

JUJU AND STATECRAFT: OCCULT RUMORS AND POLITICS IN GHANA

By

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ABSTRACT

Religion plays an integral role in all aspects of Ghanaian life, including politics. In recent years, many scholars have commented upon the spectacular rise of Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana since the 1970s, noting its particular influence in politics and in shaping the Ghanaian public sphere more generally. Curiously, though less often noted, rumors about “the occult” and occult influence have also flourished during this same period. Despite Pentecostal hostility to the occult and Pentecostal influence in public life, such rumors have become prevalent to the point that they represent a distinctive feature of Ghanaian politics. This thesis addresses the phenomenon of rumors about the occult in contemporary Ghanaian politics. It argues that the flourishing of political-occult rumors and the strength of Pentecostalism are related. Focusing on the period between the late 1970s and present, and drawing on data from fieldwork interviews and newspaper reports, the thesis examines the force of occult rumors in modern Ghanaian politics. It demonstrates some of the ways in which Ghanaian political elites deploy occult rumors for political advantage and some popular attitudes of the Ghanaian electorate to the rumors. The project proposes that the occult, far from being a phenomenon existing on the margins of modern Ghanaian society, is powerful, public and mainstream.

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INTRODUCTION

There is an ambivalence in modern Ghanaian politics, as far as the separation of religion and politics is concerned. Formally, Ghana is a secular state; yet religion influences the country's politics, as with almost all other aspects of life, and informs people's choice of political leaders.¹ One striking illustration of this intersection between religion and Ghana's public sphere is evident in electoral politics. In this context, national political actors routinely play to the electorate's religious, mostly Pentecostal, sensibilities in order to win their support and votes.² Pentecostal Christianity emerged as a significant religious force in Ghana around the 1970s and has since become persistent.³ Pentecostal discourses inform the outlook of many Ghanaians, with this form of Christianity now attaining "a prominent public presence."⁴ Consequently, the Ghanaian political field has turned into "a pentecostalite public sphere," a context in which there are strong pressures to ensure that "the occult" is suppressed.⁵

The general perception of the occult in Ghana is negative. This view was initiated by the colonialists and Christian missionaries, upon their encounter with Ghanaian indigenous religion, and perpetuated today with particular vigor by Ghanaian Pentecostals.⁶

¹ J. Asamoah-Gyadu, "'God Bless our Homeland Ghana': Religion and Politics in a Post-Colonial African State Studies," *World Christianity and Interreligious Relations*, Issue 48 (2014): 165-183; Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Michael Perry Okyerefo, Daniel Yaw Fiaveh and Kofi Takyi Asante, "Religion as a tool in strengthening the democratic process in Ghana," *Journal of African Studies and Development* Vol. 3(6) (June 2011): 124-130; Ebenezer Obiri Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah: A Case Study of Religion and Politics in Ghana* (University Press of America, 1997); J. S. Pobee, *Religion and Politics in Ghana: A Case Study of the Acheampong Era, 1972-1978* (Ghana Universities Press, 1992).

² I use Pentecostalism in this study in the broadest sense, aware of the diversities found within Ghanaian Pentecostalism. I am also aware that Pentecostal churches go by various names, such as 'Bible-believing,' 'charismatic,' 'born-again,' 'holy-ghost-filled,' etc.

³ Andreas Heuser, "African Pentecostalism and Politics: Special Issue," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol.18 (3) (Feb., 2015): 7-100.

⁴ Birgit Meyer, "Religious and Secular, 'Spiritual' and 'Physical' in Ghana" in Courtney Bender & Ann Taves (eds.), *What Matters? Ethnographies of Value in a (Not So) Secular Age* (New York: Columbia University Press (SSRC-series)): 92.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rosalind Hackett, "Discourses of Demonization in Africa and Beyond," *Diogenes*, Vol. 50 (3) (August, 2003): 61-75; Birgit Meyer, "The Power of Money: Politics, Occult Forces, and Pentecostalism in Ghana" *African Studies Review*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Dec., 1998): 15-37; Birgit Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break with the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol.XXVIII (3) (1998): 316-349.

Contemporary understandings of the occult differ from the colonial and mission-Christian characterization of the phenomenon, even though they build upon earlier legacies. Specifically, while the colonialists and mission Christians saw only some aspects of Ghanaian traditional religious beliefs and practices as manifestations of the occult, modern Pentecostals have broadened this category by adding other non-Christian elements, including Islam and Eastern religious traditions to it.⁷

Pentecostal Christians oppose the occult, casting it as an “abode of the devil.”⁸ Hence, much Pentecostal activity is geared towards subduing the occult and its agents.⁹ These efforts notwithstanding, there is a popular view in Ghana that the occult is everywhere – everyone uses it, and politicians are no exception. Consequently, aspirants to political offices and political parties are alleged, through rumors, to engage in occult activities in their bid to win power or hold on to it at all cost. The existence of such widespread rumors seems surprising in some respects and leads one to question why given the substantial Pentecostal presence and influence in Ghana, the occult has become so significant in the public sphere. I argue in this thesis that the prominence of occult rumors in Ghanaian socio-political life is tied to the growth of the public visibility of Pentecostals and expansion of Pentecostalism in modern Ghana. The prevalence of political-occult rumors, this thesis suggests, is another indication of the flourishing of religion in post-colonial Ghanaian politics.

This study addresses the phenomenon of rumors about the occult in contemporary Ghanaian politics. Drawing on data from fieldwork interviews and analysis of particular case studies in the form of newspaper articles, it examines: why political rumors in Ghana often focus on the occult; what political-occult rumors accomplish and for whom; the ways in which Ghanaian politicians use rumors about the occult to gain political advantage; and some of the popular attitudes of the electorate to the rumors. The thesis demonstrates that the rumors have become important tools in the hands of politicians to gain political advantage over opponents, and the electorate as means to critique the actions and behavior of political actors and the political process generally. In a nutshell, this research explores the important role of

⁷ I use the term ‘GTR’ in this thesis to depict the indigenous or original religion of the people of Ghana before its encounter with Islam, Christianity and other foreign religious traditions.

⁸ Meyer, “The Power of Money,” 29.

⁹ I am also cognizant of all the social activism, works of charity, singing, etc. of Ghanaian Pentecostals.

occult rumors in modern Ghanaian politics, with a particular focus on the period between the late 1970s and present. It primarily examines popular perceptions about the alleged occult dealings of politicians, which are mostly expressed through rumors, but it also attempts to talk about actual political practice, exemplified by statements and actions of some politicians reported by the media.

This project has broader relevance to politics because it advances our knowledge of popular perceptions about the occult and its engagements with modern Ghanaian politics in particular, and contemporary African politics more generally. Indeed, the rapid modernization and globalization of the Ghanaian society form a crucial part of the context of this study and is an important dimension of the analysis offered. The thesis demonstrates that the occult, and rumors about it, are significant in Ghanaian politics; it does so by identifying the forms of political advantage politicians gain by either avoiding or embracing the occult and the new ways in which notions of and about the occult are being fashioned in modern Ghana.

The alleged use of the occult by political institutions and figures is widespread in African political discourse. Any attempt to explore the complexities of the relationship between religion and politics that overlooks the impact of rumors about occult beliefs, agents, and practices on the behaviors of actors in the political field, therefore, misses an important dimension of the Ghanaian, and arguably more broadly African, religiopolitical life. Stories about or references to the occult constitute a key feature of Ghanaian politics and is a key element in my interpretation and analysis. In this study, I contend that analysis of the role of religion in African life must also factor in the role of the occult in African communities, since the exploration of the influence of religion in modern politics is enriched by including the occult as part of the religious field, considering the plethora of rumors about it. Conversely, there is also a need to understand how developments on the political landscape shape narratives about occult activities. Consideration of occult rumors and allegations may constitute the most profitable line of inquiry in efforts to understanding the role of the occult in contemporary African politics. My analysis in this project highlights the prevalence of occult rumors alongside Pentecostalism since the rise of Pentecostalism has led to increasing

interest in the relationship between religion and politics in Ghana.¹⁰ Looking at both as interrelated dimensions of religious politics has broad implications for the study of religion in politics – not only in Ghana but through much of sub-Saharan Africa.

Ghana, Religion, and Politics

The setting of this project is the West African nation of Ghana. Ghana is bordered to the East by Togo, the West by Cote d'Ivoire, the North by Burkina Faso, and the South by the Atlantic Coast or the Gulf of Guinea. Accra is the capital of Ghana. The estimated population of Ghana, as of July 2013, was 25,199,609.¹¹ There are over 46 spoken languages in Ghana, nine of which are written, including the dominant Twi, which is spoken by the Akan people of the south.¹² Formerly called the Gold Coast, and colonized by the British, and many other colonists before them, Ghana gained independence on March 6, 1957, and became a Republic on July 1, 1960. The independence movement was led by the late Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who became the first President of the post-colony in 1957. Ghana is a multi-party nation that conducts presidential and parliamentary elections every four years. My focus in this thesis concerns the major parties in the Fourth Republic – though I draw also upon earlier evidence at times. Since Ghana entered into the Fourth Republican era in 1992 till the present, two major political parties, the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the biggest opposition party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), have dominated the political scene, taking turns in winning general elections. Other much smaller parties, such as the Convention People's Party (CPP), the People's National Convention Party (PNC) and the Progressive People's Party (PPP) have also consistently contested in elections but are less central to my analysis. My thesis addresses rumors about these main parties as well as individual politicians.

Religious beliefs constitute the fundamental basis of Ghanaians' sense of social identity, values, destiny and choice of political leaders, among other things.¹³ Religiously,

¹⁰ Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Indiana University Press, 2004).

¹¹ 'Ghanaweb,' http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/country_information/

¹² Ibid.

¹³ John Kuada and Yao Chachah, Ghana; *Understanding the People and their Culture* (Woeli Publishing Services, 1999), 36.

Ghana is a heterogeneous society, although Pentecostalism shapes Ghanaian public culture. This situation marks a departure from the hitherto independent traditional states whose religious demography was essentially homogeneous.¹⁴ As a heterogeneous society, the Constitution grants Ghanaians freedom of worship and association. According to the results of the 2010 *Population and Housing Census Summary Report*, the religious affiliations of the Ghanaian population were as follows: Catholic (13.1); Protestant—or mission-established Mainline Churches (18.4); Pentecostal/Charismatic (28.3); Other Christian (11.4); Islam (17.6); Traditionalist (5.2); no religion (5.3); and other (0.8).¹⁵ The three major religions in Ghana are Christianity, Islam and Ghanaian Traditional Religion (hereinafter referred to as GTR).¹⁶ The last four decades have witnessed the emergence of religions of Asian, especially Hindu provenances, such as the Sri Sathya Sai Baba, the Unification Church, Ananda Marga and the Nichiren Shoshu Sokka Gakkai in Ghana.¹⁷ These religions are very small—forming a portion of the ‘other’ category of the 2013 religious population census data. A more significant minority, a little over 5% of Ghanaians, claimed no religion. Nevertheless, approximately 95% of the Ghanaian population does subscribe to one religion or another. Christianity is by some distance the largest religion in Ghana.

The Pew Research Center’s *Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals*, which was a study of the influence and reach of Pentecostalism in the public sphere across ten countries in Africa, clearly highlighted that “Pentecostalism has become an increasingly prominent feature of Africa’s religious and political landscape.”¹⁸ According to the survey, Pentecostals in Africa constitute 12% (about 107 million) of the continent’s nearly 890 million people.¹⁹ The report further noted that “even by African standards, the Pentecostal boom

¹⁴ Margaret J. Field, *Akim-Kotoku: An Oman of the Gold Coast* (Westport, Connecticut: Negro Universities Press, 1948).

¹⁵ The report referred to ‘Religion’ as “the individual’s religious affiliation as reported by the respondent, irrespective of the religion of the household head or the head’s spouse or the name of the person. No attempt was made to find out if respondents actually practiced the faith they professed,” 11.

¹⁶ Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘God Bless our Homeland Ghana.’”

¹⁷ Albert Wuaku, *Hindu Gods in West Africa: Ghanaian Devotees of Shiva and Krishna* (Leiden: BRILL, 2013).

¹⁸ Pew Research Center, “Spirit and Power – A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals,” October 5, 2006 <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/overview-pentecostalism-in-africa/>

¹⁹ Ibid.

stands out, and many of Africa's most populous and politically significant countries reflect this trend."²⁰ Among the ten countries surveyed was Ghana, where "the largest Christian church is the Church of Pentecost," one of the classical Pentecostal strands.²¹ Noting the place of the Pentecostal tradition in Ghana, the *World Christian Database* has also named Ghana as one of the countries with a dominant Pentecostal influence since Pentecostals (and charismatics) make up over 20% of the nation's population.²²

In line with the studies cited above about the impact of Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana, the *2010 National Population Census* also showed that Pentecostals form the biggest Christian subgroup and, in fact, represent the largest single religious grouping in Ghana making up 28.3% of the population. With this increase in the Pentecostal demographic "has come the sudden expansion of its efforts to shape politics and public life."²³ By virtue of their influence and reach, Ghanaian Pentecostals have "become increasingly important political actors."²⁴ Birgit Meyer has specifically argued that Pentecostalism plays an important role in Ghanaian public life, to the point of influencing and shaping Ghanaian popular cinema.²⁵ She also links the popularity of talk about the occult in modern Ghana generally and politics specifically to the expansion of Pentecostalism and public visibility of Pentecostals in Ghana.²⁶ This means that although the national census affiliation of Pentecostals stands at 28.3%, this figure belies the extent of Pentecostal influence in Ghana.

Pentecostal religious discourse influences many Ghanaians, including the mainline mission-established churches, which are now becoming "increasingly pentecostalised."²⁷ The

²⁰ Pew Research Center, "Spirit and Power – A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals," October 5, 2006 <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/overview-pentecostalism-in-africa/>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Gifford, *Ghana's new Christianity*.

²⁵ Birgit Meyer, "'Praise the Lord:' Popular Cinema and Pentecostalite Style in Ghana's New Public Sphere." *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Feb., 2004): 92-110.

²⁶ Birgit Meyer, "The Power of Money: Politics, Occult Forces, and Pentecostalism in Ghana," *African Studies Review* Vol. 41, No. 3 (Dec., 1998), 15-37.

²⁷ Cephas Narh Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Church in Ghana* (Boekencentrum, 2002).

extent of this Pentecostal influence in almost all spheres of life in Ghana, including politics, encourages aspirants to political positions to seek the support of Pentecostal churches and leaders, who have become key political power-brokers and sources for legitimation.²⁸ Pastors who command large followings, referred to by Paul Gifford as “Pentecostal Super Stars,” have a voice in political decision-making.²⁹ This influence arises partly from their potential sway over members in convincing them to support a particular political party or politician over others.

According to the census data, Ghanaian traditional religious adherents are a relatively small group, at only 5.2% of the population. This might suggest that the influence of GTR is limited and much less significant than Pentecostal Christianity. But GTR is still a prevalent tradition and is often deeply interwoven into Ghanaian socio-political life, even among affiliates of other religious traditions – including all forms of Christianity. Pentecostals tend to express hostility to a wide range of traditional practices, conceptualizing them as within the realm of the occult. This boundary line between acceptable GTR practices and the “occult” is a key point of contestation within Ghanaian religion; it is a key factor in the construction of occult discourses, and also in political-occult rumors. Although Pentecostals cast some GTR practices as demonic and, therefore, admonish a “complete break” from them, “the indigenous worldview still dominates contemporary African experiences and shapes the character of African Pentecostalism,” including that of Ghana.³⁰ That is, “Pentecostalism has grown because of its cultural fit into indigenous worldviews and its response to the questions that are raised within the interior of the worldviews.”³¹ Thus, GTR still plays a significant role in modern Ghanaian politics, in spite of the Pentecostal influence.

²⁸ Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*.

²⁹ Gifford uses the term to refer to the celebrity status these Pentecostal pastors are enjoying in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa presently.

³⁰ Meyer, ““Complete Break””; Kalu, Ogbu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford Scholarship Online: May 2008), 170.

³¹ Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 170.

The Occult in Postcolonial Africa

Many post-colonial Africanist scholars have attempted to define the occult. James Kiernan, for example, defines it as "a blanket category describing a variety of spiritual actions that are often concealed, obscure, mysterious, secret, and considered to be sinister, or forbidden. It connotes an inversion of ordinary or commonplace spiritual actions."³² Kiernan further explains that many Africans conceptualize the occult realm as a "spiritual world that is made up of ghosts, ghouls, evil spirits, demons, deities and their equally evil human agents."³³ Kiernan's definition of the occult exposes the typical tendency of scholars to treat the occult as a deviation from major religions, like Christianity and Islam. Other scholars have cast the occult as a realm of the magical and not belonging to the realm of 'true religion.'³⁴ There is, therefore, a kind of vagueness and slipperiness about the category "occult," when contrasted with other religious traditions – yet also its significance as a distinct domain.

