

Law Verses Tradition: Beliefs in and Practices of Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana and the Law

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Abstract : Many Ghanaians, including the rich and downtrodden, elite and unlettered, rural and urban dwellers, politicians and civil servants, in one way or the other, believe in and practice witchcraft. The existence of witches' camp in northern Ghana, the rise of Pentecostal churches, especially in southern Ghana with the penchant to cleanse people of witchcraft, as well as media reports of witchcraft imputations assuming wider dimensions in the country, often classified as a citadel of democracy, good governance and human rights in Africa, buttress the pervasive nature of belief in and the practice of witchcraft in the country. This is in spite of the fact that tremendous efforts, especially by British colonial authorities, were made to regulate witchcraft beliefs and its associated practices. Informed by Western values and philosophy, witchcraft was considered by colonial authorities as illogical and unscientific. This paper, which is largely a review of existing literature, supplemented by archival information from the national archives of Ghana, focuses on the nature of witchcraft regulation in Ghana's pre-colonial and colonial past, as well as immediately after Ghana obtained her independence in 1957. This article concludes by rhetorically questioning whether or not believing in and the practice of witchcraft in contemporary Ghana in general, and the existence of witches' camps in the northern region of the country are attributed to the failure of past regulations, as well as the failure of present government policies.

Keywords : colonial, natives, regulation, witchcraft

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