



Witchcraft in African and African-American Novel – A Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In African and therefore, African American cultural world-view, some perceive witchcraft as evil and some identify it as an art that unifies and orders experiences so that its members recognize organization, consistency and system. It tells its members what to do thereby creating a voice of prescriptive authority, and also impacts on them; definition of group interest. Witchcraft in the select works of Bessie Head and Toni Morrison is examined through Archetypal theory. Bessie Head portrays witches - practitioners of witchcraft - as evil conspirators and collaborators with the demonic world who are rarely benevolent and should be purged from the society; whereas, Toni Morrison sees them as knowledgeable and benevolent, capable of intervening and explaining misfortune; they clear doubts, solve puzzles and problems; they also give medical solutions in some health situations. Since, the works of Morrison under study portray the era slave trade; she conceives that the knowledge in witchcraft and the activities of witches were justifiable because these sustained the Blacks. From our investigation the rich and affluence are never accused of being witches therefore, they are under no circumstances threatened in spite of their evil activities as seen in Head's characters like Maru and Molake in *Maru*, or Dan, Sello and Medusa in *A Question of Power*, nor The Schoolteacher in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. This paper therefore, concludes that the practice of witchcraft and the consequent witch-purging is mostly aimed at the most vulnerable members of society - children, women, the elderly, and those that display exceptional behavior - members of the community who may not be adequately disposed to defending themselves. This paper submits that there should be a legislation to protect these ones.

Key Words: 'the witches' Sabbath, guilds and covens, 'discredited knowledge', witch doctor, witch-purging, infernal rites.

INTRODUCTION

“Thou shall not suffer a witch to live” (Exodus 22:18)

Africans and therefore, African Americans perceive their world in peculiar ways. There seem to be no formal distinctions between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African or the African American is there is religion which includes: witchcraft, superstition and magic.

Witchcraft originated with the human civilization itself. Some scholars of witchcraft agree that: “witchcraft is a belief system whose origin predates the majority of well-known religions on this earth, it dates 40,000 years back to Paleolithic period” www.witchcraft.com.au/origin-of-witchcraft.html. The fear of the unknown and its imagined role in making the day to day life easy or difficult, create witches and their craft. Witchcraft, an earth based religion, is practiced in almost all the societies and cultures across the world according to local beliefs and traditions. To further confirm the widespread involvement of man in witchcraft, Hence Thurston comments:

Global traditional beliefs have often contained beliefs in witches, wizards and sorceries. In the traditional belief, not only of the dark ages, but of post-Reformation times, the witches or wizards addicted to such practices entered into a compact with Satan, adjured Christ and the Sacraments, observed ‘the witches’ Sabbath – performing infernal rites which often took the shape of a parody of the Mass or the offices of the Church – paid divine honor to the Prince of Darkness and in return received from him preternatural powers... (102).

The belief in witchcraft is assumed to exist in antiquity, it is almost like the oral tradition; handed down from generation to generation. Witches and wizards - women and men - who possess the powers to practice witchcraft, do so as their stock in trade.

In Biblical history, it is said King Saul once sought out and killed almost all the witches and wizards in his kingdom, but as the heavens were shot to him because of his sin of disobedience to Jehovah God, Saul said unto his servants: “seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit (a witch or wizard) that I may go to her; and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, behold there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit in Endor” (1 Sam. 28:6), which reveals that kings, warriors and the affluence also seek these witches for advice and for forewarnings. In some societies this age-long practices which arise in interpersonal and intergroup relations would become fully institutionalized and recognized in so far as they are shown to have some meaningful relation to the body of their religious ideas and practices.

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Religious ideas include a set of beliefs and practices related to sacred things that unite adherents into a single community. Religion does not merely assert what the world is like but imposes attitudes on the believer, and there will be pressure towards establishing a relationship of consistency between repeated forms of behaviour and the shared system of cultural meanings. The Bible calls them “thrones of iniquity which devices evil by law” (Ps.94:20). Africans and therefore, African Americans, are deeply religious/spiritual people. More generally, almost every culture has some aspects of religious behavior. In this vein Vincent Khapoya, in *The African Experience*, comments:

There are universal manifestations of religious behaviour that one finds in Africa as a whole ... including a belief in a supernatural being or supernatural forces, a belief in the existence of one or more deities or gods, prayer or specific words that one is supposed to use when one is addressing these deities or prostrating oneself, or dancing that are required in the course of directing prayer to these supernatural forces, some (sic) kind of sacred code, sacred objects designed to bring good fortune when handled properly or misfortune when misused, sacrifices or feasts held to mark certain important occasions, and groves shrines, or monuments (54).

In religion the spiritual world is a reality distinct from the physical world. Africans live their faith. Religion is not something that is simply practiced on a given day or in a given building or place, it permeates all the departments of life. Religion is therefore generic in the lives of the Africans and African Americans. Barney Pityana reaffirms thus: “as far as we are concerned, everybody has his shrine or guardian, every family has a shrine, every clan or tribe has its major shrine ... It is inconceivable to imagine a person or group without religion ...” (Makgoba and Mbeki:157). Traditional African religion is vital, basic, mysterious and magical, and at the same time it knows how to survive in the midst of religious adversity. It is all-pervasive and has some distinct characters.

