

The Belief in Witchcraft in Contemporary Africa and Its Implications for Human Rights and National Security: A Case Study of Nigeria

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Abstract

It is argued in this paper, the focus of which is Nigeria, that the belief in witchcraft, which is still very pervasive in contemporary Africa, has very serious implications for human rights and national security. In Africa, as in many parts of the world, witchcraft is purported to be the ability of certain people to kill others or cause other havoc in the community through mystic or supernatural powers. Consequently, witches are persons who are believed to possess supernatural powers to do evil. It is also believed that witches could be engaged by some people to make them rich or to kill their enemies. Using Nigeria as a case study, the paper posits that the main manifestations of the belief in witchcraft in Africa today are in the form of ritual killings. Perpetrators of ritual killings usually cut off some parts of the human body and sell them to certain individuals who then take those human parts to meet “juju” priests or “witchdoctors”, whom they believe could make for them potent charms to enable them to engage the witches or the devil for whatever purposes. In most rural areas, it is very old people, both men and women, who are believed to be witches and are sometimes tortured or killed. In recent times, however, some children are also being accused of being witches. In the case of children, they would either be tortured, killed, or banished into the bushes, mostly by their parents or with the consent of their parents. The paper starts from the premise that witchcraft is not peculiar to Africa but has been a universal phenomenon. It recalls the witch-hunt episode that lasted for about four hundred years in Europe, during which tens of thousands of people, especially women, alleged to be witches, were tortured and executed. However, whereas Europe and most of the developed world have since put an end to witch hunts and even more or less jetti-

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soned the belief in witchcraft altogether, most Africans, including very educated ones, are still neck-deep in the belief in witchcraft. Nigeria typifies what obtains in most of the other African countries. The paper concludes by recalling the role played by scholars in the Age of Enlightenment in the decline of the belief in witchcraft and witch hunts in Europe and calls on African scholars to pay more attention to the study of the phenomenon in order to combat its horrible consequences.

Keywords

Witchcraft, Witchcraft Manifestations, Ritual Killings, European Witch Hunts, Child Witch Hunts, Witchcraft Belief and Human Rights, Witchcraft Belief and National Security, Philosophy and the Belief in Witchcraft

1. Introduction

The discovery in 2001 of the headless body of a black child floating on the River Thames, near Tower Bridge in London, brought to international limelight one of the terrible consequences of the belief in witchcraft in contemporary Africa. The manner in which the child had been mutilated (the head, arms, and legs had been cut off) suggested to the British police that it might have been a case of ritual killing relating to witchcraft beliefs (Hoskins, 2012; Hall, 2013). As the deceased's identity could not be immediately ascertained, the child was simply named "Adam" by the police. He was estimated to be between four and seven years old.

In the process of the investigation, it was reported that the British police arrested a Nigerian in Dublin, Sam Onogigovie, and twenty other Nigerians in Britain in connection with the murder of Adam (Igwe, 2004). Subsequently, it took the British police several years, using forensic isotope analysis (examining chemicals in the boy's bones and stomach contents), to trace the origin of Adam to Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria (Hoskins, 2012; BBC, 2021). Even so, it is most strange that more than two decades after this story was reported and despite all the efforts of the British police and with international cooperation, the so-called Adam's case has not been resolved, in the sense that no one has been charged in court or convicted (Hoskins, 2012; BBC, 2021).

The need to recall the "Adam" story as a starting point in this paper is to underscore the point that ritual killing is one of the main manifestations of witchcraft belief in Nigeria. The murder of that child was not just an ordinary crime but a case of ritual killing as a result of the belief or practice of witchcraft on the part of the perpetrators. Though this heinous crime took place in the capital of one of the most developed countries in the world and in the 21st century, the perpetrators were most likely to have come from Nigeria.

The belief in witchcraft has been a universal phenomenon for years in all societies across the world. Yet, for long, the issue of witchcraft has been largely a neglected area of study among Nigerian and other African scholars. Even up till to-

day, one could scarcely find any solid books or journals on the subject of witchcraft by African scholars in the Nigerian university libraries. Thus, in a recent study, it was observed that “not enough studies exist on witchcraft in Nigeria” (Uchendu, Onogwu, & Agbo, 2024: p. 7). Nevertheless, there is currently a growing interest in the subject by some African scholars (Niehaus, 2001; Bongmba, 2001; Maduagwu, 2010; Jayeola-Omoyeni, Oyetade, & Omoyeni, 2015; Uchendu, Onogwu, & Agbo, 2024).

Indeed, the issue of witchcraft has long been a neglected area of intellectual discourse at conferences or public lectures in Africa. The initiative of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) in November 2019 to organise an international conference on the phenomenon of witchcraft must be regarded in Africa as a trail-blazer. The attempt by some Christian churches to prevail on the UNN authorities to cancel the conference on the purported grounds that the conference was for the gathering of witches goes to show perhaps why most Nigerian scholars have hitherto shunned serious studies on the subject. In the end, the conference was held but under a last-minute amended theme, of “Dimensions of Human Behaviour”, due to the directive of university authorities, instead of the original theme, “First International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Witchcraft: Meaning, Factors and Practices” (Punch, 2019; Eghagha, 2019). The proceedings of that conference were later published under the title: *Witchcraft in Africa: Meanings, Factors and Practices* (Uchendu, Onogwu, & Agbo, 2024). The editors have revealed that just before the commencement of the conference, many “people and groups across the country... blacklisted the conference as the gathering of witches and wizards... and an attempt by the organisers... to blindfold and initiate people into witchcraft cults” (Uchendu, Onogwu, & Agbo, 2024: p. 6). Confirming this allegation in his Foreword to the book, Emeritus Professor of anthropology of Africa, in the University of Amsterdam, Peter Geshiere, notes that “it takes considerable courage to write this topic”, [in Africa, given that] “some observers even concluded that those involved must be witches themselves-who else would want to discuss this phenomenon?” (Uchendu, Onogwu, & Agbo, 2024: p. 9).

The aim of this paper is to bring to the fore the fact that the belief in witchcraft is still very deep and widespread in Africa, even in the 21st century. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the belief in witchcraft in contemporary Africa has serious implications for human rights, particularly those of the children and the elderly, and also for security, using Nigeria as a reference point. Following the introduction, the rest of this paper is treated in the following sections: Conceptual Clarification; Witchcraft belief as a Universal Phenomenon; Manifestations of the Belief in Witchcraft in Nigeria; Implications of the belief in Witchcraft for Human Rights in Nigeria; Implications of the belief in Witchcraft for Nigeria’s National Security; Philosophy and the Belief in Witchcraft; Conclusion.

