

Shrines, Witches, and Explanations on Trial:

The witchcraft cases of the Nae We shrine in Accra, Ghana

Undergraduate Honours Thesis by

Flair Martin

Thesis Advisor:

Jonathan Roberts

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	3
Chapter one: The historiography of Western discourses on witchcraft	8
Chapter two: How can we think about witchcraft?	18
Chapter three: Shrines in Ghana	37
Chapter four: Nae We Findings	49
Conclusions:	72
Bibliography	75
Appendix	79

Acknowledgments

I would like to offer heartfelt thanks to my outstanding friends, family, and the professors of Mount St. Vincent University who have greatly influenced my academic development, and consequently this work. This list of worthy benefactors includes, but is not limited to: Dr. Frances Early, Dr. Alex Khasnabish, Dr. Randi Warne, Dr. Roni Gechtman, Dr. Adriana Benzaquén, Dr. Martha Walls, Dr. Corey Slumkoski, Professor Leslie Newhook, Dr. Kenneth Dewar, Dr. Allan Brown, Kathleen MacLeod and of course, my high school English teacher Mrs. Francene Gillis. She always said I should go to university. I would also especially like to take this time to offer my sincerest gratitude to my thesis advisor, mentor, and friend Dr. Jonathan Roberts. Perhaps the busiest individual I have ever met, Dr. Roberts has yet to fail to create time or space for me as a student or as a person between his frantic entries into a constantly expanding daily schedule. Our meaningful discussions have taught me much about how to approach the ideas of others, the art of discussion, and of thinking itself. In skills such as these I place the highest value, and I will carry and build on them for all of my days. This work would have been impossible without his guidance. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the motivating power, encouragement, force of personality, and patience of Erica Ward as essential to the completion of this work. So, special thanks goes out to all of you, named and otherwise, who have helped in the difficult, ongoing, and often thankless mission of guiding raw potential and disorganized noise, away from the tempting abyss of meaningless sound and fury. This one is for you.

Introduction

In 2012, the British Library commissioned an archiving project entitled “Witchcraft and Curse Trial records at the paramount shrines of Nai, Korle and Sakumo We, Accra, Ghana.” The goal of this project was to preserve the hand written records of trials held at the Nae We shrine between 1984 and 2013. The result was the digitization of over 12,000 documents, many of which are related to accusations of witchcraft. These are the only extant documented accounts of witchcraft trials in existence in Africa, and as such they provide a wealth of data to be analyzed for the first time.

This thesis positions the data from these documents within the context of the historiography of both modern African witchcraft, and the literature on Early Modern European witch-hunts. It argues that there have been three models of academic thinking on modern African witchcraft: The work of E.E. Evans-Pritchard, the Manchester school, and more recent scholarship in which the work of Peter Geschiere has played a central role. This thesis will show that the first two of these approaches to modern African witchcraft have been somewhat useful in the past, but that they now represent an outmoded perspective. The third and most recent approach champions the need for contextualization and rejects the use of large theoretical frameworks to explain African witchcraft. It also positions witchcraft-related practices as a distinctly modern phenomenon, one that dynamically adapts to changing local circumstances. This thesis has been conceptualized largely within this school of thought, but with some qualifications. Peter Geschiere and Adam Ashforth have argued that economic imbalances, power relations, and kinship, play a central role in witchcraft-related accusations,¹ but they have

¹ Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, (University of Virginia press: Charlottesville, 2000), 9

not had the benefit of any hard statistical data from which to confirm or deny their position. Using documents from the Nae We shrine in Accra, this thesis will challenge these assertions and show that witchcraft-related guilty verdicts can be better explained by the internal economy of the shrine, the costs associated with being found guilty, and the completion rate of trials, than by economic inequalities between participants, gender, or kinship relations.

The first chapter discusses the progression of Western discourses about witchcraft in Africa. In the twentieth century, three primary schools of thought emerged. The first was initiated by the work of E.E. Evans-Pritchard, who positioned witchcraft as a cultural idiom. For Evans-Pritchard, witchcraft-related practices could be used as a mechanism to understand African societies. The second was the so-called Manchester school, which is best represented by the work of Max Gluckman and Max Warwick. This perspective advocated a functionalist approach to the explanation of witchcraft. The Manchester school sought to explain witchcraft via the purpose it served the societies it inhabited. The most contemporary work available today focuses on a contextualized discursive approach to the subject of witchcraft-related practices, and is epitomized in the work of Gerschiere. These schools of thought, which I will address in more detail below, were constructed based on oral interview evidence and participant observer studies. They have not had the benefit of any statistical data, compiled from an African perspective, from which to corroborate or deny their assertions about witchcraft-related practices.

The second chapter compares how witchcraft is perceived, both in the Western mind, and as a lived reality in Africa. In order to introduce the reader to the unique qualities of witchcraft in Africa, this chapter includes a delineation of important differences between the witch-hunts of

Adam Ashforth, ed., "On Living in a World with Witches: Everyday epistemology and spiritual insecurity in a modern African city (Soweto)" *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: modernity, witchcraft, and the occult in postcolonial Africa*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 206

the Early Modern European period and modern African witchcraft-related practices. This chapter also discusses the term *witchcraft* and how it is perceived, and used, in the African context. In academic circles, the term *witchcraft* is often used as a catch all phrase to describe acts involving access to unseen forces. I will divide these forms of access into divination, possession, healing, witch finding, and witchcraft defense. The purpose of this chapter is to argue that the term *witchcraft* is prone to conflation, not only with events from another time and space, but with acts and cultural practices which are neither negative nor harmful in the African context.

The third chapter narrows the focus of this thesis to West Africa and introduces the reader to the many configurations of the shrine and witch finding movements in the colonial Gold Coast, and modern Ghana. It will position the shrine as a multipurpose institution commonly used to find witches, thwart their influence, and mediate accusations. This will provide a local context for the primary subject of this work, the Nae We trial documents. This chapter will also show that, while the shrine of Nae We has all the trappings of a court, it is better understood as a vibrant cultural space where a variety of activities take place.

The fourth chapter offers context for witchcraft trials in Accra via the Nae We trial documents. It lays out the findings garnered from the investigation of the trial documents which includes data on gender, verdicts, economics, witchcraft-related defamation, and the success rate of trials. The evidence suggests that the Nae We shrine has a high number of female participants in its trials. It also shows that there is an extremely high rate of guilty verdicts in witchcraft-related trials. Additionally, an analysis of the economics of these trials reveals that any goods or cash garnered from guilty verdicts are redistributed to the shrine rather than to the successful trial participant (e.g. plaintiff). The data also demonstrates that witchcraft-related defamation accusations are just as important as direct witchcraft accusations themselves. These findings are

underscored by a low rate of successfully completed witchcraft-related trials. This thesis then argues, contrary to the work of Geschiere, that in the context of the Nae We shrine, witchcraft-related guilty verdicts can be better explained by the internal economy of the shrine, the cost of being found guilty at Nae We, and incomplete trials, than by economic inequalities between participants, gender, or kinship relations. As a result, I argue that while witchcraft-related activity at Nae We contains important elements from each of the approaches outlined in the first chapter, witchcraft-related cultural forms cannot be universally contained within clearly delineated academic categories.

This is because the various stages of academic thought on witchcraft-related activity only partially explain the phenomenon. With respect to the seminal work of Evans-Pritchard, witchcraft is in fact part of a system of explanation that has its own logic, but it does not permeate every aspect of African cultures, nor does it fully explain them. As for the contributions of the Manchester school, a social structure does exist that perpetuates societal understandings of witchcraft in Africa. In fact, I will show that the Nae We shrine is itself an example of a social institution that plays a role in the ongoing mission of witch finding in the context of Accra. The problem is that it does not always work, nor does it serve as an efficiently functioning social structure. High rates of incomplete trials are evidence of this fact. Witchcraft-related practices are as ingrained in African societies as spiritual belief is in any society. It can be understood that witchcraft-related practices are not there to serve a function as a prerequisite for existence, yet they are inseparable from a full understanding of many African cultures.

In his work on witchcraft-related activity in Africa, Geschiere presents an internal contradiction with his arguments. First, he argues that witchcraft is an inherent part of many African societies and that each instance of witchcraft needs to be individually attended to for its

own unique and dynamic characteristics. The problem arises when he ascribes a variety of characteristics to witchcraft in general. Geschiere argues that witchcraft accusations act as both an accumulative, and leveling force (through accusations) wherever new forms of power, wealth, or inequalities spring up.² Geschiere also argues that conceptions of witchcraft cannot be removed from what he calls “the dark side of kinship.”³ Even in modern urban contexts, he argues, witchcraft is “supposed to arise, first of all, from the intimacy of the family and the home.”⁴ However, the data from the trials held at Nae We show that this framework does not always apply.

The Nae We documents offer tremendous insight into the lived reality of those who experience witchcraft on a daily basis. This thesis uses the evidence garnered from the Nae We trials to challenge certain aspects of contemporary literature. This includes arguing that in the context of the Nae We trials, the roles of gender, kinship, and of economic inequalities between accuser and accused, in generating witchcraft-related guilty convictions, are greatly exaggerated. However, in order to better explain the trials held at Nae We, this work will still draw extensively on aspects of recent academic approaches like Geschiere’s that reject inflexible teleologies of change and highlight the importance of localized and contextualized understandings of witchcraft-related practices. The work of Todd Sanders, Henrietta Moore, Jane Parish, and Adam Ashforth will also be indispensable towards achieving this aim.

² Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, 10

³ Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, 11

⁴ Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, 11

Chapter One:

The historiography of Western discourses on witchcraft

The founding work in the historiography of Western academic discourses concerning African witchcraft in the twentieth century came in 1937 when E.E. Evans-Pritchard published *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*.⁵ The significance of this book is marked by both its approach, and its subject matter. Prior to Evans-Pritchard, the generally held view of African witchcraft in Western academia was that its continued practice was simply the result of backwards or “pre-logical thinking” in African societies.⁶ The phenomenon of witchcraft was thus treated as an outmoded or “primitive” system of beliefs which Western culture had at one time experienced in the past, but had now outgrown thanks to the vehicle of scientific progress.⁷

One of Evans-Pritchard’s primary contributions to the study of African witchcraft was detailed ethnographic descriptions of witches themselves. Evans-Pritchard defines a witch as “a person whose body contains, or is declared by oracles or diviners to contain, witchcraft-substance and who is supposed to practice witchcraft.”⁸ The substance referred to here can take on a variety of forms, but it is most often described as being attached to the liver, in the shape of an “oval blackish swelling or bag in which various small objects are sometimes found.”⁹ According to Evans-Pritchard, because of these physical characteristics, witchcraft can also be

⁵M.G Marwick, “Anthropologists’ Declining Productivity in the Sociology of Witchcraft” *American Anthropologist*, 74, 3 (1972): 378, 379

⁶ Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1926), 105

Peter Geschiere, “Witchcraft and the State: Cameroon and South Africa Ambiguities of ‘Reality’ and ‘Superstition’” *Past and Present*, 199, supplement 3 (2008): 316

Bannerman-Richter, *The Practice of Witchcraft in Ghana*, 15

⁷Levy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 105

Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders, ed., *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities: modernity, witchcraft, and the occult in postcolonial Africa*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 2

⁸ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 9

⁹ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, 22

genetically inherited by way of “biological transmission.”¹⁰ Witches show no external symptoms of their condition and may not even know that they are witches until an oracle or diviner names them as such.¹¹ Evans-Pritchard explained that witches are thought by the Azande to be able to leave their physical form at any time in order to cause mischief and harm. A witch can, therefore, send his “soul on errands by night when his victim is asleep. It sails through the air emitting a bright light.” Evans-Pritchard himself claims to have once witnessed a light matching this description while living amongst the Azande. However, he was not convinced it was evidence of a supernatural entity.¹²

Evans-Pritchard’s work demonstrated that witchcraft belief could be understood as a rational, system of explanation, one which was in keeping with the tenets of Western scientific logic. How the Zande understood the effects of witchcraft is exemplified by Evans-Pritchard’s now famous anecdote about why granaries collapse. A Zande man was once taking shelter from the hot mid-day sun under a granary and it happened to collapse, killing the man. According to Evans-Pritchard’s informants, this was the result of witchcraft. He argued that the Azande knew that the granary collapsed because termites ate through the wood, weakening the supports of the granary. They also knew that the man died as a result of the granary itself collapsing onto him. To the Azande, the man died because of a series of natural and explainable occurrences, but witchcraft was ultimately responsible for the man’s death because it collapsed while he was under the granary. Evans-Pritchard argued that according to the idiom of Azande witchcraft logic, this is *why* he died. Evans-Pritchard showed that to the Azande, such an incident cannot only be the result of coincidence or bad luck. Instead, they knew that the death was the result of

¹⁰ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, 23

¹¹ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, 23, 9

¹² Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, 33, 34

ill will, expressed through witchcraft.¹³ Evans-Pritchard argued that when witchcraft is responsible for a death of this nature, this is known to the Azande as the “*umbaga* or second spear.”¹⁴ In this case, the granary which killed the man is the first spear and the witchcraft is the second. To the Azande, they killed the man together. The explanation of how and why such unfortunate events occur is then produced through a combination of empirical and spiritual means for the Azande. Social anthropologist Max Marwick argued that the Azande then use witchcraft as a vehicle of explanation for questions that Western society may simply leave unanswered.¹⁵ Witchcraft then served as the explanation of *why* unfortunate events occurred for the Azande.

Evans-Pritchard saw witchcraft as an essential idiom in Zande life.¹⁶ For Evans-Pritchard, witchcraft-related practices provided a means to better understand African cultures. At the time of its publication, Evans-Pritchard’s approach represented an intellectual leap with respect to Western academic thought on the subject of African witchcraft practices.¹⁷ His work and perspectives were later expanded upon by a variety of European scholars conducting research in African localities, including anthropologists Max Marwick and Max Gluckman.

In the 1940s and 1950s, many European intellectuals became notable adoptees of a type of structural-functionalist approach to witchcraft scholarship that picked up where Evans-Pritchard left off. Scholars associated with Manchester University, like Gluckman and Marwick, came to dominate the field of social anthropology with respect to the analysis of African

¹³ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, 70

¹⁴ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, 74

¹⁵ M.G. Marwick, “How Real Is the Charmed Circle in African and Western Thought?” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 43, No. 1 (Jan., 1973): 62

¹⁶ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, 65

¹⁷ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 6

witchcraft practices.¹⁸ This loosely affiliated group of similarly minded intellectuals has come to be known to many recent scholars as the Manchester School.¹⁹

Gluckman, a leading figure of the Manchester school, focused on the notion that witchcraft should be understood by way of the function it serves the societies it inhabits. Using a theoretical framework he called “structural duration”, which he defined as cycles of social change followed by the return of equilibrium to a given society, Gluckman supposed that one could create laws of structural change.²⁰ For Gluckman, witchcraft amounted to a form of social control, a way to maintain disparate power structures within communities as well as instill and enforce moral and ethical codes of conduct.²¹ The threat of witchcraft was understood as a repercussion for the failure to adhere to social mores, bringing disorder and disruption into one’s daily life. In other words, witchcraft made sense because it served a function.²² This perspective has been critiqued in recent decades as reductionist because it supposes that witchcraft existed only to serve a societal purpose.²³ The assertion that witchcraft, no matter how or where it may be configured, could be uniformly explained underneath the umbrella of a single theoretical framework has also been fiercely critiqued.²⁴

While overarching explanations concerning how and why witchcraft exists in African societies may have since become academically unpopular, recent scholarship owes much to this ethnographic period. The importance of identifying the mechanics of witchcraft accusations was

¹⁸ Todd Sanders, “Reconsidering witchcraft: Postcolonial Africa and analytic (un)certainties” *American Anthropologist*, 105, no. 2 (Jun 2003): 339

Geschiere, “Witchcraft and the State”, 320

Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 7

¹⁹ Sanders, “Reconsidering witchcraft”, 339

²⁰ Max Gluckman, “The Utility of the Equilibrium Model in the Study of Social Change” *American Anthropologist*, 70, no. 2 (April, 1968): 221, 227

²¹ Geschiere, “Witchcraft and the State”, 320-322

²² Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 7

²³ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 8

²⁴ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 7-9

a central aspect of the Manchester approach.²⁵ At the time, scholarship on witchcraft accusations tended to be couched in the effects of colonialism and the rapid social changes which its processes often imposed upon African peoples (e.g. new forms of consumption and production).²⁶ These factors were considered responsible for a perceived rise in witchcraft accusations.²⁷ The Manchester approach saw not only a connection, but a causal relationship between these social changes, the inequalities and jealousies they can engender on a local level, and witchcraft itself. Todd Sanders and Henrietta Moore have since shown that there exists “no baseline data” with which one could prove that such a rise in witchcraft activity ever occurred, casting doubt on this aspect of the Manchester approach.²⁸ However, greater understandings of the processes that *contribute* to witchcraft accusations including kinship, jealousy, witchcraft anxiety, and socio-economic changes were comprehensively explored during this period. No longer was witchcraft considered merely an “archaic or exotic” exercise, it had become a legitimate and useful element of society and culture, one which was now possible for Western scholarship to accept.²⁹

