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**The Evolution of African Witchcraft as a Response to Misfortune: A
Qualitative Study of African Spirituality in Nairobi, Kenya and Black
Diasporic Communities in London, United Kingdom**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

York St John University

School of Humanities

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For

Adam, thank you for the music; Daniel, thank you for the words; and grandson Isaac. Thank you for the joy.

Abstract

The main purpose of this research is to counter some of the misunderstandings and stereotypes prevalent in Christian churches, popular culture and public services. In particular, it recognises that to understand African spirituality as a lived religion, it is necessary to listen to the voices of those who have first-hand experience with misfortune and have engaged with African spiritual healers and religious experts. The study employed qualitative research methods to gather insights from people for whom African religious spirituality is an important element in their daily lives. The research was undertaken in two settings, namely Nairobi and London, through semi-structured interviews, and background information was drawn from archives and reports. The findings were analysed using a multi-disciplinary approach that included religious studies, psychology, sociology, anthropology and literary sources. The main scholars who contributed to furthering the understanding of African indigenous belief and lived religion were Laurenti Magesa, Jomo Kenyatta, Graham Harvey and Robert Orsi. For the diasporic experience and process, the main scholars were Seán McLoughlin, E.M. Pye, Peggy Levitt and Robert Beckford. Throughout the study, the metaphor of 'the spiritual suitcase' was used to explore how and to what extent indigenous African beliefs have travelled to the United Kingdom (UK). Most importantly, the study included a discussion on whether notions of witchcraft as 'evil' are appropriate. The participants in this research represented a broad segment of society. They included church leaders, academics, ordained clergy, church laity, village leaders and those who work with asylum seekers. The key finding of this research is that African spiritual beliefs are still prominent in the lives of people with African heritage, with the majority believing in forces that can be manipulated for positive or negative ends. In many cases, people combine these African spiritual beliefs with Christian beliefs and practices, while for others there is a noticeable shift towards African-based spirituality.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Belief in Witchcraft

Tshishku Tshibangu (1993) stated that:

The African is profoundly, incurably a believer, a religious person, to him religion is not just a set of beliefs but a way of life, the basis of culture, identity and moral values. Religion is an essential part of the tradition that helps to promote both social stability and creative innovation. (p. 504)

Some years ago, I visited an elderly relative in a major London teaching hospital who had had surgery for a serious condition and was in recovery but still needed attention. During my visit, she inclined her head towards a bed on the other side of the room and whispered, "See that person there?" She indicated an elderly Black woman. "They had to call the police last night ... they had a snake in a box under their bed." To me, this sounded like the after-effects of the surgery, so I replied, "I am sure hospital staff would not allow that." "They didn't know ... they found it last night ... you know what it is ... it's Obeah. I don't want to stay here; I have asked to be moved to another ward."

This type of behaviour is not uncommon. In my career as a psychotherapist, working with ethnically diverse clients, I came across adults whose spiritual beliefs played a significant role in the therapeutic encounter, whether they identified as Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or a follower of a faith that falls outside the major religious categories, such as a belief in ancestors and spirits. The purpose of this anecdote is to provide an opening snapshot, an example of witchcraft and accusations of witchcraft at the grassroots level in the UK. The anecdote illustrates two things. First, it shows the response by the outsider,

my relative, that hints at a cultural behaviour being perceived as 'witchcraft'. Second, it shows the other patient's response to their own misfortune. The story suggests that old beliefs and practices are still being followed by Africans in the UK, despite efforts by the dominant monotheistic religions and modern scientific doctrine to deny or belittle their efficacy or to re-characterise them as undesirable practices. Whether this is true is one of the key questions underpinning this research.

A belief in Obeah has infused the psyche of most of the diverse ethnic groups that were transported to the Caribbean during the slavery period and were under the indentured labour system in the 19th century, as evidenced by the fact that my relative was not of African origin but East Indian. Obeah is one of many Africa-derived/Africa-centred religious traditions. It can be described as an indigenisation of African religious beliefs held by West African slaves, who were shipped to the Caribbean to work for plantation owners. Obeah retains many of the concepts of African religions. The term Obeah has been ascribed to different groups of people from West Africa; the Igbo people of Nigeria, for example, used the terms *Dibia* or *Obia* (meaning doctoring in Igbo). However, Ashanti and Akan peoples have also been cited to use names and phrases related to people who were healers, diviners and priests (Eltis and Richardson 1997; Rucker 2008). The concept of Obeah has been described in many ways. Stewart (2005 p.36) listed eight descriptions: 'Obeah as poison, evil magic/witchcraft, Obeah as a neutral mystical power, Obeah as ritual negotiation, Obeah as invisible and visible forces, divination, specialised religious knowledge' and, finally, as a religious institution with its own cosmology, philosophy and theology. For my elderly relative, this incident brought to the fore her fear and trepidation

at the thought of being so close to what were, to her, dark forces of magic, witchcraft and sorcery. For the purpose of this research, however, it encapsulated many of the themes I examined, such as how witchcraft, specifically that derived from African indigenous belief systems, is used to prevent harm from potential misfortune, is blamed for actual or perceived misfortune and is carried as an integral part of the religious imagination – the spiritual suitcase – of many individuals of African descent in the UK.

1.2 Key Terms and Definitions

1.2.1 The difficulty with definitions

In the introduction to a thesis, it is good practice, almost *de rigueur*, to define the terms that will be used throughout the work. This thesis, however, contains terms such as witchcraft, religion and misfortune. Just defining such terms has proven to be a rich seam for scholarship, even before one attempts to build further structures with these components. I am mindful of the fact that the very tools one may use (one's field of study, for instance) can have an impact on the object of study. Despite these concerns and the limitations of the terms, in the absence of better terminology, I will continue to use the terms, bearing in mind the caveat I expressed. Theoretical physicists in quantum mechanics are well versed in two dangers: the 'uncertainty principle' and the 'observer effect'. Theoretical physicist Karl Werner Heisenberg (1901–1976) stated in 1958 that 'we have to remember that what we observe is not nature, but nature exposed to our method of questioning' (Heisenberg 1989, p. 25). Heisenberg came to this conclusion as a result of understanding that an experiment to observe a thing can change the thing itself. Constraining religion within a pre-set definition, that is, by saying 'religion is', leaves one

open to a variant of the observer effect, namely the observer expectancy effect. Definitions of an object of study become bounded by the academic discipline through which the object is being studied. One might be tempted to consider that it is not possible to consider a behaviour as x because the discipline does not include or cover that kind of behaviour.

1.2.2 Religion

So, where does one turn for a definition of 'religion'? Incidentally, Heisenberg had a definition of religion. As a committed Lutheran, for him religion was 'the spiritual pattern of the community [connection between good, beautiful, and true] we call the religion of the community' (Seeger 1985, p. 232). It included culture with or without a god. Religion, he believed, 'is the foundation of ethics, ethics the prescription of life; it concerns ideals, not norms. It is also the foundation of trust'. In keeping with the observer expectancy effect, such a definition, therefore, might exclude activities regarded as 'norms' that are unrelated to ethics but that another perspective might consider to be religious.

Fundamental questions have long been asked about our understanding of the human person and our place in the world: 'What is the meaning of life?' 'What is my purpose?' 'Why do people suffer and die?' People look to religion to answer these questions and give meaning to their lives. In the UK, and London in particular, there are Christian churches, mosques, mandirs, temples and synagogues; places of worship where people go to seek hope and address misfortune and that reflect the ethnic diversity of the population. Alongside this is the increased exploration of 'spirituality' in the popular imagination. One need only browse the self-help section of any high street bookshop to

find a plethora of books inciting one to follow a Buddhist, yogic or mindfulness path to true happiness and fulfilment.

To further complicate the search for this phenomenon called religion, there is a distinction between internalised religion and religion practiced externally in people's everyday lives. In addition, religion is political and essentially has as much authority in the hands of governments as established churches. Shakman Hurd (2015, p. 8) provided a broad-brush categorisation of religion, constructing a tripartite separation of outward manifestations: 'expert religion', 'lived religion' and 'governed religion'. Expert religion consists of those facets that are generated by experts (such as academics and theologians) that might be considered 'policy relevant'. Lived religion is constructed from what people believe and practice, which may or may not have any bearing on what policymakers believe religion to be. Governed religion is religion as perceived by those with the power to make policy, whether they be in states, religious hierarchies or supra-national conglomerations of power. Shakman Hurd (2015) offered the European Union as an example of such conglomerations. These distinctions emerged predominantly out of religion viewed from the perspective of political science. The usefulness of this portrayal of religion must be seen in that context. However, the description of lived religion was useful for this research. For example, when people say they are Christian, Hindu or Jewish, they are declaring to the world, and the world assumes, that they follow a set of rules and conditions as laid down in their respective sacred texts and other doctrinal commentaries. Thus, they include themselves in a community of people who in turn recognise and confirm their belief by a process of reciprocal acknowledgment and

inclusion. The outward manifestation of religion, what can be seen, is evidenced in the religious practices of its followers. Whether this is taking the body and blood of Jesus in communion, the performing of a Puja to Krishna or Shiva, or living by the Mitzvoth, these outward manifestations are regarded as markers to identify a person with a particular faith by the individual themselves and by others.

In my search for a useful definition within the halls of academia, I came to recognise that a unified definition of religion does not exist and that the definitions of religion are as numerous as the different approaches to the study of the phenomenon. Referring to James H. Leuba's list of the fifty definitions of religion, J.Z. Smith (1998, pp. 281–282) argued that 'The moral of Leuba is not that religion cannot be defined, but that it can be defined, with greater or lesser success, more than fifty ways'. This leaves us with religion as a scholarly term to use as we will; thus, whether it is a theological or anthropological study, it becomes a

generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as 'language' plays in linguistics or 'culture' plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon (Smith 1998 pp.281-282)

Any attempt to consider that religion has a single definition that can be applied universally to any set of practices or beliefs is unrealistic and counterproductive, as it endeavours to apply itself to billions of individual lives in diverse environments and circumstances, each with unique thought processes. Scholars have proposed defining characteristics and have argued about the validity, relevance or usefulness of a given characteristic proposed by another scholar. This was discussed by Brian K. Smith (1998)

in his essay *Questioning Authority*. Clearly, perspective becomes pertinent to the argument, but some scholars tried to gain a meta-perspective. For example, Smith sought to make the word 'define' fluid. Writing about Hinduism, he argued that to define a thing is not necessarily to have it set in stone but to recognise it has fluidity and can evolve.

I would like to echo Heisenberg's maxim (Section 1.2.1) that what we observe is exposed to our method of questioning. Narayanan (2000), Orsi (2005), Burgess (2008) and Harvey (2013) argued that to study religion, the researcher must understand the 'real world' (Harvey 2013, p. 206). When studying a person's beliefs, thoughts and actions, whether these are considered to be religious thoughts and actions greatly depends on the researcher's criteria to determine what is or is not within the category of religion. A fine example of this was described by Narayanan (2000, pp. 762–774), who stated that what occupies Indians are music, films, dance and cooking certain foods for auspicious occasions and that these activities, these experiences, speak for Hinduism. He invited consideration of the 'on the ground picture', that is, the ordinary, the popular and the everyday lived experiences of Hindus, to reflect the diversity inherent to Hindu life, which is so often pushed or 'removed' as representative of 'Hinduism'.

I offer the following illustration. While in Kenya, I learnt that many of the research participants hold a belief that when Indian shopkeepers give them their change, if the picture of the president on the bank notes is pointed away from them, they will not have good luck. One might look at this belief and any resultant actions intended to negate the potential impact and ask, 'Is this religious behaviour?' Some may argue that it is not

because they have a narrow set of criteria and simply classify this as superstitious behaviour.

In this study, to make that determination, I followed the example of authors such as Graham Harvey (2013), who set his observations about the study of religion in the real world and asserted that 'religion is diffused throughout everything people do. It is integral to the everyday human encounters in a multispecies material relational world' (p. 199). This study found that for people in Nairobi and London, beliefs about African witchcraft, actions as a result of those beliefs and the subsequent real-world consequences are as much religious behaviours as attending mass or believing in the resurrection of Jesus. These are beliefs about how the world works, how the universe is organised and the right behaviours to get to where one needs to be. That destination can be taken to mean a better place in this world or the next within the belief system of the person who is taking the actions. It encompasses what Harvey (2013) suggested, as it is performative, material, relational and in the real world. Belief in witchcraft is internal; it includes a state of being as well as a practice. It is relational in that it is not just about a single person; it concerns whole communities. It is internal in the way people believe certain things about how witchcraft affects the way the world works. It is exteriorised in the actions that are performed. It is relational because of the impact African people expect it to have on others in their own family, their community and the world around them.

We are faced, therefore, with a 'shamble'. In his books, fantasy writer Terry Pratchett (2004, 2011, 2016) created a magical world in which witches exist and are seen as either a blessing, an evil or just 'interfering old baggages' by the people inhabiting that world.

The witches are capable of creating a 'shamble'; a construction of things they happen to have in their pockets. These items could be anything: a piece of paper, twigs, stones, an interesting seedpod, string or a piece of thread. Out of such items, they create devices that allow them to see disturbances in the flow of magic. In the books, there is no set idea of what a shamble should be made of. The point is that the items themselves are inconsequential and have no direct significance. They act as convenient foci for the witch's ability to see events. In this thesis, it is my goal to bring the definitions of the important terms that arose from this research to the reader as items in a shamble. The final shamble consists of the beliefs and actions that shine through from the everyday lived experiences of the people and groups I encountered in Africa, specifically in Kenya, where this study started, and in London, where it culminated.

1.2.3 Religious imagination

The words "And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music" were printed on a card that was given to me by a former therapy client and symbolised the challenges of understanding another person's inner experience. This served as a good starting point for my discussion of the term religious imagination, which I use extensively in this work. To describe how it travels with people, I have coined the phrase 'spiritual suitcase'. It is important that the reader understands exactly what I mean by this concept and how I arrived at its meaning. It is a term that encapsulates all the factors that were found to determine how the respondents see the world and their place in it. It goes beyond simple religious belief in a single doctrine. It is the store of all that a person 'knows' about how the world works – within a moral or

spiritual context – from lived experience and knowledge gathered from numerous sources (for example, family and community values; beliefs and practices; transgenerational memories; religious instruction; and social, economic and political conditions) and is refined as they live their lives. Chapters 2 and 3 explore the principal elements that are likely to have shaped the lives of the research participants in Kenya. Chapters 4 and 5 bring that forward to environments in which the religious imagination of the respondents in the UK is subject to different pressures. In the discussion on religious imagination, I mix elements of psychology and religion from Western and African sources and argue for an alternative vision of the place of witchcraft as part of a religious and spiritual belief system.

The interest in human imagination spreads a wide net that covers all aspects of the human person and the world they inhabit. Albert D'Souza (2005, pp. 21–29), citing Plato, Spinoza and Hegel, noted their 'preference for rational order, coherence and system', which led to a mostly negative valuation of images and imagination. It was necessary for these philosophers to see 'conformity to basic logical rules' in order to accept images as anything other than a 'lower' order of being less 'real' and 'less rational than ideas and rational statements'. Imagination was regarded as something unpleasant, negatively influencing rules of order and giving way to chaos. To clarify his use of the terms image and imagination, D'Souza (2005) described image as 'any immediate datum of human awareness, images are data – literally things given ... pictures flashed upon the screen of the mind' (p. 22). He then described sense-data, images such as colour and sounds, as the 'simplest and most familiar forms of images' (D'Souza 2005, p. 22), acknowledging that

symbols are equally significant and noting that almost all symbols are weighted with emotions. D'Souza, through references to both St Augustine (354–430 CE) and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939 CE), seemed to attempt to unify the ideas of the saint and the psychoanalyst. He approached religious reflection and scientific psychoanalytic investigation to map out the spiritual and psychological process for the existence and constituent parts of imagination. D'Souza (2005) cited St Augustine's phrase for imagination as

the place of images ... the mind's capacity for images' using the idiom of 'memory as a place stored with feelings, tastes, sounds', entering the body through the means of touch, ears, and mouth. Images are stored in a temporal multiplex of conscious and unconscious real time and real-life experiences which are consciously accessed or that reside ever ready to rush to the fore and offer themselves up or yet others that abide in the 'darkest recesses of memory' and have to be lured 'out of its secret cell'. (p. 24)

D'Souza (2005) included transcendence and creativity as traits of the human mind to go above and beyond and located them as aspects of imagination. Images are never predictable or tied into context of experience; rather, 'they exhibit in their actual occurrence and behaviour a peculiar kind of spontaneity' (p. 27). Images are therefore seldom wholly under human control. They come and go like the tide, independent of desires, suggesting an autonomy and function outside of will.

This dovetails into the analytic ideas of Sigmund Freud's theories of the self and ego. It has been a popular perception that Sigmund Freud and his contemporary C. G. Jung (1875–1961) were the progenitors of the scientific study of religion, the role of religion in people's lives and the impact its rituals, totems, dogma and praxis have on the psyche.

D'Souza (2005 p.29) asserts that the development of the self toward maturity progresses 'in the direction of its own unified relation to the world, but inward subjectivity continues and deepens ... frustration and repression force the development of a deep, subconscious or subliminal area of selfhood'. This subjective imagination is identified as images not in direct relation to the objective world; they are unpredictable and spontaneous, and they are the dreams, daydreams and images of free association. We could say that the self quarantines those images that are not acceptable deep into the subconscious (to minimise the impact on conscious processing), 'where they live a buried life, anonymous but powerful in the life of personality' (D'Souza 2005, p. 28).

However, this attempt by D'Souza to combine the spiritual and scientific realms of the exploration of the mind does not leave adequate space for the interpretive element of imagination. If we regard interpretation as creative imagination in action, then that capacity to create can be admitted not only as another aspect of imagination but also as a quality of self or personhood. The interpretive element is one that is evident in the acculturation of Christianity and African indigenous beliefs. By consciously focusing on reshaping the interpretation of images, ideas, space, time and thought processes, people's worldviews become like jigsaw puzzles: people look for pieces of the puzzle that fit together, allowing them to arrive at a coherent and consistent picture of the world around them. As Warnock (1976, pp. 30–31) suggested, the process allows for a critical factor that delivers a psychological pathway to recognition of the familiar in what is an unfamiliar world, thereby facilitating people's ability to live everyday lives. Warnock's view was mainly founded on the Western ideas and philosophies of Kant (1724–1804),

Hume (1711–1776) and poets and thinkers such as Coleridge (1772–1834) and Wordsworth (1771–1850). Warnock (1976) argued that the ‘role of imagination is an essential element in both awareness of the world and our attaching value to it’. Furthermore, imagination has the power to make order out of the confusion of sense experience. In the context of this study, interpretive religious imagination secures a spiritual coherence. Yet, it must be remembered that this is a continuous process rather than a static state, thus enabling adaptation of the worldview as a person experiences new environments and challenges to their worldview.

What relevance does this have when we seek to apply this to an African spiritual worldview coping with an unfamiliar environment, given that much of the mentioned body of research is largely predicated on Western Christian foundations? The answer is that it is important to understand religious imagination as it is applied to African religious beliefs because it links the awareness of African people with the reality of Christianity as it appeared in their lives and reorganised the world around them. This clash is exemplified by the approach of some Christian missionaries described in the work of V.Y. Mudimbe (1994, p. 105). He provided a detailed account of what he identified as the ‘domestication and conflict of memories’ through which space, time and transparency of consciousness become essential parts of the plan for domestication. This idea and other influences are discussed in more detail in Section 2.2.

The acculturation of Africans to Christianity as a force in everyday life required a psychological and social shift that resulted in a struggle to incorporate the often vast differences between the Western view of the world and African cosmology. Yet, there

remains an African spiritual worldview wherein misfortune; practical matters of disease, pain and suffering, and discord; and indigenous wisdom and methods continue to be relevant in modern life. It is important to recognise this if we are to accept the role witchcraft plays in the lives of the research participants in Africa and the extent to which indigenous African spirituality is present in the religious imagination of the participants who reside in diaspora. There is a growing trend towards awareness of African ways of knowing and the African worldview within the parts of Western society that seek to adapt existing policies and procedures to address issues concerning African people in diaspora. This study is my contribution to that trend.

The adage at the beginning of this section can be interpreted in different ways. The music might be an idea, faith or a desire; essentially, it describes something that moves people. Those who dance are responding to that stimulus. Those who observe are untouched by what they cannot hear; thus, they proceed to dismiss those who respond to it as insane. Both the early missions in Africa and some psychological approaches in the UK could be said to have responded to what they observed, damning those who held a belief in and practised witchcraft because they did not hear the music.

1.2.4 Misfortune

Misfortune is a notion that requires some explanation within the context of this thesis. I use the phrase to characterise universal human events like untimely death, disease, accidents, poverty, infertility and miscarriages, and failure to achieve life goals. The above list is not exhaustive since it is those who suffer who identify the misfortune. Because of its primary focus on survival, much of African religion is concerned with

securing good fortune and treating tragedy. Concepts linked to the roots of misfortune fill African religious philosophy with a fundamental and profound ambiguity. While spiritual entities support life, they are also the source of many tragedies and maladies.

Magesa (2013 pp91-92) tells us that misfortune is a disharmony in the relationship that exists between a people and the spiritual entities or is created by the evil spells, moral conflicts or malevolent spirits or witchcraft. If the ancestors' commands are rejected, they deliver disorder and misfortune - bodily and mental disease - as punishment or warnings to change one's behaviour. The course taken to resolve misfortune and balance lies with the religious expert, a diviner or Waganga who reveals the cause and actions necessary for resolution and rebalance.

Lorna Marshal (1961 p.231), writing about the !Kung tribe of the Kalahari, attempts to describe the customs that exist in the clan-based society of the Bushmen in the Nyae Nyae region of South Africa which 'help them to avoid situations that are likely to arouse ill will and hostility among individuals within and between bands'. She continues by highlighting several customs as being prominent in this enterprise: giving meat and gifts, good manners, borrowing and lending and not stealing. She then addresses how the prospect of killing and disharmony is to be avoided at all costs; that "their desire to avoid both hostility and rejection leads them to conform in a high degree to the unspoken social law" (p.232). This form of behaviour is by no means unique to the !Kung. The Azande, as described by Evans-Pritchard (1976); the Dinka, Leinhardt (1961) cited in Douglas (1966); and the Ndembu, Turner (1967), are but a few of the communities whose societies are ordered in this way.

Manifestations of social conformity within groups ensures social cohesion and minimises bad feelings and resentments, but what happens if a person does not fit in with the social, religious or behavioural norms of a group or community? In order to survive in any coherent form, the community must address the ripples created by the pebble in the pond that is the non-conformist. This involves perceiving and recognising the elements of misfortune that are created by that person. The extent to which a person identified as deviant has some power over others must be understood in order to seek appropriate remedy or closure. My case studies show how identification of the non-conformist as witch or sorcerer, as evildoer, or as just inherently flawed helps communities achieve these remedies or closure, but also how those remedies impact the non-conformist. Mary Douglas (1966 p.113) expresses it thus: 'what concerns people is the here and now, how to organise other people and oneself, to control the turbulent youths, the disgruntled neighbours, maintain authority or how to justify it'. Is there something inherent in human beings which, if repressed, finds expression as a reaction to the Other and to the group? On the other hand, are the elements that are identified by the group the real cause of misfortune or just a convenient component in a much broader tapestry of religious belief and social norms? René Girard (1972; p4) writes, 'Society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a "sacrificial" victim, that violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect'.

All the above relates to the maintenance of harmonious internal social cohesion, of the mitigation of internal stresses and to promote the health and wellbeing of the community

and its individuals. But what happens to groups such as these when they are faced with external pressures far beyond their ability to mitigate?

The San people, also known as Bushmen or Basawara, are members of various indigenous hunter-gatherer groups whose ancestral lands traverse Namibia and Botswana's central Kalahari Reserve. Due to waves of immigration by agro-pastoralists, European immigration, governments selling off land to foreign investors for diamond mining and tourism, the lives of the San people have been disrupted to their extreme detriment. According to reports by organisations such as Survival and Survival International¹, the San people have been forcibly relocated, prevented from hunting, their water supplies stopped, and have faced ethnic discrimination and forced settlement into camps where many of the people suffer with depression, HIV/AIDs and alcoholism. Here we can see that misfortune is no longer something that may exist within the community or an individual but has been imposed by entities and forces unknown to them. This, therefore, requires an adaptive response commensurate with these new sources of misfortune. The people have not lost their desire to be back on their ancestral lands and are working with the international community and organisations such as Survival and other NGOs. They take all the practical steps one might expect them to take (recourse to law, press campaigns to raise popular support for their plight etc.); however, their approach does not contradict any religious belief vis-à-vis situations outside of their communities. They do not abandon their time-honoured rituals for dealing with misfortune, such as the

¹ <https://www.survivalinternational.org/news/2128>: last accessed 27/05/23

healing dance. Both these and more modern methods are co-opted in the search for a return to a healthier community and way of life. The San people thus demonstrate understanding of the social inequities brought about as a result of global and economic movement.

In my thesis I examine whether this pragmatic approach to external misfortune is replicated in my locations of study and whether witchcraft is part of the causes of such misfortune. I show how Africans use their beliefs (which include the phenomenon of African witchcraft) to account for such events as illnesses and accidents. I provide examples of the methodologies employed in resolving or mitigating the impacts of such misfortune, the processes involved in identifying the causes of misfortune within the varied religious practices in Africa and the ways they manifest. I identify in those examples what is at stake for the group if a person is not behaving in an acceptable way or behaving in a way that brings harm to others.

1.2.5 Shaping 'witchcraft'

Witchcraft is understood in different ways, both by the communities themselves and by the academics who study them. Much relies on local contexts when conceptualisations of witchcraft are created. A glance at the past shows that the subject of witchcraft has been studied and subsequently dissevered among anthropologists, sociologists, theologians, ethnographers and psychologists. Yet somehow, in spite of this, common thought still holds the almost syncretistic categorisation that all these beliefs and practices, in all their diversity, are themselves manifestations of misfortune through wrongdoing and are evil. In the West, when one thinks of witches, two images usually

spring to mind. The first is the popular image of the wicked witch as established in the Walt Disney film *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). In this rendition, the image of the wicked witch is a woman who has green skin and dresses in black, flies on a broomstick and cackles as she tries to defeat the heroine. The other image that comes to mind is much less popular; in fact, it is one that is less comfortable to focus on. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (c. 1603–1607), the witches are three women who prophesy Macbeth's success and downfall. In her article, Carol Atherton (2017), using form, context and language, analysed the character of the witches and showed how various productions of the play in modern times offer up interpretations of the witches' appearance and demeanour in films and plays. She showed how the witches were portrayed as evil, 'unholy' and grotesque. Atherton's examination enables us to grasp the depth and breadth of the views about witches and their activities that were commonly held by people in Britain during that time. The relevance for us is that in the analyses of the three witches, it is made clear that they were responsible for every terrible thing that happened, from illness and death to crop failure and nightmares. Witches were believed to be in league with the Devil and had the power to affect the weather. It was those who lived on the periphery, who 'were old, poor and unprotected, who were therefore easy to blame for the ills of the times' (n.p.) and who were convicted and tortured.

This image comes from a period in European history that most would rather forget: the Middle Ages, when witch trials swept through Europe. If one is to believe anything from [*Malleus Maleficarum*](#), produced between 1485 and 1486 and used as the handbook for capturing and prosecuting witches, it would be that the witches were mostly midwives,

who were knowledgeable in the use of herbs and medical procedures that were not approved by the Church. The witches were also the men and women who followed pagan religions that threatened to dilute the control of the Catholic Church among the peasantry (Broedel 2003).

It is clear how the dominating discourses, whether in academia or the wider world, have led to the perception of witchcraft as evil. Yet, Wyatt MacGaffey (in Geschiere 1997, p. viii) called for a liberation from the moralising terminology of 'witchcraft' and 'sorcery' to better understand the variety of concepts involved in the phenomenon: 'indeed African beliefs in the occult are highly varied and may have nothing more in common than the word "witchcraft" applied to them by the English speaker'. Witchcraft's history is tied in with the cultural psyche of many peoples across the globe. On the African continent, the perspective on it could be said to parallel the described European situation in many ways, but this can only be so when viewed from the outside. The similarities end when one views witchcraft from an African perspective. From this viewpoint, one can see that it is more nuanced, diverse and framed around particular communities and within particular times. This study focuses on whether the transplantation of African witchcraft into diasporic communities in the UK has triggered an evolution outside its indigenous roots. Notions of witchcraft in the host UK population may have been introduced to the popular psyche through their own European past and the portrayal in the media, but witchcraft itself is firmly located in the present. Therefore, loose categorisations of these notions as witchcraft based on a single, countervailing perspective, particularly a politically and

culturally powerful one such as the Christian view, are futile at best and damaging at worst, especially when prefixed with the word 'African'.

1.2.6 What does it mean to be 'African'?

The exploration into the belief in and practice of witchcraft is fraught with the mutability of terminology, perspectives and language, caused in part by the approaches that various academic disciplines use to illuminate and frame the object. Indeed, what do we mean when we use the term 'African'? Does it have any usefulness other than to point to an area on the map of the world? We need to analyse the term African and peel back the layers of meaning that it carries for those who are so identified. For some (e.g. Magesa 2013), the term African is no more than an imposition and is essentialised and very problematic. In conversations I have had with several people over the years, sentiments such as the one from a research participant, Neil (not his real name), interviewed in London, have been expressed:

I do not identify myself as African. I tend to see myself first of all as a *Runyankole*-speaking person! But then, of course, one has to work with what seems acceptable, to an extent. So, yes, I am a *Munyankole*–Ugandan African.

Expressing how he sees himself, this participant self-identified by placing his Bantu language, *Runyankole*, as the primary signifier. However, by pointing to 'African' as 'acceptable', he admitted an external overlay that also frames his identity and lends weight to a recognisable taxonomy. While he declared his allegiance, defining himself in a way that reflects his own view of himself and his identity, his connectedness to a culture

and a place, his statement simultaneously shows that externally imposed definitions such as African have limited value at the personal level.

Such a determination has a direct bearing on the usefulness of official categorisations such as those that arose in post-apartheid South Africa. Adam Ashforth (2005, p. xix) showed how official attempts to impose social order divided the population into four groups, namely, 'Black, Coloured, Indian and White'. These groups changed and later re-categorised as the regime went into decline. Different groups such as the Zulu and Xhosa people were then collectively categorised as Black. Today, in reclaiming their indigenous roots, many people prefer the term African. This leads us to consider another term: indigeneity. Indigeneity is a contested concept described by Francesca Merlan (2009, p. 303) and others as a term that surrounds particular collectives of people ('and presupposes a sphere of commonality') who establish themselves as indigenous to pursue international attention and obtain political and economic support. Indeed, the category 'indigenous people' was recognised by the United Nations (UN) in 2007. Merlan pointed out that 'as a designation, indigenous distinguishes those who are "native" from their "others" in specific locales and with varying scope' (p. 303). In his study of the Maasai in Tanzania, Jim Igoe (2006, p. 399) reflected on the process of people forming themselves into groups to be recognised and gain support (as in the case of the Maasai and their struggles to retain their land rights and maintain their way of life). Igoe's study made the point that the category indigenous reflects the 'convergence of existing identity categories within global structures of development and governance'. The idea that being native to a particular place means that is who one is disregards several other elements

that contribute to any defining of identity and definition of African. These include race, culture, language, geography, ethnicity, colour, colonial encounters, nation states and global social, political and economic organisations. Identities are not preserved or protected from outside influences or maintained by culture or traditions but reflect a convergence of many of these elements. In this thesis, whenever a place is referred to as Africa, it refers to those areas of the map regarded as Sub-Saharan. Wherever in this text an encounter, exchange or conversation with a respondent is related, African will only be used as a description if the respondent so self-identifies. In Section 1.3, the juxtaposition of African and witchcraft is discussed.

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Discourses on African witchcraft

Section 1.2 laid out some of the difficulties surrounding clear definitions of the terms African and witchcraft. The composite term 'African witchcraft' is equally contentious in its definition. The study of African witchcraft has seen renewed interest in the 21st century in terms of its functioning in areas of finance, politics and religion. Ranger (2007, p. 275) identified a wide range of different aspects that can be lumped under the witchcraft rubric or, to use his term, 'the occult'. He listed several authors whose works featured the occult as either the cause of or a corrective to a diverse range of societal, economic and political ills across Africa.

Sociological, anthropological and theological disciplines that are devoted to research on religious institutions, beliefs and behaviours extend into the analysis of power dynamics, kinship relations, economics and developmental perspectives across the African

continent (Brain 1982; Ciekawy 1989; Ellis 2011). In addition, these approaches are used to investigate other areas, such as the role of women in witchcraft accusations (Boddy 1989; Miencha 2014), the laws governing the practice of witchcraft and the judiciary (Luongo 2011) and the issue of witchcraft and land tenure and development (Smith 2008). Manala (2004) explored witchcraft as a cause of religious disruption among the congregations of African Christians in South Africa. There is a broad spectrum of scholarship on witchcraft that considers the effects and use of witchcraft in terms of the legacy of colonialism, colonial judicial systems and politics (Tignor 1976; Elkins 2005; Luongo 2011). Finally, the discussion of its contribution to health and wellbeing cannot be omitted. MacGaffey (1986, 1970) and Flint (2008) demonstrated that across ethnic groups, herbal remedies, witchcraft and intercession of spiritual entities form a symbiosis that creates a pathway for healing. This study aims to validate whether this symbiosis pertains to the African diaspora in London.

Clearly, views that offer to decode African witchcraft from both etic and emic positions abound, interpreted through the lens of each researcher's academic discipline or preferred theory of human behaviour (McCutcheon 1999, p. 21). In this thesis, the term African witchcraft is used to describe what I consider to be beliefs, rituals and sets of practices verbally passed down from generation to generation, assimilated and embedded into the psyche, inculcated via community engagement or social conventions and continually reshaped by external factors. Thus, it evolves or is redesigned to predict, control and explain (a triadic composition proposed by Robin Horton [1975]) the environmental, social and political issues faced by people from the African continent.

Horton (1971) postulated that the conversion of the African people to Christianity, and by implication other monotheistic belief systems, can be explained as part of a natural response to socio-economic change, a process that John and Jean Comaroff (1991) identified as 'modernisation' (p. 249). Horton (1971) asserted that there is continuity between past belief systems and the new Christianity. He contended that this continuity is important to both pre-Christian belief and convert-adopted Christianity and is represented by the function of religion as explanation, prediction and control, hereafter referred to as EPC (Horton 1971, p. 95). As a result of the modifications, according to Horton, adherents do not discard outdated EPC systems when faced with the issue of social change; rather, they reshape and adapt them so that an acceptable degree of EPC is maintained. In essence, Horton's argument leads to the conclusion that aspects of religious growth in Africa are influenced by traditional cosmology's long-lasting effect and perpetual renewal in the face of social change. Religions such as Islam and Christianity are reduced to being catalysts for changes that were already 'in the air' (Horton 1971, p. 104). Horton's theory does have its detractors (Ifeka-Moller 1974; Fisher 1973, 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993), who are centred in competing theories of conversion. While I do not share Hortons' ideology in its totality, his application of EPC can be applied to African witchcraft as a tool to address misfortune. Throughout this thesis, evidence of the application of EPC in the religious imagination of African and African-Caribbean communities in London will be provided.

It should be noted that I do not consider African witchcraft to be an unchanging homogeneous whole. To understand witchcraft, it is important to place it within the

context of the wider religious beliefs of African people and consider the diversity of peoples that occupy the same geographical locations, as well as those whose peregrinations take them across the various political and ethnic boundaries that exist within the continent of Africa.

1.3.2 Themes in the study of African witchcraft

This research primarily concerns the study of African witchcraft in the UK. However, the thesis includes significant data from modern-day respondents in Kenya. Several sections have been designed to illustrate the major influences on the religious imaginations of the respondents in both locations, aimed to discern if and how beliefs in and practices of African witchcraft may have undergone phenomenological or ontological differentiation as a side effect of diaspora. This encompasses several different themes. A thematic approach in grouping the literature has been used to emphasise the connections between the groups. The review focuses on certain themes within the study of African witchcraft that pertain to how it is viewed and that examine the underlying assumptions of those who view it.

1.3.2.1 *Eurocentric anthropology*

Anthropological and ethnographic studies conducted in the 20th century considered population diversity and its inevitable concomitant, cultural diversity and provided a useful and obvious point of ingress into the themes that had a bearing on this research.

Chronologically, one of the earliest anthropological studies of witchcraft in Africa was conducted by Edward. E. Evans-Pritchard among the Azande and Nuer peoples. In his book *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (1937), he wrote about their

belief in magic as certain aspects of life being controlled by mystical forces or supernatural powers. Evans-Pritchard clearly set the tone for later research, and his work is arguably the most quoted in this field. Mesaki (1995, pp. 162–164) stated that ‘E.E. Evans-Pritchard is regarded as the principal anthropologist who developed a general mode for analysing witchcraft’. In addition, Mesaki reinforced that Evans-Pritchard’s study was constructed to focus particularly on Azande culture and was not created as a one-size-fits all category for other African peoples who hold a belief in witchcraft.

Mary Douglas (1970, p. xii) also discussed the legacy of Evans-Pritchard and surveyed the impact of the approaches employed by anthropologists and historians. Douglas claimed that theories of witchcraft and its function in society were based on historians whose grounding was the witchcraft of 16th and 17th century Europe and Massachusetts. Douglas further stated that such theories informed the imagination with notions that witchcraft was ‘part of a cumulative process with frequently a violent and tragic climax ... as a scourge, a destructive belief liable to run away with reason’.

In this context, the method taken by anthropologists in the study of African witchcraft during the 20th century also led to errors. Subsequent ways of analysing the data fell short because, as part of the analysis, critical questioning of the assumptions the analysis was based on was absent, questions were controlled and instinctive inquisitiveness was curtailed. Accordingly, what remained were studies slanted towards a misrepresentation of African witchcraft as a destructive belief and as a form of control, not, as demonstrated throughout my research, a complex, subtle and fluid epistemology.

The influence of the built-in bias of European academia was further highlighted by J.D.Y. Peel (2000, p. 216). Writing about theories of conversion, he mused:

The concept of conversion is not without its difficulties: it is hard to use it comparatively without extending the theological or phenomenological assumptions of a Euro-Christian and Protestant background to historical and cultural settings where they do not apply.

Here, we see a path that can lead to a remodelling of the idea of witchcraft in pursuit of a treatise or some other agenda.

1.3.2.2 The view from Africa

It is fair to say that Evans-Pritchard's work served as the foundation of much of the scholarship on the subject. It should be recognised that the academic study and the accumulation of knowledge extends well beyond traditional Western universities. Furthermore, many underlying assumptions in academic metanarratives are being challenged as intrinsically racist, reflecting a colonial perspective or containing notions of the assumed superiority of Western thought. Peter Kankonde Bukasa (2015, p. 8) argued that it is time for academia to advance an 'ontologically relevant Africanist scholarship that gives a sympathetic theological reading of the African lived experience'. His paper contributed to the ongoing 'ontological turn' project in humanities studies. Bukasa (2015) used the phrase 'Evans-Pritchard's fetish' (p. 20) to show the work of Evans-Pritchard as not only influencing the study of African religion (commenting on the sheer volume of Evans-Pritchard citations in other works) but also creating an illusion of African witchcraft as a power and an agent – a thing in and of itself transcending the religious world view of African religion. Bukasa proposed that the debate should focus on 'whose knowledge is

legitimised, reproduced and for what purpose ... and what socio-political and cultural functions it plays' (p. 3). He looked at how witchcraft has been utilised as a broad brush by Africanist scholars to explain, understand and encompass 'people's existential anxieties and spiritual insecurities' and argued that a 'complex set of primal indigenous beliefs is ... oversimplified' (p. 23) and that witchcraft has become a crucible that contains an explanation of African concepts of evil.

The work of Bukasa illustrates both the historical and contemporary complications that abound when approaching the subject of witchcraft. However, is it the historical perspective that creates this oversimplification? After all, Evans-Pritchard spent time listening, talking and gathering information to construct a picture that reflected his understanding of witchcraft, one that demonstrates it was not superstitious nonsense as colonialists and missionaries thought. Despite this, from the viewpoint of Okot p'Bitek (2004), cited by Ludwig et al. (2004), Evans-Pritchard's work belongs to the category of early scholars who were not interested in the proper study of African societies and tended to 'perpetuate the superiority of western cultures over those of the colonised peoples' (p. 2).

Mbiti (1989) aligned with Okot p'Bitek (2004) and affirmed that all Africans raised within a traditional environment experience some form of magic, witchcraft and divination. Mbiti was vehement in his critique of the literature from European, American and colonial administrators who, he asserted, dismissed and degraded African cosmology and witchcraft through a failure to grasp the lived reality of African cosmology. I acknowledge that the existing literature has somewhat ameliorated this attitude to witchcraft

(Faulkner 2006; Beckford 2014; Bukasa 2015; Udelhoven 2015); however, further work and analysis is needed to address this distorted view of witchcraft. This research is part of that effort.

1.3.2.3 African witchcraft in diaspora

The contentions outlined in Section 1.3.2.2 are rooted in and apply to the literature on witchcraft as it exists in various parts of the African continent. The more popular authors – those who are the most quoted – offer a rich source of information for understanding the complex weave of socio-political and religious conditions that lead to accusations of witchcraft and explore the existence of the phenomenon within national boundaries in both rural and urban settings (Meyer 1992, 1999; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere and Roitman 1997; Hallen and Sodipo 1997; ter Haar 2007; Park, 2013). However, this research concerns the study of its manifestation in the UK as a specific example of the impact of diaspora. The existing literature is dominated by reports of witchcraft linked to child abuse and socio-economic outcomes, with only a passing mention of the role of African religious belief in such cases. Afe Adogame (2013, 2014, 2016) and Adogame and Shankar (2012) wrote extensively about the passage and the movement of African Christianity and religions from various regions into Europe.

Furthermore, the continuity and practice of witchcraft as a facet of African belief has been documented (Dawson 1987; Kirwen 1987; Mbiti 1989; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere and Roitman, J. 1997; Ogembo, J. 1997; ter Haar 2009; Stroeken 2012; Magesa 2014; Hassan 2015; Mbondo 2015). Ethnography, anthropology and the social sciences tapped into the sphere of African indigenous beliefs and were joined by theological

examinations. This increased the scholarship on the subject of witchcraft as it manifests within the diasporic movement of African people to Europe and how the passage of witchcraft belief is transported within the planting and growth of African-initiated and other Black-led churches. Through examination of transnationalism, transplantation and acculturation, it is possible to track the migration of not only African people but also what has been described as a religious transnationalism among African migrants and diaspora in London and the UK. The works of sociologists such as Peggy Levitt (2006), theologians such as Robert Beckford (2011, 2014) and theorists of diasporic studies (Pye 1969; Tölölyan 1996; Kenny 2013; Dufoix 2016) demonstrated how transplantation of spiritual and religious beliefs, with their associated cultural practices, automatically accompanies the displacement of people.

Each of these thematic approaches provides a potential framework into which studies of African witchcraft can be inserted. However, McLoughlin (2005) employed Hinnell's (1997, p. 1–2, cited by McLoughlin 2005) observation to remind us that 'scholars of migration and diaspora in other disciplines have tended to overlook the significance of religion' (p. 10). I contend that those who do not overlook it, those whose interest is in theology or the study of religions, see African witchcraft in a particular light: a combatant in a moral discourse. As Adedibu (2014) asserted, the perspective in the UK that witchcraft is evil remains. This study aims to provide a morally neutral analysis of the beliefs and practices associated with African witchcraft and how the people themselves weave them into their everyday lives following transplantation to the UK.

1.3.2.4 African witchcraft in the United Kingdom

The key research question is concerned with whether African witchcraft, having been transported, is the same in the UK. It questions whether the academic world has recognised and documented how the different conditions and misfortunes experienced by Africans in Africa and Africans in the UK have caused it to mutate, to metamorphose, as it is used by those to counteract the specific problems encountered in the new host nation (as per Ambiguity—the second principal aspect of transplantation [Pye 1969, p. 237]). This research examines the existing literature that informs the policies of social services, the judiciary and religious bodies about witchcraft in the UK. By so doing, it investigates how responses to witchcraft by authorities, state-run services and other establishment interests have been shaped.

I was concerned there might be limitations to applying studies based on an African context to a non-African context and was particularly interested in the consequences of this for African people in the UK. Ranger (2007) exemplified the dangers of this process. Two quotations from Terence Ranger offered potential lines of enquiry. In an article from 2007, he remarked on the ‘flood of recent books about witchcraft’ and cited the work of Luise White (n.d.) as part of a ‘boom time for the academic study of the occult in Africa’ (p. 275). Ranger’s paper is a comment on the use of the term occult. He gathered up several works (mostly produced in the first decade of the 21st century) to demonstrate how disparate themes emerge from the study of Africa and African religion and are ‘lumped’ under the rubric of the ‘occult’ (p. 276).

In another quotation from this polemic against the idea of aggregated occultism in child abuses where witchcraft is attached, Ranger (2007, p. 282) stressed:

[the] crucial importance of context; the crucial need to disaggregate; the significance of history. There is, of course, an important debate to be held about which history is relevant – that of particular African societies, of Britain, of colonialism, of the diaspora, or a combination of all four. But as an Africanist I would argue that the key things for Scotland Yard, or anyone else, to learn lie in Africa itself.

This sparked a debate about the use of the term occult, with responses from Gerrie ter Haar (ter Haar and Ellis 2009) and Birgit Meyer (2009). Ranger's article started with the response of British police to the incident of a torso (belonging to a boy who became known as 'Adam') found in the river Thames in London in 2001 and the processes they undertook to solve the case. The case received widespread coverage in the media, with sensational headlines. As Ranger (2007) reported, the investigation took an international turn. The police were informed by 'experts' that certain elements of the case revealed a link to African religion and that the boy had been sacrificed. Ranger argued that the police could have been enlightened, given the degree of scholarship on the subject, and would have found that the 'sheer bulk (of academic work) lends unwitting support to its assumptions ... and validates the notion that "Africa" and "the occult" go together' (p. 275). Ranger illustrated this case to evidence the amount of resources available; however, it was precisely this case and that of Victoria Climbié that led to the Secretary of State

calling for a public enquiry.² Police and social services seemed at a loss to understand and address the actions of the people involved, who were relatives and attended a church whose pastor was suspected of involvement but denied all knowledge of the actions of the accused (see section 1.3.2.4).

Ranger's use of this case shows that even the police, consummate professional investigators, can be misled by academic authority and speculation in the media. In raising the profile of the Aladura Church in diaspora, Afe Adogame (2004) joined Ranger in using the case of the body found in the Thames and the reported links to witchcraft rituals to demonstrate the media's reporting on the case. He highlighted how the media 'sensationalised' the case using language such as 'voodoo', 'black magic' and 'witchdoctor killing' (p. 512), which raised the public's apprehension of particular ethnic and religious groups.

The discussions surrounding the cases led to an increase in publications about witchcraft in the UK, with children branded as witches or child abuse cases linked to faith or belief as the central themes (La Fontaine 1998, 2016, 2013; Stobart 2006; Simon et al. 2012). However, as the report commissioned by the UK's Department for Education and produced by Simon et al. (2012, p. 13) found:

²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/273183/5730.pdf. Accessed 8/2/19.

Much of the literature presenting data on the incidence and/or characteristics of child abuse linked to faith or belief, tends to conflate cases of 'witchcraft' and 'spirit possession' and does not, therefore, clearly distinguish between them.

It has been an important function of this study to unpack the types of research that have been consulted and the narratives that have informed the production of what is understood and regarded today as African witchcraft in the UK.

Other works (Anane-Agyei, A. 2001; Tadam 2014) called for greater understanding of African religion and witchcraft with recommendations for health care professionals and service providers to understand the context within which witchcraft branding occurs. The recommendations included further research, educational frameworks for child protection and proposals for working with families. Within the wider sphere of social studies, the identification of the lack of consideration by professionals of the role of religious beliefs in affecting various aspects of family life has been highlighted (Gilligan 2009). The question here is: To what extent will reform and education provide an approach that balances the wider realm of diverse religious beliefs and practices that affect the everyday lives of Africans with the legal, moral and ethical frameworks in the UK? The work carried out by Africans Unite Against Child Abuse (Afruca) was cited in many of the publications as a source of information. However, in a discussion with the programme manager for Afruca, I asked what methods were used to convey to African individuals and families that rituals and long-held practices may be or may become unacceptable (face-to-face encounter; 16 May 2017). I was informed that (at that time) Afruca had not produced any written documentation concerning this aspect of their work and, as Simon et al. (2012, p. 8) noted, information produced by Afruca and other

organisations such as churches, the Child Protection Advisory Service, the Congolese Family Centre and the Victoria Climbié Foundation ... 'has limitations: it has not been robustly evaluated and should therefore be considered as 'practice wisdom''(p.22).

Nearly all the mentioned studies attempted to give a general view of the phenomenon of witchcraft. However, the perspectives are often arranged around how witchcraft is used to explain the difficulties that African families encounter, with the accusation of witchcraft and the belief in witchcraft seen as the problem. This, in turn, leads to the exclusion, expulsion, torture and abuse of the person or, in some cases, the children that are accused (La Fontaine 2016). Witches are described as bad people who have links to the spirit world and cause harm to others. It is accepted that witchcraft is complex and hard to explain and that the culture and traditions of African people lead to a failure to understand the social and legal conventions of the host nation (Tedam 2014); however, these narratives are limited, linked as they are to issues of witchcraft, child abuse and child protection, with many of the studies reliant on anthropological research carried out in Africa.

Over the last two decades, there have been shifts in the way witchcraft linked to spirit possession is researched within the mental health field (Littlewood and Lipsedge 1981; 1997; Littlewood 2004; McKenzie 2005). Although this research contributes to the knowledge for mental health practitioners who encounter those who believe they are possessed or cursed, it also considers anthropological and psychiatric studies that hitherto have been a major source of information and reference in psychiatric treatment of Black and ethnic minorities in the field of mental health in the UK. The work of

Littlewood (2004) introduced the question of possession in mental health and presented examples of possession states, demonic possession and trance from a variety of different cultures across the world. He aligned with I.M. Lewis (1970)³, in whose view women who experience possession states belong to cults of affliction – sects such as the *Zar*⁴ and *Saka*. In these communities, the women who have experienced possession provide the support and remedy for those afflicted by a spirit. In his commentary, Littlewood drew on Lewis's study and the notion that the women in trance and possession states use their experiences to disguise their need to assert authority in the asymmetrical power struggle that exists in patriarchal societies. In addition, he claimed that these women's group are analogous with Alcoholics Anonymous or 'other such contemporary women's therapy groups' (p. 9). By using these examples, Littlewood employed an effective platform to demonstrate how Western psychiatrists could approach people who present as being in a trance or possession state. However, at the same time, his conclusion leaned towards a reduction of trance and spirit possession as a 'women's issue', thus undermining the spiritual and religious elements of the experiences. I have two issues with Littlewood's (2004) paper. First, it is based on historical anthropological accounts. While historical accounts provide a valuable starting point for research into possession states, the works were often not only ill-informed but also framed in the language and culture of colonialism.⁵ Second, divorcing such experiences from the religio-spiritual context in

³ See p. 128 for a further discussion of Lewis's work.

⁴ See Boddy, J. (1989) *Wombs and alien spirits: Women, men, and the Zar cult in northern Sudan*. University of Wisconsin Press.

⁵ See Gordon, H.L. (1934).

which they are experienced may in fact reduce their efficacy when trying to understand what the experiences mean for those who experience them.

Littlewood (2004) also reflected on Janzen's (1978) study of the BaKongo people, who take a pragmatic approach to healing by utilising traditional healers, other herbalists and medical doctors. Littlewood (2004) drew attention to the use of traditional 'local healers' in London whose approach he described as 'idiosyncratic' and 'cobbled together from a number of local and Christian (or other major religious) idioms' (p. 9). He described the way possession is dealt with as including 'cajoling' on the one hand or 'brutally' expelling the spirit on the other. He stated that 'the treatment practised in Britain may be less confident and culturally validated' (p. 9).

The description of local healers as idiosyncratic notwithstanding, the contentious issue is whether these healers are also considered to be witchcraft practitioners or witchdoctors. Littlewood (2004) did not introduce evidence to support the failure or efficacy of their ministrations. Furthermore, Littlewood's seeming adoption of a top-down view crucially fails to consider how misfortune experienced by Africans in the UK drives them to the healers. His assertion, therefore, would appear to be another example of conflating different practices, as Ranger suggested. Littlewood's (2004) description of the use of local healers highlights the dangers of ignoring the patient's or their family's interpretation, as if only the interpretive framework of his chosen discipline is relevant or valid. It is further restricted in that it does not appear to seek to understand possession states within the broader context of African religions. It misses the opportunity to consider that for some people, the spirit possessing the person may be an ancestor. If this

is the case, the implications for the individual spread to encompass the wellbeing and everyday lives of both the immediate family and their wider cultural and religious community.

Turning to Africa to gain a deeper understanding presents both insights and dangers. Moreover, it obscures the many other reasons why Africans in the UK might turn to beliefs and practices that are seen as African witchcraft. There is a thriving culture and uptake of local healing in London, as well as healers advertising on the world wide web. Among Africans residing in London, there is a shift away from forms of Christian worship towards African spirituality (La Fontaine 2016). This seeking of traditional African spiritual healing is regarded as a reclamation of Africans' spiritual heritage (Y Adofo 2016), which is far from what Littlewood referred to as idiosyncratic. If it is accepted that there is overlap, as implied by Littlewood's comparison between the approach towards healing by the Bakongo people in Zaire and African people in the UK, then people who believe they are possessed would always seek out spiritual healers. However, what would the motive be to pursue spiritual healers, given the wealth of services available for treatment in London? The answer will vary from one person to another. It could be a lack of trust in the UK health system, the need to avoid officialdom or language difficulties. It could simply be a matter of choice for someone to seek a remedy that is appropriate to their own ethnicity, spirituality or social conventions. The research participants answered some of these questions. What is clear is that belief in traditional religion has not just travelled with Africans who now reside in the UK but is also supported and reinforced by the growing network of healers using practices derived from African belief systems.

There is ongoing, ground-breaking research being undertaken by Durham University into 'voice-hearing'. An interdisciplinary team employing both neuroscience and theology is examining the phenomenon of voice-hearing. They are asking such questions as: 'What do voices mean to people?' 'How are the experiences interpreted?' 'How should human experiences such as voice-hearing be studied?' Within the context of mental health, such a study will enable a greater understanding of the phenomenon and develop innovative ways of managing and treating voice-hearing. Furthermore, the project explores 'how ... voices can act as important social, cultural and political forces' (Durham University 2017). The aims of the research are to inform policies on mental health and reduce stigma and discrimination. However, the religious element of the research appears to centre on the experiences of people holding to a Judeo-Christian belief with experiences of hearing the voice of God. The experiences of African people who believe they are cursed and possessed by spirits from the spirit realm are not represented in the research.

1.4 Main Research Questions and Gap Analysis

It is clear that African witchcraft has been shaped by particular academic approaches and Eurocentric outlooks. The discussion in Section 1.3 illustrates how the object of study can be framed, almost delimited, by the concerns and agenda of the researcher. In the wider academic sphere of the study of witchcraft as a religious phenomenon, we should be mindful that existing narratives on African indigenous beliefs and practices are based on transcribed verbal accounts of traditions, open to being framed by the prevailing narratives of the periods in which they were recounted (Fadiman 1993). This is not to say that we can evade the origins of African beliefs as they are explored and recorded in

Africa, but there is a need to accept that what scholars write has implications beyond the writers' intentions, despite any claims to neutrality they might make for any given social, political or economic context (Coleman 2016).

In this research, the missteps that can be made by approaching the study of African religion and witchcraft without the necessary ontological element that considers the lived experiences of people who still hold to their indigenous religion have been taken into consideration. In effect, by carving out a study on witchcraft that does not refer to or consider the wider cosmological context in which the actions and behaviours being studied are enacted, or by applying external notions of good and evil to the actions people undertake, there is a danger of disallowing the use of pragmatic and meaningful coping strategies. This study aims to demonstrate that African witchcraft is a unique element of a much larger belief system.

Expanding on Bukasa's (2015) argument (Section 1.3), I examined whether taking ontology into consideration might lift witchcraft studies from anthropological and ethnographical interpretive frameworks, allowing 'scholars to take into account the lived worlds people inhabit and the correlating ways of being and knowing' (p. 9). I saw that these 'lived worlds' are not solely located on the continent of Africa, with all its associated socio-political and cultural variations. In consideration of African witchcraft elsewhere, in this case in the UK, I wanted to discover whether the use of studies about witchcraft conducted and concerned with an African situation in, for example, Ghana, constituted a useful and thorough template. Through interviews with the participants, it was observed that there is overlap in London, but there are also key differences. This refers to the

concerns that arise from living in a host nation and in a multi-cultural environment that influences how and in what context a belief in witchcraft may be expressed. African people living in London are conscious of their traditions and belief in the spirit realm but at the same time avoid any mention of such beliefs in encounters with their colleagues, religious leaders and medical professionals, and they certainly do not divulge such beliefs to their employers.

When I practised as a psychotherapist in London, I worked with a diverse client group who presented with a range of issues. In my work, I conducted research to both inform and update my practice, and as a matter of course I engaged with organisations that offer mental health services with a specialised leaning towards Black and minority ethnic clients, asylum seekers and refugees.⁶ These organisations highlight cases of people who felt they were possessed or cursed and who, under the purview of state services such as the NHS mental health system, were more often than not viewed as psychotic or schizophrenic. One British study (Littlewood and Lipsedge 1981) suggested that atypical syndromes among Black patients may be misdiagnosed as schizophrenia.