2. Conceptual Clarification

At this point, it is necessary to clarify two important concepts, namely, “witch-

craft/witch” and “ritual killing”, as they should be understood in the context of this paper.

2.1. Witchcraft/Witch

Like most concepts in social sciences, the terms “witchcraft” and “witch” are not easy to define. In the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Lewis, 2015), the terms “witch”, “sorcerer”, and “magician” are used synonymously to describe someone who, allegedly, “attempts to influence the surrounding world through occult [i.e., hidden, as opposed to open and observable] means”. Witchcraft is defined as “the exercise or invocation of alleged supernatural powers to control people or events, practices typically involving sorcery or magic”. Furthermore, witchcraft is the act of “crones who meet secretly at night, indulge in cannibalism and orgiastic rites with the devil, and perform black magic”. On the other hand, although the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* makes a distinction between the terms “witch” and “wizard”, to refer to a female or male believed to have “magic powers”, respectively, there is scarcely any such distinctions between “witch” and “wizard” in the scholarly works on the subject of witchcraft (Behringer, 2004; Jayeola-Omoyeni, Oyetade, & Omoyeni, 2015; Harari, 2024: pp. 91-101). In this paper, therefore, the term “witch” is used generically to refer to male or female individuals believed to possess supernatural powers, especially to do evil.

It is important to note that there are examples of the usual hair-splitting attempts by some scholars to give so many different definitions or nuances of the term “witchcraft”, as with several other concepts in social sciences or humanities, or to suggest that there are different meanings of the term, say in European and African cultural contexts (Emeje & Awe, 2024: pp. 73). Nevertheless, most contemporary studies have demonstrated a similar universal understanding of the term, witchcraft, and the alleged powers of witches (Behringer, 2004: pp. 12-13; Harari, 2024: pp. 91-101). Behringer (2004: p. 12), for example, has pointed out that there are several basic perceptions on the concept of witchcraft held in medieval and early modern Europe, present-day Africa, Southeast Asia, Australia, and the Americas. He summarizes these perceptions as “the basic set of beliefs” in witchcraft (Behringer, 2004: p. 12). Generally, witches are believed to consist of some people who either involuntarily or intentionally aligned themselves with evil forces, thereby acquiring powers:

In order to inflict harm by mystical means, mostly on their relatives or neighbours. They gain supernatural powers, such as shape-shifting, the transformation into animals, and the ability to fly through the air. They not only act as individuals, but rather, through their alignment to evil forces, they act in groups, being part of a conspiracy (Behringer, 2004: p. 13).

Furthermore, across these regions, witches are generally believed to have the capacity:

To induce illness and death, to destroy livestock and crops ... they kidnap

babies in order to devour them or to use their body parts—for instance, baby fat in the fantasies of European demonologists ... for the preparations of powerful unguents (Behringer, 2004: p. 13).

The above descriptions of witches are similar to the general perception of witches in medieval Europe that eventually gave rise to the mass witch hunts. Thus:

Witches were said to gather at night in huge demonic assemblies, where they worshiped Satan, killed children, ate human flesh, engaged in orgies, and cast spells that caused storms, epidemics, and other catastrophes (Harari, 2024: p. 93).

Similar to the above characterisations of witchcraft, in several communities in contemporary Africa, including Nigeria, every misfortune—serious illness, vehicular accidents, business failures, deaths of loved ones, especially children, among others—is quite often attributed to witchcraft and the handiwork of witches. In this connection, the extreme example of the Azande people in attributing every misfortune to witchcraft is well known (Evans-Pritchard, 1976). In the case of Nigeria, strangely enough, whereas in the olden days, it was the very old people who were believed to be witches, in many communities presently, as we shall see later, it is mostly children who are being accused of being witches and terribly abused.

Finally, it should be pointed out that this paper focuses on witchcraft only in its historical or traditional understanding, as against the “modern” phenomenon of Wicca being practiced in Europe and the United States, which is said to be a form of neo-pagan movement. Although the Wiccans call themselves witches, scholars are of the view that the modern Wiccan movement is a twentieth-century invention with no connection to ancient paganism or the alleged witches of the witch-hunt era. In fact, members see their movement as an alternative to Christianity. Also, they do not indulge in the diabolical practices attributed to traditional witchcraft. In some states in the United States, the Wiccan movement is recognized as a religious group, and its doctrines are available in publications (Huson, 1972; Behringer, 2004).

2.2. Ritual Killing

Ritual killing usually involves the murder of people and cutting off some parts for purposes of witchcraft, magic, or other occult practices. Perpetrators either use those human parts or sell them to certain individuals who then take those human parts to meet “juju” priests or “witchdoctors”, to prepare for them potent charms, apparently, to enable them to engage the witches or the devil for whatever purposes. Adeyinka and Alatis (2026) define ritual killing as “an act of murdering human lives to appease the deities or to accrue some spiritual and magical benefits”. Ritual killings, which seem to be a phenomenon in contemporary Nigeria, are being fuelled by the greed to acquire fast wealth, but also by the belief in witchcraft. Thus, it has been observed that ritual killing is used “for the practice of ritual sacrifice with the belief that the sacrifices provide or generate money for the per-

petrators” (Ezemenaka, 2018). A senior research fellow at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, has been credited with making a distinction between ritual killing and human sacrifice. He defines ritual killings as “the act of killing human beings extra-judicially for the purpose of attaining temporal goals in life such as raw money-making, extra growth in business, political power as well as personal spiritual strength” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2021). On the other hand, according to him, “human sacrifice is the offering of human beings to transcendental forces, such as deities for the purpose of either atonement for sins or seeking protection or related favour” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2021). The distinction between ritual killings and human sacrifice is important because while human sacrifice was part of African Traditional Religion in some communities, especially in the pre-colonial period, that practice is no longer in vogue, even though there are sometimes reports of some isolated cases, as in the so-called Okija episode referred to in the section on the manifestations of witchcraft beliefs in this paper.

