

**WITCHCRAFT SCAPEGOAT: INDIGENOUS BELIEFS AND VIOLENCE
AGAINST SUSPECTED WITCHES IN KISII COUNTY, KENYA.**

BY

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(Ph.D. Religion)

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy of the Department of Philosophy, Theology and Religion, Moi
University**

2015

DECLARATION

Declaration by the candidate

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, siblings, wife and daughters; Lavine and Liyah.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank Moi University for giving me a chance to study and for awarding me a partial scholarship. I am grateful to my supervisors Dr. Hassan Ndzovu and Professor Jude Ong'ong'a for their thorough supervision. I extend my regards to Professor Eunice Kamaara and Professor Hazel Ayanga for their regular encouragement throughout the program. I express gratitude to my family members for continued support throughout this work. Lastly, I show appreciation to Dr. Karen Kolvard of the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation for giving me research funds. God bless you all.

ABSTRACT

The belief in witchcraft is deeply rooted among the Abagusii of Kenya. Research done in 2009 by Help Age International indicated that an average of six suspected witches are violently abused every month in different parts of Kisii county. Hostility against suspected witches manifests itself in killing, displacement from homes and destruction of properties thereby violating their human rights. This study aimed at explaining the contemporary upsurge of violence against suspected witches in the region. The main objective of this study was to explore the role of Abagusii indigenous religious beliefs in violence against suspected witches in Kisii county. Specifically, the study investigated the following objectives: to determine the indigenous Abagusii worldview on witchcraft, to ascertain the moral and normative foundation of violence against suspected witches, to establish causes of continued witch accusations in the Kisii county and to examine the repercussions of violence against alleged witches to stability of their families in Kisii county. This study is guided by René Girard's "Scapegoat" theory and the functional theory of social sciences. The functional theory guided the study in explaining that Abagusii indigenous religious beliefs have a function in the current violence against suspected witches in Kisii county; it promotes violence against suspected witches; gives the moral and normative basis to violence against suspected witches and violence against suspected witches is a social control mechanism which reinforces and defines acceptable behaviour by imposing informal sanctions. The scapegoat theory leads into explaining that accusations of witches in Kisii county are diversions for blame of socio-economic changes which Abagusii worldview cannot explain. Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized for this project. The primary data was collected through questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions. Purposive sampling was incorporated to access data from a sample of Kisii elders, traditional religious specialists, local government administration officials, human rights activists and youths. Thereafter, all the collected data was analysed and presented in descriptive form. The data was juxtaposed with photographs, graphs, tables, and charts. The findings of the research demonstrated that the increased violence against suspected witches in Kisii county is due to recent social changes that Abagusii indigenous religious worldview is unable to explain. It is also concluded that the Abagusii indigenous religious beliefs apportion blame on witchcraft as a scape goat to the weaker group such as women, the poor and the aged people as being responsible for the social strains evident in the society. It recommends that the Kenyan government should train policemen to handle violence against suspected witches' cases and offer civic education to Abagusii on the impact of the belief in witchcraft. Campaigns should be done against violence against suspected witches and people who accuse others of practicing witchcraft should be arrested and prosecuted. To overcome the problem of scarcity of land, Abagusii should be encouraged to come up with eco-villages and they should be taught on alternative means of sustenance apart from land.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|--|
| SDA | Seventh Day Adventist |
| SPSS | Statistical Package for Social Science |
| BBC | British Broadcasting Corporation |
| AIC | African Independent Church |
| URTI | Urinary Tract Infections |
| HIV | Human Immunodeficiency Virus |
| AIDS | Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| U.N. | United Nations |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| OCPD | Officer in Charge of Police District |
| D.D.P | District Development Plan |
| KANU | Kenya African National Union |

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Witchcraft is a mystical and innate power which can be used by its possessor to harm other people through secretive harmful substances or techniques (Middleton, et al., 1963:3). On the other hand, witches are evil persons who use mystical powers to harm people (Schmidt, 2005:4). Historically, many societies condemn witches through various forms of violence because most negative occurrences and misfortunes are associated with them (Haar, 2007:1). Such negative occurrences include: diseases, poverty, madness, accidents, barrenness, lightening and mysterious deaths.

Studies have demonstrated that violence against suspected witches is a worldwide phenomenon where the suspected practitioner of witchcraft is a target of persecution (Demos, 2008). In the middle ages (1480 to 1700), witch hunts in Europe and America resulted to the execution of three hundred thousand suspected witches (Gehman, 2000:67). During this period, suspected witches were tortured and killed in an effort to force a confession that they flew in the sky, had sexual relations with demons, turned into animals, and engaged in various other sorts of magical practices (Demos, 2008).

Reports relating to belief in witchcraft or witchcraft accusations are common in Africa and the alarming element of such reports is the lynching or killing of alleged witches that often follows witchcraft accusations (Haar, 2007:1). For instance, in Gambia, violence against suspected witches was ordered by its ruler, Yahya Jammeh. This led to the arrest of over one thousand suspected witches who were taken to secret detention centres and forced to drink hallucinogenic concoctions. The proclamation by

the president occurred in the context of “witch-hunt campaign” that spread terror in the country. Gerrie ter Haar (2009: 69) observes that women suspected as witches are kept in ‘witch camps’ in Northern Ghana. In 2004, twenty seven witch suspects died in Nigeria after they were forced to drink a local concoction meant for witch identification. The commission of inquiry on witchcraft violence in South Africa reported that in the first six months of 1998, three hundred and six crimes that included murder, damage to property and assault were perpetrated against suspected witches in the Northern Province (Rickross, 2009). On 6th January, 2015, four women along with thirteen children in Enga province in Papua New Guinea's northern highlands fled their villages amid accusations that they practice witchcraft (Oakford, S., 2015). The women were blamed by a local witch hunter for a measles outbreak that had killed several locals.

In Kenya, violence against suspected witches is evident in varying degrees among different communities. The Abagusii who are the focus of this study are among the communities employing violence against witches with a continuous upsurge in the number of killings of suspects. The belief is attributed to negative occurrences such as barrenness, death, sickness and poverty (Masese, 2006:317). In spite of embracing Christianity and modern lifestyle, some of the Abagusii people still believe in the reality and destruction caused by witchcraft. They therefore engage in a variety of forms of violence against suspected witches in an effort to terminate the practice. Deaths from witch-burning episodes are high every year and the trend appears to be on the rise (Omolo, 2009). Violence against suspected witches among the Kisii is a national scourge because an average of six people are exposed to various forms of violence every month (Daily Nation, 2009:14). Many people have died, others injured, some rendered orphans

and others forced to migrate from their homes. The most intimidated groups are the elderly women who are exposed to various forms of violence and children who are left orphans. The scourge is threatening the stability of families in the county hence need for finding ways of curbing the violence (Menya et. al, 2010).

The violation of human rights that is inherent in witchcraft accusations, whether it is by way of banning, killing or suspension occurs in many countries in Africa (Haar, 2007:22). Government bodies, Churches, non-governmental organizations, teachers, educationalists and human rights activists have gathered on many occasions to address the issue to consider the way forward in vain. In a public address at a round table conference on the matter, Ghana's Human rights Commissioner stated the problem as follows (Report on the Round Table Conference on Treatment of Suspected Witches, 1998:17):

As nations we face daunting challenges in effectively grappling with these issues, and in preventing the violation of the rights of persons accused of witchcraft, we should recognize the input from each and every segment of society in order to attain a lasting solution to these problems.

This study heeds to the call by using the African religious approach in line with resolutions raised during an international workshop on religion and human rights held in Ghana in 2002. In their view, they resolved that religious functionaries and traditional leaders can play a crucial role in influencing people's perceptions in regard to curbing violence against suspected witches (International Workshop on Religion and Human rights, 4-8 November, 2002). In response to the matter, a question could be asked: why is

this phenomenon evident in Kisii county and not among the neighbouring communities such as the Luo, Kipsigis, Maasai and Kuria who also believe in witchcraft?

This study tries to seek solution to the problem of violence against suspected witches in Kisii county from an African religious perspective. In order to find out the role of Abagusii indigenous beliefs in violence against suspected witches, the study intends to answer the following questions: How does the Abagusii indigenous worldview influence evident violence against suspected witches in Kisii county? What is the moral and normative foundation of violence against suspected witches among Abagusii? Why does Kisii county experience continued accusations of witches? How does violence against alleged witches among the Abagusii affect their family stability? The study took Kisii county for analysis due to the prevalent cases of hostility against suspected witches in the region between 1993 and 2013. It centred on investigating two areas:

- a) Abagusii indigenous beliefs about witchcraft and;
- b) Violence against suspected witches in Kisii county.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Witchcraft accusations and the resulting violence have become phenomenal in Kisii County. According to Masese (2006: 318), violence against suspected witches has increased among Abagusii. This poses serious problems that are economically, socially and politically disruptive and frustrate any attempt at self-development. Help Age International (2009: 5) reported that about six people are exposed to various forms of violence every month in Kisii county for allegedly practicing witchcraft. The foregoing is threatening life and peaceful coexistence among the people of Kisii county. Numerous

cases of violence against suspected witches is supported by studies indicating that several people in Riamoni and Nyakeyo villages together with Suneka and Marani divisions in Kisii County were lynched and their properties destroyed on suspicion of practicing witchcraft (Koech, 2009, Nyasato, 2009, African Press, 2008). This has created an atmosphere of mistrust and hatred among the people. Despite increased incidents of violence, the Kenya Constitution (2010) provides for freedom of belief even in cases where the majority of the population would find certain beliefs harmful or despicable. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, violence to suspected witches is against human rights.¹ Increasing cases of violence against suspected witches demonstrate that it is difficult to contain the practice. This study aimed at explaining the contemporary upsurge of violence against suspected witches in the region and tries to seek solution to the problem from an African religious perspective. In realizing this aim, the study raised the following questions:

- a) How does the Abagusii indigenous worldview influence evident violence against suspected witches in Kisii county?
- b) What is the moral and normative foundation of violence against witch suspects among Abagusii?
- c) Why does Kisii county experience continued witch accusations?
- d) How does violence against alleged witches among the Abagusii affect their family stability?

¹ Article 3 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to explore how the role of Abagusii indigenous religious beliefs to violence against suspected witches in Kisii county. The study aimed at explaining the contemporary upsurge of violence against suspected witches in the region. In that respect the following specific objectives were set and pursued for the investigation:

- a) To determine the indigenous Abagusii worldview on witchcraft,
- b) To ascertain the moral and normative foundation of violence against suspected witches among Abagusii,
- c) To establish causes for continued witch accusations in Kisii county,
- d) To find out how violence against witches in Kisii county affects the stability of their families?

1.4 Justification of the Study

The study was timely and relevant as it seeks to explore the role of the Abagusii indigenous religion in violence against alleged witches, and more so, how the phenomena can be reduced being a social problem in the community. Violence against suspected witches is negatively affecting the Abagusii through killing of people, destruction of property and families disintegrating.

It is anticipated that after this research, local government administrators will benefit from recommendations on how to fight the belief in witchcraft and witch hunting in the society with an aim of promoting peace and stability in families and the society at large.

Cases of violence against suspected witches have increased despite efforts from the Church, non-governmental organizations and the government. Findings from this study shall help law enforcement agents in strategizing for ways of curbing violence against suspected witches.

Studies on witchcraft have been undertaken among African societies like Digo, Akamba, Gisu, Dobu, Abagusii, among others. Despite a continuous acknowledgement of the existence of the practice in the Kisii society, there is no scholarly study done to explore how the indigenous Abagusii religious beliefs mitigate violence against suspected witches. This is the gap I endeavour to fill in addition to examining the moral and normative justification of violence against the suspects, and the impact to the stability of their families.

Findings from this research will add to the available literature in African religion, anthropology, and sociology on witchcraft, African religion and violence in the society.

1.5 Literature Review

Scholarly interests on the role of witchcraft in society have produced an enormous body of literature on the subject. This section provides a critical survey of the literature on witchcraft and the resultant violence against alleged witches. Peter Geschiere argues that the challenge of modernity has hampered efforts of Africans to control violence against suspected witches. His study focused on southern and western Cameroon. He traces two contradictory themes: the idea that people accumulate power and wealth through witchcraft, and the notion that the fear of witchcraft diminishes inequalities between people by motivating people to share their resources. The implication of the first assumption is that witchcraft powers increase inequality, while in the second posits that the fear of such powers acts to decrease inequality (Geschiere 1997: 10). Significantly, Geschiere stresses that the contexts in which such contemporary notions flourish are ones in which secrecy is prevalent. Powerful politicians tend to keep their activities and deliberations secret, reinforcing the popular impression that they have magical or witchcraft powers. Further, he argues that the media draw on urban rumours or legends as their sources and multiply their circulation. Newspapers and radio programs contribute to such impressions by reporting spectacular stories about witchcraft among the elite. Modern technological items are often cited as intertwined with witchcraft ideas, for example, in references to a witch's x-ray eyes or claims that people are compelled as zombies to "drive planes" at night. Geschiere brings out a number of general points that could provide explanation to witchcraft accusations among Abagusii. One is the ideas

that witchcraft play an ambiguous or double role in society as a tool used by elites to gain their own ends, while the elites see it “as a weapon of the weak against the state” (Geschiere,1997: 10). Secondly, Geschiere’s work informs us on the issue of a connection between witchcraft and the kinship relations that hold within the household in all societies which needed investigation.

Ebolaji Idowu (1973: 175) discusses the phenomena of witchcraft in Yoruba land and posits that despite the introduction of Christianity, western culture and formal education, majority of Yoruba still believe in the reality of witchcraft. It is as a result of this belief that some local ‘prophets’ of certain sectarian Churches have taken the role of traditional medicine men to combat the practice. These ‘prophets’ recognize the existence of witchcraft, which they believe should be destroyed and rendered inactive through the powers of prayers. It is this kind of attitude toward witchcraft, which has made the sectarian Churches to be popular among the Yoruba. The foregoing information was useful to the inquiry on the intensity of the belief in witchcraft among Abagusii and the strategies the society has adapted to contain witchcraft beliefs.

A study on various witch hunting movements in different parts of Africa, which include the Bamucapi movement in Zambia, Malawi and Central Rhodesia; the Atinga movement in Ghana, Togo, Dahomay and Nigeria; and the Christian influenced movements like the Zionist prophets and Seraphim in South Africa and Nigeria respectively, was conducted by Geoffrey Parrinder. In his study he posited that:

In recent years there have been numerous new witch finding movements in different parts of Africa. One was the Bamucapi which in 1934 spread across Malawi, Zambia and Central Rhodesia and into parts of Congo. The Bamucapi were young men in Europe clothing who travelled about in twos and threes smelling

out witches. They would get the village chiefs to line all the people in a row, men separately from women, and they tried to catch their reflections in small mirrors as they passed by. The mirror was supposed to reveal the witch. Anyone who refused to pass was threatened with sickness and exposure (Parrinder, 1974 127).

According to the author, the Atinga witch finders claimed they could detect witches by going into a trance, and those found guilty were ordered to stop witchcraft. The ideas and views raised by Parrinder assisted in shaping this study. The study discovered that just like the Atinga, the Abagusii have *sungu sungu*, a vigilante group that employs violence against witch suspects in the community. The book also identifies a witch hunting society in Nupe and Yoruba that captured witches in the evening and subjected them to an ordeal before killing them. These traditional methods of curbing witchcraft show that there are certain communities in Africa who employ techniques influenced by Christian teachings. An example is the Zionist prophets among the Zulu and Seraphim in Nigeria (Parrinder, 1974: 127). It was found out that majority of Abagusii are Seventh Day Adventists whose teachings were investigated on whether and how they condemn violence against suspected witches.

Other studies like that of Rosemary Ekosso (2004) equate the practice of witchcraft with 'black magic'. Significant in her study is the notion that witchcraft has both negative and positive influences on people's lives. Ekosso's study demonstrated that the Bakweri community believes that the *Nyongo* (witches) are capable of killing people and thereafter use their bodies to accumulate wealth. As a result, people who accumulate unexplained wealth (riches) are believed to be witches. Ekosso's analysis of the economic function of witchcraft was applied in their study to investigate the practice

among the Abagusii. The result of this analysis was that the increased cases of violence against suspected witches in Kisii county are a scapegoat.

Studies that illuminated on witchcraft and gender include the one done by Fortune Reo (1963) in the Dobu society. Reo notes that witchcraft is allegedly dominated by women who indulge in nefarious activities in spirit form while their bodies sleep. This explains why most men among the Dobu fear their wives and mother in laws because they could possess the power of witchcraft. Just like the Dobu, my study found out that though witchcraft is associated with all genders among the Abagusii, it mostly attributed to women than men (Reo 1963:200). Just like the Dobu, it was found out that women are the most accused as witches in Kisii county. Women are accused of being suspected witches by their husbands' relatives because they are strangers in their new homes where they are married to. It was noted that there is rivalry between young women and their mother in-laws. It was also found out that most women in Kisii county stay in the rural areas while their husbands stay in urban centres because of work, therefore they have more chances of accusation compared to the men.

Though Segun Ogungbemi (1975) considers the fear of witchcraft to be a disturbing phenomenon and a threat to family life and social harmony in the contemporary African society, his approach is different from sociological and anthropological analysts. Using a philosophical approach, Ogungbemi argues that the belief in witchcraft is a product of imagination and thereby superstitious. He posits that the psychic influence of the fear of witchcraft in African societies is more real than the physical appearance of witches. According to him poverty and ignorance have contributed to the belief in witchcraft. It is against this premise that Ogungbemi

suggested that an education that challenges beliefs and practices with evidence is crucial in eradicating the belief (Ogungbemi, 1997:51). Ogungbemi's argument about witchcraft in Africa cannot go unchallenged. The fact that witchcraft pervades the whole of Africa does not mean that all Africans suffer from psychic problems. This kind of argument illustrates Ogungbemi's inability to grasp the depth of African thinking as far as witchcraft is concerned. His criticism that witchcraft is imaginary and witches do not exist is invalid. Studies on the subject among Abagusii indicated that the belief in witchcraft and witches are a reality. The reality of witchcraft among Abagusii is spiritual, psychological, emotional, and physical. The mental reality has physical effects; Ogungbemi rightly argues that witchcraft is not a physical reality but mental probably spiritual one. It was found out that the association that the Abagusii attach to the reality of witches is misplaced; they look for scapegoats in elderly people (women) because of resources, land in particular.

Andrew Sanders examines witchcraft among the Cewa of Zimbabwe, discussing a case of a Christian village headman, Gombe, who trained as an evangelist, married a Christian woman, and became headman of his village. As a headman, Gombe decided to take a second wife to entertain his guests better. This act seriously antagonized his first wife and signalled his departure from the Christian practice of retaining only one wife (Sanders, 1995). Gombe and his second wife subsequently declared that they found witchcraft substances hidden in the first wife's hut prompting them to seek redress in the traditional court. From the foregoing case, it can be interpreted that polygamy can lead to accusations of witchcraft. During this study it was found out that strenuous relations among co-wives generate witchcraft accusations in Kisii county.

In addition, Max Marwick discusses reasons for witchcraft accusations among the Cewa, arguing that it provides a means of rupturing relations that have become intolerantly strained. He observes that witchcraft accusations have increased due to the rise of unemployment thereby viewing the allegations to be similar to a switch in a control mechanism that reacts to population increase which leads to competition for the available resources (Marwick, 1950). Just like the Cewa, findings from the study indicated that witchcraft accusations in Kisii county have increased due to socioeconomic change. Marwick's thoughts are significant in understanding societal relations and witchcraft accusations among the Kisii.

Max Gluckman explains that the belief in witchcraft among the Zulu is widely spread and witches are generally believed to be women who derive their powers from the shadowy world that is neither of the ancestors nor that of God. Gluckman observes that according to the Zulu, the possession of witchcraft is not considered evil, but it is the intention that makes witchcraft evil (Gluckman, 1970:33). Gluckman's ideas were taken into consideration when studying the Abagusii to find out their religion's worldview on whether witchcraft is evil or not? The study revealed that Abagusii view witchcraft as evil and it is the basis for violence against witch suspects. Just like the Zulu, it was found out that witchcraft accusations in Kisii county are increasing because of the failure of the indigenous Abagusii religion to explain causes of some misfortunes and diseases in the community such as HIV and AIDS.

A study by Thomas Beidelman examines the practice of witchcraft and the various approaches employed to counteract the practice among the Kaguru of Tanganyika. Among the Ukaguru there is always a certain category of people suspected

of witchcraft, which include those economically successful, powerful leaders such as chiefs, rowdy wives, envious co-wives and tribal outsiders who are settled in Ukaguru. The practice has created enormous tension in the Ukaguru society leading to migration of people to avoid being bewitched by neighbours. Subsequently, some people in Ukaguru have reacted by purchasing counter witchcraft paraphernalia from well-known diviners (*muganga*). In their efforts to eradicate witchcraft, people in Ukaguru have used various strategies such as exposing suspected witches to certain ordeals to determine whether they are guilty or innocent. The study found that the Abagusii just like the Ukaguru use unfair ways of detecting witches. It is common knowledge that if people insert their hand in hot water or oil they will feel pain, therefore, no one can escape suffering if judged through this ordeal. Just like the people of Ukaguru, the study found out that Abagusii think witches are evil humans. This prompts the need to investigate whether the Abagusii religion had methods of determining the guiltiness or innocence of suspected witches and how to rationalize the explanation. Beidelman explains that any witch suspect found guilty was killed, but if the accused person is found innocent, the accuser is made to pay a large fine (Beidelman, 1963:39).

Mark Auslander's findings present witch-finding movements in Eastern Zambia in which young male witch-finders accused the senior members of the society for blocking the fertility of the juniors (Auslander, 1993). Such a form of symbolism clearly indicates tension between generations. Auslander found out that there are traces of tension between the youth and the aged generations since most of those exposed to violence over accusations of witchcraft are the elderly. This study investigated on whether increasing cases of violence against suspected witches could be as a result of tension between the

youth and the aged in Kisii County. Auslander's findings were therefore of immense value to the study.

Maia Green (2005) examines the relationship between witchcraft suppression movements in southern Tanzania and the entrenchment of witchcraft. Green contends that these movements help to encourage witchcraft rather than discourage it. This study observed that just like in Tanzania, Abagusii have sungu sungu as a witchcraft suppression movement which has encouraged cases of violence against suspected witches as people use the movement as a scapegoat to their socio-economic challenges. The study identifies and blames sungu sungu for the rise of violence against suspected witches in Kisii county.

Edward Miguel studied the relationship between income loss due to drought and flood and witch killings in Tanzania. Droughts and floods were blamed on witchcraft resulting in killings in Tanzania (Miguel, 2005). During that time, the alleged witches were women aged over fifty years earning below average, and whose killings were initiated by close relatives and neighbours. Taking the Tanzania example, the study investigated whether we have factors which have motivated violence against suspected witches in Kisii county. Following on the understanding of Miguel, the study looked for the motivation of witch accusations in Kisii county hence identifying land conflicts, economic rivalries, jealousy, the coming of new religious movements and competitions for available rare resources. Indeed witchcraft accusations are a scapegoat for misfortunes among relatives.

According to John Mbiti (1969), witches are the most hated people in African society. He observed that witchcraft accusations are found in closely knit communities,

especially among neighbours and relatives. His study asserts that there are various reasons that drive people to use witchcraft with domestic tensions outlined as one of the reasons. However, there are other instances when witchcraft could be used to get rid of others for fun, or to inherit their property, or take revenge for some wrong done to perpetrators of witchcraft. Further, Mbiti notes that witchcraft is deeply entrenched among Africans in spite of modern education and religions like Christianity and Islam, thereby concluding that it is difficult to eradicate the belief and practice in Africa (Mbiti, 1969). Mbiti's ideas were useful in guiding the study's investigation as to the affection the Abagusii have towards witches. Also in spite of modern education and contemporary religions such as Christianity, like other African societies, some Abagusii still practice witchcraft.

A study by Richard Gehman (2000) explores the practice of witchcraft among the Kamba of Kenya where he observes that all misfortunes are attributed to witchcraft. He writes:

Virtually every unusual event or tragic experience can be explained by witchcraft. Anything from a poor harvest, sickness, death, accident or headache, to a quarrelling relationship or unusual phenomena finds their explanation in witchcraft. Nothing happens by chance to a traditional Mukamba. There is no 'natural death' (Gehman, 2000:80).

He argues that witches in Kamba society employ various techniques to harm their victims, which include items that were once in contact with their victims to kill them. Further, the author shows that Kamba witches act without rites and spells and use hereditary psycho-physical powers to attain their ends. Due to mystical and innate powers within them, Kamba witches are thought to be able to do extraordinary things that are

beyond ordinary human abilities. Kamba witches act innately, participate in naked night dance, eat human flesh and suck blood from their victims. For individuals who would like to be witches, it is possible for them to attain the powers through either inheritance or purchasing of witch powers. When someone is suspected of witchcraft, a group of elders gather to search the residence of the alleged witch. If they find witchcraft paraphernalia, the elders would take the suspect out of the village and kill him.

Gehman further argues that in other cases, before one pronounces a suspected witch to the public, the individual must visit at least three diviners. If all diviners are in agreement villagers arrest the alleged witch and present the suspect to the elders of *King'ole*, which acts as a supreme court. If the elders proved the suspect to be guilty of witchcraft they killed the alleged witch using an arrow (Gehman, 2000). Gehman's study based on a Kenyan community, the Akamba, was of significance to this study which is also based on, though a different Kenyan community, the Abagusii. It helped in assessing the relationship between misfortunes and witchcraft as well as the role of the traditional courts and the sungu sungu vigilante groups in dealing with issues of witchcraft. This understanding is further buttressed by Judith Bahemuka.

Just like Gehman, Bahemuka (2000) discusses witchcraft beliefs and practices among the Akamba. In her analysis she posits:

Every social evil in Akamba society is explained in terms of witchcraft. These evils are diseases, poverty, misfortune, inability to have children and inability to find a husband or a wife (Bahemuka, 2000:105).

According to Bahemuka the ultimate aim of witches is to destroy life and harm people in the society. She argues that Akamba witches have the ability to mysteriously transform

from one form of animal to another and sometimes to birds and snakes. In curbing the practice in the Akamba society, Bahemuka observes that the community relies on the expertise of witch smellers who upon detecting the alleged witches are condemned to death (Bahemuka, 1982). This study revealed that initially Abagusii had people who have powers to reveal witches but doubts whether they can be relied on.

In exploring the understanding of witchcraft among the Kikuyu, another community of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta (1938) posits that the most hated and unpopular magic in the Kikuyu community is *orogi* (witchcraft). The possessor of such magic is looked upon as a dangerous and destructive individual. The practice is regarded to be against the ethical and moral laws of the community. It is argued in the book that when alleged witches are caught performing witchcraft, they are usually presented before the *kiama* (council of elders) for judgment. During the trial a diviner will be brought to perform certain ordeals to the suspected witches. If the alleged witch is found to be harmless, the individual will be released after undertaking an oath binding them not to engage in witchcraft. However, if the suspect is declared guilty, a death sentence is imposed on the individual. After the death sentence certain rituals observed to cleanse those who executed the penalty (Kenyatta, 1938). Kenyatta's study shed insight on my project regarding the ethical and moral laws on associated with witchcraft.