Accordingly, these distinct characters were observable in the history of the African slaves in the New World during the Middle Passage as lingering memory of the African values on their minds. The memory enabled them to go back to the sense of community in the traditional African setting and to include all Africans in their common experience. During the process of the slaves becoming a single people, on those slave ships; as they experienced common horror - unearthly moans and piercing shrieks, the smell of filth and the stench of death - the practice of witchcraft was a source of strength them. Holt and Brown acknowledge that such “slave ships were the first real incubators of the slave unity across cultural lines, cruelly revealing irreducible links from one ethnic group to the other” (128). This ‘slave unity across cultural lines’ is what Carl Gustav Jung calls “collective unconscious” the depths of the psyche

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blocked off from human consciousness which houses the cumulative knowledge, experiences, and images of the entire human race (Bressler:92). The archetypal images of the sea and the ship are very symbolic: with the “sea representing the spiritual, mystery ... death and rebirth ...

unconscious” (Gue:119); while the ship is the “microcosm; mankind’s voyage through space and time” (Gue:120). For the slaves on those horrific slave ships, witchcraft, magic or superstition were welcome flights from their sorrows. John Rex comments: “in a society in which the logical type of reasoning to be found in science is highly prized, the meaningful relation will take on the form of a deductive system” (152), religious beliefs are therefore, determined by socio-cultural conditions of a people, the physical environment in which they live, their past experiences, and their collective needs and goals as a people in the world over.

Witchcraft Acquisition

Most scholars of witchcraft believe that witchcraft can be inherited, bought, or superimposed upon an individual. According one of the scholars on witchcraft Riekje Pelgrim, she opines that witchcraft is a characteristic that one is born with. Although she says it is not possible to inherit witchcraft from the fathers, that it is mostly passed on through the mothers at birth. But Asande is emphatic that “witchcraft is both a physical and inherited trait, which is transmitted through unilinear descent from the parents to the children; sons of a male witch inherit witchcraft from their fathers and the daughters of a female witch inherit witchcraft from their mothers ((Evans-Pritchard:2). Adeibe concurs that this inherent power is kept by witches in their stomachs, and is passed through inheritance from parents to children (Adibe:99). Hence Thurston further asserts that this innate type of witchcraft is passed on selectively. Not all the children of a witch will inherit their mother’s characteristic (Thurston:105). If a witch wants to know whether her new-born child also possesses the power, according to Pelgrim “she can run a quick check by throwing the baby against a wall of her hut: if the child indeed has witchcraft, it will cling to the wall like a bat. The mother can then start to train the little witch or wizard, so that the innate power can become fully developed, (Website:<http://asc.leidenuniv.nl>). The Bible refers to such a one as “a transgressor from the womb” (Isaiah 48:8), again Isaiah says of himself: “The LORD has called Me from the womb” (Isaiah:49:1). God says of Jerimiah “before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee; and before thou comest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations (Jer 1:5). These passages go to confirm that a baby can be initiated for good or for evil right from the loins of the parents.

It is however also believed that witchcraft can be acquired at a later stage in life. In this manner, it is superimposed by the ancestors, bought or innocently ingested through bewitched foods (Adibe:100). Sometimes the ancestors have a score to settle with other ancestor(s) or with the living, and they take possession of one of their descendants. This possessed person will then have to carry out the evil will of the ancestors. In this manner a person is overtaken by witchcraft *and* acts to it quite involuntarily. Other people just become inexplicably evil during their life and they decide they want to become a witch or wizard. They can then approach a reputed witch or wizard or a corrupted traditional healer and buy witchcraft off him or her. Additionally, pure jealousy or hatred can lead a normal human-being to become a witch or wizard on a subconscious level. This type of witchcraft can be compared to that of the western concept of conscience and is usually related to the notion of guilt. Website:<http://asc.leidenuniv.nl>. Witchcraft can be acquired spiritually and materially too.

Children are also initiated by being fed with human 'flesh and blood' to enable them to inherit the craft of their parents (Danfulani:4). Some children who confessed to being witches say that they got their witchery from their parents. Pierre de Lancre and Francesco Maria Guazzo, believe that "witch parents introduced the children to Satan, they took the children to Sabbaths, married children to demons, inspired the children to have sex with Satan ..." (Cited in Wikipedia April 2012). Parents also ignorantly give out their children to Satan out of their love for their children; this creates a scary fear of child witch that cuts across all tiers of society. This fear, stems from the belief that spiritual spell can be given to a child through food and drink. Then the soul of such a child who eats this spell will therefore leave the body to be initiated in a gathering of "witches' and 'wizards' (guilds and covens). The initiated child will then has the power to wreak havoc, such as causing all forms of diseases. Currently, children have become the target for initiation by the elderly 'witches' as it is believed that they are more susceptible for their spells and are quicker in action, (Cited in Stepping Stones Nigeria April, 2013). These findings therefore, establish the myth of child-witch that has led to the killing, maiming, abandoning, and drowning of many children.

There are many deliberations on witchcraft and their activities. Umebe Onyejekwe discusses 'Witchcraft: Myth Of A Curious Institution', Eleanor Jewell dwells on 'how to identify a witch', still others dwell on 'the witches ointment', Riekje Pelgrim interrogates 'Witchcraft and Policing: South Africa Police Service attitudes towards witchcraft and witchcraft-related crime in the Northern Province', Bartholomew Chidili looks at it under 'African Religion and Society', Amos Tutula dwells much on the activities of witches in some of his works like *The Village Witch Doctor and other stories*, and *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town*, etc. My interest in this topic is founded on the present social uproar on witches and their diabolical activities as revealed by some

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spiritualists and mediums, that caused some parents to denounce, kill and maim their venerable children and grand-children respectively, on the basis of being suspected witches or wizards, and vis-a-vis the children's indictment on their parents and grand-parents of being witches and wizards. Parents and children associate their ruined: health, families, businesses, and all their other misfortunes on their children and the aged ones, respectively. These wild-spread accusations and violence compelled Obong Godswill Akpabio, the Government of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, to set up 'Child Witchcraft Panel' headed by a high court judge, to investigate the soundness of these accusations and counter accusations, with a bid to arresting this social menace.