3. Witchcraft Belief as a Universal Phenomenon

As noted earlier, the belief in witchcraft is universal. Hence, the belief in witchcraft is not peculiar to Nigeria or Africa, and there is enough evidence to show that the belief in witchcraft could be found in all the continents (Behringer, 2004; Niehaus, 2001; Bongmba, 2001; Harari, 2024: pp. 91-101). With regard to Europe, the belief in witchcraft had terrible consequences, the most notable being the European witch hunts, which lasted for about four centuries. Some scholars date the commencement of European witch hunts from the 14th century (Kieckhefer, 1976; Cohn, 1975; Bailey, 2003), while others argue that the hunts began in the 15th century when they became more organized and institutionalized (Levack, 2013, 2016; Ellerbe, 1995; Behringer, 2004; Harari, 2024). Levack’s periodization of the European witch hunts is from about 1450 to 1750.

In any case, while Europe and other developed countries seem to have put behind them the belief in witches since the Age of Enlightenment, this belief is still very pervasive in contemporary Africa, as also in Southeast Asia and Latin America (Muller & Sanderson, 2020). As in the present-day Africa, witches in early Western societies were believed to operate secretly to achieve their private aims, unlike in the case of the public practice of religion. They were said to use a variety of means to achieve their goals, including divinations or oracles to predict the future; invocation of spirits, use of amulets and charms to ward off hostile spirits; and carvings to represent enemies. In general, witches were usually feared.

Witches had also always been believed to be associated with the devil. By the late fourteenth century, they were accused of heresy against Christianity. The combination of the so-called *maleficium* (or malevolent sorcery) with witchcraft and their association with the devil provided the ground for mass witch hunts in Western societies. Thus, for more than four centuries, these societies embarked on the unprecedented killing of witches, that is, witch-hunts. Ellerbe (1995) de-

scribed the European witch-hunt as “one of the darkest chapters of human history”, while Robbins (1959) described the witch hunts as “the shocking nightmare, the foulest crime, and the deepest shame of western civilization”.

From several studies, a number of facts have emerged about the witch hunts in Europe. First of all, it has been established that the Catholic Church contributed to the intensity of witch hunts through its doctrines and introduction of witch trials (Behringer, 2004; Harari, 2024: pp. 91-101). Later, other Christian Denominations followed suit. In 1374, Pope Gregory XI declared that all magic was done with the aid of demons and thus was open to prosecution for heresy. Witch trials continued through the 14th and early 15th centuries in several countries in Europe. By 1435-1450, the number of prosecutions had begun to rise sharply, and toward the end of the 15th century, two events were said to have stimulated the hunts. The first was Pope Innocent VIII’s publication in 1484 of the bull (decree) *Summis desiderantes affectibus* (“Desiring with the Greatest Ardour”), condemning witchcraft as Satanism, the worst of all possible heresies. The second was the publication in 1486 by Heinrich Kramer, a Dominican friar and Papal Inquisitor, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (“The Hammer of Witches”), which attributed witchcraft mainly to women. It was Kramer’s book, more than anything else, that prepared the ground for the European mass witch hunts that were intensified from the 15th century. The book was like a Handbook on the identification, prosecution and execution of the so-called witches. In the book, Kramer describes how honest Christians could identify witches. In particular, Kramer recommends that pious Christians should use “torture in order to extract confessions from people suspected of witchcraft, and was adamant that the only punishment for the guilty was execution” (Harari, 2024: p. 94).

Widely influential, this latter book had eight editions by 1500, another five by 1520, and another 16 more editions by 1670 (Harari, 2024: p. 95). The hunts were said to be most severe from 1580 to 1630, and the last known execution for witchcraft was in Switzerland in 1782 (Hannam, 2003). There is a lot of controversy about the number of so-called witches executed in Europe during the hunts. It is claimed that as many as nine million people, mainly women, lost their lives, after dreadful torture, during the four centuries of European witch hunts. Some scholars, however, believe that no more than 60,000 women were executed during the period (Hannam, 2003). Yet other scholars put the figure at between 40,000 and 50,000, including people from all walks of life and ages, including children as young as five (Harari, 2024: p. 96).

It should be emphasized that today, there are scarcely any reports of witch hunts in Europe or in most developed countries even though some people in the more developed world are said to still believe in witchcraft. A recent global statistical study on the belief in witchcraft, reports that in Sweden about 9% of the people still believe in witchcraft; in Germany—13%; in the United Kingdom—14% - 15%; and in the United States of America—16% - 17%. On the other hand, the percentages in many countries of Asia and Africa are much higher. For instance, in Tunisia it is 90% and in Nigeria (surprisingly) it is said to be 57%; while the global

average is 40% (Gershman, 2022). It is instructive that in the survey, witchcraft is defined as “as an ability of certain people to intentionally cause harm via supernatural means” (Gershman, 2022).

4. Manifestations of the Belief in Witchcraft in Nigeria

Given that the belief in witchcraft is not peculiar to ancient Africa, the present concern is that even in the 21st century this belief does not seem to be waning as is the case in Europe and other developed societies. A cursory search on the subject of witchcraft in the media or on the Internet suggests that most people in Africa still believe in witchcraft. A study on the phenomenon of witchcraft conducted in Nigeria in 2009 included a questionnaire on the belief in the existence of witches. The questionnaire was administered to selected Nigerian university students, lecturers, the clergy, security agents, and policy makers. Nearly everyone who filled out the questionnaire affirmed the existence of witches and their powers to do harm to people (Maduagwu, 2010).

Ritual Killings as the Main Manifestations of Witchcraft Belief in Nigeria

The main manifestations of the belief in witchcraft and its consequences in contemporary Nigeria, as in many sub-Saharan African countries, are in the form of ritual killings. Probably, the practice of ritual killings has been in existence throughout the ages, but never before has this practice or the reports of it been as widespread in Nigeria as they are today. It is believed in Nigeria that most wealthy or successful people have engaged witchdoctors or juju priests to prepare potent charms for them using human parts. Thus, many Nigerians believe that some businessmen who suddenly become very rich or even some successful politicians must have done so through engaging witchdoctors, which usually involves ritual killings (Smith, 2001; Usman, 2017). This belief has been and is still, perhaps inadvertently, being popularized by Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry.

Almost daily, the manifestations of witchcraft, especially in the form of ritual killings, are reported in Nigerian newspapers. Ironically, most of these are reported to take place not only in remote villages but also in urban areas such as Lagos, Owerri, Calabar, Kano, and even the Nigerian Capital, Abuja. According to Igwe (2004):

Ritual killing is common practice in Nigeria. Every year, hundreds of Nigerians lose their lives to ritual murderers, also known as head-hunters. These head-hunters go in search of human parts—head, breast, tongue, sexual organs—at the behest of witchdoctors, juju priests, and traditional medicine men who require them for some sacrifices or for the preparation of assorted magical potions.