I came to believe it is necessary to achieve a balanced view that accommodates how African people in diaspora maintain long-held beliefs (which predate any Christian or Muslim overlay) and continue to live with and practice rituals that are intended to enable good fortune and ward off misfortune in everyday life. The key objective should be to find

⁶ The impact of such organisations is discussed in Section 4.5.3.

the mechanisms that allow Africans in diaspora in the UK to do so, should they so choose, without infringing secular law, while remaining consistent with a Christian overlay and at the same time making use of public service provisions that are rooted in yet another worldview. That balanced perspective may be found by considering the lived experience of those whose notions of causality include a belief in witchcraft so that their own attempts to achieve wellbeing are not thwarted. Religion and culture are powerful influencers of behaviour and attitudes, and diaspora juxtaposes conflicting ideas and values. What one culture considers to be problematic mental health issues may not be considered in the same fashion by another culture. The stigma associated with these behaviours being perceived as illness can result in low uptake of services by certain groups.

Religion can have a powerful influence on choices and decisions when seeking help (and even whether one seeks help). As a result, some service providers have established projects that work with particular minority groups. Is this the way forward, or should all services be able to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population in the UK? Authors such as Geschiere (1997), Jones (2004), Karagiannis and Schiller (2008) and ter Haar (2009), as well as aspects of neuro-scientific research, examined the role of the church and belief in everyday life. The work of Jean La Fontaine (1998, 2009, 2016) and charities such as Inform locate the existence and impact of belief in witchcraft and possession in Europe and the UK. Agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) encourage the consideration of religious beliefs and witchcraft

accusations for aid workers in refugee camps (Powles and Deakin 2012; Goodall 2015).⁷

There are resources that relate to faith and belief provided by initiatives such as Project Violet (set up by the Metropolitan Police as a response to abuse); Afruca, a faith-based organisation that works on behalf of adults and children from Africa who have been trafficked or coerced by the use of witchcraft and magic or through manipulation of a belief in witchcraft; and Stop Child Witch Accusations, which is part of a coalition that includes Thirtyone:eight (formerly the Independent Churches Child Protection Advisory Service). Different churches have different responses when accused of being involved in abuse incidents. According to Rev Joel Edwards, General Director of The Evangelical Alliance UK in 2005, churches engaging in this type of outreach ought to be meticulous and open. They must acknowledge the exorcism's inherent wickedness, which the church and society find upsetting, and be sympathetic of people's emotional and spiritual needs. In 2006, Jesus House for All Nations Flagship Church of the African derived Pentecostal Redeemed Christian Church of God hosted a symposium attended by representatives from the African Caribbean Evangelical Alliance, the Metropolitan Police, the Church Mission Society, and the director of the Royal African Society. This number and variety of churches attests to the power of what has been described as the peculiarity of cultural phenomena, such as the purported importation of witchcraft to Britain (<http://www.lapidomedia.com/christianity-or-the-occult>). To analyse the impact of such

⁷ Reports of accusations of witchcraft in refugee camps are included in Section 4.2. They provide fine examples of witchcraft as a component of the concept of the 'spiritual suitcase' while on the journey from one place to another.

initiatives on those who seek to use their indigenous beliefs (including witchcraft) to resolve life's challenges, this study examined such projects and the reaction of both the Christian establishment and leaders of Black-led churches in the UK (Sections 4.6.3 and 4.6.4).

This research drew on the lived experiences of African participants in both Kenya and the UK, with some contributions from African migrants of other nations in the UK research data. It used contributions from respondents of African-Caribbean descent to gauge how the transatlantic slave trade might have influenced the transmission of the beliefs and practices of African witchcraft. By so doing, I aimed to discover if and how African witchcraft changes – as Kim Knott (1986, p. 8) stated, 'how ... religion and the religiousness of its people change in an alien milieu'. In addition, I aimed to show, without moral judgment, the role African witchcraft plays in the total religious imagination of those who use it or retain a belief in its power and efficacy. As stated in Section 1.2.5, in the West, the popular media of communication exchange such as movies, plays and books have greatly contributed to shaping the perception of witchcraft.⁸ Visual media can

⁸ Witchcraft is either good, bad or, in the case of a musical show in the West End of London, 'wicked', transformed by dint of replacing the bad witch with the good witch (<https://apollovictoria.londontheatres.co.uk/>). Diametrically opposed to this portrayal are the real-life reports in national newspapers, such as the *Evening Standard* (<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/torture-of-african-children-for-being-witches-is-spreading-7880442.html>)/<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2110932/African-witchcraft-murders-These-evil-zealots-hide-culture-race.html>)/<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/mar/01/accusations-witchcraft-pattern-child-abuse>)/<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-16955554>), and on television.

inspire the imagination, creating images that can be accompanied by acts that are heinous and evil.

Section 1.3 highlighted the complex weave of narratives and cultural formations surrounding the approach to witchcraft in Africa. Furthermore, it is important to appreciate the additional socio-economic, religious and cultural formations that are present in the UK. Africans often live in some of the most deprived areas of the larger cities, have a higher-than-average rate of unemployment, are more likely to experience poverty than other groups, and are disadvantaged in their access to housing (Mitton and Aspinall 2011; Gumber and Owen 2014). This is not meant to imply that the incidence of belief in witchcraft is causatively linked to economic or educational deprivation. Common sense would dictate that, given the facilities available in the UK, access to health and welfare services would ameliorate these misfortunes. However, in certain communities, witchcraft is still used, both as a way of explaining misfortune or bad luck and as a defence if the person experiencing the misfortune carries out certain rituals (Parrish 2000, 2005).

The lack of recognition of African religion and the belief in witchcraft keeps this belief and practice on the periphery of socio-economic integration. Emotive media reporting of witchcraft beliefs, and the associated element of possession (with emphasis on child abuse cases) characterises African witchcraft as a social services problem. I have seen the way that witchcraft has been studied and how studies have predominantly focused on child abuse. This serves to imprison the public perception of African witchcraft within a very narrow discourse. Consequently, African witchcraft in Britain is viewed through the prism of child abuse and mental health. Surely this cannot be the whole story. I argue that

this is a limiting and unhelpful perspective. Furthermore, I propose that there is an absence in the understanding of witchcraft as a multi-faceted element in African religion. This research was conducted with the intent to contribute to allowing witchcraft to escape from these narrow confines and to help understand the role witchcraft plays in understanding the world and in healing from misfortune for African people in Britain.

Gerrie ter Haar (2009, p. 72) argued that 'there is a paucity of research into the everyday religious life of African communities that, if it existed, would benefit any agency's approach to the subject'. At the same time, Helen Anin Boateng (2009), writing about how Ghanaian migrants in the UK cope with death and bereavement, made the point that within the Ghanaian communities, the wellbeing of the bereaved is most supported. This research examined whether belief in witchcraft provides a conduit for the expression of the human condition: fear, anxiety, peace, security, insecurity, failure and success. Within the study of religion, there is little in the way of research on the role of witchcraft as a positive energy and its effectiveness as a response to misfortune as perceived by African migrants in the UK. This study investigates the existing narratives about African religions and witchcraft in the UK, thereby addressing these issues. It pays attention to the way academic scholarship has informed the perception, analysis and response to accusations of witchcraft as it is encountered in London.

The aim of this research is to deepen the understanding of the role of witchcraft in the healing process. It involves an exposition of traditional African religion as a crucial element in the movement from surviving overwhelming circumstances to a state of thriving. This study examines the development of the current state of witchcraft belief

and practice in London within African diasporic communities. To this end, it seeks answers to the following questions: How do the various organised Churches respond to the phenomenon of witchcraft in the UK? Do the various African independent or initiated churches, and other Black-led churches, located in the UK encounter witchcraft or accusations of witchcraft within the congregation? How do social and governmental bodies balance diverse religious practices within the existing moral and ethical frameworks of the host nation? How have the social aspects of the host nation influenced the day-to-day lives and perceptions of Africans, their own status and identity, their conception of self and their values and morals? Is there a disconnection between prevailing attitudes in the UK and the beliefs and needs of African communities in Britain?

To achieve an understanding of witchcraft in the UK in a way that will usefully inform health services and policymakers, it is necessary to create a perspective that sees a belief in witchcraft and possession free from the characterisation (by established religious dogma) of being evil or as a primitive superstition that can be treated with pharmaceuticals. If it is seen as a religious belief that acts as a basic coping mechanism, in the same way 'accepted' religions are, then much more needs to be done to equip interested parties with the tools to approach those people who feel they hear voices or have been bewitched. A key aim of this study is to fill that gap.

1.5 Methodology

1.5.1 Research methods

I am here among these working-class people in this ... landscape because I want to hear their stories, I take their voices seriously. This is what research in religion means, ... to

attend to the experiences and beliefs of people in the midst of their lives, to encounter religion in its place in actual men and women's lived experiences, in the places where they live and work. (Orsi 2005 p.147)

This study is concerned with the beliefs in witchcraft that are held by African diasporic populations in the UK. In addition, it focuses on the perception of witchcraft among those organisations and agencies that seek to minister to these populations at the political, religious and societal levels: churches, local councils, police and judiciary, health services and charities. It examines the social and cultural impacts of these beliefs within a religious framework, with special emphasis on the health and wellbeing – the lived experiences – of the individuals and their religious and social communities. Because it concentrates on the spiritual elements of witchcraft, this study was primarily conducted from the perspective of the study of religions. The next section outlines the principal approaches that were used in the study and the reasons for their selection, that is, those methods best suited to the nature of the study and the specific difficulties the subject presents for researchers.

When determining which research methods to use, quantitative methodologies were discounted. This study does not seek to measure quantifiable phenomena. It could, for instance, count how often and how regularly a participant attends a church as a measure of the participant's commitment to their faith (or just their need to be within the community), but it would not necessarily provide an explanation for what they believed. In addition, this study does not attempt to manipulate encounters to measure the consequence of those manipulations on participants' beliefs. This ruled out formal

interviews with set questions to arrive at a person's core beliefs. Consequently, the research methodology for the collection of data was a synthesis grounded in elements of two qualitative traditions:

- Naturalistic/Phenomenological
- Heuristic

Taking a naturalistic/phenomenological approach to the study of witchcraft beliefs and African religions meant that the study could use the tools of observation that seek to study phenomena as they occur in their normal context, without any preconceived notions or expectation (Frey, Botan and Kreps 1999). I was the central research tool, determining the structure of the observational/participatory encounter and employing multiple procedures to draw out the various constructions of reality that existed within the context of this study. This approach was underscored by my psychotherapeutic training, which is grounded in my first-hand experience as a practising therapist using the core conditions developed by Carl Rogers (1902–1987) of unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence (Rogers, Kirschenbaum and Henderson 1989). Rogers' approach encourages the researcher to use self-awareness and reflexivity to 'stand as if in the other's shoes' (p. 496).

This naturalistic approach was complemented by elements of heuristic research. Moustakas (1994, p. 95) stated that by stepping into the unknown world of the other, the researcher gains an understanding of the underlying dynamics and constituents of the encounter and 'lifting out the existential meaning of an experience' (p. 174). Thus, value

is added to the quality of the exchange and meaningful connections are formed while reinforcing the process of gaining first-order explanations from research participants. However, this study provides no interpretation of participants' stories and accounts; it is idiographic in that it relays the participants' own interpretations and the felt sense of their experience.

As this study touches upon wider social responses to the phenomenon of African witchcraft, these first-order methods were supplemented by the tenets of intercultural dialogue to ensure that exchanges were 'open and respectful' regarding differences in culture and to facilitate an environment where 'participants have the freedom and ability to make choices' (European Commission and Intercultural Dialogue 2017).

The methodology used in this research is similar to that used by Dione Hills et al. (2013)⁹ in research conducted for the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations as part of the Traditional Healers Action Research Project for the King's Fund. The primary data was collected between March 2017 and September 2022. During this period, time was also dedicated to conducting research in the university libraries at The School of Oriental and African Studies, the British Library and the library of the University of London Goldsmiths College, as well as accessing online resources and periodicals. This part of the study

⁹ The study reflects what I envisaged would be reflected in this research. Hills et al. (2013) utilised a threefold methodology in attending to the unique nature of the subject matter; cultural assumptions, discretion in engagement with respondents and flexibility of methodology were identified in the wider methodological approach.

sought to determine what existing research there was and to examine a priori narratives within the various academic disciplines working in this field of study.

1.5.2 Demographics

Field research was undertaken in two parts. The first part was conducted in London (2017–22) and the second in Nairobi in Kenya (2018).¹⁰ This bilocation would serve to determine whether and how relocation affects the transmission of beliefs in witchcraft, enabling a reasonable comparison to be made between similar populations to account for elements such as intergenerational shifts as well as, and in conjunction with, societal and cultural shifts as a result of the change in host environment. The language used in all encounters was English, although some everyday Swahili greetings were used to convey consideration of and respect for the respondents and to show a willingness to learn. Paraphrasing and reflecting for clarification, as part of active listening, were employed to address any misunderstandings.

In London, African-initiated and Black-led churches were sourced in several ways:

- Via internet search engines, with a focus on churches in the London area serving communities of Kenyan peoples such as the Kikuyu and Luo.
- Via personal knowledge of such churches in Southeast London.
- Through links with agencies working with communities of African people in London.

¹⁰ The reasons for choosing Kenya are discussed in Section 1.5.3.

- Through shared information from other researchers of traditional African spirituality in diaspora.

For each church and congregation the study covers, I contacted the pastor or elder by telephone. This allowed me to introduce myself, explain the research topic and seek permission to talk with the pastor or elder face to face. At these meetings, I provided more information on how the research would be conducted, including written material on the academic institution the research is linked to and my ethical responsibilities in matters of confidentiality and data protection. The face-to-face encounter served to establish a rapport and be the foundation of trust that allowed me to fully observe the activities of the church and its congregation. Where permission was granted, I recorded events using an audio-only recording device, which allowed an authentic, transcribable representation. This prevented the potential problem of selective notetaking and a reliance on memory. I played no part in any performative rituals or services within formal settings, even if invited to do so, and only acted as a witness.

As the subject is fraught with social and religious sensitivities, and there is the potential for social and spiritual reprisal against people who talk about witchcraft, I had a duty of care to be alert to potential harm and adverse effects and to protect the integrity and value of the data collected. No formal interviews were conducted, as these are regarded as authoritative and directive. Instead, each participant was encountered in their local setting, where I worked towards creating a facilitative environment for discussion and conversation. This led to the encounter involving the topic to be discussed but without fixed wording, which allowed the conversation to deviate from the original topic if

potentially interesting material emerged. In these encounters, the conversation flowed freely, but I steered it in a way that allowed me to introduce specific terms when the opportunity arose. What Hills et al (2013 p.72) advise is required of the researcher is that they engage in 'active listening combined with open enquiry' to ensure the participants have been properly understood.

As well as engagement with individuals who volunteered information through these encounters, contact was established with traditional African healers, diviners and herbalists, who were identified through their advertising leaflets and established links with organisations working within African communities. The inclusion of these individuals created a broader picture that encompasses, to borrow terms from economics, both service users and service providers. As an aside, it was hoped that this approach would also yield interesting results relating to the commodification of religion and healing.

A similar process was followed in Kenya using local contacts and informants so that cultural variations and group conventions in the introductory process could be observed. It was important to consider that even though encounters would largely be in English, an interpreter would be required to ensure local idioms were properly interpreted and understood. It should be noted that due to the significant South Asian presence in Kenya, my presence as an outsider was initially not obvious, which seemed to mitigate any immediate discomfort for the research participants.

Finally, although this study focused on churches originating from and with strong connections to Kenya, there were individuals within the African diaspora who self-

identified as African and may or may not have held an affiliation to a specific church or religion but did not regard themselves as included in a 'home group' or ethnic community group. These respondents chose to share their relevant experiences. Individual participants were not pre-selected but voluntarily consented to participate in the research.

1.5.3 The choice of Kenya as a research area

In 2015, after completing my degree and authoring my first paper on witchcraft in the UK, I realised that to be authentic and give due regard to the subject, I should travel to Africa to experience and explore the phenomenon of witchcraft and witchcraft beliefs at one of its sources. Inspired by my university lecturer Mark Faulkner and his work with the Boni people on the island of Lamu off the Kenyan coast, I travelled to Kenya to conduct further research. I chose Kenya, rather than any other African nation, because as a former colony and a member of the Commonwealth, it has strong ties to the UK. There is a history of people coming from Kenya to the UK to work, study and settle. More importantly, I had some familiarity with the context, having established a network of contacts within religious and academic circles in Nairobi on a previous visit. This meant that, for this study, I could use the time available for field research more efficiently. This is not to say that previous knowledge automatically provides a smoother process, but it can make the researcher more aware and alert, and it can challenge what had been previously experienced.

Furthermore, I envisaged that being in Kenya would provide valuable insights and address the aims of this research by building an understanding of how misfortune is perceived

and reacted to by African people in an African city such as Nairobi. The encounters in the field in Nairobi, in turn, would allow me to build a picture of how misfortune is perceived by people there and how they respond to misfortune. I would then be able to contrast and analyse the results with a similar demographic in London. Using this process, the hypothesis that misfortune is redefined by African people in London in the UK could be examined.

I acknowledge that the Kenyan element of the field research has its limitations. The field research and results are confined to Black Kenyans, who were the male and female respondents that agreed to meet and talk with me. Moreover, these respondents all profess to being Christians yet live their faith very much against the backdrop of indigenous beliefs that continue to inform the religious landscape, as shown by this research. The constraints on the research sample were the result of the accessibility of local gatekeepers – those people I was able to engage with to gain access to local communities (for example, see Figure 2) – and the time available for research. The activities and logistics of setting up meetings took many conversations over many days, even before factoring in travel time to the less accessible communities, such as those in Machakos county. The locals I encountered in everyday situations who agreed to be included in the sample (that is, those not found through the gatekeepers) are also predominantly Christians and live their faith in much the same way as the respondents sourced through the gatekeepers.



Figure 1. Sign advertising a self-help group. Source: The author



Figure 2. The ladies of the self-help group. Source: The author

I did not find Black African Muslims in Nairobi who would engage in a conversation about witchcraft; therefore, regrettably, a source of potentially useful insight could not be factored in. It follows that similar Muslim communities in London also had to be excluded

to avoid introducing a variable that would make comparisons of the two sample sites problematic. Islam is referred to only in the larger context of its presence and influence in East Africa. Given the scope of these limitations, it would be incorrect to generalise my findings to the whole of the diverse African population across the African continent and the tens of thousands of African people in London.

Finally, I do not extend the analysis of the field research in the UK and Kenya to the full diversity of the Black African population in London. I use the analysis as an informative tool for those areas where there is a clear crossover of how misfortune is experienced and where witchcraft is used as a resource to combat it. It is a truism in anthropological research of this kind that one may not extrapolate from the specific to the general; however, I hope that the findings will prove useful in the meta-analysis when aggregated with similarly focused studies.

Sections 3.1 to 3.4 are the result of library research and cover the country's geographical location, history, religion, politics, economics and health. Within these, it is necessary to consider the impact of race relations, the slave trade, the British and colonialisation; the introduction of farming; and social mobility within pre-existing African hierarchical systems. It must also be understood that the values and morals of kinship in ethnic communities (that go back generations) affect the everyday actions of individuals as they operate in society. They also inform how the modern political elites use them to consolidate their power. Section 3.5 is a picture of modern-day Nairobi, drawn from my direct experience of the city and its surrounding rural areas, which involved an intense

period of field research carried out over six weeks, and reflects my encounters with people recounting their life experiences in terms of misfortune.

In keeping with the focus of this study, the approach to Kenyan culture has been streamed through the lens of misfortune, witchcraft and healing. In addition, this study uses the work of 'insiders' of the broader African context: Black African authors and writers whose works convey a felt sense of the world around them and who illustrate the impact of dramatic events, such as colonisation and the mission endeavours, on the fabric of everyday life right across sub-Saharan Africa. As Magesa (2013, p. 4) discussed, although there may be different expressions of religious beliefs and morals and different rhythms in everyday life, there does exist an underlying similarity of expression of spirituality and purpose among African peoples, 'a sameness of spirit and intention'. The existence of an aggregate of common expressions in African indigenous religions is also featured in Fernando (1999, p. 10), who affirmed: 'Individual villages will invariably have their own religious idiosyncrasies, and the religions of numerous people ... may in fact be extremely diverse', yet with 'remarkable resemblances between different traditions, similar myths, rites and ideas repeatedly appearing'. This similarity extends to African peoples' responses to misfortune, which is why it was valid to use non-Kenyan sources in this work to support or illustrate certain assertions about the responses of Kenyans. For example, Nigerian author Chinua Achebe's (2001) *Things Fall Apart* describes the struggles of an Igbo community trying to maintain the survival of religious beliefs, laws and customs. Achebe's story recounts the dissolution of village life and community and focuses on the events within one family, elucidating the struggle to negotiate everyday life while having

to deal with the devastating challenges to traditional values caused by the imposition of alien moral standards via colonial judicial systems and Christian missionary activity. The conversations with research participants in Nairobi evinced the same characteristics in their responses to misfortune.

1.5.4 Ethnicity and gender considerations

The research methods that were chosen for this study place considerable emphasis on the researcher and their impact on the collection of relevant data within encounters. Therefore, it is important to note that, in this study, my identity could have been a significant factor. I am female, geographically Caribbean, ethnically Indian, culturally British and politically Black (within the Western political landscape). Thus, there were emic and etic perspectives involved. Furthermore, there was a need to keep in mind that

‘human behaviour and belief systems cannot be reduced to the study of mere regularities, simple patterns and constant laws, as if all human beings in situation W will do X, say Y and think Z’. (McCutcheon 1999 p.3)

As a migrant and a person of Indian extraction, others’ perceptions abounded in terms of what I would bring to the encounter. Questions were raised regarding my views and religious affiliation during face-to-face encounters with participants. Such questions were answered honestly. In addition, my gender infrequently raised the issue of ‘place’ as regarded within maternalistic and paternalistic communities where hierarchies of knowledge and status exist. To mitigate any unintended effect on participants’ behaviour and responses, I used my skills, training and extensive experience as a psychotherapist to work towards building a facilitative environment to encourage trust, reflecting on the

contributors' need for safety and assurance. Each encounter, therefore, had the participant as the sole focus.¹¹ By encouraging their account, the dynamic of the meeting shifted to them having agency over the direction, tone and content, while my position remained as neutral as possible.

1.5.5 Ethics and obligations

As a trained psychotherapist, I was already aware of and abided by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy's code of ethics, even though no conversations were conducted as therapy. Such knowledge and practice were applied in the research activities. All information and materials gathered from participants, whether verbal, recorded, written or witnessed, were routinely coded, and names were changed where case studies were used in the research. Under the Data Protection Act, I am obligated to actively protect information about participants from unauthorised access or disclosure, both as a therapist and as a data controller.

The participants were informed about any reasonably foreseeable limitations of privacy or confidentiality in advance of disclosing any information. Participants were also made aware of my statutory duty: the law requires disclosure in the likelihood or event of self-harm, harm to others, safeguarding, child protection, terrorism or serious crime.

¹¹ See Al-Natour, R.J. (2011) who provides a brief insight into the unpredictable impacts of the researcher on the researched.

Individuals have not been named; the use of the material was purely for the understanding of the experience of the participants from a religious perspective, and there has been no intent in the presentation of the findings to either misrepresent the participants or present them in a less-than-favourable way.

In terms of any conflict of interest between my clinical practice and the study, at no time was my counselling directed or repurposed to meet any stated aim, ambition or conclusion of the research project. No information gained or experiences recounted during therapy sessions were used in the research project, regardless of relevance. Finally, all encounters were conducted in accordance with the York St John Code of Ethics, the key considerations of which, for the purposes of this research, are:

- The physical and psychological safety of participants, particularly the vulnerable
- Conflicts of interest
- Confidentiality and data protection
- Intellectual property issues
- Proportionate and reasonable review

1.5.6 Reflections from the field – Nairobi

“Where are you going? Nairobbery!?” This was the reaction of a colleague who had studied and worked in Kenya’s capital city for over a decade. It added to the concerns that a female travelling alone would naturally have. Being alert to the environment and being safe is high on the agenda when travelling to regions that are potentially unsafe.

This response was to stay with me as I landed at Kenyatta airport on a delayed flight from London. It stayed with me as my luggage failed to arrive and three hours later I left the

airport without it into the Nairobi night at 11.30pm. It stayed with me as the taxi that I had the foresight to arrange from London drove through the red traffic lights in the city. I later learnt that no one stops at traffic lights unless there is a policeman nearby, in which case they still do not stop but ease slowly through the lights. At the time, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advised that, in terms of places you could not go to, those not included were 'Kenya's safari destinations in the national parks, reserves, and wildlife conservancies'. It continued:

On 14 March 2018, the Inspector General of the Kenyan Police reported that a major terrorist attack, targeting Nairobi, had been prevented by Kenyan police in February 2018. Attacks could be indiscriminate in places frequented by foreigners including hotels, bars, restaurants, sports bars and nightclubs, sporting events, supermarkets, shopping centres, coastal areas including beaches, airports, buses, trains and other transport hubs. Places of worship including churches and mosques have also been targeted. Be particularly vigilant in these areas. (<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/kenya>)

The UK government's advice and my colleague's incredulity added to an already streetwise perspective (from my previous visit to Nairobi) that enabled me to negotiate the daily traffic and ubiquitous security checks (at the doorway of every major shop, restaurant and supermarket in Nairobi, reflecting the high security level across the city and surrounding areas).

During this research, I explored sensitive issues with respondents. Hardships, misfortune, religion and witchcraft were the main topics of the encounters. About two weeks into the

field research, I reflected on one respondent (Susan) and her behaviour after our interview had ended. She asked to talk to me about “something ... because I see that you listen.” She told me of her difficulties in paying her daughter’s school fees (the school had sent her 14-year-old daughter home because the respondent had no money for that term’s school fees). I felt uneasy, and I kept the conversation in mind. I intuited that the respondent was waiting for me to do something, maybe offer advice, but my unease was that the respondent wanted to ask for a contribution to her daughter’s fee. This would have been against my professional and research ethics. Compartmentalising my unease in that moment, I directed her attention back to her own actions and solutions to her misfortune.

One day, I was taking an amiable stroll with one of my contacts in the grounds of the National Museum of Nairobi. As we walked along, the people around us were staring more than usual. I asked my contact, an African woman and cultural anthropologist based at the museum, why this should be the case. Why were people so openly staring? Her reply was, “They are interested in us talking.” When I asked what she meant, she explained that, for some people, it is unusual to see a Black woman and an Indian woman walking and talking together in such a fashion. She reminded me about the role of Indians in the history of Kenya. This correlated with my research. For instance, in 2009, Rev. Dr David Githii, the moderator of Kenya’s Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), claimed that an Indian goddess not only controls the country’s currency but also dominates Kenya and is responsible for the state of the nation. He proclaimed that she enslaves Kenyans, preventing the people from being released to a wonderful destiny by having a negative

spiritual effect on the country's mostly Christian population (Kibiwott 2009). This linking of demonic and evil forces with India is used as the reason for the continued misfortunes of Kenyans in East Africa and as a block to good fortune in the present. The people who agreed to talk with me suggested that South Asian witchcraft is the source of misfortune and the cause of African Kenyans' lack of economic success. In one encounter, a respondent, Audrey, described how her partner, who worked for an Indian-owned company, was afraid he would be jobless if he decided to leave for more pay elsewhere. The Indian magic would prevent any other Indian business employing him. She told how the company had

brought in someone, a priest from India who walked around and around the place ... using magic to make African workers stay and not leave the firm. The workers went to see a healer ... they used bones from pigs and pigs' knuckles ... they put the bones around the office to break the spell so they could leave.

The fear that she spoke of was that her partner and the other African workers believed they would be cursed if they left the Indian-owned company. They would be prevented from leaving and getting better jobs, and they would not be able to find work elsewhere. Mangat (1969, p. 85) commented that 'the adverse criticisms of the Asian community were to provide a precedent for the future and the tendency to use the Indians as a scapegoat was to continue'. This commingling of attitudes towards misfortune and the scapegoating of Indians in Africa makes several appearances in studies of deliverance theology by notable authors and academics (Meyer et al. 1995; Gifford 2001, 2009).

From this point on, I paid attention to the perceptions of the African respondents and to what degree my ethnicity and gender impacted their responses. Conversations about misfortune tended to lean towards poverty and the lack of money and jobs. Several respondents expressed negative views about Indians, describing them as treating Black Africans as menial, not paying them well and treating them as if, as one respondent put it, “we Africans are below them.” Indians, as I saw, still have house boys – servants who work for families and tend to live near or on the premises. Many Africans who work have nannies and house girls to care for the children. It is seen as a way to share wealth: the family have help, which allows them to work, and the servants receive a wage that, in turn, keeps their families housed and fed. From my conversations with people from all walks of life, from academics to taxi drivers, I learnt that house help often become part of the family circle, and employers may help them with children’s school fees, emergency loans and health problems. I learnt first-hand that in Nairobi, there is prejudice between Indians and Black Africans. Being of South Asian descent put me, at a cursory glance, into the stream of Indians who live and work there and who have a high standard of living, well above that of most African people. This is significant for several reasons. At times, the stares were intimidating, so maintaining alertness to ensure safety was a constant effort. Further reflection was needed to consider how my ethnicity and gender might colour the content and type of encounters I would have and the subsequent effect on the data itself. Consequently, I was aware that I needed to pay attention and be prepared to question the authenticity of people’s responses. In actuality, more than two decades of experience as a practising psychotherapist led me to trust the respondents’ answers and narratives, considering them clear and transparent, even though I was alert to and

negotiated the dynamics of potentially toxic perceptions. This left me less concerned about the significance of my gender and ethnicity and thus unhindered in my focus on the collection of the data from different individuals and groups, with the crucial component of maintaining authenticity as a measure of deep analysis.

1.5.7 Reflections from the field – London

My research in London drew on interviews conducted with religious scholars, heads of agencies active in the sphere of working with African people in the mental health system, those campaigning for the rights of African people and targeting the trafficking of Africans to the UK and Europe, and individual respondents with direct experience with witchcraft in the UK. Illuminating the experience of misfortune and showing the presence of witchcraft belief and practices in addressing it requires thinking about the subject within the context of its location. Furthermore, making any comparison between Nairobi and London requires being cognisant of the constraints that the conditions in each location place upon the collection of material. A researcher must make judgements on the impact of location on any research conclusions.

In terms of the field research, the first and most obvious factor was access to potential respondents. This part of my research overlapped with the UK's lockdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the UK government meant that access to potential respondents was severely constrained for a time. A switch to online methods of meeting (such as Zoom) was impractical in some cases and, in fact, detrimental to the confidentiality, psychology and spiritual safety of participants, although some telephone interviews were conducted with the consent of the participant.

An additional consequence of the conditions surrounding the lockdown was that I had to consider that, in any encounter with respondents who related experiences of misfortune, those experiences would be overshadowed by the outbreak and its paradigm-shifting impact on daily life. This all resulted in unavoidable limitations on the potential pool of respondents. I was unable to gain access to what are described as house churches in South London. Telephone calls and messages were not returned. I reasoned that to gain access, I needed a direct invitation from a member of the church. None were forthcoming. Access to such churches may have provided richer insights into the constitution of the spiritual suitcase of Africans in diaspora and the various ways that Christian doctrine and indigenous beliefs can be intermingled in attempts to explain or ward off misfortune.

A further limitation has to be acknowledged. It was relatively easy to find people in London who describe themselves as healers (herbal and spiritual) and advertise methods, practices and treatments that have been associated with witchcraft, witches and witchdoctors (without proclaiming themselves as such). However, most would not engage with me about the beliefs behind what they offer unless I was prepared to pay a fee and disclose personal information. A few (such as Ayo) were prepared to talk, but they do not necessarily associate what they do with witchcraft or with defence against it, as considered in this study. On one occasion, someone who advertised himself as 'from birth an African Spiritual Healer and Advisor' had a hostile reaction during my introduction to the research. He accused me of "wanting his secrets" and stated that he would not tell me how he got his "powers." Afterwards, I received calls from him during which he angrily demanded to know what I wanted. For the first time, I experienced

discomfort and the tangible sense that this area of the research was fraught with tension, anxiety and a real sense of danger. The behaviour of that individual could be associated with a desire to disassociate himself from a phenomenon that might lead, at best, to integration difficulties (being seen as 'other') and, at worst, scrutiny by legal and financial authorities. Access to a corpus of data originating from such a source would have greatly expanded an analysis of the active side of witchcraft practices, rather than the analysis being weighted towards the perceived targets of witchcraft. It is in this area that the occult label becomes warranted. Practitioners do not readily share their knowledge.

Finally, in terms of limitations, one of the important features of this study was to engage with organised churches such as the Church of England and the Catholic Church and to identify the approach taken by the judiciary towards African witchcraft. While I was given the opportunity to speak to members of the Metropolitan police, the Catholic Church and the Church of England, repeated attempts to discuss issues relating to witchcraft in London with the dedicated safeguarding units of the Catholic Church and the Church of England were severely limited. Initial contact was ended abruptly with a cursory comment to access the websites of those organisations concerned with safeguarding and child abuse linked to faith or belief.

The second factor relates to how I, as the researcher, impacted the one-to-one sessions held with the respondents. In Kenya, I was very much an outsider, even if on the surface I appeared to have a place in the margins of Kenyan society. I was not a member of that society and was therefore outside of the social conventions that are embedded within the indigenous population – notwithstanding any common human threads of social

interaction that cross borders, such as considerations of appropriate greetings and respect for others. In the UK, despite being an immigrant, I am part of British society, and my history spans several decades of working and living in London. I am attuned to and part of the fabric of society there. However, one factor contributed to the interaction with respondents and enabled access to the gatekeepers and groups: we share an umbrella under which, at some point, we were all immigrants and settled in a nation that is not our homeland. This might have aided my research by providing insider knowledge of the resources in the public and private domain, but for a respondent, there is a level of trust to be negotiated before they can feel comfortable revealing aspects of their life that a 'Westerner' might simply not understand and may well judge adversely. This may, to an extent, have been true for respondents in Nairobi, but there is a qualitative difference between the participants in the two locations with respect to each one's relationship with the wider society. In Kenya, Black Africans are the majority, whereas in London they are a minority. This directly impacts the relationship between researcher and respondent, but the impact is different in the two locations.

The third factor was the environment itself. Both London and Nairobi are bustling cities with millions of inhabitants, centres of commerce and finance, and the political centres of their respective nations. However, London, while having its poorer neighbourhoods, has no equivalent to the sprawling slums of Kawangware or Kibera (see Figure 3), the largest slum in East Africa, where living conditions are harsh, inhabitants often have to get by on what the more affluent have discarded, and access to necessary services and utilities is often controlled by criminal cartels (Majoro 2014, p. 2; Langat 2019, n.p.).



Figure 3. The slum of Kibera. Source: The author

There may be similarities to be drawn from the fact that both the UK and Kenya are ostensibly democratic countries, with Christianity playing a significant role in the respective nations' societies and institutions, but any comparative analysis of experiences of misfortune and the role of African witchcraft – and any conclusions arising from it – needs to consider the significant differences between the two environments. The London research and analysis was conducted with this in mind, acknowledging that everyday life in London creates fundamentally different problems for the inhabitants to solve compared with those experienced by Africans in Kenya in their everyday world. This speaks to one of my major conclusions that one cannot take research conducted in Africa and simply overlay it on African communities in the UK when forming policies in the spheres of social care, education and mental health services.

2 Influences on the African Religious Imagination

2.1 African Indigenous Belief and Witchcraft

‘Sometimes the spirits speak for you and sometimes the spirits make you speak’.

Laurenti Magesa (2013, p. 33)

This chapter covers the two key areas likely to have had the greatest influence on the research participants: indigenous beliefs and Christianity. I consider them to be the primary constituents of the spiritual suitcases of those who chose to participate in this research. This chapter covers the interaction between the two as the catalyst that led to the phenomenon of African-initiated churches (AICs) and as the bedrock for the discussion on misfortune in Section 3.4 and the overall findings for both Nairobi and London. It will start with the foundation laid by indigenous beliefs.

The mythology and ontology of African belief systems are complex and incorporate the external environment and nature as essential to the fabric of life, which itself is regarded as divinely created and maintained. The study of African belief systems is commensurately complex. Consideration of the different African nations’ cultures, innumerable languages and dialects, and religious influence on everyday lives cannot be separated from the people who practice the religion (Awolalu 1976; Kirwen 1987; Kirwen 2005; Mbiti 2015). However, Gerrie ter Haar (2009) provided us with a starting point. She argued that to understand African religions, one could begin by looking at the original Latin meaning of *religio*, used in reference to the Roman religion in the third century BCE

that had divination as a central characteristic of worshipping. Messages were channelled from the gods to the people and made manifest through this medium. The Christian Church shifted the classical Roman view of religion, reclassifying it as superstition in opposition to its self-classification as true religion, thus engendering a negative opposition. Ter Haar (2009) stated that the exploration of African religion by Christian missions utilised the same strategy.

The study of African traditional religion reveals a sort of symbiotic relationship between two planes of existence: one inhabited by the living and the other by the spirits and other entities. In this relationship, each provides the conditions for the other's continued wellbeing and existence. Thus, African religious practice is concerned with sustaining life in this world, in the here and now, but the forces that sustain life reside in another plane, in an invisible other world that is occupied by the various spiritual entities. Religious practice is an interaction between this world and the other world. Religious experts act as intermediaries between the people and spiritual entities through ritualistic ceremonies. Misfortune, especially that which can be described as existential misfortune, such as infertility or infant mortality, is generally understood to have its source in the other world. However, the ultimate cause is to be found and must be rectified within the community of the living through appropriate ritual action. As Grimes (1982, p. 57) posited: 'Ritualising transpires as animated persons enact formative gestures in the face of receptivity during crucial times in founded places'. Rituals are the medium by which personal and social issues can be modified, and because of the primary emphasis on sustaining life, much of African religion is focused on ensuring good fortune and healing

misfortune. Concepts relating to the sources of misfortune imbue African religious thought with fundamental and profound ambiguity in that the spiritual entities that exist in the invisible realm, although sustaining life, are also the source of many misfortunes and afflictions. Today, when most Africans identify as Christian or Muslim, the belief in God *and* the world of spirits remains universal in Africa (Evans-Pritchard 1937; Idowu 1973; Awolalu 1976; Janzen 1992; Dowden 2014). The idea that what came before was superstition also pervades the exploration into the realms of witchcraft belief. The academic discourse on witchcraft emphasises the use of these beliefs for social purposes. Anthropologists were not only interested in African religions but also the influences of witchcraft and power beliefs in the maintenance of social order. The resulting discourse is that witchcraft beliefs were used to condemn the ambitious leaders and counteract changes that could injure or destroy the local order. As Peter Geschiere (1997, p. 217) suggested in his attempt to locate witchcraft in modernity, 'witchcraft appeared to be a primarily conservative force'. In other words, the study of witchcraft became a study of micro-politics. John M. Janzen (1992), writing about the widespread ritual institution of *Ngoma* (which he described not only as a term used for a musical instrument but also for the complex behaviour associated with music, such as singing and dancing and clapping hands), listed the institution's common characteristics as including recruitment of people afflicted by disease, a chronic handicap or social pathology. He further described *Ngoma* as a ritual therapeutic event at which the ritual begins with a prayer or statement and is regarded as a therapeutic rite that articulates the affliction of sufferers.

Witchcraft, one is led to conclude from these seemingly disparate descriptions, is understood in different ways, both by the communities themselves and by the academics who study them. Much relies on local contexts when conceptualisations of witchcraft are created. What follows is a selection of attitudes, ranging from belief in witchcraft as a physical force to one that occupies a spiritual milieu. Added to this mix of characteristics is the place the traditional healing elements of witchcraft have taken within the Christian Church through their subsumption into church services and associated practices and informal teachings. Priests and pastors assume the mantle of traditional religious experts to heal those suffering, using exorcism and the power of prayer and belief within communal worship spaces. One only has to attend a service at a high street AIC or other Black-led church to see this in action.

David Maxwell (1995), writing about the Hwesa people of North-eastern Zimbabwe, stated that witchcraft is not merely an idiom for community members to address social stress. Individuals do practice sorcery, buying medicines to gain advantage over others or to gain protection, both from witchcraft and from accusations of witchcraft. He argued that 'the cost of witchcraft accusations within a community can become too high' (p. 321). Maxwell gave the example of a witchcraft eradication movement led by a man called Makombe, who in 1976 compelled people to destroy all charms and horns on pain of death because they represented the tools of magic and witchcraft.

Koen Stroeken's (2012 p.24) study of healing among the Sukuma people of Tanzania shows how different theories such as anthropology, sociology and ethnology have distinguished witchcraft and magic as reactions to modernity and post-colonial

neoliberalism. Stroeken took issue with the arguments of Jean and John Comaroff and others who researched the way witches were seen in medieval Europe. Those researchers were ascribed the role of 'modernity's prototypical malcontent [who] represented traditions that obstructed the upcoming merchant's capitalist aspirations'. This, Stroeken argued, is an unfortunate interpretation, as 'the authors make abstraction of the subjects presumptive process, an experiential process, and so place the witches spell on par with a fortune-seeker's use of magic' (Stroeken 2012 p.24). Pointing out the trend of study from the 1970s' functionalist approach to then current studies of witchcraft, he cited the work of Englund (2002), who referred to the rhetoric of globalisation as an explanation of witchcraft in terms of global forces.

There is a stock of work to describe the ways in which witchcraft in Africa is used to counter the misfortunes that people experience in their everyday lives and the way in which it is used, as Robin Horton (1971, p. 95) described, to explain, predict and control situations that cannot be accounted for. These experiences range from the profound life events of death and dying to what was reported on by Rev. Richard Coles (2010). An avid football fan, Coles journeyed to Africa to present an exploration of witchcraft and Juju in a programme titled *Should God Be Allowed on the Pitch*. In the programme, he explores the relationship between football and faith. He interviews football fans who recount tales of matches being held up for hours when players refused to leave the dressing room, believing that a sorcerer had used Juju on the team.

The report highlights the resilience of indigenous beliefs and gives us a modern context in which to highlight that today witchcraft is applied to many more areas than it was

historically. In their exegesis of the role of ritual in the everyday lives of modern Africans, John and Jean Comaroff (1993, p. xxii) argued that witchcraft is far from being a homeostatic feature of pre-colonial societies. The signs and practices of witchcraft are integral to the experiences of the modern world to counter the magic of the modern world and to address the shifting effects of forces that are embodied by their local elites, many of whom arrive from outside. They described modern witches as dynamic and versatile individuals who 'travel across broad horizons, reside in towns and become the mistresses of money makers, wear make-up and current fashions' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, p. xxii). Here again, we find modernity portrayed as a corrosive element blocking good fortune and wellbeing. However, every age has its own 'modernity'.

Thus, it can be observed that when it comes to witchcraft, there is no standard way of defining what it is or why it is. The subject has been problematised by different authors who have recognised it as not only a belief but also as something that exists in the minds of African people and is used as either a function or a reaction. My own view, gleaned over several years of research, is that while I can accept these compelling views, there is a stringency that excludes the influence of witchcraft in the everyday lives of African people. In my experience, the African continent is awash with industry, film, music, art and literature as well as entrepreneurs and businesses. Opportunities for people are filtering down and straddling the class and tribal divide. Even grandmothers are setting up business, as I discovered during a visit to Nairobi in Kenya. I encountered an elderly grandmother in a café. As we sat sipping lattes and cups of green tea, we exchanged a few pleasantries, and she told me she was retired but had started her own business

installing house alarms. She talked about the need for these alarms, as people needed to be protected: “It is not good to walk here, so the house must be safe ... but it is hard.” She said that people wanted money from her, and she talked about the corruption and bribes she was asked for but that she refused to hand over. This encounter took place during a visit by then President of the United States Barrack Obama, who, together with an array of financial and business gurus, was on an African tour to promote entrepreneurship. I felt no evidence of witchcraft being required as an antidote to modernity. I contend that Africa and, more precisely, its people are greatly attuned to change through global forces and influences and recognise how to tap into the opportunities and technologies on offer by foreign investors to increase their potential to succeed. However, most of us will agree that when such an African becomes a migrant to a host country, they will not experience the economic, political and social milieu in the same way they did in their country of origin. Any hardship or misfortune will be experienced within the political, social, religious and economic context of the host nation. Witchcraft represents another avenue whereby misfortune may be mitigated, not just as a tool to counter the impact of modernity. The interesting question becomes: How does the belief and practice of African witchcraft perform, function and maintain efficacy when transplanted to different soil? This is addressed in Chapter 4, where I present my research as it applies to the UK.

2.2 The Church and Mission

Any consideration of African Christianity must include the question of what it replaces, leading as it does to the reconstruction and reinterpretation of orthopraxy in everyday

life towards a soteriological goal rather than dealing with the problems of everyday existence. Theologian Laurenti Magesa (2013, p. 8) described the approach to sickness that still exists among people across Africa, such as the Akamba in Kenya, the Dinka from South Sudan and the Bemba from Zambia, who hold the belief that witchcraft or 'bad behaviour' from an 'unknown power is the ultimate cause of the affliction'. This is discussed in Section 3.4.4. However, in preparation for that discussion and for the discussion in Section 3.4.5, I turn to the development of Christianity in Africa and the impact of the Christian missions on the African religious imagination.

The missionaries arrived in Africa believing that African people had no religion. In their zeal to convert Africans, they 'dismissed traditional beliefs as being primitive, backward and atavistic' (Kirwen 1987, p. xvi). Early missionaries often preached that African traditional beliefs were devilish, satanic and demonic. Anyone connected with witchcraft was condemned or told to renounce this evil, turn to the Christian God and seek his forgiveness. If they did not, they would be excluded from involvement in the church's activities and services (Dawson 1987; Kirwen 1987; Magesa 2014). However, as Mbiti (2015, p. 29) stated, 'it is hard to destroy beliefs', and Africans secretly retained their traditional beliefs and practised them as the need arose (Hassan 2015; Mbiti 2015). The Akamba people in the formerly Eastern province of Kenya, like most of the African converts, accepted the Christian teaching to a degree, but as Mbondo (2015, p. iv) argued:

whenever misfortunes come or strike, the same Akamba Christians resort to their traditional beliefs and in particular specialists who use mystical powers to give directives on how to address the situations.

Kirwen (2008) lent testimony to the rationale for the continued belief of the people in what he termed the ministry of diviners. They were aware that when they were given a new name, a Christian name, it would usually be the name of a Christian saint through whom guidance and inspiration would be provided. For the Akamba, the names were associated with the reincarnation of Christian ancestors. The new name was regarded as a new identity. This harmonised with the Akamba's own naming system, which associated the named with ancestors or heroes of the community. Christian rituals were seen as being akin to the Akamba rituals of the diviner and witchdoctor, who would consult the ancestors when giving traditional names at naming ceremonies. Kirwen explained that when praying to the 'Father in Heaven' during baptism and other services, the people were praying to their own creator god, in this case *Ngai*, whom they had worshipped since time immemorial (Kirwen 1987, p. xiii).

This created tension for those African converts who remained in their communities to convert others in the villages. This friction often erupted in violence, as in Chinua Achebe's (2001, pp. 174–180) depiction of the mission church arriving in the village and the death of what the clan and surrounding villages regarded as the spirit of the ancestors, *egwugwu*. The *egwugwu* are a symbol of the culture and independence of the community, or *Umuofia*, and are seen as ancestral gods. They are represented by masked *Umuofia* elders. The *egwugwu* (elders) serve as respected judges in the community, listening to complaints, prescribing punishments and deciding conflicts. When one of the local converts to Christianity is seen to defy the ancestors by tearing the mask off an *egwugwu*, the clan and surrounding villages all cry out for his death. The villagers

considered that one of the greatest crimes a man could commit is to unmask an *egwugwu* in public. The perpetrator is not killed. Instead, the elders raze his compound and church to the ground. As the elders and the people consider what action to take, Achebe opens the window to the clash that is created between Christianity, the life of the community itself and the framework of beliefs that held all together.

One of the reasons for the dismissive, often combative attitude towards indigenous practices was that the missionaries had no prior training in or grasp of indigenous cultures and religions. They failed to comprehend the role of indigenous religion, diviners, witchcraft and healers in everyday life, and the African worldview was unacknowledged. Christianity's reaction to the practise of polygyny (*wake wengi* in Swahili), having more than one wife, is a good example of its initial stance towards indigenous life: judging it to be pagan and immoral. Early missionaries' attempts at conversion insisted that certain practices, such as polygyny, could not continue. Given that witchcraft was already under the microscope of the colonial rulers (who made laws to at best control witchcraft or, failing that, at least mitigate its power and influence), the church's view was that witchcraft was only evil. The views and response of the Christian church to witchcraft not only failed to capture the nature of indigenous cultural and traditional religious beliefs but also ignored the depth of the spiritual realm – what Gifford (2009, p. 86) called an 'enchanted worldview'. Magesa (2013, p. 26) termed it a 'vital force' and described an

inner visible power in anything at any given moment. In every activity, every thought, every word, every attitude, it is important to make sure that there is 'friendship' or unity between what you see and what you do not see but is still part of the reality.

This is the harmony that must be sought in life; it must be cultivated and carefully respected if life is not to be harmed. (p. 27)

This will be examined in more detail in Section 3.4.4, with special emphasis on concepts of misfortune. This failure to understand the pre-existing conditions of religiosity in sub-Saharan Africa is one that has been advanced by scholars (Barrett 1968; Pauw 1995; Ludwig and Adogame 2004; Magesa 2014) as part of the weave of elements responsible for the formation and growth of AICs.

There is extensive literature on the factors that contributed to the birth of AICs and on the argument that the rise of AICs was a consequence of the failure of the missions to effectively supplant these beliefs (Barrett 1968; Daneel 1987; Pauw 1995; Gifford 1999; Meyer 2004). I should make it clear that AICs do not comprise a homogeneous type of church, nor do they form a single monolithic entity with necessarily the same elements and characteristics that would define a cohesive framework of orthopraxy and orthodoxy, although there are broad similarities. Given the abundance of AICs and their presence around the world, we risk misunderstanding their natures.¹² Gerrie ter Haar (2009, p. 23) invited us to consider that ‘the spirit-oriented nature of African Christianity builds on the indigenous traditions of Africa’. It is that spiritual healing and the areas of healing and medicine that mission churches did not accommodate that added significantly to African Christians becoming disillusioned. Indeed, what proved to be most successful about AICs

¹² Anderson, A. (2001) *African reformation: African initiated Christianity in the twentieth century*. Trenton N.J., African World Press.

is their ability to adopt Christianity yet adapt it by incorporating fundamental indigenous spiritual components into their doctrines and ritual practices (ter Haar 2009). In addition, while exploring African spirituality and Western thought, ter Haar emphasised the importance of African beliefs, particularly the belief in the spiritual realm that coexists with the everyday world and is accessed through dreams, visions, spirit possession and miracles. A key factor is the alertness among African people to evil and witchcraft. The significance of this is that some AICs are active proponents of banishing evil through exorcism. Many AICs incorporate indigenous beliefs within their ceremonies and rituals, while others dismiss all pre-existing beliefs as evil (ter Haar 2009, p. 24). The question that remains is: Which specific activities and beliefs from pre-Christian African cosmologies are considered evil and by what criteria?

At the outset, those who broke from the mission churches were, as Anderson (2001, p. 10) suggested, dismissed by 'church leaders and other observers' as sects, among other things, and labelled 'syncretistic' and 'nativistic'. They were defined by Turner (1979, pp. 80–92) as 'a church which has been founded in Africa, by Africans, and primarily for Africans'. Barrett (1968, p. 163) highlighted the independent nature of AICs, describing them as 'not only a specifically Christian development but also a strictly indigenous phenomenon' that purposefully rejected Western ecclesiastical models and forms of being Christian but kept the Bible. In seeking to explain parallels and common threads within the tapestry of the independent movement, Barrett (1968) provided elements that fall into two categories: universal features, which are common to all groups, and local features, some of which are present only in certain groups and some also in others. He

considered the spirit of the age, taking in variables and fixed features that accumulate and interact to form one essential trait possessed by all involved groups. This is the foundation of his explanation for the phenomenon of interdependency. An example of a universal feature lying at the foundation of society in Africa is family, home and the concept and practice of community, wherein every person knows their rights and responsibilities. These features can be seen in varying forms among many differing communities and groups across regions of Africa. Family land is the preserve of the family spirits and the ancestors who guard it. They, in turn, are venerated in the ancestral cults. The fertility of the land and animals and the success of polygamous marriage practices depend on the cult of an impersonal earth deity. Magesa (2013) explained that community in the African sense not only signifies a group of people who, at an innate level, share and hold common beliefs and interests – the community or group is ‘both a society as well as a unity of the visible and invisible world’ (p. 34). This demonstrates how interwoven these social structures are; politics, law, religion, art, language, culture and society are interlocked in a stable self-correcting order that struggles to withstand externally imposed change without affecting the whole structure. The assault on the structures was one for which the mission churches were held culpable as a result of their arousing hopes of enrichment and the promises of education, and the ‘richness of Christianity’ made by the churches to the early converts to Christianity.

One example of this assault (and it is one that is hotly contested even now) is the case of what is known as the clitoridectomy controversy (Kenyatta 1969; Luongo 2000),¹³ the high-profile controversy surrounded the Kikuyu rite of passage (*irua*) – circumcision of both young men and girls. The rite celebrates a key life stage when girls and boys move into ‘womanhood and manhood in the Gikuyu community’ (Kenyatta 1965, p. 128). In Kenya in 1929, the Church Mission Society (CMS) sought to denounce and ban the initiation rituals, particularly for females, regarding it as ‘barbarous, nothing but a horrible and painful practice’. Kenyatta (1965, pp. 127–128) proclaimed the circumcision rite as ‘a people’s social custom’, ‘an important fact in the tribal psychology of the people’, and ‘the essence of an institution which has enormous education, social moral and religious importance’.

Kaplan (1986, p. 177) evidenced a similar situation in Tanzania, where the Berlin Lutheran Mission made a carefully planned effort to develop a Christianised version of the traditional girls’ initiation. He cited a 1939 report by C.M. Culwick in which an attempt to Christianise the practice of female circumcision and initiation by setting in place certain conditions that reshaped the initiation rituals is described: ‘as much of the old ceremonial as was permissible in the opinion of the mission has been incorporated in the new

¹³ See, Luongo, K.A. (2000) The clitoridectomy controversy in Kenya: The "woman's affair" that wasn't. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 28 (2–3). Kenyatta, J. (1965) *Facing Mount Kenya*. New York, Vintage. This book provides an in-depth description of the rite itself as well as the religious elements and the political and social impacts. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. (1965) *The river between*. This book provides a real-world example of the choices faced by women and the people living in rural locations portrayed in his book and the consequences of the choices experienced by the whole community.

system'. This was intended to smooth the evolution from the old to the new by not making a complete break with the past. One such condition was reducing the period of the ritual, which required one year of isolation, to a mere two months, after which the girls were sent to boarding school.¹⁴

For the Maasai people who were spread across the northern, central and southern areas of Kenya and northern Tanzania, the reduction of the time was of major significance. This period, as described by Fadiman (1993, p. 226), was 'specifically intended as a period of further trial, a final stage in their transition from boyhood to warrior status'. It was the gateway for the young men of the group to move towards joining the rank of warrior. According to Fadiman (1993, p. 225), 'both Catholic and Protestant missionaries objected violently to the operation as a direct violation of God's will'. He described (p. 228) how the missions' interference had a disruptive effect on converts' abilities to find brides, become warriors and progress into the councils of elders.

It is important, at this juncture, to explore a key aspect of such extended rites of passage – liminality. The first phase separates the initiate from their current place in the society. The last phase restores them, inwardly transformed and outwardly changed, to the

¹⁴ FGM (or female circumcision), as defined by N. Toubia and S. Izett (1995, Abstract in *Women's rights human rights*, London, Routledge), is a collective name given to several different practices that involve the cutting of female genitalia. The aim of this practice is to prepare girls for womanhood. In a World Health Organisation Publication (1998) prepared by Toubia, Izett stated that FGM is carried out between the ages of four and fourteen and described it as a 'rite of passage' (p. 2). In 2017, a challenge to the ban established in 2011 on FGM in Kenya contested the ban, claiming that it 'discriminates against national heritage'. However, the High Court in Kenya upheld the 2011 ruling to outlaw the practice (<https://www.africanews.com/2021/03/17/kenya-upholds-anti-female-genital-mutilation-fgm-law/>).

community and completes the ritual. It is during the middle, or liminal, phase that the initiate passes into a cultural and spiritual realm that, as stated by Turner (1969, p. 94), 'has few of the attributes of either the past or coming state'. During this liminal phase, the initiates are in a place likened to a void that is neither here nor there; betwixt and between, they are basically stripped bare. However, their secular powerlessness is compensated for by a sacred power. They are, in a sense, ground down in order to then be reconstituted 'anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life'. The neophyte in the liminal phase must be a 'tabula rasa' on to which knowledge related to the new status is inscribed. In light of this, is it any wonder that the church's interference in the length of the ritual would be seen as akin to interference by witches to reduce the efficacy of this liminal stage and weaken the community? In practice, there would be a degradation of the rites of the ritual ceremonies. Turner (pp. 102–103) explained that the spiritual significance is represented in all facets of the performance of life-stage rituals. Even the wood for the fire must not be cut with an axe; it must have fallen naturally from a tree. All the activities involve the community: the elders, the religious experts, the circumciser and all the people gathering and handling the ritual artefacts. Their function and use would have been reduced or even made redundant as a consequence of the church's reaction and the conditions they applied. Life-cycle ceremonies, as Van Gennep (1960, cited by Turner 1969, p. 94) defined, 'accompany every change of place, state, social position and age'. The focus and structure of the rites of passage disappear and worldviews change due to these kinds of external pressure. Change can occur naturally; people and societies evolve over time through interaction with other groups and through marriage where socio-cultural exchanges are

made. However, non-organic changes in life induced by the suppression or destruction of rites have wider implications for the society and for the individual. Given the pressure exerted by mission churches, the African religious imagination and worldviews have been altered. In addition, the growth of the efficacy of witchcraft as the cause of misfortune has become a major factor. Historically, initiation rites and ceremonies were rooted in Kenyan socio-religious, cultural and economic spheres. Akaranga (1987, p. 269), in his treatise of the Avalogooli people of western Kenya, asserted that religion is important in terms of the spiritual, social, economic and political development of the Avalogooli. During the ceremonies, it was the elders who passed on instructions to those on the path into adulthood, and the elders taught oaths, curses, taboos, morality and prohibitions after circumcision and while in seclusion. Akaranga (1987) emphasised the role of the rites of passage as being central to African lives, with 'morality being the most important element in traditional African society' (p. 255). In addition, he cited that together with the 'impact of Western Education, Christianity, Social mobility, Intermarriage and the present Economic system', an inexorable decline of not only social relationships between elders and young people but also education in moral values occurred due to the scarcity of those capable of supplying traditional education to the next generation. The relevance of the controversy follows Barrett's (1968, p. 117) assertion of enforced change. It is reasonable to conclude that the meanings represented by the initiation rituals and the importance placed on the rituals by individuals and wider communities were threatened. It fractured the orderliness of the indigenous social structure. Being without such unifying customs, as enacted in the ceremonies, dances and songs (*mambura*), inevitably leads to misfortune.