As a literary scholar, I wish to express the literary perspective of this topical issue as portrayed by some African and African American literary writers and also noting the Biblical standpoint on witchcraft and the practice of it. Therefore, this research paper examines witchcraft in the select works of Bessie Head namely: *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru* and *A Question of Power*, and Toni Morrison's *Sula*, *Songs of Solomon* and *Beloved*. Reference will also be made to Ntieyong Akpan's *The Wooden Gong*, and Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth my Brother*. The paper also examines the effects of witch purging, and the social and spiritual responsibilities of the Church in related witchcraft activities. The topic will be interrogated using the Archetypal theory. Carl Jung sees archetype as " 'primordial images' the 'psychic residue' of repeated types of experience in the lives of our very ancient ancestors which survive in the 'collective unconscious' of the human race and are expressed in myths, religion, dreams, and private fantasies, as well as in works of literature" (Abrams:201). These 'primordial images' in this paper are expressed through the myth of witchcraft. Northrop Frye calls these 'primordial images', 'demonic imagery' (147). Frye further explains: "The demonic divine world largely personifies the vast, menacing, stupid powers of nature as they appear to a technologically underdeveloped society" (147). Since at a point in time the whole was underdeveloped, witchcraft then becomes an evil from antiquities.

The Paradoxes of Witchcraft:

"idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife seditions, heresies ... They who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God," (Gal. 5:20).

Witchcraft may be said to be one of the traditional African and African-American religions, Bessie Head and Toni Morrison respectively; employ the metaphor of witchcraft or 'demonic imagery' as markers for self-dilution and self-identity, respectively. Commenting on African Traditional religion, Lesiba Teffo says: 'Traditional African religion...is

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all-pervasive and has distinct character. ... God is the center of African religions. ... God as the Supreme Being, not necessarily the Christian God' (157), witches refer to Satan as their god.

Pelgrim asserts that:

the people of the Northern Province of South Africa believe in witchcraft and that it is part of their everyday lives. They have grown up with notions of witchcraft; they talk about it and experience it. For them, witchcraft is a discourse. The belief in witchcraft should, like any study of religious beliefs, be approached from a cosmological angle
Website:<http://asc.leidenuniv.nl>

The beliefs and practices of this ancient craft work mainly in the minds of a set of people with common worldview. To some Africans and therefore to some African-Americans the machinery of fate is administered by a set of remote invisible gods, whose freedom and pleasures are ironic because they exclude man, and they intervene in human affairs chiefly to safeguard their own prerogatives. It is believed that most slaves, who survived the horrors of the middle passage to the New World, were witches and they flourished in this art to drown their adversities, whips and chains.

Head describes the power of witchcraft as "a sustained pressure of mental torture that reduces its victims to a state of permanent terror, and once they start on you, they don't know where to stop, until you become stark raving mad. Then they just grin" (*A Question*:137). Some critics of witchcraft agree that witches and wizards use their maleficent power innate in them to mysteriously harm others (Hinnels:560). Still other people say that witchcraft is centered on the idea that certain evil people in the community usually resort to bringing harm on fellow humans, and they accomplish their desired goals through the utilization and manipulation of nefarious supernatural agents (Chidili:2). The concept of witchcraft in the words of Suhr applies to 'those people who through sheer malignancy employ magical means to encompass all manner of evil to the detriment of their fellow-creatures' (Suhr:273), their dubiousness is usually borne out of jealousy and hatred for goodness. It is a characteristic that is ascribed to both male and female. Their innate tendencies to manipulate, exploit others in secret make it difficult to identify the culprits. In collaborating with Head, these critics consider that witchcraft therefore, is based mainly on wickedness.

On the contrary, Morrison is optimistic that witchcraft is a positive characteristic of the black people. She opines

We have a peculiar way of looking at the world. We are very practical people, very down-to earth, and even shrewd people. But within that practicality we also accepted what I suppose could

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be called superstition and magic, which is another way of knowing things. But to blend those two worlds together at the same time was enhancing, not limiting. And some of those things were 'discredited knowledge' that Black people had; discredited only because Black people were discredited therefore what they knew was 'discredited'. And also because the press toward upward social mobility would mean to get as far away from that kind of knowledge as possible. That kind of knowledge has a very strong place in my work (Evans:342).

This 'kind of knowledge'... 'discredited knowledge,' strengthened the slaves for want of moral instruction and replaces the 'Sabbath Schools' when their slaveholders are reluctant to expound the scriptures to the slaves (Sernett:77). Though most slaves have no confidence in their preaching because they preach a pro-slavery doctrine, that 'servants be obedient to your masters; - and he that knoweth his master's will and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes' (Sernett:77). With this inversion of word of God, the slaves know that they are destined for doom unless they are delivered by this 'discredited knowledge'. Morrison uses this belief system, as an undercurrent self-defining influence to control the actions and destinies of most characters in her works here under study.

Okon Uya comments:

Even when conversion to Christianity occurred, most Africans in the New World; slaves and free men remained 'involuntary proselytes' and cling to their old African beliefs which they often reinterpreted in Christian forms (Uya:22-23).

Denounced as superstition and pagan worship by slave masters, this African derived religious thought; hold sway in slave communities, giving them focus and stability. Remarking on his experience as a fugitive slave, Henry Bibb says:

Many slaves put their confidence not in pro-slavery teaching, but in an alternative system of belief variously known as conjure, hoodooing, or root doctoring. The practitioners used various charms and concoctions to inflict misfortune, tell the future, protect their clients, and ... aid in the affairs of the heart. (76).

Uya shares Bibb's opinion that conjure among the slaves perpetuate evil on their clients and in accordance with this African cosmology, fulfillment eludes:

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individuals and communities because of the machinations of malevolent forces working through persons who delight in causing suffering by placing 'evil spirits' on them through their ritual powers of magic and sorcery (Uya:22-23).

Throughout slavery days and much after, Africans in the New World, in varying degrees, adhered primarily to traditional African derived religions. Witchcraft therefore, plays constructive and destructive roles among the African Americans.

