219</sup> Self-styled exorcists often operate at the margins of Christianity. They deceive by manipulating and counterfeiting healings for commercial enterprise,<sup>220</sup> disguising themselves as God’s agents under the pretext of experiencing the Holy Spirit. I am not condemning all emerging ministries outright, but the seeming quest for power, fame, popularity and economic ventures calls for circumspection. It is time the mission-founded churches in association with government agencies and community leadership regulate their activities because they are draining the life-force of the vulnerable in the name of Christ.

Mission-founded churches need not gloss over issues of witchcraft as mere imagination, superstition, or ideology. The cursory approach of the mission-founded churches on this issue is causing serious social problems. It is also a vacuum in which the emerging delivery ministries have built their nest, misapplying, misinterpreting and misleading the gullible.

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<sup>219</sup> K. Neil Foster & Paul L. King, *Binding and Loosening: Exercising Authority Over the Dark Power* (Kaduna: Evangelical Press, 1998), p.200.

<sup>220</sup> A.S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary*, seventh edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.237; *The Concise Edition Dictionary and Thesaurus* (Glasgow: Geddes and Grossest, 2002), p.411.

First, the church needs to be firm on the fact that evil cannot be eliminated by ignorance. Moreover, the church should not deny that evil exists and works in social, ethical, economic, political and moral dimensions.

Second, belief in witchcraft differs from accusations of witchcraft. Although everyone enjoys the freedom of belief, the action (accusations) needs to be regulated by local norms as well as national and international law, which prevent infringements on the human rights and personal freedom of others. For example, physical, psychological and emotional abuse as well as lynching the purported witches should be strongly condemned and banned. Upholding human rights and affirming the dignity of the human race take cognisance of gender stereotypes and age.

Third, evangelical churches, in consultation with the traditional religious groups, legal professionals and human rights activists, should prevail on the government to enact a law that would ban self-styled exorcists from operating their own ministries.

Fourth, the church's leadership should provide more space for dealing with passages of the OT and NT that talk about mystical powers: demoniac powers, and powers and principalities. This is because every biblical text is a cultural product within wider historical contexts. If belief in witchcraft has been an issue for centuries in Africa and is hard to abolish, as other scholars have noted, there is the need to address its consequent lifelong social effects on the individual (alleged witch or witch victim) and the entire community. The basic reason is that the church cannot gloss over the deep-seated fears and concerns of its members drawn from the society. If the concerns continue to be taken for granted, they will consequently affect the church in all its facets. The mission-founded churches need to provide realistic alternatives and satisfying answers that show that evildoers are generally not witches.