After a flurry of interest in the 1950s and 1960s, there was a decrease in the amount of anthropological scholarship being produced on the subject of modern African witchcraft.³⁰ The reasons behind the decline of production of new anthropological research being conducted in the 1970s and 1980s are not entirely known. Marwick has pointed to the lack of a reliable body of statistical evidence from which one could compare theoretical frameworks and further the field

²⁵ M. G. Marwick, “Another Modern Anti-Witchcraft Movement in East Central Africa” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 20, no. 2 (April, 1950): 105

M. G. Marwick, “Anthropologists’ Declining Productivity in the Sociology of Witchcraft” *American Anthropologist*, 74, no. 3 (1972): 380

²⁶ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 9

²⁷ Marwick, “Another Modern Anti-Witchcraft Movement in East Central Africa” 105

²⁸ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 10

²⁹ Sanders, “Reconsidering witchcraft”, 339

³⁰ Marwick, “Anthropologists’ Declining Productivity in the Sociology of Witchcraft” 378

of study, as one possibility.³¹ One could also argue that during this period the expansion of Western scholarship into a variety of previously under-explored fields including race, gender, and ethnic-oriented studies, may have also played a role. In any case, by the 1990s anthropological curiosity in the subject of African witchcraft was reignited. Historians also began to make greater contributions to the field by taking a greater interest in viewing the development of twentieth century African witchcraft through the lens of historical process.³²

Peter Geschiere, Adam Ashforth, Todd Sanders, Henrietta Moore, and John Parker are a few of the notable new contributors to contemporary literature on African witchcraft. One characteristic these authors have in common is a focus on witchcraft as a distinctly “modern” phenomenon that has changed according to cultural and social circumstances as opposed to a “traditional” one that was expected to disappear with the advent of new technologies, Western rationality, and scientific progress.³³ This new approach is informed by the fact that Western academia has been enduring a period of internal reflection in recent decades where a reversal of “the analytic gaze” has occurred, in turn creating a greater space for self-critique.³⁴ Recent scholarship on African witchcraft has thus taken a largely discursive approach. This perspective is characterized by a shift from using large structural explanations and theoretical frameworks to explore witchcraft, to a greater focus on the meanings of witchcraft accusations at the local level. In other words, how do people experience witchcraft? How is it talked about? What anxieties are at play and how do they manifest themselves? How do the dynamics of kinship affect and

³¹ Marwick, “Anthropologists’ Declining Productivity in the Sociology of Witchcraft” 383

³² Marwick, “Anthropologists’ Declining Productivity in the Sociology of Witchcraft” 378

John Parker, “Witchcraft, Anti-witchcraft and Trans-regional Ritual Innovation in Early Colonial Ghana: Sakrabundi and Aberewa, 1889-1910” *Journal of African History*, 45 (2004): 393

³³ Todd Sanders, “The Modernity of Witchcraft” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 30, no. 1 (2000): 127

Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 3, 4, 11, 12, 13

Geschiere, “Witchcraft and the State”, 316, 317, 334

Ashforth, “On Living in a World with Witches”, 207, 217, 219

³⁴ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 13

interact with witchcraft? This approach is also characterized by an effort to avoid the imposition of hegemonic Western intellectual discourses onto perceived subaltern subjects.

A greater emphasis on local contexts and conditions with respect to witchcraft is a typical feature of recent scholarship on the subject.³⁵ This approach is driven by the understanding that each cultural example of witchcraft should be treated on its own terms. Peter Geschiere, author of the influential work *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, outlines three main themes in his approach: *ambiguity*, *regional variation*, and *kinship*.³⁶ First, *ambiguity* refers to the fact that in the African context, witchcraft can rarely be reduced to strictly positive or negative dichotomies. Instead, witchcraft can be expressed in a variety of ways, and for a number of purposes.³⁷ Like Evans-Pritchard before him, Geschiere contends that for those who live with it, witchcraft is a part of everyday life and that anybody can potentially be a witch. This contention complicates clear definitions as to whom or what is a witch.³⁸ For Geschiere, the ambiguity of witchcraft is also a potential levelling force, one which addresses issues such as growing economic disparities and political upheaval.³⁹

Secondly, *regional variation* refers to the understanding that each configuration of witchcraft in a given community or culture, especially in the African context, is subject to a wide range of variables that make it unique. Region, culture, language, power relations, economics, and a variety of social factors all play a role in how witchcraft practices may evolve in a given locality.⁴⁰ Todd Sanders, a social anthropologist and expert on African witchcraft practices, argues that witchcraft activity is about agency and local circumstances. He argues that it can help

³⁵ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 13

³⁶ Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, 9

³⁷ Peter Geschiere, "Domesticating Personal Violence: witchcraft, courts and confessions in Cameroon" *Africa*, 64, no. 3 (1994): 326

³⁸ Geschiere, "Domesticating Personal Violence" *Africa*, 325, 326

³⁹ Sanders, "Reconsidering witchcraft", 339

⁴⁰ Todd Sanders, "The Modernity of Witchcraft", 128

to tell the story of unique places in a “plurality” of ways.⁴¹ In other words, the traditional aspects of witchcraft practices are constantly subject to change and both witchcraft accusations and their causes can be adapted to fit unique situations.

Finally, *kinship* relations have become a primary focus for recent scholarship as the number one source of witchcraft accusations. Geschiere calls this “the dark side of kinship.”⁴² He contends that one reason why witchcraft practices remain so prevalent is because of their strong ties to the dynamics of familial relations.⁴³ Many researchers point to jealousies or financial burdens among relatives as a factor in the explanation of witchcraft accusations. Work done by Jane Parish on Ghanaian immigrants in the U.K in 2005 indicates that the threat of kinship witchcraft crosses geographic boundaries. Parish contends that Ghanaians located in the U.K claim that they could come under spiritual attack at any time from Ghana by a female member of their family. The interviewees attributed “suspicious” about their “prosperity” as the motive for such witchcraft attacks.⁴⁴

Newer scholarship also addresses important issues such as how representations of African witchcraft are presented, especially with respect to the use of language. For example, what do we mean when we say “witchcraft”?⁴⁵ Geschiere has shown that witchcraft is ambiguous in nature because it never simply fits into a dichotomy of good or bad, benevolent or evil.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders contend that a Western understanding of what witchcraft means often “conflates itself with European history and a notion of

⁴¹ Sanders, “Reconsidering witchcraft”, 339, 340

⁴² Geschiere, “Domesticating Personal Violence” *Africa*, 325

⁴³ Geschiere, “Domesticating Personal Violence” *Africa*, 323, 325

⁴⁴ Jane Parish, “Witchcraft, riches and roulette: An ethnography of West African gambling in the UK” *Ethnography*, 6, no. 1 (March 2006): 106

⁴⁵ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 4

⁴⁶ Todd Sanders, “The Modernity of Witchcraft”, 128 - This is not entirely true as it is the term itself which is awkward and not the understanding of it in the African context, a fact which I attend to later in this thesis.

backwardness that is not applicable in the African sense.”⁴⁷ Evans-Pritchard himself was among the first to cognitively separate historical European examples of witchcraft from contemporary African practice by stating categorically that they are not the same thing.⁴⁸ Moore and Sanders thus suggest the use of a term much less laden with uniquely Western historical contexts such as “occult forces.” However, they are aware that this is problematized by the fact that the term ‘witchcraft’ is widely used in many African cultures which experience witchcraft as part of their daily life.⁴⁹ It follows that to use different terminology, is to risk further imposing Western intellectual schemas onto unique and novel cultural circumstances. Geschiere contends that it is futile not to use such terms despite the fact that, for the people who live with witchcraft, they may mean a multitude of different things.⁵⁰ Careful consideration of how representations are addressed can then be understood to be an important facet of contemporary witchcraft literature. As such, the term *witchcraft* will be carefully considered in this work.

A discernible progression can thus be traced in Western literature on African witchcraft. First, Evans-Pritchard’s approach saw witchcraft as the essential African idiom, a key which could unlock the cultural code of societies that lived with witchcraft. Secondly, the Manchester approach viewed witchcraft as a social fact, one which only made sense if it fit into the structure of society and served a discernible function. Finally, contemporary authors have absorbed some of the more useful characteristics of both of these approaches and contributed the understanding of witchcraft as something that is inherently dynamic and must be understood in terms of the local places and people that it inhabits. This approach sees witchcraft as a modern and dynamic

⁴⁷ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 4

⁴⁸ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft*, 64

⁴⁹ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 4

⁵⁰ Geschiere, “Witchcraft and the State”, 316

cultural form that should be respected by Western academic discourses. One which is drawn from a traditional past, but that exists as part of an ever-present lived human reality.

Chapter Two:

How can we think about witchcraft?

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with the basis for a stronger understanding of the meanings of witchcraft in a Ghanaian context, but in order to move forward, we must move back. First, this chapter includes a delineation of important differences between the witch-hunts of the Early Modern European period and modern African witchcraft-related practices. The second section of this chapter will address the complicated semantics and understandings of the term *witchcraft* in the African, and especially, Ghanaian context. The purpose of this analysis will be to reveal the distinctions between witchcraft and other forms of access to unseen forces in Africa.

Witch delineations

On the surface, there are certain similarities between Early Modern European witch-hunts and contemporary African witchcraft-related practices which invite comparison in the Western mind. Such similarities include certain aspects of their material cultures including potions, powders, and magically imbued objects of power (or so-called fetishes in the African context). There is also the ability of some individuals to access unseen forces in order to cause harm, cast curses, cause illness, or even crop failure. There are also similarities in aspects of the geographies of blame, including a greater focus on women as perpetrators of witchcraft, as well as kinship or familial bonds being tied to the ability to access unseen powers. This is true despite the vast temporal, cultural, and geographic differences between the two. However, the differences between European and African notions of witchcraft are profound, making them,

despite their similarities, very distinct phenomena. This section will address the major differences between these two cultures of witchcraft-related practices, including unified continental iconographies, codified literary configurations like diabolism, and aspects of the state level institutionalization of the witchcraft trial. Additionally, I will provide descriptions of what a typical witchcraft trial held in Ghana might look like today, and compare it to an Early Modern European witchcraft trial in order to illuminate the distinctions between them.

Many scholars have sought to explain why the witch-hunts of the Early Modern period took place. This tragic European phenomenon has been attributed to everything from the Reformation, to political instability, woman-hunting, and the weather.⁵¹ Much ink has also been spilled in the pursuit of multi-causal explanations and rigorous investigations of the “preconditions” which led to the widespread prosecution and execution of witches.⁵² A common misconception exists in popular Western culture today where, because witchcraft is a very real part of many African cultures, it follows that such cultures must be suffering from an irrational “backward” sensibility where they have failed to throw off the shackles of superstition.⁵³ This perception flows from the historical experience of the European witch-hunts as the object of a shared Western past where illogical notions about occult forces ran amok before rational thinking prevailed.⁵⁴ I will argue that such misconceptions need to be addressed for the simple

⁵¹ Gary K. Waite, “The Reformation and the End of the World” and “The reformation, Magic, and Witchcraft, 1520-1600,” in *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Houndsmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 149.

H.C. Erik Midelfort, “Heartland of the Witchcraze,” *History Today*, February 1981, 28.

Wolfgang Behringer, “Weather, Hunger and Fear: Origins of the European Witch-Hunts in Climate, Society and Mentality,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. Darren Oldridge, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, (2002), 69.

⁵² Brian P. Levack, “The Dynamics of Witch-Hunting,” in *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), 176.

Thomas Robisheaux, “The German Witch Trials,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 179.

⁵³ Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders, ed., *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities: modernity, witchcraft, and the occult in postcolonial Africa*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 2

Bannerman-Richter, *The Practice of Witchcraft in Ghana*, 12

Geschiere, “Witchcraft and the State”, 320

⁵⁴ Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1926), 105

reason that the European example of witchcraft does not lead into the African one, nor are they the same thing.⁵⁵ In the interest of historical integrity it is important for each time and place to maintain a measure of autonomy from the other, despite the fact that they share the complicated term *witchcraft*. I will address this term in greater detail later in this chapter. The purpose of this section is then to help prevent the creation of ill-considered and preconceived notions about contemporary African cultures based on misplaced popular Western historical schemas.

I will begin by outlining some of the well-defined characteristics of the Early Modern European witch-hunts. The imagery of the witchcraft Sabbath played a significant role in Early Modern European witchcraft trials. This meeting was often portrayed in artwork, literature, and trial documents of the period with a variety of consistent features regardless of region (with the notable exception of England where the Sabbath played less of a role in the legal structure of prosecutions and confessions).⁵⁶ These features are exemplified by trial documents which are available to us. Many descriptions of what became a familiar scene can be found in the confessions (often delivered under torture) of those on trial during the large Germanic witch-hunts during the late 16th century. Common themes of the Sabbath included a magical means of conveyance to the gathering on items such as a broom or flying “black goat.”⁵⁷ Dark pacts with the devil or the renunciation of Christ are also regular features of Early Modern Sabbath discourses.⁵⁸ Other common tropes connected to the Sabbath included plots to destroy local harvests, infanticide, cannibalism, lewd sexual acts, and inappropriate dancing.⁵⁹ Scholars such

⁵⁵ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), 34.

Bannerman-Richter, *The Practice of Witchcraft in Ghana*, 15

⁵⁶ Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006), 303

⁵⁷ “The Prosecutions at Trier (1581-93),” in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, (2001), 311.

⁵⁸ “The Prosecutions at Trier (1581-93),” 311, 312.

⁵⁹ “The Confession of Niclas Fiedler at Trier, 1591” in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Routledge, 2004), 177.

as Brian P. Levack contend that the imagery of the Sabbath represented an inverse version of the social order which in turn made Sabbath activity into a palpable threat to the very foundations of Christian society.⁶⁰ Confessions regularly contained recurring details which were part of educated elite conception of the witchcraft Sabbath throughout Europe during the Early Modern period. This conception was known as Diabolism, or diabolical theory.⁶¹ Details that matched this conception of witchcraft came to be expected, even encouraged, by inquisitors and prosecutors and were readily given by those under duress in an attempt to stop the pain of torture.⁶²

The image of the Sabbath, and the confessions garnered at Early Modern European witchcraft trials thus serve as a discursive intersection in the witch-hunts. This is because a distinction exists between how witchcraft was perceived by educated elite officials, and the populace writ large during this period. This distinction is highlighted by two important concepts: *diabolism* and *maleficium*. Maleficium can be understood as the harmful effects of witchcraft as it was experienced on the ground. Maleficium is a term tied to popular conceptions of how witchcraft manifested itself and was experienced by common peasants during the Early Modern period. Misfortunes attributed to witchcraft such as crop failure, serious illness, death, and infertility were thus known as maleficium by the mid-15th century in Europe.⁶³ Historian Robin Briggs shows that lower class individuals could often live with the suspicion that their friends or neighbors were witches for long periods of time without ever informing officials and thereby initiating a trial. Briggs builds the argument that there may have even been an economy of

Pierre de Lancre, "Dancing and Sex at the Sabbath, 1612," in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Routledge, 2004), 105

⁶⁰ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 303

⁶¹ Darren Oldridge, "General Introduction," in *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. Darren Oldridge, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), 4.

⁶² "The Trial and Confessions of Johannes Junius at Bamberg (1628)," from George L. Burr, ed. *The Witch-Persecutions* (1896) (public domain)

⁶³ Oldridge, "General Introduction," 4.

witchcraft. For example if someone fell ill as a result of what they believed to be witchcraft, they could privately make an accusation against someone in hopes of obtaining a cure from the accused. In exchange for such ministrations, Briggs argues, the witch could “secure pardon and immunity by removing the evil.”⁶⁴ This social flexibility with witchcraft at the popular level contrasts starkly with the hard and fast rules of the witch hunts which were overseen by local educated elites and fuelled in part by diabolical theory.

According to historian Darren Oldridge, diabolism represented the product of scholarship of educated European elites (often theologians) who argued that the power of maleficium was in fact the result of a dark pact with the devil.⁶⁵ One famous example of an educated proponent of diabolical theory is found in Heinrich Kramer. Kramer, a Germanic inquisitor and influential author of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches), was a well-known contributor to diabolical theory. For Kramer the power of witchcraft was the result of a “compact” with the devil which amounted to a blasphemous “heresy.”⁶⁶ Diabolism, as a cohesive theory among European elites is pointed to by many scholars as a “key ingredient in brewing the witch-hunts” as the pact with the devil represented a particularly heinous religious betrayal.⁶⁷ Witchcraft, and maleficium, was understood to be a fact of life by European commoners in the Early Modern period. However, it was diabolical theory which acted as an impetus for elite involvement in a vast majority of the Early Modern European witch-hunts.

In concert with diabolical theory and the Sabbath, Levack points to certain “preconditions” required for the large scale witch-hunts to take place in Europe during the Early

⁶⁴ Robin Briggs, “The Experience of Bewitchment,” in *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 75

⁶⁵ Oldridge, “General Introduction,” 6.

⁶⁶ “Heinrich Kramer on the Torture of Accused Witches,” from *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), trans. Montague Summers (1928).

⁶⁷ Brian A. Pavlac, “Medieval Origins of the Witch Hunts,” in *Witch Hunts in the Western World: Persecution and Punishment from the Inquisition to the Salem Trials* (Westport: Greenwood, 2009), 45.