The practice of witchcraft survived alongside Christianity in the folk cultures. It served as a counterculture to protest the worldview of the dominant society and met needs in the slave quarters that Christianity did not. Again Bibb agrees with this statement as he says: "Some Christian slaves viewed conjuration (witchcraft) as trafficking with the devil but others paid their fees and tried their luck." (76) In Ntieyong Akpan's *The Wooden Gong*, Ikot one of the characters claims: "I am a witch doctor (a medium and clairvoyant who possesses healing power of assisting victims of evil witches), I know that "Churchmen are among my most regular customers" (Akpan:77) in spite the 'churchmen's' studious protestations to the contrary, do consult him: "in healing and destructive powers of juju or witchcraft" (Akpan:77). Witchcraft is a practice commonly used as a powerful tool in the knowledge of things beyond human capabilities in traditional medicine.

With no modern hospitals and scientific medicines available even for the commonest disease of malaria; the people have no alternative but to run to witch doctors in time of any illness. When the community and individuals progress agrees to this system of thought, they will thus, depend largely on the ability of the groups to rally round benevolent spirits through the invocation of the power of traditional priests who, through rituals, can identify and exorcise the evil spirits from both the community and individuals. These antiques flourish because to some extent they collectively and communally bind a tribe or nation together in their common psychological and spiritual activities. These 'demonic imagery', 'demand sacrifices, punish presumption, and enforce obedience to natural and moral laws as an end in itself' (Frye:147). This shows the sense of human remoteness and futility in relation to the divine order which is only one element among others in most tragic visions of life, though an essential one in all.

Pelgrim opines that witchcraft beliefs all over Africa came under fire with the arrival of the colonial masters. Indigenous ideas were perceived by the colonial masters as irrational and heathen, and it was commonly held that 'backward' Africans could be uplifted through means of education. Programmes that were set up to eradicate witchcraft beliefs or more especially to combat their social consequences, proved relatively futile. Medical awareness programmes were thus based on the reasoning that if people know how some illnesses occur, they will stop holding

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some personified force, like a witch, responsible for them. People were taught for instance about how to avoid contracting and spreading infectious diseases; this proved pointless however, because the foundation of reasoning was not dealt with. From the perspective of the belief in witchcraft, people will always question 'why' a person contracted a disease, even though they are aware of the 'how'.

In Akpan's *The Wooden Gong* the colonial authorities arrest members of the "Spiritualists Movement" or 'false prophets' (85), and their victims. These false prophets claim the powers of identifying and capturing witches and wizards, and of averting malady and misfortune on man. In vain the colonial authorities try to educate the people on the falsehood of their absurd belief in the existence of such powerful individuals or entities to cause them misfortune. In Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* Mr Pilkings the District Commissioner, stopped Elesin the King's Horseman (who should traditionally commit suicide after the death of the king), from committing the ritual suicide, invariably his educated son Olunde flies in from London to fulfill this cultural obligation (Soyinka:215). The colonial master and even the Christian religion have not successfully removed the strong believe in witchcraft and its inherent evil.

Obviously, some sociologists reason that "witches are generally believed to be evil and rarely benevolent. They feed on the body of their victims and thereby cause death" (Otite & Ogionwo:169), and this is in line with the belief of most societies. Nevertheless, Evans-Pritchard another sociologist postulates that some societies explain:

misfortune in terms of the intervention of witches. ... Any resultant witchcraft trials are a means of clearing doubts and solving puzzles and problems and thereafter the way to medical or other solutions of any ill health is prepared. Hence witchcraft among the Azande, as among many other African peoples, serves to explain and to help to solve problems, for example of ill health, misfortune, strains, frustrations etc. that feature in their daily life (Otite & Ogionwo: 169-70).

While Head may tend to agree with Otite & Ogionwo that the metaphor of witchcraft are destructive forces that should be exterminated, Morrison agrees with Evans-Pritchard that its creative and curative essences are worth being identified with.

Witchcraft or Magic: ("Black magic" "Green magic," "White magic," "Grey magic," "Folk magic,") "hedge wizard," "demon-worship," www.essortment.com > *History* – whatever the colour or type of witchcraft, witchcraft is generally perceived as some wicked practice by

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which the possessors cripple the good and progressive life of their perceived enemies. It is also said to be the manipulation of evil powers inherent in cruel persons, to cause harm to others. Nonetheless some of the witches call themselves white witches who do good whereas the black witches perpetuate evil.

Witchcraft in the Works of Bessie Head “There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination or an observer of times or an enchanter or a witch” (Duet. 18:10)

Head depicts societies that are slowly and painfully awakening from the primordial stage where witchcraft, magic and sorcery are prevalent in their workaday world. In her three novels under study *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru* and *A Question of Power*, respectively, she explores the realism and mysticism of the African world or folkways - witchcraft - which includes mystery, superstition and magic. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, these entities are ways of life for the people; they use the acquired powers for evil or for good as the case may be. As Makhaya moves from Apartheid South Africa northwards to Botswana “with his shut away worlds where the sunlight never penetrated, haunted worlds, full of mistrust and hate” (82), in search of peace of mind rather than fame, he encounters the mysterious, tinkling sounds which create an eerie atmosphere which blends with malevolent forces or witch doctors. The rhythmic tinkling of the bells in the middle of a Botswana wasteland reminds Makhaya of horrifying stories about tribal societies and their witch doctors who perform their ghoulish rites by night. They are said to possess a ‘second eye’ with which they see herbs for herbal medicine. Witch doctors and their craft are widely known within the community and most times their activities are often carried out at nights. Nights become a shielding and a covering for the witches from the non-initiates. The archetypal elements like the ‘sunlight’ and ‘wasteland’ show the conflict in the heart of Makhaya; with the sun representing ‘creative energy’; but the wasteland shows the ‘spiritual aridity, death; nihilism or hopelessness’ (Gue:119-120). Still in *Rain Clouds*, Paulina Sebeso’s daughter Lorenzo, is a child prodigy, she adopts the use of magical powers of art to transform the lukewarm relationship between her mother, Paulina and Makhaya into something meaningful. Her sculptured mud village, a microcosm of Golema Mmidi, strikes a chord in Makhaya and later in Gilbert. The symbolic placing of palm trees in the mud village by Makhaya and Gilbert are forms of phallic gesture intended to bring life to the village and for Makhaya to bring life to Pauline. Through her mysterious power the little girl draws Makhaya out of himself whereas her mother had failed to do so with her cunning. Lorenzo uses her mystical powers positively to build human relationship.