Although an unorganized portion of Ghana's religious field, the occult is a crucial domain of religious notions and praxis. Unlike the institutionalized religions that fiercely secure their boundaries against infiltrations by practices they consider unorthodox, the modern Ghanaian occult scene features an eclectic mix of religious notions, ritual specialists, formulas, and devices from GTR, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism, to mention just a few of them. The sphere of the occult constitutes a space in which individuals and groups in Ghana, and for that matter, African communities elsewhere, seek answers to the puzzles of their daily experiences, especially dislocations such as poverty, disease, chronic lack of money, and unemployment that render them weak and helpless outside of organized religions. As will be seen later in this thesis, Kiernan's definition is close to how many Ghanaians conceptualize the occult, even though different people will stress different beliefs and practices as the occult.

Present interpretations of what the occult is have evolved in the context of the social, religious and political changes and factors in Ghana's history. Certain elements of Ghanaian

³² James Kiernan, *The Power of the Occult in Modern Africa: Continuity and Innovation in the Renewal of African Cosmologies*, ed. (Lit Verlag, Berlin, 2006), 5.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Aloysius Obiwulu, "Occult Power and Africa's Socio-Economic Problems," (Undated): 69-82; J. Obi Oguejiofor, "Occult Powers and Socio-Economic Dynamic in Nigeria," *Bigard Theological Studies*, (2006): 11.

indigenous religion, deemed as unacceptable beliefs and practices, were characterized as the occult upon the religion's encounter with outsiders—colonial authorities and Christian missionaries—and over the years acquired new meanings and elements with the advent of Pentecostal Christianity. These accumulated meanings inform present usage of the term, “occult,” when people make reference to how it is enlisted by others. While colonization and Christianization were part of the modernizing strategy, post-colonial Ghanaian society has continued to open itself to a host of modernizing and globalizing influences. These include, among other things, the introduction of imported cultures, technological advancement, as well as Eastern religious traditions. All these elements have become part of the modern Ghanaian occult landscape. I expand on the occult's history and evolution in Chapter One.

In Ghana, the occult means different things to different people due to the ambiguity of its reference. Language was therefore very significant in my field interviews and made an enormous difference as to how some of my respondents understood the question about the occult in Ghana. The occult is a Western term and not one that all Ghanaians apprehend. Although ‘juju’ is equally foreign, from the French word, *jouer*, it has become part of Ghanaian local parlance and the popular understanding for and meaning of the occult. Juju is, therefore, the closest equivalent local term and was the one that many of my informants used. As the occult does in English, juju also carries negative connotations to Ghanaians. While a handful of my respondents said juju was not the same as the occult, the majority saw the two as the same. A few argued that the occult was a broader term that encompassed many different evil and socially unacceptable negative forces, beliefs and practices, including juju, but the majority saw juju as the local understanding of the occult; they considered juju as the popular expression for a collectivity of occult practices. Many Ghanaians then understand the occult in terms of juju. This study, therefore, uses the two terms, the occult, and juju, interchangeably, although there are other local names for the phenomenon, such as *edzoe* (Ewe), *eduro* (Twi), and *tsofaa* (Ga). I discuss this further in Section III of Chapter One when I explore some contemporary popular understandings of the occult in Ghana.

Scholars have described the elements that constitute the occult in Africa. Aloysius Obiwulu, for instance, names “witchcraft, sorcery, possession of extraordinary powers, divination and the ability to foretell the future, conjuring the dead, mermaid spirits, juju, the

ability to control various spirits and necromancy” as some of the constituents of the occult.³⁵ Jean and John Comaroff have also made mention of “ritual murder, the sale of human body parts, the putative reproduction of zombies, pyramid schemes, and other financial scams” as some of the elements of the occult.³⁶ In Ghana, there is no consensus on what the occult is constituted of, however. People’s classifications of the occult are shaped by a range of factors, including their level of education, social background, and religious affiliation. Some of my informants distinguished between tradition and the occult. They argued that rituals, such as human sacrifice and anything that “violated human sanctity” were occult, while social and cultural practices, like the celebration of indigenous religious festivals and the pouring of libation, were part of the tradition.³⁷ The latter, considered socially acceptable, are the ones politicians in Ghana are generally comfortable to identify with in public, while they shun the former, deemed socially unacceptable, backward and evil— belonging to the occult realm. The boundaries of social acceptability of the occult are inherently imprecise and variable. Yet, social acceptability remains a powerful shaping force, and one that is apparently intimately connected with popular conceptualizations of the occult in contemporary Ghana.

Although there is no consensus on what elements make up the occult in Ghana, my interview respondents mentioned some of what they thought were its main constituents. These included the pouring of libation, witchcraft, “aduto” (spiritually poisoning someone), sorcery, “sikaduru” (money rituals), the use of charms, amulets, and talisman, ritual murder, human sacrifice, “juju,” “voodoo,” the use of “tukpe” (Ewe word for bullet), incantations, sacrifices to idols, chanting, and invocation of spirits. Other elements included “sakawa” (cyber fraud), being a member of a ‘secret society,’ such as the lodge fraternity and Illuminati, necromancy, the use of “holy” or “Florida water,” burning of incense, Spiritism, and calling on saints.³⁸ Indeed, some informants, especially the Pentecostals, even categorized belonging to non-Christian religious traditions, like Islam and Eastern religions as part of the occult. The

³⁵ Obiwulu, “Occult Power,” 69-82.

³⁶ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, “Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony.” *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1999): 279-303.

³⁷ Damba, interviewed by author, Ajiringanor-Accra, February 20, 2014.

³⁸ Called “Florida Water” because it is believed to have been made in Florida, in the USA. These practices were cited by various respondents.

occult, as many Ghanaians understand it presently, therefore encompasses many different religious beliefs and praxis and other elements and not just that of GTR.

Some of the surviving forms of GTR are: the pouring of libation; offering sacrifices to the gods or ancestors; celebration of traditional festivals; consulting traditional ritualists for help; *aduto/tukpe*; and the use of charms, amulets, and talisman.³⁹ Others are: witch-finding rituals; money-making rituals (*sikaduru*); *Bragoro/Dipo*; naming and funerary rites; divination; invocation of spirits; incantations, the chieftaincy institution; traditional land laws; and marriage rites.⁴⁰ As we can see from this list, most of them were mentioned by my interviewees as elements of the occult in Ghana, as cited previously. However, my informants viewed the chieftaincy institution, traditional naming, marriage, and funerary rites more favorably than the other surviving forms of GTR; they regarded these as perpetuating Ghanaian culture and identity. Even Pentecostals generally do not see these rites as belonging to the realm of the occult and argue that it is only the morally and spiritually backward elements of GTR that they look upon as the occult.

The non-GTR elements considered as the occult are the so-called esoteric beliefs and practices. These include being a member of the lodge fraternity and *Illuminati*, engaging in necromancy, the use of “holy” or “Florida water,” burning of incense, Spiritism, calling on saints, and consulting a *Mallam* for help. These practices are categorized as belonging to non-Christian religious traditions with ‘questionable’ and ‘illegitimate’ spiritual sources, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. The occult may, therefore, mean different things to different people in Ghana, but the sense I got from the definitions and descriptions given by my informants was that although some people see the occult as a vital spiritual resource, it represents spiritual and moral backwardness. Other aspects of the occult are regarded as obscure traditions that do not belong to the realm of a ‘true’ religion, like Christianity.

The occult has evolved over time; different eras have brought about different occults, in the sense that the boundaries of the category have shifted. Scholars, such as Comaroff and Comaroff attribute existing rumors about the occult, its beliefs, and practices to modernity and globalization and, thus, argue that “the occult economy is an integral feature of millennial

³⁹ *Aduto* is the practice whereby you can spiritually poison someone in a bid to seek justice.

⁴⁰ *Bragoro* or *Dipo* are rites that are used to initiate adolescents into adulthood among the Akan of Ghana.

capitalism – that odd fusion of the modern and postmodern.”⁴¹ Others, like Terence Ranger, adopt a different stance. Ranger has contended that instead of scholars attributing the popularity of occult operations and narratives about it to modernity, they should look at its particularity and historicity since every era has its own manifestation of the occult.⁴² Ranger further suggests that scholars “need to discover how and when phenomena are allocated to the category of evil and the realm of the occult.”⁴³ This is because “witchcraft and the occult are only ‘modern’ in the sense that they still exist and respond, as they have always done, to the tensions of African society.”⁴⁴

In Ranger’s view what scholars term as the occult in Africa is not only, if at all, “a product of globalization” and modernity.⁴⁵ There is, therefore, “the need to question the idea that the present is a moment of unprecedented witchcraft [or even occult] fear – it is hard to imagine polities and societies more obsessed with witches [and or occult] than the late nineteenth century Akan.”⁴⁶ It will thus be useful for scholars to distinguish practices associated with the occult today from the category “occult.” This thesis contends that although modernity and globalization account for some of the ideas about the occult in contemporary Ghana, secretive and reputedly malevolent religious practices have always been a part of Ghanaian religiopolitical experience.

Some scholars have highlighted the occult’s influence in post-colonial politics, particularly in relation to the legitimization of political power.⁴⁷ Meyer, in her examination of the occult’s influence in Ghanaian politics, for example, claims that “political conflict in Ghana appears to be cast in terms of a dialectics of divinization and demonization of power.”⁴⁸ Writing on politics in Cameroon, Fisiy and Geschiere, have similarly noted the impact of the

⁴¹ Comaroff and Comaroff, “Occult Economies,” 283.

⁴² Terence Ranger, “Scotland Yard in the Bush: Medicine Murders, Child Witches and the Construction of the Occult: A Literature Review,” *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 77, No. 2 (2007): 272-283.

⁴³ Ibid, 278.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 280.

⁴⁷ Meyer, “The Power of Money”; Okyerefo, Fiaveh and Asante, “Religion as a tool.”

⁴⁸ Meyer, “The Power of Money,” 29.

occult both in the leveling and accumulation of political resources.⁴⁹ Johannes Harnischfeger views politicians' accusing opponents of allegedly using the occult as a pretense because these politicians do not necessarily "believe in the occult, but they just exploit the superstitions of the electorate."⁵⁰ In the same vein, Kiernan is of the view that "the occult is harnessed as a political instrument to attain, maintain, contest, and resist power in the political domain."⁵¹ Political capital, according to Kiernan, "can be gained from supporting popular drives for the suppression of occult dealings."⁵² Hence, he posits that political-occult rumors in Africa are "politically motivated."⁵³ The occult is also regarded by other scholars as a source of political power.⁵⁴

This thesis builds on the existing scholarly literature and shows how rumor helps to reveal the alleged secret operation of the occult in modern African political life. My thesis reveals that the occult is part of the Ghanaian religious landscape and so any study of the relationship between religion and politics in Ghana must factor in the occult, especially rumors about how politicians allegedly engage in its activities for political gains. Additionally, such a study must consider how the Ghanaian electorate also uses political-occult rumors to level the political playing field by deploying them as metaphors to critique and mock political domination and means to have a glimpse into the lives of their otherwise powerful and somewhat distant political elites, which is exactly what this project sets out to do.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Cyprian Fisiy and Peter Geschiere, "Witchcraft, Development, and Paranoia in Cameroon: Interactions between Popular, Academic and State Discourse," in *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, eds. Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders (London/New York: Routledge, 2000): 227.

⁵⁰ Johannes Harnischfeger, "Witchcraft and the State in South Africa," *Anthropos Institute* (2000): 104.

⁵¹ Kiernan, *The Power of the Occult*, 10.

⁵² *Ibid*, 16.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 169.

⁵⁴ Kiernan, *The Power of the Occult*; Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice In Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Isak Niehaus, Elizaar Mohlala and Kally Shokane, *Witchcraft Power and Politics: Exploring the Occult in the South Africa Lowveld* (Pluto Press, 2001).

⁵⁵ Kiernan, *The Power of the Occult*, 10.

Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

Theoretically, Pierre Bourdieu's sociological concepts of *Field*, *Capital* and *Habitus* influence how I frame my analysis of the role of occult rumors in contemporary Ghanaian politics in this thesis. According to Bourdieu, a *field* is an arena for the "struggle to accumulate and monopolize different kinds of capital."⁵⁶ These fields can be political, social, religious, autonomous or inter-related.⁵⁷ The struggle in fields pits those in subordinate positions against those in superordinate positions and "impose on actors specific forms of struggle."⁵⁸ This study frames the political field in Ghana as a competitive arena for the struggle for power – between politicians and the electorate and shows how this field structures the forms and representation of political dynamics.

The term *habitus* was used by Bourdieu to denote "a lasting, generalized and transposable disposition to act in conformity with a (quasi) systematic view of the world and human existence."⁵⁹ The *habitus* is thus "internalized and naturalized as a mode of thought and behavior" and "precedes conscious thought, ordering one's choices and structuring one's activities."⁶⁰ Religion, Bourdieu argued, is an important producer of *habitus*; its discourse, praxis, and even communities inform the ways in which people process their experiences and shape themselves to happenings around them.⁶¹ This thesis casts Pentecostalism as the major producer of the religious *habitus* in Ghana since its influence has become widespread. As the religious phenomenon with the strongest presence in Ghana presently, Pentecostalism informs the lives and lot of many Ghanaians. Pentecostal discourse delegitimizes all non-Pentecostal sources of power and is the lens through which many Ghanaians view the occult.

In relation to politics, Bourdieu suggested that what is at stake for competing actors in a particular *field* is the power to control the worldview of the populace by imposing on

⁵⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Social Space," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 6 (Nov., 1985): 724.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Henrik P. Bang, *Governance as Social and Political Communication*, Ed (Manchester University Press, 2003), 145.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Bradford Verter, "Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu," *Sociological Theory*, (2003): 152.

⁶¹ Verter, "Spiritual Capital," 152; Bourdieu, "The Force of Law," 121.

them a particular religious *habitus*.⁶² While Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* is useful in helping us understand the impact of a particular religious *habitus*, in this case, Pentecostalism, in shaping opinions in Ghana, I argue that a religious *habitus* need not always be imposed on populations, since an existing religious *habitus* can also be manipulated. In Ghana, Pentecostalism is not necessarily imposed on the populace by politicians, but is the mainstay of the religious culture and informs the way many Ghanaians, including politicians, view the occult. This view of the occult also informs their attitudes to political-occult rumors.

Competition for *capital*, which encapsulates assets other than money and property, according to Bourdieu, is a crucial feature of fields and entails actors to maneuver and struggle for desirable resources.⁶³ The political sphere of Ghana is an arena for the struggle that pits political actors against one another.⁶⁴ What is at stake in this struggle, as far as political elites are concerned, is votes that in turn translate into access to political power and for the populace, it is to resist political domination. For Bourdieu gaining *capital* involves using every means at one's disposal to attain power and for Ghanaian politicians, they spin occult rumors about both themselves and their opponents to acquire the perks that come with political power, such as "prestige, status, and authority."⁶⁵ But the Ghanaian electorate is not entirely credulous and also uses the rumors to level the playing field; they deploy them as "weapons of the weak"—metaphors to critique, contest and deride political action and behavior.⁶⁶ In this study, I outline some of the forms of political advantage that are gained through the deployment of occult rumors by both politicians and the populace in Ghana.

Methodologically, I made use of ethnography in collecting the data for this thesis. I spent a considerable amount of time in Accra, the capital of Ghana, to gather data for this project during my fieldwork from November 2013 to March 2014. Since this is a thesis on popular notions and rumors about the perceived influence of the occult in contemporary Ghanaian politics, I used a range of informants, including Pentecostals, Muslims, Ghanaian

⁶² Bourdieu, "The Force of Law," 121.

⁶³ Bourdieu, "The Social Space."

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Terry Rey, *Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy* (Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2007), 51.

⁶⁶ James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press, 1985).

traditional religious adherents, and non-Pentecostal Christians, which I believe gave me sufficient range of representative views. These informants comprised of students, businessmen and women, public servants, teachers, mechanics, housewives, the self-employed, the educated and uneducated people. Some of them claimed to be supporters of the various political parties in Ghana, especially the NPP and NDC, while others said they did not belong to any particular party.