A study of the Luo community who are neighbours to the Abagusii is worth noting. While studying the Luo, though of Uganda, Okot P'Bitek asserted that there are three types of *la-jok* (witchcraft): *tal*, night dancer; *abiba or okwata*, who's familiar, is the kite; and *yir*, evil eye. Despite of the three categories of witchcraft, the Luo define a witch as a person with queer behaviours. P'Bitek notes that most of the people accused of

witchcraft among the Luo are men who acquire it from their fathers. Like in most communities in Africa, witches are the most feared people in the Luo community because of their ability to inflict harm and suffering to their victims. According to the study, Luo witches engage in various nefarious activities including feasting on dead human flesh. As a result, it is common among the Luo to erect a fence on a grave of a newly buried person to prevent witches from taking the body. During their nocturnal activities, witches like dancing around people's houses, leading to the Luo sprinkling ashes around houses on the belief that when witches step on it, they will be harmed. It is believed that the ashes act in a way that renders an alleged witch immobile. The next morning, people seize the immobilized alleged witch, a long nail is driven through his head, or a long dry stick is forced through his rectum (Okot, 1978). P'Bitek's ideas were taken into consideration in my study that demonstrated that unlike the Luo, contemporary Abagusii rely on rumours and petty evidence to pronounce a suspected witch guilty.

Closely related to my study is the one done by Erick Masese among the Kisii community. Masese observed that the belief and practice of witchcraft is a pervasive aspect in the community arguing:

Witchcraft belief and practice (*oborogi*) is a pervasive aspect of the Gusii community. In this community, it is seen as the greatest threat to life. Curses and evil spirits might explain every social evil, but witchcraft is nearly always the reason in the minds of those who are struck by misfortunes like the demise of a close relative, all kinds of grave illness, impotence, snake bites and madness. This attribution of witchcraft to every misfortune has thus seen men or women killed for being accused of practicing witchcraft (Masese, 2006: 317).

The above quotation illustrates that most misfortunes befalling the Kisii are attributed to witchcraft. According to him, witchcraft among the community is transmitted from

parents to children through socialization at an early age. He argues that witches in Kisii exhume corpses, change into animals and birds during their nocturnal operation. He further explains that if Abagusii prove a witch suspect guilty, they order for the execution of the suspect. Masese concludes that with the introduction of colonialism, Christianity and Western education, traditional methods of solving witchcraft cases were rendered ineffective leading to increased witchcraft accusations and killings (Masese, 2006:320). This study investigated whether we have other factors for the increased accusation of witchcraft.

Another study on witchcraft among the Kisii is the one conducted by Justus Ogembo (2006) that analysed a spate of witch-killings that was underway in Kisii region from 1992. His study integrates the testimony of participants and witnesses to incidents of witch-killing with ethnographic and socioeconomic information in order to understand what led to the sudden rise of this violence in November 1992 and its rapid decline in July 1994. Ogembo's book contributes to our understanding of how, in this era of globalization, the forces of the free market economy that are set into motion in one part of the world are experienced and interpreted in another as the workings of the supernatural. The gap that my study filled that previous studies did not address was to show how Abagusii indigenous beliefs and practices mitigate violence against suspected witches.

The foregoing literatures addressed the belief in witchcraft and witch hunting in various communities in Africa. However, none of them has dealt with the role of traditional religious beliefs in violence against suspected witches in Kisii county, the moral and normative foundation of violence against suspected witches and the impact of

the violence against suspected witches on the stability of families in Kisii county. Some have attempted to explore the Abagusii belief in witchcraft in general, but their studies were done several years ago providing the need for a contemporary study on the subject. Therefore the present study attempted to fill gaps left by scholars on the subject of violence against suspected witches among the Abagusii.

1.6 Theoretical framework

This study is guided by the structural functional theory and René Girard's (1965) "Scapegoat" theory. The structural functional theory guided into the study of two objectives: to determine the role indigenous Abagusii worldview in violence against suspected witches; and to ascertain the role of indigenous Abagusii religious belief systems in the moral and normative foundation of violence against suspected witches in Kisii county. René Girard's "Scapegoat" theory guided the third objective: to establish possible causes of increased witch accusations in the contemporary Kisii county.

The structural functional theory was developed by Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and expounded by Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), Talcott Parsons (1902-1978) and Radcliff Brown (1881-1942) (Bajpai, 1996). This theory emphasizes on the organic unity of society. The structural-functionalists opine that a society is made up of various elements. Each of the different elements of a society has a function that contributes to the preservation of the structural survival and the coherence of the society as a whole. If one of the organs fails, the whole system will either collapse or be forced to readjust. The society's survival depends on the harmonious interaction of its various elements. All elements in a social system have a functional unity as they work together without conflicts. These elements include the structure (social organizations and institutions) and

their functions (patterns of social behaviour) (Durkheim, 1915). These parts of the society are interrelated; a change in any part affects all others.

The theory is equated to the human body that is made up of different organs which are necessary for the survival of the body. If one of the organs is removed, the human being will either die or he will not function normally. This theory guided the study in explaining the fact that increased violence against suspected witches is because of the declining influence of the traditional Abagusii religious beliefs on the contemporary Abagusii. Religion is a social phenomenon and the social function of religion is to act as a lubricant and glue to the social process. It is glue in the sense that it binds an individual to the society, and a lubricant as it provides legitimation and authority for the social structure, norms and moral order, which facilitates the smooth functioning of society.

Later, Malinowski added that religion as a social phenomenon fulfils a function in relation to human psychological needs (Malinowski, 1948). It provides psychological safeguards against fear of death and give humans a feeling of mastery of their fate. Taking a different approach Radcliff Brown analysed the social structural pattern of societies with regard to overall cohesiveness and functioning with regard to religion in maintaining social order (Brown, 1952). Lastly, Parsons describes the main function of religion as being the creation of cultural values, beliefs and symbols (Parsons, 1944). According to him, ritual action and religious belief are forms of symbolic statement about social order.

The theory further explains that social systems work to maintain equilibrium after external shocks disturb the balance among social institutions in the society (Merton, 1968). Such social equilibrium is achieved through socialization of members of the

society into the basic values and norms of that society so that consensus is reached. Where socialization is insufficient, social control mechanisms exist to restore conformity, or to segregate the nonconforming individuals from the rest of society (Merton, 2004: 894-90). Violence against suspected witches in this case is a social control mechanism as it imposes sanctions informally.

This study examined the Abagusii religious beliefs through the principles of structural functionalist theory so as to investigate the role it plays toward violence against suspected witches. The research concluded that Abagusii indigenous worldview has a function of promoting violence against suspected witches in Kisii county through its teachings on who is a witch; what witches do; and how a witch should be punished. The study also found out Abagusii religion has a function to violence against suspected witches in Kisii county; Abagusii indigenous belief systems gives violence against suspected the moral and normative foundation. It was found out that violence against suspected witches has a function of reinforcing and defining acceptable behaviour. It is a social control mechanism that tries to restore conformity to basic values and norms of a society. However, this theory cannot fully explain all aspects of this study, requiring another theory to expound further on causes of violence against suspected witches in Kisii county.

This study was also guided by René Girard's "Scapegoat" theory to explain the third objective: to establish possible causes of increased witch accusations in the contemporary Kisii county. This theory is grounded on the principle that human beings are mimetic creatures (Girard, 1965). Mimesis is an all-encompassing expression of imitation, which also focuses on acquisition and appropriation. (Girard, 2005: 101).

Human beings imitate what they see in others. The more they imitate each other, the more alike they become leading to rivalry. Increased rivalry creates increased. “Violence is generated when two or more partners try to prevent one another from appropriating the object they all desire through physical or other means” (Girard 1979:9).

Since all human life is based around necessary acquisitions (as well as unnecessary acquisitions), conflict must always occur since acquisitive mimesis is one of the core human traits. Whenever one person sees another person attempting to acquire some object, those around him/her will also begin to desire that object and attempt to acquire it. This makes an assumption that accusations of witchcraft are used to eliminate competitors from the county through misfortunes such as death and sickness, thus a scapegoat.

Scapegoating is a way in which a society attempts to place blame through sacrifice of an animal or a person to channel violence away from them. Girard calls ‘scapegoating’, an allusion to the ancient religious ritual where communal sins were metaphorically imposed upon a he-goat, and the beast was eventually abandoned in the desert, or sacrificed to the gods. An example can be drawn from Leviticus 16:10 which quotes; ‘But the goat chosen by lot for Azazel is to be presented alive before the Lord to make purification with it by sending it into the wildernesses’.

Once the Israelites sinned against Yahweh, they could perform an animal sacrifice to make atonement for their sins. Just like the Israelites, African religion requires community members to make sacrifices once members have wronged the supernatural world in order to avoid punishment. A community can therefore direct inside violence towards an exterior violence to create peace through separation. Jensen (2007:54)

believes that due to the rapid change in the society, people's lives are disrupted and this has caused communities to seek out someone to place the anger and fear on. Many communities place this fear on the weaker classes; the women, the poor, the aged and frail (Scott, 2009). An understanding then can be arrived at that violence against suspected witches in Kisii county is a scapegoat.

The study is guided by Girard's theory into concluding that witch accusations in Kisii county are diversions for blame or anger of socio-economic changes affecting Abagusii. Abagusii religion blames all misfortunes facing them such as death, sickness, poverty and lack of success to unseen forces of witchcraft where an individual or groups of individuals become the scapegoats for all the bad feeling in the community. Order is restored by expelling or killing the scapegoat, and the community becomes peaceful again. The single act of sanctioned violence, acts almost similar to a vaccination against a disease.

The 'sacrificers' choose an arbitrary victim because of their vulnerability and "difference" (Girard, 1986). The victim is not given time to defend himself/herself against the charges laid against him/her, and the 'scape goaters' themselves believe the charges. Part of the nature of the scapegoating mechanism is that, the 'scape goaters' do not know that they are scapegoating, and the charges pointed to the scapegoat are held to be true (Girard 1979:15). Girard expounds that, magic does not exist, so the methods allegedly used by the "witches", and the beliefs of harm from magic by the villagers is nonsense (Girard, 1986:8).

According to Girard, the person that receives the communal violence is a 'scapegoat' in this sense: her death or expulsion is useful as a regeneration of communal

peace and restoration of relationships. This explains the understanding that Abagusii indigenous religious beliefs blame those with extreme behaviour as people behind social strains that cannot be addressed by the religion. The study concludes that indigenous Abagusii religious beliefs have a function to violence against witch suspects and violence against suspected witches in Kisii county is a scapegoat.

1.7 Research Methodology

1.7.1 Scope of the Study

Violence against suspected witches is a worldwide phenomenon. This research was confined to Abagusii community of Kisii county, Kenya. Focus was made on individuals accused of witchcraft together with those who witnessed violence against suspected witches in the county.

This research was limited to two variables; Abagusii indigenous religion and violence against suspected witches. It aimed at determining the contribution of Abagusii indigenous religion to violence against suspected witches.

1.7.2 Research Design

This study utilized the descriptive, analytical, comparative and historical approach. The descriptive approach is geared towards describing the belief and practice of witchcraft among the Abagusii. People's views were analysed, evaluated and any useful contribution was assessed. The comparative method was utilized in this study to compare and contrast the traditional and the contemporary methods of punishing suspected witches. The historical method on the other hand was used to investigate socio-

cultural background of the Kisii community and historical circumstances that have shaped these people and their culture in regard to violence against suspected witches. The approach attempted to trace the Abagusii religious beliefs before, during and after colonization and advent of Christianity.

1.7.3 Research Site

The study was carried out in Kisii county, Kenya. The county is located to the south east of Lake Victoria and is bordered by six counties with Narok to the south, Migori to the west, Homa Bay to the north west, Kisumu to the north, Bomet to the south east and Nyamira to the east. The county covers a total area of approximately 1,317.4 Km² and its geographical coordinates are 0° 41' 0" south, 34° 46' 0"east (Ogendo, et.al. , 1988). The map below shows the location of Kisii county in Kenya.



Figure 1: Location of Kisii County in Kenya

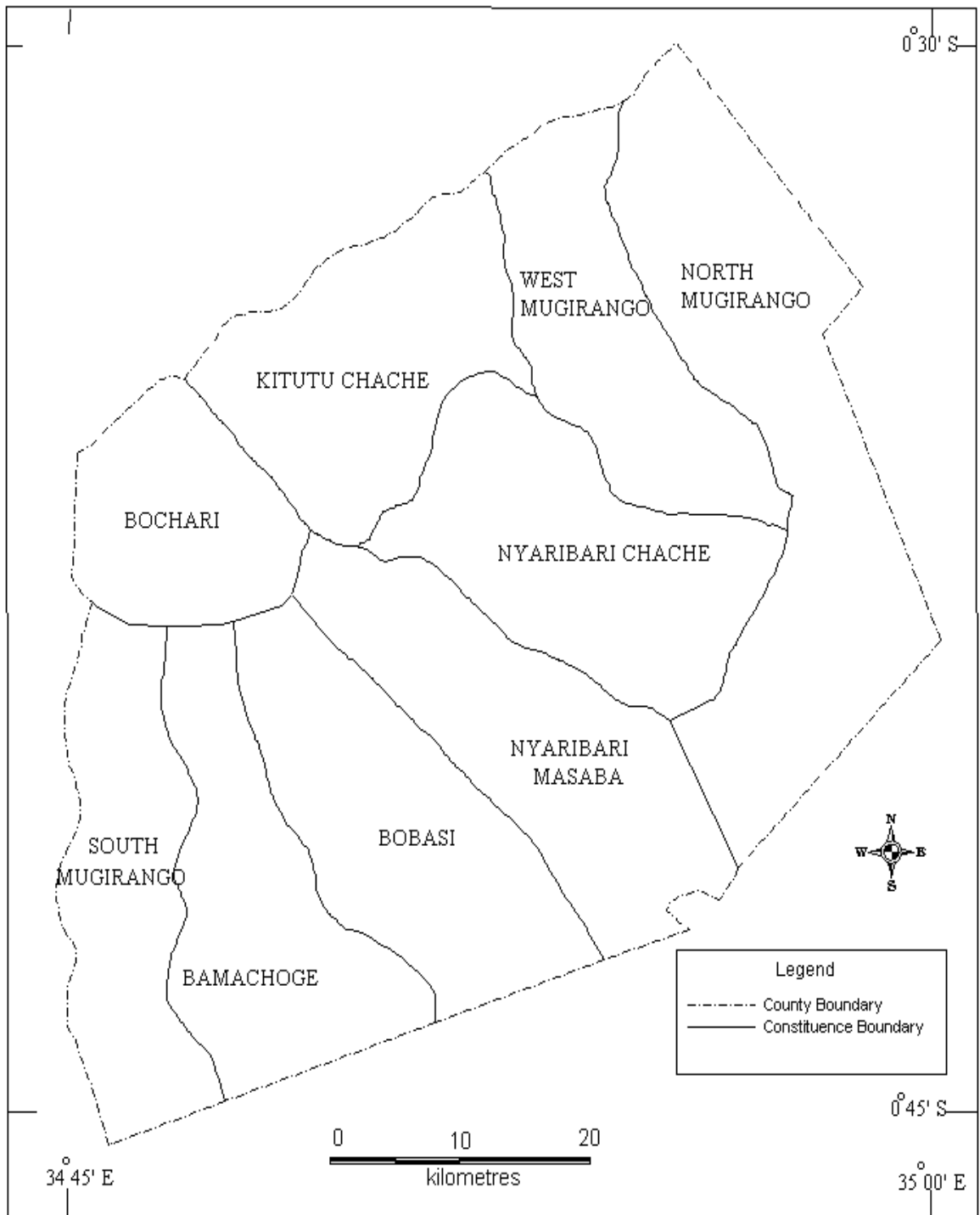


Figure 2: Map showing the Constituencies of Kisii County

1.7.4 Study Population

Kisii county is one of the most densely populated counties in Kenya (Levine et.al. 1966:223). The Abagusii constitutes the 6th largest ethnic group comprising about seven percent of the national census with a population of 1,152,282 (Male 48 percent, Female 52 percent) (Soft Kenya, 2011). The region has a population density of 874.7 people per Km² that leads to the Abagusii utilizing most of the available space for agriculture, affecting food production.² Studies indicate that 51 percent of the population in Kisii county lives below poverty line, as a result most of the Abagusii engage in non-agricultural employment such as commercial businesses and soapstone carvings, either locally or in other urban centres found in the country (Soft Kenya, 2011).

1.7.5 Sample Frame and Sample Size

The study involved both male and female respondents aged between 18 and 80 years. This is the age bracket of youth and adult respondents who were able to give their views, opinions and experiences with regard to the role of Abagusii indigenous religious beliefs in violence against suspected witches in Kisii county. The respondents were selected from nine constituencies of the county using purposive sampling technique. Respondents for this study were selected from a population of 1,152,282 (Kisii Central D. D. P., 2007). The sample size was determined from the formula advanced by Yamane as cited by Israel, (2009) which states:

² In 2009, the Annual Growth Rate was 2.75%. Between 1963 to 1980 an average woman in Kisii County bore close to nine children. 45% of the total population is between 0-14 years, 51.6 % between 15-64 years and 3.4% above 65 years.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the population size, and e is the level of precision. When this formula is applied, we get a sample size of 400 people since N (population size) is 1,152,282 people and e (level of precision) is ± 5 percent. The following information summarizes characteristics of the population of Kisii county.

| Population detail | Characteristics |
|--------------------------|---|
| Total Population | 1,152,282 (Male – 48 %, Female – 52%) |
| Population Density | 874.7 people per Km 2 |
| National Percentage | 2.9 % |
| Annual Growth Rate | 2.75% (2009) |
| Age Distribution | 0-14 years (45%), 15-64 years (51.6 %), 65+ years (3.4%) |

Table 1: Characteristics of the population of Kisii county (Source, Kisii District Development Plan, 2008-2012:16).

This study was informed by a sample of 400 (four hundred) informants, who were chosen according to their constituencies. The study relied on 9 (nine) focus group discussions (FGD'S) of 20 (twenty) members each (180 respondents), together with (30) thirty key informants who include four elders, four alleged witches, six pastors, four Abagusii religious specialists, four clan elders, four chiefs and four relatives of lynched suspected witches. A total of 180 (one hundred and eighty) questionnaires were prepared and distributed among the respondents residing in the identified constituencies.

1.7.6 Sampling Procedure

Both probability and non-probability methods of sampling were deployed to sample groups of informants. These techniques ensured that respondents from each

constituency in the county were obtained. Purposive sampling technique was used to identify the respondents who had the ability to give relevant information. This sampling technique was crucial in identifying respondents particularly in those areas that were next to where violence against suspected witches had taken place. The identified key informants included: the clan elders, alleged witches, pastors, Abagusii religious specialists, chiefs and relatives of the victims. The information acquired from the key informants was complemented with information obtained through the questionnaires and oral interviews.

On the other hand, random sampling was employed to pick a cross section of the Abagusii who were used to divulge information on the impact of violence against suspected witches to the stability of their families. The information was collected through interviews and administering questionnaires.

During the field work, groups of respondents were identified through snow ball sampling where respondents introduced the researcher to individuals portended to have more knowledge on the topic of study. We sought assistance of sub-chiefs and village headmen of the various sub-locations and villages of Kisii county to help trace individual respondents in their areas of influence. The presumption was that the sub-chiefs together with the village headmen knew almost every family and clan in their areas. Elders were Abagusii men and women aged 50 years old and above whereas Abagusii religious specialists included council elders, traditional priests, mediums, diviners and witch smellers. On the same hand, youths involved as respondents in this study were aged between 18 and 30 years.

1.7.7 Sources of Data

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data, and information was collected for a period of eighteen months. Primary data was obtained through personal interviews, observation and questioning residents who resided in areas where suspected witches had been exposed to various forms of violence. Secondary data was acquired by scrutinizing written sources that include books, articles, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, essays and seminar papers relevant to the research.

1.7.8. Instruments of data collection

Both primary and secondary methods of data collection were employed. Primary data collection tools included interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions. With regard with interviews, residents from the area of study were sampled out for interviews through cluster sampling. Respondents staying at areas within two Kilometres from the area where violence against suspected witches had taken place were sampled out. Data presented in this study was collected through in-depth interviews and all discussions were tape recorded to enable the researcher to refer back to them when necessary. The interview schedule was designed to allow free flowing discussions guided by specific questions. The sampled out respondents were exposed to snowball sampling technique where identified respondents introduced the researcher to other respondents after being interviewed. Respondents were interviewed on, Abagusii worldview on witchcraft, the morality and legality of violence against suspected witches and the impact of violence against suspected witches on their families.

Nine focus group discussions were conducted in each constituency within the Kisii county in which every group had twenty members. The composition of each group was consisted of four elders (two men and two women), four youths (two women and two men), two assistant chiefs, three people from families affected by the violence meted on suspected witches, a witch 'smeller', two members of the vigilante group, two pastors and two village headmen. Group discussions were held to provide rich and unexpected data in relatively a short time. This method was crucial as respondents were able to discuss issues of witchcraft and violence on suspected witches openly in groups than as individuals. Respondents were interviewed on the morality and legality of violence against suspected witches and their recommendations on how violence against suspected witches can be reduced in the county.

The structure of the questionnaires included both open and closed ended one. Information gathered from the discussions was integrated with the standard questionnaire to improve the researcher's interpretation of meaning and validity of all information gathered. Considering that the study is centred on witchcraft, which in the Kisii context is not openly discussed, research instruments were designed to probe and ensure minimum misreporting. As a control against misreporting, an introductory letter that stressed the importance of correct information was given to all respondents that guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. Questionnaires were used to collect information from respondents, providing an element of quantification in order to increase reliability and exactitude in attaining colossal amounts of information. Open-ended questionnaires were directed to traditional Abagusii religious specialists such as witch smellers, vigilantes and relatives of suspected witches, whereas closed questionnaires were administered to the

youth, clergy and clan elders from each cluster. The questionnaires served as a guideline for discussions that stimulated informants by probing questions related to the topic of study. Questionnaires helped in examining carefully whether any information has been left out by other methods.

Sources of secondary data included libraries, archives, documentary centres and data bases. Libraries that were indispensable include libraries of Moi University, University of Nairobi, University of East Africa Baraton and Catholic University of East Africa. Some of the documentary centres include the Central Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Culture and Social Services, South Kenya Conference Centre-Kisii and National Archives. Documents such as books, articles, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, documentary depictions, news stories, ethnographic researches, essays and seminar papers relevant to the research were also scrutinized.

1.7.9 Methods of Data Analysis

Data was analysed after collection to verify its authenticity through the quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. Quantitative techniques of data analysis were used to analyse quantifiable data. All data collected through oral interviews, focused group discussions and questionnaires was transcribed. The transcription of data from notes, written articles and reported speech was done to make linkages between themes, ideas and concepts. Data was analysed by referring to the research questions, objectives and literature. Part of it was coded to provide quantitative data that was analysed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). This type of data was represented in form of tables, charts and graphs. Tables were used to summarize data, in which graphs illustrated levels of the belief and practice of witchcraft.

Documented information was obtained and analysed from both published and unpublished records in public University libraries in Kenya.

1.8 Ethical Issues

The study population participation in the research exercise was voluntary. In order to meet this requirement, the researcher used well-prepared introduction procedures before soliciting data, explaining who he was, and the objectives of the study. The consent of the respondents was sought before data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity was assured and the names of respondents given in this study are not their real names.

1.9 Problems Encountered

The study had various limitations; getting respondents for the research was difficult despite numerous assurances of confidentiality and the availability of a non-disclosure agreement. The barrier was a reticence in participating in a study that involved disclosing information on witchcraft. Other respondents expressed fear of potential attack by 'witches' for exposing their activities to the public. Some suspected that they would be accused of being witches due to their knowledge on witchcraft. Many respondents requested a non-disclosure agreement before participating in the study and therefore reluctant to be involved in focus group discussions that included members of the sungu sungu vigilante. In order to protect the respondents, the researcher used pseudo names on the people interviewed. In some cases interviews were emotional as they reminded the relatives and victims of violence on the loss they incurred, thereby slowing the interviews.

In many areas it was hard to gather the elderly in one place for a focus group discussion. Many elderly people were afraid that, by gathering them together to discuss witchcraft, people would conclude that they were admitting that they were witches. In a few cases, it was a challenge to establish the ages of participants. As a result, some participants who said they were, or appeared to be, of a particular age or age-group, may have been younger or older than their actual age. A few potential participants were asking for upfront payment to participate in the study. Some of them refused to grant an interview or to participate in focus group discussions.

The main problem encountered was that of fear by the respondents to participate in discussions on the topic of research since it was a contentious issue. Some of the informants were not willing to give information on witchcraft because of the fear of victimization by the government agencies, sungu sungu human rights organizations and churches. To counter this limitation, informants were issued with a letter of introduction assuring them of confidentiality and anonymity. The researcher assured them that the research findings were to be used for academic purposes only and will not be used for any other purpose.

The relatively short time allocated to the study did not allow exhaustive exploration of issues related to violence against witch suspects. No similar study had been conducted before among the Abagusii hence it was challenging to access relevant documented secondary information on the role of Abagusii indigenous beliefs in violence against suspected witches. Furthermore, there is scanty baseline data in Kenya on which to base the violence against suspected witches in the area of study. Hence other studies from outside Kenya had to be consulted.

1.10 Operational Definition of Terms

Age grade- A social category or status based on an age range.

Age set- A social group defined by those who share the same age status and are a recognizable group.

Clan- A non-corporate descent group in which genealogical links to a common ancestor are assumed but are not actually known. They also share a common totem.

Key informants- A few individuals selected on the basis of criteria such as knowledge, compatibility, age, experience, or reputation in society that provide information about their culture.

Qualitative methods- Rich descriptions of cultural situations obtained from interviewing, participant observation, and collection of oral and textual materials. Ethnographies are reports from qualitative research.

Religion- A set of attitudes, beliefs, and practices pertaining to supernatural power.

African religion- The religion of the Africans before the coming of the foreign religions.

Sungu sungu- A vigilante group found in Kisii County.

A witch- A person believed to practice evil acts in the society and has a conscious tendency to kill or disable others through magic with an aim of hindering positive development in the society.

Witchcraft - A mystical and innate power which can be used by the possessor to harm other people through secretive harmful substances or techniques.

Worldview- A way of perceiving reality.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS DESCRIPTION OF KISII COUNTY

2.0 Introduction

Abagusii is a Bantu speaking community found in Nyanza Province of western Kenya. The name has its origin in the founder of the community, *Mogusii* (Nyarango, 1994). The community occupies the two fertile agricultural counties of Kisii Central, and Nyamira, which collectively is referred to as *Gusii* or the Gusii highlands. This chapter presents in brief the historical, social and religious description of the Kisii county. It discusses the general description of the area of study in form of political coverage in terms of constituencies and later discusses the climate of the area in form of temperature, and rainfall. Later, it explains the physical characteristics of the county in terms of drainage, vegetation, landscape and soil. The foregoing data will be used to support arguments made in the subsequent chapters in the search for causes of violence against suspected witches in Kisii county. The subsequent section on history, traditional religion, health, economic organization is also significant in the analysis of the causes of violence against witch suspects in the later chapters.

2.1 General Description of the area of study

Politically, the county covers nine constituencies that include Bonchari, South Mugirango, Bomachoge Borabu, Bomachoge Chache, Bobasi, Nyaribari Masaba, Nyaribari Chache, Kitutu Chache South and Kitutu Chache North (Kisii Central. D.D.P., 2009:8).