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The death of young Isaac Sebeso another artist, also Paulina's child, also plays a 'mysterious' role in the power struggle between the malicious Chief Matenge and the long-suffering people of Golema Mmidi. Chief Matenge the wizard haunts, exploits and harasses his subjects with sorcery and witchcraft. Since it is believed that one of the ways for those without superhuman powers to counter the actions of a witch or wizard is by open confrontation which leads to the witch or wizard's confession, followed by their death, the villagers match Chief Matenge's sorcery with resilient inner power as they silently litter his premises like rags. Isaac's death is an archetypal motif as he becomes the sacrificial scapegoat; he dies to atone for the people's sins and restores the land to fruitfulness (Gue:121). While Chief Matenge's death is in line with the Biblical injunction: 'Suffer not a witch to live' (Exodus 22:18) He is also the archetypal image of the: 'tyrant leader' brutal, miserable and with an unquenchable will for evil (Frye:148). The evil power of witchcraft here brings ruin not only to the victim but also to the victor. Chief Matenge in a moment of panic and insanity hangs himself; an abomination, even among the commoners who he manipulates and torments with witchcraft. As a scape-goat figure too Chief Matenge's suicide purges the land of the evil associated with drought and witchcraft. Chief Matenge like the Biblical King Manasseh: "... observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft and dealt with familiar spirits and with wizards; he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke Him to anger" (2 Chron. 33:6). Chief Matenge's enchantments and witchcraft and his use of familiar spirits provoke the people to anger and he dies by suicide; a taboo against land therefore, he could not be buried by or among his people.

The underlying controlling force of the folkways detectable in *Maru* is also on witchcraft. 'Tladi,' is a monstrous ancestral African witch-doctor and Maru is believed to be its contemporary image. As a chief, Maru possesses superhuman powers that enable him to detect potential enemies so that he can act accordingly. He afflicts Margaret Cadmore with severe neck pains through witchery and incapacitates her before he elopes with her (122). He magically penetrates Margaret's subconscious and conscious minds and knows that there are two rooms; one room for him and the other for Moleka. Maru plays the archetypal role of the traditional African chief as superman with supernatural knowledge and power. He is able to determine other people's destinies, through clever manipulations or otherwise. Through witchcraft he sexually abuses the women and makes them "flee the village or become insane" (36), to ward off the thought of marriage. Likewise, through the use of witchcraft sorcery and magic Moleka's sex victims "exploded like bombs" and "the strongest fled as though they had seen a nameless terror" (35). Witches are said to involve in sexual fantasies at the Sabbath, (the name given to the nocturnal gatherings of witches, demons and other spirits), at which frenzied dancing and sexual orgies take place. In the Biblical history, as

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Joram saw the fury in Jehu, he asked “Is it well” and in reply Jehu “ ... answered and said what peace so long as the whoredoms (sic) of your mother Jezebel and her witchcraft are so many?” (2 Kings 9:22), whoredom and witchcraft are twin evils and peace is far removed from such people who indulge in it. Maru and Moleka ravaged the village with their sexual exploits through witchcraft thus bringing calamity to the people.

Maru and Moleka represent what Frye describes as ‘tyrant-leaders’, and because they are witches, their sexual orgies affect the women negatively. Frye opines that “In the sinister human world one individual pole is the tyrant-leader, inscrutable, ruthless, melancholy, and with an insatiable will, who commands, loyalty only if he is ego-centric enough to represent the collective ego of his followers” (148). According to the witches accounts before their inquisitors they confess that: “when they had sexual intercourse with the 'devil' his penis was painfully cold; this may refer to the insertion of the broom, accompanied by rapid changes in body temperature caused by the initial effects of the drugs” (www.a1b2c3.com/drugs/var009.htm). The highly respected Maru and Moleka are also like the Biblical Simon of Samaria, a witch who “before time in the city uses sorcery to bewitch the people of Samaria giving out himself as a great one” (Acts 8:9,11) and to him they had great regard because for a long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. Why would Maru and Moleka go unpunished? Whereas, the villagers seek to stone poor Mma Bolio to death for practicing her trade as a traditional healer - but for the timely intervention of Chief Sokoto - in *When Rain Clouds Gather*. Would the varied treatments accorded these supposed witches and wizards be due to class and status; the powerful and the powerless; the privileged versus the unprivileged?

Witches are said to possess the powers to fly and to turn themselves into animals: “travelling on a broomstick, or by transforming into a bird or other creatures, the witch would find her way to the Sabbaths” (www.a1b2c3.com/drugs/var009.htm). Still in *Maru*, Dikeledi suspects the goats - that are always found in Margaret’s house - to be some of the witches in the country. Commenting about witches, she says: “They can turn themselves into lions and buffalos. There was once a witch who was starving and turned herself into a goat. She behaves just like a beggar who is also a blackmailer” (112). Therefore, when Dikeledi encounters the unnatural acts of the two goats ‘Queen of Sheba’ and ‘Windscreen Wiper,’ companions of Margaret, she believes them to be witches. Similarly, in John Clarks *The Wives’ Revolt*, the male characters also perceive goats as mediums for the practice of witchcraft and they seek to rid the village of all goats (9-10). Frye portrays the animal world ‘in terms of monsters or beasts of prey’ (149), the goats here since they are said to be witches become monsters. Other animals commonly associated with witchcraft include: snakes, wild cats, baboons, crocodiles, owls, polecats, skunks, birds and insects like all types of bugs.

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Likewise, in *The Wooden Gong*, Akpan acknowledges that witches and wizards are believed to metamorphose:

into anything, particularly birds, in order to cover great distances: they always operated at night; they could make themselves invisible to human eyes other than those of their society; they could enter into any place through any opening even if such an opening should be too small for an ant to pass through (Akpan:84).