Modern period.⁶⁸ According to Levack, one such required precondition in the Early Modern European context was the existence of a sophisticated legal and judiciary system equipped with the tools and the will to prosecute witchcraft.⁶⁹ Another is that a “crisis mentality” must exist amongst the people of a given region.⁷⁰ The institutionalization of the witch-hunts, via the legal machinery of local authorities was common during the Early Modern period in Europe. As described above, this is what led to the ability of authorities to conduct trials and execute large numbers of the accused during large chain reaction witch-hunts. This legal protocol was also heavily informed by the overarching theory of diabolism.⁷¹ The crisis mentality which accompanied large chain reaction witch-hunts is well documented and could often lead to false accusations. With these characteristics of the Early Modern European witch-hunts in mind, one can differentiate this period clearly from examples of contemporary African witchcraft-related practices.

One important difference between Early Modern European witchcraft and contemporary African witchcraft is the existence in the former of unified conceptions of what witchcraft practices look like. This is especially true in the case of the European witchcraft Sabbath. This is not to say that there is not a common understanding of the causes, forms, or business of witchcraft in Africa. It is to suggest that unlike the Early Modern European example of the Sabbath, there is no evidence of a single pan-African iconography, literary tradition, or unified understanding of what witch meetings should look like.⁷²

⁶⁸ Brian P. Levack, “The Dynamics of Witch-Hunting,” in *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), 176.

⁶⁹ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 304.

⁷⁰ Levack, “The Dynamics of Witch-Hunting”, 178.

⁷¹ Levack, “The Dynamics of Witch-Hunting”, 179.

⁷² Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 4, 13.

The image of the Sabbath was widely understood amongst the elite classes during the Early Modern period in Europe.⁷³ Africa has no such common pan-continental treatment of witchcraft. Instead, recent work by scholars suggests that every local example of witchcraft in Africa has a wide variety of elements which make it unique within its own context.⁷⁴ Additionally, African witchcraft expert Peter Geschiere contends that witchcraft is an essential part of the local social order rather than its “antithesis.”⁷⁵ Evans-Pritchard argued that African witchcraft is fundamentally unlike the Early Modern European example, and categorically stated that they are not the same thing.⁷⁶ It is important to note that in the African context, moral ambiguity is also a feature of witchcraft and it does not share the easily defined good vs. evil dichotomy we see in European examples of diabolism and maleficium.⁷⁷

Another important difference between Early Modern witchcraft in Europe and Modern African witchcraft is the absence of the overarching diabolical theory espoused by the church, local authorities, and intellectual communities in the African context.⁷⁸ African understandings of witchcraft fall much more in line with the practical aspects of harm caused by maleficium. This is because the presence of immediate danger from witches exists at a local community level. However, witches in Africa are not considered to achieve their power through a pact with the devil.⁷⁹ It is also important to remember that the concept of maleficium still fails to describe the African experience of witchcraft-related practices. It is a misnomer in the African sense because this term belongs to a historical period and place which is unique to the Early Modern European

⁷³ Pierre de Lancre, “Dancing and Sex at the Sabbath, 1612,” 105

⁷⁴ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 4.

⁷⁵ Geschiere, “Domesticating Personal Violence”, 324

⁷⁶ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft*, 64

⁷⁷ Peter Geschiere, “Domesticating personal violence: witchcraft, courts and confessions in Cameroon.” *Africa* 64,3 (1994): 326.

⁷⁸ LeVack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 303.

⁷⁹ Jane Parish, “Witchcraft, riches and roulette: An ethnography of West African gambling in the UK” *Ethnography*, 6, 1 (March 2005): 105

example. Suggesting otherwise is simply anachronistic. Historians Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders argue that terms involving witchcraft cannot be “meaningfully” transferred from one culture and time to another.⁸⁰ Therefore one can certainly assert that the literary and cultural traditions associated with witchcraft in the Early Modern European example are products of their own distinct time and space. Together they produced a particular form of witchcraft, one which cannot be compared or likened to present day African conceptions of witchcraft. Ideas about witchcraft in the African context are sustained by local understandings which are under a continual process of reinvention and re-configuration according to changing elements of everyday life. Large institutional structures are not required to confirm or deny the existence of witchcraft, nor are they required to educate Africans on how to think on the subject.

Some of the necessary preconditions for the Early Modern European witch-hunts, pointed to by Levack, are also notably absent from modern African witchcraft-related culture. Government-level legal involvement with witchcraft is, for the most part, not present in modern day Africa. While witch-finding and even witch executions are certainly a feature of many modern African cultures, the apparatuses of government and church as the drivers of these witch-hunts, fuelled by torture derived confessions, are not.⁸¹ Similarly the “crisis mentality” is also notably absent from modern African witchcraft discourses with only a few isolated exceptions. John Parker and Jean Allman argue that in the early 1930s in what was then the British Gold Coast Colony (what is now known as Ghana), the witch-finding spirit Nana Tongo became very popular, and many witches were discovered and punished in a variety of ways during the early

⁸⁰ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 4.

⁸¹ Peter Geschiere has noted that in places in West Africa the practice of witchcraft has been legislated against, however the vast majority of African countries do not recognize the existence of witchcraft at the state level, nor does this example resemble the witch-hunts of Early Modern Europe for the reasons argued here and countless others. Peter Geschiere, “Domesticating personal violence: witchcraft, courts and confessions in Cameroon.” *Africa* 64,3 (1994): 323

20th century. However, this hardly resulted in the crisis mentality outlined by Levack that we see in the Early Modern European example. By 1934 rather than picked up by colonial administrators as a matter of serious domestic concern, legislation was passed which further delegitimated local traditional authorities like Nana Tongo. Order in Council no. 28 “the Native Customs (Witch and Wizard finding) Order” in fact took witch-finding off the books and made the practice itself illegal.⁸² It is well documented that modern African witchcraft can be the cause of many social anxieties and “uncertainties.”⁸³ However, witchcraft is more commonly considered to occupy an undesirable but intrinsically important part of many African cultures. It can be understood that witchcraft is largely accepted as a fact of life for many Africans, one that must be dealt with and negotiated at times. Unlike the Early Modern European example, it is not perceived by elites as a threat to the established social order, nor is it seen as the result of a diabolical pact with the devil.⁸⁴

To provide an example local to Ghana, Nigerian born Ghanaian scholar Gabriel Bannerman-Richter points out that for the Akan people (a large cultural demographic of the country) “witchcraft is not a religion...it is not Satanism, which advocates worshipping the devil as a deity and desecrating the holy and the sublime.”⁸⁵ Neither is witchcraft in Africa the result of a set of coincidental or necessary preconditions. It is not even known definitively if, or when, there was a precondition to witchcraft with respect to African cultures. It is important to note here, that witchcraft is not merely a brief phase of African history with a definable ending as in the European example. Instead, it occupies an ongoing and dynamic space in the cultures and

⁸² Jean Allman and John Parker, *Tongnaab: The History of a West African God*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 165, 170

⁸³ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 3.

⁸⁴ Geschiere, “Domesticating personal violence”, 324.

⁸⁵ Bannerman-Richter, *The Practice of Witchcraft in Ghana*, ii

contexts it inhabits.⁸⁶ For these reasons, (and many others) concerns and fears connected with witchcraft do not reach the widespread fever pitch in the Africa of today that we see in the Early Modern European example. This is because they are an accepted part of a lived reality, and have been for generations.

The physical description of how witches actually manifest their power is also significantly different in many African locales. According to Bannerman-Richter, witchcraft is understood in Ghana as a “kind of astral projection in which a human being can vacate her physical body and enter a superphysical world where she can consciously perform actions which she remembers upon waking up.”⁸⁷ Bannerman-Richter further explains that what makes one a witch or not, is what one decides to do with the power granted them by their “spirit allies.”⁸⁸ Are they used for benign or malevolent purposes? The ambiguous nature of the relationship between unseen forces, harm, healing, and what actually constitutes witchcraft are then part of a complicated matrix of understanding which requires careful consideration. This contrasts from the Early Modern European example in that the witch actually leaves their physical body in order to engage in spiritual activity.

Setting aside the largely academic arguments for the cognitive separation of Early Modern witchcraft from Modern African witchcraft, one can use examples of trials that occur today in Africa in order to provide a more practical perspective. For this comparison I will use witchcraft trials held at the Nae We shrine in Accra, Ghana. This trial format represents the only socially legitimate recourse for individuals who wish to level accusations at someone for practicing witchcraft against them as the Ghanaian state does not recognize, nor prosecute, this

⁸⁶ Todd Sanders, “Reconsidering Witchcraft: Postcolonial Africa and Analytic (un)certainities, *American Anthropologist*, 105, 2 (June 2003): 338, 340

⁸⁷ Gabriel Bannerman-Richter, *The Practice of Witchcraft in Ghana*, (Winona Minnesota: Apollo Books, 1982), ii

⁸⁸ Bannerman-Richter, *The Practice of Witchcraft in Ghana*, ii

offence. Simon Panfo, the High Court Registrar of Accra notes that he is aware of the trials held at Nae We but argues that one cannot “prove” that someone is a witch.⁸⁹ The state is thus aware of the trials held at Nae We. However, it does not choose to interfere with the internal affairs of the shrine, nor is it willing to undertake the prosecution of witchcraft-related trials. Using the trial records and interviews provided by officials at the Nae We shrine, one can provide a glimpse into how a witchcraft trial is carried out in Accra.

A typical trial at Nae We consists of a plaintiff and a defendant (sometimes represented by two or three witnesses who can speak on their behalf)⁹⁰ with a panel of shrine officials sitting opposite and presiding over the proceedings, each with a particular role. There is a priest (head of the shrine), a secretary (record keeper), a linguist (sometimes two of them and they are in charge of translating and presenting the officials during the trial),⁹¹ as well as a variety of elders on the panel. A minimum of three of these officials are required for a trial to proceed.⁹² The shrine also collects a sum of money from each trial participant that goes towards the maintenance of the facility.⁹³ The plaintiff initiates a trial by reporting a grievance or accusation to the shrine. These grievances can cover a wide variety of relatively minor offences, the most common of which are defamation of character or insult cases (which are often the result of a public witchcraft accusation). These are recorded in the trial documents as “charges”.⁹⁴ For a fee, shrine officials then dispatch a bailiff to deliver a summons-to-appear at the Nae We shrine to the defendant. The priest of the shrine, or elder shrine official, nominally heads the panel and asks a

⁸⁹ Simon Panfo, High Court Registrar, Interview conducted on May 17th, 2012 at the Nae We shrine in Accra, Ghana by Dr. Jonathan Roberts.

⁹⁰ George Larlai Blankson a.k.a “Landlord”, Chief Baliff, Interview conducted on June 9th, 2012, at the Nae We shrine in Accra, Ghana by Dr. Jonathan Roberts.

⁹¹ Michael Kotey Okyeare, Linguist, Interview conducted on May 16th, 2012, at Nae We shrine in Accra, Ghana by Dr. Jonathan Roberts.

⁹² Numo Tumo mli Yartey III, Head of the Nae We Family, Interview conducted on May 13th, 2012 in Accra, Ghana by Dr. Jonathan Roberts.

⁹³ Numo Tumo, Head of the Nae We Family, May 13th, 2012.

⁹⁴ 2006. August 18th. Nae We Trial Documents, 1984-2013

series of questions to both the defendant and the plaintiff in an effort to uncover the “truth” of the matter at hand.⁹⁵ Interestingly, the defendant in a trial is allowed to cross examine the plaintiff directly in an attempt to prove their innocence, and witnesses are not generally preferred by the panel as they may give false testimony.⁹⁶ After the hearing, the panel retires to a segregated shrine room in order to come to an acceptable consensus on what decision to pass. Trial documents from Nae We reveal that even plaintiffs can be found guilty of an offence.⁹⁷ If found guilty of witchcraft, the most common punishment is to have to provide the materials and cash required to cleanse the witchcraft spirit, also known as “purification.”⁹⁸ Sometimes a cash settlement can be made outside of the trial and it is also common for the guilty party to have to cover the court fees.⁹⁹

This trial configuration contrasts starkly to that of the Early Modern European witchcraft model, which focused on the use of torture to obtain not only confessions, but further names for prosecution in this manner.¹⁰⁰ No one was safe from a possible accusation during the large chain reaction witch-hunts in Europe, even high level officials and elites could face prosecution as a result of accusations given under torture. These prosecutions often resulted in an inevitable confession, followed by a summary execution.¹⁰¹ This approach was often characterized by a sole official, such as a magistrate, who was in charge of passing decisions which regularly involved the most extreme forms of punishment including torture and death. European trials also regularly featured a prosecutor or inquisitor and no defense for the accused. While many people were in fact acquitted, the gravity of the number of those who were not, and of those who were

⁹⁵ Michael Kotey, *Linguist*, May 16th, 2012

⁹⁶ Michael Kotey, *Linguist*, May 16th, 2012.

⁹⁷ 2006. December 6th. Nae We Trial Documents, 1984-2013

⁹⁸ 2006. December 6th. Nae We Trial Documents, 1984-2013

⁹⁹ 2006. December 6th. Nae We Trial Documents, 1984-2013

¹⁰⁰ “The Trial and Confessions”, (1896) (public domain)

¹⁰¹ “The Confession of Niclas Fiedler at Trier, 1591”, 175.

doubtless innocent of the charges, remains a central feature of the legacy of the European witch-hunts to this day.

It should be understood that some of the similar features of Early Modern European witchcraft and Modern African witchcraft, such as the belief in unseen forces which can cause harm, are superficial when compared to the differences between them. Large structural institutions such as the Church, academia, and governing authorities, which helped drive the European witch-hunts forward, are not present in the African experience. Neither are codified literary configurations like diabolism. Nor is a unified iconography like the one represented by discourses and images of the Sabbath. That these two examples share the term “witchcraft” can lead to a conflation in popular Western conceptions, one that is couched in Eurocentric perceptions of what witchcraft is, rather than the actual African experience of witchcraft itself. Africa contains a vast constellation of cultures and understandings about witchcraft which ultimately cannot even be amalgamated into a single form from which to even draw an initial comparison. The example of a Ghanaian witch trial reveals that in some parts of Africa witchcraft, while taken seriously, carries far less serious consequences than its Early Modern European counterpart. Every time, place, and space occupies its own unique historical context. It is therefore imperative that one avoids ahistorical cognitive conflations.

What do we mean when we say *witchcraft* in an African context?

Recent scholarship still often uses “witchcraft” as a catch-all phrase, commonly with negative overtones, to refer to a variety of African material and cultural forms that are connected with unseen forces. This academic habit obfuscates the diverse realities of access to unseen forces in the African context. Depending on the context of its setting, the term witchcraft can be broken down into a variety of acts which tap into unseen forces including divination, healing,

sorcery, and anti-witchcraft or witch-finding activity. Levack contends that even in the Early Modern European example, the term witchcraft confuses the potential for magic to be used for positive purposes, or “white witchcraft.”¹⁰² As recent scholarship suggests, each instance of witchcraft-related culture in Africa should be carefully attended to for the unique characteristics which it exhibits. As such, I will differentiate between the different aspects of what is often simply called “witchcraft” in an attempt to refrain from perpetuating a reductionist technique.

Jan Vansina argues that to the sub-Saharan African worldview, a variety of invisible forces other than just the overtly negative forces associated with the term witchcraft have each occupied their own unique “cognitive reality.”¹⁰³ Vansina’s analysis is in specific regards to the Bantu speaking peoples as a result of what is now known as the Bantu cultural migration. The Bantu cultural migration refers to the gradual movement (over hundreds of generations) of peoples, culture, and discernibly similar linguistic patterns all over West, Central, and South Africa. Vansina contends that this process began circa 3000 B.C. Using techniques of both glottochronology and linguistic regression analysis, which tracks the use of core words and concepts across hundreds of languages, Vansina has demonstrated that the term “witchcraft” is widely understood to be associated with an evil enterprise. Witchcraft is thus power that is used only to cause death or serious malady.¹⁰⁴ Witchcraft in this sense is often associated with the term sorcery. Vansina argues that diviners, herbalists, ritualists, healers, and other professionals who have access to invisible forces are (and have been) each understood by African people in terms of the craft which they practice, and *not* as witches.¹⁰⁵ The recent work of Karen E. Flint on the healing traditions of Zululand during the 19th and 20th centuries also clearly demarcates

¹⁰² Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 11

¹⁰³ Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforest: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 72

¹⁰⁴ Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforest*, 94-98

¹⁰⁵ Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforest*, 94-98

the difference between those who are thought to have practiced witchcraft and those who have acted in the capacity of healers or as witch-finders.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, simply for the benefit of Western shorthand, individuals who work with a variety of unseen forces, and for a plethora of diverse reasons, should not be automatically represented as witches.

Ghanaian medical sociologist P.A. Twumasi has shown that in the Ghanaian context, different types of access to unseen forces are easily discernible from each other and should not be lumped together using the singular term witchcraft. For example, Twumasi has demonstrated a clear difference between the traditional practices of healing and the negative forces which are employed through witchcraft or sorcery. He identifies four main kinds of healers, traditional birth attendants, faith healers, spiritualists (or diviners), and traditional herbalists.¹⁰⁷ Diviners, also known as “fetish priests”¹⁰⁸, are the main type of traditional healer whose practice of their craft may be misconstrued as witchcraft by one unfamiliar to the differences. These healers have special access to spiritual agents and can use this relationship to diagnose and heal illnesses through possession, divination, or by other ritual means.¹⁰⁹ Twumasi contends that such healers are the first to be consulted for treatment when one feels that they are under a spiritual attack as a result of witchcraft. Divination is thus an aspect of traditional healing which has access to unseen forces, but which stands diametrically opposed to the concept of witchcraft as laid out by contemporary Western academics and which is understood by many African peoples.¹¹⁰ This argument is further evidence for the need to cognitively separate the varying forms of power which can be accessed via unseen forces in the African context.