One such misfortune experienced by men and women who were not circumcised was far-reaching. For the Kikuyu, it is taboo for a woman or a man to have sexual relations if they have not been circumcised. Furthermore, if an uncircumcised man marries a woman from another district, misfortune arises, as the couple will not be welcomed into the family. Furthermore, the man will be disinherited and made homeless. The family of the man cannot return to his homeland. The man's family will not bless the marriage, and he must divorce because he has not maintained the tribal custom. The ritual of circumcision is ubiquitous across Kenya, and while different groups vary in aspects of the ceremony, the rite of passage of circumcision is essentially paramount to the success of the whole group. The consequences of the ban were manifold and ultimately spread outward into the fabric of the social and political sphere to the point when, in 1930, the subject was raised in the House of Commons (Kenyatta 1965, p. 126).

It was during a period in the 1920s (Elkins 2005, p. 20) that organised opposition to colonial rule began to take shape in the form of the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA).¹⁵ Numerous missions (such as Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist and Catholic) had established stations in and around Kikuyu reserves. These establishments were in the vanguard of the British civilising mission that, as Elkins (2005, p. 20) stated, entailed the conversion of Africans to an 'entire Western way of life'. The Protestant missions

¹⁵ Beginning as an association of young men educated in mission schools, the KCA's remit included returning ancestral lands acquired by the British colonialists and settlers, challenging the authority of the colonial state and combatting the restrictions and attacks on the Kikuyu way of life – their culture, religion and practices.

launched an attack on the Kikuyu custom of female circumcision (although the attitude of the CMS in refusing to adopt any policies on female circumcision became a factor that led to divisions between the CMS and other mission groups). When other mission churches banned the practice for their converts, they met with a strong reaction from the KCA, which set out to defend the cultural practice. The missionary opposition to the practice of clitoridectomy as well as the quality of education, colonial racism and political activism are considered to be elements that led to the movement of the so-called Pentecostal Independent Churches in Kenya (Droz 2001). When the colonial office introduced restrictions on and regulation of female circumcision, Kikuyu people reacted by leaving the established churches to form their own independent churches and schools, where circumcision would continue to be practiced.

Thus, the controversy surrounding female circumcision had a central role in politics during this period (Murunga and Nasong'o 2007; Luongo 2011, p. 159). The movement of the people from mainstream mission-led churches to AICs shored up and maintained the religious and cultural spheres of everyday life. The lessons taught by the elders of the community would be lodged in the psyche of those undertaking initiation, providing them with the tools to navigate through their lives in the wider world. The effect of lessons does not disappear, and in Chapter 4 it is demonstrated that when travelling to other countries, such as the UK, these lessons travel with those who were initiated to enable life in the host nation. In unfamiliar surroundings, they represent a touchstone, providing guidance, giving feelings of security and maintaining the link to their sense of identity and religious belief.

3 Tracking Witchcraft: Nairobi and Its Surroundings

3.1 Geography, Climate and Population

Having set the scene for the evolution of the religious imagination of Black Africans, it is time to turn our attention to the research location in Africa. This section includes a detailed description of some of the macroscopic elements that impact the experiences of good and bad fortune for the people of Kenya as a whole and Nairobi in particular. It may seem curious to begin with the topography of the country, but it will become apparent that the geography and climate of Kenya is fundamental to the health of the nation and its people. It follows that in a country with moderately high levels of undernourishment, the climate and climate change impact people's livelihood. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN, 46% of the population in Kenya currently live on less than one dollar per day, and 35% of children under five years old are malnourished (FOA 2018). Drought and the timing and quantity of the rains lead to either good or bad fortune. In the case of subsistence farmers, the wrong conditions mean that food becomes scarce and school fees cannot be paid. People from rural areas – where there are few services, if any, and little or no support infrastructure available for the villages – migrate to urban areas for work and better lives. Rural landowners who can grow crops look to the markets in Nairobi to sell their produce in order to feed their families. However, for those whose crops have failed due to land degradation, Nairobi is a place where there are labour opportunities, health services and education. Many migrants gravitate to the slums of Nairobi, to places such as Kibera on the outskirts of the city – the largest slum settlement in East Africa. In the north of the country, where nomadic

pastoralists continue with their custom of migrating to seasonal pastures, changes in climate can exacerbate tensions between pastoral and agrarian communities in the competition for land on which to graze livestock or grow crops.¹⁶

Kenya lies close to the equator, covering an area of some 225,000 square miles, with a littoral position east to the Indian Ocean and with Lake Victoria to the west. It is bordered by Somalia to the north-east, Ethiopia to the north, South Sudan to the north-west, Uganda to the west and Tanzania to the south. Kenya can be divided into broad geographic regions: low arid plateaus rising into the Central Highlands, with a fertile level to the west towards Lake Victoria and to the south to the Borderlands. The Central Highlands are bisected by the Great Rift Valley, home to Kenya's highest points – Mount Kenya and Mount Elgon, on the border between Kenya and Uganda. Kenya's lowest point is at the Indian Ocean.

The climate varies by location, from tropical along the coastal region to, depending on rainfall and elevation, lush to arid in the interior. On the coastal plain of Kenya lies Mombasa, fringed by mangrove swamps, lagoons and coral reefs and with more rainfall than the rest of the country, shifting southward and northward from 47 inches near Mombasa to less than 26 inches near Somalia. The natural hazards associated with these climatic conditions are flooding during the rainy season and drought, both of which can

¹⁶ The land itself and land tenure is bound up with social organisation and conflicts between ethnic communities, as is demonstrated later in the chapter. See also Kinuthia-Njenga, C. and Blanco, P.K. (2009). Dyson-Hudson, R. and Dyson-Hudson, N. (1980).

have devastating consequences, including food shortages that lead to sickness, starvation and human suffering. The United States' Central Intelligence Agency, the World Health Organisation and a report by climate researchers and collated by the Met Office and Nottingham University (Gosling, Dunn et al 2011) describing the climatic conditions in Kenya have all commented on the effect of climate change in terms of the decline in the yield of main food staples, such as maize and beans, and the reduction in livestock. People in Kenya face disasters that require aid from organisations such as the World Health Organisation, whose report on the drought of 2005 estimated that two million people needed food assistance. Kenya is one of the 192 countries that have signed the Kyoto Protocol, and it is party to several other initiatives, which cover endangered species, deforestation and biodiversity. The highland region supports a great diversity of wildlife that is not only of scientific value but also an important source of revenue through tourism. National parks and reserves such as the Maasai Mara are a major destination for travellers going on safari, contributing KES 310.1 billion to the GDP, with an expected 3.5% increase to KES 515.0 billion by 2028 (WTTC 2018).

Kenya's population as of May 2020 stood at 53,647,618.¹⁷ Records show that since 1955, the percentage rate of year-on-year population growth has fluctuated between 2.28% (2020) and 3.9% (1985). It is appropriate to remember that the indigenous African population in Kenya is comprised of 70 ethnic groups, with Kikuyu, Luhya, Kalenjin, Luo and Kamba having the highest population numbers, to which must be added Chinese,

¹⁷ <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/kenya-population/> (Accessed 12th May 2020).

Europeans and, of course, Arabs and South Asians. However, in 1999, the Kenyan government stopped providing the ethnic breakdown, instead separating the information on the population by age, gender and district. In a 2005 report, Odhiambo Makaloo states that since 1962, districts are no longer purely occupied by one specific group; therefore, the numbers of ethnic groups cannot be exact. However, the number of ethnic groups has risen (Makoloo, Ghai and Ghai 2005 p.11). There is also the issue of Kenyan people not declaring their ethnicity in the government's 2009 census due to ethnic conflicts and violence following the 2007 election. In 2017, it was reported that the approximately 46,000 South Asians living in Kenya were declared 'Kenya's 44th tribe' (Mwere 2017, n.p.). Thus, it is clear that within any settlement – be it ancient on the shores of the Indian Ocean or modern such as the city of Nairobi – there exist relationships between people within which influences occur one on the other and which in turn contribute to the culture of the society as a whole.

3.1.1 Historical contacts and influences

Following Magesa (2013, p. 4), who wrote of the perils of speaking about “Africa,” “African culture”, “African Religion” or “spirituality” in a monolithic, undiversified sense’, we must be equally careful in describing the culture of Kenya and recognise the different elements that thread their way through the very fabric of an old region but young nation. Reduction to an essential Kenyan culture is problematic. First, Kenyan culture, like African culture, is a tapestry of various skeins rather than a homogeneous whole, and the importance of this fact cannot be minimised. It requires some exploration when establishing any idea of a Kenyan identity. This chapter, while noting the different

elements that constitute the fabric of Kenya and its people, will examine the weave of faiths and religions that influence it and to what extent they shape the nation's people and their everyday lives. The next section will summarise the historical, anthropological, political, sociological and religious influences on Kenya in order to understand their impact on the lives of people living in Kenya today.

There is evidence that the area we now know as Kenya and Tanzania has long been a regional trading hub. Arab settlements dating 2,000 years ago are known to have existed from Mogadishu in the north to Maputo in the south. The trade routes linking East Africa to the Indian Ocean hub depended on the monsoon winds. These carried traders southwards in December and then shifted direction from south to north in the summer (see Figure 4).

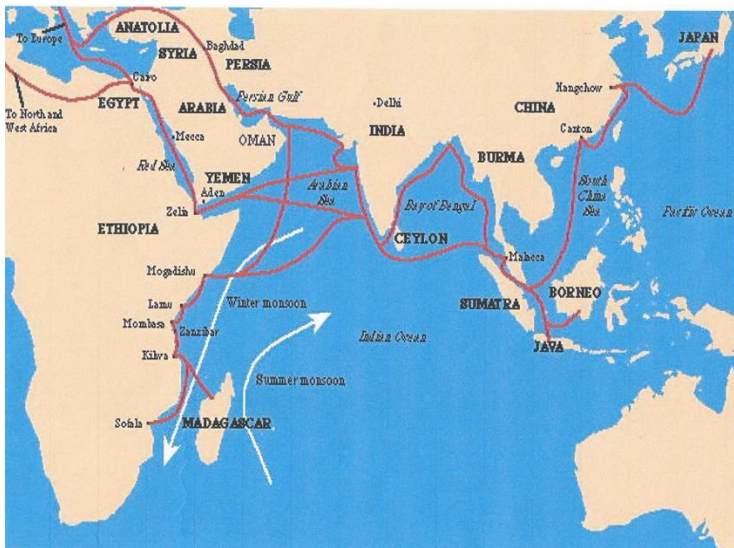


Figure 4. Indian Ocean trade map. Source: stock photograph

The proximity of Arabia and India to the east coast of the African continent, coupled with the rhythm of the monsoon winds, enabled trade between African peoples and Asians

(people travelling from the Indian sub-continent). Archaeological evidence shows that trade between the continents has existed for thousands of years and that Indian, Arab and other traders settled in East Africa during those times when they were unable to voyage home during the monsoon season (Chami 1999, pp. 205–215; Wood 2011).

However, it is important to remember that only a skeletal history can be derived from the scope of current archaeological studies, given the paucity of written records. Kesby (1977, p. 261) questioned how the peoples, the 'tribes', came into being, suggesting a lack of clear information about events in the period 1600–1850, let alone earlier than that. Kesby (1997) suggested that, consequently, much of what has been put forward is false: myths and folk history from 'numerous writers inferring or guessing what happened' (p. v). There is one source, however, that is recognised and often used by authors. Randell L. Pouwels (2002) attempted to establish the beginnings of trade and contact using the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (in Latin, *Periplus Maris Erythraei* literally means 'a sailing around'). The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* is a manuscript that lists, in order, the ports and coastal landmarks that vessels could find along the shore. It describes trading opportunities at Roman Egyptian ports along the coasts of the Red Sea, north-east Africa and India. Pouwels (2002) used it to suggest that an 'east-west nexus between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean was already in place as early as the second Century CE' (pp. 385–425). Citing Schoff (1915), Pouwels (2002) suggested that East Africans traded raw materials and exchanged primary products such as rhinoceros horn, tortoise shells and ivory for ghee, cloth and glassware with Arab and Indian traders as early as the sixth century. One source of historical records of East Africa was that of the traveller Ibn

Battuta who, in the fourteenth century, arrived in Mombasa. He described the inhabitants as 'pious, honourable, and upright, ... [with] well-built wooden mosques' (de Vere Allen 1981, pp. 306–334). The remark made by Ibn Battuta about the wooden mosques gives a clear picture of the religious environment that existed at the time. Islam was a major religious influence in East Africa and shared a presence alongside Christianity (in the form of the Eastern Coptic Church, which travelled from Egypt to what was then Nubia, present-day Sudan and Ethiopia). The history of the Christian Church in Africa must include the arrival of Christianity in Ethiopia. Here too it was a trade route, in this case from the Mediterranean through the Red Sea to Ethiopia and India (Baur 1994, p. 35), that led to, between the fourth and sixth century CE, the founding of Christian enterprise in Ethiopia. The country received its first Bishop from the Patriarch of Alexandria c. 350 (Cross and Livingstone 1974, p. 474). It was in 1498 that Roman Catholicism arrived in Mombasa on the Kenyan coast with the Portuguese explorer Vasco De Gama, who established a mission on behalf of the Catholic Church. One of the earliest Catholic churches reportedly established by Vasco De Gama in 1498, known as the St Francis Xavier chapel, still stands in Malindi in south-eastern Kenya (Wanzala J. 2015, n.p.). However, De Gama was met with local opposition, and it was in 1844 that, at the behest of the Anglican Church Missionary Society, Johann Ludwig Krapf arrived in Mombasa during a period regarded as the beginning of the 'modern era of Christianity in East Africa' (Park 2013, p. 85).

The building of the Uganda Railway linked the interiors of Uganda and Kenya with the Indian Ocean port of Mombasa in Kenya to support trade. It also provided missionaries a

way into the interior of Kenya. Baur (1994, p. 254) described it as a 'highway' into the Kenyan highlands for waves of missions. He noted how 'in eleven years more than twelve missions arrived, nine of which were Protestant' (p. 254). This gave the Protestant missions a significant presence in what was then the British East African Protectorate. From the early periods of evangelisation, Kenya saw a rapid increase in churches under the Protestant rubric. Nearly 20 different mission endeavours from all over Europe and the wider Christian world were planted in Kenya. Within a period of approximately 70 years, missions arrived from Germany and Great Britain. As well as the missions from Europe, there were also missions to Kenya from the United States and Canada. These included missionaries from the Church of God in 1905 and the Southern Baptists who, despite being late to the party by not arriving until 1956, gained wide traction due to an abundance of missionaries (Park 2013, p. 87).

One of the leading ministries coming into Kenya was the combined Anglican CMS and Presbyterian CSM, with the Church of Scotland alongside.¹⁸ The Roman Catholic Missionaries of Africa, the Society of African Missions and the Holy Ghost Fathers arrived in 1889. The race was joined by Catholic Mill Hill Fathers (1904) and the United Methodist Mission (1910). The Sisters of Mercy, which arrived in Uganda in 1899, expanded across Africa and arrived in Kenya in 1956. Its community is heavily represented in Nairobi

¹⁸ What is now the PCEA came into being in 1946 when it merged with the Gospel Missionary Society (GMS) from America and the Church of Scotland Mission. For the history, development and growth of the PCEA, see Wamagatta (2001).

(Gifford 2009, p. 56). The Hospital of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy is relied upon by local indigenous people in Nairobi who are too poor to go to hospitals that cater to the elites of Nairobi and those that provide services for Europeans. Yet, the service provided by the Sisters of Mercy is not free. This is not charitable work. As one respondent explained: “I give them money ... my son is sick ... they will help him.” This respondent, Abby, worked as a maid and was poorly paid by her employers. At 23 years of age, she was a young mother of a two-year-old boy, working to support herself and her family. Her son’s illness was a hardship on the whole family, who relied on her wages to meet the costs for daily living expenses.¹⁹

Today, the churches have a high public profile by publishing pastoral letters relating to the issues of the day that they consider to be within the purview of the church. Concerned with the moral and spiritual welfare of their congregations, the various Christian denominations publish letters that relate to family life, sex education and the wellbeing of the population. In 2009, Presbyterian moderator Rev. Githii (2009, p. 67) declared that the state of the nation was due to the influence of an Indian goddess. Other church leaders have issued pastoral letters. For example, Bishop Philip Anyolo condemned

¹⁹ Sources such as the *CIA World Factbook* calculate that the average age at which a mother in Kenya has her first child is 20.3 years old (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ke.html>) [Accessed 4th November 2018]. The average number of children for a Kenyan mother is 3.9 (<http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/scienceandhealth/Kenya-women-having-fewest-children-in-East-Africa/3073694-4073866-rywekr/index.html>) [Accessed 4th November 2018]. Working as a maid, this respondent would be earning in the region of KES 12,926.55 per month (average £3.97 per day) (<https://africapay.org/kenya/salary/minimum-wages/>) [Accessed 4th November 2018]. Based on the cost of medication for a person whose classification by the World Health Organisation is ‘unskilled’, this respondent would need to use seven days’ wages to buy one inhaler for a child with asthma. (http://www.who.int/medicines/areas/technical_cooperation/MedicinepricesKenya.pdf) [Accessed 4th November 2018].

corruption, called for fair and free election processes, commented on the behaviour of politicians and the judiciary and expounded on women's rights and other issues (Ayaga 2017).

The accounts of the legacy of colonial rule and the missionary endeavour in Africa have been well documented by sociologists, theologians and other academics (Kanyandago 2002; Gifford 2009; Gyekye 2011; Magesa 2013). This will not be pursued in this thesis. The remainder of this chapter explores how the responses to witchcraft by the colonial authorities and the Christian Church have conditioned the ideas and behaviours of African people and reshaped how they frame their concepts of good and bad misfortune. In addition, it examines how the belief in and practice of witchcraft have endured until today in spite of the already alluded to reforming efforts.

3.2 Nairobi

Like many capital cities on the continent, Nairobi is a product of colonialism. The location of Nairobi – or *enkare nyrobi*, a Maasai phrase meaning 'a place of cold waters' – provide sufficient water from two nearby rivers: the Nairobi and the Mbagathi (Obudho 1997). The city was founded to serve the economic development programme of the colonialists, who needed a staging post during the construction of the Kenya–Uganda Railway as it snaked its way from Mombasa to Lake Victoria. This strategic development served the British as a means of transportation for people and soldiers and was used to take raw materials to the coast for export. The city was akin to a waystation. Colonists, civil servants, military personnel and workers arrived and then moved on to other areas.

Nairobi was not planned as a city, but it became a hub for industry and for the people who had migrated there to establish businesses.

One of the main concerns for colonialists was malaria and other communicable diseases. Disease proved to be one of the principal barriers to expansion of the settlements and the railway. Charles Miller (2015) described the environment that the early settlers and railway workers had to navigate as 'waterless and poorly mapped ... the route punched through some three hundred miles of gradually rising savannah and scrub country that teemed with lions, whined with tsetse flies and breathed malaria' (p. 6). Up to this point, the health of Africans was not even a consideration for the colonialists. Indeed, as Dawson (1987, pp. 417–435) pointed out, the colonial government took the view that male labourers becoming ill 'was not a worry ... as sick labourers could be routinely dismissed and easily replaced'.

The location of the city proved conducive to settlement due to the relative lack of malaria in the region. To the west of the city, land was appropriated for residential purposes for White colonists and deemed suitable due to the milder climate. The fledgling city was strictly segregated and was used as a staging post for British colonial civil servants on their way to other parts of the empire and for settlers on their way to live in the highlands. Africans were not part of the makeup of the early settled population of Nairobi; the local population that was there was used only as a resource to enable the city to function. Between 1900 and 1922, laws and ordinances, such as the Native Pass Regulation and Ordinance (1903), were introduced in Kenya to regulate the movement of Africans. The Native Registration of Natives Ordinance (1915) required African males aged over 15 to

carry a card around their necks with their fingerprints and record of employment. This card, or *Kipande*, was needed when they left their reserves for White settler areas (Shadle 2010). Any African found outside the reserve without a Kipande was regarded as a vagrant and could be imprisoned.²⁰ Home (2012, p. 185) pointed out that 'Africans were only welcome in towns as obedient workers', while Tignor (1976) propounded that the settler population used these tools to exclude the local African population in order to maintain political security by controlling and policing the number of Africans in White areas. Furthermore, the settlers could be selectively inclusionary, when necessary, to ensure a supply of cheap labour within White settler areas.

The colonisers required a steady flow of 'African labourers to urban Europeans and to the cash-crop growing areas' (Dawson 1987, p. 3), and the local people could be forced to work through the combination of labour laws, land appropriation and the imposition of taxes that increasingly had to be paid in coin. It became a function of British rule that the laws introduced in Kenya enabled the production and maintenance of a labour force that would support the settlers' economic interests and provide able-bodied men for the British military campaigns during the First World War.²¹ Shadle (2010, p. 510) maintained that for White colonialists, the law 'was essential to their project, a tool to advance and protect their racial, political and economic dominance ... laws should be passed and

²⁰ See Tignor, R.L. (1976) Chapter VII for more information on the uses of the Kipande to subjugate Africans in Kenya.

²¹ MacGregor, R.W. (1968) provided a complete version of Sir Edward Northey's Labour Circular, No. 1, 1919. See pp. 103–104: 'Kenya from within: A short political history'.

enforced to create a new society'. The European settlers saw the courts as a means to serve their interests: maintaining Africans in servitude; protecting settlers' freedom, physical wellbeing and properties; and providing support to 'teach Africans new ways of thinking and acting' (Shadle 2010, p. 510). The decision by Sir Charles Eliot, the commissioner in Kenya at that time (1901–1904), to invite White settlers produced expectations from these settlers that it was the state's responsibility to provide a steady flow of 'cheap African labour' (Izuakor 1988, p. 38).²² To make estate agriculture viable, White settlers and colonial officials devised what Collier and Lal (1986) termed 'a form of coercive monopsonistic organization' (n.p.) to drive Africans into labour at low wages.

As described by Githinji (2019), to further cement the transformation, the British appropriated land in Kenya by various means, using, for example, the Land Acquisition Act (1894), Crown Lands Ordinances (1902 and 1915) and the Kenya Native Areas Ordinance (1926). Land was seized from groups such as the Maasai, who were evicted and moved into reserves (Hughes 2006). Africans lacked sufficient land in their reserves to support themselves and had little choice but to migrate to the European farms and towns in search of work.

Through the initial act of alienating land to settlers, the colonial state deprived some Africans of their means of production and laid the basis for the entry of Africans in ever-increasing numbers into the wage labour force'. (Elkins 2005, p. 15)

²² Izuakor (1988) made interesting points about the ideas of Charles Eliot who, while entertaining the notion of doing good for the native African, was in actuality serving the interests of White settlers.

The final part of the colonisation equation was the tax regime levied on the African people. The hut tax, first introduced in the coastal areas in 1901, started at the rate of one rupee per hut. However, further taxes were often levied if the man had more than one wife or had relatives who could not pay their own taxes. Initially, the tax could be paid in labour, livestock or trade goods, but later it had to be paid in cash. The tax burden made it difficult for married wage labourers to accumulate savings, and their net income could only supply a subsistence living for their family if they maintained access to land. A three-rupee²³ poll tax began to be collected from 1910 and had to be paid by all men over 16 years of age not liable to pay the hut tax (those who were not married). The poll tax was exacted from unmarried men between 15 and 40 years old (Clayton and Savage 1974; Shadle 2010). The labour migration system in Africa was one in which the wage paid to the (usually male) worker was barely sufficient to cover the cost of maintaining the worker from day to day during the period of their employment, with little left to buy other goods for their family.

These impositions caused life for the indigenous people to change dramatically, bringing new sources of misfortune for them to cope with. However, the situation for the South Asians in Nairobi was very different. They could live in the city. The importation of South Asians in the 1890s enabled the completion of the Kenya–Uganda Railway (1895–1901),

²³ For further insights into the effects of introducing coin in Africa, see Pallaver, K. (2018). In addition, the work by Sharon Hutchinson (1992) is also significant in presenting how paradigm shifts within communities occurred at a local level with the introduction of coin/money among the Nuer.

which became known as The Lunatic Line.²⁴ Estimates put the number of transported Indians at between 30,000 and 34,000, depending on the source (Herzig 2006, p. 13; Moywaywa 2013, p. 38). A large number of Indians were recruited by agents, but many made the journey willingly. From rural villages and the lower castes, they were driven to seek work by the harsh economic conditions and the rigidity of the caste system that prevailed in India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Salvadori 1989). These labourers had the technical skills and experience needed to supplement the local labour force, who did not possess the necessary skills, according to the White settlers. Some settlers believed that the 'Africans were not willing to do this kind of work' (Herzig 2006, p. 13). Sir Charles Eliot (1966) echoed this sentiment when he affirmed that the local workers were well suited to the work of maintenance but doubted that they 'could be used for purposes of construction' (p. 215). Furthermore, he surmised that the hideous cost of importing labour from India would not have been significantly reduced by using local labour due to the sparse population in the jungle surrounding the first part of the line.

²⁴ To put this into context, the 1880–1890 scramble for Africa spurred the British colonial government to attempt to have the railway built in five years. This was to ensure control of Uganda before other European powers such as Germany put claim to it. For an exegesis of the scramble, see Pakenham, T. (2015). Charles Miller (1972), in *The Lunatic Express*, showed how the endeavour of building the railway from Mombasa on the Kenyan coast to Lake Victoria in Uganda was fraught with funding problems, and the planned route for the railroad had to traverse through a hostile landscape. At the time, politically influential bodies reflected the opinion of the British public, who referred to the enterprise as the 'lunatic express'. Miller (1972) related how parliamentarian Henry Labouchère (1831–1912) called the endeavour a gigantic folly and named it the 'lunatic line', as cited in Taylor, I. (2020, p. 1), *Kenya's new lunatic express: The Standard Gauge Railway*.

The construction of the railway accommodated other Indian migrants who set up *dukhas* (small shops). The dukhas were lifelines for the Indian workers, providing imported home comforts and often acting as hostels for those with no place to sleep. The writer Bhanuben Kotecha (1994), cited by Alibhai-Brown (2012, pp. 70–71), described their role:

Whenever Indians came across an Indian shop along the forest tracks, they immediately felt at home ... a mutual warmth and understanding in a foreign land bound them together.

The Indians occupied the middle ground between the Black Africans and the White settlers. They ran the shops, worked as clerks and traders – positions and opportunities not afforded to the native population – and held the economic ground above the native Blacks, leading to feelings of acrimony from Black Africans (Moywaywa 2013), strands of which can still be found in Nairobi today. There are Black Africans who believe that Indians have their own magic and witchcraft that account for their success and must be countered, as related by research participants Miriam and Jane, who would not shop in certain Indian-run stores because they had been handed notes in change with the “face of the president pointing away from me just so I won’t have good luck.” At a conference on the issue of Migration and Integration in February 2020 at Oxford University, a fellow researcher from Kenya described how people who belong to Pentecostal churches claim that witchcraft is responsible for things going wrong in the church and that the power of the witches travels to Kenya and other areas of Africa from India. He told of a popular video that enforced this belief. The video was made in Nigeria and was circulating in Kenya and places such as Ethiopia.

He stated:

In Kenya, the Ramayana is broadcast on Kenyan national television on Sundays, and Kenyan people follow it like a soap. They have become enamoured with the portrayal of the Gods and Demons and with Indian magic.

The railway opened up Kenya's interior to mainly British colonists, who seized large tracts of land in the highlands from the indigenous peoples, namely the Kikuyu, Embu and Maasai, to whom it belonged (Hughes 2006).²⁵ The colonists used the land for farming. As the railway grew and spread into the interior, it not only transported the European farmers, missionaries and administrators; they, in turn, brought with them systematic programmes to attack slavery, witchcraft, disease and famine. One enormous problem for the British was that of witchcraft. Traditionally, communities such as the Meru people were governed by the traditions of the tribal ancestors, which were passed down to the elders of the tribe and administered by them. As Fadiman (1993, p. 23) noted, related to this tradition was the belief that the spirits of the ancestors 'remained in contact with the living to ensure obedience to the traditions was maintained'. This involved the enactment of rituals conducted by specialists who were believed to be in close contact with the spirits and, as intermediaries, worked to moderate any conflicts within the community or appease the spirits for any wrongdoing. As Waller (2003, p. 258) noted, Africans saw witchcraft as a powerful influence on their lives, and tribes had systems in place to combat the evil and maleficence wrought by suspected witches (Fadiman 1993; Waller

²⁵ See Hughes, L. (2006) acknowledges that while different ethnic groups underwent some form of loss, the British took more land from the Kenyan Maasai than from any other community.

2003). This would frequently lead to violent action against the suspected witch. However, less aggressive penalties were often meted out, such as banishment from the community.

The British approach to ruling in Kenya was to take the Lugardian model²⁶ of indirect rule. This model farmed out pseudo-control to the local 'Big Men': native authority figures and persons of substance who hold 'positions of both ascribed and achieved status' (Lentz 1998, pp. 47–67). Falling into these categories are people from all levels of the community group: lineage elders, wealthy peasants, persons in governance and individuals excelling at conciliation or fighting within their communities. This last group is portrayed in the characterisation of the main protagonist, Okonkwo, in Chinua Achebe's (2001) *Things fall apart*.

Lineage elders hold positions that take the decisions, safeguard the wisdom of the people, uphold the prevailing morality and have the final word in upholding the laws and customs of the people. Furthermore, a Big Man is surrounded by a cadre of men who provide a mechanism of support that legitimises and sustains his position within the community (Sahlins 1963, p. 289).²⁷ The British overlaid onto this concept a judiciary system that broke many of the traditional methods that were used by Africans to combat witchcraft. They set about producing the mandates that culminated in the Witchcraft Ordinance of

²⁶ Frederick D. Lugard was a British colonial administrator with experiences in various colonies, such as Nigeria (High Commissioner, 1900–1906, Governor and Governor-General 1912–1919) and Hong Kong (1907–1912).

²⁷ The concept of the Big Man is not exclusive to Africa. Sahlins' (1963) work, situated in Melanesia and Polynesia, shows that the existence of the Big Man has a central role in the social order of communities across cultures. 'Poor man, rich man, big-man, chief: Political types in Melanesia and Polynesia'. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5 (3), pp. 285–303.

1925 (National Council for Law Reporting, Kenya Law 213). Through various stages of tweaking, the mandate defined what witchcraft was and what it was not and attempted to draw a distinction between black and white magic. As presented by Waller (2003, p. 245), the 1909 ordinance created three offences that were classified as criminal acts: (1) 'to claim to be a witch' or 'to pretend to exercise or use any kind of supernatural power, witchcraft, sorcery or enchantment ... for the purposes of gain' (Section 2 of the Act); (2) to advise others how to use witchcraft or to supply them with the 'pretended means of witchcraft' (Section 3); and (3) to use such advice or means to 'injure any person or property' (Section 4). This was vital to what came next. These rather poorly defined categories were further refined. For instance, 'gain' was replaced by 'causing fear, annoyance or injury'. What occurred, as these seemingly fluid ordinances were put into effect, was that the native tribunals and their communities needed to catch up, to shape and reshape existing traditional processes in ways that attempted to accommodate the British legal framework. It does not take a huge leap of the imagination to then understand how native traditional mechanisms, which had evolved organically over centuries, could be and were being fragmented. In addition, it explains the erosion of authority and undermining of the status held by those who conducted and dispensed judgment and punishment in their communities. Waller (2003) asserted that what lay behind the efforts of the colonial rulers to quash the practice of witchcraft – its purpose – was to reduce, even remove, a local rival to their power and authority. Witches were clearly the wrong hands for any form of power.

For Kenyans, these shifts created a dissonance. They had to find a mindset, an adaptation that allowed them to live with alien legislation while trying to maintain traditional defences against witchcraft. The fundamental dilemma was that they could no longer act against witches without the standards of proof required by the imposed laws, lest they themselves be sentenced to death. Nor could they leave witches alone when witchcraft was obviously (in their worldview) the source of their misfortune. The admixture of the judiciary, the church and folk tradition created a maelstrom of indecision and a challenge to people's religious imagination. This is important, as will be discussed later (see section 5), because religious imagination is, as Warnock (1976, p. 10) observed,

necessary to enable us to recognise things in the world as familiar, to take for granted features of the world which we need to take for granted and rely on if we are to go about our ordinary business.

3.3 Religion in Modern Kenya

The religious landscape of Kenya is a web of various traditions. Islam and Christianity dominate. Yet in Nairobi, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Brahma Kumari and the Satya Sai Baba movements also have a significant presence, often recruiting Africans as well as indigenous South Asians. To this tapestry, we must add African panels such as the Mungiki cult and the Akurinu religious movement. These also have an impact on Black Africans' religious imagination. Wamue (2001) described the Mungiki cult as 'a religious movement ... with diverse aspirations ranging from political to religio-cultural and socio-economic liberation' (pp. 453–467). Mungiki began as a splinter group of the Tent of the Living God, founded in 1960. The movement established itself in

the late 1980s to early 1990s. It came into being ostensibly to protect the interests of the Kikuyu during Mau Mau land clashes with the Maasai and the Kalenjin people and, by its own definition, was modelled on the rebellion that took place from 1952–1960, during British rule (Murunga and Nasong'o 2007). During this period of oppression by the British, the Mau Mau, who were from different ethnic groups such as Akamba and Kalenjin but were mainly Kikuyu people, were, as Blakeley (2009, p. 81) attested, subjected to 'violence, mass detention and torture', which served to keep the population in terror, and before independence was secured, suspected insurgents were kept in camps where they suffered horrendous physical torture, flogging and rape by the British police force, Home Guard and military personnel. Aligning themselves with the Mau Mau, the sect took on the mantle of freedom fighters. The cult recruited from those who lived in poverty and on the very lowest rung of the social structure. This was reflected by the make-up of the Mungiki, who were reported as being a secret society with up to 500,000 members, mainly from poverty-stricken areas such as Mathare, the second-largest slum in Kenya. By recruiting the less advantaged, the experiences of the members equipped them with prime motivation to fight against oppression and exploitation and to respond to socio-economic and political processes that kept them in poverty and reduced their sense of self-value. Added to this was the Mungiki platform of a return to African traditions and rejection of westernisation, the legacy of colonialism and Christianity. The platform included the restoration of the self-respect of Black people, advocating brotherhood, sisterhood and a lifestyle based on traditional values. It sought to denounce non-native religions and to reconvert its members to indigenous beliefs (Murunga and Nasong'o, 2007). However, the Mungiki cult became notorious and was held responsible by the

authorities for protection racketeering, ethnic violence and involvement with politicians and members of parliament who were said to benefit from the votes of cult members and the general public through intimidation and violence. Consequently, the group was banned in 2002 (BBC 2007).

Wamue (2001), who chronicled the Mungiki movement, wrote that the more informed members of the Mungiki leant towards the work of high profile African American and Afro-Caribbean figures, such as Dr Rev. King and Marcus Garvey, who were active in pushing for social and political parity for Black people in the United States. They were also informed by religious texts from the Old Testament said to guide their attitudes towards the role of women. The Mungiki pushed away from Christianity and towards more traditional religious practices and ways of life. They advocated for the establishment of shrines which, for the Kikuyu people, would be holy ground used for worship. In their various leanings and aspects, the Mungiki applied their message to all the social, political and religious spheres of Kenyan life. Given the call towards traditional beliefs, the Mungiki message appeared to fill gaps that the Christian Church had been struggling to fill and still seeks answers to. One such gap is the response to witchcraft. Traditionally, many Kikuyu people have a belief in witchcraft, and its effect on life is greatly feared (Beecher 1935). I was informed by a respondent (Frank), who identified as Kikuyu, that to his knowledge, the last time a witch was believed to be killed in Kikuyuland was 30 years ago. He stated that there were no longer witches in Kikuyuland. However, writing during the period of colonisation, when the first stirrings of modern African political organisation in Kenya began and African Kenyans sought to protest against pro-settler policies, Beecher (1935)

noted that witchcraft was believed to be the root cause of sudden illness and other misfortunes, recommending that 'deporting' witches would thus give the people joy (p. 518). It is interesting to note that witchcraft is not mentioned in Wamue's (2001) paper, yet it is an integral item of Kikuyu religious belief. On balance, given that witchcraft is steeped in the psyche of the Kikuyu (based on Beecher's evidence), it follows that a return to indigenous religion would be accompanied by the presence of witchcraft. Given that figures put the Kikuyu at 22% of the Kenyan population (MAR data), I submit that witchcraft is to some degree present as a significant public practice. A visit to the Presbyterian University in the Kikuyu district and an encounter with Bishop Miolo revealed that witchcraft still exists in church congregations and that the Church actively seeks to combat the effects of witchcraft belief through the application of Western methods of counselling and education.

I argue that there is a process that takes place at the interface between religious ideals that can account for these counter-intuitive shifts in belief structures and that these shifts are prompted by interactions at a local level, such as encounters in local shops, and by sheer proximity to differing worldviews and their perceived impacts on the lives of the viewers and those viewed. Karen Flint (2008) showed this process within the area of healing and explored the phenomenon of therapeutic symbiosis by which, in South Africa, traditional African healing and Indian Ayurvedic medicines are sold and used together in a synthetic approach to healing by African traditional healers. This betokens a connection between health, psychological wellbeing and strategies for averting misfortune and bringing good fortune in the guise of wealth, material and social advancement. However,

I speculate that these features of human interaction are uncontroversial and exist in any society, not just in the heterogeneous societies that exist in South Africa.

3.4 Concepts of Misfortune

In this chapter, a detailed description of the founding of Nairobi was presented, showing the reality of the social, economic and spiritual circumstances within which the local indigenous population were assigned a place by British colonial authorities. Forced into menial work and with poor resources for health and wellbeing, whether local Africans thrived or merely survived rested on the rulings and actions of the colonial powers and the Christian Church. Colonial rule, Christian missions and the introduction of settlers began to reconfigure African communities through the removal of locals from their ancestral lands, displacement of different ethnic groups into reserves established by British administration and processes employed by missionaries to convert African people to Christianity. However, in everyday life, many indigenous Kenyans still pursue the age-old process of engaging with religious experts and healers from indigenous belief systems to resolve misfortunes such as physical or spiritual illness. Globalisation, technology and the arrival of social media have mitigated the effects of misfortune in some areas of everyday life, such as health care, but according to recent reports, large numbers of

Kenyans continue to rely on traditional healers and witchcraft practitioners to treat illness and as a way to gain success at work and in relationships.²⁸



Figure 5. A coconut juice trader under a tree with a signboard detailing services of a traditional healer in Malindi, Kenya. Source: National Media Group photo file



Figure 6. Street seller of herbal remedies in Nairobi. Source: The author

²⁸ See, for example, <https://www.nation.co.ke/health/traditional-healers-malaria-health-kenya/3476990-4215002-4t0ekvz/index.html> or <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/news/Kenyans-at-home-with-traditional-healers--herbalists/539546-4396346-lq0fl/index.html>

This section presents a description and analysis of how perceptions of misfortune and the use of witchcraft as both defence and explanation have been reimagined for the modern world, based on the experiences of indigenous Africans who live in or travel to work in Nairobi and its surrounding places, such as Machakos. While some African societies, particularly pastoralists or hunter-gatherers such as the !Kung people of the Kalahari (who conceive that disease and misfortune come from spiritual beings (Westerlund 2000)), do not attribute misfortune to witchcraft, this section brings into context how witchcraft remains a compelling element of African indigenous religion for many people and is linked to moral behaviour and communal coherence for many ethnic groups. From a religious perspective, the role of the Christian Church in the everyday life of African people is examined through its response to misfortune and accusations of witchcraft. However, it is necessary to first bring one element out in the open, however obvious or trivial it may seem.

3.4.1 Misfortune is relative

Misfortune is an umbrella term; it can be particularised in its experiencing, as each person will feel and express it from a unique perspective. In addition, any narrative surrounding misfortune must be taken in context by associating the experiences with the person or people who are living through it and their particular personal, social and environmental situations and emotional, psychological and spiritual circumstances. To further understand misfortune, one must consider how perceptions of misfortune – their expression in terms of the language used – may fluctuate over time and vary from person to person and country to country. This is particularly true for a study that has a theme of

how people in diaspora use their spiritual suitcase to combat misfortune. It is impossible to apply the same perspective of good or bad experiences to people from different cultures and ethnic communities or, indeed, from one person to another within a given culture or community (Lado 2009). As an example, I will offer how I, writing while living in relative comfort in a house in a suburb of London in the UK – arguably the fifth-biggest economy on the planet,²⁹ with free medical care facilities and a welfare system - would understand what life is like living in Kibera, the largest slum in East Africa. One’s perception of misfortune may vary from it being a question of degree of suffering, that ‘there is no single way to suffer’ (Kleinman and Kleinman 1998, p. 2), to misfortune being a consequence of a misdeed brought about by another person or persons. Alternatively, one’s perception may depend on how misfortune appears or how it is experienced by single individuals or their wider community. Finally, as Evans-Pritchard (1937, p. 24) pointed out, ‘linguistic conventions may well lead to misinterpretation of ideas’. Expression of misfortune, suffering and distress will vary depending on the local vernacular. While English is the lingua franca in Kenya, the country is multilingual. The variety of spoken languages reflects the country’s diverse ethnic groups and is intertwined with the languages spoken by migrants from neighbouring countries and those introduced by Indo-European settlers (Simons et al. 2019). For the research

²⁹ Depending on the criteria used. For further information, see https://fullfact.org/economy/uk-worlds-5th-or-9th-largest-economy/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI7fy68PCN4AIVSrftCh2ivgXXEAAAYAiAAEgldkPD_BwE and <https://www.investopedia.com/insights/worlds-top-economies/>

respondents and others I encountered in Nairobi and its environs, misfortune is as unique as the person narrating their story.

What is clear, therefore, is that misfortune is relative, and within context, it is perceived at a personal, spiritual, local and community level. What a perception of misfortune entails; how it is experienced, responded to and expressed in Nairobi and London by the contributors and respondents; and whether there is a shift of definition and perception between the two are the central elements of this research. The remainder of this chapter presents the investigation of African indigenous beliefs and the way they influence perspectives of misfortune. It will begin with an anecdote from one of the modern Nairobi respondents and then expand into an exploration of various influences upon that perception using examples from various groups, such as the Azande and the Gurage, and the Meru and Maasai people of Kenya. This is followed by an exploration of the impact of the introduction of the Christian idea of sin into Africa and how it may have altered existing perceptions. Finally, it returns to modern Nairobi to examine the modern perception of misfortune in the light of this process and the continuing use of witchcraft to account for it through the voices of the research participants.

3.4.2 Misfortune in Africa

‘To talk of suffering is to talk not of an academic problem but of the sheer bloody agonies of existence’ (Bowker and Bowker 1975, p. 2).

For most African people, the term misfortune covers a multitude of meanings, but it is generally used as a means of expressing something bad, something evil that has occurred

and may be linked to witchcraft. This is chronicled in the legion of accounts of witchcraft in Africa (Evans-Pritchard 1937; La Fontaine et al. 1963; Magesa 2014; Mbiti 1990; ter Haar 2009). Many of the people in Nairobi who agreed to talk with me did not use the term misfortune to describe situations such as illness, death or struggles to feed their family in our conversations (conducted in English). The term that was most used was suffering, and they expressed how their faith helped to relieve their suffering and to manage and cope in their daily lives. In one conversation, a female respondent (Miriam) recounted how the death of her husband was a devastating experience for herself and for her two sons. He had died suddenly, and she was left with two small children and no means of financial or familial support. Although living in Nairobi, she is of the Luo group, and her family and extended kin still live in a village much further out in western Kenya. She had met her husband at the African Inland Church in Nairobi, and although he was Kikuyu (another ethnic group, and in Kenyan culture such an intermarriage is frowned upon), they got married. Miriam spoke of her “suffering” after her husband died. She did not have a regular job and used what little money she could get from doing “day jobs ... and cleaning.” She spoke of starving herself so that her children could eat. She described how she would go to the church and talk to God: “It was only there I could show my grief and suffering.” She explained how, for weeks after her husband’s death, she would go to church to talk. Eventually, she had become stronger and looked for work. For Miriam, it was not the lack of support that led her to speak to God about her suffering. She said, “He was the only one ... he listened to everything I said ... when I did not stop crying ... God listened.” By expressing her misfortune in the death of her husband, she was also describing her experience and the struggle to cope and survive as suffering. She

considered her suffering to be the aggregation of the social, psychological, emotional and spiritual elements. According to Bowker and Bowker's (1975, p. 1) comparative account of suffering in the Western and Eastern world religions, it is a 'common experience in human existence that religion gives central importance and consideration to suffering'. Their assertion that protection, happiness and contentment can be gained by following the ethical obligations demanded by religion endorses Miriam's consideration that it was the accumulation of social, psychological, emotional and spiritual elements that created such suffering for her and her family. In the sense that Bowker and Bowker pointed to what the Church could offer, this participant felt encouraged and confident to face her misfortune, 'reassured in the face of catastrophe and death' (Bowker and Bowker 1975, p. 1) through her conversations with God.

3.4.3 African perspectives on misfortune: Spiritual causality

During his career as a journalist focusing on Africa, Richard Dowden travelled and wrote extensively about Africa and African issues.³⁰ His book *Africa, altered states, ordinary lives* is the result of his personal and professional explorations of people and events in the different communities as he traversed nearly every country on the continent. In the book, Dowden (2014) remarked: 'In all the years of travelling in the continent I have met only two Africans who said they did not believe in God' (p. 324). Dowden's statement overlays

³⁰ Dowden, R (2014), until recently the Chief Executive Director of the Royal African Society, made a unique contribution to understanding the issues. Through his personal and professional relationships, he presented a lucid analysis of Kenya's social, religious and political issues that frame the lives of the people and the overarching issue of religious extremists that foreshadows the counties development.

the idea that in Africa, there is almost no African who does not believe in God. Although Dowden did not make it immediately apparent in which God most Africans believe, it stands that indigenous African ontology and Christianity share the concept of a God or Supreme Being, the representations of which differ in significant ways. While this belief in God is ubiquitous, it is important to peel away the layers of such a belief and the structure of the spirituality, which, as Meyer (2008, p. 25) asserted, forms the basis of the individual's and community's 'self-definition' and portrays the 'horizons, values and purposes' of their entire being in the world. God is known by different names in different ethnic groups, and his name reflects his nature and attributes. For many African people, the spiritual world is not a place that exists elsewhere, outside of life. It is not held as a point of view or a way of looking at something. It is the lived experience, 'more a way of an activity' and 'involves dynamic relationships with visible and invisible powers' (Magesa 2013, p., 25). Using descriptions from various African sources, I will illustrate how these dynamic, intimate relationships order everyday life and form the basis of cause and effect.

To fully understand African concepts of misfortune, it is important to understand that in African indigenous beliefs, causality is perceived to be an ontological feature of the spiritual realm. African spirituality encompasses the experiences, thoughts, activities and powers that condition the ways in which people live on a daily basis. Relationships exist between people, God, subordinate spiritual entities and the spirits who occupy the natural elements and features of the world. It is in the interest of the people to ensure that these relationships, which are often quite fragile, are kept as harmonious as possible,

with the aim to achieve a happy and fruitful life. Maintaining a harmonious balance is, therefore, in many respects an ingrained communal reflex to ensure that the various forces impinging upon them do so positively rather than negatively (Ferdinando 1999). This communal reflex can become formalised in the persons of religious experts with unique skills, able to commune with spiritual entities, who ensure that balance is maintained through prayer and sacrifices, examples of what Magesa (2013, p. 39) termed 'prevention strategies'. The relationships are reinforced through ritual action, conducted by specialised human agents, between the people and the various spiritual agents (Kenyatta 1965; Mbiti 1990; Olupona 2000; Kirwen 2005; Magesa 2013). A diviner is one example of a religious functionary who characterises different facets of spiritual causality. In Akamba indigenous religious thought, a diviner can act as a predictor of future events by seeking out unknown causes of misfortune and discovering secrets. For the Gikuyu, diviners are the people who make the will of the ancestors and the creator God known to the community (Kirwen 2005). Yet another form of divination is that known by the Yoruba of Nigeria: *Ifá* divination, which does not rely on spirit mediumship. It was described by Olupona (2000, p. xvi) as a highly complex process used whenever an important choice must be made by an individual or community. *Ifá* divination plays a role in the life of one of the research participants in London. This will be detailed in a pivotal account of the resilience of African indigenous beliefs in diaspora (see section 4.6.4).

Evans-Pritchard, in his book *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande* (1937), wrote of the Azande people and their belief in magic as certain aspects of life being controlled by mystical forces or supernatural powers. The Azande belief is that witchcraft

is a physical substance that some people have in their stomachs (residing in the intestines) but is unknown to themselves and can be inherited. The Azande believe that although this substance appears naturally and physically, it operates in a supernatural way, bringing misfortune and sickness on other people. The people do not spend inordinate amounts of time accusing others or responding to accusations of witchcraft, but they do refer to it in everyday conversations. Witchcraft is suspected when a husband and wife argue, the crops fail or someone is taken ill. Simon Bockie (1993), writing of *Kindoki* (a term he preferred to witchcraft) among the BaManianga of the Kongo, described how a person who is suffering misfortune may not be criticised or condemned but should be helped in their time of trouble and embraced by the community and shown compassion and support by family and community, leading to social inclusion and empathetic responses. Issues common in the West, such as depression, feelings of isolation and suicide, are rare; however, one needs to ask whether these feelings, categorised under these labels in the West, would be so associated by Africans.

I.M. Lewis (1970, p. 293) argued that unsolicited possession by malevolent and capricious spirits may serve as explanations for illness and affliction, that a relation with stress and conflict in what he called peripheral spirit possession exists and that there are 'possible structural correlates' between witchcraft and spirit possession. His argument was that a victim who interprets their affliction in terms of possession by malevolent spirits engages in an indirect strategy to give responsibility for their misfortunes to mysterious forces outside society, rather than attributing them to others. Lewis (1970) clarified that by peripheral spirits, he meant those malicious, morally lacking spirits residing outside

culture and society who can be called upon in particular severe social situations. These spirits invariably target women and low caste³¹ depressed men. That women are more commonly possessed than men, he stated, infers no biological reason but rather indicates a common thread of deprivation, frustration and discontent as highlighting a stream of people as recipients of possession. These people then receive special consideration, privileges and unusually exalted positions. Lewis (1970) demonstrated this by citing incidents of women making special use of this phenomenon. A girl who was unwilling to marry ran off from her father and the village only to return 'possessed' some days later, and she eventually became famous as a diviner (p. 295). It appears that Lewis (1970) suggested a deliberate, conscious effort to deceive.

Another example is the Gurage of Ethiopia, where men worship a male god and women a female deity. This *damwamwit* deity is not only worshipped but is considered to possess all freeborn women and a class of Fuga men despised as a carpenter class. Being part of the female deity's (*damwamwit*) rites or being possessed by her in times of severe distress and affliction enables both men and women to be treated as elite Gurage males would. Lewis (1970) argued that the advantages of being possessed are therefore obvious. I would argue that Lewis' and scholarly discourse's attribution of possession as

³¹ See Kesby (1977), who pointed out that social patterns are complicated by the presence of what he called 'endogamous castes' (p. 53). These castes each have a specialised occupation: some are smiths, while others are hunters. However, he drew a distinction between Indian castes, as most of the people in Africa do not belong to castes at all.

a way of expressing and addressing social and individual misfortune makes witchcraft and possession akin to Munchausen syndrome: a psychiatric disorder that causes an affected person to exaggerate or create symptoms of illness in themselves to gain investigation, treatment, attention, sympathy and comfort from medical personnel. This effectively characterises witchcraft, possession and accusations of the same as a way for people to gain attention or raise their status. As Lewis (1970, p. 300) maintained:

to be possessed engenders redress of situations of adversity by making claims for attention and demonstrations of regard from a superior in a relationship of inequality without the potential inherent challenge of that relationship to a point where it breaks down, it allows for expression of aggression whilst maintaining the status quo.

Although the need for this type of, albeit temporary, reclamation of enablement and power to relieve severe misfortune may exist, this analysis stands in danger of reducing possession to nothing more than a ploy engaged in by unscrupulous or morally negligent people.

Generally, African indigenous societies have a creation myth that tells of the origins of human life and death. In Kenya, one of the largest ethnic groups, the Gikuyu, believe in one God, *Ngai*, the creator and benefactor, the 'Great Elder', who has no father or mother, works alone and visits the people but does not engage in their daily lives. God lives in the sky but resides on the mountains, one such being Mount Kenya, from where he visits the people on earth. *Ngai*, as a benefactor, gave the Gikuyu people land, where nature would provide for them, and commanded that they establish a home and have children. Indeed, a Gikuyu prayer said to *Ngai*, recounted in Kenyatta's (1965, p. 82) *Facing Mount Kenya*, contains this line: 'Let the women, herd and flock be prolific'.

Prayers are made and sacrifices offered to Ngai under the *mokoyo*, or fig tree, by families and communities during special times, such as during the performance of rituals at births, initiation rites, marriages and death. God is offered prayers and sacrifices for the coming of the rains to make the land fertile and bring a good harvest. For the Gikuyu, God is not to be approached to resolve misfortune until all else has failed. Instead, a religious expert communicates with the ancestor spirits to restore harmony and prescribe the actions needed to appease the spirits (Kenyatta 1965). Among the Luo people, death is seen as a rite of passage, and rituals take place to cleanse the home of evil spirits.

There are many taboos, which shape nearly all aspects of daily life. For example, Gikuyu women are said to hold the family traditions in their huts; therefore, it is vital that an evening fire is kept, thus maintaining family harmony and prosperity and keeping evil at bay. It is also taboo for a stranger to enter a woman's hut which, as well as being the family home, is sacred and doubles as the place where prayers are made to the ancestral spirits. If a stranger enters the hut, it is 'feared' that the hut becomes 'defiled' and misfortune occurs (Kenyatta 1938, pp. 74–75). As actions and behaviours deemed impermissible by religious and social convention could lead to misfortune for the individual, it is necessary to conduct rituals to avoid the consequences. The rituals and ceremonies are carried out by a range of people, specialist living agents (in Kiswahili, the generic term is *waganga*) such as herbalists, mediums and diviners, whose traditional functions include exorcism, prophecy and the removal of spells. *Waganga* act as mediums between the physical realm and the spiritual world. The religious experts go through

many years of training, both formal and informal, to learn how to treat and address everyday illness and minor ailments.

As well as illness, accidents, disease, and psychological and spiritual misfortune have what Park (2013, p. 173) called 'mystical' causes. These mystical causes are highlighted when someone dies. Death moves the living being to the realm of the ancestors. Kirwen (2011, p. 16) described it 'like going into another room'. A physical death is not the end. The person is believed to continue as an element in this life for as long as that person's name is remembered. Thus, a child who carries the name of the person who has passed on ensures that person remains and is accepted as a presence in the family. In fact, the deceased is regarded as being alive and interested in the everyday life of the living. This is strengthened when the deceased appears in dreams.³² The spirits can become the demons that adversely affect the lives of relatives if those relatives have not honoured the deceased and neglected to conduct the appropriate rites during the burial. Rituals involve appeasing the spiritual entity believed to be causing misfortune. It is worth identifying that not all those who die are paid obeisance by the living. There is no automatic sequence of events that enables the transition of the dead to ancestor status; it is reserved for blood relatives, kinspeople within the ethnic group. Even then, death must occur according to certain conditions. A person whose death is caused by an accident or through socially unacceptable ways does not become an ancestor. People

³² Kirwen (2011) brought together the perspectives of respondents from different African groups to provide a concise and clear image of the meaning of death and its cultural and religious significance for African people.

who are outside of the lineage group cannot move to the rank of ancestor. This demonstrates the strength of attachment between the living and the departed.

In his study of the Meru people of Mount Kenya, Fadiman (1993) described how God is conceived as *sui generis* and separate; in essence, he is aloof from the people and regarded as ambivalent in that, if angered, he takes blessings away. Once soothed, he can be beneficent. The Meru creation myth is one where God created the world and all that is in it and then left it to the people to live in and care for. However, alongside God are the spirits of the natural world, of rocks, pools, animals and trees, making these sacred places. All those sacred places have a 'life force' (Fadiman 1993, p. 29). In addition, there are ancestral spirits, who have retained their life force and their living bodily characteristics and are invisible, which enables them to move among the people to oversee their good fortune and bring about punishment. Such punishment comes in the event of the living breaking the social conventions laid down by ancestral traditions and causing communal conflict. According to Fadiman (1993, p. 30–31), for the Meru,

intent was irrelevant. Acts of seduction, rape, murder, or property damage obviously engendered conflict. But (men) accidentally catching sight of women bathing, of scavenging hyenas, or of human corpses had the same effect. The first set of actions meant conflict with the living; the second set, with the ancestral spirits.