The people believe that there is almost no evil the witches could not propagate because of they possess extra powers. Hence Thompson further affirms that witches receive from:

“the Prince of Darkness preternatural powers, such as those of riding through the air on a broomstick, assuming different shapes at will, and tormenting their chosen victims, while an imp or ‘familiar spirit was placed at their disposal, able and willing to perform any service that might be needed to further their nefarious purposes (102).

Witchcraft may be said to be a preoccupation that borders on primitive tendencies, yet it is a reality in the cultural belief of the people. Witchcraft may be said to be a preoccupation that borders on primitive tendencies, yet it is a reality in the cultural belief of the people.

In *A Question of Power*, Head uses witchcraft, sorcery the mystic and the fantastic, overwhelmingly to portray the uninitiated’s powerlessness in the face of witches’ ‘thunderbolts’. The power of witchcraft is felt pungently as Elizabeth - the protagonist of the novel - raves from flashes of self-doubt to almost total madness, after abusive sexual orgies from Sello, Dan and Medusa who are all witches. The Bible refers to them as “well-favoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms (sic), and families through her witchcrafts” (Nahum 3:4). Inherent in the practice of witchcraft is whoredom, treachery and wickedness as exemplified in Sello, Dan and Medusa whose sexual relationship with Elizabeth is violent, inhuman and lesbianic in nature. These witches manipulate Elizabeth with sex and deceit until she almost loses her identity. Frye submits that “the demonic human world is a society held together by a kind of molecular tension of egos, a loyalty to the group or the leader which diminishes the individual, or, at best, contrasts his pleasure with his duty or honour; such a society is an endless source of tragic dilemmas ...” (148). In this society these ‘demonic’ humans – Sello, Dan and Medusa – ‘diminish’ Elizabeth as their victim. Yet these super-powers go unpunished.

Like Head, Kofi Awoonor in *This Earth my Brother*, perceives witchcraft to be evil, manipulative and causes death to their victims. At the death of Amamu’s cousin Dede, Amamu, strongly believes that the death of his cousin is caused by: ‘the witches eating up her intestine’

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(166). Akpan agrees with Head and Awoonor that the witches and wizards have powers to kill and maim. He says:

But their (witches) great powers were always used for ill. They could kill people, particularly young ones, turning the spirits of the deceased into animals for the nocturnal feasts. They could ruin anybody's health or business. Because of all this, (sic) those who had acquired the art never allowed themselves to be known, not even by those with whom they shared rooms. Indeed, to avoid any suspicion which could have arisen from their physical abandonment of the places of sleep in order to attend to their witch-hunting, they were believed to have the power of assuming dual bodies at once, so that when one body was sleeping the other would be out and about (Akpan:84-85).

Confirming the dual nature of witches' bodies, the Bible says: "... There is the natural body and there is the spiritual body" (2 Cor. 15:14), with the spiritual body the witches can disguise to deceive non-initiates; they can change shape and leave their bodies on their sleeping positions so that others can never suspect them while they go out most often in the nights to conduct evil practices like stealing, killing people, destroying property, causing accidents spreading diseases, triggering inexplicable illnesses, causing political unrest, extreme drought and related hunger, and all forms of atrocities. They can seduce sleeping victims and have sexual intercourse with them without the preys' knowledge. Witches are not regarded as some threat from outside, but rather as a threat from inside, they are viewed as a danger to the community from within that community, which is precisely the reason that they are considered so dangerous (Akpan:84-85). This agrees with the Biblical saying "that one's enemies are of one's household" (Matth 10:26).

Witchcraft in the Works of Toni Morrison

"O foolish Galatians who hath bewitched you that you should not obey the truth ..." (Gal 3:1)

Morrison presents witchcraft in *Sula*, *Songs of Solomon* and *Beloved* as a form of self-definition. In *Sula*, she uses the power of witchcraft as a symbol of control and self-identity. One-legged Eva, Sula Peace's grandmother is said to be a 'witch' who uses hatred "to define ... strengthen ... or protect herself ... from routine vulnerabilities" (31). It is believed that she stuck out the leg on the railroad and was crushed by a moving train - in order to benefit from Government Insurance Policy - a programme that is outside the reach of the blacks. Eva's desperate action to castrate herself is an act of witchcraft. In Barbara Johnson's view: 'castration is recognized as a mechanism of social control' (Conner:5). Furthermore, Eva sets her only son Plum, ablaze to release him from the

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world that denies him his manhood, fearing he may one day crawl back into her womb. Frye discloses: “the inorganic world of fire as a world of malignant demons” (150). It is believed that only malicious beings like witches have the audacity to perform such hideous acts. Eva becomes what Wilfred Gue, et al. dub: “The terrible mother, witch or sorceress” (120), while Plume becomes what Frye refers to as “*pharmakos* or sacrificed victim, who has to be killed to strengthen the others” (148). Eva’s witchcraft and the need to control the threat of chaos are also evident in her adoption of three boys of different ages but who become physically indistinguishable. She names the three little stray children ‘Dewey’ by the way they looked, and they remained infantile and ever at Eva’s mercy, never growing up into self-reliant adults. Eva is associated with fearlessness, danger and death.