I knew a few of my interview respondents, but also made use of gatekeepers who led me to the majority of my informants. I was fortunate that some people were fascinated about and became particularly interested in the subject matter of this research and convinced their friends and relatives to participate in the interviews. This is why although I initially set out to interview about 30 people, I ended up with fifty-eight (58) informants. For a detailed list of my interview respondents and their description, see the List of Participants under Primary Sources in Bibliography. The majority of the interviews were with individuals, while a few, such as the one with the basketball club in Nungua, were conducted in group settings. The group interviews generated much debate, which made it easy for me to get different and varying perspectives from the respondents involved. The interviews focused on my informants' personal religious experiences, and their understandings of the occult, its influence in politics and their views on rumors about it (see Appendix A for sample interview questions). During these conversations, apart from the general occult rumors that were not political, my informants relayed to me many rumors about political-occult practices. Eighty-seven (87) distinct rumors were recounted to me by my informants and are listed in Appendix B, according to type.⁶⁷

I have grouped the eighty-seven political-occult rumors related to me by my informants into three main categories.⁶⁸ They are rumors that: (1) politicians use to denigrate opponents; (2) demonstrate politicians invoking the occult positively; and (3) show that politicians use occult 'ways and means' to win elections. The rumors that denigrate

⁶⁷ The rumors exclude those I encountered in newspapers and in personal conversations.

⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that some of these rumors have already been reported by the Ghanaian media, as I will demonstrate in Chapters Four and Five. These political-occult rumors may then be my interviewers repeating some of the stories the media has already put out there about the alleged occult invocation by some politicians in Ghana, although their versions differed quite a bit from the ones already reported by the media.

opponents (Type 1) are the ones my informants interpreted as those allegedly spread by political actors as part of their political gimmicks of discrediting opponents. Such rumors cast aspersions on the alleged political use of the occult by political opponents to portray them in a negative light in the eyes of the electorate and as a result influence the outcome of elections. An example of this type of rumor is that: “Rawlings used the occult and had a lot of occult elements in the castle, which was why when Kufuor became President, he had to have the whole castle/seat of government spiritually cleansed before occupying it- with the help of Pentecostal pastors.”⁶⁹ The goal of this denigration is to depict the alleged perpetrators—politicians—as better alternatives to vote for. These rumors make the politicians appear as the ones who can be trusted to win power through ‘legitimate’ means and not the occult.

Type 2 of the rumors demonstrate how some Ghanaian politicians invoke the occult in a positive way, in spite of the anti-occult rhetoric, spearheaded by Pentecostals. The politicians in question use the rumors to seek justice by imprecating individuals and groups who they claim to have accused them wrongly, cast themselves as having a powerful persona on account of the supposed occult powers backing them, and enforce loyalty by using occult threats to coerce people into voting for them.⁷⁰ For instance, Kwame Nkrumah has been rumored to have “ruled the nation with the help of Kankan Nyame, a god he imported from Guinea, which was why many people feared him at the time.”⁷¹ But this tendency of Ghanaian political elites associating with the occult, instead of avoiding it, is not a common feature in politicians’ strategic positioning with the occult and rumors about it. Avoidance of the occult and rumors about it is the norm while embracing them is the anomaly.

The third category of political-occult rumors highlights some of the occult deals political elites purportedly engage in, popularly referred to in Ghana as ‘ways and means,’ to win or retain power due to their political ambition. These involve individual politicians and political parties purportedly manipulating the electoral process spiritually in their favor. They do this by consulting juju or occult ritual specialists for directions about how they can

⁶⁹ Kofi Halm, interviewed by author, Nyamekye-Accra, February 12, 2014.

⁷⁰ Such rumors, as I will show in Chapter Three, are viewed with cynicism and construed as ensuring the public fears the politicians involved and to keep detractors and opponents at bay.

⁷¹ Osikani, interviewed by author, Fadama-Accra, February 6, 2014.

incapacitate troublesome political opponents, 'charm' or hypnotize the electorate to vote for them or sometimes for the ritualists to send occult spiritual forces, in the form of dwarves or goblins, to cast votes for them on Election Day. An example of this type of rumor is the one that alleges that: "In the run-up to the 2012 elections, the leadership of some of the parties went to Benin to consult an occult agent for powers and were asked by the occult agent to eat the fresh carcass of an animal that has been ritually killed."⁷² In the secular sense, 'ways and means' can also mean some of the shady and secret deals, apart from the occult, politicians engage in to win crucial elections. Such 'ways and means' include political actors conniving with the Electoral Commission to rig elections in their favor, buying votes with money or bringing in people from either neighboring communities or countries to vote for them.

Out of the eighty-seven (87) political-occult rumors cited by my informants, forty-one (41) of them were on Type 3 (occult 'ways and means'). This very high number confirmed the popular perception among the Ghanaian populace about the alleged political use of the occult and demonstrates that no political party or individual politician is exempt from occult rumors. The second most popular type of political-occult rumors are the ones that denigrate political opponents (28) and shows the tendency of politicians to distance themselves from the occult and rumors about it, while they associate political opponents with same. But how have these rumors changed over time and how has the negative Pentecostal discourse influenced this change? While the subjects of many of the new rumors have changed, their contents have not. The present rumors are, therefore, either new versions of old ones or about new subjects. These political-occult rumors, I suggest here, have now rather become more visible and widespread by virtue of the fact that everyone is talking about them due to the constant media reportage and popular negative Pentecostal discourse on the occult and its purported links with and influence in modern Ghanaian politics. Moreover, like the older rumors, most of the elements considered as part of the occult that politicians allegedly engage in for political successes in the new rumors are also GTR elements. I demonstrate these political-occult rumor types in the succeeding chapters of the thesis.

⁷² Hassan, interviewed by author, Ajiringanor-Accra, February 20, 2014.

The information gathered from my research interviews constitute the primary data for this project. I continued to be in touch with some of my major respondents through telephone conversations after the conclusion of my field research. The identities of my interviewees are protected through the use of pseudonyms throughout the thesis. The political and religious leanings and their lack thereof of my participants were significant. As we will see in the discussion that follows, my participants' religious leanings informed their general views of the occult and politicians' alleged links with it. Their political biases also influenced how they answered the questions I posed about their perceptions of politicians' alleged involvement in occult activities. In a nutshell, the religious backgrounds, political leanings, and sometimes the level of education, of my interview respondents informed their attitudes to political-occult rumors.

In addition to scholarly literature on the occult in contemporary Africa, I also sampled excerpts from popular Ghanaian newspapers, such as *The Daily Graphic*, *The Spectator*, *The Chronicle*, *The Ghanaian Times*, *The-Hajj*, and *The Ghanaian Free Press* and online news sources, including 'Modernghana.com,' 'Peacefmonline.com,' and 'Myjoyonline.com.' These news outlets feature political stories daily and weekly. Moreover, I used excerpts from popular Ghanaian and Nigerian movies, such as *The Chosen One* (1 and 2) and its sequel, *Beware of Wonders* (1 and 2) that portray how individuals allegedly obtain their wealth, prestige, and power – including political power—through the occult.⁷³ As a Ghanaian who has witnessed six presidential and parliamentary elections in the past two and a half decades, I drew on my personal reflections on modern Ghanaian politics to analyze the data used in this research.

The ethnic make-up of my interview respondents was mostly Akan with a few informants from other ethnicities, like Ga, Ewe, Dagomba, and Hausa. The Akan make up the majority of Ghanaians and their language, Twi, is the most widely spoken language. In view of this, the most important language to this study was Twi, which is also my mother tongue. The second most important language was English, Ghana's official language. About half of my

⁷³ Popular Nigerian movies found on the YouTube channel online https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=the+chosen+one+nigerian+movie.

interviews, especially those with lecturers, religious leaders, students and informants who could not communicate in Twi, were conducted in English and the other half in Twi. I have employed a personal narrative writing style in this thesis that helped me to situate myself in the text and demonstrate how I interacted with my interviewees; it also enabled the voices and perspectives of my informants to emerge in the text.

Thesis Outline

Religion has always been a part of Ghanaian traditional life, but the category “occult” is a new one and has evolved through different eras of Ghana’s history. The colonial and Christian missionary enterprises in Ghana, then the Gold Coast, and their negative characterization of certain GTR elements they regarded as irreligious and anti-social eventually brought about the usage of the negative term, “occult.” This notion is now perpetuated in Ghana by Pentecostal Christianity through its discourse that informs the way many Ghanaians see the world, including their negative views about the occult. Chapter one of this study sketches the history of the category “occult” in Ghana—from pre-colonial times to present—and shows how over the years the term has evolved and taken on newer meanings and elements. It demonstrates the key influences on contemporary Ghanaian popular understandings of the occult and how these affect the nation’s politics presently.

Rumor, be it verbal or published, occupies an important place in Ghanaian socio-political life. Apart from serving as a source of news, it has the potential to shape public opinion about politicians and political institutions, especially ideas about their alleged dealings with the occult. Chapter Two examines the influence of rumors generally in Ghanaian socio-political life. It looks at what rumor is, its character as news, the media for its transmission, the natural compatibility between rumor, religion, and the occult, its influence in politics, and some of the elements that account for the believability of political (occult) rumors. It also explores some of the ways in which the Ghanaian public uses specifically occult rumors as important “weapons of the weak” to resist political authority.⁷⁴

Political-occult rumors can influence public opinion about political actors, but the Ghanaian public expresses a variety of attitudes to such rumors. While some of them readily

⁷⁴ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.

accept the rumors as true at face value, others have become suspicious of them and treat the rumors with cynicism. The people who accept the rumors at face value consider that the occult is everywhere, everyone uses it irrespective of their religious affiliation and politicians are no exception. Those who treat the rumors with cynicism have typically become skeptical of politics in general and blame their sensational reportage by the media. Others are cynical due to their political affiliation, but the public image of a politician can also influence cynical attitudes to occult rumors about them. Chapters Three and Four explore these two disparate attitudes of Ghanaians to political-occult rumors. Chapter Three demonstrates what accounts for the authority of truth of rumors alleging political use of the occult that makes people accept them, while Chapter Four shows why some Ghanaians have become cynical of such rumors.

Politicians in Ghana either avoid or embrace the occult and its concomitant rumors for political advantage. The politicians who avoid the occult do so by either associating opponents with it or denying rumors about their own links with the occult due to the Pentecostal influence in Ghana and the perceived moral and spiritual backwardness of the occult. But their avoidance of the occult is to deflect criticisms and gain trust, as a result of which they delegitimize opponents and become the bearers of important news. While it is rare, a few politicians sometimes identify with the occult in public, despite widespread anti-occult rhetoric due to the occult's positive characteristics of being a neutral and trusted space for adjudication, a truth and lie detector, and the deliverer of instant justice. But such politicians also demonstrate their identity as true and proud Ghanaians and leverage the power of the occult by touting themselves as the ones with supernatural occult power backing them. Others seek to gain trust among the electorate as the ones who are honest to come clean of their occult use and generate news to ensure their names and profiles constantly stay in the media. The fifth and final chapter looks at this political utilization of the occult in Ghana.

My research began on the assumption that most of the things Ghanaians claim to happen in the so-called secret world of the occult could be speculative rather than factual. Thus, since the veracity of claims about the occult activity of Ghanaian politicians cannot be readily proven, I focused on rumors about the occult, instead of actual political-occult practice. The problem of proof has led me to consider as rumors even stories that are reported by the Ghanaian media as actual statements or actions of politicians; indeed, many

such stories derive initially from hearsay. But while rumors cannot be taken as truth claims in themselves, in the context of the Ghanaian socio-political space, rumors do not only exist; but constitute important forms of public discourse. I show in this project how rumors have become the lens through which certain seemingly hidden and or strange occurrences are communicated and made sense of in the highly religious political field of Ghana. The chapters that follow demonstrate the influence of narratives (rumors) about the occult in postcolonial Ghanaian politics. I explore the history and evolution of the occult in Ghana next.

CHAPTER ONE

THE OCCULT IN GHANA: ITS HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

This chapter argues that the colonial and Christian missionary enterprises in what was then the Gold Coast, and their negative characterization of some aspects of the indigenous religion eventually brought about the usage of the term “occult.”⁷⁵ This negative view of some aspects of Ghanaian traditional religion (GTR) as representations of the occult is now widely held in Ghana by Pentecostal Christianity, despite the fact that GTR still plays a role in almost all aspects of life. This significant role of GTR in Ghanaian socio-political life is not new but has historical precedence. In the pre-colonial era of Ghana’s history traditional religion safeguarded “the security, unity, and cohesion of the group” and the “establishment of social and moral order.”⁷⁶ Although Ghanaian Pentecostals still perpetuate the colonial and mission Christian notions about GTR as the occult, they have broadened the category of what is the occult in postcolonial Ghana by adding other non-Christian elements to it. This chapter sketches the history of the occult in Ghana and demonstrates how colonial, Christian and Pentecostal religious expressions have shaped its popular contemporary understandings. It suggests that any history of the occult in Ghana must also be a history of the construct and its changing meanings. The historicity of the occult is necessary for us to understand the context for its present understandings and why rumors about it have become so prevalent and important in post-colonial Ghanaian political life.

This chapter is divided into three major sections that trace the history of the occult in Ghana and highlight changes in the ways in which the term has been construed from pre-colonial times to the present. The first section explores GTR’s role in pre-colonial Ghana. In order to know the role of GTR in pre-colonial Ghana, we need to consider the issue of sources or evidence for pre-colonial religious beliefs and practices. One may well ask that: since most

⁷⁵ It is worth noting here that colonial and Christian missions were preceded by Islamic explorers in Africa, who also looked down on the religious traditions of the natives. Thus, the negative misrepresentations of African religious beliefs and practices by 14th century Islamic explorers, such as Ibn Battuta, set the stage for how the European colonists and Christian missionaries also treated African traditional religions. The colonial authorities and Christian missionaries came to Africa with their own prejudices about the African peoples and their religions.

⁷⁶ Max Assimeng, *Social Structure of Ghana: A Study in Persistence and Change* (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1999 second ed.), 51.

of our knowledge of early Ghanaian society came from missionaries and other Europeans, how can we know anything about pre-colonial religious traditions? Some of the information presented in this chapter comes from African sources, but as we will see, most are derived from accounts by European writers. Interestingly, many of the religious beliefs and practices they wrote about earlier persist in postcolonial Ghana, as demonstrated by some of the responses from my interview respondents. Although I present some primary data in this chapter, I draw largely on secondary literature in talking about pre-colonial, colonial and even contemporary scenes. The second section examines the encounter of GTR with colonialism, mission Christianity and later Pentecostalism and how these outside elements formulated ideas about the occult. The final section investigates some contemporary popular meanings and understandings of the occult in Ghana.

Section I: The Role of Ghanaian Traditional Religion in Pre-colonial Ghana

This section proposes that the category, “occult,” was created in the colonial encounter. Before that time, Ghanaian Traditional Religion (GTR) was central to Ghanaian cultural life. In other words, GTR was part of their socio-political life, since the adherents did not regard religion as a separate aspect of their culture and existence. This is not to say that there were not aspects of the religion that corresponded, or at least approximated, the idea of the occult. There were certain elements, such as witchcraft and sorcery that were set aside as malevolent and deviant even by the indigenous people themselves before GTR’s encounter with Europeans and Christianity. However, the conceptions of the occult that shape contemporary understandings in Ghana were forged in the colonial era as colonialists and Christian missionaries reinterpreted the traditional religion in particular, mostly negative, ways.

In order to appreciate the new understandings and meanings Ghanaians attach to the occult presently, it is necessary to first consider the character and functions of GTR in the pre-colonial era. It was through this religion that the Akan, the largest of Ghana’s ethnic groups, for instance, communicated with the Supreme God, referred to in their language, Twi, as “Onyame” or “Onyankopon” and his lesser gods, called, “Abosom” for various ends.⁷⁷ The succeeding paragraphs of this section discuss some of the ways in which GTR’s spiritual power

⁷⁷ Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, (FEP International Private Limited, 1978).

was used to meet the day-to-day needs, including the legitimization of political power, of pre-colonial Ghanaians.