The area has an average maximum temperature range from 83° F (28.4°C) at the lowest altitudes to 73° F (22.8°C) at the highest elevations. The average minimum temperatures are 61.5° F (16.4°C) at the lowest and 50° F (9.8°C) at the highest (Ogendo, et.al, 1988:30), which is due to the area's high altitude, and its closeness to the equator and Lake Victoria. Generally, the area experiences relatively moderate to cooler temperature conditions ranging from 16°C to 27°C. The county receives rainfall mostly in the afternoons accompanied by lightning and thunderstorms, which is influenced by the Lake Victoria water mass. The movement of air masses between two temperature belts in the northern and southern hemispheres within the inter-tropical convergence zone gives the county two rainy seasons; long rains starting in February to May, whereas the short rains are experienced from August to December. The average annual rainfall ranges from 2000 mm in the east to about 1600 mm in the west. Rainfall in the region is, therefore, adequate and supports a diversity of agricultural activities and animal husbandry (Sponemann, 1974:20).

The biggest rivers in Kisii county are the Gucha and Sondu rivers (Akama, et.al, 2006:3). River Gucha originates in the North Mugirango and traverses Kitutu, Nyaribari, Bobasi, Machonge and South Mugirango onwards to Homabay district in South Nyanza where it drains into Lake Victoria. On the other hand River Sondu starts from Borabu/Sotik area, and flows in the northern parts of Gusii land along the boundary with Kericho district and enters Nyakach in Kisumu district before draining into Lake Victoria (Akama et.al, 2006:6). Kisii county has also a number of swampy areas in the valley bottoms such as Nyaturago and Chirichiro. The swamps are situated within the Keroka

erosion surface that is composed of Pleistocene rock deposits, which include black clay, alluvium and silt clay deposits eroded from the surrounding highland areas.

Consequently, vegetation in Kisii county is influenced by rainfall pattern, distribution and the area's physiographic. Prior to the settlement of the Abagusii in the area in the early nineteenth century, most of the natural vegetation of this region was made up of moist montane forest (Bogonko, 1977:34). However, by the beginning of the twentieth century, due to intense clearing of forest land for human settlement and agricultural production, most of Gusii land was converted to open savannah woodland vegetation characterized with scattered trees shrubs and a variety of grasses, which include the "Kikuyu and Star type" grasses. The Kikuyu grass is mainly found in the eastern parts of Gusii land in areas of altitude 6000 ft and above, whereas the star grass is mostly found in lower lying areas in the west.

The Gusii region has two ecological Zones that include Masaba and Chache (Maxon, 2003:265). Chache is the lower ecological zone found in the west, while the higher ecological zone is "Masaba" found toward the east. Gusii has a rolling, hilly landscape reaching altitudes of 3,900 feet (1,190 meters) in the far north-western corner and 6,990 feet (2,130 meters) in the central highlands. Its terrain rises in the southern and eastern direction to an altitude of 7000ft (2,134 m); and it slopes westwards (in the direction of Lake Victoria) to altitude 4,500 ft.(1,372m) at its lowest point in the west. The area has a ragged landscape with several escarpments and hills.

The soil formation in Kisii county is influenced by relief, drainage and existing rock system. The high altitude areas in the east have dark humid alluvium soil, whereas the lower lying areas in the west consist of a mixture of light coloured humid and clay

soil. On the overall, the region has fertile soils suitable for various agricultural activities. Since pre-colonial times, abundant rainfall and fertile soil has made Kisii county one of the most productive agricultural areas in Kenya. The proportion of cultivable land ranges between 70 and 80 per cent (Kisii Central D.D.P., 2007:12). The Abagusii have exploited their land by growing cash crops, such as tea, coffee and pyrethrum in addition to traditional foods like maize, millet, sorghum, yams, pumpkins and green vegetables. Bananas are a popular fruit in Kisii region and are often found growing along the constantly flowing river-beds. This explains why very little free land remains due to the intensive farming taking place on the densely populated Kisii land. The next section discusses the historical migration of Abagusii in order to trace the origin of the belief in witchcraft in the latter sections.

2.2 Historical Migration of the Abagusii

The Abagusii oral tradition indicates that they originated from a mythical place called “Misri” (Akama et.al, 2006:22), which is in the North-westerly direction from the present day Gusii land (over eight hundred years ago taking an easterly direction) and settled first near Mount Elgon region in western Uganda. During this moment, the Abagusii belonged to one family with the Kuria, Luhya, Meru, Kikuyu and Kamba ethnic groups whom they fondly refer to as “*abanto baminto*” (our people). Similarly, existing mythology among other Kenyan Bantu communities trace their origin to this mythical site “Misri”.

Though most Bantu mythologies trace their origin to Misri, the exact spatial location of the place is not known. Some analysts contend that Misri is the same place as

the biblical Egypt in North Africa. However, this appears to be unlikely as there is no collaborative linguistic, archaeological or ethnographical evidence to support this theory (Akama et.al, 2006:23). Clearly, it can be argued that although, in all likelihood, this mythical place did indeed exist, there is no collaborative evidence to support the theory that it is the same place as contemporary Egypt. Other scholars trace the origin of the Abagusii in Eastern Congo forest from where they migrated along with other Bantu communities such as Abaluhya, the Agikuyu, the Abasuba and the Akamba (Ochieng, 1974: 8).

The ancestral Gusii population entered western Kenya from Uganda to their present lands (Ochieng, 1974: 10) From Mount Elgon, the Gusii moved and settled in Kisumu in the middle of the sixteenth Century (Akama et.al, 2006:1). On the way, for two generations, they stayed at Goye Bay, by Lake Victoria, before they moved to the Kano plains and later to their present location due to the expansion of the Luo and the Maasai tribes. Gusii folk history contends that the leaders of the initial family units that settled in the Kano plains were sons of a family patriarch called Mogusii, hence the origin of the Gusii name (Akama et., 2006:11). This Goye Bay was characterized by unreliable rainfall distribution and unfavourable environmental conditions for growing subsistence crops and animal husbandry. At one time, the place was hit with severe drought that led to death of large numbers of livestock and extensive crop failure. Due to this calamity, their stay in Kisumu was short lived, thereby moving southerly and settled in the Kano plains. According to Abagusii folk history, the families that settled at the Kano plains were led by highly experienced hunters who guided people in hunting expeditions in search of wild animals and fish. During this period (over 300 years ago) the Kano plain was a park

like country that consisted of tall Savannah grassland and acacia trees, which provided a humble habitat for wild animals like gazelles, buffalos and wildebeests.

While in Kano plains the Abagusii came into contact with the Luos and due to pressure on sustenance resources, conflict emerged between the two communities forcing the Abagusii to leave the plains. The Abagusii's predicament at the Kano plains was aggravated by the nocturnal raids from the Maasai, driven by the cultural belief that all cattle belonged to them. This led to the Maasai staging nocturnal raids against Abagusii villages, burning down houses and killing people as they took away their cattle (Akama et.al, 2006:34). Another "push factor" that forced the Abagusii out of Kano plains was the fear of being sandwiched by two dominant non-Bantu communities, the Maasai and the Luo (Nyarango, 2004:56). There was eminent danger of socio-economic annihilation and cultural assimilation as demonstrated by the nocturnal attacks by the Maasai, which were affecting the Abagusii's way of life whereas the Luo numerical strength impacted on their culture and lifestyle (Ibid, 20). This realization among the Abagusii over the bearing influence of the Luo culture coupled with incessant urge for self-preservation can be postulated as another factor that added their urgency to move out of the Kano plains to Manga.

At Manga, the Abagusii started to experience increased population pressure relative to available resources. As a consequence, several segments of the Abagusii started dispersing to adjacent virgin habitats in search for new places to settle. Particularly, several Abagusii families moved from Manga and settled in Kipkelion area along the present Bomet and Kericho border. Due to unforeseeable circumstances, the Abagusii settlement at Kipkelion area did not last long. First, the Abagusii found the place to be

extremely cold and unsuitable for human habitation and growing of their staple food crop (finger millet). Consequently, there was persistent crop failure leading to severe famine and starvation. Secondly, the area appeared to be disease prone, as many people were affected by weather elements and begun dying from pneumonia and other related respiratory ailments. More so, the arrival of Kipsigis raiders in Kipkelion forced the Abagusii to move out of the area. This chain of calamities led the Abagusii to refer to the place “*Kabianga*”, which literally translates “to a place where everything refused”. As a result of the myriads of calamities, various Abagusii families started to retreat from Kabianga area, most of them taking a southerly direction and eventually settling in the present Trans Mara district, a place called Nyangarora (Interview with Mango’ng’o, 16/05/2011).

Due to these odds against the community, various members of the Abagusii clans decided to move to high altitude areas of Manga (Nyamongo, 1998:98). Being led by distinguished family patriarchal, they moved together as a distinct family unit due to insecurity that was prone in the area. Currently, the Abagusii are divided into seven clan clusters named after Mogusii’s seven sons: Mogetutu, Mogirango (who were twins), Mobasi, Machoge, Nyaribari and Monchari (Nyarango, 1994). According to Ochieng (1974), these young men established the seven Abagusii clans: Bogetutu, South Bogirango, North Bogirango, Bomachoge, Bonchari, Bobasi, and Nyaribari,³ which are named after totemic animals.⁴ Some of Abagusii families, particularly from Basi clan

³ A clan is group of people, as found in traditional African communities, sharing a common ancestor, totem or belief systems.

⁴ The Abasweta whose totem is Engoge (Baboon) constitutes the largest Gusii clan. The descendants of Mosweta evolved Kitutu, Nyaribari and Machoge clans. The second

decided to remain in Litein-Sotik area, and eventually assimilated into predominant Kipsigis culture. From the Manga escarpments the Abagusii continued to expand, covering the present Kisii county. When the British invaded Kisii land in early 1900s, the community initially responded with armed resistance that ceased after World War I (1914–18). The following section discusses the indigenous religion of Abagusii, which is a prerequisite to tracing the Abagusii worldview in the latter sections.

2.3 Abagusii Traditional Religion

According to the Abagusii belief, *Engoro* is regarded as the Supreme Being who created the world, and whose manifestation is seen in fauna, flora and celestial bodies. The term *Engoro* could be literary translated to imply the giver or supporter of life, and He is believed to be male, omnipotent, omnipresent, immanent, benevolent, omniscient, and supreme. He is regarded as the giver or distributor of life, wealth, wisdom, and blessings. Knowledge about *Engoro* is articulated through proverbs, short statements, songs, prayers, invocations, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies (Interview with Mankone, 17/05/2012). However, over time the Abagusii have also been noted to use the name to *Nyasaye*, the Luo name for God. The reason for the embracement of the Luo name *Nyasaye* is attributed to a Western Christian missionary influence who

largest Gusii clan is the Abagirango which was founded by Mochorwa (The clan name (Abagirango) is derived from the name of their totem animal *engo* (leopard) which means 'people who refused to kill a leopard). The third is the Ababasi whose totem animal was *enchage* (Zebra) a name given due to his expertise in skinning animals. The fourth largest Gusii clan is the Abanchari whose totem animal is the Hippopotamus (This clan was founded by Machabe who is believed to be a son of a Luo elder named Chieni. Machabe sought refuge in Gusii after killing his kinsman and married a daughter of Mogisero known as Monchari. The clan is named after the daughter of Mogisero) Abagisero forms the smallest Gusii clan and it appears that they are a break-away group from the original Abasweta clan. Their totem animal is *engoge* (Baboon).

evangelized the Luo before entering Gusii land. Due to *Engoro*'s sacredness the Abagusii approach Him through intermediaries who have to be consulted before reaching to the Supreme Being. Abagusii believe in existence of ancestors (*chisokoro*) who they appease through sacrificing animals. These intermediaries go through a hierarchy of beings who include; the ancestors (*chisokoro*), the spirits (*ebirecha*), and the divinities.

The Abagusii hold that *Engoro* created and sustains the universe, in addition to governing the destiny of humans, sending to people rain or drought, plenty or famine, health or disease, peace or war, depending on whether individuals lived a good or a bad life. It is argued that *Engoro* is pure, just and generous, who is all-knowing and thereby held with highest regard by the Abagusii. *Engoro*'s sacredness is further illustrated in his invisibility and residing in the sky (*erioba*). This Supreme Being does not directly interfere in the daily affairs of people, but occasionally reveals himself in storms, thunder, earthquakes and lightning. Other events on earth are carried out by his agents and ancestors (Interview with Sagini, 18/05/2012).

Traditionally, worship is done through prayers, sacrifices, offerings, songs, proverbs, short statements, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies. Prayers are offered twice a day (at sunrise and sun set), during harvests, at birth, before journeys or in cases of natural calamities such as sickness, seek protection against attack from witches, lightning, and hunger. Worshipping is done either individually or publicly. Religious specialists such as prophets, oracles, priests and diviners lead public worship as they are viewed as *Engoro*'s representatives on earth and as a result are respected in the community (Interview with Maosa, 18/05/2012). The following chart shows hierarchy of beings among Abagusii.

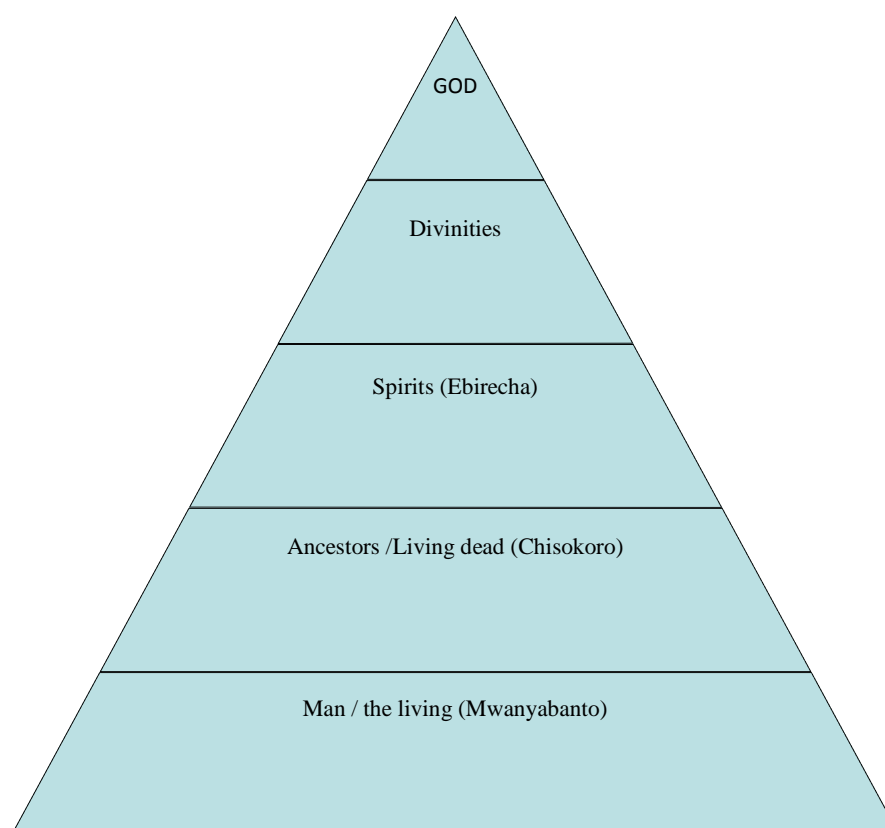


Figure 3: Hierarchy of Beings. (Mbiti, 1967, Birundu, 23/04/2011)

Failure to appease ancestors means that the spirits will begin to meddle in human affairs and bring misfortune. This is why when a person has good luck it is said that the ancestors are ‘sleeping well’. Traditionally, ancestors are regarded as the link between the living and God, explaining why all prayers to God are addressed through them. They are also held as the guardians of morality in the society and punish wrong doers such as witches.

Gusii traditional religion has no written sacred scriptures and creeds like other African religions (Mbiti, 1991:11). Despite the existence of religious specialists in the

Abagusii religion, everyone in the community is considered to be a religion carrier. The transmission of the religious knowledge is regarded to be a lifelong process that can be conveyed either formally or informally to its members. As an important aspect of identity, people are unable to absolutely detach themselves from the faith since it is entrenched in all aspects of culture in the society. The foregoing makes it difficult for people to depart from the belief in witchcraft despite of influence from western education and Christianity. This explains why those amongst the Kisii who embrace Islam or Christianity continue holding some aspects of the traditional religion while dealing with certain instances of their lives (Mbiti, 1967:2). There are observed moments when a section of the Abagusii reverts to their traditional religion during calamities. A significant observation of the traditional faith is that it is dynamic, changing with new environments and cultural alteration thereby adopting new forms. The religion insists on the continuance of life after death, no judgment, no paradise to be hoped for and no messianic hope or apocalyptic vision (An interview with Moturi, 12/07/2013). The subsequent section addresses the health situation in Kisii county.

2.4 Health Situation in Kisii county

Kisii county has four district hospitals, nine Sub-District hospitals, eighty dispensaries, twenty three health centres, twelve medical clinics, two nursing homes and several traditional clinics (Kisii Central District Development Plan, 2007: 20). The doctor's ratio to the total population is 1:34,992, while the infant mortality rate is 90/1000 with mortality rate under five years being 109/1000. Prevalent diseases in the area are malaria, diarrhoea, pneumonia, upper respiratory tract infections (URTI), HIV/AIDS (Kisii Central D.D.P., 2007: 20). Apart from the western trained doctors, most people

consult traditional healers who include herbalists (*abanyamete*) and diviners (*abaragori*) spread throughout the county.

The Abagusii have a variety of *abanyamariogo* (traditional healers) such as herbalists, mediums, surgeons and bone setters who can be distinguished according to their areas of specialization. Usually, medicine men inherit the profession from their parents or close relatives, but there are cases of those who claim that ancestors ‘called’ them in dreams or visions to become medicine men. The practitioners of this office are both men and women whose personal qualities are expected to be trustworthy, upright, morally friendly, willing and ready to serve, able to discern people’s needs and problems, and not exorbitant in their charges. Apart from healing, other duties of the Abagusii healers include giving potions to increase love, ‘treat’ people in order to prosper in business or to succeed in politics. They perform various rites to increase the fertility and productivity of the field and livestock, and cure barrenness (Interview with Sorobi on 12/03/2008).

It is also the duty of medicine men to purge witches, detect sorcery, remove curses and control the restless spirits of the dead among the Abagusii. Some healers are experts at conjuring and hypnosis, playing the role of the psychiatrist in the community. They are experts at questioning their patients and can diagnose the causes of their psychosomatic disorders with amazing accuracy. Medicine men have access to and, sometimes are believed to control the forces of nature and other forms of knowledge unknown or little known to the public. Because of their expertise they symbolize the hopes of society, hopes of good health, protection and security from evil forces (Interview with Barake, 15/03/2008).

If afflicted by misfortune, the Abagusii visit a diviner (*abaragori*) who may point to displeased spirits of the dead and prescribe sacrifice. In addition to *abaragori*, who are usually women, various healers also exist. In prescribing medication for a myriad of ailments, the *Abanyamoriogo* (herbalists) employ a variety of plant mixtures as medicines. There are also indigenous surgeons (*ababari*) who set fractures and treat backaches and headaches through trepanation (needles). *Omonyabi* is a religious specialist in powers to reverse effects of particular misfortunes. On the other hand *omokundekane* is a specialist who officiate traditional religious functions such as sacrifices. *Omoriori*, (witch smeller) is a specialist in finding hidden witchcraft articles and reveals witches in the society.

51 percent of population among Abagusii lives below the poverty line (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2009:10). The county has an age dependency ratio of 100:94. Livestock keeping is viewed as a sign of wealth among the Abagusii and particularly cattle, which are valued as source for payment of dowry, fines, offerings and sacrifices. Those with several cattle have high chances of becoming polygamous. Traditionally, cultivation of land was done by the family members only and this explains why families that had many wives and children had cheap labour compared to those with few children (Interview with Omari, 13/11/2012). In a nutshell, prestige was attached to the size of livestock, land, number of wives and children. It is against this background that the researcher endeavoured to examine the connection between land and witchcraft.

Alcoholism is a severe social problem among the Kisii in the contemporary period. Traditionally, only elderly people were allowed to drink large amounts of the local brewed beer (*amarua*), a mechanism of social control that is evident to have today

broken down (An interview with Ntabo, 12/2/2013). Probably close to 50 percent of young and middle-aged Gusii are regular drinkers, with a larger proportion of men than women. This heavy drinking has contributed to reported cases of violence, neglect of children, and poverty due to reluctance to work. Addiction to excessive drinking is a factor blamed on witchcraft by Abagusii.

Although violence toward women (beatings) is common among the Kisii since earlier in this century, alcohol and poverty have intensified the practice. As a result, it is alleged that women have reacted against this phenomenon by employing magical charms (*kababa*) to tame their men, making them docile. However, it is difficult to distinguish the magical items meant for witchcraft and, those used as love potions. It is common for the women to be accused of witchcraft once caught with the magical charms meant for love portion.

The exploitation of women in Gusii society is a serious human rights problem. According to customary law, observed mostly in the countryside, women cannot inherit or own land, cattle, or other resources. This makes them completely dependent on men for survival and attainment of any future security. Until a woman has adult sons, she is under the authority of her husband and has to ask permission from him to leave the homestead. Women who do not adhere to these rules or oppose certain cultural rules are branded as witches and in situations where their men are observed to be quiet, the women are suspected to have employed *kababa* (love portion). More so, when their husbands die at a young age, the women are further suspected to have killed them through witchcraft.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter identified the constituencies that make up Kisii county. The constituencies were used for stratification purposes in collection of data in the later sections. It discussed the climatic patterns, vegetation distribution, and ecology of the area which shall be used to make judgment on the causes of violence against suspected witches in the county. The section discourses the population characteristics which guided the researcher in data collection and also traces the migration patterns of the Abagusii which was used later in tracing the historical origin of the belief in witchcraft in the next chapter.

This chapter dealt with the Abagusii traditional religion which addresses the belief in God, worship among Abagusii and sources of the religion which helped in the building up of Abagusii traditional worldview on witchcraft, beliefs in witchcraft and the religious teachings on morality of violence against suspected witches. Subsequently, the chapter analysed the health situation in the county. It addressed the distribution of health facilities, identified prevalent diseases and pinpointed personalities in charge of healing. The foregoing helped in the understanding of the interpretations of Abagusii on the role of witchcraft in the society and the responses of individuals towards the belief.

Thereafter, the chapter identified the percentage of population which lives below poverty line. It also identifies the dependency ratio of the population found in the county. Later it discussed how Abagusii earn a living which supported arguments on the connection between land, sources of income and violence against suspected witches in the county.

Consequently, the section identified social problems facing the county such as alcoholism, violence against women, poverty and scarcity of land which were used to make interpretation on causes of increasing violence against suspected witches in Kisii county. The section is a prerequisite to the later sections of the thesis as the chapter presented a limelight of the area which facilitated to relate it to the topic of study. We therefore proceed to the next chapter on Abagusii indigenous worldview on witchcraft and violence against suspected witches.

CHAPTER THREE

ABAGUSII INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEW ON WITCHCRAFT

3.0 Introduction

This chapter determines the Abagusii indigenous religion's worldview on violence against suspected witches in order to understand the contemporary cases of hostility among the Abagusii. In this respect, the chapter examines the Abagusii's worldview on witchcraft, mythological genesis of the practice and physical description of witch. The chapter is a prerequisite to the subsequent discussion on the morality and legality of violence against suspected witches in the region.

3.1 Abagusii indigenous worldview on Witchcraft

A worldview is a way of perceiving reality. A worldview on witchcraft can be summarized into the following six questions: What is Witchcraft? Who is a witch? Where do witches come from? What are the activities of witches? How should we act against witches? What is the origin of witchcraft?

The respondents were asked to indicate whether they believed in the existence of witchcraft. The responses to the question were classified according to constituencies and their responses were as follows:

| RESPONSES | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| CONSTITUENCY | YES (x/20) | NO (x/20) |
| Bonchari | 17 | 3 |
| South Mugirango | 16 | 4 |
| Bomachoge Borabu | 20 | 0 |
| Bomachoge South | 15 | 5 |
| Bobasi | 18 | 2 |
| Nyaribari Masaba | 13 | 7 |
| Nyaribari Chache | 20 | 0 |
| Kitutu Chache South | 20 | 0 |
| Kitutu Chache North | 19 | 1 |
| | 158/180 (87.8%) | 22 (12.2 %) |

Table 2: The extent for belief in existence of witchcraft.

The foregoing table indicates that the majority of the Abagusii (87.8 percent) believe in the existence of witchcraft.

According to the Abagusii traditional religion, a witch is a person believed to practice evil acts in the society and has a conscious tendency to kill or disable others through magic with an aim of hindering positive development in the society (Interview with Abuga, 12/03/2011). The Ekegusii word that translates to ‘witchcraft’ is ‘*omorogi*’ who can be of either sex, while the practice of witchcraft is known as *oborogi*. Witchcraft (*oborogi*) is a mystical and innate power which can be used by the possessor to harm other people through secretive harmful substances or techniques. Therefore, a witch is a person who uses magic in order to harm victims by devouring their life essence (An interview with Kebira, 15/04/20130).

Abagusii's worldview just like other African communities explains that the cosmos consists of two parts, the visible and invisible world (Mbiti, 1992:70). The visible world is the home to human beings, while the invisible world is the abode of spirits. Boaz Onyancha, (2009: 60) claims that the Abagusii believe in a number of spirits and identifies the following types of spirits; the ancestor spirit (*ekerecha kie esokoro*), the spirit of the offended Luo (*ekerecha kie omogere*), the spirit of a python (*ekerecha kie ebasweti*), the spirit of the sky (*ekerecha kie erioba*) and the spirit of the initiate (*ekerecha kie omware*). All these spirits can be classified in two categories, good spirits and bad spirits. Good spirits are the ancestors and divinities who are in good terms with the society, while the bad spirits are considered to have fallen out of favour with the Supreme Being (Chepkwony, 2011:5). Bad spirits may also be those of human beings who were mistreated when they were alive or died 'bad' deaths, like drowning, suicide or those who did not make it to the land of ancestors for some reason or another. The spirits of such persons keep reappearing to the living in form of ghosts. However, at times the spirits may reside in a person who could start acting as a witch bringing harm and misfortune to people. Magicians, witches, and sorcerers are widely held to possess the skills that could assist them in manipulating the relations between the two worlds (Interview with Ocharo on 12/06/2012).

Respondents were asked to name activities of witches. The table below indicates their responses:

Question: *What are the activities of witches?*

| Activity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Total | % |
|----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|-----------|
| | x/20 | x/20 | x/20 | x/20 | x/20 | x/20 | x/20 | x/20 | x/20 | | |
| Causing death | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 19 | 165 | 92 |
| Cause diseases | 20 | 16 | 13 | 20 | 19 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 18 | 163 | 91 |
| Night running | 16 | 15 | 13 | 18 | 20 | 18 | 18 | 20 | 16 | 154 | 86 |
| Cannibalism | 5 | 7 | 6 | 10 | 13 | 10 | 15 | 18 | 12 | 96 | 53 |
| Keeping strange creatures | 10 | 13 | 11 | 09 | 10 | 08 | 12 | 12 | 14 | 99 | 55 |
| Deterring development | 12 | 16 | 15 | 11 | 16 | 10 | 16 | 12 | 10 | 118 | 65 |
| Cursing | 10 | 09 | 08 | 08 | 12 | 13 | 10 | 16 | 15 | 101 | 56 |

KEY: 1. =Bonchari, 2. =South Mugirango, 3. =Bomachoge Chache, 4. =Bomachoge Borabu, 5. =Bobasi, 6. = Nyaribari Masaba, 7. =Nyaribari Chache, 8. =Kitutu Chache South, 9. = Kitutu Chache North.