Sula also is said to be a witch; with detached interest, she watches her mother burn in a mystery fire; a tragic destiny. The unnatural marks on Sula are likewise pointers to her being an enchantress. It is widely believed that most witches sport some marks on their bodies which is placed there by the Devil. According to Eleanor Jewell, “The Witches’ mark was the seal of the Devil, given to witches upon initiation. These marks could be a scar, a mole, a birthmark, ... Some witch-hunters believed that a witches’ mark was only put on the bodies of witches that the Devil thought he could not trust” ([www.ehow.com/Culture& Society/Religion](http://www.ehow.com/Culture&Society/Religion)). The devil himself cannot trust Sula hence the birthmarks on her. One of such marks on Sula’s eyes is “as steady and clean as rain” (45). The images of fire and water are both creative and destructive forces. Water is also a primal force which has power of fluidity and must be contained within a form or it will become destructive. Again, to Mari Evans “Fire and water have always been associated in the human mind with powerful spiritual forces and are symbolic of the inherent complicity of the natural order in which life and death are inextricably connected” (59). In a racially segregated and violent society these two elements – fire and water - reecho as lite-motifs for the survival of the Blacks. Remarking on the devils marks on witches, Jewell posits however, that: “even if a person had no mark, it did not mean she or he was not a witch; if a witch has no mark, it means that she or he is especially devoted to Satan” ([www.ehow.com/Culture& Society/Religion](http://www.ehow.com/Culture&Society/Religion)). One-legged Eva has no visible marks like Sula apart from her self-imposed deformity to enable her receive insurance to maintain her family; she must be Satan’s devout one. Like Eva, Sula castrates herself by cutting off the tip of her finger to intimidate the white boys who are out to molest her and Nel Wright her bosom friend. Her action scares the white rascals and bullies into believing in her fearlessness and extra powers - the powers of a witch. Her action, to Morrison is also vital for existence in such a racial society.

Sula drowns a playmate Chicken Little in a river, though accidentally, nevertheless she never confesses this mistake nor shows any

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remorse even in private. Sula, unlike Robert Bannerman in Marilyn Heward Mills' *Cloth Girl* who as a young boy witnesses a childhood friend drawn in the sea, and he remains scarred of the sea even up to his adulthood to the extent that he cannot see himself going swimming. Ever since this incident Bannerman has a phobia with "the unwavering respect that comes from recognizing one's uselessness in the face of a vast unconquerable" (9), yet he did not in any way contribute to the drowning of his friend; but Sula remains hardened and unperturbed about her act. 'Rivers' represent among others, the archetypal image of "transitional phases of the life cycle" (Gue:119). Frye postulates that "the world of water is the world of death, often identified with spilled blood" (147). As a young girl, Sula may be said to possess some wicked powers that enables her stay sane after spilling the blood of Chicken Little. Sula is ever willing to feel pain as to give pain.

After Sula's ten-year absence from Bottom, her return is heralded by a plague of evil robin birds to the village; what Frye admits to be an "animal world" portrayed in terms of monsters or beasts of prey (149); the robins devastate and make a mess of the environment. The community associates this plague to Sula's witchcraft. She institutionalizes her one-legged grandmother Eva, to gain control of the family home built by her grandmother, at the expense of her leg. Sula's quest for power and control equates that of Eva. Like Dan Medusa, Sello and Maru and Molake in Head's *A Question of Power* and *Maru*, respectively, Sula's unnatural quest for sex throws the women of Bottom in disarray with regard to their husbands and children. She goes to bed with Jude, her best friend's husband and when Nel confronts her, Sula is nonchalant about it. The Bible says "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry ..." (2 Sam. 15:23), Sula is lawless, rebellious, and stubborn and her adulterous nature portrays her as a witch. In spite of the evils perpetuated by one-legged Eva and Sula, Morrison perceives these atrocities as forms of self-definition.

Morrison uses the allegory of the witch in *Songs of Solomon* to prove that witches could be indicators of history. The old and colourless witch Circe - who everyone had believed dead - is surrounded by dead bones, uncleanliness, and thirty large, ferocious and strange German Weimaraner dogs. Morrison describes her as:

so old only her mouth and eyes were distinguishable features in her face. Nose, chin, cheekbones, forehead, neck all had surrendered their identity to the pleats and crochet-work of skin committed to constant change ...

She had to be dead. Not because of the wrinkles and the face so old it could not be alive, but because out of the toothless mouth came the strong, mellifluous voice of a twenty-year-old girl (242-3).

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Circe is an archetypal figure, and the traditional birth-woman who inherits the property of the Butlers (the whites who killed Macon Dead (Snr.) to take his farms). The last of the Butlers becomes penniless and commits suicide. Invariably, everything the Butlers loved, stole, lied and killed for is inherited by Circe the black house keeper. Circe becomes what Frye refers to as “the demonic erotic relation ... “ (149), for Circe’s destructive passion to possess the Butlers’ possession frustrates her totally, as she wishes her body be found by man before the dogs eat her up. Circe, though in this state of dead but alive; is a historian. She informs Milkman, the protagonist of this novel that his grandmother’s name was Sing Dead, an Indian by birth and that she was never a slave; that Sing and Macon Dead Senior lived in Virginia, Charlemagne (Shalimar), thus she directs Milkman to communal identity. Circe also directs Milkman to the ‘Hunters Cave’ (the inorganic world) for the ‘supposed gold’ he seeks, what Frye terms ‘the quest’; (Stevick:15), which eventually leads him to his family history. Circe refocuses Milkman to his need for responsibility to others; for the sharing not only of their happiness but of their pains; she guides him to his inheritance and thus his self-definition. To Morrison, witchcraft and its inherent activities serve as a catalyst to sharpen their memories and to awaken some inner strength in the slaves.