There have been accounts of numerous cases of ritual killings associated with witchcraft in Nigeria. The so-called Otokoto saga is recounted here as an illustration.

1) The Otokoto Saga as a Typical Case of Ritual Killings in Nigeria

A very notorious case of ritual killing took place in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria, in 1996. It involved one Chief Vincent Duru, popularly known as “Otokoto”. As reconstructed by Igwe (2004), the police in Owerri arrested a man, Innocent Ekeanyanwu, in 1996, with the head of a young boy, Ikechukwu Okonkwo. In the course of the investigation, the police discovered the buried headless body of Ikechukwu in the premises of Otokoto Hotel in Owerri, owned by Chief Duru. The police soon discovered that there was a syndicate led by Chief Duru that specialized in ritual killing and the sale and procurement of human parts. These human parts were believed to be for witchcraft. When the news of this horrible discovery was made known, it sparked violent protests among the inhabitants of the city. The mob burnt down the Otokoto Hotel and looted the property of the suspected members of the syndicate. Chief Duru and six other members of his syndicate were arrested and prosecuted, and in February 2003, they were sentenced to death by hanging. The Otokoto saga had many twists. The main suspect, Ekeanyanwu, died in police custody shortly after arrest in suspicious circumstances, for which three police officers were sentenced to death. Some suspects were later acquitted after several years in prison. Vincent Duru was eventually executed in 2016, about 20 years after the crime (Punch, 2016b).

2) Other Cases of Ritual Killings in Nigeria

It should be noted here that the Otokoto episode is only a tip of the iceberg of the numerous cases of ritual killings as manifestations of the belief in witchcraft in Nigeria. One could recall the case of the arrest in 2001 of a 13-year-old girl, Jummai Hassan, by the Nigerian police in Maiduguri, on the allegation that the girl was involved in the ritual killing of a little child and about 47 adults (The Guardian, 2001). Related to ritual killing are also stories of human sacrifice to “juju” shrines, of which the Okija case in Anambra State, Nigeria, in 2004, should still be fresh in memory. As reported in the media at the time, the police had raided two Shrines belonging to two deities, namely “Ogwugwu isiala” and “Ogwugwu akpu”. In the process, the police discovered about 20 human skulls and 50 corpses at various stages of decomposition inside the “evil forest” as the place is known (The Guardian, 2004; Ezekwere, 2004; Odili, 2004). There are similar cases of ritual killings or outright extra-judicial killings of people alleged to be witches across sub-Saharan Africa, including Tanzania, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Zambia (Muller & Sanderson, 2020). Wolfgang Behringer, an expert in witchcraft studies, was said to have estimated that “between 1960 and 2000, about 40,000 people accused of practising witchcraft were murdered in Tanzania alone” (Muller & Sanderson, 2020).

5. Implications of the Belief in Witchcraft for Human Rights in Nigeria

As shown in the last section, the manifestations of the belief in witchcraft in Africa are mainly through ritual killings. Of course, ritual killings in a broader sense in-

volve abuse of human rights, as the very first article in the United Nations 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is the right to life. The UDHR was later expanded into the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICCPR) in 1966, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) also in 1966. Later, the UN also adopted two Optional Protocols to the ICCPR in 1966 and 1989 (Maduagwu, 1987). These four instruments of human rights constitute what is called the *International Bill of Human Rights* (United Nations, 1983). Most countries of the world have incorporated the basic fundamental human rights in their constitutions. For the purposes of the discussion of this section, it is important to note that there are several articles of human rights, including the prohibition of torture and inhuman treatment.

This section is devoted to what has been described as child witch hunts in Nigeria, particularly in Akwa Ibom State, which invariably involve killing, torture, both physical and psychological, and other forms of child abuse, all of which constitute grave violations of human rights. It has been aptly observed that the drivers of child rights violation and abuse are several, including “harmful practices based on tradition and/or superstition, religious belief and false information” (Obi-Bisong, 2022: p. 375).

By far, the most terrible consequences of the belief in witchcraft in Nigeria are the case of child witch hunt in Akwa Ibom State, which was brought to international limelight about twenty years ago (McVeigh, 2007). Historically, mass witch hunts are not common in Africa or Nigeria. There might have been and still are cases of maltreatment or even killings of some elderly persons on the allegation of witchcraft. Moreover, even though witches were abhorred and feared in the olden days in many African societies, there were scarcely any known cases of organized witch hunts. In recent times, as noted above, there are reports of witch hunts in many African countries. Behringer (2004) has also made an extensive report on South Africa. As will shortly be elaborated upon, the killing of children accused of being witches in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, can be regarded as a case of large-scale witch hunt and abuse of human rights in Africa. In contemporary Nigeria, allegations of some children or house-helpers being witches and causing business misfortune, illness, or even the death of some family members have become rampant, and quite often those children are subjected to psychological or even physical torture in the family. Most often, the allegations of children being witches are propagated by clergymen and women in contemporary Nigeria.

The bizarre abuse of little children in Akwa Ibom State, based on allegations that they are witches, was made popular by the British journalist, Tracy McVeigh (2007). McVeigh was then the Editor of the *Guardian's* global development desk (The Guardian, 2020). She had traveled to investigate the phenomenon in the small town of Esit Eket in Akwa Ibom State some time in 2007 and published her findings on 9 December 2007 (McVeigh, 2007).

According to McVeigh, evangelical pastors helped to create a terrible new campaign of violence against young Nigerians. She maintained that children and babies, branded as evil, were being abused, abandoned, and even murdered while

the preachers made money out of the fear emanating from parents and communities. As with many cities in southern Nigeria, Esit Eket is littered with many Pentecostal churches, some of them often located in shanty houses. Thus, according to McVeigh (2007):

[This] exploitative situation has now grown into something much more sinister as preachers are turning their attentions to children—naming those witches. In a maddened state of terror, parents and whole villages turn on the child. They are burnt, poisoned, slashed, chained to trees, buried alive or simply beaten and chased off into the bush.