Using GTR spiritual power, traditional religious ritual specialists tapped into the spiritual realm to help their clientele with both material and spiritual challenges. These needs included, but not limited to, “the protection to render innocuous the possible effects of witchcraft and black magic... cure or prevent misfortunes or illness... purification of the soul or for the purpose of warding off evil spirits.”⁷⁸ The goal of these was to guarantee the safety, protection, and prosperity of both individuals and the community, among other things. The spiritual power in GTR was also used by pre-colonial soldiers, traditionally referred to as, “Asafo companies,” among the Akan to win wars.⁷⁹ In those days, success in wars was not based on the military or strategic skills or expertise of the warring factions, but on the potency of the spiritual power backing them. This is because the wars were either won or lost in the spiritual realm before they were even fought in the physical world. These warring factions consulted indigenous religious ritual agents who gave them potions and instructions as to how and when to strike upon their enemies in order to win the wars. When any of the instructions were flouted, it meant dire consequences for the community. Winning a war, therefore, cemented the supremacy of the gods of the winning faction; it also underscored the important role of GTR in the military escapades and warfare in pre-colonial Ghana.

Indigenous healers in pre-colonial Ghana also relied heavily on the spiritual power found in GTR to heal individuals, families and whole communities of their ailments. In the Ghanaian traditional religious worldview, especially among the Akan, almost all physical illnesses were seen as having a spiritual dimension to them and were treated as such. Even though purely material causes of illnesses were sometimes identified and acknowledged, when an illness was severe or manifested some particular symptoms, it was believed that the afflicted person had to be sick spiritually before it manifested physically. The idea was that when someone became sick, the person’s soul or spirit (*sunsum*) was sick as well. This was because in traditional Ghanaian understanding “whatever happens to a person has a spiritual

⁷⁸ Joseph Brookman-Amissah, *The traditional education of the indigenous priesthood in Ghana*. Department of Educational Foundations (University of Cape Coast, 1975).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

dimension” to it.⁸⁰ This understanding called for a holistic approach to the treatment of sicknesses.⁸¹ Indigenous religious healers were thus consulted to find cures and to prescribe both preventative and protective measures. Ritual specialists were also asked to diagnose whether someone was a witch or not. When a person was found to be a witch, he/she was exorcized.⁸² If the person resisted exorcism, they were either banished from the community or killed—sometimes by burning them alive; alternatively, when suspects died their bodies were mutilated before burial.⁸³ In this way, the supernatural power found in GTR was used for both medical and witch-finding purposes in pre-colonial Ghana.

The term, “witch” or “obayifo” in Twi, was a pre-colonial word. Witches were treated in the aforementioned ways because their activities were categorized as malevolent and anti-social. That is, “most Akan believed witchcraft was a threat that had to be combated.”⁸⁴ There is a link between traditional “witchcraft” and the idea of the occult in later times in Ghana’s history. Although pre-colonial Ghanaians did not regard their religious tradition as the occult, some forms of engagement with supernatural power were more acceptable than others. GTR was an integral dimension of Ghanaian culture, including political life, but the manipulation and management of both constructive and malevolent spiritual power were central concerns to its adherents. What counted as “witchcraft” consisted of certain practices of imputed nefarious intent; there were certain socially unacceptable personal attributes, such as greed, envy and sometimes abnormal physical appearance that made individuals susceptible to charges of witchcraft.⁸⁵ Secrecy was also a factor of witchcraft accusations in pre-colonial Ghana. The category of witchcraft, then, provides some kind of bridge to later notions of and about the occult in Ghana, since certain elements of the occult are characterized by many

⁸⁰ Meyer, “Religious and Secular,” 96.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² T.C. McCaskie, “Sakrobundi ne Abrewa: Sie Kwaku the Witch-Finder in the Akan World,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, Historical Society of Ghana New Series*, No. 8 (2004): 87, 116. See also Noel Q. King, *African Cosmos: An Introduction to Religion in Africa*, (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1986), 72; M.F.C. Bourdillon, “Witchcraft and Society,” in *African Spiritualities: Forms, Meanings and Expressions*, Ed Jacob K. Olupona, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002): 176.

⁸³ T.C. McCaskie, “Sakrobundi ne Abrewa,” 87.

⁸⁴ Natasha Gray, “Witches, Oracles, and Colonial Law: Evolving Anti-Witchcraft Practices in Ghana, 1927-1932,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2001): 363.

⁸⁵ Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*.

contemporary Ghanaians as a phenomenon shrouded in secrecy. This is why it is important to distinguish between what elements can be classified as the occult—unacceptable practices that are potentially manipulative and “violate human sanctity”—and ones that perpetuate indigenous Ghanaian religious traditions.⁸⁶

Furthermore, supernatural powers found in GTR were held to be present in the solution of a myriad of both spiritual and mundane problems, including the individual or the group’s safety and protection, fruit of the womb, marital issues, and financial problems. When there was an epidemic, often believed to be unleashed on the community by the gods due to their displeasure with individuals or the community, the traditional priests were consulted to find a solution to it.⁸⁷ During famine or drought, as well, these ritualists were sought to perform rituals to avert the crises. Ritual specialists sometimes led the community in “rain making” rituals to plead with the gods to bring down rain to end the drought in order for the community to have a bounty harvest in the coming year.⁸⁸ My respondents indicated that such practices obtain to this day in Ghana, especially in the rural areas, where people consult traditional religious ritualists for help with both spiritual and everyday problems.⁸⁹

Local hunters also needed GTR spiritual power to aid them in their daily expeditions. They believed that there were evil spirits roaming the forests and sometimes many of their prey were evil spirits, who intended to harm them, while some were their gods who manifested themselves as wild animals. Hunters, therefore, needed spiritual eyes to decipher what was a real animal and what was a spirit. Besides, the hunters needed spiritual power to stand up to and defeat the evil spirits they came in contact with in the forest. In the light of all these, hunters had to fortify themselves with powerful charms, amulets, talisman, and verbal incantations infused with spiritual power in order to be successful in their trade.⁹⁰ They also required the gods to lead them to their prey and grant them the ability to overpower

⁸⁶ Damba, Ajiringanor-Accra.

⁸⁷ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 165.

⁸⁸ Ranger, “Scotland Yard in the Bush,” 276.

⁸⁹ Hassan, interviewed by author, Ajiringanor-Accra, February 20, 2014; Salaam, interviewed by author, Legon-Accra, January 18, 2014; Damba, Ajiringanor-Accra; Saaka, interviewed by author, Legon-Accra, February 14, 2014.

⁹⁰ McCaskie, “Sakrobundi ne Abrewa,” 118.

them. The supernatural power found in GTR was thus useful in helping local hunters in their hunting expeditions to ensure both their safety and success in pre-colonial Ghana.

Religion and politics also went hand-in-hand in pre-colonial Ghana, whereby aspirants to traditional stools invoked their traditional gods for legitimation. As Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Harr have noted, religion has “always been a factor of Ghanaian traditional politics.”⁹¹ GTR was then not only used to meet the social and economic needs of Ghanaians, especially the Akan, in pre-colonial times but was also instrumental in local politics. Kwame Gyekye has argued that there is no distinction between African life and religion; that is, there is no difference between the sacred and the profane in African religious thought because religion informs all other aspects of the life of the traditional African, including politics.⁹² This is why the chief was and still is both the spiritual and political head of his people, making his position a sacred one.⁹³

In pre-colonial Ghana, when local authority and political power were in the hands of chiefs and queen mothers, aspirants to traditional stools or skins consulted religious ritual experts or oracles to divine and determine whether they would occupy the throne or not. If their chances of success were found to be slim, they would solicit the help of powerful traditional religious ritual agents who would mar their opponents’ chances.⁹⁴ Often this intervention was by way of changing the minds of the decision-makers spiritually through the use of charms.⁹⁵ The practical uses of the occult in Ghanaian traditional politics also included rulers consulting ritual specialists for reasons related to warfare, land disputes, the security of the chief, to combat adversaries, and in the general day-to-day affairs of the people, to mention just a few. Traditional religion was also at the heart of pre-colonial Ghanaian law, as R.S. Rattray famously illustrated in the case of the Ashanti.⁹⁶ This was because the people did

⁹¹ Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power- Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 48.

⁹² Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Dupuis, Joseph, *Journal of a Residence in Ashantee* (London, 1824), 114-17.

⁹⁵ Comfort Max-Wirth, *Pentecostalism and Politics in Ghana: The Manipulation of Pentecostal Symbols for Political Gains in Ghana’s Parliamentary and Presidential Elections from 1992-2008*, MA Thesis, Florida International University, USA, (2010): 27-28.

⁹⁶ R.S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (London: Oxford University Pres, 1929/1956).

not separate their religion from the laws that governed them, thus confirming the notion that religion forms the basis of Ghanaian action and thought.⁹⁷

The pervasive influence of GTR in pre-colonial Ghanaian socio-political life illustrates that the beliefs and practices considered to be occult—and therefore negative and backward—in contemporary Ghana are not entirely equivalent to the traditional religion of the people as they knew it. This is because even though it appears that GTR has been assigned to the margins of modern Ghanaian politics, it was more mainstream and enjoyed socio-political prestige in pre-colonial Ghana. GTR was crucial and was not deemed as negative; its spiritual power was rather regarded as a neutral power that individuals, groups, and communities used for either benevolent or malevolent ends, depending on who was using it.⁹⁸ GTR beliefs and practices helped pre-colonial Ghanaians to cope with mundane and spiritual issues of life. It was not until the advent of the colonial, missionary and later Pentecostal Christian enterprises in Ghana that some aspects of the traditional religion came to be seen as the occult. I discuss how the occult was formulated by colonialists, mission Christians and Pentecostals and how these notions have influenced present understandings of the occult in Ghana in the section that follows.

Section II: Colonial, Missionary and Pentecostal Formulations of the Occult

This section is an examination of the colonial, missionary and Pentecostal formulations of the occult that have influenced its contemporary popular understandings in Ghana. In 1471, Portuguese explorers arrived on the shores of present-day Ghana. It was these Portuguese who named the land the 'Gold Coast' due to the abundance of gold at the time. The Portuguese were followed by other Europeans – the French, the Dutch, the Danes, and finally the British from the sixteenth century. Colonialism—particularly the period of British intervention, increasing influence and rule from the nineteenth century—ensued, and lasted until the middle of the twentieth century. The colonialists, upon their encounter with the indigenous people, were “tangential or even dismissive—of the beliefs, the ideas, the emotions, and the concerns of popular or folk culture,” even to the point of discrediting their

⁹⁷ Rattray, *Ashanti Law*.

⁹⁸ Meyer, “Religious and Secular,” 95.

religion.⁹⁹ Colonialism, therefore, played a major role in shaping negative views about GTR, and in defining the nature of the occult in Ghana.¹⁰⁰ Contemporary understandings of Ghanaian indigenous religious culture draw upon the hostile critiques developed by the colonists and Christian missionaries. In particular, much of GTR is construed as “the occult” or “juju,” terms that delegitimize the religion as superstitious, implying that it is harmful, spiritually and materially, as well as being antagonistic towards the legitimate religion of the Christian majority. I discuss the attitudes of the colonial authorities first, rather than the Christian missionaries, in this section because the colonialists had the power to enact laws against specific indigenous practices, which in turn benefited the Christian missionaries’ efforts at evangelizing the natives.

In their efforts to denigrate the people’s religion, as they did in all the places they colonized in Africa, the colonialists used derogatory terms, such as “ancestor worship,” “superstition,” “animism,” “paganism,” “primitive,” “savage,” “heathenism,” “idolatry,” and the most popular of all, “fetishism” to describe the indigenous religion.¹⁰¹ These labels stemmed from ignorance and ethnocentrism, but they were also used to justify the colonization of the African continent, generally, and Ghana, specifically. These labels explain, in part, why the Europeans saw colonialism as an “Unqualified Blessing for Africa.”¹⁰² The belittling terms later evolved and were all put under the umbrella of the occult. T.C. McCaskie, for example, traced the popularization of the usage of the term “occult” in Ghana to the late nineteenth century, when the colonial authorities wanted to suppress beliefs and practices they considered to be superstitious and most importantly “occult.”¹⁰³ McCaskie cited the

⁹⁹ McCaskie, “Anti-witchcraft cults in Asante,” 145.

¹⁰⁰ I may be using “colonialists” and “colonialism” in a very broad and somewhat reductionist way, which may have heuristic value, but for the purposes of this study, I am conflating the whole colonial encounter into this generalized characterization.

¹⁰¹ McCaskie, “Sakrobundi and Abrewa,” 116; John Parker, “Witchcraft and Trans-Regional Ritual Innovation in Early Colonial Ghana: Sakrobundi and Abrewa, 1889-1910,” *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2004): 399; David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in South Africa* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1996); Natasha Gray, “Witches, Oracles, and Colonial Law: Evolving Anti-Witchcraft Practices in Ghana, 1927-1932,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2001): 346.

¹⁰² A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 108.

¹⁰³ McCaskie, “Anti-witchcraft cults in Asante.”

example of how the colonial District Commissioner of Obuasi in the early 1900s described the witch-finding cult, Sakrubundi, as: “The fetish is not of Ashanti origin. It has been imported and hawked around the various villages by an Apollonian who has sold it and its occult powers.”¹⁰⁴ The spiritual foundations of Sakrubundi were considered both foreign and inauthentic, but the assertion also suggests that “authentic” GTR might not be “occult.”¹⁰⁵

Consequently, the British colonial authorities took a stance in the late 19th century against Sakrubundi and the other witch-finding shrines by banning them and imprisoning their adherents. As McCaskie claimed, the attitude of the colonial authorities was due to the potential of the traditional religious movements making blacks equal to whites, although they did it under the guise of clamping down on religious practices that went against “societal order.”¹⁰⁶ Meyer has also aptly suggested that:

Those religious ideas and practices deemed detrimental to societal order were suppressed, if necessary by force. The colonial administration, in other words, distinguished not only between—and introduced the categories of — ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ religion, but also ‘good’ and ‘bad’ religion.¹⁰⁷

Certain GTR beliefs and practices, then, did not fit perfectly into the colonialists’ modernizing project.¹⁰⁸ Although at the time some chiefs defended one of the shrines, Aberewa, that “it was a protector of human life, a force for good, a calming influence, and did not ‘break the laws,’” the colonial authorities went ahead to ban it along with other shrines.¹⁰⁹ Ranger has contended that:

Ideas of the British colonial authorities about Sie Kwaku [the founder of the Aberewa Shrine] were an ideological, but unreflective bundling together of stereotypes about native cupidity and superstition and reflected no serious interest in or knowledge of the movements’ beliefs and motives.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ McCaskie, “Sakrobundi ne Abrewa,” 143.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ McCaskie, “Anti-witchcraft cults in Asante,” 140; Meyer, “Religious and Secular,” 89-90.

¹⁰⁷ Meyer, “Religious and Secular,” 89-90.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ McCaskie, “Sakrobundi ne Abrewa,” 118.

¹¹⁰ Ranger, “Scotland Yard,” 279.

The colonial authorities, therefore, did not take their time to understand the religious traditions of the natives and, as a result, classified some of them as the occult.

The witch-finding movements' adherents resisted colonial authority even after they were banned by secretly indulging in their practices, which highlighted the tenacity of GTR in colonial Ghana.¹¹¹ This points to another dimension of the occult, which is its secrecy. Anti-witchcraft activity and colonial policy conspired to drive certain practices that had previously been more visible and accepted underground. In other words, the colonial environment affected religious practice, making previously visible practices secretive and rendering them more liable to be viewed as the occult. The colonial creation of the occult both engendered and exacerbated the secrecy of the occult. Colonialist critiques, therefore, addressed the secrecy that surrounded certain GTR practices that were driven underground, which was not a factor before. The colonialists were suspicious of the authenticity and efficacy of so-called secretive GTR practices. Consequently, the term, "occult," came to reference allegedly inauthentic and impotent religious practices, which seemed at odds with its fearsome reputation in the colonial era. Due to the supposed secrecy about GTR practices that colonialists interpreted as the occult, rumor provided the needed access to them. Rumor still acts as the avenue of access into the alleged secret realm of the occult and politicians' involvement in its activities in Ghana, which is the focus of this study.

Christian missionary and colonialist use of the term, "occult," was not entirely interchangeable with their understanding of traditional religion. The term was then not a precise synonym for GTR in its entirety. This is because only certain aspects of GTR were especially emphasized by them when describing the practices as occult—practices such as those that involved cursing people, killing or ritual murders. For example, Natasha Gray has argued that "when the British colonized the Gold Coast in 1874, they declared that native customs would be respected except those repugnant to natural justice and morality."¹¹² Although their intention may have been questionable, this means that GTR practices that the Europeans found most abhorrent and, therefore, "detrimental to societal order" were the

¹¹¹ Natasha Gray, "Independent Spirits: The Politics of Policing Anti-Witchcraft Movements in Colonial Ghana, 1908-1927," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 35, Fasc. 2 (May, 2005): 139 – 158.