¹⁰⁶ Karen E. Flint, *Healing Traditions: African Medicine, Cultural Exchange, and Competition in South Africa, 1820-1948*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), x, 93

¹⁰⁷ P.A. Twumasi, *Medical Systems in Ghana: A Study in Medical Sociology*, (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1975), 25

¹⁰⁸ Twumasi, *Medical Systems in Ghana*, 27

¹⁰⁹ Twumasi, *Medical Systems in Ghana*, 27

¹¹⁰ Twumasi, *Medical Systems in Ghana*, 28

Following in this line of argument, another category which is often misconstrued with witchcraft in Western discourses is its opposite, anti-witchcraft or witch-finding. Jane Parish argues that protection from witchcraft can be procured in a number of ways for those who fear the threat of a witchcraft attack. In the case of Ghanaian immigrants in the United Kingdom, Parish notes that victims of witchcraft could seek the help of “native doctors” who could perform customized rituals as well as provide them with “protective talismans” which could shield them from spiritual attacks which had not yet occurred.¹¹¹ Parish further contends that the consultation of such powerful diviners at witchcraft finding shrines could serve as a means of “financial protection” or “spiritual insurance” from the loss of gambling bets to greedy relatives who have turned to witchcraft as a means of expressing their displeasure or jealousy.¹¹²

Historians John Parker and Jean Allman contend that there are many shrines with spiritual deities connected to them which focus on providing witch finding services. They argue that a variety of named gods such as Tongnaab, which originated in the Tong Hills of North Eastern Ghana, have historically seen surges in popularity and influence and have been adopted as a tool to combat instances of witchcraft. For example, in Southern Ghana Tongnaab became known as “Nana Tongo” in the early twentieth century at the height of colonial rule, and was “focused overwhelmingly on finding and healing, or on securing protection from, individuals regarded as ‘witches.’”¹¹³ It can then be said that the use of unseen or occult forces for the purpose of defending against witchcraft attacks should also remain situated well apart from witchcraft itself in any treatment of this complex topic.

¹¹¹ Parish, “Witchcraft, riches and roulette”, 111

¹¹² Parish, “Witchcraft, riches and roulette”, 117

¹¹³ Allman and Parker, *Tongnaab*. 16, 125

To offer an example local to the subject of this thesis, the most commonly spoken language in Accra, Ghana (the locality of the Nae We shrine) is Ga. For many of the trials held at Nae We, Ga is the primary language used. A Ga-English dictionary compiled by M.E. Kropp Dakubu reveals no connection between the meanings of the word *witch* and that of those who practice healing, divination, or magic. This is pertinent because various manifestations of these acts are often conflated with the blanket term *witchcraft* in Western discourses. Dakubu defines the Ga word for witch, *ayɛ* as “devil, witch, witchcraft.”¹¹⁴ The word for witchcraft itself, *ayɛkpɛmɔ* translates evenly into “witchcraft.”¹¹⁵ It can be understood that in the context of the Ga language, the term witchcraft is a stand-in for overtly negative forces. If we move on to the Ga word for heal, (which as noted above can often be conflated with witchcraft due to the processes involved with divination) *tɕa* is defined as to “join, link, add to...s/he mended...heal, cure.”¹¹⁶ The word divine in its verb form (*to divine*), *gba* also contains no negative overtones and means to “tell, divulge...s/he told me the truth...prophecy.”¹¹⁷ Finally, the word for magic, *akunya* refers to “magic rites...a kind of charm.”¹¹⁸ Clearly, the acts of divination and healing are not viewed with the same negative outlook as that of witchcraft with respect to the Ga language. Bannerman-Richter argues that the term *witch* was simply applied by Europeans as a means to describe African involvement with supernatural powers. Among the Akan of Ghana for instance, there already existed a word for one who practices and dispenses evil - *obonsam*. If true, then the persistence of this vague umbrella term to denote solely negative outcomes may be the result of an incompatible translation, one which does not truly capture the diverse meanings of access to unseen forces in the Ghanaian context.

¹¹⁴ M.E. Kropp Dakubu, *Ga-English Dictionary*, (Accra: Black Mask Ltd. 1999), 32

¹¹⁵ Dakubu, *Ga-English Dictionary*, 32

¹¹⁶ Dakubu, *Ga-English Dictionary*, 159

¹¹⁷ Dakubu, *Ga-English Dictionary*, 55

¹¹⁸ Dakubu, *Ga-English Dictionary*, 22

Historian Jonathan Roberts shows that aspects of the Ga language have dynamically benefitted from Akan derived terms with respect to the conceptualization of how unseen forces can affect human beings. Roberts argues that there exists a set of two terms in the Ga language which are Akan derived and refer specifically to “states of health in the body.” These terms are *susuma* and *kla*.¹¹⁹ The *susuma* can be roughly understood as a spiritual part of the body which can have a direct effect on its physical health. According to Roberts, having a weak *susuma* can leave one vulnerable to a witchcraft attack, whereas a strong *susuma* can help protect an individual from the malice of witches. Strongly related to, but separate from the *susuma*, is *kla*. *Kla* can be considered to be the part of an individual which continues to exist after the death of the body, or a “divine spark.”¹²⁰ According to Roberts, the *susuma* of a witch can be used to leave their body in order to attack or consume someone’s *kla*. In this context, anti-witchcraft procedure then relies on purging the attacking *susuma* from a victim or “defending the ravaged *kla*.” Roberts argues that this understanding of unseen bodily forces and witch finding practice is exclusive to the Akan or Ga linguistic group.¹²¹ These terms then provide further insight to how the activities of witches, and subsequent opposition to them, are perceived in Ghana. They also help to illuminate how truly limiting the term *witchcraft* can be in the modern African context.

The purpose of this chapter has been two-fold. First, I argue against conflating Early Modern European witch-hunts and the cultural and material forms which make up witchcraft-related practices in the modern African context. Second, I show that many of the acts which are commonly referred to as witchcraft by contemporary Western literature may not even be considered to be acts of witchcraft by those who live with them. Many certainly are not considered to be acts of witchcraft with respect to the Ga language, or the locality of this

¹¹⁹ Dr. Jonathan Roberts, *A History of Healing in Accra*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Dalhousie University, 2014

¹²⁰ Roberts, *A History of Healing in Accra*, 2014.

¹²¹ Roberts, *A History of Healing in Accra*, 2014.

research in Accra, Ghana. The ambiguous nature of the terms and understandings connected with the unseen forces associated with witchcraft, healing, witch finding, and divination further render easy dichotomous explanations impossible. If we are to discuss the lived reality of witchcraft as it is perceived in the context of African localities, then it behooves us to struggle to remain as clear as possible with respect to these complex terms and differentiations.

Chapter Three

The Shrines of Ghana

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will outline the diversity of compositions, and purposes, of some of the shrines that can be found throughout Ghana. It will also introduce some historical examples of shrine-related witch finding movements in Ghana as they provide a context for any discussion concerning the Nae We shrine in Accra. Using an analytical framework put forth by John Parker, the second section will specifically attend to the configuration, activities, and roles played by the Nae We shrine. This section will show that while the shrine of Nae We has all the trappings of a court, the shrine is better understood as a vibrant cultural space where witchcraft-related trials are also held.

Shrines, witch finding, and spiritual mobility in Ghana.

The physical compositions of shrines in Ghana are as varied as the locales in which they are situated. A shrine can be a particular outdoor location or cleared area, like those made by the Dagara in northwestern Ghana. Such shrines are adorned with only a single but specific stone which can be used to make animal sacrifices to an earth deity in order to appeal for the fertility of women, or for bountiful soil.¹²² Other shrines can be found in busy indoor urban locations, like the one inhabited by the water god Mami Wata in Aflao, an Ewe speaking region bordering Togo. For its followers, this shrine constitutes a physical location where Mami Wata can be petitioned for material wealth and fortune.¹²³ The powerful anti-witchcraft deity Tongnaab is

¹²² Carola Lentz, "Of Hunters, Goats and Earth-Shrines: Settlement Histories and the Politics of Oral Tradition in Northern Ghana" *History in Africa*, 27, (2000), 197-193-214

¹²³ Lentz, "Of Hunters, Goats and Earth-Shrines", 193-214

known to inhabit a particular cave nestled in the Tong Hills of northern Ghana.¹²⁴ Such shrines can contain everything from wooden or stone sculptures of the deity, to plastic toys, even Christian or Muslim memorabilia.¹²⁵ Shrines may thus configure themselves in a variety of locations, shapes, and sizes. They can even spread their influence abroad or outright move to new locations.¹²⁶ It is common for shrines to be administered by individuals who are specialists concerning the god to whom a given shrine may be dedicated. There is often a complex political configuration at play in the dynamics of shrines as there may be many individuals involved with the day to day operations. Such individuals can include elders, priests, spirit mediums, administrators, fetish priests, and other officials.

According to John Parker and Jean Allman, the first recorded witch finding movement in the Gold Coast was Domankama or “the creator.” Domankama was a spirit god who provided access to powers necessary to combat *bayi* (the twi word for witchcraft).¹²⁷ This short-lived movement lasted from 1879-1883 in the Ashanti region until it was crushed by the then ruling Asante state. Allman and Parker contend that, like later witch finding movements, Domankama employed three main steps to eradicate witchcraft. First, the deity would be sought to identify those who were active practitioners of witchcraft. Secondly, those who were found to be witches would be cured of their affliction and finally, they would be incorporated into the movement itself.¹²⁸ This configuration differs from that of the Nae We shrine of Accra with respect to witch-finding. This is because there is no official strategy to re-absorb those who are found to be witches into the structure of Nae We, or its body of followers.

¹²⁴ Allman and Parker, *Tongnaa*, 3, 37

¹²⁵ Tobias Wendl, “Visions of modernity in Ghana: Mami Wata shrines, photo studios and horror films”, *Visual Anthropology*, 14, no. 3 (2001): 273

¹²⁶ Allman and Parker, *Tongnaa*, 6

¹²⁷ Allman and Parker, *Tongnaa*, 126

¹²⁸ Allman and Parker, *Tongnaa*, 126

Another significant witch finding movement on the Gold Coast was Sakrabundi, which was first documented in 1889. The deity later transformed into Aberewa around 1906.¹²⁹ Unlike Domankama, Sakrabundi was an imported god who came to the southern reaches of the Asante region from the Northern grasslands via the Kingdom of Gyaman. Allman and Parker contend that this area served as a “cultural crossroads” both because of its physical position as a well-traveled way point, and as an area which boasted a rich religious and ethnic diversity.¹³⁰ Sakrabundi primarily offered protection “against evil and misfortune.” This god was known to British and French administrators who had heard of a ‘great inland fetish’. This particular fetish, upon pain of death, bound all of its followers to a strict moral code of behavior and was particularly focused on the banishment of witchcraft.¹³¹ Allman and Parker contend that this fact is what put Sakrabundi at odds with colonial administrators, as the deaths of accused witches became a growing problem which had to be addressed. Maurice Delafosse, (a French ethnographer at the time) noted that the consecrated water which was used in Sakrabundi rituals to find witches, cure them, and then kill those who broke the moral codes of conduct, often seemed only to kill wealthy individuals. Delafosse believed that these were deliberately pre-targeted victims for death-by-poisoning because their property would then automatically transfer to the fetish priest. For Delafosse, this amounted to little more than a “murderous extortion racket.”¹³² If Delafosse was correct, then the reason for the deaths of many of those who were accused may have in fact been the result of greed rather than of an honest search for witchcraft, however there is no evidence to suggest that this was the case.

¹²⁹ Allman and Parker, *Tongnaa*, 129

¹³⁰ Allman and Parker, *Tongnaa*, 128

¹³¹ Allman and Parker, *Tongnaa*, 128

¹³² John Parker, “Witchcraft, Anti-witchcraft and Trans-regional Ritual Innovation In Early Colonial Ghana: Sakrabundi and Aberewa, 1889-1910” *Journal of African History* 45 (2004): 402

Parker contends that the Aberewa movement emerged directly from the Sakrabundi movement circa 1906 as a result of heightened intervention of colonial officials with respect to the heavy punishments inflicted for the practice of witchcraft by Sakrabundi. Parker argues that the Aberewa movement thus reflected an indigenous response to the colonial position on their anti-witchcraft strategies. This response resulted in a switch from the harsh punishments administered by Sakrabundi to a focus on healing delivered by Aberewa. This shift may have been caused both by the loss of the Akan chiefs' ability to impose death sentences, as well as the inability of British administrators to validate witchcraft as a reality and therefore a punishable offense.¹³³ For a brief period in 1907, the Aberewa movement was tolerated by British colonial governors as Chief Commissioner of the Ashanti F.C. Fuller was pleased that the movement discouraged criminal activity. Fuller was particularly happy that the movement had a rule which said that its followers should obey the colonial government.¹³⁴ This period quickly ended the following year however when the growing popularity and autonomy of the movement was perceived as a threat by administrators because they felt it undermined their authority. Aberewa was then suppressed by colonial forces and its shrines were destroyed. The god was also officially prohibited.¹³⁵

Parker illuminates the capacity of such shrines to demonstrate innovation and resistance to colonial anti-shrine activity when, during the 1920s the French launched a similar assault on a Sakrabundi shrine complex at Wirekye. Sakrabundi artifacts and shrines were again destroyed by colonial officials. However, Sakrabundi was discretely “brought out” once again, but was now known as Bedu. Bedu, like Aberewa, also underwent minor transformations in order to survive the colonial onslaught by turning into a god which focused on positive social issues such as

¹³³ Parker, “Witchcraft”, 410

¹³⁴ Parker, “Witchcraft”, 414

¹³⁵ Parker, “Witchcraft”, 417

fertility, prevention of epidemics, and internal social control. As a result, Bedu also ingratiated itself to colonial administrators for a time.¹³⁶

Another major witch finding movement which was exported south from the Northern savanna grasslands was Tigare. Allman and Parker contend that Tigare was brought to Yipala by a subject of an Asante chief around 1931, but may have moved south as early as 1914.¹³⁷ Tigare specialized in healing diseases and finding and eliminating witchcraft. By the 1950s, Tigare became the most influential and powerful witch finding god in the entire region, extending all the way to Southwestern Nigeria where it also underwent a shift and became known as “Atinga” to the Yoruba peoples.¹³⁸

The most recent and active form of witch finding in Ghana can be found in examples of Christian churches. Many of these charismatic churches throughout the country offer a syncretic solution to witchcraft by using the authority of the bible and of God to make claims about the ability to find and exorcise witches. Bannermna-Richter argues that preachers of these churches claim to have the ability to spot witches in their congregation. After calling on the Holy Spirit to cleanse the individual of witchcraft, they then charge the witch “exorbitant fees” as an offering of gratitude or thanks for providing the procedure.¹³⁹

There are several important aspects to Parker, Allman, and Bannerman-Richter’s analysis. They show that while there is always the potential for ambiguity to exist, witchcraft is a very different practice from witch finding, it is thus critical to keep this fact in mind when writing and thinking about witchcraft itself. They also confirm the assertions of many contemporary scholars with respect to the dynamic and adaptive nature of Ghanaian witchcraft-

¹³⁶ Parker, “Witchcraft”, 419

¹³⁷ Allman and Parker, *Tongnaa*, 140

¹³⁸ Allman and Parker, *Tongnaa*, 140

¹³⁹ Bannerman-Richter, *The Practice of Witchcraft in Ghana*, 10,11

related culture through their descriptions of a variety of the Ghanaian witch finding movements and shrines. This is particularly true with respect to the response of the shrines over time to changing social, political, and economic circumstances. This demonstrates two important aspects of spiritual and witchcraft-related culture in Ghana. First, witchcraft has been subject to change over time, and has adapted to the needs of those who made use of it in the past. This helps to explain its continued adaptation and practice today. It provides a consistently relevant means of cultural expression, communication, and interaction with the world of unseen forces. Secondly, shrines can physically move through space and time in order to combat witchcraft. The gods associated with them can also metaphysically travel in order to continue inhabiting them. This fact provides an interesting contrast to the Nae We Shrine as it has never been moved from its physical ancestral home in Accra. It has existed for hundreds of years in that locale. It is also interesting to note, that while not strictly part of a witch finding movement, the Nae We shrine can be understood as a site which can provide the service of witch finding, prosecution, and punishment.

The Nae We Shrine.