So, why are children now being regarded as witches, whereas in the past, it was usually very old women and men who, in all societies, were believed to be witches? Today, quite often, “problem” children (for instance, the disobedient, troublesome, or those performing poorly in school) are the suspects. Furthermore, in most cases, house-girls or boys are the main targets (Umukoro, 2016; Onuzulike, 2013).

As the belief in the existence of witches is pervasive in Nigeria, only a few people in Esit Eket do not believe that the children are witches and are doing something about rescuing the children who are accused. One such person is Sam Ikpe-Itauma, who opened his house to look after some of the abandoned so-called child-witches. At the time of McVeigh’s visit in 2007, there were 131 children in his care. In his words, Ikpe-Itauma states:

The neighbours were not happy with me and told me “you are supporting witches”. This project was an accident. I saw children being abandoned, and it was very worrying. I started with three children; then every day it increased to up to 15; so we have to open this new place. For every ... maybe five children we see on the streets... we believe one has been killed, although it could be more as neighbours turn a blind eye when a witch child disappears (McVeigh, 2007).

Eventually, Ikpe-Itauma and his wife turned their community project into an NGO called the “Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network” and were soon overwhelmed by a huge number of children fleeing to them for refuge. They estimated that about 5000 children have been abandoned in the area since 1998, while many dead bodies may have been dumped in rivers and thrown into forests.

Another individual who is critical of the alleged child witch hunt in the community in Esit Eket is Chief Victor Ikot. Chief Ikot did the unthinkable by taking a “witch-child” into his own home. However, the so-called witch, Mbet, who was 11 years old when McVeigh was visiting, was also his niece. Mbet’s story to McVeigh is typical of the stories of over ten inhabitants of Ikpe-Itauma’s centre, aged between 4 and 16, that she had talked to. As reported by McVeigh, the view of Chief Ikot on the whole episode of child witch hunts and the role of the clergy is very instructive:

Nowadays when a child becomes stubborn, then everyone calls them [sic]

witches. But it is usually from the age of 10 down; I have never seen anyone try to throw a macho adult into the street. This child becomes a nuisance, so they give a dog a bad name and they can hang it. It is alarming because no household is untouched. But it is the greed of the pastors, driving around in Mercedes that makes them choose the vulnerable (McVeigh, 2007).

Chief Ikot's view should be contrasted with the view of one of the pastors interviewed by McVeigh. Pastor Joe Ita belongs to the Liberty Gospel Church, founded by Helen Ukpabio. The church has 60 branches in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. The popular evangelical DVDs produced and starred in by the founder are responsible for spreading the belief in child witches in the area. Pastor Ita of this church claims:

We are the only ones who really know the secrets of witches. Parents don't come here with the intention of abandoning their children, but when a child is a witch then you have to say: "What is that there? Not your child". The parents come to us when they see manifestations. But the secret is that, even if you abandon your child, the curse is still upon you, even if you kill your child the curse stays. So you have to come here to be delivered afterwards as well (McVeigh, 2007).

It would appear that following McVeigh's report, which was posted online as well as in a BBC documentary under the title, "Saving Africa's Witch Children", the Akwa Ibom State Government enacted the Child's Rights Law in December 2008 (Eleonu, 2008). Under the Child's Rights Law, anyone involved in any form of torture, trial by ordeal, or inhuman treatment of a child, purportedly to cure, purge, or exorcise such a child of witchcraft, would be liable to 10 years of imprisonment without an option of fine.

Subsequently, the Akwa Ibom State Government arrested one Bishop Ulup-Aya, who had told a BBC documentary film team that he killed 110 child witches. However, after his arrest, he reportedly told the police he had only killed the "witches" inside, the children and not the children themselves (Mail Foreign Service, 2008).

Yet, it is one thing to enact a law outlawing witch hunts against children or adults; it is quite another thing to liberate the people from the superstitious belief underlying these hunts. Thus, Gray Foxcroft, the Programme Director of the Akwa Ibom-based Non-Governmental Organization, "Stepping Stones Nigeria" (SSN), fighting against child witch hunt in the state, was credited with this statement:

The vast majority of Akwa Ibomites including commissioners, legislators, policy makers, police and social welfare teams, and even ordinary persons believe that children can be witches. Some people even tend to associate ailments such as epilepsy with witchcraft. The abuse of child rights is likely to continue for as long as this superstition endures (The Guardian, 2008).

Indeed, it would seem that despite the enactment of the Child Rights Act in 2008 by the Akwa Ibom State government, the abuse of children as witches has

not decreased significantly. In 2016, almost ten years after McVeigh's report, a Nigerian journalist with *The Punch* newspaper visited the State apparently to assess the situation of things. His account of what he learnt in Atakidiang Ebughu community in Mbo Local Government Area of the State and Uyo, the State Capital, as well as in Calabar, the Capital of neighbouring Cross River State, is a replica of McVeigh's report and shows that the torture and killings of children on allegation that they are witches is still rampant in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States (Umukoro, 2016). *The Punch* journalist's report was accompanied by some pathetic and horrifying pictures of some little children before and after they were rescued from bushes where, as he put it, "left to die" (Umukoro, 2016).

It has been recently confirmed by another writer that the abuse of some children alleged to be witches in Akwa Ibom State and in the neighbouring Cross River State is still ongoing, despite the efforts of the authorities to eliminate the practice (Nwagbara, 2022: p. 402). Incidentally, this writer was on an official study tour of Akwa Ibom State with the students of the National Institute for Security Studies (NISS), Abuja, in 2021. During an interactive session on security and socio-political issues with some government officials and academicians, he raised the issue of child abuse in the state on allegations of witchcraft. A lecturer from one of the universities in the state, who happened to be a pastor, insisted that witchcraft was real and that some children in the state were witches and needed to be delivered.

While the profiling of some children as witches seems to take place in many parts of Nigeria, it is strange that the practice seems to be rather high in Akwa Ibom State and also the neighbouring Cross River State. Even more inexplicable and perhaps peculiar in the communities of those States is the practice of torturing children to death or banishing them to the bushes to die, and with the consent or even perpetrated by their own parents (McVeigh, 2007; Umukoro, 2016; Nwagbara, 2022).

This development requires more research. Why is the accusation of children being witches rather too high in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States as against many other parts of Nigeria? One wonders whether the emergence of the child witch hunt in the States of Akwa Ibom and Cross River could be an offshoot of the killing of twins in many parts of the former Eastern Region of Nigeria until that practice was eventually eradicated through the campaign initiated by Christian Missionaries in the late 19th century. The most famous one who fought against the killing of twins when she arrived Calabar (present day Capital of Cross River State) in 1876, was the Scottish Presbyterian missionary, Mary Slessor (The Mary Slessor Foundation, n.d.; BBC, 2015).