While spiritual entities in another plane sustain life, they are also the source of many misfortunes and afflictions, such as curses placed on transgressors and for which a religious expert, acting as intermediary between the living and spiritual realm, is needed to perform the correct rituals to remove it. In many groups, such as the Meru, indigenous religious practice is concerned with sustaining life in this world, ensuring good fortune

and healing misfortune. The rules and structures are laid down as guiding principles for the people and, consequently, for the benefit of and creation of harmony in the community. Furthermore, among the many spiritual entities, it is the ancestors who are closest to the creator and are regarded as the protectors of right moral behaviours, life and the living. Fadiman (1993) stated that in their desire to protect the people from straying away from traditional ways, ancestor spirits would contact people in ways that would alert them to their misdeeds. This communication would take place through warnings delivered by messages from a dead ancestor in a dream or by an animal acting in a strange way. The warnings, if disregarded, would result in punishment. I suggest that the spiritual presence of ancestors must therefore not only be richly interwoven into the everyday life of the Meru, but the people must also be highly cognisant of their presence.

To summarise the previous examples, I borrow Magesa's (2013) deliberations on spirituality that make the point that there is a uniqueness to an individual's expression of spirituality because it results from lived experience. So, too, it is for different communities; thus, we are presented with 'various spiritualities' (Magesa 2013, p. 6). However, it remains that within its African expression, spirituality contains the essence of cause and effect. Good fortune is dependent on observing the right conduct, which in turn brings favour from the Supreme Being and his spiritual agents. If a person violates the principles laid down by God or the ancestors, sin is introduced, and misfortune follows. This leads us nicely into the Christian idea of sin and its introduction to Kenyan settings.

3.4.4 Sin and pollution

Peter Brown (1970) may seem an odd choice to begin an account of sin, but at the same time it offers a sign to a path that leads to one source of the perception of sin. Writing about the rise of Christianity from late antiquity into the Middle Ages (300–600 CE), Brown's account of a provenance of misfortune shows the impact of Christianity on not only a redefinition of the origin of misfortune but also the paths that could be taken to address it. The cause of misfortune originated with Adam and his disobedience of God's commands: the concept of 'original sin', following the Pauline doctrine that 'through one man ... sin entered into the world' so that 'by the trespass of the one the many died' (Cross et al. 1974, p. 1,010). This extension of sin to all humankind firmly trapped all humanity in sin from which only the Church offered a way out. What Christianity provided was not only an explanation of misfortune (in terms of sin) but also the means of deliverance through baptism (salvation). The community of the saved (the Church) provided protection from Satan, and more immediately, the practising Christian gained 'immunity from sorcery' (Brown 1970, p. 31). This research considers how communities in Africa experienced and considered misfortune at the time missionaries arrived and how the notion of sin was used by missionaries to influence and situate themselves within the sphere of African indigenous belief and influence its perception of misfortune.

To understand how early missions introduced and integrated the Christian notion of sin into the African religious imagination, one must venture into the history of the early missionaries as they encountered African rituals and practices. This will shed some light on the strategies they adopted. Baur (1994, p. 66) observed that early missionaries saw

the fight against what they classed as paganism as 'a fight against Satan, and traditional religion simply as idolatry'. Africans were a primitive people whose rituals of sacrifice were an 'adoration of Satan' and had to be driven out. In fact, Africans were nothing more than a blank slate, 'a tabula rasa ... their souls easy to reach and impress with whatever doctrine is proposed to them' (Kilger 1917, p. 75, cited by Baur 1994, p. 94). Missionaries held to the notion that family cults, the veneration of ancestors and entities such as nature spirits were all diabolical and evil. They were all the work of the devil. They took a critical and oppositional attitude towards African religion and practice and characterised it as devil worship, with special antipathy reserved for diviners and ritual divination (Kirwen 2005). Consequently, anything associated with these rituals was regarded as adversarial to the missionaries, and the enactors of such rituals were hounded until they submitted.

As previously mentioned, the notion of God already existed in Africa before missionaries arrived, and the notion of evil was well known within the indigenous frame of reference. The notion of original sin and redemption, however, was lacking (Zahan 2000). African societies are vigilant to the existence of evil, with a tendency to be absorbed with its nature. Evil is often experienced as real, concrete and indisputable. It is manifest in the existence of evil spirits and through human agents such as witches (ter Haar 2009; Udelhoven 2015). African indigenous religion is not, as Awolalu (1976, p. 275) noted, 'a fossil religion' but a religion that is lived in the everyday. Many of the missionaries arrived in Africa, as stated earlier, with little or no experience or knowledge of the people that they encountered, much less their cultural or religious beliefs. They would have arrived

with the biblical idea of the nature of sin (Romans 5:12). They came proclaiming that by accepting the Christian God through baptism and renouncing evil, the people would be saved, thereby gaining a rewarding and fulfilling existence in the next life, after death.

This attitude blinded some Christian missions to the inherent differences between spiritual healing and harm in African indigenous belief systems: the foundational, spiritual elements of protection and healing and what was harmful; local notions of good and evil; and the difference between healer and witch. In African indigenous beliefs, the totality of the universe's existence can be divided into three realms: this physical world, the other world and the margin between them, that is, the boundary. In this world are the living, the social world of human society and the real manifest world that is seen and experienced by human beings.³³ Interlaced with the physical realm is the invisible world of forces and powers that sustain the visible world. This realm is occupied by spiritual entities. African religious belief permeates all areas of life, and for many African people, there exists a complex ontological belief system, where the spiritual realm is populated with a pantheon of spiritual beings, nature spirits, ancestral spirits and, above all, a High God. In between these two, the margin comprises the sacred spaces, shrines and altars where religious experts using sacred objects enact rituals to communicate between the worlds. It is through such intercession by religious experts that people can appeal to

³³ There is an abundance of literature concerning African indigenous religions and spirit beliefs, authored by Africans and non-Africans. In this work, the term 'spiritual beliefs' is focused on the area of spirit belief and its expression within the context of misfortune. See Parrinder, E.G. (1967), Mbiti, J.S. (1970, 1990), Ranger, T.O. (1988) and Magesa (2013).

benevolent spiritual powers from the invisible realm to find the cause for their suffering and for their misfortunes to be abated.

To resolve this dichotomy, missionaries did not repackage their concept of sin as such; they took another path by adapting it and applying it to the rituals that had sustained daily life for African people and their communities. Whether branded as adaptation, assimilation, Christianisation or syncretisation (Parkin 1970; Ranger and Kimambo 1972; Baur 1994), this method enabled the missionaries to take African indigenous religious rituals, such as initiation rites for young men and women, and introduce Christian elements into their fabric. Such a strategy meshed well with the pragmatic approach taken by the Africans, whose rituals were not static in their enactment. Ranger's (1972) account of Anglican missions in Masasi, Southern Tanzania, highlights the non-ideological aspects of the mindset of African people. Their encounters with different groups, with different rituals and ceremonies, provided a 'complex process of borrowing and adaption, which led to new ceremonies or a series of new ceremonies' (Ranger and Kimambo 1972, p. 224). It is also germane to point out that not all missionaries were resolved to banish African indigenous religions and practices. Indeed, many were sincere in their attempts in what Steven Kaplan (1986) called 'indigenization' (p. 167). Kaplan used the efforts of Bishop Lucas of Masasi to demonstrate the attitude of some to tolerate and accept that African indigenous beliefs and practices would continue to exist while also coming to terms with its seeming incompatibility with a Christian way of life. Ranger and Kimambo (1972) and Kaplan (1986) both referred to the way Bishop Lucas attempted to integrate Christian teaching into local initiation rites.

Such rites have both spiritual and social importance. The young people are introduced to the art of communal living, adulthood and the responsibilities and moral duties that befit their place in society. It is also a preparation for marriage, procreation and the attendant familial responsibilities. In addition, initiation rites open the door to the initiate's education on knowledge held only by the elders of the group. The endeavours of Bishop Lucas, as recounted by Ranger (1986) and Kaplan (1986), used Christian liturgies, prayers and blessings and imported them into both the physical and spiritual space within which an initiation rite took place. However, the original meaning and the symbolism of the rites remained unaltered within the African religious imagination, as it was integral to the continued good fortune of the community and the initiate.

An example of a more direct approach to misfortune by missionaries is the missionary John Ganley (1985), cited by Dyrness (1990, p. 56), who, while realising that he could not deny the power of witchcraft, chose to employ a different method to introduce the concept of Christianity, using the concept of sin.³⁴ Based among the Bakaonde people, Ganley was made aware of a village that was believed to be cursed by witchcraft. The people were suffering from illness and death. Ganley gathered all the villagers and, using their belief in the evil of witchcraft, introduced the idea that the misfortunes were the result of pollution caused by original sin. He told them that evil and pollution had come

³⁴ Dyrness (1990) contended that the biblical rendition of sin in Romans 5:12 and its progression into the world is linked to the African concepts of evil and sin. He advanced that pollution is a spiritual condition of the person and that the problem of sin is not simply the performance of an act.

into the world because man had sinned and that God had departed. The villagers reportedly nodded agreement while Ganley went on to tell them that witchcraft was evil. To remove evil and sin, the pollution had to be removed. He went on to instruct the women of the village, as representatives of the community, to confess their sins in front of the village. Once this was done, Ganley declared that evil was in front of them and that they could leave it there and follow (the Christian) God's way of life or take it back to their houses. If they followed God, the witchcraft would be ended, and life could begin.

I conclude that the efforts made by Christian missions were clearly effective in reshaping some performative elements of rituals and introducing a more nuanced vision of the world and their place in it into the psyche of African people. Be that as it may, what remained sacred for African people was that ability to explain, predict and control misfortune using the means available to them. The intervention of the missionaries was designed to establish their place in the communities and bring souls to Christ; however, the success of these efforts would have depended significantly on the perceived efficacy, in the minds of Africans, in supporting their ever-present fight against misfortune. There are also other factors we must consider in the development of the religious imagination of modern Kenyans. Post-independence, politics also had a role to play in reshaping perceptions of witchcraft. One event stands out in post-colonial Kenyan politics, and the next section will explore the impact of this event. It will explore how the governmental bodies used indigenous religious beliefs and accusations of devil worship and witchcraft, introducing a shift and projecting witchcraft into the very fabric of governmental and social misfortune.

3.4.5 Politics, Christianity and the Moi report: Satanism and witchcraft

So far, Chapter 3 has examined the historical influences I deem to have most shaped the religious imagination of modern Kenyan Africans. The purpose of this approach is to show how these influences might affect their responses to misfortune. It is also an important milestone along the road to understanding how and why the responses of a Kenyan in Nairobi and a Kenyan in London might differ. This is necessary if we are to understand the current state of witchcraft belief and practice in London within African communities and challenge the response of the authorities to it, especially if those authorities look to Africa for solutions (see Section 1.3.1). Section 3.2 discussed in some detail the resolve of colonial authorities to subjugate and control the belief in and practice of witchcraft, as a form of colonial oppression, through judicial processes and practices. Section 3.4.4 outlined how missionaries in Kenya sought to convert Africans to Christianity through a combination of methods that married a belief in African witchcraft with Western Christian notions of sin. Evil and misfortune were re-characterised as punishment for the practice of rites and customs connected with witchcraft beliefs.

This section continues the narrative of misfortune and belief in witchcraft and witchcraft practices in Nairobi and its surroundings. It focuses on one significant near-contemporary event that restructured the narrative on witchcraft and its consequent effect on everyday life. It introduces forms of political introjection into the discourse on witchcraft and spiritual malevolence in tandem with the esoteric role of the Christian Church. Overall, it demonstrates the impact of key political and religious figures, policies and decisions made by the burgeoning Kenyan elites after independence on the lives of ordinary Kenyans. As

a side note, I found it interesting that the behaviour, tactics and attitudes of the major actors during the colonial period were replicated in Kenya by domestic powers in their fight for political dominance.

After the sudden death in 1978 of Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, Daniel Arap Moi was installed in office. During Moi's 24-year term in office, he introduced various strategies designed to cope with or manage growing political opposition. Moi instigated what Smith (2008, p. 32) described as a 'crackdown on all forms of perceived protest and opposition and drew on colonial and African idioms and memories ... to create a paranoid political culture'. One of the ways by which this culture was created was through a now infamous report on devil worship commissioned by Moi in 1994. It is not my intention to pursue the findings of the report in full, but I will review certain of its controversial findings for the following reasons: the report and the reported findings and recommendations contributed to an atmosphere where Kenyans became further sensitised and hyper-alert³⁵ to devil worship and satanic cults, and the report subtly shifted the role of witchcraft in the religious imagination. In addition to having social consequences, being accused of witchcraft was now politically dangerous.

³⁵ Hyper-alertness or hypervigilance is one of the many symptoms of complex PTSD. People are affected by overwhelming negative or traumatic personal life experiences and events, resulting in the development of a sense of hopelessness or victimisation. Trauma and negative experiences are experienced in various ways and can occur as a single event or as a constant foreground to one's life, for example a car accident or living in a conflict environment. Such experiences erode the foundations of existing coping strategies, and a state of constant alertness serves as a safety mechanism. See DSM-IV; Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (2013), DePierro, et al (2019).

Moi authorised the Catholic archbishop of Kenya, Nicodemus Kirima, to form a commission whose task was to investigate devil worship in Kenya. My attempts to gain access to a copy of the report proved difficult, to say the least. It appears to be a report that only certain people have access to, such as those high up in religious, political and academic circles. Possession of the report is a sensitive topic. From the remarks by various contacts during my search for the report, I surmised that people who have a copy would rather this is not widely known.³⁶ The report was not officially released to the public because of 'legal implications' (Gough, D. 1999). Nevertheless, by 1999 it had been leaked to the Kenyan parliament, certain religious organisations and Kenya's mainstream daily newspaper, *The Nation*. I was told that the copy was "a photocopy of the report made under the table"³⁷ and that *The Nation* had proceeded to serialise it. The commission's report was subsequently disseminated throughout Kenya and abroad by various local, national and international press agencies.³⁸ *The Nation* claimed that the administration had released the commission's report to religious organisations but not to the public due to 'the sensitive nature of the findings' (Gicheru, K. 1999, p. 2). An audit conducted by Africa Centre for Open Governance, or AfriCOG, in 2007 pointed out that the investigation into devil worship was prompted by the Church. It is therefore no surprise to learn that the body of the commission was predominantly Christian, with clerical representatives from

³⁶ Unauthorised possession of the report could lead to a breach of the Kenyan Official Secrets Act, Part II, Article 4 (<http://www.icnl.org/research/library/files/Kenya/Officialsec.pdf>).

³⁷ Personal conversation in Nairobi, 23 July 2019.

³⁸ Among the British press, the *Guardian* and BBC had coverage of the Moi report.

various denominations. According to AfriCOG, the PCEA, the Christian Inland Church and the Anglican Church of Kenya all had representatives on the commission.

Paul Gifford (2009) listed the salient points of the report and gave an account of the socio-political situation surrounding Arap Moi's commission.³⁹ His account offers insight into the complex relationship between the Christian churches and a political system portrayed as distressing in its corruption and based on clientelism. Furthermore, the political impact of ethnic allegiances added to the controversy surrounding the report. Arap Moi utilised what Ajulu (2002, p. 26) called the 'politicisation of ethnic cleavages' to consolidate his position and realise his economic and political aims.⁴⁰ Gifford (2009, p. 10) commented that throughout his regime, Moi, a member of the Kalenjin, kept other groups at a disadvantage by, for example, hindering agriculture production by the Luo and orchestrating ethnic clashes along the coast of Mombasa, thereby shattering the tourism industry, a major revenue source, held largely by the elite of the Kikuyu.⁴¹ Tribal clashes were most severe in 1993 at the borders between the lands of the Maasai, Kikuyu and Kalenjin peoples in the Rift Valley. Hundreds of families were displaced from their farms and livelihood. In 1994, further outbreaks of ethnic violence between Kikuyu and Kalenjin

³⁹ Gifford (2009) sourced the report via the national newspapers and a report by John Amino (2000), 'a pirated version, containing much of the report' (p. 200, n. 21). This report was also cited by Samper (2009), although the author is listed as 'anonymous' in this work.

⁴⁰ Ajulu (2000) discussed the question of the politicisation of ethnicity as a tool for dominant political elites and as a strategic resource in governmental strategies. See also Michela, W. (2009) on the role and use of ethnicity in Kenya's political regime.

⁴¹ The Kalenjin are a combination of groups, including the Pokot, Nandi and Marakwet, in the Rift Valley. The various groups shared the Nandi dialect and combined under the name Kalenjin; thus, Nandi-speaking peoples became a major ethnic group in Kenya (Omosule 1989).

led Roman Catholic bishops and opposition leaders to repeat accusations of government responsibility for instigating the unrest (Lake 2003).⁴²

The official report revealed the existence of satanic cults in Kenya. It claimed that there was widespread devil worship in Kenya and that it had reached into schools, churches and government offices.⁴³ The commission concluded that any group or institution standing in opposition to the good of society may qualify to be called satanic. The commission did not spare some of the established churches and spiritual movements. The Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses were accused of being doorways into the occult. The Freemasons, the Theosophical Society, Rastafarians and various other groups came under particular attack, with the Freemasons being accused of 'praying in the dark, eating human flesh ... and walking backwards when entering temples' (Galana 1999, n.p.). According to the report, having wealth – or the trappings of wealth – is a possible sign of devil worship. Item 7 of the report is of particular interest to this study. It states that witchcraft as a cult should not be confused with African traditional healing systems and that such systems are intended to safeguard life and not destroy it. Unlike witches, traditional healers were not destructive to life or moved by envy or hatred. This is why

⁴² Lake (2003) offered a factual and in-depth analysis of Kenya as a country in its totality and the situation concerning Arap Moi's time in office. See Kenya: Recent history. In: Murison, K. ed. (2003)

⁴³ Report of the Presidential Commission of Enquiry into the Cult of Devil Worship in Kenya. Chairperson: Archbishop Nicodemus Kirima. Commissioned October (1994), unpublished. During my field research, I obtained access to a copy of the report held at the offices of *The Nation* newspaper, with the help of the librarian at the office on Kimathi Street, Nairobi. The report had not been digitised at the time of my visits to the archive and remains undigitised as of June 2019.

both 'sorcerers and witches were isolated and seen as enemies of society ... that witchcraft is inimical to human survival' (Commission Report, p. 2).

The report places the responsibility for a large portion of the religious and social ills of Kenya on foreign influences that sway the people to harmful ways, thereby damaging Kenya's cultural and moral values. The popular media – films, videos and wrestling on TV – were blamed for these influences. The report claims that African people were lured into the occult by the culture and music seen and heard in the *matatus*. One recommendation is that a special police force be formed to investigate cultic crimes and alleged devil worship cults, especially in Kenya's schools, to combat these influences (Weru 2010). Close monitoring and investigations into these institutions and societies is advocated, as is strict censorship of the media. The newspapers were filled with responses from those who were targeted by the report. AllAfrica Global Media (an organisation that gathers news from across Africa and distributes reports on its website) documented responses from opposition politicians such as Paul Kibugi Muite, who suspected the report was a mechanism for dismissing opposition to Moi's regime. Others, including Catholic Bishop John Njue, was alleged to have dismissed the report as narrow-minded, 'irrational and a coverup' (allAfrica.com 1999). Other church leaders, such as Bishop Mwana a'Nzeki and Presbyterian minister Rev. Joya, and the secretary general of the teachers' union were reported in the newspaper as having declared it 'a waste of public funds' (Daily Nation 1999, n.p.). Moreover, the reactions to the report did not miss the fact that leading the commission was the primate of the Catholic Church who laid the charges of occultism and Satan worship.

It was clear that the report targeted those individuals, churches, spiritual movements and societies in Kenya that fell outside government control and were ill-disposed towards government policy and Moi's regime (Galana 1999). It must be apparent to any observer that the composition of Moi's commission and the conclusions proposed by its religious representatives bring to light Moi's political motive of curbing any opposition movement to his political regime. It also brings into stark relief the relationship between Arap Moi's ruling party and particular Christian church leaders that created a combined political, social and religious climate, deeply affecting the ordinary people of Kenya. In their everyday lives, people, particularly those in Nairobi, had to navigate a web of suspicion and mistrust, made all the more convoluted by the mixed and contradictory messages coming from official channels and other supposedly trustworthy sources. Gifford (2009, p. 27) highlighted the involvement of Christian leaders who opposed Moi's regime and those who were seeking to bolster his regime. In the latter camp was Bishop Kitonga from the Redeemed Gospel Church of God, who preached that Moi 'was appointed by God to lead the country'. Moi himself associated himself with the righteous by telling the people that 'freedom of worship would be lost because opposition parties believed in witchcraft'.

The machinations of the ruling body's politics during the period of Moi's presidency echoed elements from the period of colonial occupation that saw African Kenyans living their daily lives in conditions regulated by higher authorities. During colonial occupation, control or agency in their lives was dependent on the social and economic strategies and targets of the ruling British administration and the proselytising messages and processes of missionaries. During that period, indigenous religious beliefs were demonised, and

laws were made to restrict the use of witchcraft and other spiritual pathways. This limited time-honoured methods by which people could identify the causes of misfortunes or provide an explanation and thereby offset the effects of misfortune. However, unlike the conditions of British rule, Moi's regime, typified by the devil worship report, acted to reassert an awareness of – and plant into the people's consciousness – an idea that their and the country's ill fortunes were not a result of bad government. They were not, in fact, caused by anything related to socio-economic development and bad governance but to demonic power, what Gifford (2009, p. 203) highlighted as 'spiritual causality' (originating from local and international sources).

It should be noted that, in his introduction, Gifford (2003) expressed how he relied heavily on the – mostly Christian – contributors to the daily newspapers in Kenya. These contributors wrote commentaries on subjects that affected most areas of life, although he highlighted that they 'were without the preoccupations of the professional theologian or clerical caste' (p. 2). Of course, this was but one of the many sources used by Gifford. Footnotes refer to pastoral letters, church newsletters, government reports and newspaper articles as being among his main data sources. There are numerous daily newspapers in Kenya operating as free press. They act as the country's watchdog for political, social, economic and religious matters (Odhiambo, L.O. 2002) and, more importantly, are a rich source of up-to-date information and opinion.

Nevertheless, there is still the question of whether such commentaries provide too narrow a perspective. For example, Shiko Gathuo (2010) pointed to Gifford's attention to the behaviour of politicians, leaving behind the historical context of Kenyan elitism in

which the British colonial establishment elevated members of the community to the position of chiefs. Wamagatta (2008, p. 295) illustrated how, through this process, the councils of elders – who established laws, regulated conduct and meted out punishment in their community – came to be supplanted by appointed chiefs or collaborators. These men were installed by colonial authorities among different ethnic groups, such as the Kikuyu, and were often compelled to perform tasks for the colonial government. They collected taxes and acted as labour recruiters, sending people to work destinations under guard. They were paid a nominal sum of cash money by colonial authorities. For the appointees, the main draw was to share in the ‘wealth, power and prestige’ of the colonisers, leading to improved social standing within their communities. For Africans, the position of chief given by the colonial authorities was regarded as a high rank in the colonial civil service. However, chiefs or collaborators soon became adept at finding ways to become rich and powerful. One of the methods they employed was to take money from those who could afford it, who would thereby avoid enforced labour. This left those unable to pay the bribes – the poor, the very young, the very old and, of course, women – vulnerable to the burden of carrying out communal labour. The wealthiest of the chiefs and collaborators owned land and had many wives and houses (Tignor 1976, pp. 42–72). Gathuo (2010, p. 177) expressed how ‘the system which the colonialists employed enabled the growth of an elitist attitude that bred the elitist attitude prevalent today’. This attitude, inculcated by those who form today’s elites, fed into the concept of the Big Man. This method of accomplishing power and authority was evident in Moi’s time as leader and continues today in Kenya’s political and social sphere.

I expand on Gathuo's (2010) conclusions by adding my concern that Gifford's sources, though widespread, represented a narrow section of Kenyan society: the educated, English-speaking elite. I think engaging with a wider cross section of the Kenyan people, those at the local level, would have provided a richer analysis of the impact of the report across Kenyan society. Moreover, it is the religious and spiritual effects of the Moi report on the everyday religious life of ordinary people in Kenya, and in particular Nairobi, that merits attention. Once Moi and portions of the Catholic Church and other denominational churches wove devil worship, demons and Satanism into ordinary people's everyday tasks, how did the people protect themselves when conducting such routine tasks as going to local Indian supermarkets to buy food or combat the failing grades of their children in school? Such an expansion would have allowed greater insight into ordinary people's experiences, thereby bringing a realism to the study, in a sense moving from a top-down perspective to one from the factory floor.

This realism was paramount to this study on witchcraft in Nairobi. What I gleaned from my field research conducted with local people in Nairobi and its surroundings was how ordinary folk sought to protect themselves from demons and harmful spiritual entities. In several cases, this involved a shift in religious imagination – the idea of “putting Jesus to one side.” Some participants sought out long-established ways of protection by connecting with indigenous diviners and other spiritual experts to avoid or correct misfortune. This supports and concretises one of the main themes of this study: indigenous religion is not static but is adaptive to the needs of ordinary people.

Nearly all the people I met and conversed with in Nairobi described a pattern of behaviour that can best demonstrate how a belief in witchcraft shapes everyday habits. The most prominent of these are examples from academic professors and bishops who are based in Nairobi but grew up outside of Nairobi city. In one conversation, a professor from a university's Philosophy and Religious Studies department described his walk to school:

like I remember my mum used to tell me and this ... she would tell me ... be very careful, even as you walk and you chew sugar cane ... you don't just throw the chewings anywhere; no ... somebody may pick [up] those chewings and bewitch you ... And I see, if you look at it in one sense, it was hygienic in nature ... and [she] would also discourage [us] from writing letters anyhow ... because [writing] a letter to a girlfriend ... some of those girls that you are befriending are not good; they would take your letter to the mother ... and some of these women, it was believed they had some ... they were keeping snakes, some pets in their villages [and] in their houses, and they would make ... they would [take] a portion of a broken pot ... it would be abroad where the snake would come, it would coil ... and it would actually be ... they would stay in there, they would actually make a soft spot for it (the snake), so when it [came], it would coil, and it would stay there ... and even up till now, there are certain families that are feared [for] keeping those totems ... Some of them are kept within the home, others are kept along the riverbeds, and people even fear going there.

The professor, whose awareness of witchcraft was instilled in him at a very young age by his mother, then formed a pattern of behaviour that resulted in a conscious process to avoid misfortune. This participant was one of many who, as adults during Moi's regime, became increasingly hypervigilant. The coverage of the report and the discourse surrounding the responses has also resulted in a situation where witchcraft is jostled from what was perceived to be a position of an unsophisticated, local concern to one that takes centre stage in wider society. Living under conditions that require ordinary people to be

alert to the spread of Satanism and evil in all areas of everyday life has created powerful processes that affect the livelihood of ordinary people as they struggle to ameliorate their economic and social situations.

J.H. Smith (2008), who explored how economic and social development has advanced a reimagined view of witchcraft, described the effects of socio-economic turmoil in Kenya. Smith worked with the Taita people of eastern Kenya. His locus of attention on the attempts of the Taita people to 'transform witchcraft into development' (p. 91) was gained by having access to and interacting in the everyday lives of the people in their homes and by observing their relationships and way of life. In light of their struggles against the social and political constraints levied on them, the Taita people attempted a reimagining of witchcraft as something that can be controlled and reshaped to suit the needs of development by identifying it as having 'a productive element' (Smith 2008, p. 20). However, Blunt (2004, p. 305) pointed to a distinction between Satanism and witchcraft, referring to Satanism as a 'theory of illicit socio-economic evil, of global dimension' that includes witchcraft, and claimed that 'satanism has a different source of illicit power (the devil) than the more parochial discourse of witchcraft'. He asserted that witchcraft is more aligned with alleged anti-social behaviour (compared with Satanism). Diane Ciekawy (1989) and Stephen Ellis (2011)⁴⁴ brought this into focus (the foundations

⁴⁴ Ellis (2011) presented unique insights into contemporary Africa's continued political turmoil and issues of corruption, providing a view into the effects of corruption on subjects such as climate change and farming at the local level. A report produced by Monzani (2018) for *Transparency International* outlines the tensions that exist among government institutions, civil society and communities around forest governance, linked with the effect of corruption and the issue of land tenure for villagers in rural Kenya. See also Bearak's

of the discourse surrounding witchcraft within the processes of statecraft, development and economics), seeking to establish how corruption and violence during Moi's regime spread out to Kenyans in rural areas. As Wrong (2009, p. 11) reported, 'sleaze had become endemic'. Kenyans already lived with handing over petty bribes to policemen and local officials, and they knew that jobs were handed out by politicians and their cohorts to members of their own ethnic groups and that the country's politicians and those in authority were feeding off the nation, further blighting people's ordinary everyday lives. Additionally, religious leaders were spreading the word that evil was everywhere, especially in the school system.

For those Kenyans with a belief in indigenous religions and witchcraft, the commission's report not only categorised them in opposition to Arap Moi and the health of the nation but also placed witchcraft in the same category as devil worship and Satanism. Thus, in a similar vein to the methods employed during the colonial period, this politicisation of witchcraft was another avenue to eradicate witchcraft practices, pushing witchcraft further away from any association with indigenous methods of addressing misfortune and healing. An important consequence of this and of the behaviours of politicians and political elites was a heightened mistrust of political and social institutions among local people. Moi's accusations levied towards the various institutions and religious

(2018) article, which reports on the lack of opportunities in terms of jobs and education as a consequence of alleged corruption of politicians and the elites in Kenya's government and institutions.

establishments became the link that Blunt (2004, p. 297) described as 'the very mechanisms by which Satan collected the life force of Kenya's regular folk'. This led to a loss of faith in these institutions' ability to deliver benefits and protection from misfortune in everyday life. What is clear is the misfortune experienced by the diverse ethnic population in Nairobi during this period. Ethnic tensions existed within a climate of accusations, from the Christian churches and other bodies, of fraud, repression and corruption by the government. Attempts to combat this graft were hampered by the fact that the opposition was poorly organised. This resulted in widespread discontent and social alienation, increased crime rates and an uplift in urban violence (Lake 2003, p. 550). However, the elements of African indigenous religions – the rituals, belief in ancestors and spiritual entities as agents of spiritual causality – remained as pillars that provided context, structure, meaning, values and ethical principles for African communities and continued to be sources for social stability and cohesion. In conversations with respondents about this period in Kenya's history, they described how "traditional religion and belief in magic and witchcraft was pushed down ... so much that people would not speak about it." In Nairobi, I met 40-year-old respondent Audrey, a university graduate and journalist working for one of the free city newspapers in the central business district in Nairobi. During the conversation, she talked about how things were for her parents during that period. She described how "the middle class were joining the Christian churches as a kind of status elitism ... it got them into politics, and they wielded some political and religious authority." She told me that her brother "is Down's Syndrome" and that her grandfather had told Audrey's mother that "someone had gotten to him." Her grandfather told the mother to see "a healer ... a witchdoctor, you know ... to get him

fixed.” Audrey’s mother was a devout Christian who tried to convince Audrey’s grandfather to go to church because she was worried that he (grandfather) “would burn in hell.” However, the mother still sought witchcraft as a potential remedy. In the 21st century, these beliefs are far from outdated. Indigenous religions remain vital, enmeshed within the framework of modern life, and they continue to be challenges for the established religious and secular authorities in African society.

3.4.6 Witchcraft: Misfortune, gender and status

Section 3.4.5 showed that the practice of witchcraft and those accused of devil worship can become the focus of all that is unacceptable in society and the target for political action and spiritual retribution. The authors of the Moi report used them as scapegoats, much in the Girardian sense (see Section 1.2.3). However, it was not just Moi’s political, ethnic or business enemies that needed to fear accusations of witchcraft and demon worship. Far removed from the elite sphere, I found that in Kenya, accusations of witchcraft were evident at the local level: the elderly poor were suspected of witchcraft because of their grey hair and red eyes and were thrown out of their homes by family members and other relatives.⁴⁵ In situations where a member of the family fell ill or

⁴⁵ The identification of who might be a witch was well documented by scholars such as Middleton (1967), Magesa (1998) and Shorter (1998), who thoroughly documented which people are at risk of being identified as witches. They include people who may be perceived as extroverted or introverted. They are stereotypically poor but are seen to be inconsistent with societal expectations (Magesa 1998, p. 174). One respondent would read the reports in the newspapers about people who were lynched, whose homes were destroyed by fire or who suffered stigma resulting from being suspected or accused of witchcraft and were consequently ostracised by family and neighbours (Njeri and Kazumgu 2015). At the everyday level, people read such stories in the newspapers or, as one respondent (Deborah) showed me, access them on social media, in this case, YouTube.

someone died unexpectedly, some were accused of witchcraft by their own children. In one report (Rugene and Samuel 2016, p. 3), an 80-year-old woman had her hut burnt down by her grandchildren, who accused her of bewitching their mother. Land, property and money have been motives for ejecting the elderly out of their villages. Those ejected end up in places known as rescue centres. Such facilities are usually inadequate but are there to provide the elderly with shelter from abuse and violence.

Sending the elderly off to centres for shelter becomes a vehicle by which punishment can be meted out. Relatives and the wider community use the accusation of witchcraft for their own benefit. The threat of being evicted from a home to a state of abject poverty is then no less than a means to exert control over the most vulnerable and disabled of people, the sacrificial victims. Actions associated with scapegoating include eviction, expulsion, exorcism and banishment. These are forms of punishment for people accused and found guilty of witchcraft. Such actions are harmful to the individual but are regarded as beneficial to, and even necessary for, the community, depending on the motivation for the action (Wiggins 2005, p. 2938). The decision made by people to enforce a judgement against a person or group accused of witchcraft is usually based on the claim that someone will be healed or that an unexplained occurrence or event – illness, accident or death – will be resolved. In addition, a community will often feel that it will be improved or enhanced by ridding itself of the offensive people.

It is important to highlight that in many patriarchal societies in Kenya, the status of women has customarily meant that they need the protection of their husbands, sons or, in the case of widows, other male members of the family. In the absence of any

protection, disproportionate accusations of witchcraft are made against women and children. Accusations are made against women of all ages. Miencha (2014, p. 140) highlighted elements that lead to not only accusations of witchcraft but also to witch hunts:

scarcity of land, jealousy, inheritance disputes, malicious gossip, unexplained diseases and deaths, hunger due to crop failure, illiteracy and to some extent the breakdown of the traditional judicial systems.

When witchcraft is suspected, a witch hunt is conducted, and suspected witches are subjected to punishment. As one respondent (Peter) described: "They put charcoal in the recipient, and they put [in] pepper. You know, pepper, the powdered one, and [when] they were coughing they would go beating them." Other forms of punishment include inserting sharp objects into the vagina or anus. This last practice was included in a news article (Hari 2009), the headline of which sensationalised the topic, bringing into stark relief the issues faced by women and children accused of witchcraft in Africa.

Miencha (2014, p. v) focused on the conviction that the Gusii people believe that the evilness of witchcraft threatens society. He argued that a gender bias exists: women are particularly discriminated against, and punishment is levied more towards them than men. Consequently, the woman's role in the family and the community is undermined, and their social standing, basic human rights and psychological wellbeing are affected. In countries across Africa, women and children are in constant danger of being accused of witchcraft and the punishment, abuse and death that follows. For example, among the many ways that witchcraft is acquired, LeVine (1963, p. 225), also writing of the Gusii

women of Kenya, observed that although a witch (*Amarogi*) can be of either sex, it is much more likely to be a woman. He went on to suggest that this imbalance reflects the belief that witchcraft 'is an acquired art ... handed down from parent to child', leading to the conclusion that while men can also be witches, it is the females who are nevertheless more likely to be so branded. This is also the case among the Akamba of eastern Kenya, who believe that witchcraft is transmitted from the mother to the eldest daughter or, if the mother dies, transmitted to the daughter by a maternal aunt who is also a witch (Bahemuka 1982, p. 105).

Given that women and children are marginalised and the targets of accusations of witchcraft, I contend that another effect of this form of discrimination is that the relationship between women is jeopardised. Although their roles and status are rooted in the social order according to custom, as with the Gikuyu (Kenyatta 1965, pp. 12–14), a woman's place among the group is still precarious. Miencha (2014, p. 143) highlighted the existing practice of polygyny of the Abagusii, where the co-wives who compete for the favour of their husband may accuse a younger or older wife when an experience of misfortune occurs. During my research, accusations of witchcraft between female members of the family permeated the narrative on witchcraft, both in Nairobi and in London.

The effect of being determined a witch is often a sanction for social behaviour and affirms group solidarity by defining what is bad. Masese (2005, p. 328) noted these bad behaviours as 'incest, nakedness and other kinds of forbidden knowledge', all of which contribute to the evil of witches. In addition, Masese (2005, p. 328) pointed out that for

the Gusii, the belief in witchcraft bolsters value systems and mitigates against the inclination to hold the ancestors accountable for misfortune. What is demonstrated by these comments is witchcraft's usefulness as a channel for people to project 'attributes to others or to events qualities which properly belong to oneself' (Feltham and Dryden 1993, p. 144). Marwick (1982, p. 53) also posited this idea of projection. Like I.M. Lewis (see section 3.4.3), Marwick regarded it as a convenient strategy to avoid blame or to bring a positive focus onto those who claim witchcraft as the culprit for their misfortune. My challenge to this idea is that neither Masese nor Lewis appear to have tried to balance the experience of spiritual misfortune with that of functional, everyday misfortune. These spheres are not disparate elements but are intricately bound together. Therefore, the removal of witchcraft would not, as Marwick alluded, remove the possibility of misfortune from the equation.

As documented in this study, within African indigenous religions, actions or behaviours that run counter to the prevailing norms are perceived to disturb the balance between this world and the spiritual realm or threaten the status quo of the wider social group will be countered by rituals and actions that are purposed to restore harmony in the community and balance in the relationship between the people and the invisible realm of the spirits. The next section will present evidence from the experiences of the research participants to show that the religious imagination of modern Kenyans contains all these elements. Subsequently, it will show that these elements persist when transported in diaspora to the UK and that agencies attempting to cope with the phenomenon of

witchcraft need to be aware of them and carefully consider them when shaping policy and strategy.

3.5 Experiences of Misfortune: An Average Day in Nairobi

3.5.1 The challenges of the everyday

Chapter 2 and the preceding sections of this chapter explored the major historical and religious influences on Kenya and Nairobi, with the aim of achieving several objectives consonant with the main research questions presented in Chapter 1. First, the exploration demonstrates the place that witchcraft has occupied through time in Kenya. It highlights the adaptability of African indigenous religions under pressure from various economic, political, religious and social environments. Second, the exploration shows the attitudes of the various agencies of power operating at the time – the missionaries, the colonisers’ political and legal institutions and, post-independence, the home-grown social and political regimes – towards the belief in and practice of witchcraft. It shows how during and after the colonial period, the prevailing conditions changed and shaped the religious imagination, social conventions and affiliations of African Kenyans within their communities. Finally, the exploration brings into focus how witchcraft and its involvement in misfortune have been experienced in the daily lives of African Kenyans and how belief in witchcraft is intricately interwoven with their sense of self, values and morals. In essence, it provides insight into how the modern mindset still holds a belief in witchcraft and helps to comprehend the ways people in Nairobi experience, categorise and either reject or accept witchcraft as part of their lived reality. The remainder of this chapter paints a picture of modern Nairobi and delves into the ways that misfortune is

perceived in everyday life, the forms misfortune takes and how witchcraft still figures in the lives of those with whom I spoke. The forms are not only experiences of death and dying but also attempts to find work, means of movement from village to city, illness and other challenges to wellbeing.

For many Nairobians and those (the majority of people who work in the city) who commute from its economic catchment area for work and to sell produce, the everyday issues they face are, in essence, not very different from those that affect any other person on the planet who has limited means but still seeks to have a good life, provides for their family and sends their children to school. For the majority of the sample, success in these aims is hampered by a variety of challenges. Knowing the impact of these challenges on their daily lives adds to our understanding of how witchcraft beliefs help people navigate through them. Just getting to work is one such challenge. There are people who drive private cars into the city, but the majority travel into and out of Nairobi in *matatus*. These are the privately-run buses and minivans that ferry people to, from and around the city. They are driven at reckless speeds over rutted roads, racing through the few traffic lights that exist in the city. Nearly all the newspapers in Nairobi report, on at least a weekly basis, on the activities of the *matatus*. *The Standard*, *The Daily Nation* and *The Star* are but a few. They carry articles covering the state of disrepair of the buses, reporting that they put passengers' and pedestrians' lives at risk as they weave in and out of heavy traffic, blasting out loud music. They write about the touts who lean precariously out of the vans to pull in as many passengers as possible (Kiage 2018; Njeri 2018; Odenyo 2018).

For these touts, usually young men, escaping poverty is the primary motivation.⁴⁶ Those who do not have the 50 bob (approximately 40 British pence) to travel in the matatus will walk.⁴⁷ At 5pm Monday to Friday, a sea of people can be observed walking out of Nairobi to the estates on the outskirts of the city and beyond.

In the urban marginal communities, such as Kibera, hustling is endemic. The hustlers, who can be men, women or children, buy bags of sweets and other easily portable commodities and then thread their way through the dense, polluting traffic fumes to sell those goods to the people in cars. For others, such as respondent Susan, it was making *mandazi*, a cheap snack, which she sold along the walkways of Kibera to support herself and her two siblings. Touting and hustling are activities that encompass everything and anything that can earn people a few shillings. They make up an informal economy; these are non-regulated activities and are regarded as illegal, as the actors do not pay taxes and do not have a license to operate a business, largely because 'those who live in the slums and work hard in the informal economy are usually completely preoccupied with making ends meet' (Macharia 1992, p. 221).

Political corruption and any resultant misfortune are regarded as part of everyday life.

During this research, I would frequently take taxis. On one occasion, travelling to meet a

⁴⁶ Kenda Mutongi's paper, *Thugs or entrepreneurs? Perceptions of Matatu operators in Nairobi, 1970–the present* (2006), gives an account of Nairobi's perspective on the role of the matatu and the touts, from having been regarded as making a contribution to the country's rising fortunes in the early years of independence to having become a convenient group to blame for the state of the nation's deterioration.

⁴⁷ I was struck by the use of the term 'bob' in colloquial conversation, as it was the British slang word for a shilling pre-decimalisation in 1971.

respondent in Karen, an affluent suburb of Nairobi, the taxi driver was pulled over by a policeman and seemed to be just chatting. He then passed something to the policeman, and we moved off. In a second incident, on a trip to a shopping centre, the taxi driver was pulled over by three policemen who appeared to be carrying out random checks on car ownership and insurance. Again, after some discussion, the taxi driver put something in one of the policeman's hands, and we proceeded on our way. On both occasions, I asked the drivers what had happened and why the policemen had stopped them. The answer from the first driver was: "I know him; I gave him money for tea." This is a common euphemism. A person looking for a bribe will ask for money for tea (chai). The second driver said: "They want money ... I was scared ... I just started work ... I don't have money to give them ... but they let me go." Neither driver used the term bribe, but they seemed resigned to these situations, in spite of a desire for there to be a change. One driver expressed that "if we have a clean man in charge, all this will stop ... a clean man, a politician who is not corrupt."⁴⁸

This is the backdrop to my research in Nairobi, bringing the struggles of the people I met, and their stories, into high relief. Within this context are the experiences that the respondents chose to disclose. They are the stories about their experiences of misfortune as they told them, describing the ways that they approached situations, how ways to address their various dilemmas were found and the rationale for their ultimate choices.

⁴⁸ These encounters are my own experiences while travelling as a passenger on the 14th and 21st of August 2018. The taxi drivers are not participants in the research proper.

The narratives presented here are based on the respondents' particular experiences with witchcraft. The reality of this continued belief in and use of witchcraft is clear in their stories. More importantly, the narratives demonstrate a worldview indicating that witchcraft as an element of spiritual causality has not been replaced in its totality by Christian notions of sin and salvation. Witchcraft fits into a worldview that provides balance and addresses physical, spiritual and psychological wellbeing. For one respondent, this balance was achieved through the act of, as she described it, "putting Jesus down for a stint." For others, it was to maintain, in equal measure, their commitment to Christianity in denouncing witchcraft and their participation in the mechanism involved in witchcraft accusations and the subsequent resolution within their community. Given that witchcraft is still a criminal offence, carrying up to 10 years in prison, this took a great deal of courage for these individuals, whose sensitivity to the subject was at times palpable. For example, they would frequently glance around to see who might overhear our conversation. Their stories speak for the case that witchcraft and African traditional religions remain crucial elements in the movement from surviving overwhelming circumstances to a state of thriving.

The respondents were not selected using any specific criteria. This approach was implemented to obtain sample narratives from a broad spectrum of people from all walks of life: professionals, clerical workers, people who were self-employed, hustlers, unemployed individuals, those with status in the social sphere (in this case, bishops and mission priests from Presbyterian, Catholic and independent churches), theologians and educators. Most participants were encountered as a matter of course on my daily outings

in the city. Some were approached through introductions by other respondents, and some were pre-existing contacts. Nearly all the respondents identified as Christian, but it is the sheer pragmatism inherent in the psyche of the people I met with that stands out. Whatever choice was made was not on the basis of one ideology – nor was it made alone or without the guidance of one or more religious experts.

3.5.2 Witchcraft: Reason and remedy?

Misfortune experienced by the people is not solely attributed to a lack of jobs or poverty but extends beyond the socio-political. It plagues the physical, psychological and spiritual spheres. For many of the respondents, Western medicine is only one path for addressing physical and mental illness. It is positioned alongside indigenous traditions as an avenue to be pursued. In particular for one respondent, Michael, Western medicine and indigenous forms of healing were both used in his recovery but in very different ways. As a child in 1973, Michael was disabled after falling out of a tree, having damaged his back, and he was unable to walk. He was an orphan and did not tell anyone that he had climbed the tree and fallen, for fear of getting into trouble. His older brother took him to Kenyatta Hospital, but because he had not told anyone that he had fallen from a tree, the staff suspected he had polio and treated him with medications. The treatment continued, according to Michael, for “one year and two months.” After this treatment, a visiting American doctor saw him and overturned the polio diagnosis. The doctor, discovering that Michael had fallen, began a regime during which time Michael regained the use of his arms and upper body. Through an interpreter, he spoke about how he spent nearly two years under the care of Western medical doctors. However, while he was regaining

his strength and mobility, his family still sought an alternative cure. Michael's brother, "some people from the community" and extended family took him to the local witchdoctor⁴⁹ to determine where the misfortune had come from and to find its cause. From this understanding, the hope was to then find a cure for his injury. Several witchdoctors were consulted and offered many different reasons for his accident, the last one being that there was something inside Michael and that he was a diviner. Michael's father and grandfather were said to have been diviners and herbalists. The Akamba believe that diviners are born with or inherit their talents but that something must be sacrificed to gain their knowledge. Nothing the family were told gave them the answers they needed to cure Michael, so they eventually turned to their Christian church, which reinforced that what had happened to Michael was an accident. The family reluctantly accepted that explanation. At the time of our conversation, Michael said that his knowledge of herbs came from his grandfather and his father and that he did in fact help people as a diviner and through his use of herbal remedies. The family's pursuit of answers led directly to the use of witchdoctors and diviners as a means of EPC. This story of the family's approach and actions has three salient features: a pragmatic layering of

⁴⁹ An early use of the term witchdoctor is found in the writings of Robert Montgomery Martin (1836 p.168) In writing about the 'Kafirs' at the Cape of Good Hope, he noted that 'the most heinous offence is that of witchcraft', and those who 'stand forth as the accuser', who use 'absurd ... obscene and diabolical rites' are identified and 'styled Doctors'. He continued: 'like all barbarous peoples, the Kafirs are lamentably superstitious; and hence they have the most implicit dependence on these wretched imposters'.

potential paths to wellness, a belief that there are no accidents in life and a recognition that the incident has ramifications beyond the health of respondent Michael.

The first feature is one that Karen Flint (2008)⁵⁰ analysed in depth in her exploration of therapeutic symbiosis. Flint tracked the connection between physical health, spiritual wellbeing and psychological wellbeing. Her work documents the combination and use of different forms of treatments, namely intervention by religious experts, witchcraft and traditional herbal remedies, to address misfortune and bring good fortune in the guise of wealth, material and social advancement. Importantly, Flint recognised that healers play an important role in maintaining local beliefs. Although Flint wrote about South Africa, her conclusions can be applied equally to Michael and his community to show how their spiritual beliefs interweave with conventional medicine to create a multimodal approach to health and wellbeing. She acknowledged that healers who practise indigenous medicine are highly specialised and that the knowledge of herbs and healing is kept by individual healers and families as well as communities.

The second feature is that approaches to illness and death, including their prevention, can take the form of measures to appease the ancestors or prevent the violation of community taboos and countermeasures to witchcraft attacks. Bockie (1993) illustrated the process that is in play when misfortune occurs. He described how, due to limited

⁵⁰ Flint's work makes a major contribution to the understanding of the role of healing and witchcraft. Although located in South Africa, the work mirrors healing approaches across Africa. For other studies on religion and healing practices, see Janzen, J.M. (1992) *Ngoma: Discourses of healing in Central and Southern Africa* and Bockie, S. (1993).

belief in such causes of death as would be found on the African continent, e.g. bacterial infections, viruses and malnutrition, 'any kind of disease or accident can be attributed to unhappy spiritual beings or to human beings with mysterious powers to do harm' (p. 40). African concepts of healing often revolve around illness and misfortune resulting from an imbalance between the individual and the social environment, and misfortune is brought about by others in the present or by invisible powers from the spiritual realm (Berglund 1976; Bockie 1993). African indigenous religions contain what Gyekye (2011, p. 161) termed

a communitarian society, wherein exist morals that hold at their centre common good and shared values through which individuals cooperate for the proper functioning of society.

This enables the community and the individuals within it to flourish.

Balance is restored through consulting religious experts, who play a pivotal role in counteracting evil and spiritual afflictions through ritual and divination.

This brings us to the third feature. During the recounting of Michael's experience, the interpreter (who was also Akamba) expressed how, for Akamba, there must "always be a cause, something that lies behind the misfortune." Within the Akamba community, it is understood that the accident that disabled Michael was a potential disaster for the whole community and future generations. As a man, Michael was expected to move from the first stage of being an adolescent to a second life stage, marked by a rite of passage, to that of being a warrior, then a young and middle-aged man and from there progressing, once he had married and had his own children, to being an elder of his clan. Family units consist of the head of a family, a patriarchal senior man, wives, children, sons and

daughters-in-law and their children. The group is multigenerational, and by maintaining this configuration, unity is upheld within the family and the wider community. For women, the first life stage commences when they are deemed to be of marriageable age and regarded as capable of assisting the older women with day-to-day tasks in the community. To be a married woman carries with it status, which arrives with the birth of healthy children (Luongo 2011). Good fortune comes with fertility and is measured by the number of children and the size of the family unit. The children are an assurance of the continuation of the family lineage. Michael's injury could have been a disaster for his family and his clan. It could have prevented marriage and affected his ability to have children, thereby threatening his entire lineage and legacy. In the case of this Akamba respondent, it is clear that the community had to be included in the decision to seek out the cause of the misfortune, and within their involvement, that what Mary Douglas (1966) described as a fixed purpose – referring to the concern of the people to perpetuate social harmony – is made manifest. That the boy had fallen out of the tree and was disabled due to his injuries was accepted as an accident, but the family and the community turned to witchcraft to understand why it had happened to him and at that time.

A well-renowned source of reference for this mindset is, once again, the work among the Azande of the inescapable Evans-Pritchard. Since its publication in 1937, this work by Evans-Pritchard continues to be one of the most cited by authors across many disciplines: works by Mary Douglas (1966), Clifford Geertz (1973), John Mbiti (1989), Appiah (1993), Kapferer, B. (2003) and Haidt (2012) are but drops in an ocean of works that employ his anecdote about the people in the Zande village sheltering from the glare of the sun under

a granary that collapsed and killed them to demonstrate the process of witchcraft belief and misfortune. However, another example that Evans-Pritchard (1976) used in his study of the Zande villagers is an incident of a boy and a tree stump. While walking on a path he knew well, the boy banged his toe on a tree stump and split the skin. The toe would not heal, and the boy said that it was witchcraft. He had been bewitched, and that was the reason why on that occasion he had banged his toe. He concretised his reasoning by making it clear that cuts normally heal quickly for him, but this one was not getting better. Why else would it not heal, if witchcraft was not involved? What is important to consider in these two examples is that in everyday life, to make sense of misfortune, the average Zande will ultimately look to witchcraft for the cause. The boy knew the path, and the people routinely sat under the granary. In both events, Evans-Pritchard clearly understood that from a rational Western viewpoint, the circumstances surrounding the events were clear. Obviously, the boy did not see the stump. He was fleetingly distracted and injured his toe. The people sheltering under the granary knew the risks but were reckless or naïve and could have avoided the tragedy. Yet, it is equally true that there had been times the boy was distracted but was not injured, and there had been times the people had rested under the granary and then got up and went about their day. Evans-Pritchard (1976) clearly stated that a belief in witchcraft 'in no way contradicts empirical knowledge of cause and effect' (p. 31) and that it is the particularity of a situation, when experiences are incongruent and outside the ordered processes of life, that requires a conscious process of explanation and causation. He went on to point out that 'to our minds the only relationship between these two independently caused facts is their coincidence in time and space' (pp. 22–23). For the Zande, the explanation is that

misfortune is brought to bear from an outside source. The victim or target of the misfortune is led to a nexus wherein the unfortunate incident will occur.

The role of witchcraft and its use by the Azande has been disseminated further, using African religion, the concept of witchcraft belief and elements of social and communal practices to examine the formation of morality, culture and identity in other societies. The work of psychologist Jonathan Haidt (2012) refers to the Azande and witchcraft beliefs as part of his exploration of Western morality and politics. He asserted that people's nature is to be self-centred and sanctimonious and proposed the notion that morality has evolved to enable people to form communities. He further posited that moral values do not just exist to create justice, equality and purity; for many, authority, sanctity and loyalty are more important, thereby engendering a liberation from selfishness. Others have used Evans-Pritchard's observation to promote different agendas. Kwame Anthony Appiah (1993, p. 48) cited Evans-Pritchard's work on the Azande belief in witchcraft to understand the importance of communities in differentiating 'traditional religion and natural science' and challenged the conceptions of race and African and African American identity.

More to the point, Appiah (1993) and Haidt (2012) demonstrated, maybe inadvertently if not explicitly, that indigenous African religion and witchcraft still have the power to affect individuals and societies wherever it is carried. There is an adaptability to them that lends itself to the pragmatic approaches used by Africans for the prevention of or, at the very least, explanation for misfortune, even if they are the means of last resort. Although Haidt (2012) expressed that the existence of witches is implausible, he did state: 'there's

something about human minds that often generates this cultural institution' (p. 13). Yet, neither Haidt nor Appiah sought out the effects of such beliefs in the causes of misfortune from a local perspective, through the experiences of people whose daily life is regulated by a morality subsumed through family, community and shared religion. In effect, the prevailing culture creates a mindset that grants witchcraft a crucial position and a key role in the development and maintenance of morality and behaviour in African communities. The illustration of Akamba belief, using Michael's experience, gives credence to the mindset that witchcraft is the causal link between an individual and the misfortune that befalls them. Moreover, the individual is not necessarily the sole target; rather, the target can encompass the whole community and the wider social sphere.

3.5.3 "Put Jesus down for a stint"

The next respondent is Susan, whose narrative lays out a landscape of the sort of everyday misfortune experienced by people in Nairobi. Susan identifies as Kamba, lives in Nairobi, has a daughter and works as a counsellor for young women. Her mother died when she was a young girl, and she was sent to stay with her aunt (her mother's sister) and uncle. From that point on, Susan's life was one of chronic misfortune. As she described when she had read the information about the research:

Okay, when I read this, I said, ah, talking about African witchcraft and the misfortunates. And I said, probably [laughing], this interview is meant for me. Because this is something I have overcome with time. But it still follows me, even with the education that I have and despite the spirituality that I have. Um, maybe being a Kamba, coming from the Kamba community, um, here in Kenya ... when you talk of a Kamba community, the first thing that comes in your mind is witchcraft. So, in our home, in our village, we have a lot of witch, witchcraft that, that [sic] is there, and most Kambas, they believe in witchcraft.

The problems Susan endured started with the death of her mother. She believes her death was the result of a curse. Susan does not believe that her mother's death was due to cancer but that "there's somebody or some people who are behind the death of my mum." Susan went on to say that she believes that her uncle's wife is a witch and that they had been jealous of her mother, who had been granted land by their grandparents to build a house.

He didn't like the, the idea of my mother [being] given, getting a piece of land. So, he, he thought he, he was, he would inherit everything. So, he happens to have married another, a wife who happens to be a witch. And this witch now, she is there, she is the cause of all the death in our family. That's even the village believes that, even the neighbours.

Susan's father had left her mother, who remarried, but this marriage failed. As she recounted:

In the Kamba culture if you are a ... she was married, then the marriage did not work. So the, the dowry was returned. In the Kamba culture, when you are married and the, the normal goats, the three goats they are taken ... we normally sell our girls very cheap, you give only three, three goats eh, that is the dowry [laughing], plus a few things, sugar, honey. So, where she was married the marriage did not work well, so she left there. So now the man decides this marriage is not working, so he says he has told her, "You have to go back to your home." So she is, she was brought back, and when they bring you back, they, they even send you back with the goats that they ... they send you back with the, with the dowry. So, it's like they are giving you back completely, [and] you call it then, the goats, you call them *mbuis siulee*. So it's like they have refused you, so she was sent back to her home (author's note: the return of the goats ensured that the whole village knew she had been rejected and was being sent back). So when my mum died, uh, I have never believed that she died, you know in, in Kamba culture we, we say somebody does not die without a reason. There must be somebody behind it, the death, even if it is sickness, you still believe that there's somebody behind that death. And that one is, is with, is inside us Kambas. And

no matter the education that you have, no matter the spirituality, how strong you are in the spiritual world or what ... you still believe that is there.

She went on to tell of her life experiences and the abuses and misfortune that she and her two sisters suffered. She was pushed out of her aunt's home and instructed to find a husband and get married. That was the only way would she have a place to live for herself and her sisters. She was told to leave her aunt's house and "look for a man and get married ... and that is why I landed to this man." Having married, Susan found herself living in Kibera, and her misfortune increased soon after. She suffered a miscarriage due to repeated physical assaults and abuses by her husband, who she described as a man from Kuria. His mother did not want her in the family and encouraged Susan's husband to reject her. When her husband told her to leave, she tried to return to her family. They did not allow her to stay with them, so she was forced to return to her husband's home. After returning, she again faced abuse but in time gave birth to a daughter. It was then she decided to leave her husband.