Table 3: Responses on activities of witches.

All negative occurrences and misfortunes in the Abagusii society are associated to witchcraft (Sindiga, 1995). Majority of the people interviewed are of the opinion that witches use magic to cause misfortunes such as death and poverty. Several diseases are attributed to witchcraft causation; epilepsy (*endurume*), mental disturbances (*obobarimo or okobasoka*), hunch back (*ekeguku*), roaming about aimlessly (*ogotayaya*), infertility (*obogomba*), swelling of the body (*okobimba omobere*), impotency (*ogoteba*), and skin diseases (*enyamorema*) (Onyancha, 2009:30). 86 per cent of the respondents hold that the

witches operate at night and have insatiable appetite for human flesh which is obtained by exhuming the dead. Curiously, 90 per cent argue that witches use magic to cause misfortunes like suicide, failure in exams, unemployment, family quarrels accidents, miscarriages, death, difficult childbirths, poor crop yields, sickly livestock, loss of articles, collapse of business, thunderstorms and alcoholism.

According to oral and literary evidence, there are two categories of witches in among Abagusii, 'day witches' and 'night witches'. A "day witch" is any ordinary individual who acquires the ability to use evil magical powers or spells to kill their victims with or without cause during the day (Kgatla, 2000:149). Allegedly this form of witchcraft can be acquired by purchasing it from specific people practising it (Nyirongo 1997:184). Steven Hayes' (1995:340) description of sorcery fits Thias Kgatla's (2000:149) depiction of "day witches" who are resolute in committing acts of witchcraft and can only be deterred by death sentence.

The "night witches" are those who are able to perform their evil activities without the aid of magical potions. They are purported to operate in the night while naked thereby feared due to their ability to enter mysteriously into secured houses with ease. Abagusii believe that witches are capable of doing extraordinary things beyond the capabilities of ordinary human beings like killing their victims. They kill their victims by pointing a finger at their victims, through food poisoning, by mixing some magical potions with the soil on which their victims' footprints are made to inflict pain on them and by lightning (Kgatla, 2000:150). In other cases, they use items that at one time were in contact with the body of their victims to kill. These items include clothes, hair, human faeces, and saliva among others. It is alleged that witches can use animals such as hyenas, rats and

cats and birds like owls and hawks to kill their victims just like the Adigo of Kenya, Ibibio of Nigeria, the Shirazi of Pemba and Akan of Ghana (Ndzovu, 1999:68, Offiong, 1991:59, Trimmingham, 1964:50). According to Benard Nyasoko (Interview on 2/06/2011), witches among the Abagusii move to distant places using a special hyena because of their ability to move fast.⁵ The animals and birds can also be sent by the witch to spy on what people are doing or collect materials for bewitching. It is generally held among the Abagusii that witchcraft is an act performed by people perceived to possess mysterious supernatural power that they employ to harm others. These mystical powers may be inherent or inherited.

Night witches among the Abagusii are associated with immoral night activities meant to create discomfort among people while sleeping (Interview with Abuga, 12/03/2011). During this research, it was noted that Abagusii do not distinguish between a 'night runner' and a 'witch' like the Luhya who have a clear distinction between the two (Interview with Akwanalo, 05/03/2009). Night runners among the Luhya are harmless and alleged to be possessed by some mystical powers that make them to run at night without their full knowledge. During their nefarious activities they carry fire pots that burn herbs producing a glowing light (*rimore*). However, among the Abagusii the glowing light does not come from the burning herbs, but from trapped night flies that naturally produce light (Onyancha, 2009:30).

Night witches are accused of feasting on human flesh by exhuming freshly buried dead bodies, explaining why new graves are guarded against possible exhumation by witches (An interview with Matege, 20/3/2013)). It is alleged that night witches visit an

⁵ Benard Nyasoko a man who claims to have been captured by witches in the year 2003. In his testimony on how he encountered with witches in Suneka division.

identified grave and call out the name of the dead person who magically rises out of the grave. Upon retrieving the corpse, the body is cut into pieces and divided amongst the witches depending on their rank with the one responsible for the death of the victim taking the heart. Some parts of the dead body are kept by the witches for various nefarious activities, for instance, the brewing of strong local beer.⁶

Apart from killing other human beings, the Abagusii also hold that witches have the capabilities of interfering with fertility of land, animals and humans (Interview with Omoke, 18/03/2011). There are cases where people have hired fertile and productive farms, which turn out to be infertile after witches bury magical substances in it. More so, it is argued that witches can cause impotency to humans, lead to the birth of same sex children preferably girls, or affects academic performance of children. The link between poor educational performance among the Kisii and witchcraft is demonstrated with some parents taking their children to distance schools in order to avoid being bewitched. The extreme danger posed by the night witches is illustrated by their ability to turn their victims into zombies (Kgatla, 2000:154). The death of the resultant zombies is held to be deliberate to fulfil a certain goal.

The Abagusii believe that witches have the powers of making a person dumb. They are accused for removing an individual from their sleep, torment and feed them

⁶ Moffat's uncle died. After burial, they were warming themselves around a bonfire near the grave at around 2 A.M. An animal which looked like a dog appeared out of nowhere and jumped over the fire. A wild wind followed causing the pressure lamp and the fire to go off causing darkness. All those who were warming themselves got scared and ran away into the house. From their hideout they claim to have seen shadows of people encircling the grave a short while and disappeared. Later, in the following day they discovered that the grave had sunk and they believed the body had been taken away. For the people in Kisii County, once a grave sinks it is believed that the body had been exhumed by witches. Mose (12/02/2009).

with human flesh, and together wander in the cold night (Onyancha, 2009:25). For the individuals who have been made dumb, it is possible to regain their speech after a traditional healer performing magical treatment on them. During the treatment all the villagers are summoned for a ritual that compels them to spit on the victim hoping to neutralize the powers of the responsible witch thereby enabling the individual to regain their speech. Erastus Ogeto (19/06/2013) explained that in 2010, a young boy disappeared at night from their home at Mosoch. Villagers suspected that the boy would have met witches because he reappeared in the following day dumbfounded. All elderly villagers were summoned to a centre at Mosoch where they were told to spit saliva at the boy one by one. One aged woman spat at the boy and he managed to speak. A group of young men bounced on the lady hitting her with weapons, gathered dry leaves and burnt her. 'No body, even the area chief rescued her from the angry youths' said Erastus.

Witches among the Abagusii are believed to operate in organized groups that gather at night to plot deaths and misfortunes of their victims (Interview with Nyang'au, 15/03/2011). It is believed that each witch has a turn to kill a relative. Witches in Kisii County are also blamed for causing diseases, such as tuberculosis and paralytic stroke. According to Joseph Nyang'au, contemporary witches in Kisii county have a great network that extends from the county, to distant places such as Tanzania. Just like the Adigo, witches among the Kisii are believed to work consciously and voluntarily, and cult members are formally admitted into the group.

According to the Abagusii, bewitching occurs among relatives, and that is why witchcraft accusations are prevalent among individuals who are closely related and reside close to each other (Gluckman, 1959). However, this study also observed that the

foregoing idea has changed, as the Abagusii just like other African communities believe that witchcraft attacks have widened their social limits, even though the family context remains the most popular zone of operation (Geschiere, 1995:20). Moreover, witchcraft accusations are currently linked to social change and as a source of instability and insecurity within the community. In the past, witches operated within their own lineage, but today their operation go beyond relatives to include neighbours, friends and colleagues. The following section explains the mythological genesis of witchcraft to help us to understand the causes of increased violence against suspected witches in the later sections.

3.3 Mythological Genesis of Witchcraft

There are numerous narratives explaining the origin of witchcraft among the Abagusii. It is alleged that initially the Abagusii did not have the knowledge of witchcraft, but came to acquire it through contacts with other communities. During the community's various immigrations they came into contact with other ethnic groups such as the Luo who ostensibly taught them witchcraft. As a result, they acquired the skills to protect themselves from external aggression. Later, the usage of witchcraft changed and began to be used against neighbours and family members due to hatred, envy and jealousy (Interview with Ong'au, 28/05/2011).

Another narration posits that witchcraft came into existence due to envy among two brothers, Otworu and Metobo. When the two brothers were of age, Otworu became more prosperous than Metobo, leading to the latter feeling jealousy because their parents loved and favoured the former. Metobo decided to solicit the assistance of diviners in

their village in eliminating his brother. In realization of this goal the village sorcerer gave Metobo conditions, which included availing a 'green' goat that has not crossed any river.

One day while hunting in the forest, Metobo was caught up in the rain, and removed his cloth (*egesena*) to protect himself from getting wet. After the rain subsided, he put on his cloths and after a short while he met a spirit (*ekerecha*) who had been rained on and was shivering due to coldness. The spirit requested him to light fire for it and to reveal the secret staying dry despite the heavy down pour. Metobo offered to reveal the secret but on condition that the spirit bestows him with mystical powers necessary for controlling nature and human life (Interview with Ong'au, 28/05/2011).

The spirit obliged by breathing to Metobo a certain power, and warned him that it would not be beneficial but a source of sickness and other maladies in the society. To test the powers, the spirit asked Metobo to look at a tree that was nearby and he was amused when it suddenly dried through thunder upon completing his wish. After narrating to the spirit what he did to stay warm, the spirit felt cheated and demanded the powers back, but Metobo used them to change into a bird and flew back to his village. While in the village Metobo cursed the wealth of his brother by killing his cows and making the farmland unproductive. The evil power overwhelmed Metobo leading to the death of his brother who he exhumed after his burial.

When the villagers suspected that Otworì's body had been exhumed, they consulted a diviner who revealed that Metobo was responsible for the misfortunes that befell his brother. The entire village was enraged and chased him away to unknown place where he raised a generation of witches. Occasionally, Metobo would visit the village at night in form of birds, owls, cats or hyenas and initiated a few people into the art of

witchcraft. Sporadically he would meet his newly acquired initiates in the villages to plan their evil activities. As a result they were blamed of all the misfortunes facing the community ranging from death, sickness, failure of crops, infertility and poverty. This explains why whenever Metobo's descendants were identified; they were killed to prevent the spread of witchcraft further to other generations (Interview with Ontuga, 28/05/2011).

According to the Abagusii worldview, witchcraft is inherited from parents. If a woman is a witch, it is alleged that she trains her children the acts of witchcraft, and it is perceived that daughters are more likely to oblige since they spend more time with their mothers. One of the respondents indicated to me that if a child refuses to learn the art of witchcraft from their parents, there is a possibility that they could lead an abnormal life or develop a mysterious illness (Interview with Nyaruri, 12/05/2010). There are also cases of some married women learning the practice of witchcraft from their mother-in-laws, fearing that if they refuse to accept the offer they could become mentally ill. As a sign of their seriousness to join the witchcraft guild, they are expected to offer one of their children as sacrifice. The following section discusses the physical description of a witch among Abagusii.

3.4 The Physical Description of a Witch among Abagusii

The Abagusii describe a witch as an ugly person with dark-shrinking skin, big red eyes, long unkempt hair, thin, and usually the aged. They are also regarded as people who have unique and unsociable characters such as living isolated life, greedy folks and successful people with a poor background (Interview with Ong'au, 28/05/2011).

Although anyone regardless of age and sex can be a suspected witch, there are others who are more frequently suspected as witches among the Abagusii. They include domineering wives, economically prosperous individuals and academically successful persons are accused of using magic to impede the development of others. Consequently, it is common for people to hate individuals who are successful, accusing those who fail to attend funerals as evading revenge from the spirit of the dead person, and without justification blame the old people of using witchcraft to elongate their life (Interview with Ontiri, 28/05/2011).

3.6 Conclusion

The chapter reveals that the majority of the Abagusii (95 percent) believe in the existence of witchcraft. It was found out that Abagusii define a witch as a person who uses magic in order to harm victims by devouring their life essence. Abagusii worldview associates all negative occurrences and misfortunes to witchcraft. The worldview identifies activities of witches which include; causing death, causing diseases, night running, cannibalism, keeping strange creatures, cursing and envying those who are successful in the community.

Abagusii worldview holds that we have two categories of witches in among Abagusii, day witches and night witches. Night witches are accused of feasting on human flesh by exhuming freshly buried dead bodies and have the capabilities of interfering with fertility of land, animals and humans. The worldview teaches that witches among the Abagusii operate in organized groups that gather at night to plot deaths and misfortunes of their victims. It also points out that witchcraft accusations are prevalent among individuals who are closely related and reside close to each other. The study notes that

the foregoing has changed in Kisii county, in the past, witches operated within their own lineage, but today their operation goes beyond relatives to include neighbours, friends and colleagues.

The study noted that Abagusii worldview has numerous narratives explaining the origin of witchcraft among the Abagusii. Most respondents alleged that initially the Abagusii did not have the knowledge of witchcraft, but came to acquire it through contacts with other communities.

The researcher noted that Abagusii describe a witch as an ugly person with dark-shrinking skin, big red eyes, long unkempt hair, thin, and usually the aged. They also regard witches as people who have unique and unsociable characters such as living isolated life, greedy folks and successful people with a poor background. The study noted that anybody can be regarded as a witch in Kisii county provided that he or she operates within extremes in terms of behaviour.

In all, it was found out that Abagusii religious worldview has a function towards violence against suspected witches. It has a duty of creating awareness about the existence of witchcraft as a phenomenon, connects the belief in witchcraft with the mystical world, explains functions of witches, explains the origin of witchcraft and influences the mode of punishing witches hence violence against suspected witches.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MORAL AND NORMATIVE FOUNDATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST SUSPECTED WITCHES AMONG ABAGUSII

4.0 Introduction

Violence against suspected witches entails punitive expeditions by vigilantes or self-appointed witch-finders, often leading to the injury, murder and confiscation of properties belonging to suspected witches. The culture of violence has been a serious problem over the last two decades in the county since many people have been killed, injured, lost property, and others displaced.

Abagusii religion defines a set of moral values with the aim of ensuring that there is harmony and cohesion among members of the society. The religion has always defined a set of moral values with the aim of ensuring that there is harmony between members of the society and the supernatural world. This chapter explores the normative and morality of violence against suspected witches among the Abagusii. In order to meet this objective, it starts by examining the traditional methods of combating witchcraft, highlighting the punishment subjected to witch suspects in the contemporary Abagusii society and reviews the community's judicial system historically in relation to witchcraft and violence against witches. Later, it discusses the role of vigilantes in violence on alleged witches against the back drop of the Kenya's constitution on witchcraft. Further, the chapter analyses the category of people vulnerable witchcraft accusations among the Abagusii.

4.1 Traditional Methods of Combating Witchcraft among Abagusii

John Mbiti (1969) has tried to analyse traditional African communities from a

comprehensive point of view. On the issue of moral values he maintains that there exists, many laws, customs, set/forms of behaviour, regulations, rules, observances and taboos, constituting the moral code and the ethics of a given community or society. Some of these are held sacred, and are believed to have been instituted by God or national leaders” (Mbiti, 1969:205). The interpretation by Mbiti forms the basis of understanding the system of moral values among Abagusii in relation to violence meted against suspected witches in the community.

If someone is killed or falls ill, it is customary among Abagusii to find out whether that person faced the misfortune because of witchcraft through a diviner. If witchcraft is suspected as a cause of misfortune, the next stage is to identify the culprit who is likely to be perhaps someone long suspected of witchcraft, possibly a weird outcast who resents everybody, or perhaps a relative who bears a grudge. There are several ways that Abagusii find out who is to blame for their misfortune. First of all, the victim may have someone in mind, looking to his conscience and identifying someone who bears a grudge against him. There may be a hostile relationship between the victim and the witch or someone who has hired the witch. Just like the South Africans, there is no question that the grudge-bearer belongs to one’s own family (Interview with Siriba, 28/05/2011).

As a rule, the first people to be suspected of witchcraft are those living close to the complainant. Witchcraft accusations, therefore, underline the sad fact that jealousy, hatred and aggression exist within the intimate circle of the family, where solidarity and trust should reign supreme (Kgatla, 2004:84).

Traditionally, when Abagusii suspected that their homestead was being

bewitched; the individual consulted a diviner (*omoragori*) who used oracles to communicate with ancestral spirits to identify the witch responsible for a given illness or misfortune. Apart from diviners, the society also has witch smellers who are experts for identifying witches. A person who felt his homestead was seriously endangered consulted several diviners or witch smellers and eventually decided to follow the one whose interpretation and advice are most compatible with his belief and fears. If the individual accepted the diagnosis, he would either enact litigation against the suspected witch with clan elders to try the culprit, or hire a sorcerer to kill the witch, or seek for the services of a witch smeller to ferret out witchcraft articles buried in his property (Interview with Ombasa, 12/07/2012).

Customarily, the Abagusii had set out procedures for trying and punishing witches found guilty through a public ordeal. One of the ordeals in determining a witch included crushing certain herbs and tying them around the arms of the suspect who was compelled to immerse their hands into a hot water pot to retrieve a ring. If the person showed signs of being scalded, the suspect was considered guilty (Interview with Otworu on 15/06/2012). Another ordeal involved drinking a bitter potion, and thereafter run in circles. In case the suspect fainted, he or she was pronounced to be guilty of witchcraft. Rationally, it is clear that most of the older people were unable to escape this rigorous test due to their feeble bodies. In some cases, a witch suspect was challenged to drink a mixture of water and soil from a grave. In case the suspect refused to drink the mixture, he or she was considered to be a witch. During interviews, respondents were asked on the reliability of the ordeals to determine innocence or culpability of the suspects, and 95 per cent of those interrogated doubted the techniques.

Question: *Should we rely on traditional procedures of detecting witches?*

| CONSTITUENCY | YES (x/20) | NO (x/20) |
|---------------------|------------|------------|
| Bonchari | 3 | 17 |
| South Mugirango | 1 | 19 |
| Bomachoge Borabu | 4 | 16 |
| Bomachoge South | 3 | 17 |
| Bobasi | 2 | 18 |
| Nyaribari Masaba | 3 | 17 |
| Nyaribari Chache | 1 | 19 |
| Kitutu Chache South | 2 | 18 |
| Kitutu Chache North | 1 | 19 |
| | 20 (11 %) | 160 (89 %) |

Table 4: Reliability of traditional procedures for finding witches.

When an ordeal indicated that the suspect was guilty, a group of men from different homesteads gathered at night to kill the alleged witch using clubs. The diversity of the group, the darkness of the night and use of clubs rather than spears preserved the anonymity of the killers and protected them from subsequent claims for homicide compensation (Interview with Ontonyi, 16/03/2012). However, the foregoing has changed in the contemporary Kisii county since suspects are killed during daylight.

Abel Ontonyi further explained that in some cases, once an individual was suspected to be a witch, a group of young men would be mandated to keep a close watch on the supposed witch. The young men secretly took positions near the homestead of the suspect hoping that if the accusations are true the accused would go out at night to perform witchcraft activities. In situations where the suspected witch went out, the surveillance team would wait the suspect to return and subject the individual to torture. In

case of a female witch, the vigilante group would seize her and thrust a stick from the *omokomoni* tree to the accused person's vagina, destroying her womb and birth canal. This technique was the opposite of the torture subjected to male suspects who were killed by plunging a nail into their skull. There was consensus among the respondents that the Abagusii preferred killing suspected witches because it prevented possible retaliation from the witch suspects, and also to stop the power of witchcraft from being transferred to the younger generation. It can be concluded that Abagusii traditional methods of finding witches are not reliable. Under normal circumstances no suspect can escape being termed guilty through these ordeals therefore we can conclude that all people in the Abagusii society are potential witches if prone to the traditional methods of finding witches (Interview with Momanyi, 28/05/2011).

4.2 Punishment for Witch Suspects in contemporary Kisii County

Abagusii are guided by the philosophy of communalism where individuals cannot think of themselves without the other. They act in line with Mbiti's African adage: "I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am." (Mbiti, 1975:9). Every person in the Abagusii community is a keeper of the other and responsible of doing wrong. 'If you find a neighbour's child doing wrong, you have an obligation to correct or even punish that child', Ototo observed (Interview with Ototo, 12/07/2012). The society has bestowed certain expectations on members to the extent that if one goes against the norms of the society, he or she is punished and this regulates the way people behave. Abagusii religion takes morality as a communal issue; it is the responsibility of all people to ensure that community members live according to the expectations of ancestors. Failure to monitor

the behaviour of other community members and rectify it may call for communal curses such as extended droughts.

Abagusii religion forbids murder since it is considered a taboo to kill another human being. However, in cases such as witchcraft the religion recommends death or banishment. The religion recommended death to prevent revenge from the suspected witches and to prevent their reincarnation after death (Ontonyi, 16/03/2012). The religion taught that only those elders who are buried according to the community's traditions get promoted into the next world. Not everybody participated in the killing, but only old men who had stopped the power of siring were allowed to kill after going through certain rituals. However, in some cases, the elders could forgive some of the accused suspects. Abagusii religion believes that anyone who dies must be accorded a proper traditional funeral and ceremonies. In case a person is not buried according to the traditions of the community, the dead person may become a wandering ghost, therefore a danger to those who are still alive. It is also believed that giving the dead a befitting burial rite helps to protect the living from sudden death. Mbiti affirms that "life goes on beyond the grave" (Mbiti, 1975: 119). However, in case the person was a witch the religion recommends an indecent burial. Reincarnation⁷ is a common belief among Abagusii. Abagusii religion teaches that, whenever a child is born into a family, the father of the child makes enquiries from the elders of the family to know the departed parent or ancestor that have reincarnated. They believed that the dead returns to their communities. Sometimes, reincarnates of the dead bears the dead person's name and character when he/she was alive. There could be as many as possible reincarnates of a particular dead soul in a

⁷ Reincarnation is the belief in the soul of a dead person being reborn in another body.

family. These reincarnates have similar characters and physical appearance in terms of body size, complexion, facial look and mode of movement with the dead person. Witches are not given a proper burial to prevent reincarnation and children are not named after them as it is feared that the character of the witch which he or she may be named after may recur (Interview with Mogaka, 29/05/2011).

Transmigration (metempsychosis) which is the changing of a person into an animal is also a common belief among Abagusii. Abagusii belief system teaches that the dead witches may reappear in the form of the animals and reptiles which are interpreted as symbols of terrible punishments by the dead or ancestors to the living for not adhering to the moral values of the community while they were alive. Abagusii religion teaches that the dead must be “detached” from the living and make a smooth transition to the next life as soon as possible. Witches are not sent to the next world since no body celebrates and conducts their burial rites properly to ensure smooth transition (Nyagokiani, 12/7/2013).

Abagusii religion models the abode of the living dead after the pattern of the living. The herd-boy herds the goats and sheep, the women hoe their gardens and reap the crops, the men delight in their cattle, the villagers gather for discussion in the evenings. There is no division of the dead on the basis of character. Apart from witches and outcasts, all the living-dead, good and bad, live together in the world of spirits. Their character is much the same as in this life, partaking of jealousies and offended feelings like the living.

There is concern that the traditional methods of detecting and punishing witch suspects are not adhered in the contemporary Abagusii society (Interview with Onchuru,

12/04/2012). It is observed that hundreds of people are killed among the Abagusii, and the assailants are organized groups of young men, acting under the directives of relatives of victims or other interested parties.

Most respondents explained that traditional methods of finding and punishing suspected witches cannot be relied on because of influence from Christianity, modernization, formal education and westernization. Christianity has discouraged many from adapting the traditional methods of finding and punishing witches. Most of the youths perceive the methods as archaic. Most young people engage most of their time in schooling hence we do not have many people taking the role of traditional specialists who are knowledgeable in methods of finding and punishing witches. Most people prefer to copy the western life styles which take witchcraft issues as primitive.

In 2008, an enraged group of young men went around Marani division with a list of supposed witches in the area whom they killed, accusing them of contributing to retardation in the village through the power of witchcraft. It all began when a list alleged to have been prepared by witches indicating names of their supposed future victims was found on the road. Government officials attempted to diffuse the tension in a meeting, but it was all in vain as the young men later regrouped and initiated an orgy of onslaught on the suspected witches (Interview with Gichana, 01/12/2010). Just like the Marani case, it was found out that in Kisii county, most witch suspects had been killed after a note book was found in the village which had minutes on the members of a witch organization, names of people the accused witches had killed and those they were planning to kill. It can be argued that, it could be that someone sat down and wrote a list of the witch suspects. The foregoing statement could be supported on the grounds that witchcraft

activities take place at night in darkness, there is no lamp lit such that one can take down minutes. On analysing the books presented as evidence, it was found out that the letters were smartly inscribed within the line which is not practicable since one cannot write straight lines in darkness. Secondly, some of the accused suspected witches were people who had not gone to school therefore, they did not know how to read and write. Third, it was also noted that the minutes were written in the formal format and in fluent English language. It can be argued that, some of the accused persons did not have good formal education whereby they could write fluent English or Kiswahili language. It can be argued that the correct format was used to write the minutes. The minutes had a date, place of meeting, members, apologies and minutes plus signatures which are not practicable for people who attended school 60 years ago and did not go beyond standard two. Following is a picture of one of the houses which was lynched at Marani.



Figure 4: A demolished house in which a suspected witch was lynched.

Another incident of violence was witnessed at Etono village, Kenyeny District. Residents of the village lynched an alleged witch for bewitching his own son who had succumbed to death after a short illness in the hospital the previous day (Interview with Miruka, 24/03/2013). Villagers forced the victim into his grass-thatched house and set it ablaze as he protested his innocence. When it became apparent that the old man was not dying 'quickly,' a section of the mob dug a shallow grave and buried the badly injured man alive. Security officers who arrived late exhumed the body and moved it to the hospital mortuary. In the ensuing sad drama, some respondents claimed the deceased's son had been diagnosed with high blood pressure and they did not understand how the witchcraft accusation was being dragged to the issue (Interview with Omari, 28/06/2013). It can be argued that the man was killed because he was not in good terms with his son because he had denied him permission to sell a section of their family land. Rumours held that this incident could have been fuelled by rivalry between the wives of the man.

In another incident, in February 2009, five elderly people accused of witchcraft were burnt to death in Bomatara village (Suneka division) on allegations that they had abducted a child whom they later made dumb after using witchcraft (Interview with Nyasato, 16/03/2009). This incident is illustrated with a picture below showing women being lynched at Bomatara village.



Figure 5: Witch suspects being lynched at Bomatara village in Kisii county (<http://www.bestgore.com>)



Figure 6: An alleged witch being lynched in Kisii county

From the foregoing cases, it can be established that the belief in witchcraft is still strong in Kisii county and it was also established that the traditional methods of punishing witches are not being followed.

4.3 History of Abagusii Judicial System in Relation to Witchcraft and Violence to suspected witches

The practical aspect of belief in Abagusii religion is not only worship, but also human conduct. Belief in *Engoro* (God) and in the other spiritual beings (*Chisokoro*) implies a certain type of conduct that respects the order established by God and watched over by the divinities and the ancestors. Abagusii have a sacred reverence for life, for it is believed to be the greatest of Engoro's gifts to humans. The promotion of life is the determinant principle of the Abagusii traditional morality (Interview with Nyabuto, 28/06/2011).