¹¹² Gray, "Witches, Oracles, and Colonial Law," 363.

ones that they spoke of as the occult.¹¹³ But the colonial authorities may have suppressed the traditional beliefs and practices they considered as threatening their rule and had the potential to prevent the natives from leaving behind their religion to follow Christianity, but encouraged the ones, like the chieftaincy institutions, that facilitated their strategy of “Indirect Rule.”¹¹⁴

The British banned the witch-finding movements by way of suppressing them, but according to McCaskie, they:

Were not successful in their mission to silence the followers of Abrewa and the other shrines, because they later came to terms with the fact that the beliefs and practices they (colonial authorities) categorized as occult formed part of the religion of the people and they, therefore, loosened their grip.¹¹⁵

My position here is that even though the colonialists “loosened their grip” on the movements at that time, the negative labels they used to describe some elements of GTR still linger on and continue to have a hold on many modern Ghanaians, who look down on the religion. This is why Meyer says that “the newly independent Ghanaian state faced and still faces the colonial legacy of these distinctions [between “good and bad religion”] and the ambivalences and tensions that ensued.”¹¹⁶ Thus, the colonial characterization of the occult still informs how many Ghanaians see GTR.

With colonialism came the Christian missionary enterprise in Ghana.¹¹⁷ While the previous relationship between the missionaries and colonization has been hotly debated, there is wide agreement that Christianity and colonial power were closely interconnected throughout the nations they colonized in the African continent, and elsewhere in the world. The missionaries came to Africa with their own prejudices and misconceptions about Africa and upon their arrival “condemned everything African in culture, the chief of it was

¹¹³ Meyer, “Religious and Secular,” 89.

¹¹⁴ During the time of colonialism the British came up with the policy of Indirect Rule, whereby the colonialists ruled the people through the chiefs; they enacted laws that were enforced by the local chiefs.

¹¹⁵ McCaskie, “Anti-witchcraft cults in Asante.”

¹¹⁶ Meyer, “Religious and Secular,” 90.

¹¹⁷ By Christian missionaries, I am referring to both Catholic and Protestant missions.

religion.”¹¹⁸ Like the colonialists, the Christian missionaries also “depicted the gods of the people – who they saw as heathens – as demons and the first converts eagerly adopted this view.”¹¹⁹ Other aspects of the religion were referred to as the “occult.” For instance, R. Austin Freeman, the colonial mission’s medical officer and a missionary, on his way to Bonduku, the capital of Gyaman in the Asante, witnessed what he called “the Grand Fetish Dance at Odumase, 6 January 1889.”¹²⁰ Freeman described how the “fetishman,” who led the dance:

Capered about with surprising agility, running to and fro inside the circle and occasionally kneeling on the ground at its center... Now and again he retired to an adjacent fetish house to perform some occult part of the ceremony... whence he presently returned to renew his gambols.¹²¹

For the “fetishman” to retreat to another place to perform “some part of the ceremony out of the sight of the people present,” according to Freeman, meant that it was “occult” due to the secrecy attached to it. Missionary disparagement of such practices, therefore, reflected their attitude toward such apparent “secrecy” and its relationship to “true religion.” It also reflected the inherent competition they perceived between mission Christianity and GTR, which partly explained why when the Aberewa shrine “ceased to operate as a large-scale, public phenomenon by 1910, the Christian missions were also relieved to see the demise of what they regarded as a most pernicious form of ‘fetishism.’”¹²² John Parker notes that “this was particularly the case in Asante, where Basel missionaries identified the defeat of Aberewa as the key breakthrough in their struggling evangelical project.”¹²³ Banning the witch-finding cults meant winning their adherents to Christianity, the ‘good’ and modern religion. The colonial authorities, therefore, enforced laws that benefited the Christian missionaries.

¹¹⁸ Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives*, 107.

¹¹⁹ Birgit Meyer, “Beyond Syncretism: Translation and Diabolization, in *the Appropriation of Protestantism in Africa*,” in *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*, eds. Ch Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (London: Routledge, 1994): 43-64; Birgit Meyer, “‘If You Are a Devil You Are a Witch, If You Are a Witch You Are a Devil’: The Integration of ‘Pagan’ Ideas into the Conceptual Universe of Ewe Christians in Southern Ghana,” *The Journal of Religion in Africa*, 22 (2) (1992): 98-132.

¹²⁰ John Parker, “Witchcraft, Anti-Witchcraft and Trans-Regional Ritual Innovation in Early Colonial Ghana: Sakrabundi and Abrewa, 1889-1910,” *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2004): 397.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 399.

¹²² *Ibid*, 418.

¹²³ *Ibid*.

One major way in which the missionaries delegitimized GTR as they competed for followers was to denigrate the indigenous meanings of the religion. According to Adu Boahen, “indigenous religion was seen as primitive and backward and therefore must be left behind and to embrace Christianity.”¹²⁴ The main goal of the mission Christians among the Ashantis was to deliver the people, bring them “to Christ and generally to subvert traditional structures and values.”¹²⁵ Meera Venkatachalam, in her analysis of the encounter between mission Christianity and the Ewe religion in colonial Ghana, has argued that:

The notion of traditional religion itself had been developed in the context of the encounter between Christian missions and indigenous priests. The former framed the practices of the latter in terms of a primitive and indeed satanic form of religion that needed to be ‘left behind’ through conversion to Christianity.¹²⁶

Christian missionaries adopted a hostile stance toward GTR, and imputed new meanings to it in keeping with their conceptualization of fundamental spiritual conflict: “spiritual entities in the pre-Christian pantheon were reconceptualized and often understood as satanic forces located in opposition to Christianity.”¹²⁷ As Venkatachalam further explained, Christianity represented “the Cross,” the symbol of good religion, while the Ewe religion or GTR was the “realm of the Devil.”¹²⁸ This negative attitude to GTR adopted by the missionaries was accepted by many Ghanaian converts and continues to influence Christian attitudes today.

One of the techniques the early Christian missionaries adopted, as part of their evangelization process, was to take away young people from their communities and send them to live in mission-established boarding schools, or self-contained portions of the communities, known as “Salems,” where Christian values were instilled in them.¹²⁹ This was done so that they would break ties with their fetish or occult religious traditions, considered

¹²⁴ Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives*, 107.

¹²⁵ McCaskie, “Sakrobundi and Abrewa,” 90.

¹²⁶ Meera Venkatachalam, “Between the Devil and the Cross: Religion, Slavery, and the Making of the Anlo-Ewe,” *The Journal of African History*, 2012, Vol. 53(1): 47.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 56.

¹²⁹ Itohan I. Osayimwese, “Colonialism at the Center: German Colonial Architecture and the Design Reform Movement, 1828–1914,” (unpublished: University of Michigan, Michigan, 2008) <http://www.osusalem.org/pages/ourhistory.php> (accessed 6 MAY 2016).

to belong to the pre-modern past.¹³⁰ Many of the young people were trained as ministers and dispatched to their local communities to preach to them about the Christian God. Their traditional names were also changed and replaced with Christian ones to better reflect values that befitted their new-found status and identity. Consequently, the converts began to accept and propagate the prevailing missionary notions about GTR as the occult.

Post-colonial perspectives, which question persisting understandings and usages of the construct, “religion,” among formerly colonized communities, view it as representing imperial perspectives on what is a legitimate religion. Meredith McGuire, for example, questions the fixed, clear boundaries implied by the concept of religion, boundaries which allow us to define some experiences as religious and others as non-religious.¹³¹ She argues that not only are these boundaries social constructions, they are also ethnocentric, since they use imperial religious experiences as the baseline for comparison with religious expressions encountered as other. What is deemed religious and what is not is then a function of who has the power to define and impose definitions. Experiences that do not fit neatly into what imperial agents categorized as “religion,” beg labels, such as “popular religion,” “folk religion,” or call for the use of labels, like the occult, that convey belittling overtones. McGuire’s perspective illustrates how some GTR elements were labeled as the occult by colonial agents and Christian missionaries because they did not fit into their label of what a true religion is. As I will show in the next section of this chapter, even after gaining independence, vestiges of this understanding still influence Ghanaian thinking.

Although negative Colonial and missionary perspectives about GTR were influential previously among Ghanaians in the colonial times, their notions have been popularized in post-colonial Ghana by Pentecostal Christianity, which also casts the religion as backward and the “abode of the devil.”¹³² This is all part of what Rosalind Hackett refers to as Pentecostalism’s “discourses of demonization.”¹³³ Pentecostalism has enlarged the definition of the occult, making new forms. In other words, in contemporary Ghana, the denigration of

¹³⁰ Meyer, ““Make a Complete Break.””

¹³¹ Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion and Social Context* (Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1981).

¹³² Meyer, “The Power of Money,” 29.

¹³³ Hackett, “Discourses of Demonization,” 65.

certain aspects of GTR now finds expression, injected with newer meanings, in the context of Ghanaian Pentecostalism. Pentecostals continue to propagate a negative discourse on GTR; they “build upon and incorporate earlier grassroots understandings of Christianity that evolve around the demonization of traditional religion.”¹³⁴ I suggest here that Pentecostalism is partially responsible for the intensity of modern Ghanaians’ preoccupation with and anxieties about the occult. The popularity of the occult, in that everyone, is talking about it, in present-day Ghana is, therefore, happening in connection with the expansion of Pentecostalism.¹³⁵ Pentecostalism is itself a strong and growing tradition in Ghana, and as such informs the lives and lot of many Ghanaians today. In addition, even the mission-established mainline churches are becoming “increasingly pentecostalized,” so that Ghanaian socio-political life is more generally influenced by Pentecostal ideals.¹³⁶ Politicians and political parties now play to Pentecostal sensibilities by demonstrating their Pentecostal credentials in order to be accepted as the “chosen of God” to rule the nation.¹³⁷

Dominant religious traditions often sponsor the delegitimization of minority competitors in order to secure their hold on the religious field.¹³⁸ GTR is one of the competitors of Pentecostalism in Ghana’s religious field, especially when it comes to the production of supernatural power; referring to GTR as the occult is part of how Pentecostals delegitimize the religion. Pentecostal discourse demonizes almost all facets of GTR, as illustrated by Reverend Dr Robert Ampiah-Kwofi, founder of the Global Revival Ministries and the President of Ampiah-Kwofi World Outreach, for example, when he declared that: “Our immediate ancestry and culture were steeped in idolatry and heathenism.”¹³⁹ Consequently, Ghanaian Pentecostals describe the realm of GTR as an important repository of “demonic doorways.”¹⁴⁰ This term refers to areas of moral vulnerability that are believed to open doors

¹³⁴ Meyer, “Religious and Secular,” 110.

¹³⁵ Hackett, “Discourses of Demonization.”

¹³⁶ Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*.

¹³⁷ Kofi Halm, Nyamekye-Accra.

¹³⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups* (Springer, Netherlands, 1985).

¹³⁹ Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 161.

¹⁴⁰ Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 110.

to demons. According to Pentecostals, people come under the influence of evil powers through such “demonic doorways,” which invite spiritual “gate crashers” into their lives unawares.¹⁴¹ These “demonic doorways” are opened as Christians become disobedient to God’s commands. According to Asamoah-Gyadu, examples of disobeying God’s commands, through which a person opens him/herself to “demonic doorways,” include participating in religious rites of passage, such as traditional naming and burial rituals, belonging to Lodge fraternities, being a member of Asian religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, and converting to Islam.¹⁴²

Asamoah-Gyadu’s description of what constitutes “demonic doorways” suggests that the Pentecostal category of the occult is now broader than what the colonial authorities and mission Christians categorized as such. Pentecostals have retained the negative colonial and mission Christian ideas about GTR, but have broadened the category of the modern occult and included the beliefs and practices of other non-Christian religious traditions, such as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, as well as technology and other western traditions, like belonging to the Lodge fraternity and Illuminati. Pentecostals perceive non-Christian religions, especially GTR, as backward and the “the abode of evil spirits” and argue that anyone, including politicians, who engages in their rituals becomes vulnerable to the effects of evil spirits.¹⁴³ This explains why they admonish Ghanaians to “make a complete break with the Past.”¹⁴⁴ By becoming a Pentecostal Christian, one gets a new identity in Christ, which also means moving away from the “primitive” and evil occult past. Paradoxically, Pentecostals deny the supernatural power of the occult but have devised spiritual means to suppress it through prayer, fasting, and deliverance.¹⁴⁵ Condemnation and sustainability of the occult by

¹⁴¹ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 110.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Meyer, “The Power of Money,” 29.

¹⁴⁴ Meyer, ““Make a Complete Break.””

¹⁴⁵ Ghanaian Pentecostals vary as far as their approaches to deliverance are concerned. They all believe in deliverance—helping members break completely from their evil occult past, but some churches emphasize it more than others depending on which strand they belong to. For instance, the charismatic and prophetic types place more emphasis on deliverance than the classical ones, to the point of selling anointing oil, holy water, handkerchief and many other ritual paraphernalia to their members in order to perfect the deliverance process.

Ghanaian Pentecostals may produce a paradoxical effect, but both approaches have the same goal – ensuring that people leave behind their evil, occult past to join them.

The appeal of Pentecostalism in Ghana lies in its ability to develop an elaborate discourse on demons and rituals to deal with them.¹⁴⁶ As Meyer has observed, “Pentecostalism appears to be able to contain the occult” because “stories about the occult are better absorbed into the Pentecostal discourse” as examples of some of the whims of the devil.¹⁴⁷ Pentecostal churches have taken over the work of the witch-finding cults in colonial times, which is why David Maxwell has observed that “the new churches are also the heirs of older witchcraft eradication movements.”¹⁴⁸ Even popular Ghanaian movies cast Pentecostalism as the only religious tradition with the requisite spiritual authority to drive out occult forces from the lives of individual victims and the country.¹⁴⁹ Movies that portray the superiority of Pentecostalism are highly patronized, while those that give the upper hand to occult forces are scorned by patrons, since the moral of such movies are perceived as threatening existing Pentecostal patterns of thought and morality.¹⁵⁰ This is because although some Ghanaians view the occult as spiritually useful, they still regard its source as illegitimate.

Although Pentecostalism strongly opposes the occult, it thrives best in contexts that are also crucial breeding grounds for occult beliefs and practices. This is why Marlene De Witte notes that “while Pentecostalism and popular religion may appear at opposite ends of the religious spectrum, on closer inspection, they are part of one and the same religious field with a largely shared religious imagery and overlapping practices and audiences.”¹⁵¹ Pentecostalism feeds off the occult, in the sense that beliefs in the activities of occult forces and their agents provide strong motivations for people to participate in the deliverance and

¹⁴⁶ Max-Wirth, *Pentecostalism and Politics in Ghana*.

¹⁴⁷ Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: religion and modernity among the Ewe in Ghana* (Edinburgh University Press, 1999), xviii.

¹⁴⁸ David Maxwell, “Witches, Prophets and Avenging Spirits,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 25, no. 3 (1995): 321–325.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, xviii.

¹⁵¹ Marleen de Witte, “Religious Media, Mobile Spirits. Publicity and Secrecy in African Pentecostal and traditional religion,” in *Travelling Spirits, Migrants, Markets, and Mobilities*, ed. Gertrud Huwelmeier and Kristine Krause (New York: Routledge, 2010): 88-89.

healing activities of Pentecostal churches.¹⁵² Pentecostals have, therefore, inadvertently sparked narratives about the occult; that is, instead of suppressing the occult, their negative discourse on it has rather provided Ghanaians with a new context to make sense of it.¹⁵³

Another element that accounts for the success of Pentecostalism in Ghana is the ability of its discourse and praxis to engage, rather than avoid or ignore, indigenous and post-colonial insecurities of Ghanaians.¹⁵⁴ These insecurities include poverty, diseases, corruption, the widening gap between the rich and the poor and unemployment, which Pentecostals link to supernatural harm and its purveyors. This is in contrast with the approach of the gradually waning mission-established Christian religiosity that tend to deny or not emphasize the existence of supernatural forces, such as witchcraft and sorcery that can harm people.¹⁵⁵ The characterization of GTR beliefs as superstition by colonialists and mission Christians is one of the views Pentecostals have discarded since they regard the realm of the occult as a real one made up of evil forces and their equally evil agents to be combatted constantly. Pentecostal discourse fosters the spread of ideas about the existence of the occult. But Pentecostals themselves have come under suspicions of their involvement in occultic practices, in spite of touting themselves as the ones with the ultimate power source to combat the occult.¹⁵⁶

There is a political side to the negative Pentecostal discourse on the occult. Ghanaian Pentecostals characterize politics as an arena indebted to “occult powers” and so “popular stories about the dark side of power are easily absorbed into their discourse as examples of the machinations of Satan.”¹⁵⁷ Power, Pentecostals claim, “may not stem from the people, as the language of democracy claims, but from secret [occult] rites.”¹⁵⁸ The only way, according

¹⁵² Paul Gifford, "Evil, Witchcraft and Deliverance in the African Pentecostal Worldview," in *Pentecostal Theology in Africa*, ed. Clifton Clarke (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014): 112-131.