From the age of 18, Susan was responsible for her two younger siblings. Together, they found a way to earn money and find a place to live in Kibera. Susan identified as a Christian, and she recounted how a priest of the St Vincentian Fathers, who ran a small church school in Kibera, helped her find a job and suitable accommodation. She described hearing voices, put in her head by her aunt and the mother of her ex-husband:

I don't know what she did, how it, you see, now the, there's all these voices ... eh? My aunt on the other side, she doesn't wish, wish me well ... And you are there, you don't have a mother, anybody, all these voices. So, me, I believe I was bewitched by either my auntie [laughing] and ... my mother-in-law.

It was at this point that Susan sought help from a Mexican priest from the St Vincentians, who she had met in Kibera. The St Vincentian Fathers is a Roman Catholic movement made up of religious congregations and lay associations who adhere to the ethos and the teachings of St Vincent de Paul of service and charitable works for the poor. Susan sought permission from the church to leave her husband and find a place to live with her sisters in Kibera. The priest told her the church would help, so Susan and her sisters started to make a popular snack, mandazis, and sold them by the roadside. They also made crochet, beadwork and rosaries and sold those at the Church to make ends meet. As a member of the church, Susan received help to find little bits of work and was encouraged to go to college.

Susan suffered a setback when the post-election violence of 2007, and the ethnic clashes that formed a large part of it, drove her and some 600,000 people from Kibera. After again seeking advice from the priest, she managed to find a place for herself and her siblings. The priest told her not to worry and that the church would offer her support. He offered prayers and counselling, but Susan was overcome by depression and had thoughts of suicide. Around this time, Susan had a daughter. Her depression was causing anxiety for her and those around her. She explained that there are many witchdoctors and diviners in Kibera and that while she would not see a witchdoctor, she did find a diviner. A friend of her mother, who had witnessed Susan's abuse, intervened and told her, "My girl, you have to put Jesus down for a stint ... Let's go and seek guidance somewhere else." Susan explained how sometimes you have to leave the Bible and Jesus. She described the diviner as an ex-Catholic priest and a Charismatic: "He is a Christian priest, but in-born (in him),

he is a diviner.” She described how he still had the power of a (Christian) priest and performed interventions. He prayed for them and told her that her mother was not at peace. He said that she (her mother) knew the people who killed her and that there was nothing that Susan could do except perform protective rituals.

After she left Kibera, she studied for an MA in counselling. While at college, she met a student who she described as a Catholic priest from South Africa. She said he is also a *Sangoma* (healer). He approached her and told her he saw rejection in her, and he asked about her mother and father. Susan found this very odd and asked why he was asking those questions. He told her he saw a “spirit rejection” in her and that she must travel to her mother’s grave in secrecy, perform nine masses, conduct protective rituals, offer a libation to the spirit of her mother and put candles on the grave. Once she had carried out those tasks, she was to travel to her sister’s house. Something would happen, and she would receive a telephone call. The call would be from the person responsible for her mother’s death. Having performed the prescribed tasks, she travelled on a matatu back to Nairobi. In her recounting these events, Susan did not seem surprised that, as predicted by the Sangoma, the matatu broke down, and she received a telephone call from her aunt. The call confirmed what she already believed about her aunt being the cause of her mother’s death. The Sangoma had said to Susan that the call would confirm what his people, his “spirit” contacts, had told him. He knew that her aunt would call her and that her aunt

“is the cause of the death of your mother because the prayer that you do there will interfere with her plans. Your auntie is behind your mother’s death. And now she sees you have done this, and you, your mum has rested, and everything will be okay.” And do you believe me,

since that time [pause], all my things are okay. Last year and when I got a friend [laughs], a Ugandan man [pause], and we are doing very well. And things started opening up, opening up.

Through Susan's story of misfortune, witchcraft and healing, we can begin to understand the role of witchcraft in the reality of people's lives. We can see the beliefs that engender the choices people make to alleviate suffering and misfortune and to, ultimately, bring understanding and make sense of the world. For Susan, cultural beliefs, kinship, morals and duty, and social and economic conditions are woven into her spiritual beliefs in a way that enabled her to balance and accommodate her need for an explanation. She engaged both Christianity and indigenous belief, consulted with people in both streams, who offered advice and guidance, and practically applied what was considered the most efficacious course of action. Her actions were encouraged by others, exemplified by her mother's friend's suggestion of putting Jesus to one side, the advice of the Catholic priest and her encounter with the South African Sangoma. Her attitude towards witchcraft is a given. During my research, I frequently heard that Kamba people still believe in witchcraft, and during her recounting of her experiences, Susan gave credence to this. She talked about the village

Like now, in some parts of Kenya, they have places where they kill women, old women they said that they suspect to be witches. They just lynch them. Even in our, in our home, you know, Kambani, when they discover that you are a witch, they, they make this kind of a sacrifice, er, like a concoction. Then they force all women to take it. It's like water they give you. They, you are, you are paraded, all of you. If you are suspected to be a witch, you are given to drink, that concoction. Then, if you are a true witch, your, your uterus comes out, so that is what they are doing these days to identify the witches and to kill them.

The question here is why Susan, who has an honours degree from a Christian college, would believe this assertion that women are subjected to such torturous ordeals and that they truly identify witches. One answer to this is that Susan lives in a country where there is still a deeply embedded and shared cultural experience of such practices. As demonstrated by the impact of the Moi report, witchcraft has a place in the psyche of Kenyan people. It is to be feared, and it is acceptable to take appropriate action to protect oneself against its effects. Appropriate action includes prayer, but prayer does not preclude the need to address misfortune through ways that have served individuals and communities for generations. This shows that educated modern Western-oriented individuals see no disparity between the phenomenological explanations offered by Western science and Christian doctrine and the indigenous customs and cultural way of life that pre-existed both in Kenya. Each has something to offer, and the respondents balanced these in their pragmatic efforts to address misfortunes. Susan cited her aunt as an example of witchcraft conducted in her village. Her aunt would visit witchdoctors, who gave her powers to bewitch other people. She described her aunt's witchcraft as not an "in-born thing" but taught by the witchdoctors, although some people *were* born witches. In Susan's world, witchcraft is ever-present, occupying a space in her worldview and the community around her. This by no means moves her away from Christianity:

I've developed a very close relationship with my God. And I believe that is what has helped me because I no longer ... yes, the witchcraft is there, but I say Jesus is there to protect me. Yeah, they can never harm me again.

At no point in the conversation did Susan suggest that praying to Jesus is not sufficient. I understood that through her Christian faith, she is aided by the church in her struggles in

daily life. Thus far, her prayers have not eased the pain of the emotional loss of her mother. The psychological damage of abuse has not diminished. Like many other respondents, Susan has a strong commitment to her Christian faith, which she demonstrates by praying a lot and attending mass every day. This way, she continues to be protected from further misfortune. Susan continues to work for the church, counselling single mothers in Kibera.

Susan's daily life was mired in the need to avoid misfortune and find solutions to the physical suffering that she and her siblings experienced. She had this in common with many other respondents. As a resourceful person, and with the help of the Catholic Church, she had made the shift from a bad situation to finding her own a home. However, what Susan pursued was the need to understand why the bad things happened, and on the advice from an elder female, she chose to pursue a remedy for what she felt was spiritual misfortune. She told me that she chose a diviner, not a witch, to help her, to give her answers and to protect her from spiritual forces.

Susan had consulted Western doctors and was prescribed anti-depressants but still felt unable to protect herself from her misfortune and, given her responsibilities for her siblings, needed to restore her wellbeing. As she put it:

This idea of families protecting themselves from the witches. You take like a, like ... um, it's like you, you, you are protected. Like, they come, the diviners will come, they cut you, they put something in. So that is like protecting your family and your properties so that nobody can bewitch you. So, these days, that's what people are doing. Yeah, you protect your family, yeah [pause].

By finding out the reason for her mother's death from a Sangoma, she gained some clarity and felt confirmed in her belief that the cause of her mother's death was her aunt's curse and that the curse had also created the circumstances for her own subsequent misfortunes.

3.5.4 Community, conformity and conflict

This section will illustrate that this sense of belonging and conformity, in the context of misfortune and belief in witchcraft, can have a profound effect on how one shapes a strategy to combat misfortune. The respondents in Kenya not only expressed their own experiences and associations with witchcraft but also talked about the reaction of their families and the wider communities towards those who had been exposed as witches and practised so-called witchcraft. While in Nairobi, I spent some time in Kawangware, a slum area within Nairobi's boundaries and located only a couple of miles from the lush gardens and residence of Government House. It is home to a transient population that settles there while looking for work. The respondents I met were all members of the (then) newly set up Pentecostal ministry of the New Testament Church of God (NTCG) and were anxious to talk about the church and the pastor who instructed them in their faith (see Figures 7 and 8).



Figure 7. Grounds of the New Testament Church of God, Kawangware. Source: The author



Figure 8. Sunday best in Kawangware. Source: The author

Several of the men I encountered professed devotion to “Christ Jesus” and denied the existence of witchcraft. Participants such as Jeremy, Jane and Maisha were adamant that “it did not happen” in their villages or towns. This led to conversations about how they

explain the misfortunes that were attributed to witchcraft. In their opinion, people who talk about witchcraft do not have enough faith, and the people suffering misfortune are being tested by God. The respondents' denial of witchcraft in their villages came from the lessons of the pastor, who talked about belief in witchcraft as the devil's work and wickedness carried out by people who had not found Jesus. The pastor wanted them to tell me positive things, as was evident when one of the respondents disclosed that the pastor had "informed us that you were coming to ask us questions about the church."

However, I noticed a dissonance between these expressions of denial among the men and some of the women. One young man, who identified as Akamba, had recently got married. He described his belief that the people who suffered misfortune needed to be helped by those who had been saved. "With guidance from my bishop, what I understand by misfortunes is when a person is not clothed by the blood of Jesus Christ." He continued, "I am born again. Er, there [are] no boundaries for the people ... For misfortunes to come to the people of God, no boundaries. They can come, hard times can come". This young man, Carl, was with his wife, Martha, who described their struggles to find work. There was a marked difference in her narrative about misfortune. Martha, who was of the Gikuyu group, had been trying to find different employment for two years. She was very unhappy and wanted to find a job that paid more and was closer to home than her current one. She talked about her deep moods that turn her mind.

... some days, I do ask myself why it is taking long. I give prayer, I live in the house of God, but where is God? ... God came to me, God telling me it is deliberate ... otherwise ... God has a reason that is that ... But I do pray all the time that God will really open the door for me, like a better ... It put me into deep moods, yeah.

Martha's story was very emotional and spoken in an almost pleading voice. Through my experience and knowledge as a psychotherapist, I was aware that this shifted the atmosphere in the room. Ethically, it was my responsibility to draw the conversation into a more comfortable place. I waited while her husband held her hand. Martha's response to her misfortune was not rigid; she was proactive in seeking employment, using technology to look for jobs and going to interviews. What she sought was an explanation for her inability to find a job. She had an expectation that God would provide her with answers, but although she prayed constantly, her expectations were not being met, and she was clearly unhappy. This mirrors the experience of Susan, whose Christian faith did not supply the closure she needed after the loss of her mother and who had opted to consult an indigenous healer to find answers. Whether Martha ever opted to follow a similar path is not known.

When I reflected on this encounter, listening to the recording several times, Martha's emotive responses brought questions. During the meeting, she was clearly in a vulnerable and emotional state and kept glancing towards her husband. I recall interpreting this in the moment as looking for reassurance, with some visual cues that suggested there was some frustration being expressed. This impression was reinforced when I revisited the recordings. My questions involved the possible influence of the pastor who had met with me. I had provided the pastor with written information, including the necessary ethical disclosures about the nature of my research and its focus, prior to my visit and the request for volunteer interview subjects. I cannot categorically state the pastor either screened the volunteers or primed them to ensure only suitable answers were given; however, my

25 years' experience as a therapist, coupled with the inconsistency between their responses and those from respondents not sourced through a gatekeeper, strongly suggests this possibility. The implication is that the pastor's direction to be positive overlaid and modified Martha and Carl's responses. From this, I infer that any mention of belief in witchcraft was restricted or suppressed, which would be wholly in keeping with the idea that communities place strong proscriptions on certain subjects and behaviours for the purpose of self-preservation. This leads to a fear of being seen to not conform, even fear of the simple accusation of non-conformity. As shown in Section 3.4.6, scapegoating is a reality.

From these encounters with ordinary people trapped in extreme social conditions, I learnt that perspectives can be significantly shaped by a figure of authority, such as a pastor, culturally comparable in status to a village or clan elder and regarded as knowledgeable and wise. The respondents' conversations show the degree of influence that their church exerts on the everyday lives of ordinary people trying to survive and make sense of the misfortunes in their lives. Carl and Martha, a young couple starting out in life, professed a belief that by renouncing evil, they will be protected by Jesus and overcome misfortune. By observing the authority of the pastor and following the conventions and teachings of their Christian faith, they will come to a good place. The dissonance between this expectation and the actuality of their lives was present in the non-verbal aspects of the conversations I had with them. Conflict exists between the desire to conform, as expressed by Carl and Martha, and the pragmatism in seeking answers to immediate issues, as displayed by Susan. Their belief and resultant behaviour model another

perspective on redefining the response to misfortune: balancing faith in an eventual promised outcome against the real need for an immediate solution to a pressing existential problem.

As described by the research participants, they tend to conform to expectations placed on them by religious experts, communities and wider social elites. The fear of being accused of witchcraft is an incentive to appear to stay on the straight and narrow and avoid the misfortune that would otherwise result. The effect of this is seen in the way people use witchcraft (or at least acknowledge the existence of witchcraft) to promote their own wealth and wellbeing or as a response to their own difficulties. The process of scapegoating means that what was once perceived as intrinsically neutral has become characterised by Christianity as something intrinsically evil. Harmful through his innate evil nature, for many African Christians, Satan has come to dominate their perception of the spirit world and its effects on the living. Diviners, herbalists and witchdoctors have been banded together in the category of witchcraft. Any discussion of witchcraft must be related with misfortune and considered the enemy of life. In accordance with its definition in the Moi report, witchcraft is understood to interfere with fecundity, harmony, good health and healthy animals. If a witch is known to be in the area, they are sought out and blamed for the occurrence of misfortune. In Kenya, devil worship (with which witchcraft is associated) was conceived by the authors of the Moi report as the source of all the country's economic and social woes. The atmosphere surrounding the report turned witchcraft into a weapon to be used in the socio-political and religious arenas – a multifunctional Girardian scapegoat. If we are to understand and compare how

witchcraft is presently included in the coping strategies of Kenyans in Nairobi and London, we must recognise that the scapegoating employed in the Moi report, layered upon the way communities traditionally managed witchcraft, has had a significant impact on the worldview of whole communities and how Kenyans express and act upon their beliefs.

3.5.5 The clergy: Balancing dogma and pragma

From conversations I had with priests at various levels in their churches' hierarchies, it became apparent that there is an inner struggle to reconcile competing cultural and religious beliefs. An example of this was provided by another respondent I met in Nairobi, Peter, who is an ordained Catholic priest. In our conversation, we talked about community. Peter widened the contextual experience within which the struggles of those who have a Christian faith but continue to pursue indigenous religious practices are played out. His story reveals layers of interwoven issues that are precariously balanced. His experiences shed light on the reactions of his clan members and the wider group towards not only Peter's intervention in the following case study but also his Catholic faith. It reflects in microcosm the ongoing struggle between Christianity and the continued presence of witchcraft within the African religious imagination.

Peter recounted how witchcraft was used to make sense of an unexpected death. He explained that he was faced with a dilemma that only afforded a choice between two unpleasant alternatives. On the one hand, he was a member of a family and a wider ethnic group that held a belief in and attitude towards witchcraft and malevolent spiritual forces, passed down through generations. On the other hand, he was both committed to and obligated to represent his Catholic faith. This included the obligation to promote the

Church's attitude to indigenous belief in general and witchcraft in particular. Peter's story encapsulates his struggle to reconcile the seemingly disparate enactments of religious beliefs of his family and wider clan group with his role as a Christian priest and desire to provide ministry under conditions that subtly inflect Christian responses to witchcraft. This dichotomy was further complicated by the fact that as a celibate Catholic priest, Peter has abdicated his responsibility as the eldest son to continue the family lineage. As we will see, this was made worse by what unfolded for his family. He had broken custom and put into jeopardy not only his identity and place in the world but also that of his family. Peter was left struggling with the issue of his identity as an African man whose social, psychological and spiritual self could not be separated from his ethnic group and its morals, values and philosophies. Peter's situation demonstrates that for many African people, making meaning out of tragic life events such as unexpected death or, more keenly, the death of a young person is (as expressed by Peter)

a big dilemma, and I'm still ... I'm still struggling with that dilemma until today, until today, in the sense that, er, I find myself, yes, I'm really out for the people, you know. But then, when I go back to my village, there is another reality that is also strong.

This young man was in his last year of training as a Catholic priest and was waiting to be assigned his first ministry. He described his call to Catholicism through events that took place in his youth and were linked with his move from a Koranic school to a Christian mission school. Both of Peter's parents were Muslim, but his mother converted to Catholicism when Peter was a teenager. As a consequence of Peter's choice to become a priest, his father, an elder of the family and the wider Muslim kinship group, ostracised and disowned him for being a "traitor" to the family and their customs. Peter is the eldest

of the family and understood that as a Catholic priest he could not marry⁵¹ and that he was in fact breaking with a central principle of the African family. Paris (1995, p.77) identified centrality of family as having 'the primacy in the spheres of social reality and personal identity'. As the patriarch of a large family, Peter's father was regarded as a successful person and given a great deal of respect and prestige by his community. Peter's decision to become a Catholic priest broke with custom and created discord in the welfare of the family, thus incurring disapproval and bringing misfortune to the family. Peter explained that his father had ostracised him partly based on custom and partly because he was fearful of the reaction of other kinsmen. He was told by his father that "as his first child, according to our custom, I could never join anything like this (the Catholic Church). Instead, I should go to university and ensure the continuity of our descendants, you know, our family line, the family tree."

There are many ethnic groups in Africa who live by the ethos that a person is only human once they have been socialised into the living tenable community, which is organised in terms of family relationships. Kirwen (2005, p. 66) asserted that this socialisation is not a choice but an essential part of being a person. It has a direct bearing on the success of the group, whose survival depends on families producing as many children as possible to

⁵¹ Celibacy is a contentious topic, with the discipline's applications varying between churches, such as the Latin Church, the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Ethiopic Catholic Church. There are exceptions within Canon Law regarding celibacy (celibacy in this case meaning abstaining from all sexual relationships and, by extension, being unmarried). For example, in the Catholic Church, only unmarried men are ordained to the priesthood, but the legal position in the East has remained the same: men may marry before ordination to the priesthood but not after. For more background and the current position, see Cross, F.L. and Livingstone, E.A. eds. (1974) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (p. 259).

preserve the family name. Akama (2006, p. 53), for example, described that the Gusii people of western Kenya hold the belief that the welfare of the group depends on people having healthy children who will survive to maturity in order to renew the family lineage and kinship group and enable them to expand, develop their land and raise their status among other groups. Paris (1995, p. 101), on the other hand, used a much more holistic view, which is closer to the function of family as a state of being: 'the life of a person is wholly dependent on the family and its symbiotic functions of biological lineage, communal nature and moral formation'. As the first born, Peter was expected to go to university and ensure the "continuity of our descendants." The disapproval at Peter's decision to become a priest, which went against social expectation, had an impact on his self-esteem and his identity, leading to him feeling

that there was, erm, a vacuum. I did not have a root. I was not rooted anywhere, but I was kind of having, er, some branches that was the church that I was just holding, hanging from. I didn't even know whether it was going to break or not, but the roots, no, I had no roots.

Kirwen (2005, p. 66) described being ostracised as 'like being condemned to the Christian hell, for he/she is cut off from the roots of existence and wanders the earth like a lost sheep, unprotected and culturally dead'. This young man leant towards the Catholic Church for his survival against the disapproval of his family and the wider kinship group.

Peter's history includes a further tragic turn, which brought to light another aspect of how a community's response to misfortune involves witchcraft. Peter explained:

My brother was in line to take over from me as the first child, and he could have lessened my burden. But he died in a car accident on the day of his own wedding, and that was the catastrophic day in the life of my family.

He went on to describe how the family accused the village elders of being responsible for the death. Sixteen elders were locked in a room for two days by relatives and the younger members of his father's family. The young men accused the elders of using Peter's brother to pay a debt in another town, and they were about to kill them.

They used him to pay a debt in a different town, his flesh and his blood ... I mean, they were using that realm that they use, er... You become like a vision, you become like a goat or whatever, and then, they now exchange you with another, different person somewhere. So, if anything that is happening is witchcraft, you hold the elders ... they are the ones who know everything. That's the belief.

This was an extraordinary situation. For many African communities, the respect for elders is ingrained in the collective psyche. It is an essential feature of the mores, customs and taboos of the African religious imagination. Kenyatta (1965, p. 59), writing as a member of the Gikuyu people, noted:

The function of an elder, both in his own family group and in the community, is one of harmonising the activities of various groups, living and departed. In his capacity as mediator, his family group and community in general respect him for his seniority and wisdom, and he, in turn, respects the seniority of the ancestral spirits.

Peter tried to talk about his role in the negotiations with the community and family members to release the elders, but his narrative became quiescent. His description of the incident with his brother seemed to confuse him. He became reluctant to talk about the community, their attitude and behaviour towards him, at which point I chose to bring the meeting to a close because he appeared to be distressed. Caught in what appeared to be an untenable position, he questioned his role in the church, but at no point was there an indication that he would deny his heritage or denounce witchcraft or the indigenous

forms of addressing misfortune. On the contrary, he was invested in trying to bring about understanding of the reality of witchcraft:

For me, I see the other side of that reality, which they call witchcraft. For me, I call it African metaphysics because there are some things I don't understand, you know, but it doesn't mean that whether I say it exists or it does not exist, it does not depend on me, you know. But it is there; you can see that the people are affected by that reality there. Yeah, and they are looking for what it is that gives meaning to our lives? Eh, what is it? Yeah.

Many of the clergy that I met in Nairobi and its surrounds disclosed a belief in the force of witchcraft as a malevolent force. What was revealing was that nearly all the clergy who talked with me about witchcraft had similar stories about their experiences with witchcraft, as many of them were of the same ethnic group as their parishioners and held a shared knowledge of the folk tales and customs. Each had come from a background that involved the use of witchdoctors, either directly or as a family participant. While for some it was a force that imbued the spiritual psyche of the people, for others it was a platform to invest in the use of different methods of engaging with witchcraft beliefs, such as the use of Western counselling approaches. In my conversations with respondents, many of the priests, ministers and pastors talked about having a sense of disharmony and apartness that engenders a different valence from belonging to a group and being a Christian priest. Fr Adhiambo, who is of Luo ethnicity, expressed difficulties similar to Peter's in the fulfilment of his ministry. He explained that his resolve to dissuade the people in his congregation from a belief in witchcraft and the use of indigenous healers has steadily abated. He does not speak against what he described as "ancestral habits and beliefs." Instead, he simultaneously facilitates indigenous practices and belief by

drawing the people into the church and introducing God as a way of avoiding misfortune and experiencing healing. He expressed how this leaves him feeling unsettled. He feels he is pulled in two directions and cannot reconcile the fact that as a “Luo ... an African man, I cannot tell a man he is my brother ... if he believes in evil things. I must renounce him. But the Bible teaches us that we are all brothers and sisters together.” Indigenous beliefs, therefore, are not kept at arm’s length. Both Peter and Fr Adhiambo attempt to establish the alterity of indigenous religiosity through a kind of essentialism in which spirit beliefs and the use of witchcraft are set into the very nature of being. I suggest that these responses from African clergy at the local level are little bound by the dogmatic and institutional strictures of the Church and that the dilemmas experienced by the local priests prompt a facilitation of the long-held indigenous values of their congregants. A culture’s account of what makes us, as human beings, tick is the desire to find meaning and make sense of misfortune (Bruner 1990, p. 13), and witchcraft continues to play a role in the EPC of misfortune. While early missionaries treated witchcraft as an impediment to salvation and civilisation, Christian theologians have since produced an avalanche of work that consists of what Ukpong (1993, p. 68) asserted is ‘re-thinking and re-expressing the original Christian message in an African cultural milieu’. Ukpong continued: ‘thus, there is integration of faith and culture ... African theology means Christian faith attaining African cultural expression’. This was reflected by Fasholé-Luke (1975), Shorter (1985), Voshaar (1998), Magesa (2004) and Udelhoven (2015). Like their counterparts Manala (2004) and Ngong (2009), they acknowledged that witchcraft is a reality. The response of the Church is not confined to a theological undertaking but requires a response at the local level by the pastors, to whom many turn for guidance and

help. The pastors and local clergy find themselves looking for practical ways to deal with the needs of congregants who have been accused of being a witch or who believe they have been bewitched.

However, not all the clergy that I encountered stated such inner conflict. Dr David Gilbert Bwire, National Administrative Bishop of Kenya of the NTCG, described how, as a young man, he was blinded by a woman “we knew was a witch” in his village. He talked about how, in the 1960s, his father would extensively use witches and witchdoctors to purchase charms, which would be tied around their bodies to protect from attacks by evil spirits. He described how his father had sought help from witchdoctors from Uganda and from some he knew in Kenya to bring his sight back and that he regained his sight a year later. When he was 18, another problem occurred, resulting in his father gathering the whole family and clan together and using a witchdoctor to conduct a ritual to

treat the home, to treat every child. The witchdoctor demanded for him (his father) to slaughter a sheep. So, he killed the sheep. He was only able to take part of the sheep, but now he only demanded the head. So, this witchdoctor, his witchcraft could only work through every child in the home taking saliva in the mouth of that er, the, the head of the, the sheep that had remained – you just went and spit in the mouth of the sheep [which] was open.

Bishop Bwire explained that it was around this time, at the age of 18, that he was “born again.” As an adult, he chose to use the ritual at the family home to challenge his father by refusing to take part. He prayed to Jesus and by doing so “confused” the witchdoctor, who had to abandon the ritual. He described how “using the power of God gave him wisdom to ... and knowledge of what to speak.” Bishop Bwire then went on to describe

that belief in witchcraft is “bondage,” leaving people unable to work or function. He believes that if people believe in witches, others will fear them and think that evil spirits will afflict them, so neighbours will not visit, families will not interact and children will not play together. It is a misfortune for the family. Bishop Bwire’s personal experiences of witchcraft, his forceful challenge and his rejection of his father’s use of witchdoctors and rituals appear to have led him to reject witchcraft and take the position that any belief in witchcraft is concerned with the mind of the person. People can be educated out of the belief by approaching the problem through counselling and prayer in order to be “delivered in Christ.”

Others look to modernity for solutions. The NTCG is one of many Christian denominational churches in Kenya that invest in talking therapies, such as counselling, to relieve the misfortune of their congregants and to encourage intense prayer sessions involving other church members. It is at this layer of church administration that I saw evidence of the belief and practice of witchcraft being treated as a mental health issue. Dr Bishop Miolo of the PCEA lectures at the Presbyterian University and ministers at the Bethel Church in Nairobi. He explained that the courts in Kenya use mediation in family and couple disputes. The courts and government, in attempts to reduce the workload of lawyers who provide the services, have encouraged the use of psychologists. Bishop Miolo explained how, together with his wife (a psychiatric nurse), he encourages the use of mediation for his church members and is involved in inviting other pastors to be trained in counselling as part of their theological training. The pastors who do not have training

can refer people to the “right places.” Dr Miolo did not explain what he meant by ‘the right places’.

The bishop identifies as Kikuyu and is familiar with the indigenous beliefs and ritual practices of his ethnic group. He explained that he is not a convert to Christianity; he was born into the Presbyterian Church. He expressed his view of witchcraft as reflected in the Bible, that is, as a forbidden belief. He further expounded that there is “no strict division” between people who attend church but are not born again (and who continue to ascribe misfortune to the ancestors and believe they are still haunted by them) and those who are born again; both have to choose “to believe in God completely ... to be accepted in the life of Jesus” and, as a result, no longer consider witchcraft belief. Bishop Miolo talked about meeting the needs of the people and about the Church providing practical solutions to issues of misfortune by supplying food and clothing and finding homes for the homeless. I should make it clear that Bishop Miolo did not claim to be speaking for the PCEA as a whole. His narrative on witchcraft was founded on the belief that people must choose between belief in indigenous religion and the Christian Church, that this was a conscious choice to reject other religions and that people “cannot worship two Gods.”

What is clear from this encounter is that the Presbyterian Church takes a psychological approach to the belief in witchcraft, which is seen as something that can be treated. The Church, by admitting forms of counselling, mediation and talking therapy as responses to witchcraft belief, has adopted an approach that is a medicalisation of belief in spiritual causality and witchcraft. In other words, people who continue to believe in witchcraft are no longer approached through a spiritual lens; rather, they are viewed as mentally ill. This

is an important consideration for comparison with the approaches taken by various services in the UK (c.f. Scrutton, 2015 and 2016). The following chapters will include a more detailed discussion on this cross-pollination of approaches, where Western organisations look to Africa to combat witchcraft and African churches mine Western sources to achieve that same goal.

3.5.6 A modern synthesis

Through an exegesis of Kenyan life, using encounters with local people and their stories, it is evident that misfortune and the use of witchcraft to mitigate its effects is ingrained in many Kenyans' consciousnesses and is vital in modern-day Nairobi. Today, witches no longer hide (although they rarely use the term witch, preferring less emotive terms such as herbalist, doctor or soothsayer), advertising a plethora of services in plain sight (see Figures 9 and 10).



Figure 9. An advert pinned to a telegraph pole. Source: The author



Figure 10. An advert attached to a wall. Source: The author

Ordinary people in Nairobi have found creative and manipulative ways to shift the perception of witchcraft. Adverts are attached to walls, hand-painted signs hang from trees and homemade posters are pinned to telegraph poles. They line the main roads in and around Nairobi. Witchcraft has long been a commodity, one that is used by people to earn an income for themselves and their families. The language used to market their services acts as a bridge that crosses the divide between a place that classifies witches as evil and one where people are reportedly ‘chosen’ to be a witch by an ancestor or through ‘divine intervention’ (Wako 2019, n.p.).⁵² Of course, divine intervention may come from either a deity of an African spiritual pantheon or from the Christian God. The implication is that the witch or practitioner has been given dispensation from a higher authority. It follows, therefore, that the term ‘divine’ is the practitioners’ unique selling point that

⁵² This article, which describes the meeting between Wako and Thomas, who identifies as a witch, takes the reader on a journey from the streets of Nairobi to Thomas’s homestead, where he practices his craft. It provides a compelling picture of the existence, everyday use and practice of witchcraft in Kenya.

helps to attract clients. The movement of people, both internally and across international borders, has also contributed to a sea change in witchcraft, manifested in the use of social media and a reclaiming of indigenous spirituality within African communities in Kenya and London.

Nearly all the conversations with the 31 respondents led to disclosure of experiences of witchcraft in one form or another, involving either a direct curse, as in Susan's case, or direct contact or association with someone who practised witchcraft. Furthermore, they showed that misfortune is not only defined by the person suffering but also by others in their community, age set or profession. It is evident in all the participants' testimonies that the ways used to protect themselves and their families from misfortune caused by witchcraft were found to balance diverse religious beliefs and practices while providing relief from the vicissitudes of life.

Sections 1.2.6, 1.3.1 and 3.1 discussed the perils of creating false commonality when applying terms such as African. However, it should be mentioned that the experiences related to me in Nairobi resonate closely with those recounted by writers across sub-Saharan Africa. Tshibangu, Ade Ajayi and Sanneh (1993), writing about religion and social evolution, argued that in the search for understanding and coping with aspects of nature, Africans recognised many divinities and established many cults. Traditional African religion was non-proselytising and open-ended, tolerant of and pragmatic towards religious innovations as manifestations of new knowledge and ready to interpret and internalise the new knowledge within traditional cosmology. They noted that Islam and Christianity developed a kind of symbiotic relationship with traditional healers. This can

be observed in a case cited by Janzen (1978) that closely resembles the attitudes and actions exhibited in Michael's story. A woman, who had not received the blessing of her father on her marriage to the father of her child, became ill and sought treatment from different sources. Although she visited hospitals, she also saw a herbal healer and different prophets. Researching medical pluralism in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Lower Zaire), Janzen went on to describe the important role of kin and friends in the care of people suffering misfortune, calling them 'therapy management groups' (p. 90) that influence, determine and draw sufferers to those sources perceived as having power and efficacy, although not necessarily over the treatments themselves. This is mirrored strongly in the way that Michael's family came together to seek the spiritual causation of Michael's injury. Janzen observed that there is no way to determine whether belief comes into the equation of patient-affliction-healing but that it is apparent that patients try all kinds of therapies until they are healed.

In seeking common threads that provide a picture of the supernatural, we can see that African notions of spirituality create a model of two worlds that exist alongside and interact with each other: a seen world and an unseen world of spirits. This latter world is as much a part of reality as the seen world of human beings, and events in one world have an impact on the other world. The unseen world is regarded as more powerful than the human world, but the power of the spirit world can be accessed by human beings equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge. The other aspect of the unseen world is that it can be both benevolent and malevolent; therefore, the people who have access to it are both revered and feared. The unseen world is associated with different

supreme beings, ancestors and creator gods known by different local names. This establishes continuity between the living, the dead and the spiritual entities that bring good fortune or misfortune. In this chapter, the conversations with the respondents substantiate the fact that this worldview holds sway in Nairobi today, in spite of the pressures of colonialism, missionaries and post-independence political and economic upheaval. The next stage of this research sought to discover whether the African religious imagination, with witchcraft as an integral component, and the solutions it offers to combat misfortune operate in the same way in London, or if the different environment has brought forth novel variations or weakened its effectiveness. As shown thus far, the African religious imagination is remarkably adaptive. The remainder of this thesis follows its adaptation as a suitcase of spiritual remedies.

4 Diasporic Communities

4.1 Migration

The term diaspora is, as Safran (1991, p. 83) suggested, a 'Conceptual Problem'. Cross and Livingstone (1974, p. 399) recorded that the concept of diaspora began with the dispersal of the Jews in the Assyrian and Babylonian deportations to Asia and throughout the Roman Empire between 722 and 597 BC. They highlighted that, through paying the Temple Tax and adhering to the limitation of law, the relationship between Jews and their home country continued. Dufoix (2016, p. 1) provided a road map of the metamorphosis of the use of the term and pointed to its associations in the contemporary world:

describe new phenomena, that is the capacity of certain populations, during the so-called era of globalisation, to form communities, collectives, despite the spatial dispersion of their members.

Existing scholarship on the term diaspora charts the significant transformation in the meaning of the term from antiquity (originally used to describe the *dispersion* of the Jews) to the proliferation of different applications in modern times within religious and social studies (Tölölyan 1996; Kenny 2013; Dufoix 2016). Cohen (2008, p. 41) presented a picture of the movement of African people across the world during slavery and highlighted 'the extraordinary success New World Africans ... conveying a sense of their plight through art, literature, music, dance and religious expression'. Beckford (2011, p. 8) acknowledged the biblical beginnings of diasporic movement and expanded the term to encompass the principles of 'liberation, theological and socio-political underpinnings for action against oppression of marginalised people today as experienced by African and

African-Caribbean people in Britain'. He suggested that the impact of diaspora is significant and drew attention to the theological significance of diaspora as the beginning of Black political theology in Britain. Furthermore, he asserted that any formulation of diaspora 'must be open to change and adaptation' (Beckford 2011, p. 8). The meaning of the term diaspora notwithstanding, it is its application as a classification of African people that concerns this study, especially as it identifies a variety of ethnic minority communities with further distinctions of 'immigrant and aliens' (Safran 1991, p. 83).

These expansions of the term actively contribute to the construction of a social self-identity that imbues misfortune experienced today with extra nuance. As a member of a minority community that carries transgenerational or intergenerational trauma,⁵³ the felt sense of misfortune, as described by Home K. Bhabha (1986, p. xxiii), can be 'a painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present'. It should be recognised, however, that transgenerational or intergenerational trauma does not necessarily follow for all Africans of generations born in the UK. What Schwab (2010, pp. 26–27) discussed as 'disassociation or forms of psychic splitting' is reflected by some of the younger respondents who, in contrast with older

⁵³ Transgenerational trauma, or intergenerational trauma, is an element of post-traumatic stress. It is a psychological theory that suggests that trauma can be inherited by successive generations that did not experience it personally. Franz Fanon (1986), in *Black skin, white masks*, explored the impact of slavery and the effects of racism and colonialism on the experiences, lives, minds and relationships of Black people. Schwab's (2010) *Haunting legacies: Violent histories and transgenerational trauma* provides an easy-to-read treatise on this area of psychological transgenerational trauma/intergenerational trauma.

generations, did not automatically make these associations when trying to make sense of their misfortune.

As an illustration of transgenerational or intergenerational trauma, during this research I met with the project coordinator of Oremi, an organisation that deals with asylum seekers and other immigrants. The project is close to Grenfell Tower, the site of a catastrophic fire in West London in 2017 that claimed over 70 lives and displaced more than 200 residents. The coordinator recounted a meeting he had with one of the survivors, who expressed how she felt that as a victim of the fire, “We are cursed”. In my conversation with the coordinator, he explained that many of the victims were migrants and that this elderly Black lady believed that misfortune accompanied her people wherever they were living. She recounted how much “bad luck” she had to go through before she could find a place to live in London and how badly she was treated. “Even now ... I have nowhere to go.”

I found that this sense of being cursed was held among many of the respondents in London, especially among the older folk in Black and ethnic minority communities. Respondents aged over 40 were more likely to express how the misfortunes of Africans and Black people are historical, founded during the days of slavery and the slave trade. The mass transportation of Africans during the transatlantic slave trade from the 17th century onward is considered the first African diaspora, as reflected by Cohen (2008). While the belief that their misfortune is caused by a curse is generally related to and associated with slavery, the idea of a curse on all Africans has other origins. Onyinah Opoku (2014, p. 3) explained one concept of curse that exists within the African religious

imagination as 'the syntheses of the practices and beliefs of African concepts of witchcraft and Western Christian concepts of demonology'. He saw this explanation promoted within the work of deliverance ministries, positing a combination of the witch, witchcraft and demonology as what he termed 'witchdemonology'. Together with the introduction of animism, he explained that African Gods were fallen angels, disembodied spirits who inhabit rocks, trees, mountains and people. It thus transpires that 'All Africans are therefore considered to come under a curse because their ancestors worshipped these gods'. In other words, because the ancestors of Africans worshipped these fallen angels as Gods, their descendants are deemed to be cursed. The idea of the ancestral curse is thus made manifest.

There is an alternative narrative within the religious imagination of the respondents in London. The idea of being cursed as a people because of their colour harks back to passages in the Old Testament. The participants relayed a popular story from the Bible: the story of Ham (although it must be said that many were unable to recall the name of Noah's son in the applicable passages in Genesis), who was cursed by his father, Noah. The reading of Genesis 9:18–25 and its interpretation is much debated and is a contentious subject, given that it is still used as justification for African slavery and segregation. We can appreciate the depth, breadth and abiding power of this concept in the words of James Baldwin (1962), the African American novelist, playwright, essayist, poet and activist, who wrote:

I knew that, according to many Christians, I was a descendant of Ham, who had been cursed, and that I was therefore predestined to be a slave. This had nothing to do with

anything I was, or contained, or could become; my fate had been sealed forever, from the beginning of time. (New Yorker, n.p.)

Being cursed by God reverberates throughout the Bible (Genesis 3:14, 3:17, 4:11; Noah 9:25; Joshua 6:26-27), and as Goldenberg (2009) stated, 'over and over again one finds Black enslavement justified with reference to the Biblical story of the curse of eternal servitude pronounced against Ham, considered to be the father of Black Africa' (p. 3). This perception of a connection to divine chastisement speaks volumes when one considers the religious imagination of Africans discussed earlier. The relationship between misfortune, African indigenous beliefs and Christianity – the latter having had a seismic impact upon Africa and its peoples – changed the landscape of religious belief across the continent. Asamoah-Gyadu (2011, p. 337), highlighting the shifting of Christianity from north to south, made the link with 'Africans becoming disenchanted with aspects of mission Christianity that were unable to work with indigenous enchanted worldviews'.

Christianity has been reshaped via the process of inculturation and, as others have argued (Ifeka-Moller 1974; Pruitt 2007), has been altered by a variety of other influences, such as economic and political upheaval. Similarly, African religious beliefs have been reshaped as those same forces acted on the social sphere of communities and individuals who desired the riches and success on offer in the modern marketplace, be that a mobile phone, a better education, success in sporting, political or professional careers, or achieving entrepreneurial aspirations. The hope of realising these ambitions has led to Africans travelling all around the world in pursuit of a better life. What happens to the religious beliefs that travel with them? As Ellis and ter Haar (2004, p. 98) argued, in African

migrant communities in Europe, the source of healing from the causes of misfortune remains within both the 'spiritual and material realm'. Spiritual power affects wellbeing by adding or taking away a person's 'vital force' (Ellis and ter Haar 2004, p. 98), thereby increasing or decreasing their ability to face issues such as their legal status, finding accommodation and registering with doctors' surgeries in European countries.

The health care challenges for African migrants in London and the UK are many and varied. For example, in reports published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (Nellums et al. 2018), fear, mistrust and stigma are listed among the problems that surround access to treatment for emergency and primary health services. Due to UK health policy,⁵⁴ many African migrants fear having to pay for treatment and being reported to the Home Office when a debt is incurred. Language and cultural factors deter individuals such as migrants, asylum seekers and refugees from seeking treatment or registering with doctors' surgeries in the NHS. Such fears are compounded by language and cultural barriers. This can severely affect women, particularly in the areas of maternity and sexual health. One respondent, Patricia, migrated to London in the 1990s and worked for an HIV trust in central London with male and female migrants from various African countries. She explained that for women in many cultures, it is not acceptable to talk to men about sex, and many women whose spoken English is limited

⁵⁴ Under UK Department of Health NHS (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 2015, migrants bear the cost of most hospital treatments, including fees for ambulances, Accident and Emergency and some primary care services. Refugees, asylum seekers and victims of trafficking are exempt. In his article, Mickle (2016) pointed out that many people from these groups are unaware that they are exempt.

cannot speak to male interpreters. Patricia described that many African migrants arrive in London with a belief that their afflictions are caused by witchcraft. The afflicted include those who hear voices and believe it is “the voice of an ancestor.” They believe that Western doctors do not understand that it is, for example, “The spirit of my uncles telling me that my husband is not my husband.” It is also the case that people with HIV and AIDS will not share with Western doctors that they feel they are bewitched, although they may share their fears in small groups among themselves. A report by Hills et al (2013), addresses the treatments available for African and Caribbean people. It identifies that in East London, many of the African migrants who hold these beliefs about the spiritual cause of their affliction, including those who are well settled, seek out what the report terms traditional healers, herbalists and diviners for help and guidance.

4.2 On the Way

Refugee camps are in many respects diasporic communities for people who have moved from their home due to forced displacement (such as a natural disaster or civil disturbance), those who are internally displaced and those who cross international borders. There is evidence that, as Adedibu (2014, p. 260) attested, people travel with what he termed a ‘religious backpack’ and that the use of spiritual coping strategies and resources accompany people throughout their journeys across the globe. I recognise that Adedibu’s religious backpack is idiomatically similar to my spiritual suitcase; however, while acknowledging that witchcraft belief is not left behind, Adedibu did not pursue what religious beliefs the backpack carries or how these beliefs are identified within different environments and contexts. In the idiomatic usage throughout this thesis, it is

made clear what the suitcase contains. The migration and movement of people, religion and spirituality allows an appreciation of the physical journey of African spirituality and witchcraft. I argue that it also offers insight into the continuous use of witchcraft to address the misfortunes of those who, in alien surroundings, respond to the situations using traditional methods.

I propose that refugee camps represent a microcosm of the groups and communities within the diasporic milieu in London as a consequential element of shared spaces. Different nationalities are encountered during what Schnoebelen (2009, p. 4) called the ‘refugee cycle – during flight, while in a camp or urban refugee setting, during repatriation or once resettled’. In these periods of instability and insecurity, the need for protection of family and self is significant. Refugee camps, such as those in the Dadaab district in eastern Kenya, are crowded and unhygienic. People are given food rations that are often insensitive to cultural differences, there is poor security, and there are high rates of infectious diseases – exacerbated by COVID-19, which placed further restrictions on daily life.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has produced reports that highlight the effects of COVID-19 on the refugee situations around the world and the impact of closing borders. The issues faced by refugees include what the UNHCR described as a ‘coping crisis; see https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/covid-19#_ga=2.119177481.1665583820.1649066663-1839774528.164390291Refugees. People who work as cheap labour in the informal economy, characterised by small or undefined workplaces, face unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, low levels of skills and productivity, low or irregular incomes, long working hours and lack of access to information, markets, finance, training and technology. This leads to extreme poverty and issues such as food insecurity, malnutrition and lack of basic products. The World Bank has estimated that 88–115 million people will be pushed into extreme poverty due to the pandemic conditions (International Labour Organization, 2015): <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/dw4sd/themes/informal-economy/lang--en/index.htm>.

The organisations who administer the camps and the non-profit organisations who offer various humanitarian services to the people there are faced with an admixture of nationalities, ethnicities, social and economic statuses and religious affiliations. The question of how the disparate needs of such an agglomeration of people, with their own identities, morals and values, are accommodated cannot be answered by a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach. The resources of international organisations are to a large extent tailored to categories of refugees or have a targeted purpose. The UNHCR is dedicated to protecting the rights and welfare of refugees; Help the Aged International provides important practical services for elderly women, including those accused of witchcraft; and Save the Children has projects that work with children accused of being witches.⁵⁶ Despite their efforts, on the ground, individuals continue to believe that the vagaries of their lives are the result of bewitchment. They seek answers for an unexpected or unexplained death or illness from within their own metaphysical worldview that underpins and reinforces a belief in witchcraft.

Poor health and deaths in the camps provide ample reasons to suspect others of witchcraft. The experiences of misfortune concentrated in the camps and the prevalence of witchcraft accusations lead migrants and refugees to using diviners and other religious specialists as the best method of finding solutions to the many issues they face. Reports from the UNHCR (Schnoebelen 2009, pp. 22–27) show how it has investigated the incidence of accusations of witchcraft among migrating refugees. One specific example

⁵⁶ See the report by Molina, C.J.A. (2006).

reported by UN News took place in the Republic of Chad in central Africa. Nearly a dozen people fell ill in a camp of up to 45,000 refugees. Those who succumbed to the illnesses, including a child, died within a week. Witchcraft was suspected, and the resulting accusations of witchcraft led to incidents of arson and attacks on people.

The people had become ill due to malnutrition, malaria and stomach disorders (Pheage 2016–2017), three of the diseases the World Health Organisation classifies as those to which African people are susceptible. However, the report makes it clear that people in the camps had stepped away from modern medicines and had moved towards traditional healers. Such tragic examples provide evidence that people continue to consult spiritual healers and/or witchdoctors to make sense of their misfortune, to seek remedy for those who are afflicted and for protection for those in fear of greater misfortune.

The religious and spiritual resources carried by the people in camps, whatever their point of origin, are trusted to provide the means to explain, predict and control misfortune. Amid the array of different ideas of witchcraft held by different nationalities in the camps, Powles and Deakin (2004, pp. 3–6) cited the case of Peter, a refugee whose child had died and who, camp gossip said, had caused his son's death through sorcery. Consultation with a diviner revealed that witchcraft had indeed been used. Accusations were made within the family, but ultimately an elderly woman outside of the family was located and accused. The route taken by Peter to address his misfortune is one that reflects the choices made by some of the research participants in the case studies cited in this thesis, both in Kenya and London.

This research shows that the method of addressing misfortune evidenced by Powles and Deakin (2012) charts the actions taken by those afflicted with 'inexplicable' misfortune. It typically starts with a consultation with a diviner, healer or another religious expert. These consultants explain the misfortune, classifying it as the result of sorcery or evil intent by another person. This is followed by an identification of the person responsible for the misfortune and, ultimately, the recognition of witchcraft as its cause. Depending on the areas of expertise of such spiritual consultants, the afflicted is advised of a remedy or referred to a spiritual consultant with expertise in identifying potential defences against the assault.

The aim of the UNHCR has been to address issues of protection and human rights for those accused. Refugee camps are often lawless, and witchcraft can be out of control (Powles and Deakin 2012, p. 11). NGOs and the UNHCR seek to provide measures to control the consequences of a misfortune and protect those accused of witchcraft. The experiences of the refugees in the camps (violence, poverty and strife) leave the UNHCR, NGOs, faith-based organisations such as the Berkeley Centre for Religion, Peace and World Affairs and secular organisations such as Help the Aged International ⁵⁷ struggling

⁵⁷ There is an ongoing debate about the role of organised religion, established faith-based organisations and individual belief and its impact on migration and about what 'faith-based' means. Although the role of religion is accepted as a useful element in the care of migrants, it is argued that obstacles exist between secular and religious actors. See Goodall, C. (2015) *Shouting towards the sky: The role of religious individuals, communities, organisations and institutions in support for refugees and asylum seekers. New issues in refugee research*. Research paper no 275 [Internet]. Switzerland, The UN Refugee Agency, Policy Development and Evaluation Service. See also Sulewski, D. (2020) *Religious actors and the global compact on refugees: Charting a way forward*. Reference paper for the 70th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention.

to arrive at practical solutions to deal with accusations of witchcraft and establish alternatives to the violent backlash and punishment that traditional community justice often turns into (including abuse, physical violence and actual loss of life). The practical challenge is to balance the rights of the accused with those of the accusers, who feel their traditional route to redress a wrongdoing (supported by their spiritual worldview) is being denied. Schnoebelen (2009, pp. 40–43) cited the methods and policies that different global and local agencies have attempted to instigate to control the consequences of accusations of witchcraft, but whether the challenge I have framed is recognised in formal policy responses is not so evident. As discussed in Section 1.2.4, strategies such as introducing regulations that outlaw the practice of witchcraft and make accusations of witchcraft a criminal offence may reduce overt instances of accusations of witchcraft. However, as Schnoebelen (2009 p.43) stated, it is only through acknowledging that witchcraft is ‘very much alive’ that a more effective response can be crafted that will give adequate protection to those suffering from being accused and address the grievances of those experiencing misfortune allegedly at the hands of the accused. The emphasis in any such efforts needs to be judicious and based on robust knowledge of the belief in witchcraft and how it affects the decisions of those who hold such beliefs.

The reports from the UNHCR support a conclusion that African witchcraft not only resides in the spiritual suitcase but that its effects are palpable within the refugee camps that exist across Africa. It is a physical part of everyday life. Someone may experience misfortune attributable to witchcraft, or they may equally be the subject of an accusation of witchcraft. Situations involving witchcraft in the various camps documented by the

UNHCR (2008, 2005), the UN (2007), Help the Aged International (2008) and Schnoebelen (2009)⁵⁸ reveal that, even with the supportive provisions available for refugees, witchcraft remains a principal mechanism for addressing misfortune. It is not confined to one ethnic group and is spread among many communities from different areas of the African continent. The reports further show that witchcraft belief and practice is malleable and enables the various communities to utilise it for their experiences of misfortune and for protection. Another element recognised in the reports is the cross-cultural exchange of witchcraft practices, demonstrating the transmissibility and mutability of witchcraft and its practice. This research supports that assessment of transmissibility and mutability.⁵⁹ It found that in the various ethnic African and African-Caribbean groups in diasporic communities in London, terms such as witchcraft are interchangeable with terms such as Kindoki and Obeah, despite their more specific cultural origins.

4.3 African Populations in the United Kingdom

It is necessary to take the time to describe the various communities of African people that exist in the UK. The migration of Africans, as we are aware, has been taking place since

⁵⁸ UNHCR (2005) *Angola annual protection report*. UNHCR. UNHCR (2008) *Handbook for the protection of women and girls*. <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/47cfae612.html> UNHCR (28 April 2004) *Guidelines on international protection No. 6: Religion-based refugee claims under Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 protocol relating to the status of refugees*, HCR/GIP/04/06, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4090f9794.html>. Help the Age International *Rights and older people: Facts and figures*. <http://www.helpage.org/Researchandpolicy/Rights-1/Factsandfigures>.

⁵⁹ Among the internally displaced in Kenya are people from neighbouring Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia. Trends (2012) *Displacement: The new 21st century challenge*. <https://irp.fas.org/agency/dhs/fema/displace.pdf>. The UNHCR recognises other nationalities as having refugee status in Kenya, including those arriving across borders from countries such as Somalia. Kenya accommodates approximately 13,800 Somali refugees. See <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics>.

medieval times, when Africans were captured and taken to the Middle East and Asia for forced labour. Later, during the 15th to 19th centuries, the slave trade saw a dispersion of Africans to British, French, Dutch and Portuguese colonies. As Michael Gomez (2005, p. 193) noted, enslaved Africans arrived in England in the 16th century, and by the late 18th century, there were as many as 10,000 enslaved Black people, mostly in London, Bristol and Liverpool. By the early 20th century, England had a small Black community, numbering in the tens of thousands, but subsequent immigration from the colonies occurred in response to the labour and military needs of the two World Wars (Killingray 1993). This trend in immigration expanded in the 1950s with the arrival of labour from the Caribbean to assist with post-war rebuilding, which led to an increased, often violent resentment on the part of the White majority, fuelled by xenophobia and fear of economic competition. Racial antagonism helped to shape Black culture in setting up and creating ties between Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Since that time, the African diaspora has expanded in all directions. The European continent saw the most recent influxes.

This has resulted in a Britain where, particularly in urban areas, people with many different religions and belief systems live side by side. In London, there are large communities from the African continent. According to the 2021 UK census, the population estimates for people identifying as 'Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African' in London is 1,188,370, of which 697,054 identify as African, 345,405 as Caribbean and 145,911 as 'other Black'.⁶⁰ Figures from Trust for London

⁶⁰ (<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts021>).

suggest that in 2020, nearly 10% (approximately 65,000) of those identifying as African came from Kenya.⁶¹ It must be considered that these statistics focus on the population of those who self-identify as Black African residing in the UK. Other nationalities and people who, over the centuries, migrated to the African continent, such as Asians from countries such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and who subsequently left or were forced out of Africa and arrived in the UK may also be included in the figures because they identify as Kenyan by nationality, although not by ethnic origin.

Trying to determine exact figures is problematic. In conversations with the High Commissions for Ghana, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo in London in 2010, all expressed various reasons for the difficulties in ascertaining the precise numbers of their compatriots in London. According to the Information Department of the Democratic Republic of Congo, there has not been a census because the people harbour a mistrust of authority, and as they are predominantly asylum seekers or illegal immigrants, the task would be overly complicated. The Commission for Ghana also commented on the issue of illegal immigrants, expressing the figure as roughly 300,000 people. This is reinforced by the New Policy Institute's report, which highlights a hidden population of groups such as asylum seekers and undocumented migrants who are not considered in the published figures. The difficulty similarly affects the Nigerian census, as the given figure of three million for the UK is made less than certain by the fact that there are Nigerians with British passports who may have been counted twice. UK Government statistics do not break

⁶¹ <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/country-of-birth-population/> (Last accessed 19 March 2023).

down population according to country of origin. Their figures tend to be categorised by region rather than by nationality, for instance 12.12% Black Caribbean, 10.5% Black African, and 2.1% Other (www.statistics.gov.uk).

In the 1960s and 1970s, people from African countries came to the UK for various reasons: to study at universities, to gain career qualifications and to gain political asylum. Refugees fled to the UK from conflicts that led to economic and political crises in countries such as Uganda, which experienced a mass exodus of Indians and Black Africans from the rule of Idi Amin in 1972. At the time of gathering the most recent figures, the UK was gripped by the COVID-19 virus and was in lockdown, and it was therefore not possible to ascertain information from the Kenyan Embassy about the number of Kenyans in the UK and the numbers of those in the hidden population. However, Werbner (2010, pp. 158–59) recorded figures that show Kenyans are the fifth-largest Black African group in inner London, based on numbers from the 2001 census. This identifies London as a major urban immigrant destination.

The above-mentioned figures on the ethnic groups in diaspora do not include the migrants from different parts of the African continent, including Somalia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Gambia, but the diversity of ethnic groups arriving in London demonstrates the degree of social impact of diverse cultures on the everyday life of the indigenous population and vice versa. Africans find different routes to the UK, and once there, they are faced with the same official processes that trigger fear and trepidation that they experienced in their home countries, now exacerbated by the threat of deportation. Often alone and in precarious situations, these refugees, asylum seekers

and migrants historically relied heavily on each other and the established African communities and churches in London, and that remains to be the case.