Living harmoniously within the Abagusii community is a moral obligation ordained by Engoro for the promotion of life. The Abagusii religion provides the basic infrastructure on which this life centred, community oriented morality is based. Omogusii has an obligation to maintain harmonious relationships with all the members of the Abagusii community and to do whatever is necessary to repair any breach of harmony and to strengthen the community bonds, especially through justice and sharing. And this is not simply a social need, but a religious obligation since Engoro⁸, and Chisokoro⁹, the guarantors of this order are quick to punish defaulters. Any person who infringes a moral norm in the Abagusii society has not only the members of the community to fear for reprisals but also Engoro and the Chisokoro (Interview with Nyaribo, 25/05/2011).

⁸ Engoro means God

⁹ Chisokoro means ancestors

Perhaps because of their strong attachment to the community, Abagusii have a strong sense of justice. Without justice, life in the community would be impossible and there would be no harmony. A victim of injustice often makes a direct appeal to Engoro. Abagusii believe that Engoro knows everything, hates injustice, and this is why rewards and punishments are understood to come in this life, not in the life after. If a person is a wizard, a murderer, a thief, breaks the community code or taboos, or has had an unnatural death or an improper burial, then such a person is believed to be doomed to punishment in the afterlife as a wandering ghost, and could be subjected to a period of torture by the ancestors according to the seriousness of their misdeeds, much like the Catholic concept of purgatory (Interview with Mabira, 02/05/2011).

Prior to the establishment of British colonial rule in Gusii land, judicial matters were mostly handled at the homestead level by the patriarchal founder of the homestead, *Omogaka bwo omochie*.¹⁰ Disputes involving members of different homesteads were addressed in the informal courts (*Etureti*), which were presided by elders (Interview with Onkoba, 25/07/2013).¹¹

In dealing with disputes, the standard procedure involved the complainant reporting to the senior member of the *Etureti* (Nyarango, 1994: 68-79). Before the elders began hearing evidence from the concerned parties, the senior elder was expected to brief the other members on the nature of the case. After the *Etureti* had received the litigant and the defendant's points of view, they also listened to evidence from witnesses. After collecting enough information concerning the case, the elders conducted detailed consultations amongst themselves and sometimes invited other community members who

¹⁰ *Omogaka bwo omochie* means the family male head.

¹¹ The *Etureti* was usually made up of highly respected elders in a sub clan.

had important information on the history and nature of the case to join them in the discussion process before making a ruling. The *Etureti* had the authority to impose specific fines proportionate to the nature of the offence or publically reprimand an offender as punishment. This traditional court depended on magical-religious powers largely believed to be bestowed on the members by the ancestors (Mogambi, 2012:104).

With the establishment of colonial rule, this informal judicial system was replaced with the British legal system, which had new procedures and officials (Shadle, 2006: 93). During the colonial rule, witchcraft offenses were punished under the provisions of the witchcraft ordinance act, section (9) 2 No. 23 Of 1925 (Mutungi, 1977:10). Under this section, persons suspected of practicing witchcraft could be punished by being sent away from their respective societies for a period ranging between one and six months (Kenya National Archives, VQ/11/12). However, faced with limited resources from London, the British colonial government had to rely on their African employees (indirect rule) to carry out their daily administration. Many of these employees were corrupt leading to mistrust of the new judicial system by the populace (Interview with Matundura, 20/06/2013). Further, the colonial judicial system in Gusii land was served by only two courts due to the challenge of accessibility and limited resources leading to inefficient jurisdiction. The two tribunals were located in Ogembo and Manga, which are more than 100 kilometres apart. Apart from the tribunals' jurisdiction not covering all criminal cases, they did not resolve disputes that involved witchcraft accusations because the colonial government termed them as primitive. This implied that such cases were solved by the Abagusii elders through the assistance of the traditional religious specialists. These factors made colonial legal system more unattractive to many people.

Apart from colonialism, the Abagusii traditional judicial system was also affected by the coming of Christian missionaries in 1911 (Orvis, 1997:111). One of the major actions of early western religious missionaries was to change and discard what were considered primitive and ungodly practices. Among the practices targeted was the use of Abagusii religious rituals in solving crime and civil disputes. Religious rituals formed the central part of the Abagusii judicial system especially in disputes that lacked evidence to pin down the suspect or where a crime had been committed but the suspect could not be traced. These two scenarios are common in witchcraft accusations.¹² Before the advent of British rule and Christianity, capital punishment was common for those found guilty of practicing witchcraft. Unlike today, where youth gang members (*sungu sungu*) are involved, the execution of capital punishment in the traditional Abagusii society was strictly done by kinship members thereby effective. Those found to have accused other people wrongly were censored, ashamed and a heavy fine was imposed on them. This made incidences of witchcraft practices and accusations very minimal (Interview with Otete, 20/04/2011).

However, with the introduction of Christianity and the new legal system, the traditional mechanism of dealing with witchcraft practices and accusations was sidelined. Kenya's contemporary legal system does not recognize witchcraft accusations. As a result, there is a steady increase in witchcraft accusation that has led to high incidences of lynching of suspected witches by the *sungu sungu* vigilantes. Apart from the replacement of the traditional justice system, Abagusii security safeguards were also

¹² Witchcraft accusations are one of the most common issues which Sungusungu is greatly involved in eliminating. Most people who are suspected to be practicing witchcraft are lynched by *sungu sungu* members.

greatly affected by the coming of British colonial government. In the past, each Abagusii clan had an independent military unit composed of young men whose role was to protect clan members from both internal and external aggression (An interview Chweya, 18/07/2013). These young men lived in cattle encampments *ebisarate*, which apart from acting as a protective unit for the community; they also acted as informal learning institutions for the young men on adult life and future responsibilities. However, immediately after Second World War, these encampments were abolished by the British colonial government for they were perceived as a threat to their rule (Akama et.al. 2006:19). Consequently, the security of each Gusii clan was put under the colonial government and its security agencies. After independence, police and military systems continued to follow the British model, with the same lack of effectiveness at controlling crime, especially in rural areas.



Figure 7: A picture showing bodies of those killed for witchcraft allegations.

With an increasing crime rate due to high unemployment and poverty levels, ineffective government security and judicial systems, people in rural areas started mobilizing themselves in efforts to counter the emerging crime threats. Among the Abagusii, the sungu sungu vigilante group was embraced as an antidote to the emerging security problems (Kisii Central D. D. P., 2009). The sungu sungu vigilantes became a security threat to the same community they were supposed to protect, hence insecurity within security.

To gain acceptance and tolerance by the community, sungu sungu members engaged in eliminating witchcraft practices by lynching suspected witches. Traditionally, lynching of witches was done by members of the society as a way of demonstrating to the community that they did not condone the practice among their lineage (Masese, 2006). However, with the introduction of constitutionalism, lynching is treated as a form of murder and is punishable in the penal code. Lynching of witches is still the common preferred method of dealing with witches because the Kenya penal code has no provision in terms of penalties against witchcraft. However, some people pay the sungu sungu to accuse others 'falsely' of witchcraft so that they can be killed (Ombiro, 18/08/2013). Arguably, not all people killed as suspected witches are witches.

The Abagusii believe that witches are not admitted to the spiritual world and this is why they are refused proper burial. Denying one access to the community of the ancestors in death is the nearest equivalent of hell in Christianity. Abagusii religion teaches that the brutal killing of witches is to ensure that the condemned witches are not reborn, and a warning to others not to join the cult. Some community members argue that it is also a way of administering justice to those who have been harmed by the suspected

witches thereby ensuring that the spirit of the punished witch suspect does not haunt the living.

4.4 Sungu sungu as the Key perpetrators of Violence against Suspected Witches in Kisii County

The name sungu sungu is derived from a Kiswahili word to refer to big black ants. The ants work slowly, but in cooperation they are able to do a lot (Røkke, M., 2004). Just like ants, sungu sungu work together in groups and they are dangerous. Sungu sungu is a vigilante group in Kisii county. Kisii county has been experiencing high incidences of insecurity in form of high crime rates both in urban and rural areas due to low police/population ratio, which is presently reported to be 1:1000 while the standard required ratio is supposed to be 1:200-400 (Kenya Police, 2009). High insecurity in the region is associated with inadequate resources for crime detection and prevention, and poor public-police relationship due to the former's training and working conditions. To address these inadequacies in crime prevention, the people embraced community policing to supplement the work of security agents. According to Kenya Police, community policing is an approach to enhance security that recognizes the interdependence and shared responsibility of the police and the community in ensuring a safe and secure environment. The aim is to establish active partnerships between the police and the public to combat crime and enhance community safety. It is a response to the decline in public confidence in the police and the need for partnership between different stakeholders to fight crime (Coquilhat, 2009:20).

Through the approach, the community gets to understand that it has a role to play in ensuring its own safety and that of property. Community policing is, therefore, a tacit

acknowledgement that official security apparatus including the police cannot solve all security problems single-handedly (Republic of Kenya, 2009). The community policing approach ensures that the community does not only feel secure, but actively participate in the achievement of this feeling. This is because the use of community members who understand the local crime maps could be a rewarding strategy since the identification of criminals and crime black spots is relatively easier. In addition, it ensures community ownership of the process and hence it's local legitimacy. Moreover, it can ensure optimal resource allocation based on improved awareness and understanding of the criminal operating environment ((Fuentes, 2006:59).

Among the Abagusii, community policing is in form of sungu sungu vigilante group, a non-state, but quasi-official system of justice that originated from Tanzania among the Sukuma and Nyamwezi ethnic groups. These communities, unable to rely on the state for personal and property protection and resolution of other disputes especially in the vast rural areas of the country, resorted to organizing vigilante groups (Paciotti, 2004:65). As such, informal organizations emerged as alternatives to the largely passive and elusive formal systems of crime control. Later, this system infiltrated and was adopted by communities on the other side of the Kenya-Tanzania border particularly among the Kuria of Kenya. It is from the Kuria that the sungu sungu vigilante found its way to the neighbouring Abagusii. The provincial administration embraced the sungu sungu vigilante notion in the Kisii region to help stamp out runaway crime wave.¹³

Largely, the youth who constitute the sungu sungu are unemployed and less educated. They undergo no training on how to work amicably with the public.

¹³ System of official hierarchical governance structures from the president cascading downwards to the village level

Consequently, manhandling of suspects, assault, violence and extortion is common with the group, which in essence defeats the purpose of community policing. The vigilante group also works as a separate entity from the official security apparatus, hence exhibiting behaviour tantamount to being above the law or in most cases being the law themselves.

Using the structure of provincial administration, each village in the Kisii county under the leadership of village elder (*Omotureti*) is encouraged to form a group of volunteers, mostly young men to help in combating crime. Consequently, each village group had officials who included the village elder and his council members, the *etureti*, the chairman and secretary. The village elder and his council members have a duty of adjudicating in all criminal cases within their area of jurisdiction and working with the chairman of *sungu sungu* in preventing crime. The chairman's role is to preside over meetings, act as a link between other village elders and council members, in addition to being in charge of the members of a specific *sungu sungu* group and a contact person to liaise with those who required their assistance. The young male volunteers are under the leadership of a commander, who follow and execute orders from the village elder and his council. Among the duties they are expected to undertake includes apprehending criminals upon crime detection, spying on possible criminals and gathering vital evidence for resolution of criminal cases and other disputes. Clearly, the vigilante group is tasked to assist in collecting evidence that could be used against criminals together with detecting crime and deterring it by carrying out night patrols in the village. From the village, similar groups were formed at sub location level and subsequent levels of the provincial administration hierarchy (Interview with Nyabuto, 2/11/2011).

After its introduction in Kisii county, sungu sungu concentrated in eliminating crime and to some extent it succeeded in its endeavour. Many criminals were either killed by the group members or forced to flee from the Kisii region for fear of their lives. However, after the crime rate went down over time, the group found itself with no meaningful role to play. Instead, it transformed itself by taking up the role of providing protection to community members especially those involved in illegal activities like brewing of traditional liquor such as *changaa*; solving disputes among community members, collection of debts, and dealing with witchcraft allegations. Arguably, sungu sungu is both admired and distasted in equal measures in the Kisii County. It is admired for its role in eliminating various vices in the community that the government and its agencies were unable to curb, and on the other hand distasted for its cruelty, disrespect of human rights, extortion, killings and political violence. In admiration sungu sungu is referred openly as part of community and it is an enigma among the Abagusii. Initially, this group worked with various structures of the provincial administration in complementary basis in crime prevention and control. They assisted in arresting of criminals whom they handed over to the police and other provincial administration officials in their area of jurisdiction. Their modus operandi included naming and shaming people suspected of crimes in public meetings, warning criminals and relaying crime-related information to security agencies. This arrangement worked well for a while until the criminals started retaliating by killing and maiming sungu sungu members whom they accused of working with security agencies in curtailing their activities (Interview with Matonda, 12/04/2012).

This turn of events created fear and suspicion among the sungu sungu members. Within the sungu sungu rank and file, there is concern that some members, who have either quitted or are still members, were leaking information to criminals, which is in turn used against them. To curtail this emerging development, members resorted to taking oaths binding them to the group and preventing any person from quitting. Group members also suspected the security agencies whom they accused of protecting criminals because of benefiting from their activities. The accusation was given more credence by acquittal of criminals due to lack of evidence or lenient community sentencing and short custodian rulings. As a result, the group severed links with security agencies and embarked on lone fighting of crime. Consequently, they established their own justice system, which entailed that if a criminal is identified, there are procedural rules that specified how evidence is weighed and justice administered. For example, if someone is suspected to be a thief, the sungu sungu leader gave arrest instructions to the youthful *soldiers* who arrested the individual and determine their punishment. In arresting the suspect, the sungu sungu agents are allowed to assault and torture the suspect provided it does not lead to death. Once a suspect is arrested, they are presented before a committee who sometimes torture the individual if they fail to confess their alleged criminal activities. However, suspects who confess and appear remorseful are normally fined and warned (Interview with Nyabaro, 22/03/2012).

In their effort to control crime and administering justice, sungu sungu members also write warning letters to suspected criminals. The warnings entailed asking the accused to either stop their alleged criminal activities or relocate from the community. Those who fail to adhere to the stern warnings are secretly killed and all their properties

destroyed. To assert their authority, the group warns the suspect's kinsmen not to mourn or even arrange for the victim's funeral, which is meted with serious consequences with those who fail to obliged (Interview with Miruka, 2013).

In Bonchari constituency, where sungu sungu was first started, the group was credited for stamping out high crime rate. This created the impetus of introducing similar groups to other areas in Kisii region. However, unlike in the initial group where the provincial administration was involved, the subsequent groups were founded by individuals interested in combating crime, but upon payment. To ensure their acceptability in the community, the subsequent groups adopted the structure of the earliest sungu sungu group, provided free security services in the beginning, but later demanded compulsory security fees after recognition by the community (Interview with Sagini, 15/07/ 2012). Gradually, the group went out of its mandate, and began acting as a parallel authority, settling cases of debts, divorces and business disputes. They operate in sharp parallel with the chiefs and assistant chiefs, and in total disregard to the authorities of village elders hence, source of discontent among Abagusii.



Figure 8: An alleged witch being lynched by sungu sungu

To further gain recognition among community members, sungu sungu members have also engaged in witchcraft elimination through lynching suspected witches, a practice that was traditionally undertaken by kin members (Masese, 2006). However, with the introduction of constitutionalism, lynching is considered to be a crime punishable in the penal code.

4.5 Legislative Measures against Witchcraft in Kenya

Kenya is ranked 15th in Africa due to its people's belief in witchcraft, a few points behind the Democratic Republic of Congo, and way ahead of Ethiopia, Nigeria, Zambia and Rwanda (<http://allafrica.com>). A quarter of Kenyans, both Christians and Muslims, confess they believe in the existence of witches and the protective power of juju (charms or amulets). The Witchcraft Act of 1925 makes a number of practices related to witchcraft offences, for example to pretend to practise witchcraft, to claim knowledge of witchcraft, to possess charms related to the practice of witchcraft (Help Age

International, 2011:8). The Act also prohibits accusations of witchcraft if they are not made through the relevant authorities. The legislation was carried over from the colonial era and enacted by an administration that did not believe in the existence of witchcraft.

In the Independence Constitution, witchcraft is addressed by Witchcraft Act, Chapter 67 Laws of Kenya, and article 3. The Act provides for a maximum of five year prison sentence for those found guilty of the practice. According to the Act “any person who holds himself out as a witchdoctor able to cause fear, annoyance or injury to another in mind, person or property, or who pretends to exercise any kind of supernatural power, witchcraft, sorcery or enchantment calculated to cause such fear, annoyance or injury, shall be guilty of an offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years.” It further stipulates that “any person, professing a knowledge of so-called witchcraft or the use of charms, who advises any person applying to him how to bewitch or injure persons, animals or other property, or who supplies any person with any article purporting to be a means of witchcraft, shall be guilty of an offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years” (Kenya law, 2012).

Belief in witchcraft is generally not deemed to be a mitigating factor in killing someone accused of witchcraft. In *Republic verses John Gachogu and another* (2005), the High Court ruled that a mere belief in witchcraft did not constitute a circumstance, excuse or mitigation for killing a person believed to be a witch. According to the court, “when there is no immediate provocation, witchcraft as a provocative act can only avail an accused as a defence where the victim is shown to have done an act in the presence of the accused which he believed was an act of witchcraft against him and he was thereby angered as to be deprived of his self-control” (Wetangula, 2006:76). In this case, the

accused were found guilty of murder. However, as shown above, belief in witchcraft can be a mitigating factor in sentencing if the person killed carried out an act of witchcraft that made the accused so angry that he was provoked into killing. In *Patrick Tuva Mwanengu versus Republic* (2007), the Court of Appeal applied these principles and found that the sentence of the accused should be reduced from murder to manslaughter. (Court of Appeal, 2007).

Violence related to accusations of witchcraft is dealt with other offences in the penal code, including murder and robbery with violence. On violence against suspected witches, the act explains that any person who accuses or threatens to accuse any person with being a witch or with practising witchcraft shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding five hundred shillings or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years (Kenya law, 2012). The act explains that any person who employs or solicits any other person to name or indicate by the use of any non-natural means any person as the perpetrator of any alleged crime or other act complained of shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding five hundred shillings or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years (Kenya law, 2012).

The act binds administrators to protect Kenyan citizens by holding that any government official who permits, promotes, encourages, and facilitates the practice of witchcraft shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding five hundred shillings, or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years (Kenya law, 2012). When the government official satisfied that the suspected person causes or is likely to cause fear, annoyance or injury to other person by means of witchcraft, the accused would be summoned. Any person who without lawful excuse refuses or neglects to obey

an order issued under this section is considered guilty of an offence and on conviction before a magistrate, would be liable to a fine not exceeding one hundred and fifty shillings or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two months. However, the gap in the law is the burden of proof beyond reasonable doubt in proving that a suspect is indeed practising witchcraft.

Despite the fact that the government has a law that is clear regarding violence on witchcraft and witch suspects, the violence still continues. This study has observed that the Abagusii are aware of the law and the measures, but paradoxically resort to violence. The following table show responses on whether the respondents were aware of the witchcraft act.

Question: *Have you ever read or heard the content of the witchcraft act of Kenya and its measures on those committing violence against suspected witches?*

| CONSTITUENCY | YES (x/20) | NO (x/20) |
|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Bonchari | 15 | 5 |
| South Mugirango | 13 | 7 |
| Bomachoge Borabu | 10 | 10 |
| Bomachoge Chache | 17 | 3 |
| Bobasi | 08 | 12 |
| Nyaribari Masaba | 11 | 9 |
| Nyaribari Chache | 16 | 4 |
| Kitutu Chache South | 12 | 8 |
| Kitutu Chache North | 07 | 13 |
| | 109 (61 %) | 71 (39 %) |

Table 5: Awareness on the witchcraft act and its measures in Kisii county.

The table above indicates that 61% of Abagusii in Kisii county are aware of the witchcraft act and its measures against those committing violence on suspected witches. Basing on the statistics a question may be raised on why does violence on witch suspects persist despite of their understanding of the act and its measures. The foregoing situation can be explained by the strong influenced from the Abagusii religion which has influenced their worldview into witchcraft and violence against suspected witches. It can also be explained that there is a gap in the Kenyan law is the burden of proof beyond reasonable doubt in proving that a suspect is indeed practicing witchcraft, which is almost unattainable hence lack of prosecution, or acquittals for persons charged with witchcraft. The following subsection analyses the limitations of the legislative approach to violence against suspected witches.

4.6 Limitations of the Constitutional Legislation on Witchcraft Associated Court Cases

According to Help Age International (2011), a non-governmental organization dealing with issues of witchcraft explains that there is no legal definition of witchcraft in the independence constitution. It can also be argued that, the offence of making indictment is severely limited by the fact that accusations are allowed if they are made to a government official. The Witchcraft Act does not address the challenges of proving supernatural practices in a court of law (the “evidentiary challenge”). None of the six cases that involved witchcraft related killings between 1983 and 2010 were addressed by the witchcraft act, but instead considered as murder and manslaughter charges. Since many Kenyans do not have access to the justice system, the older people accused of witchcraft are often unaware of their rights, which is heightened with lack of legal advice.

Barriers to justice include lack of legal information and physical infrastructure of courts in some regions, unaffordable court and lawyers' fees, and illiteracy.

The inability of independence and impartiality of the judiciary coupled with corruption among the security agents is a further barrier to justice. In 2009 the East African Bribery Index identified the Kenyan police force as the most corrupt institution in the region (Transparency International, 2009). Arguably, the police and the judiciary are unwilling to prosecute cases related to witchcraft because of fear of reprisals and also of being perceived as protecting those accused of witchcraft. The power of a government official to relocate a person suspected to practising witchcraft is could be abused by corrupt state agents thereby contravening the Constitution of Kenya and human rights legislation.

4.7 Category of People Vulnerable to Witchcraft Accusations in the Kisii County

Most respondents posited that the people accused of witchcraft in the Kisii region usually exhibit unique characteristics. Some of the features associated with people accused of witchcraft includes physical disability (or any abnormality such as a large head, swollen belly, red eyes, etc.); those with a physical illness (epilepsy, tuberculosis, etc.) or disability (autism, Down Syndrome, etc., or even those who stutter); or especially gifted people. 90 per cent of the respondents indicated that physical disability is associated with alleged witches. In an interview with Mogere (20/5/2013), the respondent lamented, "my grandmother was accused of being a witch because she had red eyes, a problem that she endured with since childhood." It is a widely spread view among the Abagusii that people with red eyes, mostly women, are often suspected to be witches and consequently, witch-finders allege "red eyed people" are devilish in nature. However, it

is a common condition in rural Kisii region, since women spend a considerable time toiling in smoky kitchen cooking for their families (Petraitis 2003:212). Most of these elderly women rely on fire wood as a source of fuel, and smoke from the wood fuel often enters into their eyes. The frequent use of wood fuel turns their eyes red that turns them to be wrongly accused as witches. It was found out that most people in Kisii county suspect persons with red eyes to be witches.

The other category is people who show any 'unusual behaviour' such as stubbornness, aggressiveness, thoughtfulness, withdrawn, lazy and even wives thought to be uncontrollable. One of the respondents defended her relative in death arguing:

Kerubo (24/06/2012) argued that, 'my cousin was not a witch, because of considered stubborn to her late husband. She would send her husband away whenever he came home late at night while drunk and sometimes physically fighting him. As a result her brother in laws ganged against her claiming that she killed her husband whom I know died because of drinking excessive chang'aa. They did not even present any evidence to show that she was a witch. I know the younger brother wanted to inherit her against her wishes. There is no doubt he is the one who masterminded the plan to eliminate her.' (Interview with Kerubo 24/06/2012).

The view point illustrated by the above incident was reinforced by 90 per cent of the respondents claim that most of the women accused of witchcraft are considered stubborn and lazy.

The other vulnerable group comprises of people regarded as antisocial. Generally, the Abagusii live in a social system characterized by obligations of giving and sharing, which always bring forth the fear of those who are left out. Those excluded and are defined as being at the margins of social interaction thereby liable to be thought of as witches. The representation of this idea focuses on the image of a witch as an old woman

who greedily eats alone in her house. The notion of the “excluded other” and the “greedy hoarder” appear to come together in this image. Similarly, those who avoid attending funerals are believed to be evading revenge from the spirit of the dead person thus taken as potential witch suspects. The foregoing could be demonstrated with an incident that befell two sisters, Esther and Linet Nyankumeri accused of bewitching their nephew. According to their neighbours, the two were spinsters who did not get the opportunity to be married because of their bad behaviour. It is claimed that the two suspected witches had always safeguarded their home and did not allow visitors. This behaviour raised suspicion among neighbours who got curious of their secretive life and decided to break into their home, lynching them (Interview with Ogute 12/4/2013).

More so, 90 per cent of the people killed because of witchcraft accusation are elderly women with grey hair (African Agenda, 1999). Older folks returning to their villages with the savings of a lifetime find themselves charged as witches and expropriated from their houses or killed (African Agenda, 1999). On the night of September 13, 2010, in Nyangoso village, in Kisii county, young villagers battered and eventually burnt two elderly women on allegation that they were responsible for the death of several villagers (Cherono, 2011). Anna Orembo explains, ‘the grandmothers pleaded for the villagers to prove their allegations before killing them, but they did not listen to them’ (Orembo, 2/05/2011). Anna explains, ‘the best thing to do when one of your own is being attacked is to watch and wait to bury the person since not even the children can rescue their mother’.

In late May 2010, 15 people, mostly elderly women, were murdered in a witch hunt exercise in Kegogi village where more than 100 people gathered machetes and

knives and stormed Justus Bosire's home after midnight (*Ibid*). 'They broke into the house and killed my grandmother and burned our house to the ground with a claim that my grandmother and father were witches,' Said Bosire (12/11/2013). Following is a picture showing Justus Bosire's grandmother's house which was destroyed over allegations that she was a witch.



Figure 9: Justus Bosire's grandmother's house which had been destroyed.

In June 2013, a 70-year old woman was lynched by angry residents in Kisii after she was accused of bewitching a young man in the village (*African Spotlight*, 2013). The woman is said to have cast an evil spell on the man making him have a miserable life. Sources said that despite his age of 30, the man showed no interest in women and did not make any progress in life, a factor that was allegedly caused by the evil woman. Nyaberi, 20/06/2013 explains, 'villagers were fed up with her behaviours, they stormed her house

in the evening and demanded to ransack it. She refused saying that she had not stolen from anyone and that they did not have a right to check her house. The villagers accused her of witchcraft and mentioned a number of cases she was involved in and had been behind a series of deaths that occurred in the village including that of her own husband. They frog marched her to the nearest trading centre for all to see before lynching her’.

Elderly women are subjected to torture and murder during a witch hunt exercises in Kisii county. The women are accused of casting evil spell to their victims, making their lives miserable. Arguments could be made that young men opt to eliminate their parents in order to off load themselves the burden of taking care of the old people in this hard economic times.

Abagusii, just like other African cultures picture women as more jealous, vindictive and secretive than men and more predisposed to evil forms of witchcraft. The example of the Duna people in Papua New Guinea springs immediately to mind (Stewart et.al, 2004:120). An acknowledgment of intergenerational conflict therefore at once resonates symbolically with fears regarding sexuality and reproduction. It can be reasoned that the fact that women are in charge of the reproduction of their families in Kisii County magnifies men's fear of their powers.