There is evidence that prior to the 19th century, Accra was historically controlled by the Ga people and a priestly class which belonged to a “triumvirate of paramount deities.”¹⁴⁰ These priests were known as the *wulomei* and were responsible for the leadership of the shrine houses that were dedicated to the paramount gods. The three paramount deities of Accra, or *jemawoji*, were connected with natural landmarks and were known as: Nae, the goddess of the sea and commerce, Korle, the goddess of a local lagoon and protector of the city, and Sakumo, a male god who was influential in matters of war and martial combat. As goddess of the sea, the Nae

¹⁴⁰ Dr. Jonathan Roberts, *A History of Healing in Accra*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Dalhousie University, 2014

We shrine was able to benefit from early contact with European slave traders by imposing tariffs, appropriating rum, and securing other goods from ships which came to Accra in search of slaves.¹⁴¹ The three paramount gods of Accra continue to inhabit shrines administered by *wulomei* to this day.

The Nae We shrine is located in a crowded and vibrant urban neighborhood called Bukom in downtown central Accra. According to the Ghanaian government, Bukom falls under the category of a “4th class Residential Area.”¹⁴² This means that there is little economic statistical data on this neighborhood and that it is amongst the lowest income areas in the city. Because Accra is the ancestral home of the Ga people, they still informally maintain various forms of cultural authority.¹⁴³ This includes the oversight of local holiday celebrations, as well as the maintenance of local multi-purpose sites of spiritual leadership like the Nae We shrine. In addition to serving as social and spiritual centers, shrines like the one at Nae We are capable of acting as forums for dispute resolution by providing the means for relatively minor accusations to be heard by the shrine’s elders in a trial format.

Parker employs an analytic framework which focuses his research on Ghanaian shrines to three central components. First, the *shrines* themselves as sanctified places of practice, worship, and material cultural forms. Second, the *substances* associated with a particular shrine, what the shrines are made of, what materials are used, how they are configured, where they are located, and how they may be imbued with supernatural power.¹⁴⁴ Finally, the *medicines* used by a

¹⁴¹ Dr. Jonathan Roberts, *A History of Healing in Accra*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Dalhousie University, 2014

¹⁴² “4th Class Residential Area,” in *Demographic Characteristics*, http://ama.ghanadistricts.gov.gh/?arrow=atd&_=3&sa=3004 (accessed April 2014)

¹⁴³ A. Quartay-Papafio, Boi, “The Ga Homowo Festival”, *Journal of the Royal African Society* 19, no. 74 (January, 1920) 129

Numo Tumo mli Yartey III, Head of the Nae We Family, Interview conducted on May 13th, 2012 in Accra, Ghana by Dr. Jonathan Roberts.

¹⁴⁴ John Parker, “Earth and Shadow: Substance, Medicine and mobility in the history of Ghana’s Tongnaab Shrines” *Anthropology & Medicine*, 18, No. 2, (August 2011): 258

particular shrine, how they may be employed, by whom, the discourses of “health and healing” which may exist in relation to them, as well as ritual specialists and the role they may play in the medicines and healing of the shrine.¹⁴⁵

Placing the shrine at Nae We into this framework can help to provide an ethnographic context for understanding the trials which are held there. With respect to the physical characteristics of Nae We, it is situated in the inner urban area of the capital city of Ghana, Accra. As Nae is understood to be a female goddess of the sea, the shrine is conveniently located about a five minute walk from the coast and a sanctified outcropping of rock in a small cove which is surrounded by ocean water. This rock represents *Osekan* the so-called child of Nae, as Nae is believed to exist in the sea itself.¹⁴⁶ The shrine is situated in a building which has an open air component as it is still under construction. This building is roughly forty by eighty feet with a large open concept central room where trials, ceremonies, and day-to-day administrative business of the shrine take place. There is an office where many of the trial documents are kept, and which is often used by the secretary (record keeper, not a receptionist). Another room which adjoins the central hall serves as another library of trial documents as well as a deliberation chamber for the shrine’s elders during trials. A mural painted on the back wall of the shrine and which faces anyone who enters the shrine depicts the words “Nae-We” on the top and a banner below which reads “1734 acknowledged as king of Akra.” Interestingly, the image depicts a thatched roof house on the left hand side and an Early Modern era Dutch ship on the right (the words “Jan Pranger of Dutch” are what reveal the nationality). The center of the mural is dominated by a black and a white hand shaking hands. This image, although not clear when it was painted, indicates that there exists a local tradition where the Nae We shrine, and its

¹⁴⁵ John Parker, “Earth and Shadow”, 258

¹⁴⁶ A. Boi Quartay-Papafio, “Native Tribunals of the Akras”, *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 11, no. 41 (October, 1911): 322

authority have existed in Accra at least as far back as 1734. Furthermore, it strongly adds to the evidence that there existed a relationship with Dutch Europeans who visited this region as slave traders. The Ewe speaking people of Ghana who also populated this area were known to participate in the slave trade with Europeans.¹⁴⁷ It stands to reason that the Ga, with their control over the port city of Accra, acted as a commercial contact with Dutch interests during this time.

The Nae We shrine also serves as a locus for Ga related holidays and celebrations such as a harvest festival known as *Homowo*. This festival involves city wide celebrations at the start and end of an annual two month period where loud public noise is forbidden by Ga authorities. With respect to some of the substances employed by the Nae We shrine, the celebrations which bracket this period are marked by the ceremonial planting, and subsequent harvesting, of the corn. It is said that the reason for the ban on loud public music and noise during this period is to better help the corn grow. The celebrations held at the Nae We shrine during the ritual planting of the corn include a public presentation of shrine officials in their ceremonial white dress. There is also a public consumption of a local distilled gin known as *akepteshie*. This drink, or some schnapps (a favored brand of mass produced gin), is also splashed on the ground by the priest, a practice known as pouring libations. Pouring libations occurs when a few words of dedication to a particular spirit, deceased individual, or ancestors are said while spilling alcoholic beverages onto the ground. This practice comes from the idea that the ancestors are always hungry and thirsty. After the pouring of libations, the priest leads the group of shrine officials to the planting site. The water for the corn is laid out at the beginning of the ceremony and specific species of plant are soaked in it before it is later carried by one of the elders to the planting site. All of the male elders, who do not have the burden of water or seed, carry hoes with which to till the soil for the corn. Additionally, during the ceremony at the shrine, but before the officials leave in an

¹⁴⁷Elizabeth Allo Isichei, *Voices of the poor in Africa*, (Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 45

orderly march to the planting site, a variety of spirit mediums become possessed by a variety of local spirits and perform what is known as ecstatic dance. Male spirit mediums are known as *wontsemei*, and female mediums are called *woye*.¹⁴⁸ These spirits are sometimes named gods, but often are not. However, there are individuals such as the shrine priest, or *wulomei*, who is known to have direct contact with specific spirits such as Nae. The Nae We shrine can then be understood to represent an assembly point or aggregation of both peoples and spirits, which inhabit receptive hosts for the purposes of celebration during important cultural events and periods.

As for discourses of health, healing, and medicine present at Nae We, much research is still required. However, we do know that it was not uncommon for the Nae We shrine to have a dedicated ritual specialist or fetish priest(s) on hand at the start of the 20th century.¹⁴⁹ Trial documents reveal that during the second half of the 20th and early 21st centuries, fetish priests are still used by the Nae We shrine to help “purify” curses as a result of trial decisions. These fetish priests may not be permanently on staff.¹⁵⁰ In keeping with ambiguous nature of the subject, the Nae We trial documents reveal that fetish priests are also often the cause of witchcraft-related trials by providing the means for people to cast hexes, ju ju (a type of curse built into a small spiritually imbued object) and curses.¹⁵¹ Such material examples of hexes or ju ju can be brought before the Nae We elders as evidence against another person. However, after the trial, shrine officials throw such items into the sea as a method of using the power of Nae to cleanse the items and “cancel their power.”¹⁵² Fetish priests are remunerated for their services like any other

¹⁴⁸ Dr. Jonathan Roberts, *A History of Healing in Accra*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Dalhousie University, 2014

¹⁴⁹ Quartay-Papafio, “Native Tribunals of the Akras”, 322

¹⁵⁰ 2006. August 14th, Nae We Trial Documents, 1984-2013

¹⁵¹ Nae We Trial Documents, Date of Trial Document: July 9th, 1994.

¹⁵² Michael Kotey Okyeare, Nae We Linguist, Interview conducted on May 16th, 2012 in Accra, Ghana by Dr. Jonathan Roberts.

profession, so how these services are employed often becomes a question for the customer rather than a moral dilemma for the fetish priest. Interviews with shrine officials and trial documents also reveal that “medicines” can be used to effect either a positive or negative outcome in Accra. The primary Linguist of the shrine, Joseph Nii Yarboi Amugi explains that sometimes people will create concoctions, which can be either wet or in powder form, and pour them out while saying a few words, or someone’s name, in order to cast a curse upon them. Amugi recalls one trial which dealt with an individual who collected the footprints of someone and poured a curse into them in order to “destroy” the individual. As such, Amungi explains, anyone can take on the power of Nae in order to either destroy, or heal someone.¹⁵³

The Nae We shrine is thus positioned within a rich and diverse historical tradition of Ghanaian shrines which are each dedicated to a myriad of particular spirits and named gods, and which can serve a variety of purposes. While the Nae We shrine has not demonstrated the mobility we have seen from other examples of named witch finding gods, Nae does participate both in witch finding and spiritual leadership. The Nae We shrine thus provides a social space where a variety of activities take place. It is a site for the settlement of grievances - such as domestic violence or witchcraft-related accusations, assistance in healing or rectifying the wrongs of these infractions, spiritual leadership and guidance, and serves as a center for social celebrations. It is not just a court, rather a vibrant social setting where witchcraft-related trials are also held. It is important to keep the context of this highly socialized location and organization in mind when analysing the data from its trials.

¹⁵³ Joseph Nii Yarboi Amugi, Primary Linguist of Nae We shrine, Interview conducted on May 13th, 2012 in Accra, Ghana by Dr. Jonathan Roberts.

Chapter Four

Nae We Findings

Notes on method and sources

Over 12,000 digitized images have been taken from the trial records at the Nae We shrine. Each image used in this research is a high resolution picture of a hand-written record, or document pertaining to a trial held at the Nae We shrine between 1984 and 2013 (see appendix A1). In the summers of 2012 and 2013 the images were taken on location, inside the Nae We shrine. Artificial lighting was used and each image is shot to a standard in accordance with the guidelines laid out by the British Library's *Endangered Archives Program* as these digitized documents will be stored and made accessible by that institution. The work of photographing these documents was part of a research project headed by Jonathan Roberts entitled "The Shrines of Accra: Witchcraft and Curse Trial records at the paramount shrines of Nai, Korle and Sakumo We, Accra, Ghana." One of the focuses of this project is the digital preservation of the Nae We trial documents for research and study. Permission to view and photograph these documents was negotiated, documented, and secured between the research team and shrine officials. The purpose and intentions behind capturing these images was also made perfectly clear and fully informed consent was achieved according to tri-council policy.¹⁵⁴

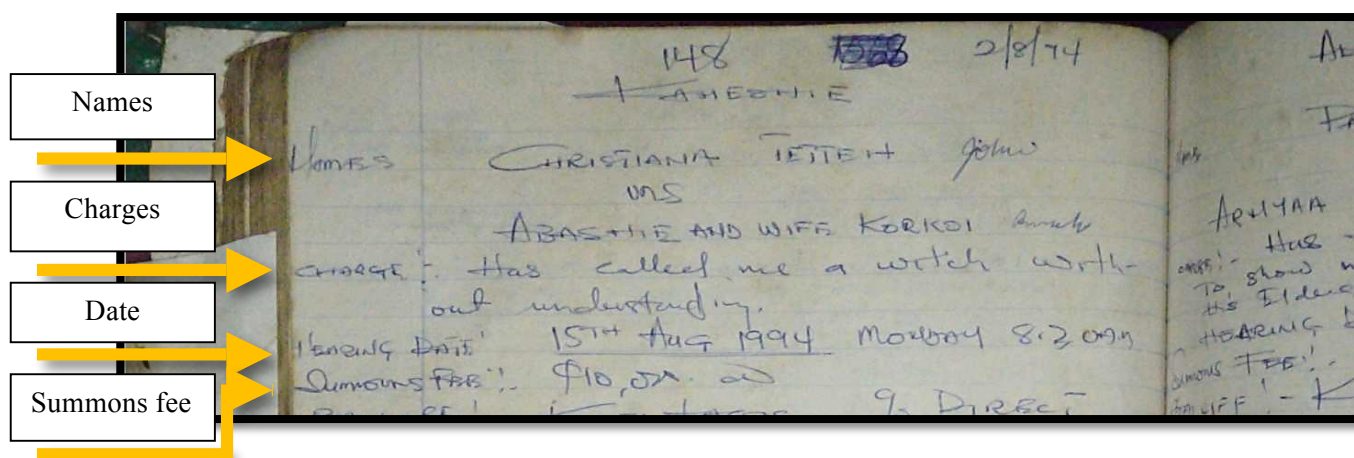
The trial documents are primarily contained in ledgers. These ledgers range in size, length, and color. They are stored in back rooms, offices, or in stacks on the desks of the Nae We shrine. These locations are regularly exposed to open air and elements from the outside environment. As a result, many of the ledgers have collected, and were damaged by, large

¹⁵⁴ "TCPS2," in *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (2010), <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tcps2/TCPS_2_FINAL_Web.pdf> (accessed April 2014)

amounts of dirt, dust, and debris over the years (see appendix A2). The Nae We shrine maintains an informal system of record keeping where senior officials at the shrine such as the secretary, know the whereabouts of any documents that may be required at any given time. Many small notes, letters, or updates pertinent to a given trial were found tucked into, or stapled onto, various trial records. Each of these peripheral documents has also been individually digitally captured (see appendix A3).

There are small inconsistencies from year to year with regards to the authoring and format of these documents. This could be attributed to different individuals holding the position of secretary over the years. As shown in figure one, generally speaking, each trial document contains several recurring features: the date, the names of the plaintiffs and the defendants, the summons fee, the charges against the accused, and the status of the case (e.g. withdrawn, adjourned, dismissed, settled, verdict, judgment). Additionally, if a trial is successfully completed and a decision or judgment is made, then the document will feature a verdict with sentences for the convicted.

Figure 1



As noted in chapter two, witchcraft-related sentences at Nae We most often involve the guilty party having to pay the cash required to cover the costs of the trial. The guilty party may

also have to provide the materials and cash required to cleanse the witchcraft spirit. In the documents this is referred to as *purification* (see appendix A4). With regards to covering the costs of the trial, the documents suggest that the plaintiff and the defendant accrue their own individual balances with the shrine for receiving the service of the trial itself. However, if one is found to be guilty, than that person is often sentenced to pay not only their own balance, but the opposing participants balance as well. This is often expressed in the documents as “to pay costs” or “to pacify” the defendant or plaintiff (see appendix A5).¹⁵⁵ Due to the sheer volume of documents, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to review all of the trials from the past thirty years and further research is required. However, all of the trials from a sample of three separate years: 1984, 1994, and 2006 have been reviewed. The number of trials totalled over 800 and all of the pertinent data concerning the witchcraft-related trials has been compiled.

The records are hand-written in English, usually by the secretary during the trial, but only after he personally translates them from the language being spoken. The trials are conducted orally, in either Ga or Twi. Each document contains a record of the charges levelled by the plaintiff against the defendant. These are often delivered in a brief summarized format by the author. For example, a common charge might read “has called me a witch.”¹⁵⁶ This is an example of a witchcraft-related trial. In the context of the Nae We trials, I use the term *witchcraft-related* to refer to any instance of actual witchcraft (e.g. curses, juju, hexes,) or a trial that involves the accusation of witchcraft activity. These charges do not represent direct quotations. There is no way to assure that a completely accurate translation was initially made by the secretary because the charges show a pattern of repeating phraseology which is so consistent that it extremely unlikely that every plaintiff used the exact same words again and again. The

¹⁵⁵ Nae We Trial documents, date of trial document, August 8th, 1994

¹⁵⁶ Nae We Trial documents, date of trial document, May 7th 1994

officials who wrote these records tended to add or omit certain words from the participant's testimony in an effort to paraphrase (in this chapter the term *participant* can refer to either the defendants or plaintiffs in the Nae We trials). In 1984, 27 percent of the witchcraft-related trials included the exact phrase "without reason" within the short text listing of the charge. In 1994, 23 percent of the witchcraft-related cases included the precise phrase "before Nai and his elders" in the charges. These phrases are also very common in the non-witchcraft-related trials. While it is possible that each of these plaintiffs used these exact words as a matter of protocol, a familiarity with the writing styles of the record keepers leads to a different conclusion. Simply put, one must be careful not to take every word of the charges sections of these documents as representing the voice of trial participants, and to maintain a critical eye for inconsistencies.

This chapter presents the data found in the Nae We documents. It includes information on the rate and type of witchcraft-related accusations at the Nae We shrine. One of the most glaring lacunae in recent scholarship is the absence of hard statistical data to back up the widely held belief that women bear the brunt of witchcraft-related accusations.¹⁵⁷ I will demonstrate that the trial documents of Nae We provide a rich source of data on male and female participation in these trials through the record left of their names. I will also demonstrate and provide interpretations for the high number of cases which are incomplete or withdrawn. Additionally, the form, composition, and severity of the judgments of the Nae We shrine officials are available in these documents and I will provide an analysis which draws on all of the available data. Information concerning the expenses incurred by both the plaintiffs and defendants is also available for analysis. I will thus make interpretations concerning economic aspects of these trials. Drawing on these analyses I will assess the Nae We shrine within the historiographical

¹⁵⁷ Ashforth, "On Living in a World with Witches" 216,
Bannerman-Richter, *The Practice of Witchcraft in Ghana*, ii
Parish, "Witchcraft, riches and roulette", 107

context featured in the first chapter of this thesis. I will argue that in addition to being unique to its local context with respect to witchcraft-related activity and resolution, being found guilty of witchcraft is better explained by the internal economy of the shrine, the cost of being found guilty at Nae We, and incomplete trials, than by economic inequalities between participants, gender, or kinship relations.