4.4 African-Initiated Churches in Britain

As discussed in Chapter 2, the history of Christian missions and their evolution in Africa is a vital influence on the religious consciousness of Black Africans. Does this influence continue to exist in the everyday life of African communities in London? For instance, does a belief in Jesus and going to church help people to find work, good housing and a good school for their children? Does it positively affect their immigration status, help with relationship problems or bring comfort in times of grief? Does it alleviate illness, both physical and mental? Hermione Harris (2006) described the Yoruba Aladura, or praying churches, in London as providing a haven for students coming to the UK during the 1960s and 1970s. The Yoruba Aladura originated in western Nigeria. Men and women came to the UK for educational qualifications that would enable a return home to 'join the ranks of the national elites' (Harris 2006, p.18). For these migrants, life could be isolated, and they had financial worries. Often, these migrants found menial jobs as factory workers or cleaners to make ends meet. Housing and money problems, exacerbated by sending money back home to support family members, also had their effect on relationships, and hardships were compounded when children came along. The churches became agents advocating on their behalf as best they could while providing a haven and succour 'for members of the church ... it was the church that both helped them survive their problems and maintain a sense of their own professional identity and future' (Harris 2006, p.19). The church was a place people gravitated to connect with others from home or mix with

other communities of Africans, giving them a sense of belonging and community, and to alleviate whatever social and political tensions existed at that time (Harris 2006). In an interview with Dr Harris in February 2010, while discussing the role of the church, it became clear it was still as strong as it had been in the past.⁶²

In terms of the role of indigenous belief and practices such as those advertised in newspapers, in leaflets pushed through the door and posted online by people calling themselves doctors and healers, what became evident is the paucity of existing research on the role faith plays in everyday life in African communities in the UK. This finding reflects that of Gerrie ter Haar (2009). It is clear that the role of the church remains strong, providing Africans in diaspora with a meeting place using 'proper twenty-first century English on their websites' (La Fontaine 2016 p.108) and evolving to meet the needs of their congregation by setting up schools, nurseries, pastoral counselling and outreach programmes for the elderly. However, my work with people from the African continent has taught me that many of the old phrases and sayings still exist in their vocabulary and, far from just being something to laugh about, are still treated with respect and a degree of reluctance to explore them. In my opinion, this indicates an imbrication of two faiths. As John P. Kirby (1994, pp. 60–61), writing about cultural change and religious conversion in West Africa, almost plaintively asserted:

⁶² Face-to-face discussion about the role of AICs in the UK between myself and Dr Hermione Harris, the School of Oriental and African Studies, 12 February 2010.

It is a truism that no group can conceivably change its deep religious beliefs and philosophy without noticeably changing its culture. Cannot a group change aspects of its culture without changing its central religious beliefs or philosophy? Or is it not possible for a group to have two parallel philosophies and sets of religious belief, each relating to a different cultural persona?

He argued for continuity between the beliefs of old and the new belief, suggesting that the new belief can only be grasped in terms 'of the old forms'. Kirby (1994, p. 67) aimed to show how traditionally held belief systems and other traditional structural alignments remain largely untouched by Christianity.

When we step into the lives of African people, it is clear that it is this dual-belief aspect of everyday life that is most affected by what Ranger (2007, p. 67) called the 'failure of mainline Christianity to adapt to prophecy, spiritual healing, spirit possession, the idea of the holy mountain, and the pre-occupation with witchcraft'. One of the questions this research aims to answer is, 'How do the various churches respond to the phenomenon of witchcraft in the UK, and do the various AICs located in the UK encounter witchcraft or accusations of witchcraft within their congregations?' To answer this, it is important to identify the AICs' perspectives on indigenous practices and beliefs, concentrating on what has been adopted and what has been rejected. How, if at all, have the modes of expression in church services been adjusted to manage the diverse beliefs and attitudes of the congregation and communities?

As explained in Section 2, one must recognise that African indigenous beliefs are intricately woven into the very fabric of individual, communal, social and political life and permeate the everyday experiences of African people. It is the everyday practices and the

social aspects that religion and religious belief bring that shape people's lives by providing values and morals and denoting people's place within their religious communities and the wider society. One can often see the ichthus on the rear window of a passing car, declaring to others of the faith and non-Christians alike that the driver, or at least the owner of the car, is of the Christian faith. In Southeast London, signs in cars are common, particularly in places such as Peckham, or Little Lagos as it is known locally, where the people who attend the proliferation of AICs often display stickers in the rear windows of their cars or give their shops and bakeries names such as 'God's Blessings' and 'The Divine Right' (see Figure 11).



Figure 11. A storefront in London. Source: The author

The term AIC is used in recognition of similar terms in use, such as African Independent Church and African Indigenous Church. These appellations indicate that the churches were set up and are led by Black African Christians, as noted by Turner (1979 see Section 2.2). To the extent that this declaration of faith relates to African Christians, the academic discourse on the churches in Africa and the threads of their origins, their rise from the days of colonialism to the modern era and the swell of the Pentecostal Movement in African countries have been well documented and dissected (Sundkler 1960; Barrett

1968; Turner 1979; Ranger 1986, 2008; Gifford 2004, 2009; Adogame 2012, 2016). Although the churches come from different disciplines, it is acknowledged that political and social elements are incorporated into the approach of the churches and demonstrate how indigenous beliefs and traditional practices have been subsumed into what has become known as African Christianity. Tshishiku Tshibangu (1993, p. 505) wrote that ‘for many Christians and Muslims the basis of moral values still derives more from the old cosmology than from the new beliefs’. He cited as evidence the continuing involvement of ancestors in the lives of their successors, belief in the forces of good and evil that ‘can be manipulated by direct access to the divinities through prayer and sacrifice, belief in the efficacy of charms and amulets to ward off evil’ and finally ‘the vast area of African life which both Islam and Christianity have invaded but have not succeeded in displacing’ – the area of health and healing (1993, p. 505). This aspect must be remembered if we are to enable the provision of a foundation for the practices and beliefs that will be relevant in addressing these elements.

This part of this study primarily involved respondents from Southeast London, where Christian churches, reflecting different denominations, have long held a place as a refuge for Africans from all over the continent and have provided a place to connect with compatriots or close geographical neighbours. The churches proliferate in areas such as South London. Historically, they have acted as hubs for African communities providing, as Robert Beckford (2011, p. 5) described, ‘a “shelter” or “rescue,” a place of radical transformation, driven by spirit and a family’. The term ‘Black churches’ acts as a descriptor to reflect the eclectic range of congregants, with a large proportion of the

multi-ethnic congregants being from across the African continent, the West Indies and Asia. It should be stressed that these churches promote inclusivity and are not exclusive to Black people. During my research visits to churches such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and NTCG Rehoboth in Southeast London, I saw many Europeans attending services. This validates Beckford's (2011, p. 2) statement that White people have a presence in the congregations. In many cases, I encountered pastors who use inclusivity as part of a general effort to publicise their services to the predominantly European wider community.

The increase in Black majority churches and new Black majority churches (BMCs and nBMCs, respectively) has largely matched the forces of globalisation and immigration to Britain, both from the Caribbean and from Africa. Within the planting of these churches are African-led churches, noted as one of the fastest growing sectors (Brierley 2011; Rogers et al. 2013) with 240 BMCs in one South London borough alone (Rogers et al. p. 13). The question of the reshaping of African spirituality in Britain receives much attention in the works of Gerloff (2000, 2010), Aldred (2005), Gomez (2005), Ackah (2010), Olofinjana (2010) and Beckford (2011) who, while tracking the history, proliferation and establishment of Black churches across the globe, focused on the UK, African theology and Black worship. The latter was described by James Cone (1978, p. 149): 'Black worship is essentially a spiritual experience of the truth of black life' and 'Black worship is the actualisation of the story of salvation in the lives of oppressed people' (p. 148). This ushered in what Adedibu (2014, p. 255) called 'a new chapter in the history of British Christianity'. Today, the spiritual landscape in Britain is an aggregation of churches of

different denominations whose theology and ministry reflect the migration of Black people from across the Caribbean and African countries and seek to provide the resources to care for the spiritual and everyday life needs of Black people in answer to the high levels of rejection, stigmatisation, discrimination and misunderstanding they face in Britain.

A partnership between the University of Roehampton, Southwark for Jesus and Churches Together in South London produced a report that highlighted the role of BMCs and nBMCs and the range of services that are offered by the churches to communities across London and the Southeast. Rogers et al. (2013, p. 13) referred to Southwark as the 'African capital of the UK' and noted 240 BMCs and nBMCs in the London borough. The Black church movement coincided with the substantial migration of African Caribbean people to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s (Gundara and Duffield 1992; Gerloff 2000; Beckford 2011).

Given that a great deal of scholarship on BMCs, nBMCs and Black theology in Britain leans towards the African-Caribbean population and considering that BMCs and nBMCs are a shared space and make provision for all ethnic minorities, this section will largely concentrate on the role of AICs. These churches are often classified by the common characteristics that highlight their African roots. Onyinah (2002, p. 110) described them as having 'replaced the anti-witchcraft shrines and the exorcistic activities of the African indigenous church'. AICs are significant in that their origin is Africa. In various ways, their establishment has been attributed to the failure of the mission churches to deliver what was promised by providing schools for African people: a political movement to reject colonialism, a response to the lack of consideration for African cultural and religious

expression and 'African independence from missionary control' (Ranger 1996, p. 66). Ranger pointed out that missionaries had not only promised education for Africans but also equal rights.

These are only a few of the complex and diverse sets of circumstances and influences that found traction within the religious imagination of the African clergy. Under the missionaries, they had received clerical training and therefore found fertile ground in the religious imagination of those who began the Africanisation of Christianity (Kaplan 1986) or African-influenced Christianity (ter Haar 2009). The AICs were and continue to be advocates for basic legitimacy in the sense that they are being led by Africans for African people. As Anderson (2001, p. 108) highlighted, they are 'expressing a meaningful African Theology, one that takes seriously the African worldview'. The spread of AICs means they now hold a significant presence in London and the Southeast. They can range from mega churches, with congregations numbering in the thousands (such as Jesus House and Winners Chape and the New Wine Church in Greenwich which puts forward 3,000 members; the Kingsway International Christian Centre, or KICC, reports 12,000 members;), to what Anderson (2001, p. 110) called 'house churches'. As the name suggests, house churches are private homes where people gather to worship, reminiscent of early Christianity. Between these two extremes are what I call the 'high street' churches. A walk around Camberwell in Southeast London reveals such churches in unused or abandoned small retail shops and other premises (see Figures 12 and 13).



Figure 12. A high street church. Source: The author

Figure 13. A church in a re-purposed building. Source: The author

The services the churches provide are directed at those within the diasporic community who are most in need – newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers – and social, spiritual and economic aid are provided for migrant communities from different areas across London. The church occupies centre stage, ‘providing a safe place for people finding their way in a new country’ (Rogers et al. 2013 p. 15) to resolve misfortunes, whether these concern family, health issues or legal matters. It is clear that these churches occupy a central role and impact the daily lives of African people and their communities. They create associations between newly arrived migrants seeking help and refuge in a foreign country. However, it is not only new African migrants who are attracted to and targeted by the churches’ services. The BMCs in London and the UK play an integral role in providing the means for spiritual and other forms of social support within entire Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. It needs to be

mentioned that BAME is a contested term. It is used as a way of aggregating ethnically diverse groups into a one-size-fits-all category. Reactions to the term come from a wide range of people of different ethnicities and with different social, economic and professional backgrounds. Many commentators object to the classification of whole swathes of ethnicities under one banner that omits important differences and identifiers, such as in the case of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities. There are also those who accept the term as a valid administrative tool to gauge trends that allow for forward planning. Within such a broad category, there is no room for those who have dual identities, such as British Asians or people of dual heritage, as demonstrated by the following excerpt from a BBC report (Fakim and Macaulay 2020): “The 'A' in 'BAME' means Asian, which, in itself, is an overly broad term. Does it mean 'South Asian', 'East Asian', 'Southeast Asian', 'Indian', 'Pakistani', 'Chinese', 'Thai', 'Vietnamese’?”⁶³ Furthermore, this lumping together of ethnically diverse peoples under the banner of BAME fails in its efforts to represent ethnically diverse people by not including religion. Simply put, the term continues to place ethnically diverse people in the category of ‘Other’. This one-size-fits-all approach contributes to a lack of understanding of African people, as their perspective on religion is, as we will see, a guiding principle in their attitude towards health and wellbeing.⁶⁴

⁶³ See Fakim, N. and Macaulay, C. (2020).

⁶⁴ See *British Government report on writing about ethnicity. How we write about ethnicity, including words and phrases we use and avoid, and how we describe ethnic minorities and different ethnic groups.* <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity>. See also a response to the report by the National Church Leaders Forum – A Black Christian Voice (NCLF).

At this point, it is important to bring attention to the fact that the UK and the rest of the planet have been and continue to be under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. AICs in the UK have had their part to play in how their congregations were affected by and responded to this major example of misfortune. The disease created conditions under which most people across the globe experienced and (at the time of writing) continue to live under some form of lockdown. Society has been placed under certain restrictions and new laws, implemented by governments around the world. At varying stages, various conditions or 'tiers' were applied to different areas of the UK. In London, buses, trains, shops and businesses – in fact, most of the services that people need in their everyday domestic lives in order to function – were curtailed and regulated. For example, only one person was allowed to leave their residence to shop for food. There have been periods when schools were closed and children were educated at home by parents and carers. Churches were restricted to smaller congregations for the purposes of prayer and worship, and the number of attendants at important family occasions, such as christenings, weddings and funerals, were reduced.⁶⁵ People were under orders to work from home and were not allowed to travel or to socialise with those outside their immediate households and support bubbles.⁶⁶ In enclosed public spaces, everyone was expected to wear a face mask, unless they had a medical exemption. Other exemptions enabled people to use public transport or travel for reasons deemed essential. Some

⁶⁵ <https://nclf.org.uk/black-church-leaders-release-statement-about-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities-report-2/>

⁶⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household>

children could go to school, as their parents were identified as key workers. These workers are considered integral to the running of local and national services, such as police, firefighters and frontline health and social care workers.

The pandemic was the catalyst for a paradigm shift in the role and provision of services and functions of African-led churches in the UK. Since 23 April 2020, AICs, BMCs and nBMCs have had to focus much more on BAME congregants. The reasons for this will be explored later in the chapter; however, it concerns the number of Black and ethnic minority people who have died due to COVID-19. A range of circumstances surround the dynamics and reasons for BAME communities' reluctance to take the vaccine. In order to combat and control the spread of the disease and prevent the devastating effects on the BAME community, a report published by Public Health England (2020, pp. 32–33) highlights faith leaders' reactions to the problems of communities that, due to COVID-19, struggled to 'recognise their religious practices but also grieve for loved ones'.⁶⁷ In their statements, it was noted that communities could not 'separate faith from people's everyday lives and lived experiences, faith is part of the solution' and that their stakeholders

⁶⁷For the full findings of the report, see Public Health England (June 2020) *Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892376/COVID_stakeholder_engagement_synthesis_beyond_the_data.pdf. The report does not identify the faith leader participants, merely stating that there was 'engagement with a broad range of 4000 people with a vested interest in BAME issues'. There is nothing to identify which faith is represented nor who the leaders are and in which part of London they are located and, thus, which communities they represent.

expressed deep dismay, anger, loss, and fear in their communities about the emerging data and realities of BAME groups being harder hit by the covid-19 pandemic than others, exacerbating existing inequalities. (Public Health England 2020, p. 6)

The report describes how faith leaders responded to COVID-19 with greater interaction with communities. They supported families through trauma and bereavement, and they helped the vulnerable. Mental health and spiritual support were offered, as well as practical help with supporting the elderly and isolated households. The main point faith leaders seem to make is 'the system's' lack of engagement with faith, as this serves as a nexus within BAME communities. By using culturally appropriate guidance and messaging, building trust with health care providers and other statutory services is seen as a key element in engaging with communities.

The report, which my conversations with local pastors verified, acknowledged the churches' efforts to dispel the myths and misinformation circulating within certain ethnic communities, such as African and Caribbean. However, the report did not mention the pastors from some AICs who claimed to have found the cure for COVID-19 or offered protection kits against it. Websites and daily newspapers, such as BBC News Online (n.a. 2020) and The Independent (Duncan 2020), carried the report of The Kingdom Church in South London, led by Bishop Climate Wiseman, who marketed 'a divine cleansing oil'. While this clearly exemplifies that snake oil salesmen come in various guises, what is truly remarkable is that it was claimed that nearly 2,000 bottles of the oil had been sold. There are several points to be made about this case. One is the fact that this happened behind the church's closed doors and is unverifiable. Whether it is true that 2,000 people bought the oil or whether this was a claim made purely to further the church's profile is a matter

for accountants. What is of concern to this research is that potentially 2,000 people in London sought the oil and had sufficient faith in its efficacy to pay £91 for a bottle.⁶⁸

As noted in Sections 3.1.5–3.3.2, a therapeutic symbiosis exists in the area of health, another example of what Janzen (1982, p. 37) termed ‘medical pluralism’. In his study on Congo society, he makes the point that it is common practice to consider both indigenous and Western medicine when choosing a treatment. His use of the term ‘indigenous therapy’ (p. 29) refers to a medical problem (*Kimbero*) being treated by medical action in the form of therapy (*Buka* means ‘to treat’ and *nyakisa* means ‘to heal’ or ‘raise’). Many illnesses are treated by therapies provided by relevant individuals trained in treating specific fields or symptoms. Indigenous therapeutic traditions and imported Western medical systems are intertwined.

People seeking treatment look for the best person to deliver the therapy and are directed to the relevant healer for treatment through the efforts of a diviner. An essential aspect of this system is the distinction between illness as a result from natural causes, expressed as ‘illness of God’, and that said to have a variety of other reasons, such as witchcraft (Janzen 1982, p. 48). In his example of a young woman seeking treatment, Janzen, described how the young woman’s family removed her from the care of a herbalist–magician and was taken to a prophet to undergo therapeutic counselling. The treatment

⁶⁸ For the full report, see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-52480133>. Several other newspapers carried the same report. As part of my background research in 2017, I made repeated efforts to talk with Bishop Climate, who at that time did not have the last name ‘Wiseman’. I was not successful in my attempts. One reason given was that the bishop was fasting and could not talk to me, while on other occasions I was told he would return my call. Unfortunately, I did not receive a call back.

involved 'baths, laying on of hands, anointment of oil and prayer for ten days' (p. 143). Janzen's (1982) and Flint's (2008) examples and Bishop Climate's production of healing oil provide a baseline to understand not only how the knowledge of indigenous healing systems is retained and pursued but also that these systems are not forgotten by those migrating to the UK. In addition, they demonstrate the robustness of African people's belief in indigenous practices and healing.

One pastor I met with, John, expressed how his role has expanded. He described how his congregants are seeking his advice on whether to have the vaccine or not:

The people are looking for encouragement, comfort and financial information and vaccine advice. I pray with them and conduct services, but they believe there are conspiracies, so they are afraid. They want information, but I'm not a doctor ... I encourage people to make the best choices.

He went on to say how people relate to others who have stories of misfortune and who use traditional medicine from home:

Those people have power now! The people are desperate ... they hear stories of workers on the frontline who say they are told, "Go to the frontline ... deliberately hospitals arrange duties to be in the front line."

It is clear that the process of healing and the belief systems employed in decision-making are redrawing the place of the Church in African communities. This is driven by people who no longer trust official sources and are seeking advice and guidance from sources they have traditionally turned to and trust when seeking solutions for everyday matters. The pastor's experience provides evidence of the following themes: there is a fragility of trust in official sources of information, the belief that the colonial practice of considering Africans as expendable is still present and religious and spiritual leaders are still trusted

by their congregants, even in matters outside the realm of religion and spirituality. Section 4.5 examines and analyses these themes in the case studies.

4.5 Carriage and Resettlement – Case Studies

The case studies in this section provide examples of what African people might encounter upon first arriving in the UK. Importantly, they show the spiritual and cultural resources they bring with them in their spiritual suitcase, which are used to bolster their properties of resistance, survival and expression and are employed in their attempt to integrate into a British way of life.



Figure 14. Suitcases stacked at the Museum of Migration. Source: The author. Used with permission of the Museum of Migration

“When we came here, we believed it was the place to be successful. We believed in Britain; it was the place to grow so we could go back home and make life better.” (Respondent Delia, London 2019)

I encountered Delia through a contact from a refugee project in South London. Delia arrived in London in the early 1960s, a few years before Kenya gained independence from Britain. Her husband planned to study engineering in the UK, and she planned to find what work she could to help support them. She described how they had travelled to the UK and hoped to connect with Kenyans who had already emigrated to London. While still in Kenya, they had heard that the Kenyans who had already settled in London would help them find work and a place to live.

Delia talked about the experiences she had when they arrived in the UK. Although they relied on the relatively small pockets of Kenyan communities, they struggled to find accommodation, often sharing houses with many other people. She recalled how finding a job was “terrible ... we (Kenyans) were not warrish like those Jamaicans ... yeah ... we could take instructions, but it was the lighter colour skinned people that had jobs.” The term ‘warrish’ used by Delia was explained as a way of being or an attitude of people from Jamaica. Jamaicans were described as having a bad attitude and were disrespectful. She believed that employers thought she would have the same attitude (because she was Black), and she could not find work.

Delia described herself as conscientious and having a strong work ethic because “we carried our culture ... and custom ... and teaching with us from there [Kenya].” Exchanges would often take place at church, as it provided a space for such gatherings. The

community would gather, and people would share food, memories and knowledge and pass on useful information about ways to manage and cope with their difficulties around social housing and financial benefits payments. Delia went on to describe her misfortune. Her husband had affairs that started after a “year or so at college.” It was known by others in the community, and the community denounced it. In the words of Delia, “bad behaviour ... a person was not good or cheat a fellow, take another wife ... people ... community would judge them; those people would bring shame to the family.” She recounted how this had brought shame to *her* family, that it would not be forgotten and that it would continue to afflict the family in the future. Delia talked about how she remembered her uncle in Kenya seeing “somebody” and getting protection for the family against “bad things that happen in the house.” At this point, Delia spoke haltingly, looking down at the carpet as she talked about being “sick” all the time, so she went to “see a woman in ... yeah ... in Battersea (a district in Southwest London). She help [sic] ... she talked to me ... what to do ... she had some medicine ... it was okay.” When I asked how it was okay, she smiled and replied: “I was better ... in myself ... spirit.” Delia described the person she saw as someone who “had medicine from ... back home.” At no point during the encounter was there a mention of witchcraft. Delia appeared uncomfortable talking about her past experiences, and eventually the encounter petered out as Delia became more unsettled.

The discomfort demonstrated by Delia was the first time I witnessed the effect of a conversation surrounding misfortune and the use of ‘medicine’ in London. In-depth analysis of this particular respondent pointed to one major factor in the encounter. Delia

presented as unwilling to be personally identified or associated with anything to do with witchcraft, preferring to narrate her story in a way that separated potential links to a source of harm and misfortune.⁶⁹ There are several possible explanations for such reticence. Respondents (who presented as reticent in the London context when talking about experiences of misfortune linked to witchcraft) may have refrained from using the term witchcraft due to the host nation's popular perceptions of and reactions to African witchcraft in the media. There is a related explanation, colouring the worldview of at least one research participant. Respondent John, a pastor from the PCEA Outreach in London, was clear that he would not use the term witchcraft, that it was a "rounding up of African spirituality by colonialists and calling it witchcraft."

It may also be that in some way Delia had a sense of foreboding and that her restraint was her way of protecting herself from potential spiritual misfortune. Such reticence was not uncommon in my conversations with research participants in both Kenya (Section 3.4.5) and London. The conversations would usually begin with the respondent talking about "healing." The term witchcraft was only used by the respondents when they talked about their parents or older others, not about themselves. It was apparent that those respondents, when I used the term witchcraft, diverted their gaze, appearing to almost bat the word witchcraft to one side. However, this was not the case across all age groups. Respondent Lattice was one of the older people who agreed to talk with me, and her

⁶⁹ For an explanation of narrative theory, see Gale et al. (2003).

reaction to the term witchcraft was most visible, as she acted out her response by saying “Oh dear,” bowing her head and turning her face away from me. She then ended the meeting.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Larry and I decided to meet in a park in London. He agreed this would be a safe outdoor place to have a conversation; we would be walking, so others would only be able to overhear snippets of our conversation. Larry had arrived in the UK three years previously and, as a qualified engineer, had been successful in gaining employment with a prestigious firm. He talked about everyday workplace stress, but he also said he felt people were listening in on his conversations, that they “knew things” about him that they could not know unless they knew what he was thinking or were watching him. Larry disclosed that he experienced “flashbacks” to remarks his colleague had made, believing they implied the colleague knew about his wife and child. Larry belongs to the Charismatic Church and is a committed Christian. He had been to see his pastor to get advice on how to remove these unwanted thoughts from his mind or to figure out how people knew his business. He also sought assurance that he was not being watched. “The pastor asked me ... was I a spy!” He laughed as he said this but still shook his head as if in disbelief at his pastor’s response. He added that he had given the pastor his address and asked him to inform his family if “anything happened to him”.

His story progressed slowly. He explained that he had gained ways of coping with the physical symptoms of the stress and anxiety but was not doing well in understanding what was happening to him – why him, and why now? He said, “In the old days, there was a saying, ‘if you have good luck, it is something to share, bad luck you keep to yourself!’”

This was said while he was talking about the way people should cope: “In the old days, they would ask other things to help.” When I asked what other things he was referring to, Larry was vague and hesitant. Finally, I asked if he meant spirits, and he mumbled in the affirmative. I hesitantly said “*Orisha...?*” At the mention of this, Larry leant to one side as if to physically avoid the word and, I interpreted, to attempt to move out of harm’s way.⁷⁰

This case study provides a snapshot in which one can identify several different aspects and elements. First, there is the element of perspective, by which one’s interpretation of a person’s behaviour can be shaped by one’s own cultural, religious and social environment. Second, there is the aspect of what constitutes the characteristics of a person’s religious belief. When someone applies the label ‘Christian’ or ‘Muslim’, the label carries with it a set of concepts that may not necessarily be shared by the person to which the label is being applied. What had made Larry move in such a dramatic way in response to the indigenous name for spirits? He had previously professed his strong Christian belief, so it is reasonable to suppose his faith is strong enough that the mere mention of the word *Orisha* would not cause such apparent distress. It is clear that his health and wellbeing are still impacted by an older system of belief that includes spirits and ancestors. His visit to the Christian pastor and the response he received did not address his worries. His next step was to engage another source for help.

⁷⁰ The *Orisha* are spirits associated with the Yoruba religion of West Africa and religions of the African diaspora such as *Santeria* in Cuba and Brazilian *Candomblé*. See Abimbola, W. (1994).

Larry had been living in London for several years and had access to NHS medical services and mental health providers, but it was his sister who eventually found him the “thing” that helped him. He related that a “lump” had appeared on his head, and he professed that it had come from somewhere or someone wishing him harm. His sister intervened and took him to see “someone from home who gave him ‘protection’,” and this person helped him. Larry did not reveal who the someone was or what sort of protection he was given, only indicating that since he had been given the protection, his work situation was better, and the lump on his head was going away. I surmise that the protection that Larry spoke of is that same method of addressing misfortune and healing employed by Bishop Bwire, a highly placed cleric in Kenya who told of his father’s consultations with witchdoctors in order to enable Bishop Bwire to do well in school. He related his experience:

So, what happens is that, er, my dad, er, we used to know that for you at least to excel in, er, in academic in school and also used to believe when people, you are not doing well in class, either you are being bewitched or somebody is practising witchcraft against your life. So, our dad used to sort of, er, practise going to witch, witch [sic] doctors, where there would be given some, some charms, and either we tied [them] around our bodies as a form of protection so that, er ... so that it acted as a form of protection so that whoever ... There was something that, er, something like, er, um, a drug that was used to tie, just you would take something like a small rock that would tie around our waist. So you are growing with it, some, they would be tied on the, the hand.

Larry’s case advocates for the reality of cross-community ties in diaspora; people in diaspora carry with them a multitude of strategies, knowledge and remedies, and they share them with others of similar background. Section 4.6 will expand on this theme. The

case studies also show that people (with Larry and Delia as exemplars) balance their Christian faith with the indigenous beliefs carried in the spiritual suitcase.

Reluctance to use the name of spirits and the word witchcraft was not universal among the respondents. Claire, a home parent training to be a mental health worker, accused her sister-in-law of being “a witch.” The accusation centred on her sister-in-law putting an “influence” on her husband, Claire’s brother, who had recently “lost a lot of money, was without energy and could not make decisions about his finances.” The use of the word witch was deliberate and expressed with certainty. There are two important facets to take into consideration. First, Claire is of African descent, in training in a discipline centred on a scientific Western perspective on mental health while simultaneously maintaining a belief in African spiritual causality. Second, in order to make sense of her brother’s predicament, Claire proffered an explanation that came from her own spiritual suitcase rather than her training. She concluded, as a simple matter of fact, that it was witchcraft emanating through her sister-in-law.

Reluctance, or lack thereof, to use the term witchcraft aside, the cases all show the power that these beliefs continue to hold over Africans in diaspora as they go about their everyday lives. In all these cases (Delia, Larry and Claire), there were discussions about the evil of witchcraft. In addition, although not specifically named, there was a strong sense that the mechanism and spirituality of witchcraft had helped Delia and Larry and that it had certainly been a spiritual entity that had interceded to provide the remedy to their misfortune. Witchcraft was explicitly named as the reason for her brother’s affliction by Claire.

This research makes it clear that while witchcraft is something that many respondents would not talk about for various reasons, some participants in London, such as Patricia (see Section 4.1), were prepared to speak openly about witchcraft, the stigma attached to misfortune ascribed to it and the fear of the consequences of talking about it as the reason for their misfortune. This leads to an important aspect of the experience of misfortune for African people in diaspora: mental illness and the impact of belief in witchcraft.

As a health care worker, Patricia's job centres on working with African migrants who are seeking asylum in London and are experiencing illnesses, poverty and mental health issues in their everyday lives. The struggles that are implicit in this work with African people involve the attitudes and beliefs of the people actually receiving help such as advice and counselling. During our conversation, Patricia related how the stigma attached to witchcraft prevents many African people from talking to others about it. Even though many people hold the belief that being cursed or bewitched is the spiritual cause of their misfortune, the stigma inhibits even discussions about their misfortune for fear of experiencing alienation by others in their social groups, including family members and neighbours. The sufferer will often be marginalised by their community. Patricia disclosed her experience with this while living in the Kenyan port city Kisumu:

And I know that one of my uncles was ... had a mental health problem, and he used to walk around town, talking to himself and things like that, and us, growing up as children, [we] were so frightened of him ... because we don't ... We didn't know anything about it. We just thought that, you know, that he would ... well, personally, I thought, maybe harm me or something. I didn't understand mental health then. He would come home, and my

mum would feed him, and he would be okay, but once he was on the street, I would never go and approach him or talk to him ... And also, mental health, I suppose, is attached to witchcraft, because we heard rumours that he was bewitched – that's why he was roaming around town. So, witchcraft and mental health, maybe they ... go hand in hand.

Thus, an explicit association between witchcraft and mental health is made, and this is carried as tacit knowledge in the spiritual suitcase. Patricia told of many who struggle:

Africans didn't really identify with that. They thought, if you wanted counselling, you were mentally ... mentally ill, and mental health and Africans doesn't really go ... There's such a big stigma. So you can imagine, you've got mental health problems, you're HIV positive, you're an African ... That's just like ... Wow, what do you do? It's almost like your life is ... there's ... your life has come to an end ... I think it's in the culture, and it's [in] most African cultures because, even where I come from, most people say it's very challenging ... obviously, it's very challenging, you know ... things like ... just simple things like your language, keeping up ... talking your language every day, the weather is different, the way you view things is different, so how ... Like, when you go to your appointment, it's different when you're talking to your consultant, you know ... In some of our cultures, as Africans, we don't look into somebody's face when ... especially if they are older or if they ... we think they are professional. We don't look in their ... we bow our heads, we don't look into their face, and that can be quite offensive with some Western people, I think. So how do you empower yourself to have that confidence to look somebody in the eye and tell them how you're feeling?

Many migrants would be aware that the mention of witchcraft is often regarded by health care professionals in Europe as mental illness. Family members who have been sectioned or given anti-psychotic drugs are reluctant to share their beliefs. Patricia continued by simply asking

“Who do you talk to? Who's going to understand? Who's going to understand that the spirits are telling you these things? Who's going to understand you? They're going to say, you know, you've lost your mind.”

The respondents in these examples may well have a sensitivity to talking about witchcraft because the associations are too closely linked with the tacit knowledge of what could or should not be done. As detailed in Section 1.5, I employed Moustakas' (1990) core processes of heuristic inquiry to fully understand and gain deep analytical insight into this sensitivity on the subject of witchcraft. In addition, I engaged Polanyi's (1966, pp. 635–652)⁷¹ concept of tacit knowledge as experienced in day-to-day life and related it to the way witchcraft and indigenous beliefs and practices are placed in the religious imagination of the research participants. These techniques and descriptions provide a plausible explanation for the behaviour of the respondents in this research, both in East Africa and in London. For the participants, the belief that to talk about witchcraft or behave in certain ways may bring about misfortune is part of that tacit knowledge. What may be referred to as gut instinct would in certain circumstances translate in the African worldview as spiritual guidance. Tacit knowledge may also hold the means to provide guidance on steps that could be taken and who to consult or seek advice from. It is not knowledge that is written, nor is it an instruction that is given to people. Ngara (2007, p. 7) placed tacit knowing alongside what he described as 'traditional ways of knowing

⁷¹ The literature on Polanyi's theory is wide and varied and has been taken up by a broad church of disciplines, including education (Nonaka 1998; Fruehauf, Kohun and Skovira 2014), organisational management (Heiberg Engel 2008), social communications and medical education and psychology. <https://dictionary.apa.org/tacit-knowledge>. See also Polanyi, M. (1966) *The tacit dimension*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press. Becerra-Fernandez, I., Gonzalez, A. and Sabharwal, R. (2004). Nonaka, I. and von Krogh, G. (2009). Nonaka, I. and von Krogh, G. (2009) .

(spirituality centred wisdom)' within the realm of the African psyche. It is, he argued, indigenous knowledge. In the African worldview, a child is a child of every adult in the community, and teaching a child in indigenous ways about the customary codes of behaviour and living is a shared duty of the adults. Indeed, it is through such processes as initiation ceremonies; the influence of elders, religious experts and practitioners; and family involvement that knowledge is absorbed. Talking about such things as witchcraft is the main purview of healers and diviners; it is not to be discussed in casual conversations. Patricia expressed that Africans feel they would be judged by the "Western world" as being primitive if they were to talk about their indigenous spirituality and ways of healing:

Some of them. Yeah, some of them ... especially, and they openly talk about their beliefs and their traditions because they feel safe, because everybody is African, and everybody has different beliefs, and they all come from the same continent, so they feel safe. They've got similar experiences, so they can talk about it, but I don't know whether they would openly go outside and talk about it and practice.

Polanyi's description of tacit knowing is that, rather than being taught in a clear and detailed manner, knowledge is informally absorbed (Fruehauf, Kohun and Skovira, 2014, p. 100). Tacit knowing is defined as skills and experiences held by people and as information that is not necessarily stored in the conscious mind so may not be easily expressed. Heiberg (2008, p. 184) described tacit knowledge 'as ... those aspects of human knowledge, skills and competencies, which lie outside the domain of rules and procedures'. In this form, tacit knowledge or 'knowing' complements my concept of a spiritual suitcase. The knowledge that is absorbed through stories determines the

behaviour of the carrier of the suitcase and may provide the means to facilitate resolution of any misfortune they suffer.

My conversation with Patricia also threw light on another dimension of the lives of Africans in diaspora: the embodied tacit knowledge of their indigenous beliefs helps them to retain their identity during the acculturating process that inevitably takes place in the host nation. This has relevance to the reluctance to speak openly about witchcraft within particular social fields where reticence serendipitously facilitates the settling of African people in diaspora in the host nation. The idea of social fields plays a role in transnationalism, identified by Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (1992, p. 1) as ‘the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement’. These social fields will be aware that Africa has historically been portrayed as the Dark Continent, and African worldviews and spirituality may at best be misinterpreted and at worst be maligned and ridiculed. This awareness is additional to the spiritual knowing that has flowed into diaspora. The case studies show how African ways of knowing reflect their worldview and sense of self. They also bring out the fact that African people have been and still are alert to these attitudes, especially those towards witchcraft as propagated by popular television shows and the print media.

As Asamoah-Gyadu (2010, p. 89) clarified:

The first source of vulnerability for African immigrants is the fear of ‘negative spiritual influences’. This refers to the fear of envious relatives, family witches and other sources of supernatural evil – both real and the imaginary – that are believed to conspire to thwart the efforts of the immigrant to succeed within a physically and spiritually precarious diaspora space.

For migrants, everyday life contains the sorts of challenges that require them to overcome their fears, which often threaten to overwhelm them. These occasions lead to the individuals seeking out help and guidance from those sources that were used 'at home' and exist in their locations that will provide them with the solutions they need. The case studies demonstrate the reluctance of African people to make their indigenous beliefs or practices obvious or known to those outside their kinship groups or communities.

There is one other aspect that exacerbates the need for this reticence. While exploring the reports of television programmes, authors and many of the London newspapers, I found that the portrayal of African witchcraft was largely contained within one stream of consciousness: child abuse (Section 1.3.1). The reports in the newspapers grabbed attention with headlines such as: 'Torture of African children for being witches is spreading' (Howie and Razaq 2012 n.p); 'Rise in brutal 'witchcraft' murders and attacks on children prompts new training for police to help them spot sorcery' (Robinson 2012 n.p); 'Torturing teenagers has nothing to do with culture or race, the evil zealots behind disturbing rise in African witchcraft MUST be stopped' (Johns 2012 n.p) and 'Witchcraft murder: Killers "obsession" took on "feral character"' (Dangerfield 2012 n.p).⁷² These

⁷² <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/torture-of-african-children-for-being-witches-is-spreading-7880442.html/>, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2110932/African-witchcraft-murders-These-evil-zealots-hide-culture-race.html/>,<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/mar/01/accusations-witchcraft-pattern-child-abuse/>,<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-16955554>,

reports coincided with the discovery of the death or abuse of children, but in more recent cases adults disclosed their childhood experiences of being accused of being a witch and possessed by evil spirits and their experiences of abuse (Mercer 2022). Nearly all the reports make reference to the Victoria Climbié and Kirsty Bamu cases as examples. The popular British television programme *Silent Witness* (Episode 3, *Suffer the Children*, 2007) constructed a plot line that involved African people being subjected to torture and children being used for organ harvesting, with an African female medical doctor as the villain whose purpose it is to use the body parts for healing. All this takes place under the cover of a Christian church located in the back streets of London. In this church, packed with people clapping and singing, a West African priest conducts services, and a ritual exorcism is performed. The setting depicts an underground, dark place with cages in the alleys and the back streets of London. The programme's instrumental music is laden with 'African' drumbeats. The narrative is driven by terms such as satanic cults, devil worship and *muti*. Someone who evidently is a sangoma is seen to read bones, supposedly divining what the police are up to, and they know things about the investigating officer. The programme profiles African people and their culture, worldview, religion and spirituality in a less than favourable light. The African characters are seen as naïve and based on general characteristics or past stereotypical behaviours. The case for witchcraft sensationalism in the UK press and media was aptly explored by Adedibu (2014), who laid

<https://news.sky.com/story/woman-branded-witch-by-faith-leader-and-accused-of-giving-mother-cancer-tells-of-ordeal-12599248>

out the place of BMCs and pastors within the mix. This witchcraft sensationalism is not unique to the UK; it is also obvious in the African media, where articles appear on a regular basis concerning 'unexplained' illnesses or the behaviour of individuals or groups that result in injury, death or loss of life and property, even in relation to the Republic of Kenya's handling of a sugar crisis.⁷³

4.6 From Nairobi to London

While living in White-dominated countries, they (Africans) try to tackle ... issues with valour and tenacity of faith, not least derived from spiritual and cultural sources which even in displacement, allow for resistance, survival and freedom of expression. (Gerloff 2000, p. 85)

In Kenya, indigenous religious beliefs and practices – including witchcraft and divination – exist as supplements to Christianity in the religious and spiritual lives of the people. In situ, African spirituality proceeds from a particular historical, political, global, physical, socio-economic, spiritual and religious background, further influenced by larger globalising influences. As Ackah (2018, p. 1) described:

African communities are dynamic and diverse, with their religions and spirituality having been shaped by factors of geographic location, organised religious settings, enslavement, colonialism, social oppression and the contemporary globalised world.

⁷³ Abuga, E. (2021) Witchcraft verification is primitive and illegal, KNCHR says. *The Standard*, 6th November. Manyara, D. (2018) I use special *dawa* to 'lock' my 19 wives from cheating – Meru man. *The Nairobiian*, 3rd and 9th August. Neymar. (2021) West Kenya sugar riddled with 'witchcraft', nepotism and mistreatment. *KBF*, 15th June. Omoro, J. (2018) Pastor condemns stranger who pooped in his house. *The Nairobiian*, 3rd and 9th August.

Contrasting these historical elements with African people who live in Britain, through either forced or voluntary relocation since the 1950s and 1960s, requires an answer to the question, ‘What are the factors in a host nation that act to reshape African spirituality, affect wellbeing and influence religious imagination?’ Thus far, the study has explored the scholarly approaches to belief in witchcraft and possession, how these play out in the everyday life of the people of Nairobi and its surrounding areas in a variety of social settings and the commonality and differences in the application of and belief in witchcraft. It has demonstrated how belief in witchcraft and possession permeates the thinking and perception of nearly all Africans in both rural and urban settings and how it is an integral part of Africa’s spiritual heritage. It has shown the need to be cautious when talking about African religions, worldviews, customs and values, which have different, maybe even unique, symbolic systems and philosophical underpinnings, and not to contextualise them in general terms. In addition, it has charted how witchcraft belief travels in diaspora, including specific evidence of its operation in refugee camps – places that are waystations for both people and ideas and provide opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges. This section will focus on the UK, where the study concluded, to explore how witchcraft is recognised there.

As mentioned, the challenges many Africans who arrive in London and the UK face are varied. Not all Africans who land in London are disadvantaged; some immigrants arrive as students and academics in university or have work in Britain’s health and social care systems (see section 4.3). The people I encountered occupy a diverse set of socio-economic and religious spaces in London; however, misfortune is experienced regardless

of social or economic status or the circumstances that surround everyday life, which are consistent among most African refugees and migrants. The pastors I met with in London boroughs (Bishop Edward and Pastor John), who led congregations in areas such as Brixton and Croydon in the south of Greater London and in East London, described the conditions that people within the African communities live in. These conditions are often endured in difficult and uncertain circumstances due to their legal status in the country. People who recently migrated or are seeking asylum are often isolated, have no home and may be squatting with somebody else, “living from couch to couch.” Many live on what cash they can earn from picking up bits of casual work, and many experience terrible hardship and abuse. In addition, there are those who have been trafficked. The churches support them financially and provide comfort and prayers, but many Africans struggle with access to social services and health provisions.

4.6.1 Witchcraft in the United Kingdom

The African has been hurt and humiliated in what constitutes his/her world and system of values, especially his/her symbolic structure ... This has led to psychological and social alienation expressed in all forms of self-denial by Africans as they express and live hatred for what is African because this is perceived as primitive and backward. This is the worst form of poverty because it attacks the African in what makes him/her African; this is anthropological poverty. (Kanyandago 2002, p. 50)

It appears from this quote that Kanyandago laments the fate of African people. He expressed the damage that he perceives to have been inflicted on African people's sense of self. Angered by the role of the missionaries in what he regards as the destruction of the African people's symbolic structures, he characterised African symbolism as providing

a link for African people to a connection with their consciousness of their 'experiences, ... individual, social and historical past and immediate present' (p. 50). Such a symbolic structure was one of self-reliance, passed on through oral traditions and proverbs. The African concept of self-reliance is formed through the solidarity of communal work where encouragement for self-reliance is promoted (p. 49). However, through missionary endeavours such as educating Africans to disregard such notions, the connection was separated, resulting in estrangement from the meaning of symbols as a means to gain satisfaction and connect with a sense of personhood in what is being accomplished individually and within communities. Symbols have religious meanings, expressed in rituals and myths that explain the origin, purpose and meaning of the world and humanity's place in it. However, in his analysis of the impact of economic and social development in Africa, Kanyandago seems to have used a most European of premises to account for the missionary influence on the consciousness of African people. The author used the work of Rollo May (1961), a Western existentialist psychologist whose reflections on symbols are largely bound with psychoanalysis and the dreams of patients.⁷⁴ Kanyandago's analysis does not explain the continued vitality of indigenous religious praxis, especially that of witchcraft, which clearly has outlived all missionary attempts to deny its place in African people's consciousness. In fact, the survival and the

⁷⁴ Rollo May (1909–1994) was a proponent of existential psychology, coming out of the existentialist movement of philosophers and theorists such as Jean Paul Sartre, Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. He wrote several works on the subject of symbols. See his work *Symbolism in religion and literature* (1961) for more on this complex rationale for symbols, consciousness, the breakdown of values and the loss of identity.

recent rise of indigenous forms of healing and witchcraft activities is tied in with success and self-reliance, as demonstrated by political leaders engaging with witchcraft practitioners in their endeavours to win elections and the poor's attempts to escape poverty. The symbols of self-reliance that are said to have been decimated and the relationships with the past that Kanyandago claimed to have been broken are, in fact, grounded in the present and travel with diasporic communities across the globe, although shaped in ways to suit the current conditions in terms of development and socio-economic and religious life.

The evidence for this assertion comes from several years of collecting pamphlets, flyers and business cards that advertise the services of African witchdoctors and traditional healers. These arrived through my letter box, appeared on the windscreen of my car in car parks and were handed to me on the street (see Figures 15–17).

Seeking Professional Solutions to your Personal Problems

Mr FAKOLE

Serious African International Medium
20 years of experience in Haiti
100% Successful

- ◆ Quick Return of your loved one ◆
- ◆ Success in business and games ◆
- ◆ Protection against bad spirits ◆

Results are sure, serious and guaranteed for appointments call:

020 8691 7267
07983 871 142

207 Deptford High Street, London SE8 3NT
Buses:- 47, 188, 199, 177 & 53

Figure 15. London advertising flyer 1

SPIRITUAL HOUSE

OF PROFESSOR ADRIANNA

Are you unhappy in love, marriage and business? Do you feel someone has done you wrong? Are you or a loved one having problems with drugs, alcohol, legal matters, immigration, school, work or financial problems? Are negative and evil forces such as Kala Jadoo black magic and evileye taking over your life? I can and I will destroy all life's obstacles.

With 40 years experience I am a 7th generation spiritual healer. I specialize in removing evil spirits and bad luck from you and your home, I will heal the sick, cure any skin disorder, childless couples become parents, reuniting the separated, stopping loved ones from marring outside their faith or culture and restoring happiness to you and your family.

If you been to other psychics that wasted your time and money go to Professor Adrianna.

IN GOD WE TRUST

One visit will convince you no problem too big or too small. Call now for a better tomorrow.

0777 3199, 020 8 9071

Figure 16. London advertising flyer 2

Mr MAMADU
 FROM BIRTH
 A GIFTED AFRICAN SPIRITUAL HEALER
 AND ADVISOR

No matter how difficult your problem is there is a solution to it. Black magic, love, voodoo, sexual impotency, business transactions, exams & court cases. I can help you reunite with your loved ones, split unwanted relationships & gambling. For all your problems Mr Mamadu is the answer, no disappointment.

Quick results **GUARANTEED** Payment after Result
 PLEASE DON'T REMAIN IN SILENCE WITH YOUR
 PROBLEM: SEEK HELP FROM MR MAMADU

07459 6114 496
07947 958 200

Bus stop: St Asaph Road, Brockley. No's: 343 & 484
 French, Portuguese and a little English spoken

Figure 17. London advertising flyer 3

A simple online search for terms such as ‘African witchdoctor in London’ or ‘African traditional healer’ shows how many of them advertise online. The printed material and online presence reveal the growth and visibility of African witchcraft practiced in London, which contrasts with the normative portrayal of witchcraft inhabiting a hidden realm. One does not need to ‘know someone who knows someone’ or go on to the dark web to access their services.

Thus, the fact that witchcraft exists in London cannot be disputed. There has been engagement with witchcraft located in the UK from a variety of perspectives. One recent area of study and investigation is the issue of child safeguarding and abuse linked to faith or belief (Oakley et al. 2016, 2018, 2019). Other foci have been the role of witchcraft in the accumulation of wealth and power (Jane Parrish 2000, 2005a, 2005b) and satanic rites

linked with witchcraft in the UK (Jean La Fontaine 1998, 2016, 2018). However, a consensus about the meaning of witchcraft and its operationalisation remains elusive.⁷⁵ This limits the understanding of the reality of witchcraft practice and belief in the sense that no single example will fit precisely into the meanings emerging from the various disciplines that attempt to define what witchcraft is in its totality. As experiences of misfortune are as unique as those who experience them, it is reasonable to pursue the understanding of what misfortune looks like in the London context and the role of witchcraft to address the problems faced by African communities in everyday life. This is not to mean that witchcraft does not have a place in the spiritual lives of other communities and groups. There are other communities in London that have embraced African spirituality, such as African-Caribbean people attempting to re-establish a spiritual connection to their ancestral home and beliefs.⁷⁶ London, like the refugee camps described in Section 4.2, contains a tapestry of different nationalities from Africa interwoven – in living, working and social and religious spaces – with Black people from other parts of the globe with African heritage, such as the Caribbean. This presents a unique opportunity to view the African worldview, spirituality and witchcraft within communities in London. This chapter includes that element of this research, exemplifying

⁷⁵ Witchcraft definitions have an enormous catalogue and are varied, seen through the lens of different disciplines and the context in which the subject is studied. The following noted scholars offer a selection of views from said diverse approaches: Evans-Pritchard (1937, 1971), Kenyatta (1965), Douglas (1970), MacGaffey (1986), Mbiti (1990), Baur (1994), Ashforth (2005, 2018), ter Haar (2007) and Luongo (2011).

⁷⁶ There are organisations that promote, educate on and provide access to African spiritual healers and repositories of esoteric knowledge, such as Ancestral Voices (<https://ancestralvoices.co.uk/>).

the transformation and use of African spirituality and witchcraft within what is termed diasporic Blackness. This section contains a collection of case studies, with an observational preamble, although this is not a case study in itself. In analysing this event, which took place in a suburban street in South London, it is compelling how people from African communities continue their beliefs, propagate rituals and inculcate beliefs and practices in their chosen place of residence.

One day, while I was in my office, I noticed my neighbour from the house opposite mine standing in his front garden with his family. This was not unusual. My neighbour and his family regularly waited in his front garden on Sunday mornings, and a car would arrive to take them to church. Unfortunately, each Sunday morning the driver of the car would toot the horn as the car pulled up. My neighbour was a member of a church, and it was the church that arranged collecting him and his family for the Sunday service. As neighbours do, we had passed the time of day, and he had introduced himself. I will call him Gideon (not his real name). One day, Gideon said he was planning to get his own car because other neighbours had been complaining about the noise of the other car tooting its horn. Several weeks later, I noticed Gideon waiting by a parked car when an elderly lady arrived, and he bowed his head towards her. At this point, I must stress that my office overlooks the street. The elderly lady was attired in African dress, including a head wrap made with the *Kente* fabric⁷⁷ associated with Ghana, although this did not necessarily mean that this lady was of Ghanaian origin. The lady proceeded to walk around the

⁷⁷ <https://www.aaihs.org/the-history-and-significance-of-kente-cloth-in-the-black-diaspora/>

vehicle, inspecting it from front to back, side to side and up and down while continuously passing her hands over the car and chanting. Gideon followed her around the car and appeared to repeat what she was saying, at times closing his eyes, placing his left hand across his chest and crossing himself with his right hand as he did so. They continued to walk around the car, making gestures and talking, but I did not hear what was being said. When I met Gideon again some weeks later, I mentioned that I had seen the lady and wondered whether she was a relative. He replied that she was a “healer of my people” and that she had blessed his car to protect them from any problems, such as accidents or mechanical problems, “to keep us from bad things.” I did not pursue the conversation, but it is offered here as a starting point to the case studies that follow.

The first case study is Geoffrey. Geoffrey is a reporter and broadcaster for a radio station that airs in London. The station is geared towards Africans in diaspora and is affiliated with *Informer*, an online East Africa newspaper connecting East Africans at home and in the UK. Geoffrey presents an early morning programme on news and events that mostly involve reports from around the world on the persecution of Christians. He was cautious about discussing witchcraft and made it clear that he does not believe in witchcraft, declaring that he is a Christian and that “God is bigger than witchcraft.” As a Christian, Geoffrey feels that there is no greater authority or power than God. As we talked, I asked whether he discussed things such as misfortune and witchcraft on his programme. His answer was given in a quiet voice, creating in my mind the notion that he did not wish to be overheard. Reflecting this quietness, he avoided answering; instead, he smiled, nodded and said, “It is not good to say this ... yeah.”

Geoffrey went on to express the difficulties he envisaged in approaching Kenyan people in the UK to talk about the subject of witchcraft, saying that they would be reluctant to engage with such a subject and would be unwilling to participate in conversation. He talked freely about Kenyan populations across London, saying that communities of Kenyans and Kenyan churches are mostly located in East London. He was knowledgeable about the politics of the Christian Church and we discussed the situation with Arap Moi and his use of Christian churches to forward his political agendas. During decades as a psychotherapist in practice in London working with ethnic minority clients and people from diverse cultural backgrounds, I have observed people's body language and verbal expressions, and I recognised Geoffrey's reaction to the questions of misfortune and witchcraft as not only a reluctance to talk about the subjects but also a warning, informing me that continuing would be unwise. He was only prepared to tell me that he knew of "such cases" of witchcraft in the UK, that he knew "these people" existed and that he had found pamphlets stuck to his car windscreen and delivered through his letterbox that advertised the services of people calling themselves diviners, psychics, mystics and doctors.

Geoffrey recounted the experience he had with a young colleague at the studio who was coming to the end of their studies at college. One day, this colleague announced that he was going to Egypt. When asked why, the person told his co-workers that he had seen a "clairvoyant ... we call witchdoctor/diviner" and had been told that "great things await us there, wealth, love and success." Geoffrey then told me that he and his colleagues decided to investigate this clairvoyant. They liked the young man and wanted to keep him

from harm. They decided to contact the clairvoyant and ask for a reading. The clairvoyant told Geoffrey and his colleagues to provide a “bright new gold watch that had never been worn and a palm print of the person who wanted the reading.” Geoffrey and his colleagues decided to go along with the requests but then took matters into their own hands. He described how he and his colleagues bought a cheap gold coloured watch from a high street store. Here, Geoffrey’s story had a surprising highlight. In order to test the witchdoctor/diviner, Geoffrey and his colleagues, through “contacts at a zoo,” got hold of a photocopy of a palm print of a monkey. Geoffrey was at pains to stress that it was not a human’s palm print but that of an ape. They sent these objects to the diviner, who then told Geoffrey that the person would become a rich man, live in Essex, would get married, get divorced and then remarry, and he would be highly successful at work. Geoffrey repeatedly highlighted that the palm print that was read was that of an ape, using this as proof to reinforce that the witchdoctor/diviner was a fraud. He believes that these people use deception and are criminals who use people for their money to benefit themselves. As a devout Christian, although he knows of witchdoctors, Geoffrey refuses their claim to know mysterious things and to acknowledge they have any power.

Geoffrey’ case appears to point to his Christian faith and belief in God as strong and able to withstand the vicissitudes of life. He denies the power of witchcraft to affect misfortune. He obviously regards people who claim to be clairvoyant or able to undertake African spiritual healing as charlatans. By following the steps to obtain a reading as he did, he manipulated what was given to the clairvoyant, creating an illusion: the watch looked to be gold but was not real, and the palm print appeared to be that of a person

but was, in fact, that of an ape, a photocopy procured from a zoo. For Geoffrey, the outcome of the event seems to negate the idea that witchcraft is an instrument used to address misfortune. He considers it a method of EPC and just a dishonest way of relieving people from their worldly goods and money. This is proof that not all African people hold witchcraft as part of their personal worldview. Yet, Geoffrey was involved in supplying objects that ostensibly would be part of the witchdoctor's ritual process. Despite his Christian faith, he worked to enable a co-worker to make a real-life decision and develop his career, thereby at the very least recognising witchcraft practice.

The case of Geoffrey sheds light on the way that African worldviews are deeply rooted and that, in London, these views are evidenced in the practice of rituals. Gideon, whose Christian faith is positioned alongside his belief in rituals that serve to protect him and his family, engaged in an African ritual of protection that is generally performed around the home to prevent misfortune and witchcraft.

Rituals such as those for protection, naming ceremonies and healing practices continue to centre Africans living in London, affording them a sense of security and maintaining their identity. As with death rites, which are an important part in the sequence of life events and rites of passage, Gennep (1960, p. 5, cited by Kanu 2019, p. 26) defined life cycle rituals, rites of passage and initiation as 'groups of rituals which celebrate transition from one phase in the life of an individual or community to another'. Fairchild (1965, p. 262) defined these stages as 'the ceremonies which cluster surround the great crisis of life periods of transition from one status to another, notably birth, puberty, marriage and death'. Naming ceremonies and practices vary from country to country and group to

group, but what stands out is the importance of the name itself. For example, Swilla (2000, p. 38) mentioned that among the Chindali of Tanzania, the names of living relatives are given to a child, whereas the Kikuyu and Akamba people of Kenya conduct rituals prior to the naming of the child receiving a name (Mbiti 1969, p. 116). A Mijikenda child, at the ceremony of *Vyalusa*, is given a clan name by a grandparent and welcomed into society (Mumbo 2013, p. 379). In Ghana, with the custom known as *kpodziemo*, the baby's name tells others which family or clan they belong to and their group's heritage and origins. Thus, the naming ritual is without question one of the most important features of everyday life in diasporic communities. Important periods of transition are closely tied in with good fortune for the women in Kenya, as Wane (2000, p. 61) explained. He stated that pregnancy rites not only facilitate the birth but also protect the mother and child from evil powers and malignant people. While these rites contribute to and ensure spiritual good fortune and continue to be practiced in London, they have, as mentioned, been adapted, as with the case of Gideon. The character and meaning of the rite are not lost, but the performance is transformed to suit the circumstances. Thus, the attachment to spiritual entities is continued, and good fortune is upheld.