Now, while it may not be common to hear of mass witch hunts in many African countries, there have been reported cases of torture, killing, and banishing of children in some African countries in recent years (Muller & Sanderson, 2020). On the other hand, there are constant reports in the press of the abuse or even killing of some elderly persons, mostly women, accused of being witches in Nigeria and

many other African countries (Punch, 2016a; Eboiyehi, 2017; Muller & Sanderson, 2020).

6. Implications of the Belief in Witchcraft for Nigeria's National Security

The belief in witchcraft has had terrible consequences and implications across the world. Historically, we have seen how that belief led to massive witch hunts in Europe for about four hundred years, leading to the deaths of several thousand people, especially women. In contemporary Nigeria, we have noted that a major manifestation of the belief in witchcraft is in the form of ritual killings. Related to ritual killings is unprecedented torture and even killings of children, and also sometimes the elderly, alleged to be witches. These episodes constitute grievous human rights abuses.

There is yet another emerging implication of the belief in witchcraft in Nigeria that should not be allowed to fester because, ultimately, it would have serious adverse effects on national security. The issue of security is very critical and has been deliberated upon in so many ways all through the ages, by philosophers, political scientists, and statesmen. Consequently, it will not be necessary to go into details in explaining the concept here. Suffice it to say that it is generally understood that national security encompasses both the protection of the country and its citizens (Wahab & Ogbogbo, 2020). In Nigeria, as in many other countries, several agencies are involved. These include the military, whose primary responsibility is to protect the country from external aggression. Then, internally, there are the police and so many other paramilitary agencies, with complementary roles (Karim & Sesay, 2022). The various security agencies and their functions have been provided in the Nigerian constitutions, of which the latest is the 1999 Constitution, as well as extant laws.

It is posited here that if both the hierarchy and the rank and file of the members of the Nigerian security agencies should begin to believe that in dealing with security situations in the country, they would not only be planning to confront the enemy *physically* but also take into account the *supernatural or spiritual powers* attributed to witchcraft, then the security of the nation would be impaired. This is exactly what, at least, one Nigerian scholar has been propagating recently in some policy and security training institutions in the country. This scholar claims to have invented a theory that he calls "*Strategic Spiritual Intelligence*" (*SSI*) (Nwolise, 2014).

Professor Nwolise has stated the basic thesis of his theory of SSI in the lectures and seminars at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and at some Nigerian policy and security training institutions. Reading some of his lectures and publications, it can be surmised that the kernel of his so-called *SSI* is the belief in witchcraft and other elements of African Traditional Religion (Nwolise, 2014). In his Inaugural lecture at the University of Ibadan, Nwolise (2014) argues that it is important to interrogate the sources of poor performance of the Nigerian security agencies in combating the Boko Haram insurgency and to seek new strategies. He has dismissed what

he calls Buzan's five new dimensions of national security, namely, "military, political, societal, economic, and environmental", saying that those are "too narrow and Euro-centric". He proposes what he calls ten additional dimensions of national security to encompass the following:

Physical, Psychological, Technological, Image, Territorial, Treasury, People's Power, Global, Legal, and Spiritual Security. *The new focus on Spiritual Security for example enables us understand hypnotism, witchcraft, juju, ritual murder, curses, spirit wife and spirit husband, "abiku"/"Ogbanje", familiar spirits, possession, etc* (Nwolise, 2014. Emphasis, added).

One could now see where Nwolise is situating his SSI. For him, "the intelligence capacity of the nation has to be developed with the complementary role of Strategic Spiritual Intelligence (SSI)" (Nwolise, 2019). Obviously, what Nwolise is advocating is that the security capacity of the nation has to be developed by understanding and recognizing the spiritual powers of *totems* in African Traditional Religion, including witchcraft. On several occasions he maintains that the Nigerian militants and terrorists "spiritually fortify themselves" with a lot of charms and rituals. According to him, "*one of such rituals involved being bathed by menopausal women with spiritual concoction to make their bodies impenetrable to bullets*" (Nwolise, 2019. Emphasis added). Nwolise's controversial thesis on SSI, juju and witchcraft has received mixed reactions among Nigerian academics, especially at the University of Ibadan (Onoja, 2019).

It should be noted that Nwolise seems to be one of the highly recognized resource persons in the Nigerian security training institutions, and the negative implications of his theory for Nigeria's national security should be obvious. For instance, on 30 September 2019, the Nigerian Army Resource Centre, Abuja, organized what it called a "Spiritual Warfare Seminar" under the theme, "Countering Insurgency and Violent Extremism in Nigeria through Spiritual Warfare". Nwolise was the main speaker at that seminar, and his retrogressive views and, apparently, supportive comments attributed to the then Chief of Army Staff were widely reported in the Nigerian media (Olokor, Ramon, Aluko, & Isenyo, 2019; Erunke, 2019; Intervention, 2019). The day after the Seminar, *The Punch* (Nigeria) came out with the headline: "Knocks as Buratai seeks prayers to defeat Boko Haram". According to the newspaper:

The Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Tukur Buratai, has said terrorism and terrorist groups could not be eliminated alone by the military unless religious bodies and organisations in the country come to the "forefront of the spiritual battle." Buratai stated these on Monday in Abuja at a spiritual warfare seminar at the Nigerian Army Resource Centre, with the theme, "Countering insurgency and violent extremism in Nigeria through spiritual warfare" (Olokor, Ramon, Aluko, & Isenyo, 2019).

It is instructive that the Nigerian General was criticised by some Nigerians for holding such views. One commentator said that he could not understand how a

military head of the army would be “recommending a fetish approach to prosecuting a physical war” and called on the President to sack him (Olokor, Ramon, Aluko, & Isenyo, 2019).

However, the General also had apologists. One such was Emmanuel Osuagwu Ugochukwu, said to be a civil rights lawyer. He dismissed the reports that the General had called for *spiritual support* to end insurgency, claiming that the General was quoted out of context (Vanguard, 2019). According to Ugochukwu, the statement by the Army Chief, delivered by his representative at the seminar, never suggested using spiritualism to fight insurgency on the warfront. Said he:

Rather the Chief of Army Staff, Tukur Buratai, called on religious leaders to support the Nigerian Army in eradicating ideologies fuelling insurgency in the country. What the Army Chief stated clearly was that aside eliminating the insurgents in the battlefield, *their ideologies must also be killed spiritually. Ideology is not a physical realm, it is a thought process and you do not kill ideas or ideology by physical war* (Vanguard, 2019).