Findings

One finding of interest concerns the number of witchcraft-related cases as a percentage of the total number of cases heard at the Nae We shrine over the sample three years. The table below shows that in 1984, 30 percent of the total number of trials held at the Nae We shrine were witchcraft-related. In 1994, this number dropped to 21 percent. In 2006, the number rose slightly to 27 percent. Further research must be done in order to ascertain whether or not the drop in ratio during the year of 1994 was part of a pattern or simply represents a statistical anomaly. This preliminary data indicates that the percentage of witchcraft-related trials out of the total number of trials held at Nae We is neither increasing nor decreasing dramatically.

	1984	1994	2006
Total number of trials held at Nae We	145	501	200
Total number of witchcraft-related trials	44	106	54

Table 1: prevalence of witchcraft-related trials

In the sample years studied, an average of 47 percent of the witchcraft-related cases were withdrawn by the plaintiff, cancelled because the defendant did not show up for trial, or settled

outside of the sphere of the Nae We shrine's authority.¹⁵⁸ For the purpose of this work, these trials are called incomplete. There is no evidence that there were any consequences for either the defendants or the plaintiffs who were initially involved with incomplete proceedings. The table below shows the rate of completion for Nae We trials over the sample three years. For a trial to be successfully completed it must reach a verdict and/or pass a sentence. An average of only 27 percent of the witchcraft-related trials at Nae We were successfully completed. Another group of trials, titled "other" in the table below, included the names of a plaintiff and a defendant, the charges against the defendant, a hearing date, and a summons fee, but lacked any follow up data on whether or not the trial was resolved in any way. The written entries simply stop after recording the initial trial data. These cases made up a relatively small but notable number of the total witchcraft-related cases. In 1984, 1994, and 2006, they represented 13, 15, and 14 percent of the witchcraft-related trials at Nae We respectively.

	1984	1994	2006
Total witchcraft-related trials	43	106	54
Number of incomplete trials	24	48	23
Number of successfully completed trials	18	42	23
Other (no data on outcome)	6	16	8

Table 2: trial completion

In 1984, women represented 76 percent of both the defendants, and the plaintiffs at Nae We witchcraft-related trials. In 1994, they made up 80 percent of the defendants and 66 percent

¹⁵⁸ Nae We Trial documents, 1984-2013

of the plaintiffs. In 2006, 77 percent of the defendants were female and 68 percent of the plaintiffs were also women. The high ratio of females to males amongst the plaintiffs and defendants is significant. The table below shows the number of female and male participants in Nae We witchcraft-related trials over the three sample years. The numbers represented here do not always amount to the total number of witchcraft-related trials because some trials feature small groups of individuals as either plaintiffs, or defendants in a single case. The table demonstrates that women represented the majority of participants on both sides of witchcraft-related accusations.

	1984	1994	2006
Total witchcraft-related trials	43	106	54
Number female defendants	33	85	42
Number of male defendants	10	28	18
Number of female plaintiffs	33	70	37
Number of male plaintiffs	7	31	19

Table 3: female and male trial participation

In 1984, 30 percent of witchcraft-related trials involved a plaintiff whose grievance was that the defendant had called them a witch. In 1994, 33 percent of witchcraft-related trials also involved this type of grievance. In 2006, 37 percent of cases were of this variety. A finding of interest to come out of the Nae We trial documents is that a significant number of the cases from the three sample years reviewed are in fact about the *accusation* of witchcraft rather than the practice of witchcraft itself. The defendants in these cases are often individuals who have been

accused of accusing someone else (usually the plaintiff) of witchcraft rather than of actually engaging in its practice. For the purpose of this work, this is called witchcraft defamation. The table below illustrates the prevalence of this phenomenon. There was a slight rise over the three sample years in the percentage of witchcraft defamation cases with respect to the total number of witchcraft-related cases. Also present in the data is a slight rise in the incidence of counter accusation cases. This is when the plaintiff bolsters their accusation of defamation with a counter accusation of witchcraft against the defendant. Over the three sample years there was an eight percent net increase in this type of counter accusation case.

	1984	1994	2006
Total witchcraft-related trials	43	106	54
Number of witchcraft-related defamation cases	13	36	20
Number of actual witchcraft accusation cases	30	63	38
Number of counter accusation cases	2	9	7

Table 4: witchcraft defamation and accusation cases

Among the successfully completed trials, another finding of note is the presence of a very high rate of guilty verdicts. In 1984, 66 percent of the verdicts handed down to defendants were guilty. In 1994, 78 percent of the trials delivered a guilty verdict against the defendant. Finally in 2006, 82 percent of the defense cases received a guilty verdict. Interestingly, at the Nae We shrine, the plaintiff can also be found guilty during trial proceedings. Because of this only one trial in 1984 returned a not guilty verdict, and zero trials returned a not guilty verdict in 1994 and 2006. The table below shows the total number of witchcraft-related trials, the total

number of successfully completed trials, and the distribution of verdicts amongst the participants of those trials (the category of “other” in this table represents trials where the verdict has been passed, but the outcome is unclear or unintelligible from the trial records). The figures in this table represent one verdict per trial. The number of plaintiffs or defendants is not taken into account, merely the verdict of the trial.

	1984	1994	2006
Total witchcraft-related trials	43	106	54
Number of successfully completed trials	18	42	23
Number of guilty verdicts for defendants	12	33	19
Number of guilty verdicts for plaintiffs	2	9	4
Total number of not guilty verdicts	1	0	0
Other (no data on outcome)	3	0	0

Table 5: verdict distribution

The economy of a trial held at Nae We consists of three main components: fees collected by the shrine, payouts of cash and/or goods from a guilty party to the opposing participant, and the purchase of goods and payment of fees by the guilty party for purifications. The document shown in Appendix A4, the case of Asherley vs. Kpeley on December 31st 1994, provides an excellent example of a successful trial with robust economic activity. The charge in this case was “to come and show me the reason why she has been cursing me all the time.”¹⁵⁹ The most common fee collected by the shrine is the initial summons fee which is charged to both

¹⁵⁹ 1994. December 31st, Nae We trial document, 1984-2013

participants at the start of every trial. In this case, the summons fee was 8,000 cedis (\$8 US).¹⁶⁰ This equates to about four days of income for the average wage earner in the context of Accra at this time. At an average of about two U.S dollars a day, it can be understood that the initial trial proceedings at Nae We cost the typical participant about two days' worth of income.¹⁶¹

The next expenses we see in the case of Asherley vs. Kpeley are the opening and closing fees. These fees only appear in trials that are successfully completed. They are charged to each party in the dispute. This is usually indicated by the phrase "each" after the opening and closing fees are listed in the documents. In this case, the fact that each participant has been charged is indicated by the multiplication of the opening and closing figures by two. Each participant's total is then added together to show the entire balance owed by both parties. In this case, each participant owed the shrine 15,000 cedis (\$15 US), in addition to the summons fee (see appendix A4).

The next entry in the document is the verdict, "committee found Kpeley guilty in the case...she to paid Asherley." This is followed by an itemized list of the fees incurred during the trial and the underlined phrase "full payment to Asherley" and the date "31/12/94." In addition to her own expenses, this means that Kpeley was ordered to pay Asherley's expenses for the trial as well as the full summons fee. This payout on behalf of the plaintiff is contained in the documents as an itemized list and is shown below (as well as in Appendix A4). The date written next to the words "full payment to Asherley" indicates that Kpeley paid these expenses to the shrine on behalf of Asherley in full, on the day of the trial. The final figure of 23,000 cedis (\$23 US) that

¹⁶⁰ "Ghana Currency," in *Ghana – 2014*,
http://photius.com/countries/ghana/economy/ghana_economy_currency.html (accessed April 1014)

¹⁶¹ "Ghana Income and Wages," in *Ghana – 2014*,
http://photius.com/countries/ghana/economy/ghana_economy_income_and_wages..html (accessed April 1014)

was paid by Kpeley represents a significant amount, over eleven days' worth of the average income in Accra at this time.

1. Summons fee	8,000c	(\$8 US)
2. Opening	7,500c	(\$7 US)
3. Closing	7,500c	(\$7.5 US)
Total	23,000c	(\$23 US)

The final expenses for this trial were the purification items. Kpeley was ordered by the Nae We panel of judges to procure these items for the purpose of cleansing the witchcraft spirit from the body. In this case, the 17 items (see appendix A4) were used for the removal of the curses which were the impetus for the charges laid against Kpeley. A conservative estimate of the cost of these items in 1994 would be about 121,000 cedis (\$121 US). Livestock, like goats and chickens, are commonly featured in these purification item lists and can quickly escalate the expenses for a guilty party. In addition to the cost of these items, an extra cash payment of 12,000 cedis (\$12 US) is the last item on the purification list. It is not made clear in the court records if this cash payment was ultimately kept by the shrine or paid to the individual(s) who performed the purification, or if they were the same thing. As far as those who are found guilty are concerned however, the shrine is the recipient of any purification items or cash.

The purification items found in trials like this one are consistently similar in successful trials throughout the three sample years, as are the various fees. As a result of her guilty conviction, the total amount of value in cash and goods that Kpeley transferred to the shrine for the trial was 171,000 cedis (\$171 US). For the vast majority of those who utilized the dispute resolution feature of the Nae We shrine at this time, this figure easily translates into more than two months' worth of earnings. Being found guilty of a witchcraft-related offense at the Nae We

shrine is thus a financially expensive affair. Importantly, this data tells us that the shrine also receives a significant amount of added revenue for successfully completed trials (especially those with guilty verdicts) in the form of opening and closing fees. Additionally, all of the purification items, including cash, are also transferred to the shrine from the guilty party. The plaintiff, or non-guilty party, receives no form of compensation, reward, or monetary reimbursement that could be likened to the Western concept of monetary awards for punitive damages. Through this trial process non-guilty parties do receive vindication, and the removal of any curses or other witchcraft-related activity. However, their only material reward, as in the case of Asherley vs. Kpeley, is that they do not have to pay any shrine related fees or purchase any purification items.

With respect to the sentences handed down by Nae We officials, this data suggests that for the most part, there are no lasting physical repercussions for those found guilty. Interviews with shrine officials reveal that occasionally, convicted witches can ask for a trial by ordeal in order to demonstrate their innocence. The head of the Nae We family, Numo Tumo mli Yartey III, recalls a time when one woman who was found guilty denied that she was a witch. She asked for trial by ordeal which involved putting her face up to a rope on the ground which was used to catch witches. The rope stuck to the woman, proving her guilt.¹⁶²

Finally, while these results are still preliminary, it should be noted that kinship does not appear to play a role in the trials held at Nae We. Names are not shared by trial participants on opposite sides of witchcraft-related accusations. Nor is there any indication from interview evidence with shrine officials that familial-based witchcraft-related insecurities play a role in accusations. This is a significant finding if further research confirms this trend. Many scholars,

¹⁶² Numo Tumo mli Yartey III, Head of the Nae We Family, Interview conducted on May 13th, 2012 in Accra, Ghana by Dr. Jonathan Roberts.

including Geschiere and Ashforth, have long believed that in the African context, witchcraft-related accusations primarily originate from within kinship relations.¹⁶³

Geschiere coined the phrase “the modernity of witchcraft” to describe the dynamic incorporation of traditional witchcraft-related practices into distinctly new cultural forms.¹⁶⁴ Sanders notes that witchcraft-related practices can thus continually conform to the “ebb and flow” of changing circumstances.¹⁶⁵ An analysis of the trial format at Nae We serves to confirm this perspective in newer scholarship. It also positions Nae We as a localized and unique phenomenon. The description in chapter two of a Nae We trial, one could argue, demonstrates a syncretic intermingling of modern witch finding ideas, with the format of a British civil court. Both parties are allowed to give testimony in an effort to make their case. They can even cross examine each other. The participants are also occasionally represented by male family members in full traditional dress. The committee acts as both judge and jury, and after questioning the participants, retires to deliberate on a verdict. The differences between this example and a Western court are many. However, it is difficult to deny that the method used by the shrine to determine guilt employs a variety of tools which are reminiscent of a colonial era court room in Ghana.

Sanders and Moore argue that many Africans today believe that there has been a rise in the number of witchcraft-related accusations in contemporary African societies. However they contend that there is “no baseline data” to support this conclusion.¹⁶⁶ While the findings of this study are still preliminary, they are unique to this field of study and provide a statistical insight previously not possible. In the context of the Nae We trials, the data shows that over the three

¹⁶³ Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, 10

Ashforth, “On Living in a World with Witches” 220

¹⁶⁴ Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, 1

¹⁶⁵ Sanders, “Reconsidering witchcraft”, 340

¹⁶⁶ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 10

sample years there has not been a dramatic increase in the percentage of witchcraft accusations. In fact, even though the figure returned to 27 percent by 2006, there was a noticeable drop of nine percent in number of accusations for 1994 (see table 1). In the context of the Nae We shrine, this data confirms the assertions of Sanders and Moore.

The question of why so many of the trials at Nae We are never successfully completed, (see table 2), may be answered in part by the extremely high percentage of guilty verdicts (see table 5), as well as the internal economy of the Nae We shrine. In 1994 and 2006, 100 percent of the successfully completed trials returned a guilty verdict to either the defendant or the plaintiff. While not stated specifically in the trial documents, it is possible that a guilty verdict handed down to the plaintiff is akin to a not guilty verdict for the defendant. In any case, the trials held at Nae We are open to the public and there is no reason to suspect that such a regularly recurring verdict would not become local common knowledge. The defendants receive the most guilty verdicts by a wide margin. Since the defendant is summoned to trial at Nae We by the plaintiff, the evidence suggests that this would be well known as an unenviable position. The analysis of the economy of Nae We trials demonstrates how prohibitively expensive a guilty verdict can be for a trial participant. Combined with the knowledge that there is almost no chance of escaping a guilty verdict, and that a plaintiff can also be found guilty, it is not difficult to understand why many defendants and plaintiffs alike seek alternatives to completing a trial at Nae We.

The high rate of guilty convictions is thus an impressive phenomenon with respect to trial participants, particularly defendants who see trials through to their conclusion. This data speaks to Geschiere's contention that witchcraft beliefs are still highly relevant for many Africans.¹⁶⁷ It also underscores the gravity of how social anxieties associated with witchcraft-related activities articulate themselves, are perceived, and how resolution is actively sought in the Ghanaian

¹⁶⁷ Geschiere, "Domesticating Personal Violence" *Africa*, 324

context.¹⁶⁸ In this case, the shrine is capable of providing protection from what Ashforth calls “spiritual insecurity” by purifying the witchcraft spirit from the body of the guilty.¹⁶⁹ The question of why the guilty verdict percentage is 100 percent, or very close to it, for all three sample years (see table 5) is difficult, but not impossible to answer. The data suggests that the Nae We shrine, as an active and vibrant social center, ostensibly relies on revenue generation in order to maintain its facilities and dedicated personnel. There are no donation-oriented services that could be likened to Judeo-Christian religious congregations that involve a tithing component which could provide said revenue. Instead, the Nae We shrine is situated in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city of Accra and does not receive any substantial government funding of any kind.¹⁷⁰

This is to say that Nae We relies on the revenue generated from its role as a community space, and facilitator of events such as witchcraft-related trials. This is the business side of the Nae We shrine. As the analysis of the economy of witchcraft-related trials reveals, the shrine stands to benefit exponentially as a given trial progresses. A guilty verdict leads to the most goods and cash transferring to the shrine. This particular fact should be regarded less as a conflict of interest, and more as a means for the shrine to continue to provide what is clearly perceived as an essential service to those who utilize the trial component of the Nae We shrine. The fact that the shrine benefits from the guilty verdicts can help, in part, to explain them. It follows that the high rate of defendant abandonment may in turn be explained, in part, by the high percentage of guilty verdicts. More incomplete trials may then in fact foster more guilty verdicts as well.

¹⁶⁸ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 3

¹⁶⁹ Ashforth, “On Living in a World with Witches” 214

¹⁷⁰ “4th Class Residential Area,” in *Demographic Characteristics*, http://ama.ghanadistricts.gov.gh/?arrow=atd&_3&sa=3004 (accessed April 2014)

It has long been believed by historians and ethnologists alike that women are the recipients of the majority of witchcraft-related accusations in the African context.¹⁷¹ It has been argued there has merely been a paucity of written data from which to draw hard statistical conclusions. We can now make some preliminary assertions concerning the prevalence, and position, of women in the context of Nae We witchcraft-related trials. The data shows that women bear the brunt of accusations in the Nae We trials. It also shows that they are the most active accusers by a wide margin in witchcraft-related or witchcraft defamation cases. In the context of the Nae We trials, these findings support the contentions of scholars such as Ashforth and Bannerman-Richter concerning the prevalence of female involvement with witchcraft-related activity.¹⁷²

There is thus a strongly gendered component to the witchcraft-related trials held at Nae We. The committee, or panel of judges, is made up of positions reserved exclusively for men. Reciprocally, the data shows that women dominate the opposite side of the court room as defendants. However there is not enough evidence to suggest that gender discrimination plays a role in the verdicts handed down by the panel of judges. Such a contention would be problematized by the high percentage of female accusers (see table 1). In fact, the near total absence of not guilty verdicts indicates that both men and women have the same slim chance of being found innocent in a witchcraft-related trial at Nae We (see table 4).