On the contrary, in *Beloved* Morrison represents witchcraft among the slave-holders like Schoolteacher as unspeakable and unforgiveable evil. Schoolteacher manipulates the slaves with his unchallenged powers of witchcraft and imprints his Satanist marks upon them. He bruises Sethe psychically and physically; he milks her like a cow; he uses the ink which Sethe makes to write her animal and human characteristics on different sides of an exercise book. He orders other slaves to dig a pit the size of Sethe’s pregnancy and lowers her stomach in there to save the unborn slave while he beats a grotesque scar on her back - what Amy Denver, a white indenture labourer - describes as a blossoming tree - “Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom” (79). These scars link Sethe to other members of her community who are so deformed by the likes of Schoolteacher to reveal the horror and destructive nature of slavery. These distorted ones include: Baby Suggs, who had injured her hip as a slave and walked with a limp; Sethe’s Ma’am who bore the burned mark of a cross on her skin; Nan, Sethe’s wet nurse, who was missing half of one arm; Ella marked with ‘scars from the bell ... thick as a rope on around her waist’ (258), and Paul D, who carried the mark of the iron collar on his neck ‘three wands like attentive baby rattles curving two feet into the air’ (273). All these monstrous deformities are written on the bodies of the victims to show the slave-masters’ ‘unspeakable’ ability to put the devil’s mark on their victims. Slave-masters like Schoolteacher has power and ‘power always creates it definitions’ (Davis and Schleifer:298), and this is particularly true of the distinctions between ‘Schoolteacher’ and the slaves. Frye agrees that the “it is consistent with

this that the Eucharist symbolism of the apocalyptic world, the metaphorical identification of vegetable, animal, human and divine, should have the imagery of cannibalism for its demonic parody” (148). The imagery of cannibalism usually includes, not only the images of torture and mutilation, but of what Frye technically calls “sparagmos or the tearing apart of the sacrificial body” (148). As a wizard Schoolteacher becomes the cannibal giant who works against the slaves’ loyalty and frustrates them. Schoolteacher goes unpunished? He not excommunicated for the human society! Is Schoolteacher’s power not borne from the binary opposition of the privileged and the unprivileged?

CONCLUSION

“And I will cast off witchcraft out of thine hand and thou shall have no more soothsayers” (Mica 5:12)

In conclusion, the belief in witchcraft which holds a system of values in ordering human behaviour - has many consequences some for good and some for evil - depending on how the societies and individuals perceive it, it also contingent on the type of witchcraft and the intentions of the practitioner. Witchcraft may be called the ‘craft of the wise’, but Head finds no wisdom in it, as the craft is associated with all forms evil. She sees it as a manipulation of evil to victims and good to the practitioner. She affirms that witchcraft accounts for all the catastrophes one encounters in life; it serves as a mechanism of social control, psychological manipulation and spiritual enslavement in the hands of the practitioners. Though Morrison agrees with Head, in her portrayal of the craft among the whites as deplorable evil, whereas, among the slaves; whether the craft is for evil or for good, it seeks to foreground its need to unify, strengthen, establish self-definition and order experience among the African-Americans especially during the slave era. To her, witchcraft emphasizes group identification through rituals and consolidates the voice of the people in moments of privation; commitment, priority and choice which are central to the survival.

Generally, witchcraft beliefs could be regarded as a logical explanation for calamity: it is held responsible for any form of inexplicable misfortune on individuals or collective tragedy. The concept of witchcraft provides some Africans/African-Americans with the natural viewpoint by which the relations between humans and unfortunate events are explained and a ready and categorized means of reacting to such events. An important aspect of this kind of reasoning is the fact that it focuses on the ‘why’ of disastrous events, rather than on the ‘how’. Calamities therefore, are always personalized - always attributed to

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human or spiritual agents as the perpetrators - who are said to be a witches or wizards in the society.

Social problems resulting from a belief in witchcraft are predominantly caused by so-called 'witch-purging' practices, that is, the ridding of witches from communities. This custom varies from alleged witches and their families being expelled from their villages by simply being told to gather their belongings and leave, to being threatened, to being physically attacked and even being murdered. Since witchcraft is generally thought to be evil, it is believed that there is no place for the practitioners in the human realm; therefore, alleged witches must be removed from the communities at all cost.

I share Pelgrim's opinion that the social consequences of these witch-purging practices bring about a number of displaced persons: individuals and families that are chased out of their villages because they are alleged to be witches. The lives of these displaced people are severely disrupted: they lose their positions in the intricate social network that most African societies are based on; they will have no access to basic human needs and rights - like clean water, medical aid and schooling - and they will have no means of supporting themselves or their families since they will become total social outcasts. Since, witch-purging is closely related to intense brutality, a practice that has brought about (or may result in) a culture of violence it should be legislated upon. Finally, the practice of witch-purging is mostly aimed at the most vulnerable members of society - children, women, elderly people, and those that display exceptional behavior - members of the society that may not be adequately disposed to defending themselves. This practice of jungle justice should by all means be legislated by law as a criminal offence punishable by death sentence.

The question is: 'does witchcraft not exist among the rich: men and women'? If it does, why are these ones never punished or excommunicated from the society?

In the Holy Bible one of the ten Commandments warns: 'Thou shall not kill' (Ex. 20:13), but one of the Mosaic Laws instructs: "Suffer not a witch to live" (Ex. 22:18), therefore, witches were stoned to death, for instance King Saul ordered the killing of all the witches in Israel at a point in time (1 Sam 28:9). But Jesus Christ came with a redemptive Law that both the wheat and the weeds should be allowed to grow together until the harvest or judgment day (Matth. 13:29). Christ gives a new Law which supersedes the Law of Moses. Of Himself Jesus says: "For the Son of man did not come to destroy man's life but to save them" (Luke 9:56). If the Church is a representative of Christ, and Christ designates the Church as the spiritual legislator of the world; He says "to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the Church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places .." (Eph. 3:10). Christ also empowers the Church with "the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in

Heaven and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven” (Matth.16:19), then the Church has failed woefully in its spiritual responsibilities and in the exercise of its powers to the world among which is to bind the spirit of witchcraft. The failure of the Church to realize that Jesus Christ founded it upon the rock and gave his words “that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matth. 16:18), does not give impetus to individuals and groups to usurp the laws and begin to kill and maim fellow humans; the defenseless members of the society: children, the aged and the physically challenged, labeling them witches or suspected witches.

Again the lassie affairs attitude of the Church which is supposed to be spiritual legislator of the world has also failed the people consequently, overbearing members of the community take laws into their hands to maim, kill or excommunicate these susceptible members of the society. The white paper on the outcome of the Panel set up by the Akwa Ibom State Governor is yet to be made public; therefore, this paper cannot preempt its contents and the way forward

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