There is another feature that I will address, as it is integral to this research and its conclusions on gaining an understanding of the phenomenology of African witchcraft in London. In his work on South Africa, Adam Ashforth (2003, p. xiii) stated that 'no one can understand life in Africa without understanding witchcraft and the related aspects of spiritual insecurity'. I would echo that sentiment by saying that no one can understand life in London for African diasporic communities without understanding witchcraft and its

contribution to spiritual insecurity through experiences of misfortune in everyday life. To achieve this understanding, however, something else is required: comprehension of the granularity of African diaspora and, by extension, that of witchcraft belief and practice. The conceptualisations of African diaspora often miss the reality of spiritual contributions to the everyday life of diasporic communities from the African-Caribbean populations in London. There exists a shared cultural belief and identity that manifests in the religious life of people from Africa and the Caribbean. I have witnessed this shared belief and identity, both in the AICs and in those churches with an appeal beyond those who came directly from Africa. The respondents I talked with expressed their doubts and fears and described how they address them through prayer at the various churches they attend. The churches have been places of solace for those who believe their misfortune comes from evil sources, and they provide space to challenge the spiritual causes of their misfortune. A good example of this is the New Covenant Church on the Old Kent Road, which has a healing centre offering both 'spiritual and physical renewal' (quoted from the website). This research shows that within the AICs, overlap exists that allows people from different African and African-Caribbean backgrounds to form relationships whereby exchanges of ideas and beliefs occur between the congregants. These exchanges will often take place outside the direct purview of the church because certain ritual elements would not be accepted within the boundary of a consecrated church. This is particularly true of life stage events, such as naming ceremonies that give the child their place in the community and funerary rites to ensure safe passage to becoming an ancestor and ensure that ancestors are well disposed to their descendants and the wider community (Mbiti

1969; Akaranga 1987; Magesa 1995; Kip Korir 2008; Ezenweke 2012). Examples of this will be presented later in section 4.6.4.

Based on this knowledge, the research focus was extended to gain an understanding of the role of witchcraft in the multi-ethnic environment in which London's African and Black Caribbean residents and those of other nationalities live and to reflect on the responses of the various African-led and major denominational churches. This research, through conversations with respondents, church pastors and other clergy of South and East London churches, highlights the fact that although African and African-Caribbean communities are diverse, their belief in witchcraft does not differ in basic understanding of how witchcraft contributes to or causes misfortune. While misfortune may present itself in various guises, the reaction to what I call the treatment of misfortune where witchcraft is suspected is still a spiritual practice. The complexity and multiplicity of the various identities of people from Africa in diaspora and those of African descent from other post-colonial countries, such as Jamaica, is an important consideration for anyone studying African witchcraft in London. For many people of African descent, the legacy of African spirituality is still held within the religious imagination. This research shows that belief in witchcraft in London cannot be understood solely within a single social context or group.

Chapter 1 included a recounting of my experience with an elderly relative who spoke of witchcraft as Obeah (described as an Africa-derived system of spiritual healing and justice-making [Crosson 2020] and considered to be prevalent in the West Indies and Guyana). This relative is of East Indian origin, which has its own unique diaspora, and was

born and raised in the Caribbean. In London, one of the respondents, who is from the Caribbean and of African descent, spoke of Obeah as a cause of her daughter's illness. This respondent attends one of the many Pentecostal churches in South London that promotes 'healing' services at regular times of the week. This confirms that the belief in Africa-derived witchcraft is as capable of crossing boundaries as any other human expression of faith and spirituality. My visits to churches across London and my conversations with respondents showed that people in diaspora meet their spiritual needs within the same transnational social fields. This is especially true in South London, where along one particular stretch of road there are churches that were initiated for South Americans, such as the Iglesia Cristiana Fix the Weak London Church, which provides services for the Colombian, Chilean and other nationalities from the South American continent, and churches initiated for people of African descent.

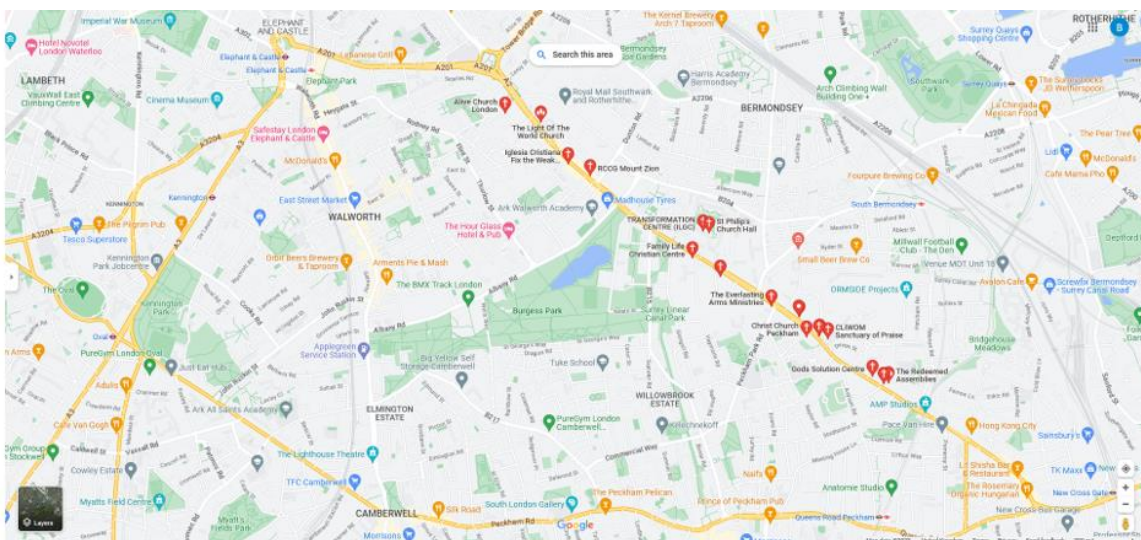


Figure 18. Churches on Old Kent Road. Source: Google Maps, accessed 12 February 2023

The AICs have a greater presence in the area than the other churches, leaving them with the greatest numbers of congregants. As I drove along this stretch of road late one Sunday morning, I noted that African-led churches have the greatest physical presence (Rogers, A. 2013, 2016) and that they are located alongside other congregations and communities. The churchgoers have, as Levitt (2003, p. 849) observed, 'brought with them particular incarnations of global religion'. The New Covenant Church, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, The Light of the World Church, the Behold He Cometh Church and Cliwom Sanctuary of Praise are but six of at least 20 churches that I could see. In this small area of South London, I found that the diversity of African people who attend churches such as Cliwom Sanctuary and The New Covenant Church were from countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and The Gambia. After services, the congregations spill out on to the pavement, clothed in their best traditional dress, showing their good fortune.

Tracking witchcraft in London cannot be adequately accomplished unless we first recognise this: in its simplest and, I would assert, most used expression, African diaspora describes a single direction of travel – from Africa to the destination. It does not reflect the complexity of the starting point or the multigenerational journeys some take within the diaspora. These journeys create unique expressions of witchcraft and its practices and speak in different languages. To begin an understanding of witchcraft in London is to first acknowledge that the common term 'African diaspora' is a misnomer that fails to appreciate the intra-ethnic constituents of communities in London. It is recognised that Black people have had a presence in Britain for centuries, arriving via different routes to

establish a presence in Europe and Britain (Fryer 1984; Gilroy 1993; Myers 2013; see also section 4.3).⁷⁸ However, the bulk of the current African and African-Caribbean population in the UK arrived after the Second World War (Gilroy 1993, p. 54). The early 1950s saw immigration to Britain from most parts of the Caribbean that were previously British colonies. These immigrants had attended Christian churches from childhood and, as Bishop Aldred described it in a conversation with me, “In Jamaica, the spiritualist church is very strong. Their view of the world is a world of spirits.”

It is not my intention to pursue or investigate the nature of African diaspora in its totality; nor is it my intention (being only tangential to this research) to explore in depth the academic or public discourse surrounding African diaspora as it applies to the UK. However, recognising the complexity of African diaspora is a critical element of the explanation for and understanding of the role of witchcraft in London among communities of faith. Amid the many conditions that exist in the host nation, the morally and culturally diverse circumstances active within modern, cosmopolitan societies holding different and often competing worldviews have created tensions within ethnic communities. However, in spite of these tensions, there remains a spiritual rallying force that unifies communities in their common desire to avoid misfortune. Belief in witchcraft contributes to a common context for the lived experience of misfortune among the diverse communities that constitute the African diaspora. The next research participant

⁷⁸ See also Lambert, D. (2017) An introduction to the Caribbean, empire and slavery. <https://www.bl.uk/west-india-regiment/articles/an-introduction-to-the-caribbean-empire-and-slavery#authorBlock1>

is part of that diaspora: the second Akare child of parents who arrived in London during the 1960s. Her case picks up the baton of African witchcraft and shows how the study of African witchcraft in the UK cannot be compartmentalised to the direct Africa–UK route. It is a complex and fragmented retelling of a situation that was experienced nearly 10 years ago but lingers powerfully in her memory. Her story provides, in microcosm, an example of how beliefs from the African continent can take different routes to arrive in the UK. In addition, it shows how African witchcraft evolved in the hostile environment of slavery to become what is known today in parts of the Caribbean as Obeah. The transposition of kinship and family ties and the contribution of the dynamic and intricate weave of family and community to the wellbeing of its members are prominent features of her story, demonstrating the resilience of these bonds despite the dispersal of people across the world. Examination of the case study further reveals how the notion of ‘bad mind’ within family groups can lead to experiences of misfortune. Finally, aspects of the case lend weight to my assertion that in seeking to understand witchcraft in the UK, a consideration of the intra-ethnic diaspora in Britain is essential and justify my contention that a platform must be constructed to interrogate the spiritual misfortune experienced within the Black diasporic population regardless of place of origin. This provides a counterbalance to the approach promulgated by some NGOs, charities and state-sponsored services (see section 4.6.3) to go back to Africa to seek an understanding of how witchcraft might operate in the UK.

4.6.2 “Dat naah guh wuk” (that is not going to work)

I met Angie (not her real name) in South London. She recounted a situation that began in London, evolved in the West Indies and ended in a major hospital in London. The location of her experiences straddles Jamaica and London and is framed by the strong ties of her immediate and extended family. The extended family group is a legacy of cultural family ties whose origins can be traced to the value system that exists all over the African continent and demonstrates the survival of African group origin and kinship systems. The extended family not only includes blood relatives and those related by marriage but also godparents and children adopted informally – in Angie’s words, “child lending.”⁷⁹ The nature of the extended family is to provide security and support. In the West Indies, by custom, a child is not allowed to use the name of an older relative but must use the title “aunt or uncle,” showing respect for the elder. This custom arrived with the people from the Caribbean, and at functions in today’s London, there will be numerous ‘aunties and uncles’, all of whom must be addressed appropriately. This family dynamic proved to be an important part of Angie’s story, which began with her relating an incident involving an intended trip back to Jamaica. Her mother-in-law told her that she should not visit Jamaica and should not venture to Kingston. Her mother-in-law was concerned that her partner’s brothers, who lived in Kingston, would become upset by the visit. As a rule, it was expected that trips back to the Caribbean would involve taking presents for family and friends, but her mother-in-law protested, saying that taking presents would illicit bad

⁷⁹ This practice is also referred to as child shifting. See Albertini, V.L. (1999) *Matrifocality and child shifting among the low income earners in Jamaica*. MA thesis, Florida International University.

feelings and animosity among her partner's siblings and create jealousy between the brothers. Nevertheless, Angie travelled to the West Indies and stayed with her mother-in-law's sister (identified as L), together with her partner and her five-year-old daughter, Lena (not her real name). Angie described complex relationships that existed between members of the extended family who lived together in the shared space in "auntie's" house in Jamaica. Different strands of the family living under one roof and children being looked after by relatives other than their birth parents is common practice in the West Indies (see the references to child shifting). In my own experience and through my research in Nairobi and Barbados, it is akin to what in Western terms is a form of fostering but involves the larger community and extended family. Many people who do not have a house of their own live with relatives and share in the upbringing of children. She talked about L, who seemed to have a matriarchal status in the family and within the broader community. Stories about L circulated among the wider family group. Angie heard that L wanted to legally foster a neighbour's child, but L exhibited "weird" behaviour. She described one incident:

Erm, but the auntie that we stayed at, she was the one that was adopting this little girl that was quite a similar age to Lena ... and when we went out one day for the day and came back, she (Lena) was dressed in another little girl's clothes. They were too small as well. And I came in ... and so the little girl's parents lived up the road, but she lived with L.

Angie talked about how her daughter did not "look right." She wanted to know why Lena was not dressed in her own clothing and was told that this had been prevented by L, although no one would explain why. Angie recounted another instance of, in her words, "strange behaviour":

We went to a petrol station to fill up the car, and she knew them, and they came up and said, hello auntie ... And the guy was looking, and then he was like saying hello, and I was like, just said hello. And then L said, "You wan' she [do you want her]?" L said she was just joking ... but it just, I just thought, why would you say that?

Angie was troubled by the idea that she was being offered to the people at the petrol station. She talked about issues concerning money, mentioning that L wanted cash to buy a new washing machine. Angie said that L had a bad mind when it came to money: "Everything was about money." She seemed to want material things and property from those around her to the point where members of L's immediate family said of her that she left a "bitter taste in the mouth." As she spoke, Angie became pensive and went on to talk about L's behaviour as in some way contributing to the events that followed.

Okay, so this all happened ... so when we were in Jamaica, Lena was fine. And then, when we got on the aeroplane, she was just asleep the whole time. And it was a bit unusual, like, she must have been exhausted. We'd gone through these different timelines. And then, when she woke up, her neck was, like, stiff, and I thought it was because she'd slept for so long.

Angie spoke about how, once back at home in London, she would try to massage her daughter's neck, but each time she touched Lena's head, it would hurt the child. She was jumpy and "freaked out, like there was something wrong," and Angie kept asking her daughter what was wrong, but there was no response. Angie was due back at work, so she went on to describe taking her daughter to the childminder, a woman who had looked after Lena for several years. On the first day back with the childminder, Angie went to pick up her daughter. The childminder told Angie that

something was wrong ... something's happened to, to Lena ... my heart was sinking, I was like, "What do you mean?" And she said, "Someone's done something to her" ... and I thought she meant like abusive, sexual abuse or something like that. I went to the house, and we were speaking, and she said, "Someone's done something to her." She said to me "Take her to the hospital." I remember her saying ... "Take her to the hospital. They're not going to know what's wrong with her, but they're going to put her on a drip, and it's going to flush her" ... and I said, she told me [to] take her today. I said, "Okay," and I took her to the hospital. They didn't know what was wrong with her, [and] they put her on a drip.

At the hospital, Angie was asked several questions, including where she had been on holiday and if they had been to Africa. Angie told them they had been on holiday to Jamaica. Angie then described what happened next:

It's really strange; we were in the hospital, and they put her on this drip and, all of a sudden (she was having a little nap) she woke up and she started to say, "Daddy, daddy, come back!" And she was, like, holding her hand out, [saying] "Don't go, don't go!" And she was calling out, she was awake, her eyes were open, she was stretching out to say ... "Don't go, don't go." And I was like, "No, daddy's not here; he's at home; he's making your porridge." She said, "No, no, he's there ... he's there; can't you see him?" "No, I can't see anything; he's at home." And then she was saying "Come back, don't go, don't go." And at that point, because even when we were in hospital, erm, an African nurse came over, and she said, she saw me leaving and she said, "Go and get some water or something," and she said, "This is spiritual ... The nurse come and said to me, "This is spiritual" again ... almost as though she didn't want to get caught saying that ... "Do you know how to pray?" And I said "Yes." And then she said ... "My friend, she prays, she comes, sometimes comes to the hospital when children are sick, and she sits and prays with them. Do you want me to give her number ... She'll pray with you" ... I said, "Yes" ... so then this woman, I rang her, and I was just talking to her. And she said she would pray. And she said, "Didi," she started to call her [Lena] Didi, and it was really strange because only my sister's friend and my sister at that time really called her Didi. And the woman said, "Let's pray for Didi." And then she was just praying and erm, you know, I just told her about the daddy, daddy come

back part. And she was just praying. And she said, "She's going to be okay. You're in the right place. She's going to be okay."

Angie went on to talk about her partner, who had arrived at the hospital and told her about something that happened in Jamaica that had to do with a T-shirt. Her partner had gone to a concert with his brothers and had taken Lena. It was a hot day, and they were sitting on a wall. He had worn a T-shirt, and he said he took the T-shirt off and threw it over the fence. He was sweating, and he was just leaving it to air out, but they forgot the T-shirt. Her mother-in-law said that there was something about the T-shirt that bothered her, so they went to see a "man in Jamaica." The man spoke about a T-shirt and that Lena was "sitting on her father's shoulders." Angie thought this man was some sort of Obeah-type man. She was told that he was a man of spirit who told her partner, "This T-shirt had your (her partner's) sweat on it, it had your daughter's sweat on it. This was not meant to harm her ... but her sweat was on that T-shirt." Angie's story took a turn after that. Her partner said that it was his fault, and he was praying to God to take him and not his child. He said this was his fault. "The man said that his T-shirt and his sweat, it was meant for him ... and it was a bad mind thing."

It seems that Angie's mother-in-law had also claimed that the situation with Lena was something spiritual. She talked to relatives in Jamaica, and it transpired that a family member took a photo of Angie's partner with him to consult with what Angie called an Obeah or spiritual man. This spiritual man made the pronouncement that the T-shirt was taken intentionally and that Angie's partner had made too much of his good fortune. He had exhibited this in the clothes he wore and his attitude towards others. Her partner's

clothing may have been bought in the UK and been of a different quality and condition to that of his relatives, leading to others regarding this as an outward projection of a belief that he was a big man. It appears that what the Obeah man said reflected the warning that Angie's mother-in-law had given to Angie prior to the trip to Jamaica and that the partner's behaviour had created resentment in others around him.

In the midst of her anguish and worry about her daughter, Angie encountered a person at the hospital whose position she could not identify but whom she described as "a bit Christianish." Angie said that this woman attempted to talk to her and tried to get her to say that what was happening to Lena was a spiritual attack or Obeah. This person talked mainly about Africa and told Angie that a lot of kids arrived back from holiday in Africa with similar kinds of symptoms. Angie would not engage with this person. In the meantime, her mother-in-law had reprimanded her for not having had Lena christened. That made Angie feel responsible for her daughter's predicament. She was also accused of not taking precautions before travelling to Jamaica. A piece of red ribbon should have been tied around the little one's waist at all times, which would have averted what was happening to her. Angie had Lena christened at the hospital, but Lena continued to complain and fuss, saying that she was hot and did not want to stay in the chapel.

Lena was in hospital on a drip for three days. She had several tests done, and at one point, Angie was told that Lena may have meningitis. It was during the preparation for this test, which required fluid being extracted from Lena's spine, that Angie had an experience that left her very upset. As the procedure began, Angie and her sister were observing from behind a glass partition. She said she saw at least five people trying to hold Lena in a

position to insert a needle and extract spinal fluid. This caused her and her sister to cry out, "Oh my God, how can they not hold her; she's tiny." Lena then turned to her mother and said, in what Angie described as a voice that sounded like a Jamaican man, "You, yuh jus' stan' deh, and cry an' yuh jus' watch dem a-hol' mi." Lena was finally discharged after a negative test for meningitis, and Angie took her to stay at Angie's mother's house.

The events that followed during their stay at the grandmother's house compounded Angie's experience and presented yet another facet of the situation for Angie to cope with. Lena's grandmother made a telephone call to a friend in Oxfordshire, who instructed her to buy specific candles that had ridges on them. She was then to burn the candles to a specific point while reading "psalms from the Bible." The candles were to be purchased from a Trinidadian⁸⁰ man who had a shop in the Elephant and Castle (in South London). This ritual was to be repeated for three days. On each day, the candles were to be lit and burnt to a particular ridge, and then they were to be blown out. Angie reflected how her mother, who was a devout Christian, did not know if the ritual would work, but she would "do it anyway, as it would not do any harm." Lena's grandmother then performed another ritual, which involved holding garlic and salt in her hand and walking backwards out the front door. Angie recounted how she woke up one night, while the family slept:

Mum was cussing and swearing in her sleep. And then I said, "Mum, Mum," because she usually wakes up really easily. She woke up, and I told her what she was saying. And she

⁸⁰ Trinidad is a former British colony in the Caribbean.

said ... she felt that it's like she was awake, but she was aware. She said someone, well, not someone ... threw a black bit of coal, and it landed in the middle of her bed, and she picked it up, and she threw it back out, and that's when she started cussing and carrying on, and the person disappeared. And I was like, "What?" And she said, "Yes, that's what happened." Lena woke up later on, after me and my mum were talking, and my mum was praying. She woke up, and we were praying, and Lena ... she sat up and said, "Dat naah guh wuk," like that ... in a gruff older Jamaican man voice.

Angie was told by her mother to continue to pray. Angie's mother replied to the little girl, "Yes, it is going to work." Angie described how, while they continued to pray, her mother talked with Lena, telling her how good will always overcome evil. Eventually, Angie took her daughter home, where she recovered and became more like herself.

At this stage of the conversation, Angie looked tired and pensive. She expressed how recounting this event in her life and that of her young daughter seemed to have triggered memories she had not thought of for a long time. She said that there would be some people who would say it was silly, but she knew that it happened. She saw her daughter calling her father as if the child could actually see her father in the room, walking away. Lena's father did in fact walk away from the family after his behaviour had changed. He had become suspicious of Angie and accused her of being unfaithful, of wearing all black clothing and of carrying a backpack all the time. He returned to Jamaica without telling her. Angie does not understand the change in him and thinks that he had some sort of mental health issue. She believes that what happened to Lena was some sort of "spiritual attack" and that she had witnessed her daughter "being like ... not being my daughter ... because she could not speak patois." She reasons that what had "afflicted" Lena was a spiritual attack on the father, as she had been very close to her father. For several years,

Angie was afraid that Lena would be afflicted again. However, she was reassured by the woman from Oxfordshire saying that Lena was okay, that it would not happen again, and that Lena had been “closed off.” She was given a warning by the “Trinidadian man,” who told her to use candles to spiritually cleanse her home once a month and to be mindful of other people when walking or travelling on buses with Lena because people who smiled and wanted to touch her child had a “bad mind.”

Angie described her experience of her daughter’s predicament as one of being powerless. She could not understand or change what was happening to her daughter, and she was unsure how to react to medical doctors and the people who were offering spiritual help. Her daughter’s distress had a profound effect on her intellectual and emotional coping mechanisms and resulted in her having to rely on her immediate family for support and guidance. Even though she sought and got help from medical professionals, she believes that, ultimately, it was the interaction with healers and the power of prayer that enabled her daughter to recover. Angie believes that what happened to her daughter was spiritual in nature and real and something that, as a trained professional health care worker, she had not imagined occurring in Britain. She talked about growing up and being told stories by her mother and older family members of *duppy* and Obeah, but she had not taken those stories seriously. Her mother would tell her about dreams and premonitions of events that would inevitably occur, but Angie thought they were “just old people’s stories from home.”

The stories told about *duppy* are steeped in the folklore and religious imagination of people from across the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica. In the region, it is believed that

duppy has to do with the spirit of the dead and can be the soul of a dead person manifested in human or animal form or as supernatural beings. It is also believed that duppy is part of the religious beliefs of Africans taken to the Caribbean during slavery. Using studies gathered in Jamaica, Leach (1961, pp. 207–215)⁸¹ provides insight into the various forms taken by the spirit and examples of the conditions that prevail when duppies are encountered. The stories that Angie heard are the same stories clerics from the Caribbean told me. Bishop Aldred recounted his experience as a boy growing up in Jamaica. When walking home from church in the dark, people would pass through a heat pocket. Bishop Aldred used a vernacular term for this: “duppy heat.” People would start speaking in tongues as they walked through the intense heat. Both Angie and Bishop Aldred recounted experiences that would be recognisable to African people in both Africa and the UK. Within the African religious imagination, air conditions are indicators of the presence of spirits or recent spirit activity. This is also recorded in Faulkner’s study of the Boni people of Lamu in Kenya (2006, p. 107, p. 191) and, I maintain, effectively provides a chain of provenance for this belief linking Africa, the Caribbean and Britain. Oral traditions or folklore form an important element of the African religious imagination, as demonstrated by Akporherhe and Oghenerioborue (2021), who investigated the transmission of folklore and culture through African indigenous language. Verbal transmission is a crucial element in passing on practical knowledge such as sewing, dancing and cooking and knowledge of ‘forms and rituals of ceremonies, values,

⁸¹ Leach, M. (1961) Jamaican duppy lore. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 74 (293), pp. 207–215.

attitudes, and beliefs by word of mouth or by customary examples' (Akporherhe and Oghenerioborue 2021, p. 57). A group's oral traditions or folklore are passed down to the next generation when people communicate their ideas, feelings, opinions, social conventions, cultural values and ethnic background through language.

As stated at the beginning of this section, an understanding of Angie's experience of witchcraft leads us to be wary of simplistic categorisation. McEachrane (2020, p.162) advised that treating the entire African continent as a single entity is 'geographically dubious - and in other ways conceptually fraught - 'distinctions between "Sub-Saharan" and "North" African'. What occurs is a fading out the 'demographics' ... the physical appearances of people, ethnic groupings, or cultural expressions.'

As a category, McEachrane (2020 p.163) contends that the term African diaspora suffers from being a coverall and lacks specificity 'with respect to cultural, ethnic, linguistic, national, political, religious identity and race'. Alongside this, Franz Fanon (1964, pp. 17-18) made the case that to compact 'all Black people together deprives them of all individuality of expression'. I argue that it is necessary to fully accept that there exists what Gilroy (1993, p. 1) described as a 'fundamental time worn assumption of homogenous and unchanging black communities'. This research highlights that to be able to understand the existence of witchcraft in London, it needs to be recognised that the penchant for aggregating Black populations as Black diaspora dismisses the multiplexity of religious belief and underestimates the complexity of the expressions of witchcraft that are historically and culturally embodied. This research, which was conducted in South London, casts light on the dearth of investigation into witchcraft as it is manifested within

different ethnic communities; thus, the different socio-economic, cultural, moral, ethical and religious lived experiences within intra-cultural communities have not been adequately considered. This problematises the approach to the subject of witchcraft, witchcraft accusations and witchcraft belief by social and governmental bodies. One of the problems is that failing to recognise both the links and differences between African groups leads to an aggregation of the Black population as people whose beliefs and practices are all the same. When coupled with sensationalist reporting, witchcraft is then regarded as something that all African people are invested in to perpetuate evil. The way the media sensationalises cases such as the discovery of the torso of a child in the Thames River in 2001 provides a magnified image of how the construction of this attitude is promoted. The Metropolitan Police classified this horrendous case as a 'ritual murder' (Sanders 2003, p. 54). Sanders detailed the case and the accompanying media reports. Ultimately, he questioned the results of the intensity of the judicial-media relationship whereby, during the ongoing investigation, a continual release of images and narrative was produced for the general public. Newspapers, television programmes and documentaries presented a theory of the case that reduced it to the bare elements, creating a misleading oversimplification. According to Sanders (2003, p. 57),

the Thames torso case has consistently cast Africa, geographically speaking, as an undifferentiated entity. Black bodies come from black Africa, which is why 'African ritual murder' and 'African witchcraft' are purportedly meaningful categories.

Sanders (p.53) went on to state that while the police did their very best, a consequence of this collaboration between the Metropolitan Police and the media 'reproduced a much older more unsettling story of African Otherness'. I contend that Sanders could also have

considered the profiling of the victim as Black African as an example of the racial stereotyping and systemic racism that was reported in the Stephen Lawrence enquiry (1999) and continues to plague the Metropolitan Police force in London.⁸² The case of the body in the River Thames is a tragic example of an ill-informed attitude leading to misunderstanding that may have been avoided. Sanders and others (see Ranger 2007) have argued that the information about African indigenous beliefs was readily available. Sanders went so far as to contact the Metropolitan Police to offer his expertise in the field of African witchcraft and lend his help; however, this seems to have been declined. Although a leading religious expert based in the UK was consulted, this still led to meaningless observations and conclusions that provided another layer of suspicion and culpability at the door of Africa and, by extension, those in the African diaspora in London. The danger created by misunderstanding the nature of witchcraft without consideration of the diversity of beliefs and people and the acknowledgement of different situations, experiences, cultural expressions and identities is the hope that a one-size-fits-all approach will address the issues. However, what this research reveals is that African people in diaspora have used their ability to adapt to the social and political forms of the host nation while referring to their spiritual resources.

⁸² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stephen-lawrence-inquiry> [Last accessed 16th February 2023].

4.6.3 Reactions to witchcraft in the United Kingdom

In Section 4.2, I assert that the practice of witchcraft is judged as evil and that the level of understanding needs to be improved to mitigate religious and popular opinion, which is so often misconceived. This section provides examples of how the churches' representatives and leaders respond when witchcraft is encountered in their congregations, when a member is either the target of a spiritual attack or is accused of being a witch. It examines how differently non-governmental agencies, charities and other community projects can approach the practice of witchcraft in African communities. I have selected two organisations that treat the subject in entirely different ways and with entirely different perspectives, and I will discuss the ramifications of these different outlooks on popular opinion, legislators and policymakers.

The research led me to the Oremi Centre,⁸³ a project in London that provides mental health care for African and Caribbean adults. It was clear from my interactions with its leaders that its focus is holistic, concentrating on facilitating learning and creating a loving and friendly environment as the most effective way to promote healing. The project takes a three-stage approach to the work with its users, initially engaging with people with mental health issues by providing a drop-in facility and by outreach into the community. This is followed by an assessment and support, which entails providing material assistance such as medical and housing support; personal assistance with challenges such

⁸³ <http://directory.kcmind.org.uk/Pages/Organisations.aspx?OID=5372> [Last accessed 10th February 2023].

as identity issues, anxieties and mental health interventions; social assistance with family and relationship issues and for those who are experiencing isolation; and most importantly, spiritual support that covers aspirations, faith and spiritual beliefs. There is also a recovery aspect that enables clients to get back to work or return to their relationships or studies, leading to social integration.

The services' users are members of various communities, namely Congolese, Nigerian and Ghanaian, who have been diagnosed with acute mental illness and committed to psychiatric facilities or have been given heavy anti-psychotic medication that allows minimal functioning. Discussions with the project's psychologist revealed that the centre's users and clients in these circumstances hold on to spiritual beliefs connected with ancestors and spirits and perceive their illness as their misfortune. In a series of conversations at the centre in 2017, the project coordinator recounted how clients often consider themselves to be the target of a curse, as noted earlier in this chapter. He described the approach of the Oremi Centre, where project workers will ask questions about the cause of their misfortune, how it might have occurred, what sort of response they received from within their own communities and how the community would address their healing if the person revealed their misfortune and wished to be healed. This last point is important, as some people expressed to the staff that they did not want healing nor to have the spirit removed, as it was part of them.

The clients are then asked how they can be helped and supported. One project worker told me about the case of a woman who believed she had been cursed and was possessed by a spirit but who was unwilling for the curse to be lifted. She believed that the person

who cursed her was the only one who could lift it. Another person seeking help at the project described being the “host” to a spirit that she claimed provided her with something that she felt ought to be a part of her but was missing, and that she could not be the same person she was without the spirit. She felt the spirit protected her. The Oremi Centre was able to address her issues, which involved a loss and grief being experienced as an “illness.”

The project workers took a holistic approach, combining African spiritual healing and Western psychological methods, acknowledging ‘the interrelationship and interconnectedness’ (Nelson 2009 p.527) involved in the client’s malady. The project worked with the client to enable her to grieve for the life she felt she had lost due to her illness, bringing together African spirituality, which encompasses ideas of kinship and community, and the Western psychology offered by the project’s resident trained psychologist.

At the time I visited, the project’s approach involved regular contact with African spiritual guides such as Malidoma Patrice Somé (1956–2021),⁸⁴ who offered the centre advice and guidance. Somé hailed from West Africa and was a diviner from the Dagara people of Burkina Faso. Seeking to understand illness, Maiello (1999, p. 224) stated: ‘In African culture, illness is not split into either physical or mental suffering. Body and mind are a

⁸⁴ See Somé, M.P. (1995) *Of water and the spirit: Ritual, magic, and initiation in the life of an African shaman*. Penguin. This work portrays Somé’s own journey into shamanism. The publisher writes that his work aims to ‘convey his people’s knowledge to the world’ (cover copy).

unit, and the mind is never experienced as separate from the body'. It is an accepted practice for projects such as these (Maiello 1999; Flint 2008; Hills et al. 2014) to work in conjunction with African spiritual consultants and healers, who undertake many functions, such as administering physical remedies – setting broken bones and administering plant-based curatives such as Mohoko, a herb used in rituals and purification ceremonies – and revealing the presence of witchcraft. There are people who choose not to take up the healing services of the project (after evaluating what is offered) and who travel 'back home' and abroad to find healers. However, part of the project's work is to convince those who travel that not all who advertise are in fact healers and that unscrupulous people also advertise and treat healing solely as a way to make money.

The project workers related experiences of the use of exorcism within churches where clergy would seek to over-engage with people, even going so far as advising them to stop taking their medication and keeping them awake for hours in prayer. They related that this type of intervention frequently leads to psychotic breaks, thereby exacerbating the distressed person's misfortune. Such practices are echoed in media reports of Pentecostal pastors telling people to stop taking their medication and to rely on God instead (Saul 2013).⁸⁵ These practices must raise concerns for medical health professionals, families and communities in London.

⁸⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/pentecostal-pastors-are-telling-hiv-positive-patients-to-rely-on-god-instead-of-taking-medication-8772400.html> [Accessed 15th March 2017].

The Oremi Centre’s coordinator explained that the inability of national agencies to address African spirituality drives people into the arms of these pastors. There is a case of a church in South London where, as payment for their past misdeeds, two sisters in their early 20s were kept as slaves, working for the pastor, his family and friends and “whomever else.”⁸⁶ The issue of unscrupulous pastors was raised during my encounter with another agency, which had a contrasting perspective and took a different approach to the role of pastors and witchcraft belief.

This other agency is Afruca, which is based in the UK and geared towards African communities.⁸⁷ This charity’s focus is to use culturally appropriate approaches to enhance the safety and welfare of children and families in Black and ethnic communities all around the UK (<https://afruca.org>). It liaises with key decision-makers and influencers, and it networks with agencies such as the Metropolitan Police, the European Commission and faith-based organisations across the UK and in Europe, working towards legislation that recognises spiritual abuse as distinct from other forms of physical abuse. Afruca provides training and an outreach service for the various African communities, running awareness programmes and organising conferences and training for professionals, agencies and authorities working with African children and families. It offers advice and support on child development and parenting skills and produces a range of publications addressing

⁸⁶https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/kurtbarling/2011/03/tales_of_slavery_in_modern_lon [Accessed 18th February 2019]. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-12789690> [Accessed 18th February 2019].

⁸⁷ <https://afruca.org/> [Last accessed 10th February 2023].

issues such as child abuse, female genital mutilation, witchcraft and child trafficking. The organisation incorporates a drive towards raising awareness of the issues in government and petitions for legislation to ensure that all pastors have criminal record searches carried out (Disclosure and Barring Service checking) and are registered as working with vulnerable groups. One of the main approaches Afruca takes is that of educating Black and ethnic minority families on the processes, prevailing laws and legal and social systems of the host nation.

One of my respondents, Frederick (not his real name), had close links with charities such as Afruca and provided a bleak portrait of the rituals perpetrated on the targets of traffickers and the practices children and young men and women are subjected to by witchdoctors and traffickers. His account revealed that these rituals are conducted by *juju* priests using the victim's hair, nails and other personal effects. They cut the flesh of the victim in particular places and make them drink a mixture of blood and alcohol and eat the raw liver or heart of a chicken. Importantly, an oath of secrecy is elicited that binds the victim in two ways. They are told that the ritual means that they have entered into a spiritual contract and a contract of secrecy. Should they reveal any information about the identity of the traffickers to the police, they or their families will die as a result. As it is often a family member who introduces the victim to the trafficker, the ties of kinship reinforce the belief in the threat. Family members or close kin will receive payment for putting a victim forward, usually in the belief that the victim will be sent to work on a farm or in a factory and will send money back home to their family. Throughout the

meeting, the terms *juju* and witchcraft were liberally used whenever a gruesome act was being described, and the practitioner was demonised as evil.

The work of Afruca is an essential service in the protection and safeguarding of children and adults in Black ethnic communities. During the meeting with Frederick, he declared that a consequence of the education programme delivered by Afruca is an erosion of cultural ways of coping. Even though the people rely on a European approach to mental health, the strong attachments they have to forms of protection from witchcraft, such as amulets and rituals, remain strong. He described how the fear of witchcraft leads people to spiritual healers, who offer prayers and rituals such as fasting, to combat a spiritual attack. While interpreting these rituals as “barbaric,” he went on to assert that “it’s not the practice ... but the practitioners ... [who] lead to abuse.” He ended by declaring that by painting African spiritual beliefs and practices as wrong, they (Afruca) are providing ammunition for people to see Africans as wrong.

The meeting with Frederick highlights the imprudent and often constrained approaches taken by those working to make sense of witchcraft and associated rituals. He highlighted the use of juju, or what he termed black magic, by the perpetrators of trafficking as being the source of evil, not the ritual itself.

A recent scholarly investigation produced as a film contributes even further to the ill-considered approach to the subject of African ritual. Richman (2021)⁸⁸ produced a

⁸⁸ <http://www7.bbk.ac.uk/hiddenpersuaders/blog/rites-undone-a-film-directed-by-naomi-richman/>

narrative of ritual that makes no contribution to the issues of trafficking and so-called religious abuse. This short film has reworked the popular and unhelpful perspective of “juju” as 'black magic' and as something used by "traditional healers and village doctors". The film engages with European professionals, such as psychologists and a social worker of African descent, and women who had been trafficked. The inclusion of Roland Littlewood was useful, as his work within psychology has begun to be considered by various psychological schools of thought. However, his insight is limited, as mentioned earlier. The narrative delivers little in the way of spiritual explanations for the major tool identified in the film as being used by traffickers. The film features a group singing and praying in a church, suggesting that the antidote to the psychological and spiritual influence exerted over the victims of traffickers is Christianity. It also demonstrates how taking one element of African religiosity can lead to misrepresentation of the multifaceted nature of the African religious imagination. Finally, the challenge for scholars undertaking such research is to engage with as many Black and ethnic minority psychologists and social workers as possible who have a grounding in the study of African religions and mental health. There are charities, such as the Community African Network and the Africa Centre,⁸⁹ that do work that way but operate at a local level; they are embedded in the communities rather than coming from outside as a quasi-official agency. Afruca, on the other hand, petitions government not only to advocate laws governing

⁸⁹ <https://www.africacentre.org.uk> and <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=community+african+network>

church pastors but also to raise awareness of the issues. In my conversation with Frederick, he opined that they must present their work in a way that conveys the enormity of the problem and the criminality undermining the social fabric of African communities, which results in economic pressures on agencies. This strategy is wholly understandable, given their motivations. In the UK, the idea that witchcraft still exists seems quite outlandish. This perception is obvious when the national news reports that a child, a Black child, an African child has been mutilated and murdered because the parents or carers believed the child was possessed by evil spirits. Here again, we find the case of Victoria Climbié and the case of the boy named Adam, who was found in the Thames in 2001, held up to epitomise the evil and savagery of witchcraft practice. Police and social services seemed at a loss to understand and address the actions of the people involved, who were relatives and attended a church whose pastor was suspected of involvement but denied all knowledge of the actions of the accused.

The juxtaposition of these approaches demonstrates the difficulties involved with attempting to represent a belief in witchcraft. On the one hand, there is an approach that sees an individual inseparable from their community and their spiritual beliefs and aims for, through their treatment, the holistic involvement of the person afflicted by or suffering misfortune. By contrast, there is a more top-down approach that focuses on the religious practitioners and articulates a need for their regulation to save victims and stop the trade of the traffickers. I believe that the approaches exhibited by the two organisations in the work that they do and the methodologies they employ to achieve their goals illustrate the differences between the motivations of these two organisations.

Both address situations and experiences of misfortune due to witchcraft and accusations of witchcraft; however, while one organisation accompanies people and seeks to discover spiritual remedies that complement movement towards healing, the other campaigns for a legislative and social framework that would prevent the situations at the source through religious checks and certification. While this two pronged approach aims for the safety, welfare and wellbeing of its target groups, the concern must always be how the strategies may as a consequence affect the spiritual and religious elements that have enabled the targets and victims to survive.

4.6.4 The response of church representatives

Section 4.6.3 provided examples of the reaction of charitable and other community-led organisations and their approaches to witchcraft in the UK. It also included some of the reactions of the British media and the social commentariat in the discussion on the themes in this study of African witchcraft (see section 1.3.2). In Section 3, case studies were presented that exemplified the reactions to the phenomenon by religious organisations in Kenya and their struggle to balance competing worldviews. This section will present the reactions of religious organisations in the UK to African witchcraft.

The following case study provides a nexus that combines many of the key conclusions and assertions that have been presented: how worldviews and rituals from African indigenous beliefs are planted and continue to be practiced; how churches, in this case the Wesleyan Chapel and Leysian Mission, respond to witchcraft; how diverse religious practices are accommodated within the host nation; and finally, that the African diaspora cannot be reduced to simple categories that unhelpfully aggregate and thereby deny the variety of

its constituent parts. In addition, this case study will be used to highlight the shifting nature of misfortune as it is experienced in London and the way that inculturation can lead to a blending of both Christian and African religious ceremonies and practices.

The church in question is in a bustling business section of the City of London. The research participant, Jennifer, described the demographic of the congregation of this church as “60% Black African, consisting of people from Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Nigeria and the Caribbean, with a few people of Fijian and Tongan nationality.” Jennifer began our discussion by talking about her experiences and knowledge of the facilitation of rituals and how addressing or not addressing witchcraft was experienced during her ministry in London. Jennifer expressed how a great number of the mainline White majority churches in the UK rarely think about witchcraft, but that for

the African indigenous churches in the big cities, it is as much of an issue here (in London) as it was in the countries of origin. But depending on where they are, where the predominant culture of that church is from, Nigeria, the Caribbean or wherever, will slightly affect how they deal with it. In cities such as London, with big immigrant populations, a greater number of the mainline churches, such as Methodist and Anglican churches with large Black populations, will deal with witchcraft by not dealing with it.

Jennifer had spent many years working in Africa among the *Tswana* and *Xhosa* people of Botswana. She talked about how, during her time there, she became aware that acknowledging and “dealing” with witchcraft also depends on the individual priests and pastors. If they have worked in Africa or are Black African clerics, they will talk about it. It is also interesting to note that certain members of the congregation in London, described as “bold ... who are Black African or Black Caribbean,” are willing to talk, to “tentatively”

raise the subject because “it is a fraught area.” Jennifer described how she has tried to facilitate conversations about witchcraft and misfortune in her own congregation by introducing the topics in the sermons, framing them obliquely around prayers of confession and thoughts of evil: “Those who have the ears to hear it, can hear it – without naming it,” pointing out that when there are evil thoughts, these can be expressed outwardly towards others. Reflecting on her work in Africa, she described the dismissive attitude held by most White clerics, who did not understand the role of witchcraft in the everyday lives of people. However, she admitted that even for “Black clerics to talk about witchcraft in polite company would be difficult if not off the agenda.” If their own families were affected, there would be a conversation, but they would not speak of it within the church context; rather, such conversations would take place outside of the church.

Jennifer disclosed that she had worked in Botswana and that, because she can speak *Setswana*, one of the main languages of Botswana, her congregation and other clerics “knew they could not hoodwink me.” By sharing a common language, she is not only alert to the difficulties being expressed by her congregants but also has opportunity to engage with them in dialogues about misfortune. Although she is not a central part of the conversations that take place, she is not dismissed from the situations that are experienced by the congregation at large, and people will talk to her about witchcraft accusations. One example of this is what happened when the wife of a minister from a neighbouring church had a miscarriage. The minister’s wife was a Setswana speaker and had accused a member of the Xhosa community of being responsible for her miscarriage. Within the community of Xhosa people in Botswana, a large contingent attended the

Methodist church, so although the accusation was levelled at one specific person, it was, by implication, aimed towards all the Xhosa people. This could have presented serious problems, such as counteraccusations and deepening animosity between the groups. The situation was resolved by the minister being moved to take the role of a cleric in the army. Jennifer explained that although she was allowed to know what was going on, as a White European, she was not able to intervene in the situation. “Why would they ... a White European female?!” Jennifer identified her colour, race and nationality as a barrier to intervention, which indicates that while she is their Christian pastor and spiritual advisor and guide, there appears to be a limit to how much trust the African congregation is willing to offer. Adam Ashforth (2005, p. xi) offered a sensitive description of what it was like to be a White foreigner in Soweto, where he was conducting research. His description reflects the experience of Jennifer in Botswana:

The essence of whatever I know about this place I have learned through my friends: how I know it is by being there as a friend. This is both the strength and the weakness of what follows. For what I came to understand – dimly, slowly, over many years of fumbling in the dark – is that their world is my world, and mine theirs, and yet we also live in worlds apart.

Jennifer’s interactions with the people who suspect witchcraft is responsible for their misfortune indicate that a distance between the world of the African person and the White European still resides in the psyche of African people. This suggests that boundaries and lines exist that may not be crossed by an outsider, regardless of how close a relationship may exist or how deeply one may venture into the spiritual world of the other.

Jennifer's introduction to and acknowledgement of witchcraft and misfortune, as well as her past experiences, meant that she arrived at her ministry in London with unique insights into the lives of the people of South Africa and Botswana. Jennifer had developed an appreciation and understanding of the effects of witchcraft on individuals and the consequences of being accused of witchcraft on communities at large. This understanding stayed with her and proved to be an important element of her work in London, as the following story will show. Jennifer talked about an incident that occurred at the church that raised her concern about suspicions of witchcraft among the congregation. There was a fire in the church. She thought it was, "in Western terms," caused by a fuse outage and the fuse box overheating. However, some did not consider it a random event, and Jennifer recalled how during a funeral for a church member from The Gambia, the family were at odds with each other. One of the family members had been left out of the funeral and was very unhappy. Jennifer went on to explain how she came to understand that it may have been the person who had been left out of the family arrangements, had not been taken seriously and felt excluded, "who might have caused the fire." She ventured that the person was projecting their sense of being wronged towards others in an attempt at reciprocity, getting back at them, so to speak, by ruining the funeral. In some way, she reasoned, the aggrieved person felt empowered. Eventually, the fire service confirmed that the fire had been caused by the fuse box, and through facilitating a meeting with the family members, the bad feelings among the Gambian family were resolved. Jennifer was the only cleric who openly admitted to the existence of witchcraft affecting members of the church and actively engaged with it. Her intervention with the family from the Gambia opened a dialogue that led to a resolution, which helped to counteract the misfortune.

Within African indigenous religions, funerals are one part of the journey of life. It is the rite of passage for the deceased, who travels to meet and join the ancestors. It is, according to Magesa (1995, pp. 154–158), when ‘the power of life is intensified for the individual and for the individual’s society’. Moreover, it is the time when the individual’s parting words have great significance, as it is these final words that name successors, impart special knowledge, make promises for favours from the spirit world and give blessings. It is also a time when curses are put on close relatives who earned the displeasure of the individual. Therefore, the prayers that are intoned at the funeral are intended to separate the deceased from the community without creating any bad feelings between the two. It is in the community’s best interest to ensure the deceased is properly buried, with all respect and due regard. Thus, the involvement of the family and relatives in the funerary process is of utmost importance, as is the presence of the members of the wider community who, as Anin-Boateng (2009, p. 147) described, ‘sympathise ... and express their grief and sorrow openly’. Writing about Ghanaians in diaspora and how they cope with bereavement in the UK, Anin-Boateng (2009) referred to the presence of the community, whether from the church or the larger community, recreating familiar cultural and ceremonial settings. Further, their support in the host nation can help with feelings of isolation and the subsequent psychological distress experienced during bereavement. She observed that, ‘fear of the unknown’ and ‘losing touch with the cultural ceremonies of their past environment’ were felt by those in her research group.

A major issue for those in the African diaspora, regardless of their nationality, is the returning of the deceased to their homeland to be buried. It requires the attendance of

all the relatives and extended family, which, due to the cost of the flights to the place the deceased wished to be buried, is a significant issue. Immediate family and relatives are also expected to contribute to the rental of the venue to host the funeral guests, the purchase of British-made goods for the funeral and catering. The cost can be prohibitive. Africans living in the UK are generally regarded by relatives back home as financially well off and are usually expected to send contributions to their families in their home country to pay for school fees and utilities. According to the World Bank, Kenya received approximately US\$3 billion from the UK in remittances in 2020, with Sub-Saharan Africa totalling US\$48 billion in 2019. The figures are an approximation, as money is also transported by friends and relatives travelling home.⁹⁰ The funeral expenses include the cost of several trips back and forth by the members of the family to plan for the funeral and can result in financial difficulties for the families residing in the UK, leading to further misfortune. In addition, the need for frequent travel jeopardises their employment. Furthermore, the repatriation of bodies is burdened by difficulties involving governmental regulations on the conveying of human remains requiring mandatory clearance from UK authorities.⁹¹

⁹⁰ These are countries that have fragile, poor or small economies and depend on the remittances as a form of income and as a source of external financing. See Ellis, S. (2011) *Season of rains*. London, C. Hurst & Co. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data> Retrieved 31st July 2022. Ratha, D. The Brookings Institution (2022). <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2021/03/15/keep-remittances-flowing-to-africa/>

⁹¹ See Anin-Boateng, H. (2009) Migration and bereavement: How Ghanaian migrants cope in The United Kingdom. In: Okpewho, I. and Nzegwu, N. eds. *The new African diaspora*. United States of America, Indiana University Press, pp. 146–163. Asante, M.K. and Mazama, A. (2009) *Encyclopaedia of African Religion*. UK,

The example of the family from The Gambia and the following example involving a Ghanaian family demonstrate the depth of Jennifer's willingness to engage with the diverse groups who attend the church. It is interesting that she chose to use these two examples, as they are from opposite ends of the life cycle spectrum that permeates African religious belief: birth and death. An immersive contextual analysis of her interview prompted the thought that Jennifer had offered these examples to demonstrate her participation in such rites as a form of acceptance of those belief systems and cultural practices. This is not a unique situation. In South London, I found many churches whose pastors were willing to attend or facilitate the funerals and baptism celebrations of African members of their congregation within the Christian context and who also attended the cultural celebrations rooted in antiquity and passed down through the generations. This reflects Kanu (2019, p. 46), who explained that the naming ceremonies are often held in advance of a Christian baptism, implying that the child is given their name before any name is registered for baptism. A child might have one name that follows the family's indigenous practice and another based on Christian tradition. The pastors I encountered did not openly admit to direct involvement (such as officiating) in the accompanying rites of passage. Although I would step back from suggesting that this constitutes any kind of syncretisation (in terms of combining the characteristics of different belief systems), I do assert that this willingness to engage facilitates, at the very

Sage. Gumisiriza, G. (2021) *African diasporic bereavement stories in the UK through 'repatriationscapes'*. <https://radicaldeathstudies.com/2021/05/25/repatriationscapes/> [Accessed 25th May 2022].

least, an alignment between African indigenous beliefs and Christianity at occasions of ritual or celebratory importance while retaining their discrete characteristics. Of course, there are occasions when nothing is said and no invitations to ceremonies are extended, such as when there is discord between different nationalities. Jennifer gave the example of what happened at an event celebrating the ending of 200 years of slavery. It turned out to be “quite traumatic,” with people from the Caribbean making accusations that Africans’ “ancestors were responsible for slavery.”

Another example that highlights the difficulty in talking about witchcraft is the case of a member of the congregation from Ghana, a practicing nurse whose family includes many pastors and ministers. She had experienced a string of misfortunes and laid the blame firmly at the door of witchcraft. She said that she was consulting lawyers to resolve matters and was insistent that she did not want “other help.” At this time, the church had a system whereby the congregation used “prayer slips,” asking for blessings for those who were ill or suffering. The cleric would read them out during services. Jennifer recounted how, by the person using a prayer slip to ask for protection from misfortune and the evil spirits, she was alerted to how afraid the nurse was. In this case, the weight of the nurse’s Christian faith and her family background resulted in her pursuing the legal route by consulting solicitors to address her misfortune. Based on her experience from working in Botswana and London for many years, Jennifer deduced the sub-text of that phrase. The “other help” that was mentioned was not clearly defined, but there was a sense that it may have meant witchcraft, despite the lack of explicit reference to it. However, in this case, I cannot discount the possibility, on the face of the simple words, that it suggests a

shift away from seeking spiritual remedies for misfortune for this congregant. I recognise that the example may just as easily epitomise the ebb and flow of choices made by people in diaspora who, when experiencing misfortune, need to make the best choices available to them in the host nation.

The way that Jennifer accommodated Christian, African and Caribbean expressions of spirituality during the time of her ministry at the Wesleyan Chapel is not representative of all the churches I approached for this research. However, what is demonstrated is the ease with which African people use the space of the church as common ground to express their spiritual insecurities. I refer to Asamoah-Gyadu (see section 4.1), who noted that finding a space that accepts their perception of their misfortune and the existence of disembodied spiritual beings – the ancestors – speaks directly to the shift in attitude towards African indigenous beliefs, the perception of misfortune and the belief that the influence of witchcraft is mollified when addressing misfortune. The congregation takes the misfortunes in everyday life and experiences of spiritual insecurity to the church to seek relief. It is also true, however, that African congregants who experience misfortune often attempt to draw on both their Christian faith and the non-Christian markers of their identity and culture. This admixing helps to bestow a sense of self that can facilitate integration into life in London while maintaining links with spiritual ancestors and keeping ties with the wider community.

So far, this case study shows that this particular church is very much run using the experiences of the pastor to both inform and structure the services. It offers the congregations ways and means to feel safe and become part of the life of the church. The

experiences that Jennifer gained in Africa allow her great insight into the everyday lives of the congregants of African descent, both those directly from the continent and those from other parts of the diaspora, such as the Caribbean. Her acceptance of the modes of misfortune and good fortune experienced by her congregation is demonstrated by her efforts to act as a moderator for families and her willingness to attend death rites and other ceremonies, such as the naming ceremonies carried out within the Ghanaian community.

Jennifer sees her church as being inclusive, one where African and African Caribbean people are both welcomed and accommodated. The adaptation of the rites and rituals that accompany people from different ethnicities within the Christian church does not hinder the transposition of African indigenous belief. I argue that this is an example of how certain actors are conduits for the continuation of beliefs and practices that are carried within the spiritual suitcase, thus providing a backstop in addressing misfortune and fear of witchcraft. The tolerance and empathy shown by such conduits facilitate the survival of beliefs and practices in environments that might justifiably be considered hostile. As Mugambi (1989, cited by Gifford 2008, p. 19) stated: 'Africans ... do not have to choose between being Christian and being African. They can be both Christian and African at the same time'. Again: 'It is erroneous to think that Western culture is morally superior to African culture, and that Western customs are consistent with the Christian faith while African customs are not'. Jennifer's ministry shows how cultures, in a form of social inculturation, survive in a host nation. This church maintains a balance between diverse Christian practices and diverse African indigenous religious practices. Finally, I

noted that in Jennifer's ministry in the City of London, there is little overlay of her experiences in term of policies, procedures and attitudes held by the church and the congregations she had encountered in Botswana towards misfortune and fear of witchcraft. The overlay that exists is understood within the London context. As already mentioned, the African indigenous religion has a porous nature, and the interstices of the belief system allow for flexibility, creativity and adaptation, thus surviving the vicissitudes of Christian theological and social conditions.

Two of the main aims of this research are to discover whether the various African Independent Churches located in London encounter witchcraft and accusations of witchcraft within their congregations and how they respond to them. The attitudes towards and responses to witchcraft by AICs and other Black-led churches in London come from a variety of denominations. The representation of this broad spectrum is essential to convey the informal infusion of elements of African spiritual belief into Christianity and the modification of church practices. During the research in London, I met with clergy (active and retired) from Black-led churches, such as the Presbyterian Church in Stratford East London, the NTCG in Brixton and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Peckham. Alongside these meetings, I had conversations with retired bishops and other clergy from the Anglican Church and missionaries from the Catholic Society of White Fathers.⁹²

⁹² Roman Catholic international missionary society of priests and brothers whose sole field of activity is Africa. See <http://www.gcatholic.org/orders/030.htm> [Accessed 13th November 2022].

One of the threads that emerged from the research is that among the clerics themselves, their ethnicity and nationality and personal experiences of witchcraft, Obeah and spiritual misfortune had shaped and informed their views on witchcraft and contribute to their approach to those who claim spiritual afflictions. For example, the pastor of the NTCG in London recounted his experiences growing up in Kenya and his father's habit of consulting witchdoctors on a regular basis to avert misfortune and to seek guidance on important decisions that affected the family. He explained how, when he was a teenager, his father would bring witchdoctors from Uganda to the family home to conduct rituals. On one such occasion, a witchdoctor came because there was a problem in the family. For the problem to be solved, "the family and the home had to be healed." He went on to describe the ritual that took place:

[The] witchdoctor demanded a sheep be slaughtered, so a sheep was slaughtered ... but the witchdoctor only wanted the head of the sheep because the witchcraft would only work through that ... and every child had to spit into the mouth of the sheep.

At the time, the pastor had discovered Christianity, so he decided to offer up a prayer at the ritual. This act confused the witchdoctor, and as a consequence, the pastor's father rejected him (the pastor). This pastor now uses a counselling approach to explore an individual's personal history and, by using his past experiences and his Christian faith, to help overcome misfortune.

Many clerics expressed doubts about the validity of beliefs in witchcraft, leading them to categorise those who believed they were cursed or were under spiritual attack as having mental health issues. These clerics would initially employ counselling and psychotherapy

and eventually use prayer and exorcism. The final resort would be to refer people to local mental health authorities. While the individual clergy I spoke to, regardless of denomination, were guided by institutional policies and doctrinal teachings, I found that on one level, there were no clear boundaries between their approaches. At the local level, the responses to witchcraft activities were modified along cultural lines. The phrases ‘duppy’ and ‘Obeah’ resonated with clerics from the Caribbean, whereas ‘witchcraft’ and ‘possession’ were used more generally. In essence, this is an acknowledgement of what Karen Fog Olwig (2004, p. 57) called a ‘complexity of socio-cultural systems found among diasporic populations, as well reinforcing cultural values’.