¹⁵³ Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*; Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels, *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment*, eds. (Stafford: Stafford University Press, 2003); Birgit Meyer, "Translating the Devil," xviii.

¹⁵⁴ Max-Wirth, *Pentecostalism and Politics in Ghana*.

¹⁵⁵ de Witte, "Religious Media, Mobile Spirits," 88-89; Meyer, "The Power of Money," 29.

¹⁵⁶ Jordan Smith, "The Arrow of God: Pentecostalism, Inequality, and the Supernatural in South-Eastern Nigeria," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* NO. 7 (2001): 588.

¹⁵⁷ Meyer, "The Power of Money," 29.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

to Pentecostals, through which one could possibly “reveal the occult or demonic side of modern politics and eventually purify the persons involved” is by “relying on the power of God.”¹⁵⁹ Pentecostals attribute developments in the past national scene—failures of government policies, national disasters, corruption, coup d’états, assassinations and the ensuing chaos in national and personal affairs—to occult demons by claiming that Ghanaian politicians’ association with the occult has brought curses upon the nation.¹⁶⁰

The negative Pentecostal notion about the influence of the occult in politics informs the way many Ghanaians view political action and behavior. A politician or political party’s direct or indirect association with the occult can potentially be detrimental to their political fortunes. This is why political-occult rumors have become important tools in modern Ghanaian politics. It also underscores how far-reaching the Pentecostal influence is in present-day Ghana. I will show in Section II of Chapter Three that political-occult rumors partly confirm the existing Pentecostal narrative on Ghanaian politics as an arena indebted to the occult. Many politicians also avoid the occult due to the Pentecostal influence in Ghana—as I will illustrate in Chapter Five.

Section III: Contemporary Perceptions about the Occult in Ghana

This section examines how contemporary Ghanaians conceptualize the occult and shows that present ideas about the occult have been shaped by colonial, missionary and Pentecostal formulations of the phenomenon.

The belief in the occult and its operations in Africa has responded to modernization and globalization. Although the occult has long been a part of African religious culture, the present impression is that it has been “un-caged, is uncontrollable and running wild due to the pace and span of economic and social changes that have swept across the continent under modern and global market conditions.”¹⁶¹ In a compilation of essays on the African portion of the encounter between modernizing forces from the West and Africa, Masquelier, Apter, Auslander and Bastian demonstrate how signifiers of the occult, such as witchcraft beliefs,

¹⁵⁹ Meyer, “The Power of Money,” 29.

¹⁶⁰ Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 161.

¹⁶¹ Kiernan, *The Power of the Occult*, 5.

spirit possession, belief in demons, and ritual cannibalism, are integral to the experience of the contemporary modern African world.¹⁶² These narratives represent “indigenously inflected critiques of western modernity, capitalism, and globalization and the inherently problematic relations of production that accompany them.”¹⁶³ To these scholars, modernity takes on different forms in different cultural contexts and cannot be defined solely from a western point of view since local encounters with western modernity engender a diversity of local developments. This scholarly discourse, the project suggests, speaks directly to modern Ghanaian views on the occult.

Anthropologists have demonstrated the relationship between the incorporation of local communities into world economics, politics, and culture, and the shift in new beliefs and practices, especially beliefs associated with the occult in modern times.¹⁶⁴ These beliefs and practices, they argue, represent local attempts to deal with the social tensions and individual conflicts arising from the socio-cultural transformations. In Ghana, the dislocations associated with globalization, like rising unemployment and impoverishment among many, the wealth and success of a few, and the growing gap between the rich and the poor, have contributed to a plethora of narratives on the alleged usage of the occult and its agents by individuals in their pursuit of material well-being and power. Even the internet, a crucial signifier of modernity, has become an important medium of occult discourse. In the context of a variety of practices, known in Ghana as *sakawa* (internet fraud), Ghanaians allege that the cyberspace has been enlisted by occult agents and their clients as a device to bewitch victims

¹⁶² Adeline Masquelier, “Narratives of Power, Images and Wealth: The Ritual Economy of Bori in the Market”; Andrew Apter, “Atinga Revisited: Yoruba Witchcraft and the Cocoa Economy, 1950-1951”; Mark Auslander, “Open the Wombs!” The Symbolic Politics of Modern Ngoni Witchfinding”; Misty L. Bastian, “‘Bloodhounds Who Have No Friends:’ Witchcraft and Locality in the Nigerian Popular Press,” in *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, Eds. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

¹⁶³ Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders, *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. (Routledge Publishers, 2001).

¹⁶⁴ Rosalind Shaw, “The Politician and the Diviner: Divination and the Consumption of Power in Sierra Leone,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 26, Fasc. 1 (Feb. 1996): 30-55; Peter Geschiere, “Domesticating Personal Violence: Witchcraft, Courts and Confession in Cameroon,” *Africa* 64 (3) (1994): 323-341; Peter Pels, *Penetration and Protest in Tanzania: The Impact of the World Economy of the Pare, 1860-1960* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992); et al.

living in far-flung places.¹⁶⁵ A kind of *sakawa*, they claim, involves the transfer of magical spells through instant messages and emails to unsuspecting targets living in Europe and North America. Under the influence of the spells, the victims send money to the occult agents in Ghana.

Narratives about the occult in Ghana may be Ghanaians' way of explaining post-colonial insecurities and the pressures of modernity, but the occult, as I have previously pointed out in this thesis, is a western terminology and, therefore, not a local one. In Ghana, many people refer to juju as the local term for the occult, although juju is equally a foreign term, but are the two words similar or different? To test this, I sampled the views of my respondents. A few of them saw juju and the occult as different. Ato Kwamena, a 33-year-old public servant I interviewed in Nungua-Accra, for instance, told me that "there is no occult in Ghana, but juju, which individuals often used to magically coerce people into doing their bidding."¹⁶⁶ Others argued that juju is not the same as the occult because the occult is organized, whereas juju is not. An example was Sefakor, a 37-year-old male academic, who said that "even though both the occult and juju have a targeted end to give individuals spiritual power, there is a bit of a difference; juju is just to kill people, but the occult is for the general benefit of the people who are in it."¹⁶⁷ Adi, a 27-year-old female teaching assistant, thought otherwise and argued that "juju could be a bit more positive than the occult because traditionally people go to juju men for their protection, but usually the occult is very negative; it is just a group of selfish people who want to harm others for their own benefit."¹⁶⁸

The majority of my interviewees, however, saw the occult and juju as the same. While many of them viewed juju as a subset of the occult because occultism is broad and encompasses both negative and positive forces and practices, others saw juju as the local understanding of the occult. This notion was exemplified by the observation made by Maa

¹⁶⁵ 'Buzz Ghana,' "You won't believe Sakawa boys do all these to maintain their luxurious lifestyle [photos]," March 10, 2016 <http://buzzghana.com/you-wont-believe-sakawa-boys-do-all-these-to-maintain-their-luxurious-lifestyle-photos/>; 'Reportghananews.com,' "Sakawa Boys Arrested After They Kidnapped A Girl On The Motorway (More Photos)" <http://www.reportghananews.com/tag/sakawa-boys/>

¹⁶⁶ Ato Kwamena, interviewed by author, Nungua-Accra, February 22, 2014.

¹⁶⁷ Sefakor, interviewed by author, Legon-Accra, February 14, 2014.

¹⁶⁸ Adi, interviewed by author, Legon-Accra, February 14, 2014.

Gee, a 39-year-old female nurse in Korle Bu-Accra, that “juju may be found in occultism.”¹⁶⁹ Another group of respondents contended, as 61-year-old male scholar Saaka did, that “juju and the occult share similar beliefs because most of the people who use juju go to those who practice occultism.”¹⁷⁰ Thus, juju, to many Ghanaians, is the popular expression for a collectivity of occult practices.

The occult is also often equated to witchcraft in Ghana, as depicted by the many local movies that portray the activities of witches and their agents.¹⁷¹ The influence of these movies on Ghanaians’ perception of the occult became evident during my interview with a basketball team in Accra when I asked what the occult was. One of the teammates jokingly mentioned *Kyeiwaa*, the title of a local movie in Twi.¹⁷² I have personally watched this movie, which is in six parts and essentially portrays the works of witches and how they allegedly harm and destroy the destinies and fortunes of innocent individuals out of greed. The way witchcraft is portrayed in the movie depicts Sophie Oluwole’s definition of witchcraft as “a mystical and innate power, which can be used by the possessor to harm other people.”¹⁷³ Other participants gave similar responses that indicated to me that some Ghanaians often equated the occult to witchcraft and claim their activities and aims are similar, if not the same. But the movie, like many others of its kind, is a fantastical and highly overdrawn fictional account. Yet some Ghanaians regard it as a window into the so-called secret realm of the occult—confirming their suspicions and fears about it.

A discussion of the occult in Ghana brings to the fore the question of its existence. I put this particular question to my informants and it led to a diversity of views. Some of my respondents answered in the affirmative that the occult exists. Those who argued that the occult exists, such as Osikani, a 31-year-old female student, and Pentecostal in Fadama-Accra, contended that it exists because “anything that has a name exists.”¹⁷⁴ In the same vein,

¹⁶⁹ Maa Gee, interviewed by author, Korle Bu-Accra, November 30, 2013.

¹⁷⁰ Saaka, Legon-Accra.

¹⁷¹ Birgit Meyer, *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (Indiana University Press, 2005), 280-287.

¹⁷² Kokubor, interviewed by author in Nungua Accra, 27 February, 2014.

¹⁷³ Sophie Oluwole, “On the Existence of Witches” in *Second Order*, Vol. VII, Nos. 1-2 (1978): 20-35.

¹⁷⁴ Osikani, Fadama-Accra.

Amissah, a 38-year-old self-employed male also in Fadama-Accra, posited that “the occult exists as long as God also exists.”¹⁷⁵ Moreover, Adi believed that occult powers exist and are in constant operation.¹⁷⁶ In support of Adi’s position, Aduako, a 52-year-old male founder and leader of a Pentecostal church in Fadama-Accra, argued that “even though I do not adhere to the occult, I will not completely write it off that it does not exist because it does exist and works for those who believe in it.”¹⁷⁷ Hassan, a 61-year-old male lecturer in Ajiringanor-Accra, also said categorically that “The occult exists, even in sports.”¹⁷⁸ To draw home this point, he told me the interesting story below:

I remember that in the 1990s, during a football match in Tamale between RTU [Real Tamale United in the Northern Region] and another team whose name I don’t quite remember now, one of the supposedly sophisticated people was saying that there is no juju in football. Immediately, someone responded by asking that who said there is no juju in football? Get up and I will show you that there is juju in football, but the person did not get up because he knew the consequences of getting up. So the occult is there; if it is not, then there is no Satan; once we have Satan, then the occult is real.¹⁷⁹

Thus, many Ghanaians believe that the occult exists, its spiritual power is potent and is used mostly to harm others. It is this perceived efficacy and potential of the occult to harm innocent people that cause many Ghanaians to dread it and attach negative connotations to it.

There were, however, other respondents who insisted that occult powers were not real and that belief in it constituted mere superstition. For instance, Ibrahim, a sports trainer in Darkoman, a suburb of Accra, and former footballer who claimed to have consulted occult ritualists, told me that “occult powers seem to exist, but they are not real.”¹⁸⁰ Ibrahim insisted on having been lured by his former coaches and teammates to consult juju men to help them win their matches but claimed their powers did not work for him. Kwame Fosu, a 50-year-old self-employed man in Nungua-Accra, shared this view and noted that “there is no power in the occult; belief in the occult to me is just superstition,” since he saw occult agents as

¹⁷⁵ Amissah, Fadama-Accra.

¹⁷⁶ Adi, Legon-Accra.

¹⁷⁷ Aduako, interviewed by author, Fadama-Accra, February 18, 2014.

¹⁷⁸ Hassan, Ajiringanor-Accra.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibrahim, interviewed by author, Nyamekye-Accra, February 17, 2014.

charlatans.¹⁸¹ Although some Ghanaians do not believe in the occult and ignore it as mere superstition, many of them think it exists and is spiritually powerful, as per the results from my fieldwork interviews.

My Pentecostal informants uniformly cast the occult as a phenomenon belonging to the sphere of demons, depicting it in strongly negative terms. Aduako, for instance, clearly stated that the occult is an “abomination to God.”¹⁸² He claimed Pentecostals believe in the “[Christian] God who gives them the power to do all things that bring about good for the individual and others.”¹⁸³ Others contended that the occult is a group of people who secretly seek evil and dubious sources of power to gain a spiritual advantage over others.¹⁸⁴ The occult, therefore, is an “affront to Christianity and God’s authority and is the worship of Satan,” as suggested by KJ, another Pentecostal pastor in Fadama-Accra.¹⁸⁵

Notwithstanding the Pentecostal influence and negative narrative on the occult, a popular perception in Ghana is that spiritual resources from the occult are crucial in meeting both the spiritual and physical needs of people. These include political figures who are alleged to use the services of occult ritualists as they prepare for elections to secure their positions, or to incapacitate opponents. Maa May, a 42-year-old businesswoman in Nyamekye-Accra, thought that “people consult the occult due to all the stress in their lives; even some Christians consult occult ritual agents when they realize their prayers are not being answered by God.”¹⁸⁶ Similarly, Hassan opined that “people have anxieties, problems, needs, and worries, and some can be solved in the physical realm, but many of them are not.”¹⁸⁷ He said there is a widely held belief not only in Ghana but Africa, generally, that “the spiritual realm of the occult is extremely important; information or help that comes from there is credible

¹⁸¹ Kwame Fosu, interviewed by author, Nungua-Accra, February 22, 2014.

¹⁸² Aduako, Fadama-Accra.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ KJ, interviewed by author, Fadama-Accra, February 12, 2012.

¹⁸⁶ Maa May, interviewed by author, Accra, December 2, 2013.

¹⁸⁷ Hassan, Ajiringanor-Accra.

and taken seriously.”¹⁸⁸ Individuals, therefore, seek solutions to their problems and anxieties from people believed to have access to knowledge of the spiritual realm of the occult.

In Ghana where the typical worshipper often purportedly has affiliations with multiple supernatural power sources, relying on institutional religions, like Christianity and Islam and the occult simultaneously is a common practice. This perception was confirmed by Salaam, a 56-year-old male university lecturer, and former politician, who suggested that it was a common practice for even Christians and Muslims to use the occult when they faced very dire situations in their lives.¹⁸⁹ He was quick to add that although the occult is a vital spiritual resource, it is dreaded by many Ghanaians since people perceived to be associated with it can be isolated from friends and acquaintances.¹⁹⁰ This explains why stories about people who are alleged to enlist the help of occult agents are often spoken about in hushed tones.

Earlier in this chapter I presented an account of the development of the concept of the occult. This suggested that colonialists, Christian missionaries and later Pentecostals characterized certain aspects of GTR as occult and their formulations inform how many modern Ghanaians view the traditional religion. Some contemporary Ghanaians, however, see the use of the term “occult” to describe GTR as problematic and claim that the term does not accurately reflect GTR. The occult, to such people, was a part of GTR that the colonial authorities and Christians have denigrated. For example, Damba, a 41-year-old male African religions’ scholar and a Muslim in Ajiringanor-Accra, said that:

The occult means different things in different contexts. Occultism is purely Eurocentric and connotes engaging in a kind of supernatural way of manipulating the spiritual world against others. But, on the other hand, if you come into the African cosmology it might not necessarily connote something that is negative. Occultism invariably connotes something negative in my view, but from the African perspective and from the perspective of the practitioner, it is a way of fortifying themselves against enemies and bad spirits.¹⁹¹

The view of people, like Damba then, is that the European advent in Africa caused a disastrous blow to the traditions of Africa, and specifically Ghana, in the sense that anything contrary to European mannerism was condemned. These negative ideas about African traditions were

¹⁸⁸ Hassan, Ajiringanor-Accra.