One wonders, the difference between Ugochukwu’s interpretation of the views of the Nigerian Army Chief and the allegation that the Army Chief was advocating that “*terrorism and terrorist groups could not be eliminated alone by the military unless religious bodies and organisations in the country come to the ‘forefront of the spiritual battle’*” (Olokor, Ramon, Aluko, & Isenyo, 2019). Be that as it may, there is no doubt that Nwolise’s Seminar presentation and its apparent endorsement by the then Chief of Army Staff have raised serious issues bordering on national security.

It would be most detrimental to the Nigerian national security if the tenets of the so-called “SSI” by Nwolise had any impact on the training doctrines in the Nigerian security institutions. If the Nigerian security leadership or the training authorities in the Nigerian policy and security training institutions were to believe in the powers of witches and juju, what would one expect from the rank and file? And, how would Nigerians feel protected by their security personnel? And, if most of our fighting soldiers and other security agents were to be fearful of the powers of witchcraft or juju, how would one expect that insurgents or terrorists like the members of Boko Haram would ever be defeated?

The foregoing concerns notwithstanding, I strongly believe that most of the Nigerian policy makers and security strategists do not take Nwolise’s controversial theory of the so-called “SSI” and his views on the powers of witchcraft or juju seriously. Thus, regardless of the fairy tales about witchcraft or juju, the generality of the members of the Nigerian security agencies are highly trained and therefore very professional. In the battlefield or in confronting criminals, the leadership and their fighting personnel rely on their training and weapons and have no regard for any occult or mystic forces. It is important, therefore, that science and professionalism remain the underpinning of the training doctrines in the Nigerian security institutions.

7. Philosophy and the Belief in Witchcraft

The key to eradicating human rights abuses and other crimes associated with the belief in witchcraft in Africa is enlightenment. In this regard, the role of philosophy is very crucial. Philosophy is all about reason and rational thinking. As we saw in the section on witchcraft as a universal phenomenon, the normal ancient belief in witches took a dangerous dimension in Europe from about the 14th century, when this belief, as a result of some Christian doctrines, led to witch hunts that lasted for about four hundred years and claimed tens of thousands of lives, especially those of women. What was unique about the phenomenon of witchcraft in Europe was not that people believed in witches but that the belief led to mass witch hunts. Ironically, it was the eventual realization by many Europeans of how irrational it was to believe in all the fairy tales of activities and crimes attributed to the so-called witches that would lead to not only the decline of witch hunts but indeed to the jettisoning of the belief in the phenomenon altogether by the majority of the Europeans.

Talking about fairy tales attributed to witches, Kramer's book, which we had referred to earlier, is said to contain some of the most bizarre fantasies about witchcraft. For example, it is said that Kramer dedicated a whole chapter to describe the powers of witches to steal men's penises. Dispelling the doubt as to whether the witches actually take away the men's penises or merely render them impotent, Kramer responds thus:

What is to be thought of those witches who in this way sometimes collect male organs in great numbers, as many as twenty or thirty members together, and put them in a bird's nest, or shut them up in box, where they move themselves like moving members, and eat oats and corn, as has been seen by many? (Harari, 2024: p. 95)

Kramer goes on to narrate a story that he claims to have heard from one man who had lost his penis:

When he had lost his member [penis], he approached a known witch to ask her to restore it to him. She told the afflicted man to climb a certain tree, and that he might take which he liked out of the nest in which there were several members. And when he tried to take a big one, the witch said: You must not take that one; adding, because it belongs to a parish priest. (Harari, 2024: p. 95)

Scholars have identified several key factors that led to the decline of witch-hunts and to the discarding of the belief in witches in Europe, including political, social, philosophical, and judicial factors (Hannam, 2003; Thurston, 2007; Levack, 2016). While it makes sense to differentiate between these factors, it should be clear that there is a lot of overlap, as only a thin line divides each one from the other. Ultimately, however, the *justification* of all the other factors, whether political or legal, must be based on rationality or philosophy. It is also a critical reflection that would

guarantee the lasting solution to the crimes associated with the belief in witchcraft in Africa.

Despite the unfortunate episode of witch hunts in European history, there are also periods of high intellectual activity that have ultimately defined European civilization (Gottschalk, MacKinney, & Pritchard, 1969). There is the Renaissance period (1400-1600) when the study of ancient Greek and Roman works was in vogue among intellectuals. Unfortunately, despite the growth in intellectual activity during the Renaissance period, some scholars of this period still justified witch hunts, which, ironically, were just beginning at that time. The next period of intellectual activity was the Scientific Revolution (1564-1642), spearheaded by Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) and Isaac Newton (1643-1727). It was during this period that the idea developed in the West, championed especially by these two important historical figures, that rational and empirical observations could be used to understand the structures of the universe. The skepticism that supported scientific thinking contributed a lot to the decline of the belief in witches and subsequently to the end of witch hunts in Europe (Butterfield, 1957; Shapin, 1996). Finally, there was the Age of Enlightenment (1687-1789), which was a period of unprecedented intellectual revolution. Philosophers like Voltaire and Immanuel Kant propounded and championed such concepts as rationality, individual rights, skepticism, and humanitarianism in the West, as against blind adherence to culture or tradition and authority, including religious institutions that had promoted witch trials. These were among the ideas that played the deciding role in the ending of belief in witches and witch hunts in Europe (Levack, 2016; Clark, 1997).

With the Enlightenment, the claims that witches could carry out all the fantastic activities attributed to them could not be rationally justified; the use of torture or other forms of punishment to extract confessions was regarded as inhuman, and progress required the elimination of superstitions such as the belief in witches. The Enlightenment era of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a rise in secular rationalism. The combination of secularism, whose basic tenet is the separation of Church and State, and rationalism, which appeals to reason rather than faith, became more widespread among European intellectuals and led to the end of the belief in diabolism and witchcraft (Clark, 1997; Lee, 2007; Levack, 2016).