4.8. Conclusion

The study notes that violence against suspected witches gets its moral basis from Abagusii religious beliefs and practices which stipulate how a witch should be traced and punished. The religion points out specific ordeals which should be followed to find witches in the community. However, it’s crucial to state that the ordeals identified are not reliable since nobody can escape the ordeal even if he or she is innocent. The reliability

of the ordeals is questionable by the community members as most of them argued that the methods cannot be relied on. The religion teaches on the methods of punishing witch suspects who are proved guilty and recommends death as the most suitable way of punishing witches since it prevents the continuity of life of the witch after death. The victims are also denied burial according to Abagusii traditions in order to prevent their soul from reincarnating as their soul may revenge on the living.

Later, during the study it is discovered that traditional methods of finding and punishing suspected witches are not followed in Kisii county. Most of the cases of violence against suspected witches are carried on by a vigilante group known as sungu sungu. Initially, sungu sungu vigilante group was founded in Kisii county to promote security in the county. But later it went out of its mandate as people started hiring members of the sungu sungu to eliminate other members of the community. The study reveals that the sungu sungu kill suspected witches before proving whether they are guilty or not and the evidence placed on the suspected witches is vague.

The study noted that cases of violence against suspected witches might have started to increase because of the gaps which started during the colonial times. The colonial masters brought in a new judicial system which replaced the traditional system of solving disputes. Apart from the tribunals' jurisdiction not covering all criminal cases, they did not resolve disputes that involved witchcraft accusations because the colonial government termed them as primitive. The idea of the colonial system not solving cases of witchcraft accusations led Abagusii to resort to traditional mechanisms. The traditional mechanisms got a setback because of scarcity of Abagusii religious specialists in finding

witches who had been converted to Christianity or discouraged due to arrests from the colonial governments. Therefore, the traditional methods of finding and punishing witches were not followed forcing the coming up of contemporary ways of punishing witches which were not procedural.

The chapter acknowledges that Kenya has the Witchcraft Act of 1925 which makes a number of practices related to witchcraft offences, for example to pretend to practice witchcraft, to claim knowledge of witchcraft and to possess charms related to the practice of witchcraft. The Act also prohibits accusations of witchcraft if they are not made through the relevant authorities. Despite the fact that the government has a law that is clear regarding violence on witchcraft and witch suspects, the violence still continues. This study has observed that the Abagusii are aware of the law and the measures, but paradoxically resort to violence. The foregoing situation can be explained by the strong influence from the Abagusii religion which has influenced their worldview on witchcraft. It can also be explained that there is a gap in the Kenyan law on the burden of proof beyond reasonable doubt that a suspect is indeed practicing witchcraft, which is almost unattainable hence lack of prosecution, or acquittals for persons charged with witchcraft.

The chapter also noted that the Witchcraft Act does not address the challenges of proving supernatural practices in a court of law (the “evidentiary challenge”). The study points out various barriers to justice which include lack of legal information and physical infrastructure of courts in some regions, unaffordable court and lawyers’ fees, illiteracy, the lengthy legal process creating a backlog for minor crimes and corruption among the

security agents. Most people were of the view that whenever suspected witches are taken to the police, they are arrested and released after a few days. The foregoing has led to distrust in law enforcement agents and court system. As a result, Abagusii assumed it is a waste of time to take witch suspects through the judicial process thereby resorting to instant mob justice.

It was noted that those taking part in the lynching mobs are unable to explain their actions, a clear indication that mob justice does not meet the threshold of law. The victims are not provided the opportunity to defend themselves, while on the other hand the perpetrators do not understand why they are lynching the suspect. It can be concluded that the morality and legality of violence against suspected witches gets its basis from Abagusii religious beliefs, traditional methods of finding and punishing witch suspects are not followed in Kisii county and the failure of the legislative system in Kisii county creates a gap for violence against suspected witches which is necessitated by the strong Abagusii worldview on violence against suspected witches. Basing on analysis from justification brought forward for the cases of violence against suspected witches in the county, it can be concluded that most evidence put across against suspected witches is fabricated. Therefore, cases of violence against suspected witches in the county are a scape goat. The foregoing necessitates the following chapter on the causes of increasing witch accusations in Kisii county.

CHAPTER FIVE

CAUSES OF INCREASING WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS IN KISII COUNTY

5.0 Introduction

The findings described in this study indicate that the traditional procedures of finding and punishing witches are not followed. This study found out that most of the suspected witches who were punished for allegations of witchcraft were not substantiated since they were killed without evidence that they are witches. During this research, Abagusii religious specialists such as witch smellers claimed that they were never consulted. For instance, Joseph Omache a known witch smeller in the county claimed, 'I have never been consulted before punishment is meted on the suspects' (Omache, 13/07/2013) Omache believes that witch hunts are really about people expressing hatred and coming up with an excuse to hurt someone, an issue which prompted an investigation.

Some suspected witches have been accused of exhuming dead bodies from fresh graves. One of the sungu sungu members claimed, 'the victim was lynched because they exhumed Ontiri's body'. The member of sungu sungu explained that, if a grave sinks, then the dead body has been exhumed. Some members rationally explained that the Gusii region receives heavy rains thus making soil moist. Once a grave is dug, the extracted soil gets some air, after the soil is returned to the grave it becomes compact hence making the grave soil to sink leaving cracks at the edges. Once the cracks are noted, most people claim the dead has been exhumed. The sinking could also be due to the collapse of the coffin.

Most suspected witches had been killed after a note book was found in roads of the village which had minutes on the members of a witch organization, names of people the accused witches had killed and those they were planning to kill. Rationally it can be argued that, it could be a scheme strategized to eliminate some people. It seems that someone wrote a list of the suspected witches in the notebook. The foregoing statement could be supported on the grounds that: witchcraft activities take place at night in darkness that one can take down minutes; the letters were smartly inscribed within the line which is not practicable since one cannot write straight lines in darkness; some of the accused suspected witches were people who had not gone to school therefore, they did not know how to read and write; the minutes were written in the formal format and in fluent Ekegusii which is not possible for uneducated people; it can be argued that the correct format was used to write the minutes. The minutes had a date, place of meeting, members, apologies and minutes plus signatures which are not practicable for people who attended school 60 years ago and did not go beyond standard two. Therefore, this could be a strategic plan to incriminate some individuals.

Majority of the people interviewed declared that they have never encountered a witch in action. Basing on the foregoing information, it can be argued that there are other possible causes of violence against suspected witches. The following factors were identified as possible causes of increasing violence against suspected witches in Kisii county.

5.1 Causes of Increased Witch Accusations in the Modern Kisii County.

There are multiple causes attributed for the recent growing accusations of witchcraft against suspected witches among the Abagusii. Some analysts place the

current violence on witch suspects to “multi crisis” (De Boeck, 2000:160). Anthropologists and social observers are unanimous in recognizing the complexity of economic, political and social factors that contribute to such accusations. During the focus groups discussions respondents were asked on the possible causes of violence against suspected witches in the county. The average responses from the focus group discussions were as follows.

Question: What are the causes of violence against suspected witches in Kisii county?

| Possible cause | X/180 | Percentage % |
|----------------------------------|-------|--------------|
| Envy | 177 | 98 |
| New religious movements | 108 | 60 |
| Mass media | 126 | 70 |
| Globalization | 101 | 56 |
| Land | 177 | 98 |
| Outbreak of peculiar diseases | 162 | 90 |
| Suppression of women | 155 | 86 |
| Search for explanation of events | 169 | 94 |

Table 6: Causes of violence against suspected witches in Kisii county.

Violence against suspected witches in Kisii tends to target aged people, who in a sense become scapegoats for numerous deaths and misfortunes. Suspected witches are accused of being jealousy of successful people in the community. In response to the fear of being bewitched, most successful people opt to relocate after buying land far from their indigenous homes. Some people transfer their children to far schools due to the fear of witches. More so, witches are blamed for misfortunes such as death in the community even if the cause is well known (Interview with Okemwa, 12/08/2012).

5.1.1 The Power of Belief: Charismatic Churches and the Abagusii traditional

World view on Causation

Charismatic Churches have promoted witchcraft accusations in Kisii county. It is observed that Pentecostalism “with its emphasis on exorcism have preyed on the Abagusii indigenous beliefs about mystical forces and powers, forcing other religions in the Kisii county to re-examine their doctrines” on these forces (Ogembo, 2006:86). John Alan Cohan, (2011) in his article on *‘The Problem of Witchcraft Violence in Africa’* contends that witchcraft accusations are fuelled by charismatic churches that benefit from treatment offered to exorcise people who are identified as witches.

Their pastor-prophets fight against witchcraft in the name of God, identifying witches through visions and dreams, and then offering treatment—divine healing and exorcism—to the supposed witches. This “spiritual” work, often of a violent nature, reinforces beliefs in witchcraft and increases accusations . . . (Suffolk University Law Review, 2011: 836).

The actions of the pastor-prophets “complement” those of diviners who also fight against the malevolent forces of witchcraft by detecting supposed witches. Evangelists in Kisii county have increased people’s anxiety about the devil through books, open-air sermons in public spaces, preaching a connection between satan, illness, and death. There are claims that violence against suspected witches in the region erupted after the coming of a Nigerian preacher Emmanuel Eni who confessed of being a former devil worshipper (Eni, 2007:9). In his confession, the preacher alleges that as an agent of the devil, he participated in killing humans, eating human flesh, drinking human blood and causing misfortunes in the society, a narrative that was closely associated with witchcraft.

During research, it was noted that a sermon hardly ends without the preacher mentioning something related to witchcraft in Kisii county. It was realized that preachers

in Kisii county have increased Abagusii Christians' mentality that witchcraft is a reality through their sermons. During their preaching, pastors quote verses of the Bible that promote violence against suspected witches.¹⁴ For example, the Law of Moses is used as an illustration to show that people accused of witchcraft should be killed through stoning or burning.¹⁵ Omonyi, an adherent of Redeemed Gospel Church explained, 'had it not been our pastor, witches could have killed me'. Omonyi explained that he had suffered a peculiar disease which doctors failed to diagnose. One of his friends visited him when he was seriously sick and advised him to seek divine intervention through their pastor. After prayers, Omonyi claims that he felt relieved and regained after some days. 'Pastor told me one of my neighbours bewitched me. I suspect it is Subira Otundo's wife,' Omonyi said (An interview with Omonyi, 5/5/2012). There are many pastors from Charismatic Churches in Kisii county who claim to have the gift of healing those who have been bewitched. In most cases the Charismatic Churches attribute all misfortunes befalling people in the Kisii region to witchcraft, a problem that they claim they could counter. However, most of these pastors don't reveal persons responsible for witchcraft cases. They let the residents suspiciously identify the witches responsible, a factor which has increased accusations in the society. Worshipers always believe in their pastors who tell them that they are bewitched in some incidents. However, the pastors don't preach forgiveness, but some quote verses such as Exodus 22:18 which gives mandate Christians authority to kill as it reads, 'Thou shall not suffer a witch to live'. In heeding

¹⁴ Exodus 22:18, which reads, "Thou shall not suffer a witch to live."

¹⁵ Deuteronomy 18:10 and 1 Samuel 15:23, which reads that witchcraft is an abomination unto God.

to the teaching, one of the respondents said, ‘even the Bible justifies killing of witches, who I am to say no?’



Figure 10: Pastor Lawrence Omambia, the lead preacher at the Community of Christ Church in Kisii, praying for a victim believed to have been bewitched.

The Seventh Day Adventist Church (S.D.A.) which has the majority of worshippers can be blamed for the rising cases of violence against suspected witches in Kisii county. When the colonial masters and missionaries arrived in the county, they brain washed the mind of Abagusii that, all those who did not accept the new religion (S.D.A) were agents of the devil (An interview with Omboga, 16/07/2012). Abagusii religious specialists were termed as witches and those who consulted them were associated with witchcraft. The missionaries taught that witches should be punished severely through death if they did not repent. Pastors went from place to place destroying houses and sacred sites which belonged to the specialists. It seems that the missionaries left a tradition which is followed up to date. Some members from the S.D.A. Church

remained non-committal to the fight against violence against witch suspects because some members had been accused of witchcraft from the same Church. They felt that if they were seen in the forefront fighting against violence against suspected witches, they may be accused too (Pamela, 23/04/2012). Pamela said 'why should I campaign against violence against witch suspects? People may say I am one of them.' One of the respondents said, 'even pastors and Church elders are witches (An interview with Obuba, 24/4/2012).' Obuba defended his claims by a story which cropped up in the neighbouring Nyamira county and published in the daily Standard, 03 June 2007.

The newspaper explained that a woman in Nyamira made it known that upon death she did not wish to have her body taken to Church for a requiem service, despite the fact that she was a devout Christian. When she passed on, her wishes were honoured by the local Seventh-day Adventist (S.D.A.) Church. However, it is said that after she was buried, sorcerers exhumed her body in the dead of the night and took it inside the Church for their rituals, thus inadvertently disobeying her dying wishes. While inside the Church, a bright light, likened to a flash of lightning, lit the Church and made witches scamper for safety. They left the coffin and the corpse, which they had placed on a table inside the church ready to begin their rituals. The 'flash of lightning' seemed to have done the work of a 'giant camera', capturing the incident and leaving a large image of the sorcerers around the coffin emblazoned on the front wall of Nyakeore S.D.A. Church. When the villagers entered the Church the following morning they found the corpse and a mysterious incriminating piece of evidence in the form of the image on the wall. From that image they could recognise some of their fellow villagers who they came to identify as sorcerers. (<http://kisii.com/the-news/1648-crazy-monday>).

In their endeavour to combat witchcraft, pastors invoke in the name of God, identify witches through visions and dreams, and subsequently offering treatment – divine healing and exorcism – to the supposed witches. This “spiritual” work, often of a violent nature, reinforces beliefs in witchcraft and increases accusations. The more God’s servant’s attributes misfortunes to witchcraft, the more people come forward with accusation on alleged witches. These actions of the pastor-prophets “complement” those of traditional healers of fighting against the malevolent forces of witchcraft. The frequent accusations are the direct consequence of a generalized climate of “spiritual insecurity” that is created notably through spreading the idea of ever-present danger, closely linked with that of witchcraft as the source of all evil (Ashfort, 2001:30). The accusations form part of a general anti-witch movement found within families, Churches, as well as state institutions.

Abagusii mythology contributes to violence against suspected witches. They claim that, misfortunes came to this world because of envy within a family setting (Interview with Michira, 12/04/2011). A myth in the community explains that when a person died, he or she would stay in the grave and resurrect on the third day. The myth explains that there was a man who had married two wives, one of the wives died, and the husband instructed the surviving wife to stay at home and nurse the dead wife when she resurrects. When the living wife saw the grave bulging to surrender the dead wife to life, she struck the grave with wood saying *motienyi okwa oboka na monto akwa asira* (the moon dies and resurrects and a person dies forever).¹⁶ With this, the deceased wife sunk back into eternal death. Since then human beings have continued to die and perish. This

¹⁶ Literal translation: Moon dies and resurrects; a human dies and perishes

myth traces death to jealousy among very close members of the same kinship. Clearly, jealousy is viewed as the driving force behind witchcraft practices, which eventually lead to death. (Interview with Kerauni, 09/04/2011).

During the field research, a case was witnessed that concerned the death of Nyaboke who had died two months after the death of her two children, Isaboke and Mitunda, in a road accident. People could not understand why three members of a family could die within a period of two months. Earlier, it was alleged by Nyaboke's sister in law (*Gesare*) that Nyaboke's elderly mother in law had in the past visited her and requested for a bed-bug (*Ensuri*). Later, after a few months Nyaboke's children died. During Nyaboke's funeral, mourners got wind of the bed bug request and started suspecting Nyaboke's mother in-law to be a witch. After burial, the elders convened a 'traditional public court' trial where Nyaboke's mother in-law was called to defend herself. She accepted that she had requested for a bed bug from Nyaboke because a friend advised her that blood from a bed bug is a cure to animal diseases. She complained that previously many of her cows had died from a mysterious disease. And as a result a friend suggested to her that if blood from a bed bug is mixed with the liver of a fish, it can be a powerful medicine. After putting her defence, it was difficult for the court to prove whether she was guilty or not since they did not have tangible evidence. However, one of the elders argued that since a bed bug sucks blood, it carried the blood of Nyaboke and her sons and blood symbolizes life then the accused is guilty. It is widely held among Abagusii that witches kill humans for blood and flesh.

5.1.2 Economic Globalization and Struggle for Scarce Resources

Economic globalization, pointing to the trickeries and frustrations of “modernity” in which many become rich but more stay poor has promoted violence against suspected witches among the Abagusii (Comaroff, 1997: 7–19). Volatile swings in fortunes have generated frustrations among the young and impel them to accuse and in some cases kill the old, whom they see as blocking their own advancement through witchcraft. Perhaps the youth feel threatened by the sense that their elders have powerful knowledge, gained by experience in life, but are unwilling to hand it over; while the elders may feel that youths are impatient and unwilling to listen respectfully.

Describing a situation that is duplicated in countries across the continent, some commentators argue that structural adjustment programs and trade liberalization have destabilized African communities, undermined their reproductive system and thrown households into “deprivation and despair” that many people have come to believe that they are victims of evil conspiracies, carried out by supernatural means (Ogembo, 2006:89). Generally, in early 1990’s after Kenya “adjusted” its economy, unemployment reached unprecedented levels; the currency was devalued, that basic commodities became unavailable; state-subsidies to basic services like education, health, public transport were gutted. In short, thousands of people, in rural and urban areas, found themselves unable to provide for their families and community and without any hope for the future. Rising mortality rates, especially among children, due to the collapse of the healthcare system, growing malnutrition, and the spread of AIDS contributed to fuel suspicions of foul play and blame on suspected witches.

The increasingly mysterious character of economic transactions and people's consequent inability to understand the forces that govern their lives is another source of witchcraft accusations among the Abagusii (Ogembo, 2006: 125). As international policies and the invisible hand of the global market transformed local economies, it became difficult for people to understand what motivated economic change and why some prospered while others were pauperized. The result was a climate of mutual resentments and suspicion, in which those who benefited from economic liberalization feared being bewitched by those impoverished, and the poor, many of them women, saw the wealth from which they were excluded as a product of evil arts and thus giving birth to violence against people suspected of using witchcraft.

Through observation, it is clear that intergenerational struggle for survival is the root of violence against suspected witches. It is young men, often unemployed, who provide the manpower for the witch-hunts among the Abagusii, often executing plans hatched by other actors who remain in the shadows (Interview with Morandia, 13/11/2011). They are the ones who go from house to house to collect the money needed to pay a witch-finder or ambush and execute the suspected witch. With no possibility of going to school, no prospect of making a living off the land or finding other forms of income, unable to fulfil their roles as family providers, many young men, in today's structurally adjusted Abagusii community, despair about their future, and are easily led to war against their fellow community members in the name of violence against suspected witches. They are often hired and trained as mercenaries by people to organize punitive expeditions, especially against old people whom they blame for their misfortunes and see as a burden as well as an obstacle to their wellbeing.

Some external factors like international policies that the Kenyan government was implementing in response to the economic crisis of 1980s contributed to cases of violence against suspected witches (Ogembo, 2006:128). These policies that were in form of Structural Adjustment Programmes were given to Kenya to implement by World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a condition for getting continued fiscal and budgetary support. The implementation of these policies at the local level was characterized by retrenchment, reduction in purchasing power of most households as prices of most essential goods skyrocketed. At the same time, the level of unemployment increased as the government froze most employment opportunities in the public sector and started implementing retrenchment of staff. In fact, some of the retrenched staff were affected and got into stress related diseases such as diabetes, and pressure which were associated to witchcraft especially among the Abagusii. One of the respondents said, 'I used to be a strong and healthy man but when I got retrenched and came to the village people thought that I had brought them farming competition and bewitched me (Otukey, 26/05/2012). Further investigations revealed that this man was retrenched in 1998 leading to stress since he had young children leading to diabetes and High blood pressure.

The elimination of government subsidies particularly in the agricultural sector made it expensive and uneconomic in most rural communities. The consequences of these changes were twofold: first, there was an increase in tension and conflict among members of the same lineage in the utilization of land resources. Second, agricultural activities were not viable anymore due to scarcity of land; and thereby people resorting to getting income from non-agricultural activities. Opportunities for non-agricultural activities existed only in urban areas and thus most young people were forced to migrate

in search of the few opportunities. Some of them lived a careless life making them to contact HIV/AIDS. This worsened the socio-economic disruption in most households. At this period also, although HIV/AIDS was being recognized as an emerging health problem, the government response was characterized by denial and blame. This reinforced people's perception that the disease that was killing the young people who had gone to the urban areas in search of livelihood was caused by supernatural evil forces of witchcraft. Tension arose in the Abagusii community and people started treating each other suspiciously and eventually directed violence against alleged suspected witches. Some people asked why specifically these youths and not others. They claimed that the disease had been sent to them by witches.

It is important to stress in this context that violence against suspected witches among the Abagusii increased with the introduction of cash economies that profoundly changed social relations creating new forms of inequality. Life in the contemporary time, paid employment, consumerism, financial pressure and an emerging individualism have all led to profound transformations in family structures. The result is a dysfunctional family and a disruption of relations between age groups – in particular the legitimacy of parental authority – and between men and women. The changes that were introduced through development posed a challenge to African solidarity. It was in the 1980s and 1990s that, together with the debt crisis, structural adjustment, currency devaluation, and the violence against suspected witches became a dominant concern in Kisii region.

Arguably, witchcraft accusations among the Abagusii could be a source of levelling mechanism that does not allow for the success of individual to undermine the Kinship structure and its associated values (Akrong, 2000: 63-70). Those who succeed

are required to operate within the societies' expectations that they share what they have with others. Those who tend to isolate themselves from others are termed as witches. The mechanism intends at strengthening kinship ties such that one remembers that no matter how rich one is, they have a duty of remembering others through sharing what they have acquired, hence the communalist ethos of Abagusii leads to a socio-centric construction of individual identity.

Victor Turner added to the functionalist paradigm his notion of the social drama in which conflicts exposed the weaknesses of lineage organization and caused fission in social groups (Turner 1996). In Turner's view, witchcraft accusations were seen as the surface indicators of underlying conflicts over land and power. His models of social drama remain valuable among the Abagusii where land disputes are origins of numerous witchcraft accusations. Kisii county is densely populated with an average of three homesteads occupying an acre of land space. The population density is approximately 500 people per square Kilometre, putting pressure on the available piece of land that is subjected to maximum agricultural use (Turner 1993). The demand for more land has sparked rivalry within the families hence a source of hatred and enmities (Omolo, 2009). As a result there are indications that witchcraft beliefs are being manipulated to justify expropriating people from their land. This is why widows are accused of being witches by the relatives of the deceased husband (Interview with Onkoba, 12/03/ 2012).

As an agricultural community, the acreage of land available for each household drastically reduced, consequently, affecting their living standards that were evidenced by food insecurity and inability to meet other economic obligations (Omosa, 1998:37). This

change led to adaption of violence against suspected witches as a tactic to scare or kill close relatives so that their land can be taken by the relatives.

The following table shows responses from each constituency to the question whether witchcraft accusations arise from competition for land. A question was asked: *Do witchcraft accusations arise from competition for land?*

| CONSTITUENCY | YES | NO |
|---------------------|------------|-----------|
| Bonchari | 19 | 1 |
| South Mugirango | 20 | 0 |
| Bomachoge Borabu | 19 | 1 |
| Bomachoge South | 18 | 2 |
| Bobasi | 20 | 0 |
| Nyaribari Masaba | 18 | 2 |
| Nyaribari Chache | 19 | 1 |
| Kitutu Chache South | 20 | 0 |
| Kitutu Chache North | 19 | 1 |
| | 172 (96 %) | 8 (4%) |

Table 7: Responses to a question on whether witchcraft accusations arise from land disputes.

96% of the respondents linked most witchcraft accusations to land. Most witchcraft accusations among the Abagusii arise due to enmity linked to long standing and unresolved land disputes pending in courts. In cases where judgment does not please one party, they resolve into hiring the sungu sungu band of youth to eliminate their competitors in the land case (Omoke, 12/05/2015). Omoke explained, ‘some of this witchcraft claims are false accusations brought about by people to take other’s land.’ It was noted that most witch accusations take place when Kenya has experienced post-

election violence. When Kenya had post-election crisis in 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2007, most people who had bought land in the Rift Valley decided to return back home. When the relatives of those affected by the violence realized that the victims may want their land for farming they fought back in the name of witchcraft. The relatives told people, 'these are people are those witches who had ran away to seek asylum in the Rift Valley.' They schemed and killed some innocent internally displaced persons in the name of witchcraft.' Most respondents argued that the foregoing can be justified because of the minimal cases of violence against suspected witches which appeared in the 2013 Kenya's general elections which were peaceful. Statistics indicate that most cases of violence against suspected witches took place in 1993, 1998, 2003 and 2007.



Figure 11: A picture of a house burnt down due to violence against suspected witches.

5.1.3 Outbreak of ‘peculiar diseases’ and Search for Answers

Prevalent diseases in the Abagusii include malaria, diarrhoea, pneumonia, urinary tract infections and HIV/Aids (Kisii Central D. D. P., 2009:9). Witchcraft enters the picture when rational knowledge fails to explain causes of some diseases. Through the prism of witchcraft one can explain the causes of unknown diseases, the mystery of death, and strange and inexplicable misfortunes. Witchcraft is a plausible explanation to young people’s infections and death among the Abagusii. People vulnerable to HIV/AIDS are mostly the youth who had moved to urban areas in search for livelihood. By getting infected and ailing from HIV/AIDS, it is blamed on some members within their lineage to be against their efforts to improve their economic status due to jealousy. HIV/AIDS is a slow wasting disease with multiplicity of infections due to compromised immunity. Among the Abagusii, illnesses that exhibited multiplicity of symptoms, wasting in nature and defies any form of treatment are taken to be caused by witchcraft. Since who are dying of HIV/AIDS are predominately young people, such deaths are classified as bad deaths and presumed to be caused only by witchcraft (LeVine, 1982). The misconceptions and traditional beliefs associated with curses and witchcraft have enhanced the spread of HIV/AIDS (Kamaara, 2005:73).