The role of gender in these trials is thus significant. Women represent the majority, by far, of the participants at the Nae We trials. The work of Bannerman-Richter, Parish, and

¹⁷¹ Ashforth, "On Living in a World with Witches" 216,
Bannerman-Richter, *The Practice of Witchcraft in Ghana*, ii
Parish, "Witchcraft, riches and roulette", 107

¹⁷² Ashforth, "On Living in a World with Witches" 216,
Bannerman-Richter, *The Practice of Witchcraft in Ghana*, ii
Parish, "Witchcraft, riches and roulette", 107

Ashforth suggests that women are thought to represent the majority of witches in African contexts.¹⁷³ However, this thesis argues that there are a variety of factors involved with guilty verdicts which problematize a simple gender-based discrimination explanation. The data shows that mostly women are brought to trial. However, it also shows that they are not found guilty just because they are women. The work of Sanders agrees, and argues that gender is not a “decisive factor” in witchcraft accusations.¹⁷⁴ There is however, a gender based phenomenon that leads to women occupying such a majority space at these trials. The busy Salaga Market is proximate to the Nae We shrine. As most of the vendors at this market are women, one possibility is that the shrine is providing many of these vendors with a form of dispute resolution. Unfortunately, the data from the trials does not impart the subtle social information required for such an analysis, and more research is required.

The documents also demonstrate the importance of witchcraft defamation accusations (see table 2). This is significant because in the context of the Nae We shrine in Accra, it partially relocates the social problematic of witchcraft attacks themselves to one that also includes the mere suggestion that one could be a witch. The negative connotations ascribed to witchcraft-related practices therefore encompass the matter of defamation of character. The work of Ashforth and Geschiere both tightly tie the concepts of spiritual insecurity, kinship relations, and economic imbalances to witchcraft accusations.¹⁷⁵ How then can we think about defamation accusations? They are technically different, though certainly related. The motivations for taking someone to trial at Nae We for this type of defamation are different than the criteria laid out by

¹⁷³ Ashforth, “On Living in a World with Witches” 216,
Bannerman-Richter, *The Practice of Witchcraft in Ghana*, ii
Parish, “Witchcraft, riches and roulette”, 107

¹⁷⁴ Sanders, “Reconsidering witchcraft”, 347

¹⁷⁵ Ashforth, “On Living in a World with Witches” 214
Geschiere, “Domesticating Personal Violence” *Africa*, 333

Ashforth and Geschiere. These witchcraft-related defamation cases are character defense cases, ones that the evidence suggests can be taken seriously in Accra.

The data shows that accusing someone of being a witch is a grievance that is taken just as seriously in Accra as actually being accused of practicing witchcraft. This is indicated by the prevalence of this sort of accusation, the forum in which they are both tried, and the fact that the consequences for being found guilty of either offense are the same at this level. If the trial is successfully concluded and either the defendant or the plaintiff is found guilty, either of being a witch or accusing someone of being a witch, the sentence most often carried out is that the guilty party has to pay all of the trial related fees. They also have to pacify the other party(s) by providing a variety of purification items, and a sum of cash to the shrine.¹⁷⁶ The data demonstrates that this process can be very costly to the guilty party. Very minor differences exist in sentences from trial to trial but for the most part they are consistent over the sample years. Any differences are largely dependent on the panel of judges presiding over a given case.

This leads to an important research question which is difficult to answer with the available data. Why is it important for individuals to take what amounts, in government courts, to personal defamation and insult cases to trial at Nae We? Many forms of non-witchcraft-related insult cases are heard by the panel of judges at Nae We. Prosecutable charges made by plaintiffs against defendants can vary from statements as seemingly innocuous as “you will born through your mouth”¹⁷⁷ to charges like “a stinking woman and vagina smelling and spat on my face.”¹⁷⁸ The trial documents do reveal that such non-witchcraft-related insult cases are perceived by both the shrine and trial participants to be as serious an offence as witchcraft-related defamation cases by virtue of the fact that they share the same configuration and consequences.

¹⁷⁶ Nae We Trial Documents, 1984-2013

¹⁷⁷ 1984. November 9th. Nae We Trial documents, 1984-2013

¹⁷⁸ 1984. July 2nd. Nae We Trial documents, 1984-2013

An analysis of the consequences for the infraction of witchcraft-related defamation, in this context, suggests that accusing someone of practicing witchcraft carries a significant social cost to the reputation of the accused individual. While this is not made specifically clear in the trial documents we do know that undesirable public insults like witchcraft defamation cases are defended in the equally public forum of the Nae We shrine. Because even successful plaintiffs in defamation cases receive no form of monetary or material reward, we can infer that it is important for them to proceed with the trial for another reason. One such reason is to dispel the lingering social stigma left by a witchcraft accusation.

Why these defamation cases are brought to trial by plaintiffs at Nae We may be interpreted through the large number of abandoned cases. The results in Table 3 suggest that a spectrum exists with respect to the actual level of local authority wielded by the Nae We shrine. Interviews with shrine officials indicate that only a few people (such individuals include heads of state, or high ranking military personnel)¹⁷⁹ have the means to avoid being summoned and brought to trial at Nae We. However, the evidence shows that escaping prosecution from the Nae We shrine is a regular occurrence because so many trials remain incomplete. Trials are sometimes held over the course of several days, which enables this type of absenteeism. The only cost incurred in these cases is the perfunctory summons fee which may, or may not have ever been paid by the participants. There is no evidence that those who fail to appear are ever actively pursued at a later date by Nae We officials. This problem is no doubt exacerbated by the shrine's lack of federal recognition as a legal entity, preventing them from enlisting the aid of the already poorly manned and funded local police force.

¹⁷⁹ Ebenezer Tete Mensah, Bailiff, Interview conducted on May 15th, 2012 in Accra, Ghana by Dr. Jonathan Roberts.

The question of why plaintiffs pursue defamation cases may then be answered by the fact that one can bring a grievance against someone at Nae We, but that there is no guarantee that the trial will ever see a conclusion. The data tells us that whether you are the plaintiff or the defendant, the option to circumvent a trial, is available as a possible avenue of escape from an unwanted trial. The high percentage of incomplete trials, (nearly half, see table 3) is evidence of this fact. To place this data in the context of the plaintiff in a defamation or witchcraft-related case, simply answering the insult of a witchcraft accusation with a summons to appear at Nae We might publicly satisfy the seriousness with which one objects to the initial accusation. Keeping in mind that plaintiffs can be found guilty in these trials, using the shrine as a forum for public defense against a case of defamation may be made easier by the understanding that one can actually avoid completing a potentially costly or embarrassing public trial with minimal repercussion.

The data in this chapter has demonstrated that the work of E.E. Evans-Pritchard had its limitations. His ethnographic contributions as well as his understandings of the logic of witchcraft cannot be ignored. However, Table 1 demonstrates that witchcraft does not permeate all aspects of African cultures. Not all of the trials held at Nae We are about witchcraft. Witchcraft is not considered, in all societies that live with it, to cause all of the bad things that happen. It is therefore important to remember that we cannot explain a culture through its witchcraft-related activity. We can however, observe how a culture deals with its witchcraft.

This data also challenges aspects of the functionalist approach adopted by the Manchester school. The institution of the shrine does serve as an example of a witchcraft-related social structure, one that does serve a variety of purposes. However, one of those purposes is to destroy instances of witchcraft-related activity rather than to support them as a function of social control.

In the context of the trials held at Nae We, the shrine cannot always even complete that mandate effectively (see table 2). This means is that we can no longer rely on large intellectual structural frameworks in order to explain all examples of witchcraft in Africa in a comprehensive way.

This chapter supports some aspects of the recent work of scholars like Geschiere and Ashforth in several ways. It demonstrates the presence of what they call “spiritual insecurities”¹⁸⁰ as explanation-in-part for accusations, and that witchcraft-related beliefs remain highly relevant for many Africans.¹⁸¹ In the context of the Nae We trials, this is made apparent in the determination of defendants and plaintiffs alike to see cases through to their conclusion. Resolution of the social threat of witchcraft or witchcraft-related defamation, despite extremely high rates of guilty verdicts, has been shown to be a priority for many trial participants. This determination is made even more poignant by the fact that these participants could have evaded the trials at Nae We if they so chose. The data also therefore supports the contention that witchcraft-related activity exists as a part of everyday life for many Africans, one that must be dealt with at times.¹⁸² The public format of the trials and the regularity with which they are held is testament to this fact in the context of the Nae We shrine.

The data further supports the argument of Sanders, Moore, Geschiere and Ashforth that rather than part of a static traditional past, witchcraft-related activity may harken back to tradition, but is constantly and dynamically renegotiating its configuration.¹⁸³ As a result, witchcraft-related activity remains both a relevant and consistently modern facet of many African societies. In the context of the Nae We shrine, we see an example of dynamic

¹⁸⁰ Ashforth, “On Living in a World with Witches” 214

¹⁸¹ Geschiere, “Domesticating Personal Violence” *Africa*, 324

¹⁸² Geschiere, “Domesticating Personal Violence” *Africa*, 326

¹⁸³ Moore and Sanders, *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities*, 3

Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, 10

Ashforth, “On Living in a World with Witches”, 207, 214

Sanders, “Reconsidering witchcraft”, 339, 340

reconfiguration in the form and format of the trials themselves. The syncretic development of a localized and unofficial judicial system, specifically developed to combat witchcraft-related activity, is evidence of the adaptability of witchcraft-related activity in the context of the Nae We shrine.

Geschiere and Ashforth stress the importance of rejecting large, overarching teleological, universal, definitions of witchcraft and its related activities in the African context. Instead, they correctly focus on addressing each local example as unique. However, it is thus critical to point out the importance of the work of Todd Sanders. Sanders argues that using two dimensional dichotomies like *traditional* vs. *modern*, or the term modernity itself, as a means to describe African sub cultures is in itself a “product of the colonial imagination.”¹⁸⁴ Sanders argues that this makes them part of a Western conception of modernity, not *about* modernity.¹⁸⁵ Along with generalized assertions about the centrality of kinship, power relations, and wealth inequalities, to witchcraft-related accusations, the concept of the modernity of witchcraft then presents an internal contradiction to Geschiere’s work.

The evidence from this study also challenges the centrality of economic and power disparities, between accusers and the accused, to the guilt of witchcraft-related activity. This perspective has been championed by Geschiere and Ashforth.¹⁸⁶ In the context of the Nae We shrine, the data shows that what Geschiere calls the “leveling side of witchcraft” does not occur. Any wealth redistribution in this context goes only to the shrine and not to a victorious plaintiff in a witchcraft accusation case. The work of Sanders agrees, he notes that “personal wealth plays

¹⁸⁴ Sanders, “Reconsidering witchcraft”, 347

¹⁸⁵ Sanders, “Reconsidering witchcraft”, 338

¹⁸⁶ Geschiere, “Domesticating Personal Violence” *Africa*, 333
Ashforth, “On Living in a World with Witches” 214

little or no role in accusations.”¹⁸⁷ The expensive nature of a guilty verdict at Nae We, combined with the fact that a plaintiff can also be found guilty, further problematizes the argument that accusations are about wealth redistribution in this context.

¹⁸⁷ Sanders, “Reconsidering witchcraft”, 346

Conclusions

The three stages of academic thought outlined in chapter one have each made important contributions to the understanding of witchcraft-related activities in African societies. Knowing which aspects to take away and which to leave behind is the legacy of each successive evolution in the literature. E.E. Evans-Pritchard brought academic discourses on the subject of witchcraft in Africa out of the realm of dismissive primitivisation. He showed that the logic of witchcraft existed in its use as a method of explanation. However, his analysis failed to explain why witchcraft existed. The Manchester school then attempted to fill this intellectual gap by offering that the purpose of witchcraft was to serve as a method of social control, the threat thereof as a means to enforce moral and ethical codes of conduct. While aspects of a social structure of witchcraft do exist, they are not universal, nor are they consistent, nor do they effectively explain local lived realities. Recent scholarship has since utilized a discursive approach which emphasizes contextualization and posited every instance of witchcraft as part of a unique, dynamic, and distinctly modern phenomenon. I have shown that this perspective is an effective means with which to understand local lived realities. However, this school of thought still has its growing pains. It has yet to fully cast off its wish to impose universal explanations and Western modernity-related schemas, of witchcraft-related activity, onto African cultures.

This thesis has navigated some of the problematic aspects of the vague and umbrella term *witchcraft*. Chapter two addresses common conflation of this term in the popular Western mind, and separates the superficial similarities between examples of modern African witchcraft-related activity and that of the Early Modern European witch-hunts. This was a first step towards isolating an understanding of witchcraft-related activity to an African, Ghanaian, and eventually Nae We context. An analysis of developmental linguistic patterns, translation errors, and local

languages revealed that from a Ghanaian perspective, the term witchcraft is grossly ill-suited to describe the myriad of understandings that exist in relation to unseen forces. This includes a variety of forms of healing, divination, possession, witch finding, and of course, sorcery for the purpose to cause harm. This section argues that this vibrant culture of access to unseen forces is then subsumed by the negative notion of ill intent and harm which is characterized by the awkward term *witchcraft*.

This work then turned its focus to the history of witchcraft-related activity, shrines, and the mobility of witch finding movements in Ghana. Chapter three outlined the local historical context for these activities, some of which are held at the Nae We shrine in Accra. It also demonstrated the need for contextualized understandings of each instance of witchcraft-related activities by contrast. This is because even in the Ghanaian context, the form, configuration, and composition of the sub cultures of witchcraft-related activities are as varied as the people who have participated in them. The second section then narrowed the contextual focus further to detailed descriptions of the Nae We shrine itself, its physical configuration, its role in the community, and the people who help to articulate that role. This section posits the shrine as more than just a court that can produce trial documents for analysis. It is an organized, living and integral part of the community in which it is situated. This thesis thus argues that the Nae We shrine can be understood as the leader, and facilitator, of a variety of social and spiritual activities, celebrations, and indeed, witchcraft-related trials.

Finally, chapter four presents both the data garnered from the trial documents and an extensive analysis of the findings. Through this analysis of the only extant documented accounts of witchcraft trials in existence in Africa, this thesis variously challenged, and supported certain aspects of all three eras of Western thought featured in the first chapter. This thesis has argued

that while gender certainly plays a role in Nae We trials, it does not explain them, nor does it explain guilty verdicts against women. Furthermore, that the internal economy of the Nae We shrine, guilty verdicts, and trial completion rates, rather than economic disparities between participants, or kinship relations, can better explain guilty verdicts in witchcraft-related trials. This work supports the contention of recent scholarship regarding the importance of contextualization with respect to witchcraft-related study in Africa. However, this thesis argues that we cannot rely on Western conceptions of modernity or tradition in order to effectively explain witchcraft-related practices. Nor can we rely on these cognitive devices to meaningfully position witchcraft-related practices within an African perspective.

Notes on further research

Future research should include a more comprehensive investigation of the unique social and economic elements that are local to the Nae We shrine. This would provide a clearer understanding as to how the trials are perceived, as well as give insight into triggers for accusations. Such an investigation should also tease out a fuller explanation as to why women represent the majority of participants in these trials. Additionally, in order to present an African perspective on the subject of the *modernity of witchcraft*, further research should include extensive interview based evidence and analysis on this this subject. This effort should seek to address, once and for all, the question of whether or not such intellectual edifices are still useful when discussing the topic of witchcraft in the African, and especially Ghanaian context.

Bibliography:

Primary Documents:

Blankson, George Larlai, Chief Baliff, Interview conducted on June 9th, 2012, at the Nae We shrine in Accra, Ghana by Dr. Jonathan Roberts.

de Lancre, Pierre “Dancing and Sex at the Sabbath, 1612,” in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Routledge, 2004)

Kramer, Heinrich, “Heinrich Kramer on the Torture of Accused Witches,” from *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), trans. Montague Summers (1928)

Mensah, Ebenezer Tete, Bailiff, Interview conducted on May 15th, 2012 in Accra, Ghana by Dr. Jonathan Roberts.

Nae We Trial Documents, 1984-2013

Okyeare, Michael Kotey, Linguist, Interview conducted on May 16th, 2012, at Nae We shrine in Accra, Ghana by Dr. Jonathan Roberts

Panfo, Simon, High Court Registrar, Interview conducted on May 17th, 2012 at the Nae We shrine in Accra, Ghana by Dr. Jonathan Roberts.