¹⁸⁹ Salaam, Legon-Accra.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Damba, Ajiringanor-Accra.

promoted through their writings and the first African intellectuals, as well as the ordinary people, accepted them without question. GTR adherents do not see their beliefs and practices as the occult, although they distinguish between them and that of sorcerers and witches, for example, who use GTR spirituality in anti-social ways. According to Damba, the same can be said of the ritual experts (Mallams) in Islam; a good Mallam is one who operates according to the proper teachings of the Qur'an, while a "quack" one mixes Islamic religiosity with dubious methods or elements.

Other interviewees claimed that the missionaries looked down on the religion of the people and encouraged their converts to do the same. For instance, Nana Agyei, a 30-year-old male polytechnic student in Lapaz-Accra, argued that "our forefathers had their own religion that they practiced and then all of a sudden the Whiteman came from nowhere and brought something called the Bible and decided we go by that or else any other thing is occult."¹⁹² A 48-year-old male computer software developer in Nungua-Accra, Ayithey, expressed similar sentiments in his frustrations about how GTR was tagged as occult by Christian missionaries and now modern Christians when he said that:

Ghanaian Traditional Religion is not occult as claimed by many Christians—this label is just used to demean the religion. GTR is like any other indigenous religion, like that of the Maoris of New Zealand, where you are studying. The colonialists and early Christian missionaries in their bid to impose Christianity on the indigenous people used the denigration of GTR as a means to convince the locals to leave their own religious traditions for Christianity.¹⁹³

In the missionaries' bid to make the natives leave their religion for Christianity, therefore, they discredited their religion. That was why Salaam also observed that mission Christianity also followed the same strategies as the Europeans and saw anything African as evil or occult.¹⁹⁴ To him, "the west has not been critical and scientific as far as African religious and cultural values were concerned."¹⁹⁵ He continued that "it is true certain values cannot stand the test of time, but it is wrong to say that all of them cannot stand the test of time."¹⁹⁶ Salaam may have a justifiable point, but it was not only colonialists and Christian missionaries who

¹⁹² Nana Agyei, interviewed by author, Lapaz-Accra, November 29, 2013.

¹⁹³ Ayithey, interviewed by author, Nungua-Accra, February 22, 2014.

¹⁹⁴ Salaam, Legon-Accra.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

were not “critical” about GTR values and condemned them as the occult, but Africans themselves. Ghanaians are no longer under colonialism and the influence of mission Christianity, which has seen a decline in recent times due to the popularity of the Pentecostal tradition, but many of them still see GTR as a manifestation of the occult, a notion that has found its way into political circles.

Those who viewed GTR favorably pointed out the positive attributes of GTR and, therefore, claimed that the religion instills morality in people, as it used to do in pre-colonial times, and forces them to be ethical because of their fear of it. This highlights the fact that when it comes to morality, GTR is a source of social and moral control.¹⁹⁷ Hassan, who hails from the Northern region of Ghana, for instance, argued that in his hometown, Dagomba, traditional religious beliefs formed the basis of the communal norms.¹⁹⁸ These were the norms that were used to check members of the society and helped curb societal vices, such as stealing and committing adultery. GTR norms are still effective mechanisms for checking indiscipline and immoral acts; they help in curbing social vices. This signifies that the influence of GTR in present-day Ghana is greater than national census data suggest.

It emerged in my field interviews that the occult is regarded in Ghana as an effective source of spiritual power and an important resource in meeting the needs of Ghanaians, in spite of the negative perception it has among many of them who regard it as evil.¹⁹⁹ As claimed by Salaam, the occult is “using traditional spirituality in solving societal or human problems.”²⁰⁰ He found it to be problematic how GTR beliefs and practices have been equated to the occult and, therefore, argued that “to say GTR is occult and thus bad is to condemn the foundations of the indigenous traditional religion.”²⁰¹ He continued that “if used well, the occult is supposed to be a problem-solving mechanism and not in any way evil.”²⁰² The occult is not a negative spiritual power but is supposed to be used to enhance the development of

¹⁹⁷ Assimeng, *Social Structure of Ghana*, 51.

¹⁹⁸ Hassan, Ajiringanor-Accra; Salaam, Legon-Accra.

¹⁹⁹ By “the occult” here, I am referring to the term when it is treated as GTR, according to even more comprehensive Pentecostal grids, and when referencing particular secretive and malevolent rites.

²⁰⁰ Salaam, Legon-Accra.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

individuals and communities. According to Salaam, the occult could thus be “shrines, divinities, and in the main these divinities are supposed to empower people to achieve certain things beyond human capabilities.”²⁰³

As I will show in Section IV of Chapter Five, not all Ghanaians, including politicians, view the occult as evil and, therefore, something to distance themselves from. Hence, some politicians’ bold embrace of the occult as a means to demonstrate their identity as proud Ghanaians, although this move also constitutes their need to gain political advantage. However, as I already suggested in the main introduction to this thesis, the occult may be seen by Ghanaians as a vital spiritual resource, but it represents spiritual and moral backwardness; other aspects are regarded as obscure traditions that do not belong to the realm of a ‘true’ religion. That is, the occult is still generally viewed in negative terms in Ghana, which is why occult rumors have become crucial tools in modern Ghanaian politics.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the history of the occult in Ghana and shown that in the pre-colonial period, there was not much to be seen as the occult in Ghanaian traditional spirituality until the advent of colonialism and its attendant mission Christianity in the early fifteenth century. The colonial authorities and mission Christians labeled some aspects of GTR as the “occult” and undermined them as powerless and superstitious. This posture of the colonial authorities and missionaries affected the construction of the occult in colonial times and their negative notions were readily adopted by the Ghanaian converts to Christianity. The characterization of some GTR elements as the occult is now being perpetuated by Pentecostal Christianity, which emerged in the early 1970s and has become popular to the point of informing the way many Ghanaians view the world. Pentecostals have, however, broadened the category of the “occult” in post-colonial Ghana and included other non-Christian religious beliefs and practices, such as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism; even international migration and technology have contributed to ideas about the occult. Pentecostal discourse casts the occult as a field of evil and has come up with mechanisms and rituals to suppress it, but the increasing popularity of Pentecostalism accounts for notions about the occult in Ghana.

²⁰³ Salaam, Legon-Accra.

Pentecostals see politics as a field that is influenced by the occult, a view that has become the prism through which many Ghanaians see politicians and their alleged involvement with occult activities. The popular sense about the occult is negative; being associated either directly or indirectly with it can be detrimental to the individual involved. This explains why it has become a viable strategy in Ghanaian political circles to associate opponents with the occult in order to discredit them in the eyes of the electorate. But Ghanaians are split on their reactions to and views about the occult because even those who regard it as evil still believe it is a vital spiritual resource in meeting the needs of those who believe in it, including politicians who use it to achieve political ends. As a consequence of this popular notion, political-occult rumors abound in contemporary Ghana. Political actors utilize these rumors to gain political advantage and the populace as tools to critique politicians and the political process generally, as I will demonstrate in later chapters of this thesis.

The meaning of the occult has evolved over the years; the occult, as it is conceptualized now, is the result of different layers of understandings that have been compiled over the years corresponding to different phases of Ghana's historical evolution. A number of definitions are in play, as far as the occult is concerned. Even if certain ones have particular force and influence, there is still contestation around the term, the practices that it connotes, their appropriateness and power. Many Ghanaians believe that the occult belongs to the sphere of the hidden; occult ritual specialists allegedly operate under the cover of darkness, as do those who consult them. Rumor then becomes a crucial avenue of access to what happens in this hidden realm of the occult. The next chapter considers the socio-political significance of rumor in Ghana and demonstrates its role in facilitating the spread of ideas and notions about the occult.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RUMORS IN GHANA

The preceding chapter sketched the historic understandings of the occult and demonstrated that its present expressions have evolved in the context of the social, religious and political factors of Ghana's history. This present chapter suggests that rumor occupies a vital place in Ghanaian socio-political life. Apart from serving as a source of news, rumor informs people's beliefs in and ideas about the occult and has the potential to shape public opinion about politicians and the political process generally. Political-occult rumors are the focus of this study, but the notions presented here in this chapter apply to all other guises or forms of rumor in Ghana.

To illustrate the socio-political significance of rumor in Ghana, this chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section explores what rumor is: how different scholars have conceptualized rumor and what it means in Ghana; rumor's function as news; and some of the means through which it is transmitted. The second section examines the natural compatibility between rumor, religion, and the occult. Section three looks at the influence of rumors in modern Ghanaian politics and shows their potential in shaping public opinion about politicians and politics generally; it also attempts to account for the believability of political rumors. Some Ghanaians believe that politicians and their operatives themselves spin rumors to gain political advantage, but others are of the view that the populace also comes up with some of the rumors as tools to check politicians. The final section examines some of the ways in which the Ghanaian electorate deploys especially political-occult rumors as metaphors to critique political action, behavior, and policies. In this way, the rumors serve as "weapons of the weak."²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.

Section I: What is Rumor?

Rumor has always been a part of human social life, but it was Gordon Allport and Leo Postman who pioneered its academic study in 1947, work that influenced many other scholars.²⁰⁵ These scholars attempted to define rumor as a social, psychological and political phenomenon. This section examines some of the ways in which scholars have conceptualized rumor, setting these understandings alongside Ghanaian popular understandings of the term as related by my informants. It also considers rumor's function as news and some of the ways through which it is transmitted.

In popular Ghanaian parlance, rumors are described as "telephone no wire" (telephone without wires) due to their ability to spread fast within few moments. From my own experience as a Ghanaian, some of the local terms people often use to describe rumors are: *huhu huhu* (words that are uttered in hushed tones); *yese yese* in Twi or *akee akee* in Ga (they say, they say); *nseku* (gossip); and *nkurofo keka* (people are saying/according to people). These terms are used to both define and describe rumor so that the transmitter does not take responsibility for its consequences. Many Ghanaians justify rumors by claiming, in the popular idiom, that "there is no smoke without fire." Some people trust rumors because if they were not true, they would not have surfaced, while others do not trust them because of their questionable source and character.

The term rumor can convey a sense that the information in question is false, but some scholars have emphasized that non-verification does not essentially make a rumor false. This is why Francis Nyamnjoh has stated that "rumor is defined not as falsehood, but the emergence and circulation of information that is either not yet confirmed publicly or refuted by official sources."²⁰⁶ Ralph Rosnow and Alan Fine also consider rumor as "information, neither substantiated nor refuted."²⁰⁷ Some of my informants conceived of rumor in similar terms. Nana Agyei, who has been introduced earlier, for instance, suggested that "most of the rumors in Ghana are not false, but are just information that no one has come out to deny

²⁰⁵ Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947).

²⁰⁶ Francis Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* (Pretoria: Zed Books, 2005), 210.

²⁰⁷ Ralph L. Rosnow and Gary Alan Fine, *Rumor and Gossip: The Social Psychology of Hearsay* (Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company Inc., 1970), 4.

or verify yet.”²⁰⁸ Even with rumors that are deemed as verified information, Kimmel says that “although the much-reported news is of publicly verifiable facts, it also is the case that much is second-hand information or hearsay.”²⁰⁹ The verification or otherwise of a rumor does not determine its truthfulness or otherwise since people can choose to believe a particular rumor irrespective of it being true or false. This is why Ibrahim, a physical trainer in Nyamekye, a suburb of Accra, said that “rumor is something some people believe, although it may not be true.”²¹⁰ His point was that the reasons people accept or reject a rumor have less to do with its verifiability than with the rumor’s ability to convince them. This insight is one that I will explore further later in this chapter and the next.

Other scholars find the characterization of rumor as a falsehood to be problematic. According to Luise White, rumor is “a very poor term with which to discuss stories that the storytellers think as true.”²¹¹ Salaam (introduced earlier) and Abeiku, a 46-year-old male public servant and foot soldier in Nungua-Accra, said that the information they gave me about politicians’ links to the occult were true because they were privy to the inner workings of Ghanaian politics and what politicians did to win power. They asserted that the stories could, therefore, not be discounted as falsehoods; from their experience, such stories were often true. Some of the stories considered to be mere rumors in Ghanaian political circles because they have not yet been verified by “official sources” are nevertheless deemed true.²¹² Mr. Osafo, who we met earlier, reiterated this point by saying that “while we cannot firmly confirm the rumors, we also cannot rule them out as false.”²¹³ The truth is subjective; what may be true for someone may not be so for another and vice versa. In view of this tricky dynamic of rumor, I use the term in this project cautiously. My focus on political-occult rumors then is not on their truthfulness or otherwise, but on how they are deployed by Ghanaian

²⁰⁸ Nana Agyei, Lapaz-Accra.

²⁰⁹ Kimmel, *Rumors and Rumor Control*, 113.

²¹⁰ Ibrahim, Nyamekye-Accra.

²¹¹ Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: rumor and history in colonial Africa* (UC Press E-Books Collection, 1982-2004: University of California Press), 58.

²¹² Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media*, 4.

²¹³ Mr. Osafo, Adenta-Accra.

politicians to influence public opinion and the electorate to critique political action and behavior.

There are two conflicting attributes of rumor—it can either be a way for people to explain happenings around them or a devious means of peddling fiction. To Rosnow and Fine, “rumor may refer to a group effort to define what is occurring, or rumor may be a packaged story, deliberately planted.”²¹⁴ These two contradictory sides of rumor are evident in Ghanaian political circles. Firstly, political rumor can be a genuine attempt at explaining events some Ghanaians refer to as “strange” events, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter. Rumor functions then as a form of communication and “is involved not only in the dissemination of information about events but also with their interpretation and commentary.”²¹⁵ Political-occult rumors, for example, are open to different interpretations and are used to interpret and comment on political events.

Secondly, a rumor could be a devious means to spread fiction in order to discredit a political opponent, as will be shown in Chapter Four.²¹⁶ Kapferer has proposed that the two main functions of rumor are “manipulation and disinformation.”²¹⁷ Some political-occult rumors especially may be part of a genuine “sense-making” process, but a widely held notion in Ghana is that others are deliberate manipulation of opinion on the part of political actors, the electorate, or the media for the sake of sensationalism.²¹⁸ But while some rumors can be spread for deliberate devious purposes, others could be the “innocent publication of unverified facts.”²¹⁹ This is because the person putting the rumor out there may be under the impression that they are spreading the “objective truth” and those passing it on may believe they are doing same.²²⁰ I will touch on this further in Chapter Five.

²¹⁴ Rosnow and Fine, *Rumor and Gossip*, 22.

²¹⁵ Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (Indianapolis and New York: Merrill Company, 1996), 211.

²¹⁶ Nana Agyei, Lapaz-Accra.

²¹⁷ Jean-Noel Kapferer, *Rumors: Uses, Interpretations, and Images* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 34-5.

²¹⁸ Ralph Rosnow, “Inside Rumor: A Personal Journey,” *American Psychologist*, 46/5 (1991): 488.

²¹⁹ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 36.

²²⁰ Allport and Postman, *The Psychology*, 33.

By its very nature, it is difficult to determine the originator of a rumor. As Rosnow and Fine have noted, “indeed the common conception of the origin of rumor maintains it is impossible to establish the creator.”²²¹ In a similar vein, Kapferer posits that “to look for the person who started the rumor is to reduce the rumor phenomenon to a purely individual problem that is external to the group.”²²² While Kapferer’s emphasis on the importance of the group in the study of rumor may be plausible, the reputed provenance of rumor is an important element of its social dimension. In the context of Ghana, although some individuals will claim to not know where negative political rumors originated from, many of my respondents contended they knew their originators—politicians who wished to either discredit opponents or cast themselves in a good light, the populace or the media. Chapter Four will discuss the former and the final section of this chapter will be devoted to the latter.

Although the source of a rumor may be *known*, the source remaining anonymous gives it “an added sense of mystery,” making it more likely to be passed on.²²³ The “anonymity” of the source of a rumor also exonerates the person who started it and the one who spreads it from assuming responsibility for the eventual harm it may cause. If a particular rumor is alleged to be *akee akee* (they say, they say) or *nkurofo keka*, (people are saying), then the one repeating it cannot be held responsible for its outcome; it also becomes difficult to pinpoint the originator. This makes rumors powerful in the hands of the electorate who uses them to critique, contest and mock politicians and the political system, as I will show in the final section of this chapter. This thesis suggests a working definition for rumor that it is any information circulated by word of mouth or the print and electronic media, which cannot be said to be either true or false, but serves as a source of news because some people believe it and has the potential to influence public opinion about its subject.