Part of the reaction to witchcraft practices within the clergy is guided by policy. There are many charities, foundations and NGOs that institute formal safeguarding policies. Examples of organisations that have such policies include the Catholic Church⁹³ and the Church of England. The policies are aimed at protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse linked to faith or belief. The UK government’s Department of Education published a report in 2012⁹⁴ that makes it clear that the protocols are not restricted to one faith, ethnic community or nationality. While making this statement, the report (*National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief*) highlights ‘witchcraft,

⁹³ I was unable to elicit a comment directly from the Safeguarding Coordinator for the Catholic Church in the UK. Instead, I was advised to refer to their website, which contains no specific statements about how their policy is used in cases of witchcraft accusations. For reference, their policy can be found here: <https://www.catholicsafeguarding.org.uk/national-safeguarding-standards/national-safeguarding-policy/> [Accessed 7th January 2023].

⁹⁴ Department of Education (2012) *National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175437/Action_Plan_-_Abuse_linked_to_Faith_or_Belief.pdf (p.3) [Accessed 3rd January 2023].

belief in witchcraft, spirit possession, demons or the devil, the evil eye or *djinns*, *dakini*, *kindoki*, ritual or muti murders and use of fear of the supernatural to make children and vulnerable adults comply with being trafficked for domestic slavery or sexual exploitation' (Department of Education 2012, p. 3). Yet, given the prevailing attitudes towards witchcraft as portrayed in the popular media, in newspapers and on television, and use of the terms witchcraft, spirit possession etc, it may seem unfair to conclude that the list might evoke an unconscious bias against Black diasporic communities, placing this group under particular scrutiny, yet I argue that this language in this context remains ill-considered because it invites such inferences.⁹⁵

In many of the Black churches and mainstream churches in London, pastoral care provides social and spiritual services for their congregation and communities, and many in the South London area provide respite care, cafes, nurseries for pre-school children and after school clubs. The spiritual needs for experiences of misfortune in physical and spiritual everyday life are met by churches that offer healing from physical disease and spiritual misfortune.⁹⁶ I found that the response to witchcraft and spiritual misfortune among the Black majority churches in London depends as much on who is officiating at the place of worship as it does on any doctrinal position of their church. The pastors I spoke to in

⁹⁵ The issue of highlighting witchcraft, witchcraft beliefs and *kindoki* misses satanic ritual abuse, which Jean La Fontaine (1998, p. 15) pointed out 'serves as the quintessence of evil in twentieth-century Western Society'. La Fontaine's research project focused on sexual abuse, torture and murder associated with worship of the devil in Britain.

⁹⁶ The New Covenant Church in South London offers healing rooms and a healing school. It advertises that people have been healed of tumours, cancer and brain damage 'through Jesus' name'. See <https://www.newcovenantchurch.org.uk/healing-rooms/> [Accessed 12th December 2022].

London are of different nationalities and have a variety of personal experiences. Consequently, their perceptions of and approaches to witchcraft as a cause or cure for spiritual misfortune are personal and varied. I concluded that their personal experiences of witchcraft influence their views on forms of indigenous African spiritual belief and practice and are in certain cases supported with the use of substantive Christian doctrinal texts. These elements all influence what leeway clerics will offer their congregants when confronted with anything where witchcraft might be involved. For example, the approach taken by Jennifer at the Wesleyan Chapel is not one that is countenanced by the bishop of the NTCG in Brixton, whose first response is to offer counselling. Bishop Brown explained that in the event of that approach not healing the person experiencing misfortune, prayers are used and “spirits [are] commanded to leave.” The bishop agreed that this ritual is close to that of an exorcism.

The focus of the approach of Bishop Brown to people who believe they are experiencing some form of spiritual violence is that it is a mental health issue for which “counselling and rehabilitation ... the use of art and skills” are employed to move people towards spiritual healing and to “find Jesus.” Bishop Brown went on to say that he preaches against witchcraft in order to teach that witchcraft does not advance the passage to salvation. The idea that people who believe in witchcraft are blocked from achieving salvation was also a consideration in the conversation with Bishop Aldred, who at the time was involved with Churches Together in England. Bishop Aldred pointed out that there is no standard response to witchcraft, but the broad view is that it is wrong and evil.

In his view, the churches he is involved with, the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, see it as:

[U]nchristian and a sample of a standard response ... is that witchcraft is of the Devil and is to be resisted and not to be confused with the power of God ... In the past, anyone exhibiting mental illness, whether they saw things or any other expression ... that it would be regarded as demonic and that something could be done to you through witchcraft, that could make you that way ... Now, near universally, it would be the case in those same Pentecostal, Charismatic churches, they would be the first ones to refer you to [a] mental hospital.

As an exemplar, he emphasised the position of the Pentecostal movement where, in the main, a clear distinction has emerged between the person who is filled with the Holy Ghost and speaks in tongues and the person who is involved with witchcraft and manifests some of those similar traits, and it is believed that witchcraft is malevolent. Bishop Aldred gave an example of this distinction: a woman dancing in the aisles would be considered to be filled with the spirit and dancing in the spirit, while a young man who just stood up and did nothing would be regarded as having mental illness. The interpretation of his manifestation would be that he was mad.

Many of the Christian clerics I encountered reject the use of witchcraft and the idea of witchcraft in everyday life, judging it to be evil and a sin, something that a person would be relieved of once they are cleansed and born again in the name of Jesus. They talked about the use of sermons to denounce rituals, how the use of talismans or other such protective devices are labelled sinful and how the use of passages such as 1 Samuel 28:7, Exodus 22:18 and Deuteronomy 18:10 are employed to reinforce the legitimacy of their doctrinal positions. Differences in the approach to witchcraft belief and spiritual attacks

can be obvious or subtle. The use of biblical texts as the word of God reinforces the evil of witchcraft, and the passages constitute a powerful and direct missive from God. Other clerics, by contrast, might offer Western therapeutic interventions by priests rather than the condemnation inherent in a more coercive approach. It should, however, be noted that therapeutic interventions fall within the theological and religious conceptualisation of a given church (Nelson 2009, p. 543).

While not explicitly mentioned by any of the clergy I met with, there is yet another approach used by many churches in the borough of Hackney in East London. The respondent from a community organisation based in East London declared his knowledge of “at least 15 Kenyan and Congolese Pentecostal churches not only conducting exorcisms to ward off evil spirits but also giving out amulets and using incision to protect people from spiritual attack.” This provides a stark contrast to the position espoused by Bishop Aldred and others regarding the use of talismans and other paraphernalia associated with African indigenous beliefs. His organisation works at the grass-roots level and is linked to other community projects to address issues of wellbeing and family planning within African communities. He has learnt through his work with African families in the wider community that people migrating from the African continent have strong attachments to their indigenous beliefs and see issues around health and prosperity through a spiritual lens. Migrants and asylum seekers carry a fear of spiritual attack and seek the help of healers, witchdoctors, spiritual leaders and prophets. Prophets in African churches are people of the Spirit whose declarations are of the Spirit and whose followers determine the power of their declarations by their success in meeting the needs of people who are

in dire circumstances and are experiencing misfortunes in everyday life. Anderson (2003, p. 181) pointed out that while there are similarities between healers and diviners, there are also 'radical differences ... whereas a diviner points to maintaining ancestor rituals, the prophet's solution is usually aimed at confronting beliefs in witchcraft', which serves as another way of addressing misfortune and reinforces a commitment to Christianity.

In the analysis of the conversations with the research participants, I found that their views on witchcraft are focused on understanding their misfortune. The increasing accessibility of diviners, indigenous healers and other religious experts in London makes it easier for people to address misfortune, protect themselves from spiritual attack, understand what might have happened to them and ward off further misfortune – all in a way that fits within the framework of their tacit knowledge. The internet, family, websites promoting African religiosity and advertising on billboards and the sides of local buses are resources that are available for those seeking to re-engage with their African culture and spirituality, without the need for registration and official checks to determine residence status. However, the reactions to the reality of belief in witchcraft from churches and clergy in London has a unique complexity that reflects the ethnicity of pastors, the denomination of the churches they belong to and the way their congregations are constituted in terms of the aggregations of ethnicities, the spread of ages and their social status within their communities and wider society.

The final case study brings together all the themes discussed in this chapter. It covers one person's spiritual journey to fulfil a need to understand key events in his life, from his Christian beginnings to his quest to seek answers within Christian teaching and his

eventual re-engagement with his African spiritual heritage. Participant Ayo resides in the heart of South London, is a qualified sound engineer and, at the time of our meeting, worked for a large broadcasting company in London. Ayo describes himself as a diviner, or *Babalawo*, someone who practices the craft of *Ifá* divination. Ayo explained that a Babalawo is a “walking encyclopaedia” and that each Babalawo specialises in different areas of *Odu* readings of *Ifá*. Although born in the UK, he re-engaged with the religion and culture of his home in Nigeria and identifies as Yoruba. When Ayo was 10 years old, his father passed away while he was living in London with his mother, who was a member of the Holy Ghost Church in London. Ayo’s father was young and successful. He died in Nigeria in a car crash “driving back from a late-night party early in the morning.” It was a poorly lit road, and Ayo said that “logically ... with the low lighting ... the circumstances [of the accident] made sense.” However, Ayo explained that “back home, when people die, people’s minds ... the first thing they check is that someone did something ... probably someone did it.” He continued to describe how, after his father passed away, all sorts of accusations were made. His father was polygamous, and his two wives were accusing one another. Each wife’s relatives were also accusing the other wife, saying

that they were witches, and they used their power to kill him [his father] ... After passing, the mourning period lasts for 40 days ... one of the consequences of the accusations was that my grandmother instructed the wives to return to their family homes to mourn.

After his father passed away, Ayo became disillusioned with the teachings of the Holy Ghost Church, which did not provide the explanations and comfort he was looking for. He travelled back to Nigeria where, as well as reconnecting with the Yoruba community, he began to learn about *Ifá* divination and established his identity as part of the Yoruba

community by discovering the prefix to his family name, which is *Ògún* (an Orissa God of war and metals). Thus, he is called *Ògún*, followed by his family name. For Ayo, *Ifá* was his refuge. He talked about the spiritual nature of his journey and his family's background in African spirituality: his grandmother was an *Obatalá* priestess who also worshipped a major water spirit, *Yemanjá*. Ayo practices his skills in London with the aid of an experienced *Babalawo* priest in Lagos to whom he is linked to share information about the people who consult with him in South London and to guide Ayo in his interpretations of the *Ifá* texts and formulas. This process, as Love (2016, p. 181) described, is where 'the client's story is revealed and interpreted'. Love (2002, p. 53) cited Scott and Torres to highlight that it is the story the person brings that the priest must understand and help the person to rewrite. As discussed (see section 3.4.3), *Ifá* divination is a complex system that uses a corpus of texts and mathematical formulas. It consists of 256 parts that are called *odu* and subsections called *ese*. As a form of spirit mediumship that does not rely on oracular powers, *Ifá* has been the focus of multidisciplinary academic studies, including anthropology and linguistics,⁹⁷ with a plethora of interdisciplinary academic publications examining its complex mathematical systems and philosophy. Historically, *Ifá* followed the slave trade and was exported to the Americas, the Caribbean and Brazil, among others. It has a major role in the *Santería* and *Candomblé* religious beliefs and is practiced among Yoruba communities in the African diaspora in America, the Caribbean

⁹⁷ For a full explanation of *Ifá* divination in Yoruba belief systems, see Olupona, J.K and Obiodun, R.O. (2016) *Ifá divination, knowledge, power, and performance*. Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press.

and the UK.⁹⁸ It also has a contemporaneous place within Islam. Olupona (2016, p. 168) pointed out that there exists a 'significant relationship between *Ifá*, Islam and Yoruba religion'.

Ayo talked about the role of *Ifá* divination in his own life. The accusations made in regard to his father's death left him with many questions and a need to find the answers to how witchcraft could possibly have been the reason for his father's death and, following the accusations he encountered as a child, the misfortunes suffered by his mother. He explained how his belief about witchcraft might work and reasoned that "people hold bad thoughts, and they visualise in their minds what they are trying to do ... to see how it will work," and that "past grudges are internalised ... then become a spiritual entity that plays up..." However, Ayo does not adhere to the belief that these spiritual beings are evil. He believes that "some are malevolent ... some are benevolent, they do not eat children!" Ayo is a well-read middle-aged man who is diligent in the study of his indigenous cultural beliefs. Supported by other priests, his efforts to find reasons for his father's death led him to discover his own story through *Ifá* divination. His belief provided him a rationale for his father's death and allowed him to accept that it had been an accident. It gave him a sense of self that is grounded in the Yoruba culture and belief system. His name was confirmed, affording him a place within the spiritual world of the Yoruba people. Finally, it bestowed upon him a method of preventing further misfortune. I submit that the

⁹⁸ The *Ifadiwura* Temple is located on the outskirts of London. It has a prominent presence on the internet. See <https://ifadiwuratempleuk.wordpress.com/> [Accessed 10th December 2022].

spiritual suitcase that accompanied his mother to the UK from Nigeria provided the tacit knowledge that led him to the Yoruba religion and *Ifá* and to the EPC that he sought, something the Holy Ghost Church did not provide. This case is one of two that demonstrate that the idea of witchcraft in diasporic communities in London differs from that of the perspectives of the general population in the UK, which is invariably that it is only evil. The reasoning Ayo demonstrated when he pointed to the belief that a spiritual entity is created by those who hold a grudge or have a bad mind indicates how this takes shape and forms into accusations of witchcraft: it is someone who projects misfortune onto another person. Ayo neither accepts nor rejects witchcraft as a cause for his father's death. He acknowledges its existence and seems to reimagine witchcraft as being the projection of harm towards others, which the target feels as a spiritual attack. His case underscores the fact that within African communities, witchcraft is not excluded as a cause of misfortune but is considered part of the route towards understanding misfortune and finding healing. Ayo's shift towards indigenous forms of healing and away from Christianity demonstrates the limitations of his church to provide him with the answers he sought. In addition, it shows the dissonance that can be created when a worldview of an overarching authority meets an individual's somewhat more pragmatic approach to dealing with the vicissitudes of life. One of the key ingredients of this dissonance is the moral conflict between good and evil and the apportioning of these values to African witchcraft and, by association, the African indigenous religious beliefs and practices involved in the healing process.

I maintain that early Christian missionaries arrived on the African continent armed with not only the Bible but also an inherent trust in the truth of their belief. They trusted that it would override all that had come before as evil. They were instilled with the belief that Christianity was all that stood before the evil of indigenous religions, and individual pastors carried an enormous degree of power and authority in the accomplishment of their mission. The danger of such power is that it leads to a top-down approach that often pays little respect to what people actually believe, and it can undermine their wellbeing. It removes what the people at the Oremi project might recognise as a vital force in the healing process. To illustrate the danger, I offer the following quotation: 'evil, in the end, is our own conspiracy' (Van Beek and Olsen 2015, p. 21). This quotation comes at the end of a chapter that explores the roots and sources of evil in the African religious imagination. The remainder of the quotation opines, 'finally, African wisdom predicts that we can never be sure that we ourselves are not only the victims of these conspiracies, but also its perpetrators'.

The inference I draw is that people themselves can be the perpetrators of their own misfortune, which means that Africans may often have only themselves to blame for the misfortunes, understood as evils, that befall them. Such an inference would not be farfetched for people who hold a worldview that people suffer misfortune through, for example, neglecting their duties to the ancestors or breaking a contract that maintains the balance of the universe. In Chapter 3, I discussed at some length the concepts of misfortune and notions of evil within African indigenous beliefs, and there is ample justification for such an inference in the academic literature referred to in that chapter.

However, I have also presented evidence for the conclusion that the idea of evil in the minds of modern Africans is a construct moulded and shaped by mission Christianity to frame the religious imagination of African people so that conversion became easier to achieve. While most people who experience misfortune will lay the cause of their sufferings on a bad person, bad influences or spirits, it is not necessarily the case that what today is called evil was always called evil. I contend that the conditions, the orthopraxy and orthodoxy created by Christian missions in their proselytising endeavour, shaped the felt sense of a bad experience, gave it form and substance as witchcraft and named it 'evil'. I reprise this thread here because it is relevant to achieving a balance between addressing experiences of misfortune for an individual in the context of their community, and applying a top-down approach that seeks to connect perceived social ills with sin rather than with curses and impose its own worldview on others.

Stephen Ellis (2007, pp. 34–35) posited the idea that past European experiences of witchcraft informed perspectives of African religions as outdated and that witchcraft beliefs came out of 'ignorance and irrationality'. Europe had abandoned its preoccupation with witches and witchcraft, but the early missionaries, in a bid to rival Islam, may not have encountered what later became known as witchcraft. They deemed the practices and rituals they witnessed as 'wrong'. He pointed out that where religious activities were not analogous with Christianity, they were labelled as witchcraft; healers and religious experts became 'witchdoctors,' and any form of witchcraft eradication was 'witch hunting'. The evil that was ingrained into European conceptions of witchcraft became attached to African religious beliefs that were practiced to address misfortune. There

were other, more politically expedient reasons for the labelling of African witchcraft as evil.

On the Caribbean Island of Haiti in 1804, the slave population rebelled against their French colonial masters. The slaves suffered inhumane living conditions, and many died from injuries and infections, tropical diseases, malnutrition and starvation. Using whatever weapons were at hand, the slaves killed most of the island's French residents and slave masters and defeated a trained force of the French Army. This event created shockwaves among the other slave owners in the Caribbean and America, and an explanation was needed for how this was even possible. The answer was that there was a spiritual/religious impetus behind the success. It was demonically inspired and sparked by a voodoo ceremony. Voodoo enabled the people to get together and form political and cultural ideals, and it served as the staging arena for pro-independence speakers to get their message across. Vodun, a fusion of West African beliefs (premised on what Horton identified as the three essential pillars of African belief and practice – EPC), had been introduced with the slaves to the island. This became voodoo – the antithesis of all that was good, holy and proper. Voodoo has become a caricature of evil, and African indigenous beliefs and practices have become guilty by association. McAllister (2012, p. 189) noted that later, evangelical missionaries reshaped the event to fit a Christian interpretation: 'The enslaved Africans appealed to their ancestral Gods and not to Jesus Christ and since the African gods are pagan gods, they must have been demonic forces – in effect, devils'. McAllister concluded that the slaves were in fact using whatever means necessary to be free; however, in doing so, they allowed the devil to rule in Haiti. In

addition, Ramsey (2011 p.9) highlighted how ‘foreigners have long taken “voodoo” (and its various Francophone and Anglophone cognates) to be synonymous with Haitian “sorcery” and with “black magic” more generally’, placing this perspective at the feet of ‘colonial and imperial histories’ and which prevail within the ‘American and European fantasies of African diasporic religion’.

Parkin (2015, p. vii) asserted that, a Eurocentric attitude notwithstanding, people

everywhere do treat with horror, utter contempt or fury, those acts, statements, and occurrences (whether human-derived from “nature” or even “spiritual provenance”) as extreme violations of the standard expectations of what it is to be human.

However, while some denounce such violations, others may view them as a necessary evil or consider that boundaries are malleable, such as ones that work for the greater good and for which the social sphere of today’s world would pause and consider that the sacrifice of individuals, nature or parts of life itself is defensible under certain circumstances. In Chapter 3, it was shown that African indigenous religions maintain moral and right behaviour and have a practicality about them. While they are positioned alongside major religions such as Islam and Christianity, in many respects they differ because they have less attachment to a high God and a greater relationship with spirits and ancestors. The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21 in Hebrew scripture clearly teaches moral absolutes, ‘thou shall not’, which it seeks to perpetuate by negating anything that is vague or uncertain about engagement with evil or its agents. The recitation of the Lord’s prayer in the New Testament and the phrase ‘...deliver us from evil’ (Matthew 6:13) is so important that Gyadu (2015, p. 23) called it

'critical' in order to 'live by God's promises in the Bible'. Such convictions can engender 'a sharpness of preaching,' as described by Jehu-Appiah (1995, p. 1), he further commented that preachers 'addressed witchcraft and evil spirits not by denying their existence but by affirming the belief in the greater power of Jesus Christ'. Such an inflexible position can mean that agents of the church are deprived of, or choose to ignore, the means to address the fear or anger in the community towards alleged witches. Such fear and anger are also felt by those who feel unjustly accused of being witches and by those who simply follow a long-held rationale of explaining misfortune by attributing it to witchcraft, ancestors or spirits. There is a profound impact on those who have relied on time-honoured elements of the African spirituality they have carried with them on their diasporic journeys.

In this context, the research aim has been to remain on the factory floor. The intention throughout has been to add the voices and lived experiences of the research participants to understand what they mean by evil in their experiences and whether witchcraft fits that definition. My purpose is to draw attention to the history of the ideas of evil from within a Christian perspective and the attachment of those ideas to aspects of indigenous beliefs and practices. As stated at the beginning of this section, there is a danger in such imposed definitions. Those who hold a belief in witchcraft and those who seek out diviners and so-called witchdoctors become subject to the same accusation of evil, by association, as those who are considered the perpetrators of evil. It creates a disparity and a tension for those with a misfortune to address, as they need to exist in a community where everything that is not in line with the religious, moral and cultural diversity of the

host society is likely to be condemned. This would include the tools and rituals they have long used to resolve their misfortune, thereby robbing them of a vital element in their search for wellbeing. Depending on the country of origin and the length of time the respondent had been resident in London, the participants revealed their doubts about whether they should act on their belief and consult a diviner or a traditional healer. If they did, they risked it becoming known to the community or even family members, and accusations of evil would also be targeted towards them. This created a struggle between the time-honoured spiritual coping strategies of their culture on the one hand and their Christian faith on the other.

All the respondents in Africa and London were aware of the risk they took by recounting their stories connected to witchcraft. There were differences in their reactions when talking about witchcraft. Some would not use the term witch for fear it may attract misfortune; other would be less reticent in their narrative and would speak the word witchcraft out loud. The fear of misfortune was accompanied by a fear born of revealing their connection to witchcraft. Some of the respondents presented their experiences of witchcraft with a degree of tension that could be felt in the conversations, while others had no such reluctance. Others, again, chose to re-term the collection of beliefs, practices and rituals the word witchcraft encompasses into something less emotive and baggage-laden. Ochieng-Adhiambo⁹⁹ exemplifies this. He expressed that using the term witchcraft “depends on what you have in mind. So, for instance, erm, I variously refer to it as maybe

⁹⁹ Professor of African Philosophic Sagacity at the University of the West Indies.

medicine, African medicine.” Adhiambo’s contribution to this discussion is important. By encompassing his indigenous beliefs, he represents the transportation of an African religious worldview, as he is a Kenyan Luo teaching students in the Caribbean about their religious and philosophical heritage. Furthermore, he exhibits the resiliency and pragmatism of his ancestral religion in addition to his African spirituality.

However, as found in the final analysis, it is also true that the respondents hold the view that witchcraft is evil (likely as a result of the mentioned processes). Yet, they continue to engage with diviners and healers to relieve their suffering, address their misfortune and seek answers to everyday situations. The intent behind the use of witchcraft can be to cause harm, and it is within the community that a diviner or healer is consulted as a defence against harm. The conversations with the respondents presented throughout this thesis show that for those who look to witchcraft contained within their spiritual suitcase, it is applied as a remedial element, useful in positively affecting their everyday wellbeing.

This research supports a conclusion that witchcraft is not intrinsically evil, as defined by early missionaries and colonialists, but that it has more to do with the historical rhetoric of early missionaries using language that today would be considered racist, fuelled by negative stereotypes of Africans’ savagery and superstition and their cultural inferiority. Yet, as my research highlights, in spite of this, such rhetoric continues to function as a loaded weapon aimed at African indigenous belief as a whole and witchcraft in

particular.¹⁰⁰ The reluctance of secular and religious respondents to talk about witchcraft, both in Kenya and in London, is in part due to the planting of Christianity in Africa and the missionary recruitment drive that viewed locals as potential converts to Christianity.

¹⁰⁰ See Boaz, D.N. *Law, religious racism and religions of the African diaspora* (2021) [Podcast]. Available from <https://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/law-religious-racism-and-religions-of-the-african-diaspora/>

5 Summary

5.1 Witchcraft – part of a strategy to explain and control misfortune

My research shows that witchcraft continues to offer individuals and communities the means of explaining opaque phenomena or the otherwise unexplainable. It remains part of the backdrop of everyday life for ordinary people in Nairobi and in places such as Machakos. All respondents were aware of witchcraft in Kenya during the period of research. It is evident that witchcraft is not hidden. It appears in the health and lifestyle sections of daily newspapers, and at times, a report about witchcraft will appear on the front page of the national and local newspapers. Added to this is the filming of events on mobile phones, which are then shared online, fuelling the existence of witchcraft, as do media reports. Both lay Christians and members of the clergy knew of witchcraft in their locality or village. I was surprised at how often these were from personal experiences or within their own families. They related the stories of their parents and grandparents or cousins. Peter (see section 3.5.4) recounted how a village elder used witchcraft to re-establish order in the community, ameliorate conflicts within families or settle disputes between villagers.

I expected witchcraft to be hidden from obvious sight and not spoken about. I envisaged quiet conversations through mediators, and while there were some, I also found grandmothers in coffee bars with forthright opinions on the subject and their own stories of social inequity, misfortune and how witchcraft was suspected as a cause for them. I encountered sellers of amulets and other artefacts of protection from spiritual assault in

the street markets. There were also signs on lamp posts (in one area, I encountered more than a dozen posters in a fifty-metre stretch advertising various services and practices associated with African witchcraft). Overall, information about combating misfortune or bringing good fortune through consultation with religious experts was readily available on the internet, in print media, through flyposting and by word of mouth (transmitting local knowledge of witches, healers and diviners). This demonstrates that access to indigenous healing methods is not out of reach.

By contrast, the bonds that cement tacit knowledge and provision of the spiritual suitcase seemed weaker in London, especially for those who were born there. There appeared to be an attenuation of those beliefs as if they had been forgotten, and others around them reminded them of the possibility of a spiritual attack as being the cause of their misfortune. When reminded, it seemed that this was considered reasonable more often than it was dismissed. My participant, Angie (p. 265), thought of them as the old ways, but I deduced that, given she was among both close family and an extended kinship group, the folklore tradition used in the transmission of knowledge contributed to her tacit knowledge, and its possibility felt right to her.

In spite of the attenuation of belief noted in the previous paragraph, belief in witchcraft continues to offer ways to address misfortune for a significant proportion of the Black diasporic community. In their everyday lives, this segment continues to consult with spiritual healers, diviners and other indigenous religious experts as part of their overall strategy to find explanations for their misfortunes, learn new ways of avoiding misfortune and establish coping mechanisms attuned to the environment of the host. African

indigenous beliefs and practices, often characterised variously as witchcraft, continue to adapt to whatever circumstances pertain. Witchdoctors and related healers and herbalists refine their services to take advantage of fast-moving technological developments in social interactions, such as social media. They harness prevailing trends to attract new business, intermingling 'New Age' beliefs, such as healing crystals and ecological themes with African indigenous beliefs. They also take advantage of a trend among second and third generation immigrants to rediscover the African ways of knowing and being. Even for individuals living in the diaspora, African witchcraft is firmly ingrained in the African ways of knowing and being. Some of my respondents, such as Geoffrey (p. 255), recognise this but attempt to move away from it by embracing western philosophical ideas. Others, such as Ayo, adhere to them as an emblem of independence and a reinforcement of cultural identity.

Overall, practices associated with witchcraft are often intermingled with other interventions, such as prayer, conventional medicine and psychological interventions, such as counselling and therapy – whatever cures, prevents or explains calamity. In addition, it is often a positive way to obtain good fortune, gain a promotion or pass exams.

In spite of this, there remains great variation in the degree of reluctance to talk about experiences of witchcraft. Some experience no reluctance, some show great reluctance and others will not talk about it at all, at least in the use of the word "witchcraft" to describe what they consider to be a spiritually based attack on themselves or their family. In London, I found that fewer people were prepared to say if they had any direct experiences of witchcraft or consulting a healer. I have to consider that the restrictions

surrounding the pandemic have had an impact, although I have no way of assessing that impact specifically. There was evidence among respondents to suggest that within diasporic communities, the knowledge and practice of witchcraft belonged back in Africa or the Caribbean, not in the UK. Some of the people I approached in London would brush aside inferences to witchcraft as if they knew nothing about it. However, informed by my background as a psychotherapist, I sensed that the reluctance to declare any knowledge or association with witchcraft was because they felt such a declaration could threaten their standing among family members, fellow churchgoers and the wider host community. Yet, others acknowledged witchcraft but dressed it in different clothes, as if speaking of it openly might lead them to experience misfortune through a spiritual attack. There was a sense that, to be fully integrated into British culture, any links to African religions or practices might fuel xenophobic sentiments among the white population. There is also a case for ownership of indigenous beliefs and witchcraft, but because it is historically misunderstood, such knowledge is better contained among themselves. I discovered that respondents in London kept secret their belief in witchcraft as a cause of their misfortune from health practitioners for fear that they might be diagnosed with mental illness. The insights gained during my field research revealed the nuanced suggestions that accompanied the choice to consult diviners and indigenous healers. More often, my respondents were guided towards healers who used the spiritual realm by those around them. Village remedies are still known among family members who were understandably cautious about advertising it for fear of being accused of being witches. In London, as in Nairobi, witchcraft beliefs and practices continue to operate within and be transmitted as an oral tradition passed intergenerationally within communities.

My examination of the pattern of movement of witchcraft beliefs and practices from Nairobi in Kenya to the streets of South London involved a stopover in Barbados in the Caribbean where such beliefs have survived and still thrive. The direct linking of East African manifestations of witchcraft in the migration to London inevitably bears witness to a cross-fertilisation and development when witchcraft beliefs and practices are encountered from West Africa, either directly or via the Caribbean. By taking this route, I was able to find the link between the strands of witchcraft beliefs that helped the slaves and their descendants to survive the Atlantic Slave Trade from Africa to the Caribbean. It was this misfortune that enabled a reformulation of African religion as Obeah. As an adjunct to this, I discovered how African witchcraft is perpetuated in diaspora by the intergenerational trauma that the slave trade engendered.

A further factor perpetuating this trauma for people from Kenya may be equally applicable to migrants from other African nations that were once part of the British Empire. The historical process of creating a colonial state in Kenya led to the resettlement of various ethnic groups. There was no choice offered by colonial administrators, and this led to the intermingling of previously separated ethnic groups and indigenous religions and forms of spiritual healing. It became illegal to practise any form of divination or witchcraft thanks to the establishment of new, centralised institutions that imposed legal frameworks to regulate indigenous healing practices. The post-colonial political climate in Kenya offered a framework in which cultural components for combatting misfortune are discarded in favour of imposed value systems placing new stresses on intercommunal relationships that facilitate the creation of a nation state out of diverse and unrelated

ethnic communities. As a reaction to this, there was a strong sense of a reclamation of these beliefs among some of my respondents, such as Ayo, as something uniquely theirs and treasured.

5.2 Concluding remarks

Chapters 2 and 3 illuminated a profound spirituality that is enabling in both subtle and obvious ways. This spirituality offers people who are barely surviving a means to move towards thriving. I found an inordinate amount of spiritual creativity and pragmatic resistance to whatever crisis was taking place in the everyday lives of my respondents. Among my respondents in Nairobi, a pragmatic approach to life was necessary. The socio-economic macro-environment demanded the means to earn enough money to maintain health. Global influences affect experiences of misfortune. Climate change effects lead to food insecurity for subsistence farmers whose ability to address their lack of food was in changing the crop they grew or relocating to urban areas to find work. In remote locations, there is a scarcity of resources and services that offer respite or help with food supply and medical aid, and there are often poor transportation services. The cost of medicine left many with few resources to treat common ailments. There is shame and stigma attached to certain female issues, such as UTIs, and with no money for antibiotics, women resort to using village remedies, such as salt water and lemon juice, to treat themselves.

However, not surprisingly, I found that the universal misfortunes; death, illness, poverty, violence, infertility and the insecurities of precarious living for people in Nairobi and

Kawangware are shared by African and African Caribbean diasporic communities in London. The elements that create differentiation in the experiences of these events might depend on several variables, such as location, religious environment and social, political or legal status. Yet, the need for healing and answers to explain the causes of misfortune continue to provide the impetus to consult with witchdoctors, herbalists and diviners. Access to such practitioners is not problematic in Nairobi or London for those prepared to pay for their services.

Yet, what stood out from the research was how individuals coped with their misfortune in everyday life and how their spiritual beliefs aided them in managing their misfortune. This brings us back to Terry Pratchett's idea of the Shamble that I introduced in section 1.2. Different beliefs and practices can be mixed and matched in the response to misfortune. It is the combination of indigenous attitudes and beliefs towards life, their Christian faith and their community of faith that were at one and the same time brought together to ease their troubles. Their spiritual suitcase is their shamble and source of power to combat misfortune. The attribution of witchcraft to a person's misfortune can be seen as an expression of exerting power over a situation of perceived impotence and lack of control. The remedies offered, whether genuinely felt or offered cynically for financial gain or leverage (see chapter 2) by those who offer them, provide a restoration of some sense of personal power and choice in the face of both impersonal forces and direct conflicts with people they know, even if a western viewpoint might regard these effects as placebos. Those afflicted experience a sense of safety and a restoration of agency in their lives.

The earlier paragraphs in this discussion summarised my discovery of a creative spirituality and a resilience born of pragmatism; however, my research, particularly in London but also in Kenya, revealed a spirit of innovation among those who transmit African knowledge of witchcraft beliefs, practices and ways of being. This contrasts with the argument I examined in section 2.1 where witchcraft is seen by the Comaroffs (1997) and others as a reaction to modernity and a conservative force. I viewed this innovating tendency as a means of staying relevant in modern society and in step with prevailing trends, arguably to attract adherents, with the only thing traditional about African religions being their ability to continually change. In London, some African healers would package their services in a way that is more akin to New Age spirituality but Africanised with woven patterns, colours, fabrics and shapes and amulets in beadwork that have an African style. Others would package their services as part of an essential journey to rediscover African ways of being. However, it was also the case that, of my respondents who engaged with spiritualists and healers, some made efforts to authenticate their claims. I found educational programmes and organisations in London that employed healers and academics from Africa, South America and the US and used technology to offer guidance and education on African cosmology, philosophy and spirituality.

Finally, I found examples in London of Africans and people in Black diasporic communities from Generation Z who became disenchanted with established churches and were researching and re-discovering African indigenous religious expressions. This seems to co-exist in parallel with the rising focus on Black theology among Black diasporic communities and, maybe coincidentally, the widening gap between Africa and Europe on

matters of doctrine in the Anglican Church. Whether these are all indicators of a broader divorce between Africa and Europe (an attempt to reject the values of their former colonial masters) is not something this thesis was meant to answer, but the case studies I have presented here might contribute to the wider academic debate surrounding that question.

As well as studying the manifestation of African witchcraft in the UK, my research sought to examine its characterisation there. First, there is an adherence to the existing academic narratives on African witchcraft where, either deliberately or inadvertently, the discourses from the diverse academic disciplines studying it (such as sociology, theology, anthropology, psychology and economics) and those who draw on them constrain their characterisation within the terms and tenets of those disciplines. New expressions and experiences of witchcraft are drawn within the existing parameters of those disciplines. I suggest that within the narrative theories of witchcraft, the attempt to define it in its totality leaves a complexity of concepts that has not drawn us any closer to a clearer understanding of the use of witchcraft as an element within a larger African religious belief system.

Outside academia, organisations engaged with African diasporic communities approach witchcraft manifestations that are more in line with their own core values rather than those of the people they engage with. The perspectives of individuals depends very much on their nationality, ethnic group, country of origin or religious affiliation. However, a schism exists between those who believe in witchcraft as a source of misfortune and organisations that work to end human trafficking, slavery and child and adult abuse,

which tends to demonise African indigenous beliefs in general by characterising the practices involved as witchcraft. For those indigenous to a western nation state, one might infer that this is a subset of the tendency to consider European ways of being as superior and African ways as backward and inferior.

Last, I observed that the characterisation of witchcraft evolves as it travels on the journeys of those who carry it in their spiritual suitcases, although the fundamental belief in it for those afflicted has not. In the UK, expressions of African witchcraft as Obeah, *kindoki* or *Ifa* become intermingled, yet the situations to which it is applied carry the stamps of its former applications. By this, I mean that it is shaped by the misfortunes that it causes (or more accurately is attributed to) or the misfortunes it is meant to explain, deter or prevent.

My research shows that African witchcraft is deeply embedded in African ways of knowing and being, even for those in diaspora. My conversations with my participants in Kenya, African people in diaspora and African-Caribbean people revealed facets of spirituality beyond anything I had thought possible and justified my investigation in its revelations of multi-layered meaning. What emerged from the conversations I had with respondents were ways of being that fell outside the initial research questions in that the accounts of misfortune were lived experiences shaped by their sense of self, their identity and a constituent part of self-identity being embodied in a multigenerational, communal past. Respondents carried within their religious imagination the tacit knowledge of spiritual healing that is deeply rooted in their psyche. Their expressions of misfortune revealed a nuanced yet substantial view of how their lives would be made better through

access to indigenous healing. By having conversations in situ, respondents' expressions of their misfortune were relived. I found that, for many, their expressions about witchcraft, though unique, depended on their physical surroundings. When conversing with respondents in their spaces, they spoke freely of misfortune and the use of indigenous healers and or diviners, but they were often shy about their experiences with witchcraft. In the early part of the research in Kenya, it became clear that conversations about witchcraft in people's personal lives were not easy, so other terms were used, such as superstition or magic. This was often accompanied by nervous laughter. Some conversations about misfortune were quiet, often whispered, but a main theme among the 64 people I spoke with was witchcraft's presence in the world and personal experiences with it in the past.

Most of my respondents in London demonstrated ways that they seek reminders of home in new spaces. Yet, the processes and procedures they encounter in daily life require language skills and knowledge they might not possess or are not practised in. This reinforces the role of the various churches who provide social and personal leadership to their communities. I learned that among the African-initiated and Black-led churches, this authority was often misused to increase the authority and power base of the church, leading to the creation of a cycle of dependency among some of the congregation.

What was clear from my respondents was a determination to keep their link to African spirituality intact while working towards integration into their localities. The spiritual, moral and ethical threads from home, wherever home may be, endure as a compass that helps to navigate the cultural and attitudinal differences in the host nation as well as

inter-cultural differences, exemplified by Delia, who is Kenyan, describing Jamaicans as “war’ish” (see section 4.5).

In Nairobi, social habits, such as not eating in a stranger’s house, not allowing food crumbs to drop on the floor and not picking fruit from someone else’s garden, are behaviours instilled into a person from childhood that shape how a person reacts to the situations and environments they are in. This right behaviour and attitude feeds into the practices and ways that life must be lived so that good fortune is achieved. For some of my respondents in London, maintaining such attitudes is often misunderstood as outdated and harmful, especially among authority figures.

My respondents were very clear in articulating that there is always another explanation for bad luck, misfortune always contains a spiritual element and there are no such things as accidents (Evans-Prichard, 1937; Mbiti, 1990; Fadiman, 1993; Magesa, 2014). There is always an agent behind such events, and that holds true for many, whether they are in Africa, the Caribbean or London. Witchcraft is the conduit through which malicious agents enact their “bad mind” and those warding off spiritual attacks marshal their defence.

Robin Horton’s (1979, p. 104) formulation that African ways of being constitute a strategy to explain, predict and control events in this world leads me to the conclusion that elements of religious development in Africa are determined by the enduring influence of an indigenous cosmology that simply renews itself. While I acknowledge that this formulation has its critics, the way that Africans in diaspora take the tacit knowledge of African indigenous beliefs passed down from their ancestors and intermingle it with

Christian values and scientifically derived knowledge betokens a pragmatism that leads me to a similar conclusion vis-à-vis the explanatory power of Horton's proposition.

The implication of adherence to the theory of explanation, prediction and control in the composition of the suitcase is that it provides an alternative method to helping people understand and address their misfortune. Misfortune, as shown in sections 1.2.4 and 3.4, is subjective and contextual. Experiences with it, therefore, take in the context of the environment. I have chosen to illustrate this with Terry Pratchett's (1995, p. 345) idea. One of his principal characters refers to something called headology, which relies on the principle that 'what people believe is what is real'. In practice, if a person believes there is a monster under the bed, it is not helpful to convince them there is no monster under the bed, that monsters do not exist. The misfortune is still felt; is still real. However, giving them a chair to stand on and a weapon allows them to defend themselves. In this way, they regain control of their defence. Denying beliefs can disable people, and while psychiatry and mental health services are essential, they are not yet equipped to deal with a perceived spiritual attack or a possession state. This work, in conjunction with this observation, demonstrates that for the various projects that work with mental health issues among Africans and people in Black diasporic communities, there is often danger in the approach, suggesting that those they engage with discard their idea of how the world works in favour of accepted manualised modes of treatment that encapsulate the pinnacle of evolution being the 'optimally adjusted personality of the white European' (preferably one who has been psychoanalysed) (Littlewood and Lipsedge, 1997 p.167; see also note 98). Finding appropriate treatments or remedies

that encourage accepting an African worldview constitutes a direct challenge to that mentality. As this work has sought to demonstrate, understanding a person's spirituality requires understanding the context in which they exist; in other words, treat the person, not the symptom.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Answers to research questions

This final chapter presents the answers to the key questions and how they meet the research aims given in section 1.3. Any limitations of the research will be acknowledged here. I will then discuss its contribution to the study of religion in a general diasporic setting, with a particular reference to London and the implications arising from it. It will conclude with recommendations for further academic research and suggest a way forward for agencies working with African and African Caribbean communities in the UK capital.

The thesis is titled 'The Evolution of African Witchcraft as a Response to Misfortune: A Qualitative Study of African Spirituality in Nairobi Kenya and Black Diasporic Communities in London, UK'. This encapsulates my objective, which is to re-evaluate African witchcraft in a UK context and provide an assessment of African witchcraft within a religious and spiritual belief system that Black African people call upon as a means of causing or preventing misfortune. Furthermore, I wanted this study to focus on African witchcraft as an aspect of lived religion within Black diasporic communities, in the same vein as works by Harvey (2013), McGuire (2008) and Orsi (2005), in which the researcher examines everyday lives, rituals and practices and interrogates religion in itself as the phenomenon *sui generis*. Finally, I set out to investigate the underlying reasons for why African witchcraft has been encoded as evil and whether it is justified.

This examination takes an overtly religious studies perspective and uses numerous modes of investigation, including anthropological, sociological, cultural, historical and literary sources to formulate a set of research questions about whether and how African witchcraft has evolved in its usage in the UK and the impact it has had on Black diasporic communities in London. The first task was to define the key terms and core concepts captured in the thesis title. African indigenous belief systems have been extensively studied and documented in a variety of disciplines, from psychiatry to anthropology. This includes notions and understandings of African witchcraft, the key concept for this thesis. To reach such an understanding, chapters 1–3 examine discourses in the existing literature and identify how notions of the African religious imagination have developed and where witchcraft fits within it. In chapter 3, I test that understanding through a phenomenological examination of lived experiences in Kenya, presenting specific threads, such as the socio-political impact of the Moi report and historical and current trends in African-initiated and mainstream churches that impact concepts of misfortune and provide local context to the religious imaginations of my Kenyan respondents. My research in Kenya and London has led me to the conclusion that the term “witchcraft” is not a particularly helpful label in and of itself. I found that the term homogenises a range of ethnic traits, languages, songs and dances as well as religious convictions and complex family, lineage, clan and group structures. There is no single definition of African witchcraft that can be applied in all situations, and academic ideas and perspectives can and do blur the lines of demarcation when the concept is used to develop policies that are applied to various ethnic groups and cultures in London. With this in mind, they

mistake the impact that the concept has on the religious imagination and everyday practices of people within Black diasporic communities in the UK, as I argue in section 4.5.

One of the key questions that arose is: what are the existing narratives about African religions and witchcraft in the UK? Within the rich vein of studies on African witchcraft, I identified a deficit in the study of African witchcraft as a lived religion in Black diasporic communities in London through the examination of existing literature in Section 1.3. Outside the world of academia, knowledge of and debate about African witchcraft in the wider society of the UK is dominated and set by rare but high-profile cases sensationalised by the media. This has channelled debates and informed approaches into the aspects of African witchcraft linked with these cases, reinforcing the notion that the term witchcraft is linked to African religious thought and practice in its totality, which, by association, becomes synonymous with evil and linked to demonic practices.

I found that the main, existing body of research about African witchcraft focuses on single ethnic communities in Africa, and such research has been and continues to be applied to UK approaches used by various governmental, voluntary and charitable organisations. I conclude, as a result of my research (see chapters 3 and 4), that while this provides information at a foundational level about African witchcraft, it belies the complexity of spiritual encounters as they are experienced in London. The use of studies about witchcraft conducted in and concerned with an African situation does not, therefore, constitute a thorough and complete template for examining analogous experiences in the UK.

The construction of my thesis and the way it presents its data answer the key research question around whether African witchcraft itself and the belief in it for members of Black diasporic communities change as a result of diaspora. My research shows that African witchcraft remains part of the backdrop of everyday life for my respondents in London, though it is diluted in comparison with Nairobi, when taken across the full spread of my participants (see chapter 5). African witchcraft continues to offer ways to address, understand or explain misfortune in London. People in their everyday lives continue to include spiritual healers, diviners and indigenous religious experts in their overall strategies to find explanations for their misfortunes, relearn old ways of avoiding misfortune, intermingle them with new ways and establish coping mechanisms tailored to the environment of the host nation. Witchcraft, as part of the African religious imagination, still offers a pragmatic approach to addressing misfortune interwoven with other interventions, such as prayer, indigenous health paradigms and psychological interventions (e.g. Western forms of counselling and therapy); whatever works to remedy, prevent or explain misfortune.

In both London and Nairobi, witchcraft beliefs and practices continue to operate within and be transmitted as an oral tradition passed intergenerationally within communities. African indigenous beliefs and practices, some of which are characterised by both insiders and outsiders as witchcraft, continue to be adapted to whatever circumstances pertain. Witchdoctors, other healers and herbalists adapt their practices to capitalise on rapidly evolving technical advancements in social media and take advantage of current trends (see chapter 5) to draw in new business. Finally, the appearance of witchcraft in the UK

is subject to the complexity of the routes that it has travelled to arrive in London, which have not been simplistic one-way journeys from Africa to the UK. The details of Angie's case study in section 4.6.2 coupled with the evidence from the UNHCR I presented in section 4.2 on witchcraft in refugee camps illustrate the complexity of the plot points on the journey of African witchcraft in diaspora. Refugee camps act as microcosms of what happens when people who do not normally come into contact with each other exchange ideas to cope with misfortune. The Shamble, a metaphor for the spiritual suitcase that I introduced in section 1.2.1 and developed in chapter 5, is comprised of whatever proves useful, whether that is in a refugee camp or on the Old Kent Road.

Chapter 5 is where the main research questions at the end of section 1.3 are addressed. The first question asked is whether the various African independent or initiated churches and other Black-led churches located in the UK encounter witchcraft or accusations of witchcraft within the congregation. Despite the limitations highlighted in sections 1.5.6–1.5.7, the evidence in chapter 4 points to how church leaders use their past understanding of African witchcraft to spot congregational acts they deem indicative of witchcraft. These actions appear contrary to widely accepted Christian decorum during church services. However, I also found that the criteria for classifying non-conformity as improper behaviours are based on the church's denomination, whether it is Anglican, Pentecostal or African-initiated.

I then asked, how do the representatives of these churches respond to such incidents? A key element is the responses' variations depending on the spiritual leaders' individual experiences and their relationships with biblical texts and church teachings, as evidenced

in section 4.6.4. Among the churches I visited, several, such as the New Testament Church of God, offered western-style counselling in conjunction with exorcisms or rigorous prayer as needed when dealing with those who felt under spiritual attack. Among the African-initiated, Pentecostal and Methodist churches that engaged with the study, especially those with a healing mission, African indigenous spiritual and cultural practices were included in their regular schedule of services. The evidence gathered from African-initiated churches across South London revealed a complex and nuanced landscape that led me to conclude that the various responses of clergymen showed a recognition of the role that African ways of knowing and being play in the ministry of their churches. Such a response contributes to a necessary and sufficient intervention to enable the good fortune and wellbeing of people in Black diasporic communities in their everyday lives. These actions also maintain a Christian following that not only breeds a dependency on the church but benefits from financial and proselytising endeavours in the community, as reflected in section 4.4.

In the context of African witchcraft in Black diasporic communities, I posed the question of how social and governmental bodies balance diverse religious practices within the existing moral and ethical frameworks of the host nation. My research, which observes how state-sponsored actors, such as the police, interact with academia and agencies working with migrants and asylum seekers, highlights the difficulty of achieving a balance that prevents further harm. The concepts of cultural forms of spirituality, cause and effect and misfortune are homogenised, making a single solution seem the most appealing

within the confines of an outcome-driven ideology that seeks to achieve as much as possible with the limited resources available for a given endeavour.

The rituals observed within the numerous distinct African communities in London were found by my research to be crucial for maintaining community cohesiveness and promoting personal wellbeing. Further, I demonstrate that for scholars whose research in Europe carves out components of African spiritual practices, such as rituals, without recognising the spiritual and social value they offer to maintain cohesion, are at best misrepresenting the ideology of the ritual and at worst misconstruing its function. This amplifies the ill-considered reactions by policy makers, particularly when those sources direct the agencies towards research focused on practices in Africa. My research contributes to the understanding that such rituals, such as naming ceremonies, performed in London homes, are linked with much older spiritual forms of protection unrelated to witchcraft.

This prompted the question as to whether there is a disconnect between prevailing attitudes in the UK and the beliefs and spiritual needs of African communities in Britain. Again, the answer is a clear and unequivocal 'yes'. My research among a variety of different denominational churches in London leads me to conclude that Black Africans and people in Black diasporic communities seek churches that best meet their particular cultural forms of worship rather than integrating into the religious and spiritual forms that exist already. I observed that the majority of the indigenous inhabitants of the host nation continue to see African practices as alien and undesirable, prompted by sensationalised and negative reporting of high-profile cases perceived as the result of

practices associated with African witchcraft. My final research question centres on what impact this enmity has had on Africans in London.

I asked the following question: How have the social aspects of the host nation influenced the day-to-day lives and perceptions of Africans, their own status and identity, their conception of self and their values and morals? This question contains several aspects elucidated in sections 4.2, 4.5. and 4.6. African people in diaspora maintain, develop and augment long-held beliefs, which predate any Christian or Muslim overlay, and continue to live with and practise rituals intended to enable good fortune and ward off misfortune in everyday life. I infer on the basis of evidence from respondents that the pressures of living in someone else's backyard, so to speak, force people in Black diasporic communities, migrants and asylum seekers to balance ways of integrating into the environment without losing their sense of self and identity. Witchcraft as a cause of and cure for misfortune is still believed in, but it is expressed differently in new contexts. Defending oneself against allegations of witchcraft becomes internalised. It becomes, for each person, a secret compartment in the spiritual suitcase, shared only with individuals they trust, as opposed to being out in the open, as was the case encountered in Kenya. Here, the methodology I created – which draws on both my personal identity and therapeutic training – enabled the development of enough confidence in both directions to accept the reliability of my participants' testimonies. Regarding the queries of how they handled their bad luck and whether witchcraft had a position among the various paths to wellbeing, witchcraft was present in people's perspectives on asking for assistance and seeking help, as in the case with Geoffrey (section 4.6.1), but this did not occur in all cases.

However, it remained an option particularly for those events that needed explanation, prediction or control and that could not be found through more mundane investigations. This option was exercised more frequently when the effects of the misfortune needed to be addressed and to prevent further misfortune attributed to a spiritual attack. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, there was a broad mistrust of and a reluctance to engage with more normative health providers, such as doctors and the information and advice given in the daily broadcasts from the NHS. Many chose to follow the guidance of religious leaders and other religious experts instead. Some of that guidance was in step with the official line from government; however, I witnessed how the guidance and practices displayed an equal mistrust of official guidelines among religious experts. These advocated reliance on prayer and faith, with some offering blessed remedies at exorbitant prices.

6.2 Contribution of this work

Meeting with people and listening to their voices and stories without judgement has been the overriding principle behind this research. I do not claim that it is comprehensive, but it has contributed to a number of key issues in the field of the study of witchcraft, religion in diaspora and migration. The findings lead to an informed perspective on indigenous religion as it is lived in the everyday lives of Black people in London and gives a voice to those who believe their misfortune is spiritual in origin. My research is conducted in the same manner as Hills et al. (2013), MacGaffey (1970, 1986) and Flint (2008). This study emphasises the spiritual element of healing through my interactions with local healers in

Nairobi and London, building on the pragmatic and integrative approach to health and wellbeing that is present in both Africa and the diaspora.

This study contributes to the study of religion by including what is termed witchcraft as an element of everyday life in London. When trying to understand witchcraft, the allegory of the blind men and the elephant¹⁰¹ can be held up to contrast with the studies of African witchcraft, which are extensive and seek to define, refine and make viable the concept of witchcraft. This study makes an original contribution by locating and investigating witchcraft as it exists in London. By talking to ordinary people as they go about their daily lives in Kenya and London, I found that witchcraft can be a powerful influence that supports the move from surviving to thriving. It is flexible, able to become anything at any time and to change anything; it is both negative and positive. Witchcraft is, then, whatever the person experiencing misfortune believes it is. This adds ordinary people's voices to the conversation on how to approach witchcraft within Black diasporic communities in London. Tracking witchcraft from Kenya to London highlights how witchcraft can and does evolve to be re-purposed for the lives of those who hold to an African spirituality in the host nation. I highlight that, as a force originating from Africa, witchcraft's evolutionary journey to London produced the concepts of Obeah and a "bad mind" and resides within the religious imaginations of people in Black diasporic

¹⁰¹ A group of blind men who have never encountered an elephant are the subject of the allegory of the blind men and the elephant, in which they attempt to learn and develop their impressions of the elephant through touch. Each blind man only perceives one area of the elephant's body, such as the side or the tusk, and is asked to give their opinion of what an elephant is, arriving at different conclusions.

communities in London. My research also adds voice to the debate on witchcraft as being evil, joining Geschiere (2002), Adedibu (2014) and Bukasa (2015). This research shows that witchcraft is *not* an evil force. This term creates a distortion that undermines the efficacy of its use as a salve for part of a healing process from spiritual afflictions.

The style and presentation I chose is deliberate in that it follows an established method of presenting material through case studies. It enables a compartmentalisation of the respondents' testimonies and provides analyses that are framed within an intellectual context that captures the meaningfulness evoked through their particular experiences. Among my respondents, I discovered a variety of spiritualities, for which I offer the following typology, albeit with porous boundaries: largely Christian yet engaging in African rites, anglicised African spirituality and those still holding to African indigenous beliefs. There is a further category, which I describe as post-Christian. This category can be divided into two sub-categories: those who no longer attend church or adhere to Christian doctrines and are becoming more secular in their ways of being, and those who are re-acquiring African spirituality and epistemologies. This latter group marks a multigenerational drift away from Christianity that is occurring among second and third generation African and African Caribbean people in diaspora in favour of African spirituality. Such categorisations achieve a more relational and in-depth understanding of the religious imagination and lived experiences of my respondents, both in Africa and in London.

The studies of religion in diaspora (Pye, 1969; Tölölyan, 1996; Levitt, 2003; McLoughlin, 2005) served as a framework for my research, which I chose to expand into Nairobi's

villages and inner-city districts as well as to the streets of London. Following their lead, I tracked the development of African witchcraft, the migration routes and the arrival and methods of African spirituality's survival in London. By doing this, I broadened the scope of the study of religion in the diaspora in London to consider the impact of intercultural and multi-ethnic influences on the development of novel spiritual practices and modes of cognition within African and Black diasporic groups.

This thesis adds to existing knowledge of how people in Black diasporic communities in London have created a spiritual mechanism to pursue good fortune and control misfortune. In Nairobi and London, there have been revelations about the development of African witchcraft and spirituality. This research also contributes to the study of religion in diaspora by providing evidence from a diverse cultural, social and religious landscape in London. It presents the view that the place of African witchcraft is not in a cage of evil, each ethnic group has unique religious attitudes and expressions, and the evolution of witchcraft has taken African spirituality in an unexpected direction. It raises the importance of transnational links that offer support and education for people in diaspora with a desire to reconnect with indigenous spirituality. It remains an element of African spirituality that provides a means of explaining, predicting and controlling misfortune in everyday life.

Finally, migration affects religion in many ways, including how religion develops as a result of migration. When religion is transmitted from one culture to another, regardless of geography or time, new cultural elements are added to the tradition, and new expectations are placed on it (Pye, 1969; Knott, 1986; McLoughlin, 2005). I conclude that

a further study of witchcraft in London should be undertaken and needs to follow the premise that, while Africa has supplied the main ingredients for the phenomenon, the pragmatism and adaptability of African spirituality in London create a unique local formulation of witchcraft that can only be conducted in situ.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

Studies of witchcraft in Africa based on particular groups in certain times and places cannot reflect the complexity and multiplexity of migrant diasporic communities in western urban environments. Much can be achieved by placing a greater emphasis on the spiritual and tacit knowledge carried by migrants, which enables them to survive. I suggest further investigation is necessary into the interstice between Christianity, African indigenous spirituality and Black theology, wherein new forms of spirituality take shape and endow African people in Black diasporic communities with unique expressions of their spirituality and identity.

There is a tendency to demonise African indigenous beliefs in general when trying to prevent abhorrent acts that may arise from such beliefs. I advise that law enforcement, the judiciary and other state-related organisations concentrate on the perpetrators who use people's beliefs to coerce and scapegoat rather than the beliefs that such malicious actors leverage to manipulate their victims. Demonising African indigenous beliefs and labelling them as evil can threaten the sense of identity of Africans in diaspora, disrupting their attempts to deal with misfortune when those beliefs are an integral part of their solution to the challenges they face.

Finally, what remains is to refrain from automatic stereotyping and to learn about each other's faiths, beliefs and practices in a mutual exchange of knowledge. An informed and shared approach to the resolution of misfortune, a ubiquitous component of the human condition, will enable a balance that does not throw out the good with the bad.

7 Bibliography

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