“The Confession of Niclas Fiedler at Trier, 1591” in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Routledge, 2004)

“The Prosecutions at Trier (1581-93),” in *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: A Documentary History*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, (2001)

“The Trial and Confessions of Johannes Junius at Bamberg (1628),” from George L. Burr, ed. *The Witch-Persecutions* (1896) (public domain)

Yartey III, Numo Tumo, Head of the Nae We Family, Interview conducted on May 13th, 2012 in Accra, Ghana by Dr. Jonathan Roberts.

Articles:

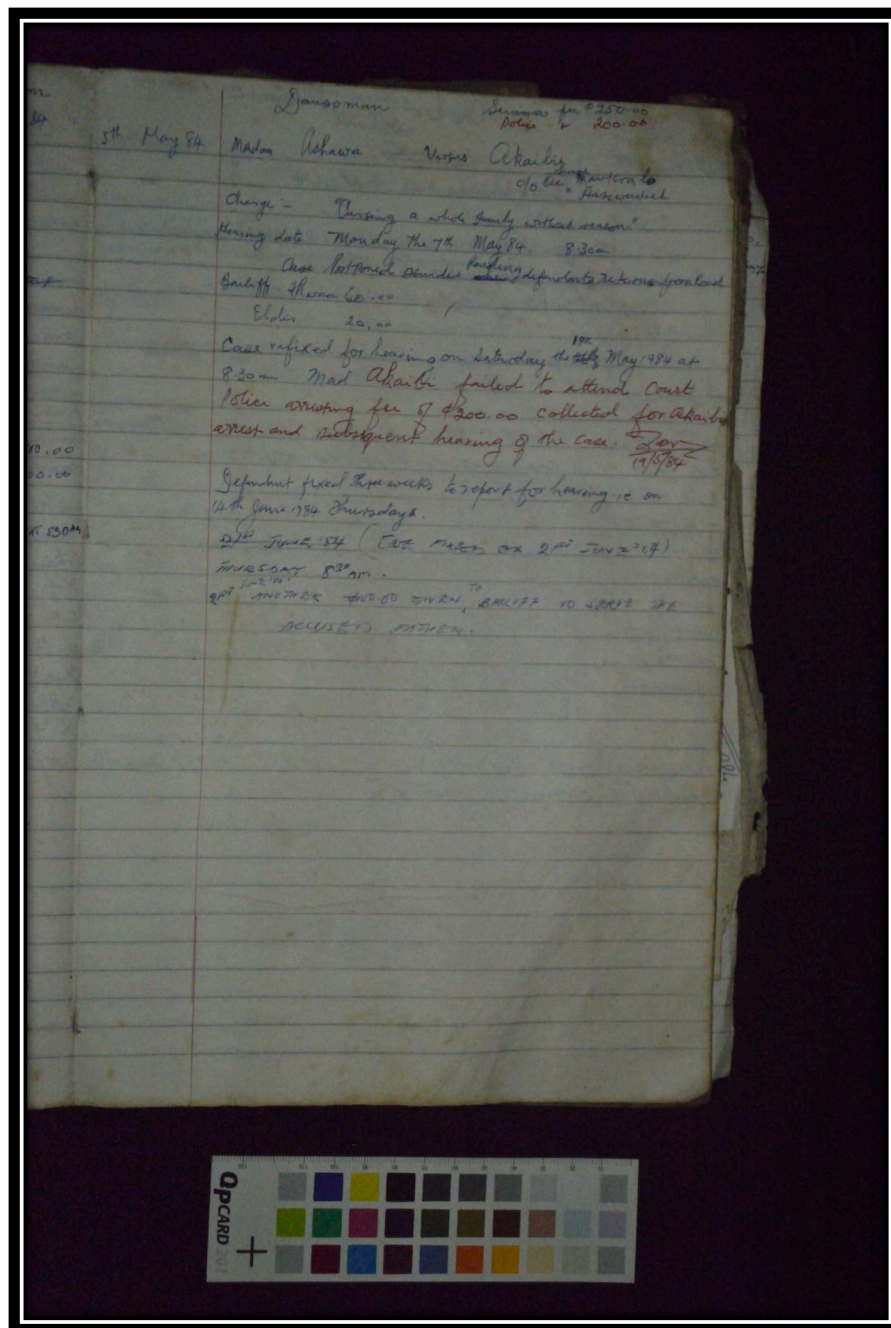
- “4th Class Residential Area,” in *Demographic Characteristics*,
<http://ama.ghanadistricts.gov.gh/?arrow=atd&_3&sa=3004> (accessed April 2014)
- Behringer, Wolfgang, “Weather, Hunger and Fear: Origins of the European Witch-Hunts in Climate, Society and Mentality,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. Darren Oldridge, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, (2002)
- Briggs, Robin, “The Experience of Bewitchment,” in *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft*, (New York: Penguin, 1996)
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E., “The Morphology and Function of Magic” *American Anthropologist* 31, no. 4 (1929): 619-641 .
- Geschiere, Peter, “Domesticating Personal Violence: witchcraft, courts and confessions in Cameroon” *Africa*, 64, no. 3 (1994): 323-340
- Geschiere, Peter, “Witchcraft and the State: Cameroon and South Africa Ambiguities of ‘Reality’ and ‘Superstition’” *Past and Present* 199, supplement 3 (2008): 313-335.
- “Ghana Currancy,” in *Ghana – 2014*,
http://photius.com/countries/ghana/economy/ghana_economy_currancy.html
(accessed April 1014)
- “Ghana Income and Wages,” in *Ghana – 2014*,
http://photius.com/countries/ghana/economy/ghana_economy_income_and_wages..html
(accessed April 1014)
- Gluckman, Max, “The Utility of the Equilibrium Model in the Study of Social Change” *American Anthropologist* 70, no. 2 (April, 1968): 219-237.
- Henningsen, Gustav, “The Greatest Witch-Trial of All: Navarre, 1609-14,” *History Today*, (November 1980) 36-39.
- Lentz, Carola, “Of Hunters, Goats and Earth-Shrines: Settlement Histories and the Politics of Oral Tradition in Northern Ghana” *History in Africa*, 27, (2000): 193-214.
- Levack, Brian P., “The Dynamics of Witch-Hunting,” in *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2006)
- Marwick, M.G., “How Real Is the Charmed Circle in African and Western Thought?” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 43, no. 1 (January, 1973): 59-71.
- Marwick, M. G., “Another Modern Anti-Witchcraft Movement in East Central Africa” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 20, no. 2 (Aril, 1950): 100-112.

- Marwick, M.G., "Anthropologists' Declining Productivity in the Sociology of Witchcraft" *American Anthropologist* 74, no. 3 (1972): 378-385.
- Midelfort, Erik H.C., "Heartland of the Witchcraze," *History Today*, February 1981, 28.
- Oldridge, Darren "General Introduction," in *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. Darren Oldridge, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008)
- Pavlac, Brian A., "Medieval Origins of the Witch Hunts," in *Witch Hunts in the Western World: Persecution and Punishment from the Inquisition to the Salem Trials* (Westport: Greenwood, 2009)
- Parish, Jane, "Witchcraft, riches and roulette: An ethnography of West African gambling in the UK" *Ethnography* 6, no. 1 (March 2006): 105-122.
- Parker, John, "Earth and Shadow: Substance, Medicine and mobility in the history of Ghana's Tongnaab Shrines" *Anthropology & Medicine* 18, No. 2, (August 2011): 257-270.
- Parker, John "Witchcraft, Anti-witchcraft and Trans-regional Ritual Innovation In Early Colonial Ghana: Sakrabundi and Aberewa, 1889-1910" *Journal of African History* 45 (2004): 393-420.
- Quartay-Papafio, Boi, A., "Native Tribunals of the Akras", *Journal of the Royal African Society* 11, no. 41 (October, 1911).
- Quartay-Papafio, Boi, A., "The Ga Homowo Festival", *Journal of the Royal African Society* 19, no. 74 (January, 1920).
- Sanders, Todd, "Reconsidering witchcraft: Postcolonial Africa and analytic (un)certainties" *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 2 (Jun 2003): 338-352.
- Sanders, Todd "The Modernity of Witchcraft" *Journal of Religion in Africa* 30, no. 1 (2000): 127-130.
- Wendl, Tobias "Visions of modernity in Ghana: Mami Wata shrines, photo studios and horror films" *Visual Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (2001): 269-292

Books:

- Adam Ashforth, ed., "On Living in a World with Witches: Everyday epistemology and spiritual insecurity in a modern African city (Soweto)" in *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: modernity, witchcraft, and the occult in postcolonial Africa*, London: Routledge, 2001.
- Allman, Jean and Parker, John, *Tongnaab: The History of a West African God*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2005.
- Bannerman-Richter, Gabriel, *Don't Cry! My Baby, Don't Cry!*, Winona Minnesota: Apollo Books, 1984.
- Bannerman-Richter, Gabriel, *The Practice of Witchcraft in Ghana*, Winona Minnesota: Apollo Books, 1982.
- Dakubu, Kropp, M.E., *Ga-English Dictionary*, Accra: Black Mask Ltd. 1999.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E., *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1937.
- Flint, Karen E., *Healing Traditions: African Medicine, Cultural Exchange, and Competition in South Africa, 1820-1948*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008.
- Geschiere, Peter. *Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000.
- Isichei, Elizabeth Allo, *Voices of the poor in Africa*, Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002.
- Levack, Brian P., *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, New York: Pearson Longman, 2006.
- Levy-Bruhl, Lucien, *How Natives Think*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1926.
- Moore, Henrietta and Sanders, Todd, ed., *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities: modernity, witchcraft, and the occult in postcolonial Africa*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Roberts, Jonathan, *A History of Healing in Accra*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Dalhousie University, 2014.
- Vansina, Jan, *Paths in the Rainforest: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.

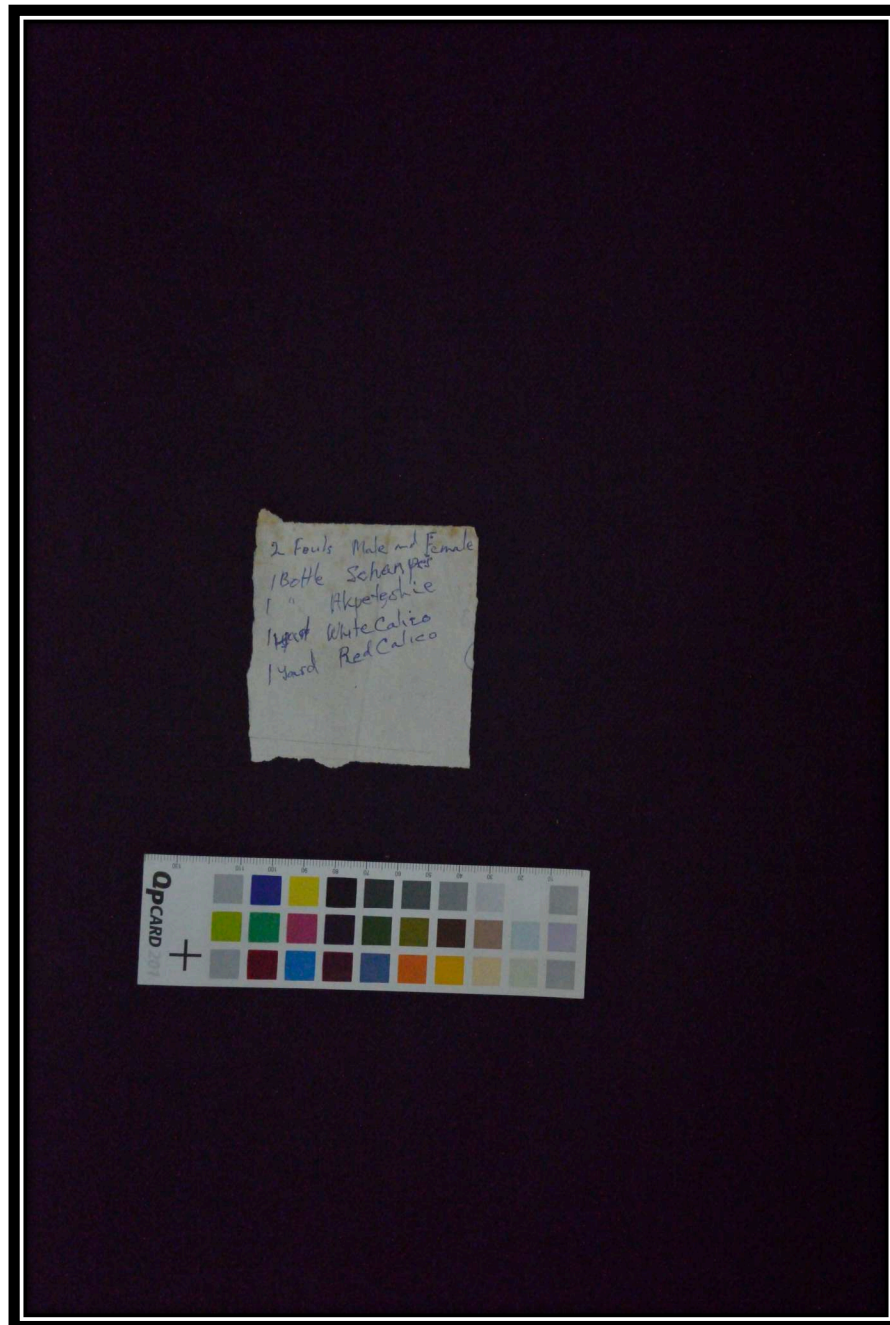
Appendix A1: Nae We trial document sample



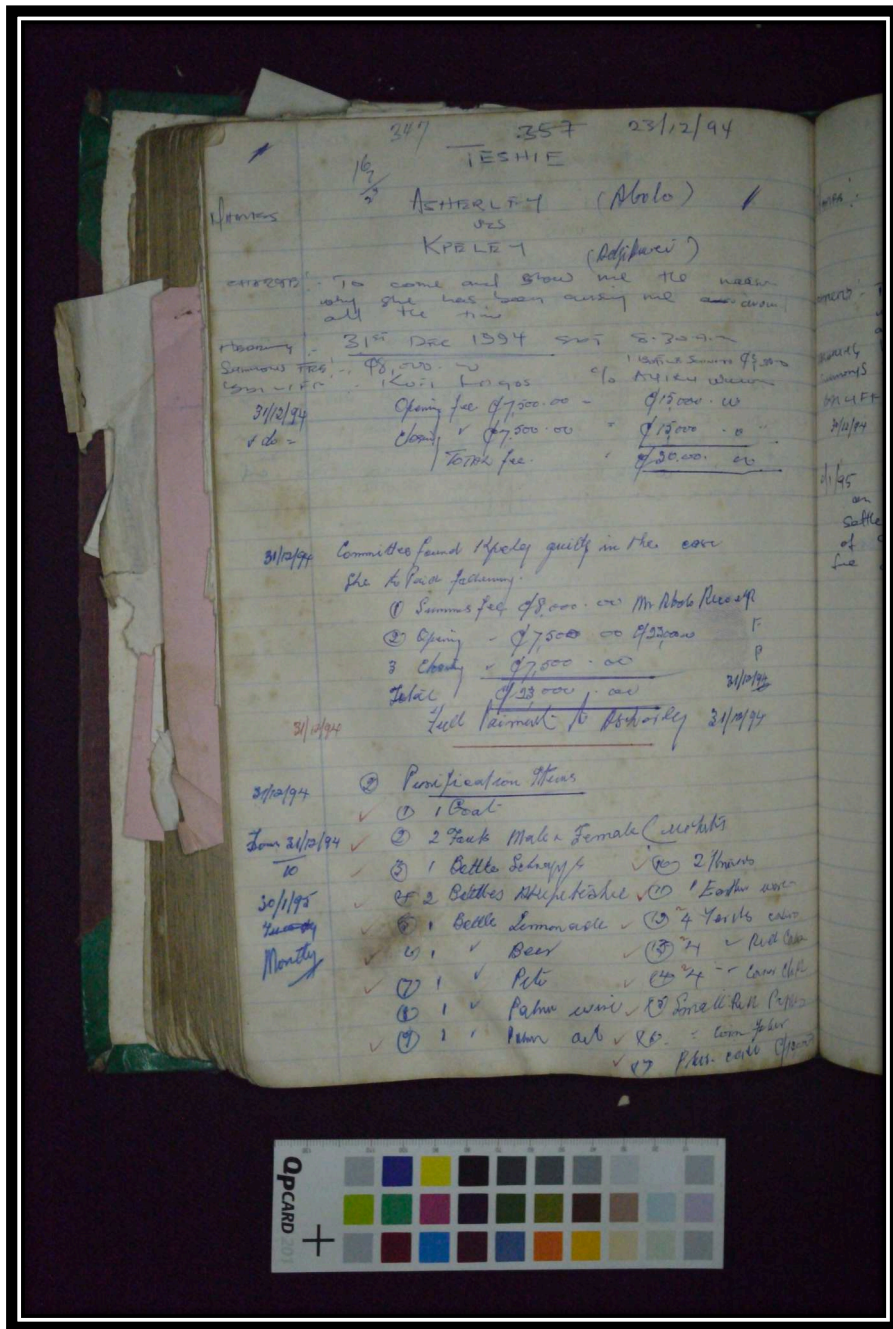
Appendix A2: ledger sample



Appendix A3: attached note sample



Appendix A4: purification list sample



Appendix A5: sentence to "pacify" opposing participant sample