According to the respondents witchcraft accusations increases during the month of July and August when malaria outbreak of malaria is rampant (Interview with Nyaboke, 11/12/2011). Since acute malaria can kill within the shortest period if it is not diagnosed, many people mistakenly blame the deaths on witchcraft. People ask, ‘why did so and so die because of malaria and not any other person?’ That is why this period has been named the months of witches. Clearly, increased cases of witchcraft accusations can

be linked to the general decline of healthcare systems in Kenya. Most hospitals lack equipment to diagnose clear causes of diseases, compelling doctors to rely on symptoms to relate the causes of specific diseases. It can be noted that some diseases such as malaria and typhoid have the same symptoms; this has resulted to diseases becoming a problem as they cannot be cured. Many people revert to traditional Abagusii methods of healing hence visiting diviners to find the cause to their diseases. Since some diseases were new to the knowledge of traditional healers, they pointed out the cause of the diseases to witchcraft (Interview with Ayienda, 12/04/2012). The foregoing can be justified through Isaboke's personal experience:

Isaboke's father who is sixty five years old is a diabetic and he maintains the sugar level through injecting himself with insulin. In the year 2010 while he was asleep, he felt an urge to go for a short call. He woke up and walked out of the house to pee not knowing that the sugar level had gone far down making him unconscious hence falling down injuring his forehead. After a few days, he started developing some unusual symptoms such as severe headache, vomiting, signs of paralysis on the left hand and leg, loss of speech and he could urinate on himself due to failure of urinary muscles. He went to several hospitals including Kisii level five hospital but the problem could not be diagnosed. He was tested for all possible diseases but in vain. Relatives advised the family to try diviners which was against the Christian teachings of the family. The father decided to see a physician in Eldoret hospital who also failed to diagnose the problem. Later, he decided to be taken to Machakos county to see a diviner whom people had described as the best. The family had despaired as the father told them, '*egiasireire rogoro, kerigerie maate*'. A Kisii proverb which can be translated as, 'what has gotten

lost upper hill, search for it downhill'. Meaning, the health professionals have failed and they should try traditional health specialists. They borrowed a car from one of the lecturers working at Moi University, who discouraged them and referred them to doctor Koech, a neurologist and brain surgeon. Dr. Koech discovered through CT scan that he had swollen brain due to internal bleeding and did surgery on him making him regain to health (Isaboke, 30/06/2012). The foregoing case is an illustration that most people blame witchcraft for diseases which cannot be explained by some doctors and bad health situation could be a factor for witchcraft accusations in Kisii county. Isaboke's father could have died if he could have gone to Machakos to see a diviner and his relatives could have blamed the death on witches.

During research a question was asked to find out whether respondents believed that witchcraft causes diseases and death. Responses to this question were recorded through the use of interviews and questionnaires.

Question: *Does witchcraft cause disease and death?*

An example of a response to a verbal interview is given below.

Verbatim Interview

Researcher: *Does witchcraft cause disease and death?*

Mr. Nyamongo: Yes it does. Witchcraft causes diseases that cannot be diagnosed in hospitals. Diseases such as speech impairment and epilepsy are caused by witchcraft and cannot be successfully treated in hospitals. Thus, witchcraft causes dangerous diseases and death of human beings.

Researcher: *Have you ever been bewitched yourself or members of your family?*

Mr. Nyamongo: Yes. Sometime back I felt pain on my knees for a long period of time for unclear reasons while I was working at Nandi hills as a mechanic. I went to various hospitals and doctors could not diagnose the ailment. One day I decided to then consult a diviner who told me it was witchcraft. The diviner removed a dead chameleon from my knee. People are not good.

The foregoing verbatim interview makes one think that some diseases are psychological since no one can expect a chameleon to enter into ones knee. He argued, 'It's true because eventually after the removal of the chameleon the pain ceased'. The foregoing led inquiry on the same opinion from the rest of the members of the community. A question was asked on whether witchcraft causes disease. The following table indicates responses per constituency to the question.

Question: *Does witchcraft cause diseases in Kisii county?*

| CONSTITUENCY | YES (x/20) | NO (x/20) |
|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Bonchari | 19 | 1 |
| South Mugirango | 16 | 4 |
| Bomachoge Borabu | 15 | 5 |
| Bomachoge South | 20 | 0 |
| Bobasi | 18 | 2 |
| Nyaribari Masaba | 17 | 3 |
| Nyaribari Chache | 19 | 1 |
| Kitutu Chache South | 20 | 0 |

| | | |
|---------------------|-----------|----------|
| Kitutu Chache North | 18 | 2 |
| | 162 (90%) | 18 (10%) |

Table 8: Shows the widely held belief that witchcraft is the main cause of diseases.

Most people want to impose meaning on the things that happen to them. According to Hammond-Tooke (1989:55) the logic that lies behind beliefs in witchcraft rests on the traditional African assumption that there is no such thing as chance in life. Everything happens for a reason. Events are always caused and the prime cause of sickness and misfortune is the witch. Here the author usefully distinguishes between immediate cause and ultimate cause. The issue of cause and ultimate cause is supported by an example from Evan-Prichard's (1937) book on Azande witchcraft:

A man is sitting under a granary and its supports collapse so that he is crushed to death. The Azande are perfectly aware that the immediate cause of the death was the collapse of the granary, or perhaps the activity of termites, but they are not satisfied with this explanation. They ask further questions: Why was this man? Why did it fall? (Evan-Prichard, 1937).

Abagusii just like the Azande believe that nothing comes out of nothing. There must be a cause for everything. All misfortunes are caused by witchcraft even if the cause can be explained scientifically. For example if a person dies because of HIV/AIDS the members of the community ask each other why not other member that the disease attacked the specific person? They point out that a witch must have sent the disease to take him.

Witchcraft explains the problem posed when one seeks to understand why misfortune befalls oneself rather than someone else (Lewis, 2013: 39). It makes sense of the inequalities of life: the fact that one person's crops or herds fail while others' prosper. Equally, witchcraft can be invoked to explain the success of others. In this "limited good" scenario—where there is implicitly a fixed stock of resources and where life is generally

precarious, with little surplus to distribute in time of need—those who succeed too flagrantly are assumed to do so at the expense of others less fortunate. The “witch,” therefore, is typically someone who selfishly wants more than they ostensibly deserves whose aspirations and desires are judged excessive and illegitimate.

Science cannot provide answers that are psychologically satisfying when we question the reasons behind events. It is for this reason that so many people turn to religion in pursuit of answers that science cannot provide. Among the Abagusii, most people turn to traditional belief systems to find answers to these and other questions. The first question that comes into the mind of people told that they are being troubled by witchcraft is not “Why me?”, but “Who?” This question is imposed on them by their world-view, and prompts them to scan the range of their associates for the possible culprit – and the person their suspicions are likely to fall on is someone whom they believe hates them. What actually happens is that the person they select is probably someone whom they themselves hate and who is thus, often unjustly, labelled as the evil-doer. The reason for this hatred is typically to be found in the competition for scarce resources referred to earlier. An imaginary example from western society will make the point. Supposing a professional tennis player, a believer in the power of witchcraft, falls and breaks her arm then asks the question “Who?” It is clear that the most likely person she will suspect is a fellow champion, in competition with her, the one who would be most likely to gain from the accident. There is no doubt that the relationship between witch and victim is always one that has conflict as its basis. Where there is no conflict there will be no witchcraft (Hammond-Tooke, 1993: 25–39).

To emphasize the chilling reality of witch executions in Africa, Hammond- Tooke writes:

A witch's execution has been likened to a morality play. In it, the community as a whole rises up in righteous indignation against this attack on its integrity, and symbolically (and literally) destroys the evil element in its midst. In a very definite sense the witch-sorcerer is evil personified, and the witch-image objectifies this so that something can be done about it (Hammond-Tooke, 1989:45).

What is certain, however, is that we will not find an explanation for this phenomenon by appealing to the 'African worldview.' Similarly, the view that witchcraft accusations are levelling mechanisms used to defend communal values against the excessive accumulation of wealth, can hardly account for these persecutions, given their destructive consequences for African communities. More convincing is the view, argued by most contemporary anthropological studies that these witch-hunts are not a legacy of the past, but is a response to the social crisis that globalization and neo-liberal restructuring of Africa's political economies have produced.

5.1.4 False Confessions and the Paradoxical Role of the Media as tool of Informing and Exacerbating for Violence against witch suspects

Coerced-compliant confessions occur when suspects confess, despite the knowledge of their innocence, due to extreme methods of communal interrogations (Conti, 2011:62). Numerous false confessions among the Abagusii are elicited through the use of torture, threats, and promises that the witch suspects will not be killed. Various theories developed to respond to the question: What is it about witch hunter's interrogations that cause some innocent people to incriminate themselves? From a psychological viewpoint coerced-compliant false confessions among the Abagusii are explained by the innocent suspect's wish to escape an aversive situation and ensure a

pleasant consequence. To account for the phenomenon of internalized false confessions, some have compared the interrogation process to hypnosis. Witch hunter questioning “can produce a trance-like state of heightened suggestibility in the suspect” so that “truth and falsehood become hopelessly confused in the suspect’s mind” (An interview with Otuke, 13/6/2013).

Ambroise Auguste Liebault was a physician in the 1860s who believed that hypnosis was based on the implantation of a fixed idea in the mind of the subject (Lie’beault, 2002:57). His experiment found out that the subject relinquished their freedom of choice and carried out any suggestion that had been implanted in their mind. When a false sense of guilt is introduced into the minds of hypnotized individuals, they fair less in a polygraph lie detector test. The same can be used to interpret false confessions of witchcraft among the Abagusii. It can be argued that not everybody who confesses as a witch is a witch, much research needs to be done on anybody who confesses to be a witch. Though around 80 percent of the respondents hold that people killed on suspicion of being witches had confessed before their death, could have falsely confessed to avoid torture.

Widespread consensus exists in contemporary witchcraft studies that part of the perception of increased witchcraft belief and hysteria in Africa today is due to the growing role witchcraft plays in the media and other areas of public discourse. These forums—television, radio, videos, and pamphlets—are helping to create the image of modern witchcraft practice, which provides the basis for many of the witchcraft (Gram, 2011:17).

The media, particularly the print and electronic media, has contributed a lot to the spread of ideas of witchcraft and violence against suspected witches. Bridget Meyer writes that contemporary Ghanaian videos depict the occult “bring light into the dark and, at the same time, [contribute] to establishing the domain of occult forces as part and parcel of modern city life” (Meyer, 2003:120) These popular videos depicting the spirit world including zombies, witches, and magicians have contributed to the public image of the evil of witchcraft. Many home videos surfacing on the internet depict deliverance rituals, including the deliverance of children. In addition, there are radio programs dedicated to testimonial sharing, where witches who have converted to Christianity are encouraged to share their stories. According to United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) report-writer Aleksandra Cimpric (2010), this packaging of modern witchcraft beliefs for mass consumption has contributed to a sense of witch hysteria widely felt among the Abagusii.

Ideas of violence against suspected witches are spread through movies, news by media stations and the internet. Around 80 per cent of the people in Kisii are lovers of Nigerian films, which have ideas of witchcraft in the society and thus influence the worldview of the viewer on the practice. The foregoing conclusion was arrived at as most of the respondents gave a reference to the Nigerian films as an explanation on the acts of a witch and their appearance. Most of the Abagusii have access to Nigerian films through the local television programs or purchased compact discs.

There are also incidences that the Kenyan news reporters exaggerate information on witchcraft and witch hunting. They relied on rumours to explain issues of witchcraft that they could not ascertain. Such stories exaggerated explanations and thus spreading

the idea of witchcraft hence strengthening accusations. Following is a cartoon in one of the newspapers illustrating a case where suspected witches had been caught.



Figure 12: A drawing by one of the newspapers to illustrate a story on witchcraft.

5.1.5 Fighting the Marginalized in Society: Women at the Epicentre of the Witchcraft Drama

The recent witch-hunts have spared no one, but the most frequent and violently attacked are older people (Ogembo, 2006:140). The young men among the Abagusii opt to eliminate their parents in order to off load themselves the burden of taking care of the old people due to hard economic times. The evident violence against suspected witches is interpreted as young people's reluctance to support their kinfolds and eagerness to appropriate their belongings, in a time of diminishing resources. But most crucial is the fact that when monetary relations become hegemonic, women's reproductive activities, and their contribution to the community are totally devalued. This is especially true of old

women who can no longer produce children or provide sexual services and are considered a drain on the creation of wealth. Many older people in Kisii county are today hunted as witches because they too are seen as “dead assets”, the embodiment of a world of practices and values that increasingly is considered sterile, non-productive.

The structure of the polygamous family among the Abagusii contributes to foment witchcraft accusations, creating jealousies and competition among co-wives and siblings with regard to the distribution of the family’s assets, especially land (Interview with Mogambi, 22/07/2013). Stepmothers and co-wives feature prominently among the women accused for witchcraft because of growing land scarcity that has intensified the conflicts since husbands find it difficult to provide for all their wives, causing intense rivalries among them and their children.

Further, witchcraft is used among the Abagusii as one of the ways to enforce women’s rigid gender roles in order to prevent them from gate crushing into roles traditionally preserved for men. It is a way of marginalizing women in society. Their traditional roles are giving birth, caring for the children and the related function of caring for the home, regardless of the individual gifts and qualities of women (Interview with Ateka, 23/06/2012). It emerged that most of those women who had been accused of being witch suspects were vocal fighters of women’s rights. Consequently, women who ‘controlled’ their husbands were suspected to have used witchcraft powers.

Just like the Ghanaians, witchcraft beliefs among the Abagusii constitute a form of social control on women (Field, 1961:100). Witches are generally accorded certain traits such as arrogance, flashy displays, maliciousness, jealousy, anger, animosity and spite for others. Most women within the Abagusii community have high temper tantrums

making them speak careless statements leading to their accusation (Interview with Mogere, 23/03/2012). Most suspicions start after misfortunes befall people and they try to connect the cause of the misfortunes to their past including quarrels and threats by neighbours. Like the Azande, witchcraft accusations among the Abagusii also arise due to competing relations between the daughter in law and the mother in law (Evans- Pritchard, 1976:3). This is because they may be competing for attention of the same man hence women hunting fellow women. The foregoing explanations support Dolvo's (2007) argument that witchcraft accusations are a means by which social tensions are made public.

Elderly women strenuously defend a non-capitalist use of natural resources, practicing subsistence farming and refusing to sell their land or trees, to keep them for their children's security, and where a generation of youngsters is growing whose minds have become unsettled because of the hardships they are facing, and are now becoming convinced that older people can no longer provide for their future or, worse, are blocking their access to wealth (Bonate, 2003:40). As Auslander (1993) writes, drawing on his experience in Ngoni land (Eastern Zambia), old men too are caught in this conflict between the values of the older subsistence-oriented communal world and those of the advancing monetary economy. In popular songs and plays, they lament that their children will poison them to sell their cattle for cash and buy chemical fertilizer or a truck. But the "battle to make wealth" is "waged [above all] upon the mature female body" because old women are believed to pose a special threat to the reproduction of their communities, by destroying crops and making young women barren (Auslander (1993:170). In other words, the battle is waged on women's bodies because women are seen as the main

agents of resistance to the expansion of the cash economy, and as such as useless individuals, selfishly monopolizing resources that the youth could use.

5.1.6 Envy

Envy is usually the principal motivation behind suspected acts of witchcraft (Suffolk University Law Review, 2011: 836). Jealousy causes hate, hate drives witchcraft; witchcraft (as evidenced by its effects) must have been caused by hate. The usual reasons for killing someone by witchcraft are: ambition for wealth and recklessness in display and in the enjoyment of worldly goods, too much power by sorcery-these are enviable failings or sins, dangerous, since they arouse the jealousy of the mighty, but surrounding the culprit with a halo of glory (Malinowski, 1970).”

The case of Abagusii can be equated to an example from the !Kung hunter-gatherers of the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa,

... [n]o one is supposed to stand out from the rest of the group. If someone were to come back from a successful hunt and show excessive pride, he would be put back firmly into his place, even if the kill were a large animal. With the freshly killed meat still over his shoulder, such an improperly proud hunter would hear the pointed teasing of his village: ‘What is it you have there? What a scrawny little thing! You didn’t kill that. It looks so sick and scrawny that it must have fallen dead into your arms’ (Richard Katz, 1982:10).

In Kisii county envy is related to competition, to the desire to excel, to prove oneself, to be successful, and to attain status and recognition. If one person possesses more than others, in the county, it is thought to have been obtained at everyone else’s expense; because there are scarce resources, one person’s gain causes another person’s loss. There is bound to be envy if anyone acquires more land than others or produces a superior harvest. Cohesion, cooperation, reciprocity, and even distribution of wealth are ways of

avoiding the envy of one's neighbours. People will usually avoid any public appearance of superiority about anything (An interview with Nyangaresi, 20/03/2012). Nyangaresi said, 'people don't want to be recognized that they are rich for the fear of witchcraft.' Some people avoid dressing smartly or live a life of a high class than others because they fear being bewitched. 98 percent of the respondents interviewed during focus group discussion felt that violence against suspected witches was an issue of envy.

Violence against suspected witches in Kisii tends to target older people of their parental generation, who in a sense became scapegoats of blame for numerous deaths and misfortunes. The elderly are accused of being jealousy of the young successful people in the community (Marucha, 22/03/2012). Marucha further explained that many people think that those who are successful politically, economically and educationally have used witchcraft to gain success. Many respondents claimed that once people become successful in Kisii, they move far away from their homes afraid of being bewitched. Those whose children do well in school live in fear that witches may bewitch their children. Currently, whenever a successful person dies, witches are blamed and relatives rise to revenge on suspected witches (Okemwa, 12/08/2012).

5.2 Conclusion

Data presented in this chapter suggests that most of the accusations witches in the contemporary Kisii county could be false since evidence presented against them were irrational. The chapter has shown that witchcraft accusations among the Abagusii are a scapegoat which can be linked to land conflicts, economic rivalries, jealousy, the new religious movements and competitions for available rare resources. In all, accusations of

suspected witches in Kisii county have increased due to the pressures of social change and new challenges of modern culture.

It was noted that witchcraft accusations are on the increase because of social change from traditional Abagusii religious beliefs to contemporary ways. Moving from traditional Abagusii social structures into contemporary social structures has created a society of conflicting demands and new challenges which has led to strained relations in Kisii county. Strained relations have led to events such as false witchcraft accusations where the accused are taken as scapegoats and punished to cleanse the society. Therefore, the current cases of increased violence against suspected witches are as a result of social economic change. The changes are new and take place so fast affecting the society negatively that Abagusii cannot understand their real causes which are interpreted as witchcraft. Abagusii have responded by acting violently to witch suspects in order to restore the socio economic situation which they have failed. From the foregoing, it can be reasoned that witchcraft beliefs are a means by which social tensions are made public.

The study concludes that cases of violence against suspected witches have increased because of the departure from traditional Abagusii religious beliefs to adapt other religious beliefs. Abagusii religion can be seen as a double edged sword, it promotes violence against suspected witches and can control cases of violence against suspected witches. It can be reasoned out that witchcraft beliefs are a group of ideas dominated by an internal logic based on cultural and experiential surrounding from which they emerged. The following section explains the impact of the violence against suspected witches to the stability of families in Kisii county.

CHAPTER SIX

EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST SUSPECTED WITCHES TO STABILITY OF FAMILIES IN KISII COUNTY.

6.0 Introduction

This section explains the effects of violence against suspected witches to stability of families in Kisii county. The family is a basic unit of the society. If a society has broken families, it will disintegrate. The foregoing is supported by Gomang Seratwa Ntloedibe-Kuswani in his study on *'the challenge of witchcraft to the Baswana ideas of community and relationships'*. He writes:

Witchcraft, as a form of evil, has become a bother and a serious embarrassment for any philosophy of life, whether atheistic or religious. It threatens to destroy all but silently (Gomang, 2007:204).

The Abagusii society, just like the Baswana has been affected negatively through violence against suspected witches. Suspected witches tend to experience various forms of violence which include physical, economic, social, psychological and sexual violence. This chapter addresses effects of violence against suspected witches to the stability of families.

6.1 Effects of Violence against Suspected Witches to Stability of Families in Kisii County

Abagusii society is centred upon the belief in ancestors; a belief that focuses on the idea of community and relationships. By venerating ancestors, people maintain relationship between the living and the dead, between the unborn and the living, between humanity and nature and between human beings themselves. The objective behind all these types of relationships is to live in harmony with all. Never the less, Abagusii have

all sorts of conflicts at personal and family level. These conflicts as ascribed to witchcraft. Witchcraft accusations are a serious concern and an embarrassment to Abagusii's ideas of community and relationships, many women have been divorced as a result of witchcraft accusations and there are relatives who do not see or talk to each other because of witchcraft accusations thus disintegrating the larger Omogusii family. In some cases suspicions of witchcraft can stigmatise the entire family and its progeny for generations. During research, a question was asked on the effect of violence against suspected witches to stability of families in Kisii county. The following table indicates the responses.

Question: *What is the effect of violence against suspected witches to stability of families in Kisii county?*

| Effect | X/180 | Percentage % |
|-------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Migration | 173 | 96 |
| Economic retardation | 178 | 99 |
| Promoted enmity | 160 | 89 |
| Drug and substance abuse | 155 | 86 |
| Affected academic performance | 176 | 98 |
| Magic | 133 | 74 |
| Property has been destroyed | 176 | 98 |
| Affected marriage patterns | 178 | 99 |

Table 9: Effects of violence against suspected witches to stability of families in Kisii county.

96% of the respondents in Kisii county argued that violence against suspected witches has led to migration of the suspects from their homes to distant places. When

people are accused of witchcraft they run away from their homes leading to family disintegration (Interview with Luwendi, 20/ 08/2011). It is common among the Abagusii to employ the services of sungu sungu to warn the suspected 'witches' before attacking them. Upon receiving such warnings, the accused vacate their homes for fear of attack. The study established that 99 percent of the victims of witchcraft violence are people over 60 years. There is concern that violence against these old suspected witches is a way of eliminating them so that young ones can acquire the land (Interview with Omambia, 23/10/2011). Traditionally, people own land through inheritance among the Abagusii. Parents have a tradition of distributing their land to their sons leaving a small portion for themselves. Allegedly, some sons also desire the piece of land left for the parents, wishing for their death to acquire the piece. As a result, they embark on devising ways of eliminating the parents and one of the ways is by accusing them of witchcraft. This has contributed to old people to live in fear, resorting to dyeing their grey hair to avoid being branded witches (An interview with Mogaka, 22/4/2012). Mogaka explains, 'many suspected witches ran away, nobody knows their whereabouts. There is no doubt that attack on suspected witches has created internally displaced persons as many people flee their homes and leave behind valuable property'.

In some cases the alleged witches are faced isolation and rejection as they are discriminated in all social spheres including the family, religion, education, and employment. Their accusation leads to cutting relationship between them and other community members. One of the witch suspects explained, 'I don't attend funerals or other public ceremonies since they called me a witch as people stare at me stunningly' (Mobegi, 12/5/2012). It was noted that the suspected witch lived an isolated life; she did

not go to her youngest son's home because she believed the rumour was started by the son's wife. Mobegi said, 'that woman cut my relationship with my beloved son, God shall pay her back. I cannot speak to her; we are like kerosene and water'. As observed by Aylward Shorter (1985:97), "to accuse people of witchcraft practices is to destroy their social personality, if not to condemn them to a more merciful (sic) death." Such suspicions are indeed condemnatory and inflict irreversible damage, both physically and socially on the suspect.

99% of the respondents argued that violence against suspected witches has led to economic retardation in families which has affected their stability. This economic effect happens in a number of ways; in some cases, employers dismiss accused suspected witches, others deny them jobs and in some cases community members refuse them access to sources of livelihood such as capital, land and labour (Interview with Mokaya, 27/06/2013). In some circumstances, the property of the accused is vandalised. One of the respondents whose grandmother had been killed said, 'young men came to my grandmothers' homestead and destroyed everything. They lynched her permanent house, burnt her granary which was full of maize and killed her cows, we did not salvage any property' (An interview with Ann, 20/4/2012). In cases where suspected witches are evicted from the community, they find it hard to secure new land for settlement and cultivation. It becomes difficult for them to start life again since their property is confiscated, looted or destroyed apart from other community members' unwillingness to allow them into their homes. As violence is meted on people suspected to be witches, properties are also destroyed in the process (Interview with Gesare, 13/ 10/ 2011. Once a person is identified to be a witch, a gang of youth would raid the suspect homestead and

embark burning down houses, destroy crops and kill animals. This approach renders families of the accused suspected witches homeless and poor. “Today I have nothing - no house, no cloths, no goats or fowls” as “everything was destroyed”, One of the respondent exclaimed (Interview with Miriam Gesare 10/07/2012). One pastor whose wife had been killed on witchcraft allegations explained, ‘since my wife had been killed in the name of witchcraft, nobody wants to see me. I had to quit my profession as a pastor since not even my followers could give me anything to start life against. My wife wasn’t a witch; I am told some people are also calling me a witch. I leave it to God’ (An interview with ‘Omorisia, 23/5/2012).

The 99% of the respondents affirmed that the economic stability of families in Kisii county has been affected negatively. This has affected the families of the victims of violence and the county in general. It was found out that some family businesses have collapsed because their immediate relatives had been suspected of witchcraft since people do not wish to buy from families of witch suspects (Nyabuti, 19/06/2012). In some cases, some people are scared of establishing development structures, on the other hand some of them do not want to build magnificent houses at their homes for the fear of being bewitched (Milka, 20/ 07/2012). Milka from Birongo near a place known as Ekona ya Gechino retorts, ‘in this village people don’t build permanent houses due to fear of mysterious death’. Some people do not want to start business next to their homes because they think envious people may bewitch them. For those who own cars, some do not drive to their homes as they fear that they may be bewitched. One Onwong’a explains, ‘here you don’t drive nice cars like yours. If you do, you won’t make it back to your destination minus getting an accident. Chanda’s son Joseph came home with a brand new

car, but did not make back to Nakuru because his car collided head on with an approaching van. People hate development I tell you'. It was found out that people drive to Kisii town, park their cars and aboard matatus¹⁷ to their home.

The belief that some people can bewitch land by making it unproductive has affected distribution and utilization of land as a natural resource. One of the respondents Obongo (22/05/2012) explained, 'my land is unproductive because my brother's wife bewitched it. How come we planted at the same time but she harvested more bags than me not forgetting that we inherited the same piece of land from our parents'. Further investigation was made on why Obongo felt that his piece of land was bewitched. It was found out that Obongo claimed that his farm was bewitched because he found some ugali and bones buried in his farm. Further investigations revealed that bones could have been buried by his dogs. It was also revealed that farmers in Kisii plant twice a year hence over utilizing nutrients from Obongo's farm. Her neighbour might have succeeded because of better farming techniques. The neighbour explained that she used the correct fertilizer, manure and seeds. The foregoing indicates that failure to unearth the cause of some incidents such as low yields is blamed on witchcraft which may not be a reality.

Violence against suspected witches promotes enmity among families in Kisii county. Majority of the families of the victims of witchcraft violence hold grudges against the perpetrators of violence. In order to find out whether violence against suspected witches affects peaceful co-existence between the victim's family members and the perpetrators, a question was asked: Does violence against suspected witches

¹⁷ Matatu- Swahili word meaning a van used to carry passengers from one place to another.

promote enmity among the families? The following chart indicates the responses to the question.

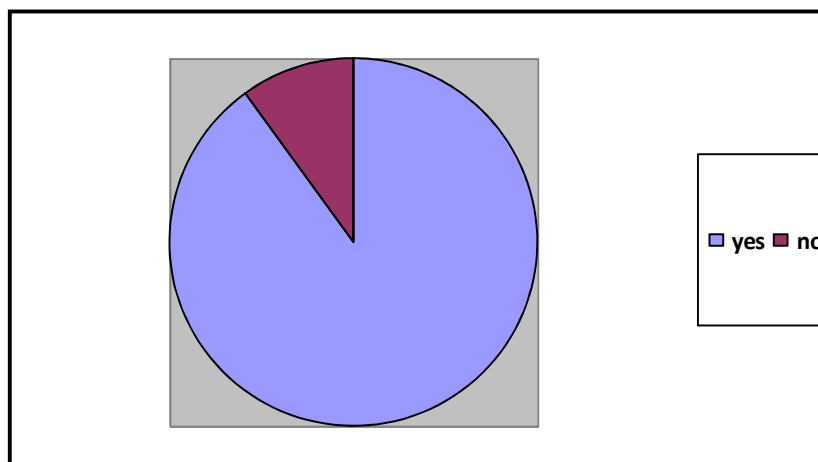


Figure 13: Responses to the question on whether witchcraft accusations promote enmity between families within the Abagusii community.