Apart from purely rational arguments against the belief in witches and witch-hunts, science or empirical factors also played an important role. For instance, Europeans were gaining more experience with medical science and practice during this period. Among the accusations leveled against the so-called witches were some physical features on their bodies, such as moles, growths, and boils—the so-called “devil’s mark”; these were said to be signs of connections with the devil. But as doctors began to notice such features in otherwise well-respected and reputable members of society, they began to doubt such marks as evidence in identifying witches. For centuries, such physical manifestations had contributed immensely to the conviction of witches at trials all across Europe. The devil’s mark became clear evidence that someone was a witch, and surgeons were given the responsi-

bility of looking for such features in the accused. However, as doctors in Geneva, for example, began to observe that the so-called devil's mark could be noticed in reputable persons, they began to have doubts. Therefore, they argued that distinguishing the devil's mark from purely natural origin was difficult, if not impossible. According to Hannam (2003), "[T]his made a capital prosecution almost impossible and only one witch was executed after 1625" in Geneva (Hannam, 2003). The same attitude eventually spread to other European societies, even if not simultaneously.

Subsequently, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, there was a gradual redefinition of the concept of the devil. Some philosophers and theologians began to develop perspectives of the devil that tended to reduce his powers. From being a spiritual being that could control events and human beings, the devil was gradually conceived of as only a figure in Christianity whose power was limited to the ability to tempt people to sin. Thus, according to Levack (2016: p. 271), "the decline of witch-hunting was closely related to the decline of belief in the power of the Devil". As the position of the devil was reduced, the practice of diabolism and witchcraft became more of a religious matter than a legal matter. Consequently, people accused of witchcraft could be given penance by the clergy rather than being made to face state trials that could lead to capital punishment (Hannam, 2003). It was this new perspective on the powers of the devil, which diminished his powers, that eventually limited the phenomenon of witchcraft to only its religious dimension and removed it as a state matter, thereby contributing to the decline of the belief in witches and also to the end of witch-hunts in Europe.

What role can philosophy or rational thinking play in combating the belief in witchcraft in Africa? Today, more than in any other period in human history, knowledge has become globalized and easily accessible, and so Africa has no reason to remain the "Dark Continent". African philosophers and other scholars must rise, as their counterparts did in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to counter the belief in witchcraft in order to eliminate its terrible consequences in contemporary Africa, including ritual killings, child witch hunts, and other human rights abuses. It is inconceivable that in this 21st century, while most parts of the world are striving to harness the benefits of Artificial Intelligence and other scientific and technological breakthroughs, Africa is still wallowing in widespread belief in witchcraft and other superstitions. Moreover, it has been observed that the belief in witchcraft is a major obstacle to the scientific and technological development of the African continent (Leistner, 2014). For Nigeria, the challenge to scholars in combating contemporary belief in witchcraft has become very urgent, not only because of the abuse of innocent children but also because of the emerging dangerous implications of the belief in witchcraft for Nigeria's national security, as we have seen.

However, combating the belief in witchcraft in Nigeria and other African countries is not going to be easy. This is not only because this belief is firmly rooted in African traditional religions (Uchendu, Onogwu, & Agbo, 2024; Emeje & Awe,

2024) but also because the majority of present-day Christians in Africa, both lay people and clergy alike, like their counterparts during the era of witch hunts in Europe, are neck-deep in the belief in witchcraft. Try arguing with a member of the clergy in Nigeria, for example, against the belief in witches, and he or she will quote several passages in the Bible about their existence.

We saw above how the pastors of the evangelical churches in Akwa Ibom State were propagating this belief and also exploiting it through their preaching and the so-called deliverance sessions. However, it is not only the Evangelical or Pentecostal clerics who are exploiting the belief in witchcraft in Nigeria. So many members of the clergy of the more orthodox Christian denominations, including the Catholic and Anglican churches, have joined them. Again, it should not be forgotten that there is a lot of financial gain for those clerics who are believed to have the power to deliver people from the scourge of witches through exorcism!

It should also be noted that the level of illiteracy and the general poverty in Nigeria today provide fertile ground both for the belief in witches and in the powers of traditional witchdoctors and Christian clerics who claim to have powers to exorcise demons and witchcraft from people possessed. It should be reiterated, however, that the belief in witchcraft is not found only among the illiterate folks in Nigerian villages but also among the educated class, policy makers, and even among some security personnel. All this notwithstanding, it has become imperative for scholars to seriously begin to address the issue of witchcraft in Africa and all its consequences.

8. Conclusion

This paper is a critical discourse on the belief in witchcraft in contemporary Africa and its implications for human rights and national security, with Nigeria as a case study. The paper begins with the clarification of some key contested concepts, namely, witchcraft, witch, and ritual killing. It then notes the fact that the belief in witchcraft has been a universal phenomenon with serious consequences, of which historically, the case of European witch hunts has become a reference point. The paper argues that the main manifestations of the belief in witchcraft in Nigeria are in the form of ritual killings, recounting the so-called “Ototoko” case as a typical example. It further argues that the belief in witchcraft has serious implications for human rights and national security in contemporary Nigeria. For the illustration of human rights abuses as a consequence of the belief in witchcraft, the paper used the reported cases of child witch hunts in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. For the danger that the belief in witchcraft could pose for Nigeria’s national security, the paper cautioned on the thesis of the so-called “*Strategic Spiritual Intelligence*” that has been propagated, in lectures and seminars, especially at some Nigerian policy and security institutions. The approach adopted in the paper is to make the discussion on the subject of witchcraft as vivid as possible. The last section of the paper was an attempt to subject the belief in witchcraft to critical rational analysis. Here, the role that philosophy played in the Age of Enlightenment in Europe in

ending witch hunts and in its beliefs was highlighted. This last section is considered very crucial because if Nigeria and indeed the rest of Africa will liberate themselves from the belief in witchcraft, then African intellectuals must rise and begin to counter the unfounded and irrational fairy tales being attributed to witchcraft and witches by the generality of African people, and with the support of some Christian clergy men and women.

Finally, it should be noted that despite the fact that the Western World has put behind it the belief in witchcraft as a “shameful” aspect of its history, their scholars have continued to research and churn out publications on this phenomenon as a way of educating or guarding its present and future generations against such irrational beliefs, but not much is being done by African intellectuals in addressing the phenomenon of witchcraft in Africa. The time has come, therefore, for African philosophers and other scholars to engage themselves in rational inquiries into the apparent pervasive belief in witchcraft in Africa, even in the 21st century.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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