Many of the families of the witch suspects held that if they are given a chance they would revenge on behalf of their family members. One former pastor whose wife had been killed at Maarani explained, ‘if I had powers I could eliminate all those who participated in the killing of my wife over allegations of witchcraft. Imagine my blood brother lied against my wife, I hate him until death. He has brought me a lot of shame in this village, God shall pay back someday’. (An interview with Getembe, 18/4/2012). 90% of the members of the suspected witches’ family are in pain since they witnessed their family members being punished on assertion that they were witches. These family members were unable to intervene and defend their relatives from the angry mobs for fear of being falsely accused as witches too.

Psychological damage is also evident on alleged witches due to insults, mockery, threats, and other acts that negatively affect the feelings of the victim. Of the ten people

who were suspected of practicing witchcraft, Seven (70%) said they were insulted by the community members regularly. The insults are intended to humiliate the suspects and compel them to stop in engaging in witchcraft. However, the insults bring shame to the family members of the witch suspect and affect them emotionally. One of the witch suspects explained, “it hurts when you pass and young children ran away shouting loudly that I am a witch. I rather drink chang’aa to seek for temporarily happiness”. Some suspected witches are subjected to psychological violence; they resort to drugs and alcohol abuse as a means to temporary suppress the humiliation they experienced.

Further, violence against suspected witches has affected education of families in Kisii county. Some children have dropped out of school because of shame and verbal violence from their colleagues and teachers (An interview with Sammy, 19/04/2012). Sammy explained, ‘I dropped out of primary school because I won’t take it anymore’. Sammy’s grandmother and others had been accused that they were using the school’s classroom for witchcraft activities. One morning, pupils came to school and found human faeces in one of the classrooms. A story came out suspecting that the faeces could belong to witches and Sammy’s grandmother who happened to be a neighbour to the school was suspected. People claimed that she could be envious on the neighbour’s children because she did not bear any. It was realized that the poor old woman had lost all her children through death when they were young forcing her to adapt Sammy’s father. 98% of the respondents argued that the poor academic performance of children in Kisii county may be attributed to the belief in witchcraft and violence against suspected witches. Respondents were asked on whether violence against suspected witches affects academic

performance of school going children in Kisii county. The following chart indicates the responses to the question.

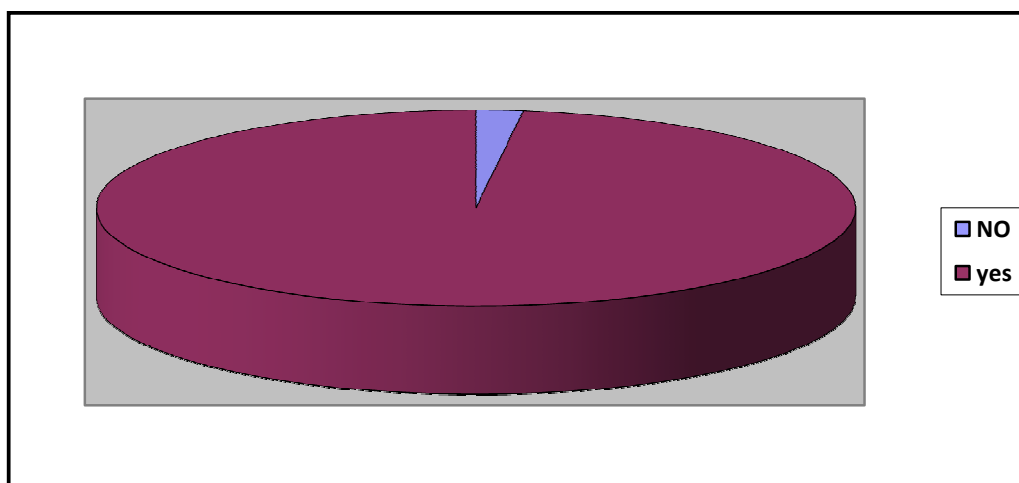


Figure 14: Responses to the question on whether violence against suspected witches affects education performance of school going children in Kisii county.

It was found out that violence against witch suspected has affected the performance of children whose relatives had been accused of being suspected witches. Such children get affected emotionally as they end up being side-lined by other children at school. Children of suspected witches drop out of school because of lack of basic school fees and other basic items such as school uniforms. Such children are segregated by colleagues and some teachers hence, affecting their academic performance. Some children believe that, witches bewitch children who perform well in school through their kids who are sent to collect learning materials belonging to the bright children (Bonyinyo, 20/05/2012). The foregoing has led to parents taking their children to schools in faraway counties (Onguso, 23/05/2011). Stephen Nyoka Nyaga in his study entitled *'The Impact of Witchcraft Beliefs*

and Practices on the Socio-Economic Development of the Abakwaya in Musoma-Rural District, Tanzania' notes that;

The fear of being bewitched makes most people fear being seen to prosper in business and to be able to educate their children up to a higher level. Parents with educated children often advise them to buy a piece of land far from home for fear that they might be bewitched if they develop their family land. Other parents refuse to have a decent house built by their children for fear that this might endanger their life (Gerrie ter Harr ed., 2007:247).

Just like Nyanga's experience in Tanzania, some children and teachers have moved from some schools in Kisii county due to the fear of being bewitched. One child explained, 'you cannot pass from that school of witches, children of witches cannot allow you to pass as they take pieces of paper from others' exercise books to perform magic on them'. The foregoing statement was made by a child who was seeking for transfer to another school after learning that they were in the same class with children whose parents had been lynched because of allegations that they were witches. It is also reported that most teachers from other provinces are not willing to work in Kisii for fear of witchcraft (<http://kisii.com/education/139-why-kisii-pupils-do-so-poorly>).

The general institution of marriage among the Abagusii has also been affected by the violence directed against alleged witches within the Abagusii community. Customarily, it is important for people to investigate the family background of the future spouse to find out if they are engaged in witchcraft activities before contracting a marriage (Interview with Mankinda, 22/09/2013). Family ties are severed due to accusations and violence against suspected witches who relatives sometimes strive to defend. Relatives of suspected witches endure stigmatization as they discriminated to the extent that many people are unwilling to take them in marriage.

Violence against suspected witches has made some children orphans hence affecting their growth and development. A family is a basic unit of the society. Once a family breaks, it affects the degree of their socialization. With reference to the witch-hunts in Kisii, Justus Ogembo (2006) writes:

Villagers rounded up and 'arrested' suspects in their houses at night or chased them and caught them like prey by day, bound their hands and feet with sisal ropes, torched them--after dousing them with gasoline purchased earlier or placing them under grass-thatched roofs--and then drew back to watch the victims agonize and perish in the flames. Some of those murdered in this way left behind a terrified and now orphaned offspring (Ogembo, 2006:1).

During interviews, it was noted that most orphans had been affected socially and psychologically. One of the orphans said, 'I wish they could have taken my life instead of my mother. My life is miserable without my mother.' Some of the children have ended up being street children in Kisii town (An interview with Obiri, 24/05/2013).

Witchcraft accusations have led to divorce in Kisii county (Kemunto, 23/04/2012). Kemunto explained, 'I pity my daughter Beatrice, imagine they sent her away on allegations that she is a witch without any tangible evidence. What I know is that her co-wives' children died because of outbreak of cholera due to lack of hygiene'. It was revealed that Beatrice's co-wife never used to boil water before drinking and her borehole had been sunken near a latrine. When the co-wife's children died, relatives accused Beatrice of bewitching her co-wife's children because she was barren. On another incident a lady known as Bitutu's husband died, she began receiving threats from her in-laws accusing her of bewitching their brother. Fearing for her life and that of her children, she decided to go back to her parents. Bitutu said: "When my husband died, the village committee discussed to find the cause of the death which my brother-in-laws

claimed was witchcraft which the committee dismissed. After the committee, I continued receiving threatening letters. I decided to run away together with my children from my home to join my parents for security reasons” (Bitutu, 22/06/2012).

Another incident, involves a pastor who was married for twenty years and blessed with four children. In the course of the marriage, conflicts began to emerge between the wife and her mother in law. One night, the pastor’s cows entered into her mother’s farm and destroyed crops. Having discovered the destruction the next day, the mother went to the son’s house and began quarrelling with the wife. She accused her daughter in law (the pastor’s wife) for failing to control their cattle. As they were quarrelling, the mother in law accused the daughter in law of being a witch blaming her for numerous misfortunes that had befallen the family since her wedding. After the confrontation, a few weeks later, the mother in law fell sick and died while blaming the daughter in law for her terrible illness. After the burial, members of sungu sungu and the pastor’s brothers ganged up to kill the woman for ‘bewitching’ their mother. She received prior information that she will be killed and thus escaped. In their frustration the mob destroyed the pastor’s house. He reported the incident to the police, leading to the arrest of the gang members and some of his brothers. This incident disintegrated the pastor’s family with his brothers, split him with the wife, divided his children with their mother, and separated the in laws. The situation further disintegrated his family and the relatives of the people he pin pointed to the police as responsible for lynching his house. When he was asked whether his wife was a witch, the pastor replied, ‘no, my wife was innocent she is not a witch. People say she ran at night disturbing neighbours who were asleep; she was not because we slept on the same bed! My wife was a staunch Christian she was

innocent I swear in the name of the Living God. My mother died because of diabetes and high blood pressure due to old age and doctors can bear witness' (Michira, 21/04/2012).

6.2 Conclusion

Kenneth Kaunda, former president of Zambia once said that, 'Europe is famous for its technology, Asia for its mysticism, and Africa for its ideas about relationships (Gomang, 2007:204).' Kenneth's views seem to be reflected among Abagusii. Abagusii face the challenge of relationships from within due to the dominant witchcraft beliefs like just like other African communities. Abagusii community is centred upon the belief in ancestors; an idea which focuses on the idea of community and relationships. Abagusii religious beliefs teach that Abagusii community is made up of three groups which include: the dead (ancestors), the living and the unborn (Entakana, 23/09/2013). The foregoing is the basis for the creation of laws against suspected witches since they are blamed for the destruction of the large Omogusii family (community). Witchcraft as an act affects the relationship between the three groups of beings: the living, the unborn and ancestors hence necessitating for its condemnation and punishment of the alleged witches in order to maintain good relationships in the community. Despite the fact that violence against suspected witches is traditionally commissioned by Abagusii traditional religion, acts of violence against suspected witches affects the stability of the larger Omogusii family.

Violence against suspected witches has affected families negatively as it has led to the disintegration of families through migrations, it has increased the levels of poverty in families, promoted enmity among families in Kisii county, it has made children orphans, made husbands widowers and women widows. It has also affected marriage

patterns since people do not wish to marry from families whose members have been accused of witchcraft while others have divorced. It can be concluded that Abagusii religious beliefs have promoted violence against suspected witches which is a threat to the stability of the family as a basic unit of the society.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Summary of Findings

The findings of this study suggests that witchcraft is a supernatural power believed to be acquired by inheritance or training among the Abagusii. It is one of the most potent and dreaded practice in the community. According to Abagusii a witch is a person believed to practise evil acts in the society at night and have a conscious tendency to kill or disable others through magic hindering social development in the community. It is held among the Abagusii that the art of witchcraft comes from bad spirits which are comprised of human beings who were mistreated when they were alive or died bad deaths.

Witchcraft is used among the Abagusii as a mode of explanation and interpretation of their problems, events, nature and reality even when reason and common sense suggest otherwise. All negative occurrences and misfortunes in the community are associated with witchcraft. Abagusii traditional religious beliefs informs the existence of witchcraft as a phenomenon, connects the practice with the mystical world, explains the functions of witches and the origin of witchcraft, and influences the mode of punishing alleged witches through ordeals.

Ironically, violence against suspected witches is an immoral and illegal phenomenon according to the Abagusii customs. The Abagusii traditional religion forbids murder since it is considered a taboo to kill another human being. However, death is preferred as the ideal measure in deterring witchcraft practitioners. Ordeals that are employed in

identifying witches among the Abagusii are dubious and questionable since they fail scientific scrutiny and testing.

The study indicates that Abagusii religious belief systems contributes to violence against suspected witches through its teachings on morality and legality of the viciousness. It was noted that the religion teaches that witches should be denied proper burial, which leads to their denial of admittance to the spiritual world.

It was determined that traditional Abagusii methods of finding and punishing suspected witches are no longer followed in the contemporary Kisii county. After the establishment of colonial rule, the informal judicial system was replaced with the British legal system that had radically different procedures. Due to crime increase, the provincial administration supported the sungu sungu vigilante to help stamp out crime in the county. However, later the sungu sungu went out of its mandate and embarked on eliminating witchcraft practices by subjecting suspected witches to lynching. Arguably, the deviation from the traditional religious norms of determining and punishing witches contributed to rising cases of violence against suspected witches.

This study found out that most of the witch accusations in contemporary Kisii could be false since the evidences presented against the suspects are irrational. During investigating the possible causes of witchcraft accusations among the Abagusii community, the study showed that most witch accusations and cases of violence against suspected witches was a scape goat. It was found out that most of accusations are aimed at eliminating certain individuals from the county due to land conflicts, economic rivalries, envy and competitions for available rare resources. It can be concluded that witchcraft accusations have increased in the contemporary Abagusii society due to the

pressures of social change and new challenges of modern culture. It can also be concluded that witchcraft accusations have negatively impacted on the stability of families in Kisii county. They have led to disintegration of families through migrations, led children to become orphans, affected marriage patterns, made widowers and widows.

7.2 Conclusions

The main objective of this study was to explore the role of indigenous beliefs in violence against suspected witches in Kisii county and consequent related objectives were to achieve the following:

1. To determine the indigenous Abagusii worldview on witchcraft,
2. To ascertain the moral and normative foundation of violence against suspected witches among Abagusii,
3. To establish causes of continued witch accusations in the Kisii county,
4. To examine the repercussions of violence against alleged witches to stability of their families in Kisii county.

It can be concluded that Abagusii religious worldview has a role towards violence against suspected witches. It has a function of creating awareness about the existence of witchcraft as a phenomenon, connects the belief in witchcraft with the mystical world, explains functions of witches, explains the origin of witchcraft and influences the mode of punishing witches hence violence against suspected witches.

It was also established that, the normative and morality of violence against suspected witches gets its basis from Abagusii religious beliefs. The religion has a

function of explaining ways of finding witches and teaches that a witch should be punished through death. It was found out those traditional methods of finding and punishing suspected witches are not followed in the contemporary Kisii county, the residents suspect individuals and decide to punish them without evidence. It was found out that the witchcraft act of Kenya has limitations which create a gap for violence against suspected witches.

It was discovered that most of the witch accusations in the contemporary Kisii county could be false since evidence presented against the suspects were irrational. Further investigations revealed that witchcraft accusations among the Abagusii are a scapegoat which can be linked to land conflicts, economic rivalries, jealousy and competitions for available rare resources. The increase of witchcraft accusations in the contemporary Kisii county can be attributed to the pressures of social change and new challenges of modern culture. It was noted that the movement from traditional Abagusii social structures into contemporary social structures has created a society of conflicting demands and new challenges which has led to strained relations in Kisii county. Abagusii religion here acts as a social control mechanism which seeks to restore itself by segregating certain individuals through false witchcraft accusations.

It was concluded that violence against suspected witches has affected the stability of families in Kisii county through: family disintegration, economic retardation, property destruction, psychological problems, promotes enmity, poor academic performance and divorce or separation.

7.3 Recommendations

This study makes the following recommendation on how to control violence against suspected witches in Kisii county:

Abagusii religion is a double edged sword; it can control and promote violence against suspected witches in Kisii county. Most of the respondents argued that violence against suspected witches can be controlled by campaigning against indigenous doctrines and practices which fuel violence against suspected witches.

The government should emphasize on the use of formal judicial organs in dealing with cases of witch accusations. The foregoing succeeded in Europe, not because Europeans stopped persecuting witches, but because they ceased to believe that issuing an indictment through a formal judicial organ was the best means of dealing with violence against suspected witches (Ellis, 2007:31). The Kenyan Government should further monitor the progress of “legislative reform. It should strengthen national human protection systems that prevent and respond to abuse, exploitation and violence. Access to the legal system for people accused of witchcraft should be ensured by promoting legal reforms to decriminalize witchcraft, demand for prosecution of persons harming others and provide adequate protection to suspected witches in the county. Decriminalizing witchcraft would prevent suspected witches from coming in conflict with the law and all the consequences associated with it. Laws governing the prosecution of persons who accuse and harm suspected witches will allow for a more robust response by the legal system. This includes religious leaders and traditional healers involved in practices that harm suspected witches. This should be done by raising awareness and educate legal professionals.

The government should regulate traditional healers and the activities of African Independent churches such as Pentecostal and Revivalist churches. The issuing of licenses to practice as traditional healers should come under closer scrutiny. The government should develop specific laws to regulate harmful practices by churches and religious leaders in the county.

Some study participants noted that if witchcraft-based violence is to be eradicated and if victims are to lead normal lives, human rights organisations should actively participate in the protection of suspects; the general public should be civic educated on the Witchcraft Act and human rights; people who accuse others of practicing witchcraft should be arrested and prosecuted; counselling services and spiritual guidance should be made available to suspected witches; and suspected witches should not be isolated.

Respondents felt the need to improve the health facilities in Kisii county by equipping them with modern advanced equipment to diagnose diseases to prevent people relying on rumours on the cause of diseases. People should be trained on the causes of diseases and how they shall prevent them. The government should enhance access and quality of health services in the county. It should improve the capacities of health workers and the availability and quality of health services as a way to reduce the belief in witchcraft as a cause of illness. It should provide public health education services on the most common diseases, such as malaria, AIDS, cancer and diabetes. Promote deliveries in hospitals or health centres.

Most of the local administrators resolved that there is need to strengthen the ability of the Kenya Police Service to respond appropriately to incidences of violence related to suspected witches and witchcraft accusations. This should be done by training

police officers on how to handle cases of violence against suspected witches. It is important to note that toughening up the laws is no solution if they're not implemented. The government may have a good law but then if it does not have the police capacity to enforce it, or if the police themselves view the situation of violence against suspected witches with indifference then Kisii county still will have a big issue of how to address the violence.

90% of the respondents argued that the sungu sungu vigilante group should be abolished as they are operating in parallel with the regular police and they are responsible for violence against suspected witches. The sungu sungu are committing crime against people as if they are above the law and immune to prosecution. They are committing atrocities with the full blessing of the Provincial Administration in the name of community policing. This gang should be abolished.

Respondents argued that campaigns should be done against violence against suspected witches. This can be done through mass media, by utilizing print media and electronic media. The campaigns should talk openly against this practice. Political parties, safety and security institutions, civic organizations, Churches and labour movements should be encouraged to commit themselves to stopping the violence.

Most respondents felt that people in Kisii county should be encouraged to come up with eco-villages to overcome the issue of scarcity of land. They should be inspired to form cluster settlements in form of villages in order to save much land for agriculture. Families should be motivated to share homesteads and leave land for agriculture. Using same homestead can promote integration, which can lead to national communal unity. If

possible, they should construct storey buildings to encourage vertical settlement to save land for agriculture.

Some respondents argued that the promotion of formal education may also reduce the incidence of witchcraft accusations and reduce the maltreatment of alleged witches (Dolvo, 2007:89). Education can solve the problem of disease and poverty which often lead to witchcraft accusations. During schooling, learners should be taught on alternative means of sustenance apart from land. Some of those who did not get a chance to go to schools should be inspired to go through vocational training in the existing village polytechnics. If this is done, it can prevent reliance on land as the only source of production in the area. Learners should also be taught on the challenge of the belief in witchcraft.

Most pastors argued that reconciliation between families of suspected witches and those who have been involved in violence against suspected witches should be encouraged. Since some of those suspected as witches are Christians, Church leaders must be inspired to address issues of witchcraft. They should endeavour to promote psychological healing and communal unity.

Most respondents argued that it is difficult to change any harmful cultural practise without having an open dialogue with leaders of a society. Community leaders, religious specialists, and *sungu sungu* commanders must be used as agents for change in eradicating violence against suspected witches. Ethnic leaders should be educated on human rights and land ownership rights. They must be trained on alternative ways of dealing with witchcraft accusations in order to promote sustainable peace and be encouraged to conduct justice in land distribution through traditional laws. They have to

take a bold step by reporting to the local administration on witch attacks. They have an obligation of fighting for the right to life of witches as humans. They have a duty of preaching to those committing violence against suspected witches so that they can change. They should ensure that we have negotiation and mediation between those committing violence against suspected witches and families of those accused of witchcraft. Negotiation and mediation consists of a dialogue between pastors, families of the accused witch suspects, relatives of those accused of witchcraft and organizations defending human rights.

7.4 Suggestions on Areas for Further Research

The study recommends the following possible areas for further research.

i) The role of Charismatic Churches in the control of witchcraft in the contemporary Kenyan society.

iii) The role of African religious specialists in controlling witchcraft in Kisii county.

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APPENDIX 1**QUESTIONNAIRE****STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL****STANDARD QUESTIONNAIRE.****INDIGENOUS BELIEFS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST SUSPECTED WITCHES
IN KISII COUNTY**

This is an academic research that seeks to establish the role of indigenous beliefs in violence against suspected witches in Kisii County (PLEASE, ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS).

Date: ___/___/___

Background

Age _____

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Who is a witch?

2. Do witches have outstanding characteristics?

(a) Yes

(b) No

3. Do witches have distinguished roles in the society?

(a) Yes

(b) No

4. What are the activities of witches in Kisii County?

5. Does Gusii culture allow punishing of suspected witches?

(a) Yes

(b) No

6. Do we have specialists in punishing witches?

(a) Yes

(b) No

7. Who decides on when to lynch a witch and how does he or she makes judgment?

8. Can Abagusii rely on traditional procedures for finding witches?

9. Does witch hunting pose an impact to stability of the Abagusii society?

- a) Yes (b) No
10. Does witch hunting affect the family of the lynched witchcraft suspects?
(a) Yes (b) No
11. (i) Does Abagusii traditional society, explain the origin of witchcraft?
(a) Yes (b) No
- (ii) Did the traditional Abagusii community members punish witches?
(a) Yes (b) No
12. Did we have witch hunting groups in the traditional Abagusii community?
(a) Yes b) No
13. After killing a witch in the traditional Abagusii community, did those who participated in the witch hunting under go through cleansing?
a) Yes (b) No
14. Did members of the traditional Abagusii community prevent witchcraft from spreading in their society by use of magic?
(a) Yes (b) No
15. Following are possible effects of violence to suspected witches in Kisii County. Mark whether you agree or disagree.

| Possible effect of violence on witch suspects | I agree | I don't agree |
|--|----------------|----------------------|
| It has led to migration of people from the county | | |
| It has led to negative economic development | | |
| Promoted enmity among people in the county | | |
| It has led to increased drug and substance abuse | | |
| It has affected academic performance negatively | | |
| It has led to reliance on magic as an antidote to witchcraft | | |
| It has led to destruction of property | | |
| It has affected marriage patterns | | |

16. Have you ever read or heard the content of the witchcraft act of Kenya and its measures on those committing violence on suspected witches?

(a) Yes (b) No

17. In your opinion are cases of violence against suspected witches genuine?

(a) Yes (b) No

18. Do we have other possible causes of violence to suspected witches?

(a) Yes (b) No

19. Should violence to suspected witches continue?

(a) Yes (b) No

ii) Support your answer.

20. Following are possible causes of violence to suspected witches in your county, _mark whether you agree or disagree.

| Possible cause | I agree | I don't agree |
|--|----------------|----------------------|
| Envy against each other | | |
| Influence from New religious movements | | |
| Influence from Mass media | | |
| Shock from globalization | | |
| Competition for land | | |
| Blame for the cause of diseases | | |
| Influence from Abagusii myths | | |
| Lack of law on punishing witch suspects | | |
| Witchcraft accusations as violence against women | | |
| Search for answers to peculiar happenings | | |

21. Does the community inform the provincial administration on any intended witch hunting activities?

(a) Yes (b) No

22. Do witchcraft accusations arise from competition for land?

23. Have you ever been bewitched yourself or members of your family?

24. What is the effect of violence on suspected witches on stability of families in Kisii County?

25. Do witchcraft accusations and violence on suspected witches promote enmity in the family?

26. Does violence against suspected witches affect academic performance of school going children in Kisii County?

APPENDIX 2

INDIGENOUS BELIEFS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST SUSPECTED WITCHES IN KISII COUNTY

FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSIONS GUIDE

Name of interviewer/ Researcher_____

Date of FGD_____

Place of FGD_____

Number of participants a) Male_____ b) Female_____

Introduction

This is an academic research that seeks to explore the role of indigenous Abagusii religious beliefs in violence against suspected witches in Kisii County.

Content

1. Who is a witch?
2. What is the origin of witchcraft?
3. What is the role of witchcraft among Abagusii?
4. Explain the various forms of punishment done on suspected witches.
5. Who decides on when to punish a witch and not?
6. How does the society ensure that they do not punish innocent witch suspects?
7. Discuss how witch hunting is carried out in the contemporary Abagusii society.
8. Discuss how witch hunting was carried out in the traditional Abagusii society.
9. Why are cases of witch hunting rampant among Abagusii?
10. How has witch hunting affected Abagusii social fabric?
11. Which possible strategies can we use to control witch hunting among Abagusii?
12. What does the society do if it lynches an innocent witchcraft suspect?
13. Do family members support the lynching of their family members who are witchcraft suspects?

14. In case a family member is lynched, do the remaining family members feel threatened?
15. In case a witch escapes lynching and runs away from the society, how does the society treat his or her family members?
16. In the traditional Abagusii community, did we have witch hunting groups? If yes, who were members of a witch hunting group?
17. After killing a witch in the traditional Abagusii community, did those who participated in the witch hunting under go through cleansing? If yes, who did the cleansing? Is the same done in the contemporary Gusii society?
18. How did members of the traditional African community prevent witchcraft from spreading in their society?
19. How have Abagusii combated witchcraft over various periods in history?
20. Are there other causes of violence to suspected witches? If yes what are the causes of violence to suspected witches?
21. Should lynching of suspected witches continue?

APPENDIX 3

ABAGUSII INDIGENOUS BELIEFS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST SUSPECTED WITCHES IN KISII COUNTY.

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KEY INFORMANTS

Name of Key informant _____

Date of interview _____

Place of Interview _____

Informant's profession 1) Male _____ 2) Female

Introduction

This is an academic research that seeks to establish the role of Abagusii religious beliefs in violence against witch suspects in Kisii County.

Content

1. Who is a witch?
2. How did indigenous Abagusii punish witches?
3. Discuss how witch hunting is carried in the contemporary Abagusii society.
4. What is the morality and legality of witch hunting 'crusades' in Gusii land?
5. How does he or she make judgment?
6. How does the society ensure that they do not lynch innocent witchcraft suspects?
7. What are the possible causes of violence against witch suspects in Kisii County?
8. What is the impact of violence against witch suspects in Kisii County?
9. What is the impact of violence against witch suspects on the stability of families in Kisii County?
10. How can we address the effects of violence against witch suspects?
11. How did members of the traditional African community prevent witchcraft from spreading in their society? What about the modern Abagusii society?