Rumor functions as news since it acts as the conduit for disseminating seemingly noteworthy and new information and appears to contain an element of truth irrespective of its verifiability or otherwise. Lord Northcliffe (1865 – 1922), a former British publisher, described news as “what somebody somewhere wants to suppress; all the rest is

²²¹ Rosnow and Fine, *Rumor and Gossip*, 24.

²²² Kapferer, *Rumors*, 20.

²²³ Rosnow and Fine, *Rumor and Gossip*, 24.

advertising.”²²⁴ Although it has a promotional quality to it, like a rumor, news can be detrimental to its subject. The idea that rumor is a form of news has been proposed by a number of scholars. Kapferer, for example, contends that rumors “are news.”²²⁵ Nyamnjoh also sees rumor as “underground news.”²²⁶ He elaborates that rumor is “an alternative to the official press, which is tedious, censored, uninformative, and often unintelligible and is a free and uncontrolled medium, to which everyone is a potential contributor.”²²⁷ Rumor then can often appear “as front-page news in responsible newspapers, with the reported information attributable to vaguely identifiable sources.”²²⁸ Allport and Postman seem to not think of rumor as something that will appear in the “official press,” but an alternative to it. Rumor, then, is not the news, but in acting as the alternative to news, it has inadvertently become the news itself. Many Ghanaians regard rumor as truth and, therefore, credible, especially when they are published alongside what is deemed as certified news, and this makes it difficult to tell a rumor from the real news.

What makes rumor newsworthy is that “there is often some residual particle of news, a kernel of truth” in it, although in its spread it becomes “overlaid with fanciful elaboration that it [rumor’s newsworthiness] is no longer separable or detectable.”²²⁹ Thus, “the deceptive quality of rumor lies in the fact that although it is evaluative and incitive in significance, it usually masquerades as the provider of objective truth.”²³⁰ Although this characterization of rumor by Allport and Postman leans towards casting rumor as falsehood, it still highlights the quality of rumor acting as the transmitter of truth. An instance is the claims made by Abeiku who literally swore by the political-occult rumors he related to me that they were real life stories and not as false as claimed by politicians. But Abeiku’s claims

²²⁴ Lord Northcliffe was a British publisher who lived from 1865 to 1922.

²²⁵ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 41.

²²⁶ Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media*, 210.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Allport and Postman, *The Psychology*, 144.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid, 33.

may have been colored by his religious background and political party affiliation, making the objectivity of his claims questionable.

The function of rumor as the transmitter of noteworthy and new information makes it news in Ghana. For instance, Philip, a 37-year-old academic, on why political-occult rumors have especially become popular in Ghana, argued that “well, such rumors are news in the eyes of the public.”²³¹ Philip’s point was that such rumors provide accounts of affairs that some people believe and spread on; they are deemed sufficiently noteworthy as to be passed on. That is, “even though there may be an originator, what makes a rumor is other people: those people who, having heard it, spread it around.”²³² It is people who judge rumors as “interesting, credible or worthy of repetition.”²³³ The fascinating thing about rumors is that they “expand as they circulate” and “as a rumor is passed along, more details and evidence are added and the rumor mutates into something more substantial than its original formulation.”²³⁴ Guha termed this characteristic of rumor “improvisation” because “rumor functions as a free form liable to a considerable degree of improvisation as it leaps from tongue to tongue and contributes directly to the efficacy of rumor.”²³⁵ What people add to or take out of rumor in its spread can eventually determine its believability or otherwise.

But it is “anonymity and transitivity,” that account for the originality of rumor.²³⁶ This is because anonymity “permits its message to be contaminated by the subjectivity of each of its speakers and modified as often as any of them would want to embellish or amend it in the course of transmission.”²³⁷ This “anonymity” also “gives rumor its openness, transitivity its freedom.”²³⁸ Although “anonymity” accounts for rumor’s originality, in most cases, the

²³¹ Philip, interviewed by author, Nyamekye-Accra, February 9, 2014.

²³² White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 41.

²³³ Alessandro Triulzi, “African Cities, Historical Memory and Street Buzz,” in *The Post-Colonial Question: Common skies, divided horizons*, by Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, Eds (London and New York: Routledge, 1996): 85.

²³⁴ Kimmel, *Rumors and Rumor Control*, 89.

²³⁵ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, 261.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, 260

²³⁷ *ibid*, 261.

²³⁸ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 264.

opposite is sometimes true in Ghana. This is because some of my respondents said they believed certain political-occult rumors because they came from reliable sources—politicians themselves or people close to them. It is, therefore, easier for people to believe a rumor when the source is known; it remains a rumor only because its facts have not yet been verified and or no one wants to be held accountable for its eventual outcome, which is often negative.

Although some Ghanaians see rumors to be mere unproven speculations, others accept them as facts, which is not to say that people are implacably in pro- or anti-rumor camps. They believe rumors that are engendered as a result of the statements some politicians make that link either themselves or opponents to the occult, for example, because they deem them as newsworthy. Such people argue that if the rumors were not true, their esteemed and trusted politicians would not have started them and the Ghanaian media would also not have published them. Akuffo argued, for instance, that:

Some people think that if the stories were not true, the newspapers would not have published them or the radio stations would not have announced them. So whether the newspaper editors or the radio stations verified the information or not, as long as they are out, they become news. As long as you can trace these stories in the archives, it becomes difficult to know which one is just a rumor or the truth itself, although I think now there is a thin line between what we call rumor and truth in Ghana.²³⁹

Akuffo's argument highlights one important aspect of rumor being news in Ghana, specifically the ones published by the media; that is, they are stated on record and can be traced in the case of doubt, making it difficult to differentiate between a rumor and actual news.

While scholars like Allport and Postman have postulated that rumor is news, others, such as Guha, do not consider it as such. Guha sees the characterization of rumor as news as "an ill-conceived assimilation."²⁴⁰ This is because:

Quite clearly rumor belongs to a class apart from news. An autonomous type of popular discourse, it may perhaps be more properly regarded as one of those 'intermediate forms' which lie, according to Levi-Strauss, between the two poles of tale and myth.²⁴¹

Guha's position may be reasonable in other cultural contexts, but in Ghana, many of the rumors are not just "popular discourse." As I will show in Chapter Five, they are often

²³⁹ Akuffo, interviewed by author, Tema-Accra, December 20, 2013.

²⁴⁰ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, 259.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 260.

perpetrated by the political elite themselves, by virtue of statements they make and their actions that are subsequently put in the public domain by the print and electronic media.

Others claim that rumors cannot be news because they concern unconfirmed information. According to Kimmel, “unlike news, which is presumed to be based on fact, rumor is always unconfirmed.”²⁴² Kimmel’s proposition is useful, but the verifiability of a rumor does not make it any more news than its non-verifiability. It becomes news because people believe it and deem it as credible and significant information. Stories that circulate as rumors may not be based on fact, and almost “always unconfirmed,” but this study argues that rumor is news in Ghana – a country where even the national news homepage, ‘Ghanaweb,’ has a “rumor mill” page.²⁴³ I will illustrate in Chapter Five that politicians in Ghana associate opponents with the occult because they see themselves as bearers of news. The few who admit to their own occult use also do so to generate controversy to keep their names and profiles in the news constantly.

The main media for the spread of rumors is by word of mouth, but rumors need conduits to facilitate their circulation. Debra Spitulnik has named “established networks like neighborhoods, friendships, workplace relationships and religious spheres” as some of the “often utilized... sites of the production and distribution” of rumors.²⁴⁴ In Ghana, the traditional medium for the transmission of rumors is by word of mouth. My informants emphasized that such dissemination can occur in many settings: during telephone conversations, at church, work, home, markets, and on the streets, to name just a few.²⁴⁵ One observation I made while on the field in Ghana was that in churches, for example, some preachers built their narratives around jokes that parodied certain political rumors. The members, in turn, spread the rumors by sharing with friends and family. Coincidentally, some of my informants alluded to the same rumors. Citation of the rumors in the pulpits can mean

²⁴² Kimmel, *Rumors and Rumor Control*, 22-3.

²⁴³ ‘Ghanaweb’ refers to itself as “Ghana homepage” and has a page solely dedicated to rumors. See <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/rumor/>

²⁴⁴ Debra Spitulnik, “Mobile Machines and Fluid Audiences: Rethinking Reception through Zambian Radio Culture,” In *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, ed. F Gins burg, L Abu-Lughod, B Larkin (2002), 201.

²⁴⁵ Emma, interviewed by author, Legon-Accra, February 13, 2014; Sefakor, Legon-Accra; Saaka, Legon-Accra; Adi, Legon-Accra.

that they already have an established circulation or authority in the public domain. Alternatively, it is possible that the pulpit is one of the early drivers of rumors in Ghana.

So much importance is attached to rumor in Ghana and if the data from my fieldwork is anything to go by, then, one can say that word of mouth conveys a sense of immediacy. Rumors that circulate through word of mouth bring their hearers into direct contact with the information, making them feel part of the information at hand. Such rumors are trusted and believed by some people because they see the one who transmits them; this person could be a relative, a friend, or a trusted person. Many Ghanaians, therefore, trust what is said, in the form of a rumor that is transmitted through word of mouth. This is why although the thesis will feature excerpts from newspapers about some of the statements politicians have allegedly made about the occult, the verbal dimension of rumors would be most crucial to my definition of rumor.

Modern media forms—television, radio, newspapers, the internet and social media—also help in the transmission of rumors.²⁴⁶ As Kimmel notes:

Once pretty much limited to ordinary conversation, in contemporary societies rumors now proliferate and in many cases are fuelled by the media. Additionally, emerging communication technologies such as the Internet have sped up the processes by which rumors are transmitted.²⁴⁷

In the Ghanaian political context occult rumors are publicized by the media who regard them as newsworthy. To illustrate this point, Aduako reasoned that “with the advent of the media and due to the liberalization of information in Ghana even if you cough, people will hear about it everywhere; the whole Ghana will catch it.”²⁴⁸ People may accept political rumors they heard through word of mouth, but when they hear or read them in the media, they deem the information as reliable from credible news channels. If the media publishes them, then it means the information is true; the information can also be traced when in doubt.

The dynamic of the media speeding up the spread of rumors is not unique to Ghana, nor is it only a contemporary phenomenon. Georges Lefebvre, in his exploration of the print

²⁴⁶ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 60.

²⁴⁷ Kimmel, *Rumors and Rumor Control*, 113.

²⁴⁸ Aduako, Fadama-Accra.

media's role in facilitating the spread of rumors during the "Great Fear of 1789" in France, observed that:

The vast majority of the French people depended on oral tradition for the dissemination of news... It goes without saying that it favored the spread of false reports, the distortion and exaggeration of fact, the growth of legends... In the empty silence of the provinces, every word had the most extraordinary resonance and was taken as gospel... In due course, the rumor would reach the ears of a journalist who would imbue it with new strength by putting it into print.²⁴⁹

Lefebvre's profound observation is borne out in Ghana where rumors are given life by the way they are broadcast in the media. An example of this was what Maa May related to me. In the run-up to the 1992 general elections, a rumor emerged about the strange sighting of a giant frog in the sea holding the flag and other insignia associated with the NDC in its mouth, she said.²⁵⁰ The implication was that the frog was an NDC occult agent. Through many retellings, the story developed varying strands and spread like wildfire. The NDC is an offshoot of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), whose rule of almost 12 years was attributed by many Ghanaians to its alleged use of occult agents.²⁵¹ Stories, such as this one are just rumors, but as soon as they are broadcast by the media they become news and regarded as more credible information. According to Maa May, she did not believe the rumor at first but was tempted to do so when it was published in one of the major newspapers. To her, for the story to have made its way into a credible newspaper, it had to be true. Maa May's sentiment was shared by a few other respondents.²⁵² The media in Ghana embellishes political-occult rumors; the television and radio stations even allow their listeners to call in to their programs to comment on them, thereby bringing the rumors to life. Social media, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber and Twitter now also help in the spread of rumors in Ghana.

There is a flip side to people believing rumors because they were published by the news media, however. Some Ghanaians have become cynical of rumors reported by the media due to their over-sensationalization (a point that I will elaborate upon further in

²⁴⁹ Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France* (Princeton University Press, 1983), 73-4.

²⁵⁰ Maa May, interviewed by author, Accra, December 2, 2013.

²⁵¹ Max-Wirth, *Pentecostalism and politics in Ghana*.

²⁵² Maa Gee, interviewed by author, Korle Bu-Accra, November 30, 2013; Aisha, interviewed by author, Official Town-Accra, February 21, 2014; Empress, interviewed by author, Haatso-Accra, December 21, 2013.

Section II of Chapter Four). These people believe that most of the stories are not true, but the media puts them out to create sensation and sell their news. Nevertheless, modern media forms have become important disseminators of political rumors alongside traditional word of mouth means. The media has thus increased the speed with which such rumors can spread. The next section examines the natural compatibility between rumor, religion, and the occult.

Section II: Rumor, Religion, and the Occult

Some scholars, as do some Ghanaians, have suggested that rumor spreads the same way as religious truth. That is, both of them are spread through words and believed based on faith. As a result of this perception, religion and rumor are considered as similar, if not the same in character and function. As I mentioned earlier in the previous chapter, many Ghanaians view the occult in negative terms and believe that it belongs to the sphere of the hidden. Occult ritual agents are also thought of as people who allegedly operate under the cover of darkness, as do the people who go to them for help. This notion has come about as a result of the seemingly secret nature of the occult and has made rumor an important avenue of access into the so-called hidden and secret realm of the occult. In Ghana, then, rumor plays a crucial role in facilitating the spread of ideas on and notions about the occult. In line with this popular notion in Ghana, other scholars have argued that there is a natural link between rumor and the occult. This section, therefore, explores this correlation between rumor, religion and the occult and argues that there is a sort of natural compatibility between rumor, religion, and the occult.

Because religious truth is sometimes based on faith and not provable evidence, some scholars have proposed that it is no different from a rumor. Such scholars argue that believers of religious truths accept them not because they are true, but because someone believed to be a reliable source told them to. An example of such scholars is Guha, who has once argued that:

Social knowledge is based on faith and not on proof. That should come as no surprise: isn't religion itself the best example of a rumor? Isn't religion the propagation of words attributed to an initial Great Witness?²⁵³

²⁵³ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, 261.

To Guha faith in the report of so-called “great witness[es]” is the basis for accepting religious truths and that makes religion the best example of rumor. His suggestion also highlights the fact that rumors shape social knowledge and since religion also informs the lot of many and underpins social action and behavior, they both achieve the same aims. Rumors and religious truth are, therefore, accepted not because of the verifiability of their credibility and authority, but they are still believed because some people deem them credible as a result of hearing them from trusted sources.

Guha’s claim about religion being the same as rumor is reiterated by Kapferer who has also posited that “like rumors, religion consists in contagious faith: one expects the faithful to take someone at his word, and to abide by the revealed truth.”²⁵⁴ It is, therefore, “not proofs of God’s existence that create faith, but rather the other way around.”²⁵⁵ This “other way around” consists of believing mere words based on one’s faith in the word and not on provable or empirical evidence. Kapferer’s point was illustrated by Maa May that: “I don’t accept most of the rumors I hear, but those who believe them do without questioning their source and authenticity.”²⁵⁶ In the same vein, Ayittey, the computer software developer in Nungua-Accra, was of the view that: “Some rumors are effective because people believe them, although there is no evidence backing them and their truth is questionable.”²⁵⁷ This means that, according to these people, like religious truths, people do not believe what they hear in the form of rumors “because it is true, founded, or proven”; it is true because they have chosen to believe them. This position emphasizes the quality of rumor that its belief or otherwise can sometimes have nothing to do with its verifiability or otherwise, but its ability to convince people to accept it as plausible from a credible source.

Going further in his argument about the similarity between religion and rumor due to the notion that they both spread through words and are believed based on words and not empirical evidence, Kapferer observed that “the intimate convictions that move the peoples

²⁵⁴ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, 261.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Maa May, Nyamekye-Accra.

²⁵⁷ Ayittey, Nungua-Accra.

of the earth are thus often based on words alone.”²⁵⁸ To Guha and Kapferer then, rumor and religious truths are spread in similar, if not the same way, since they are both transmitted by words and people believe them based on faith. But sometimes, although the reports of the so-called “great witness[es]” may be accepted based on faith by religious people, truth also has something to do with it. This is why Guha and Kapferer’s position has been contrasted by Lefebvre, who once argued that apart from the faith aspect of belief—of either religion or rumor – there is an element of truth. This is because the report has to have “the most extraordinary resonance and was taken as gospel.”²⁵⁹ There are many conditions that account for the believability of a rumor. For instance, a certain rumor may not be true, but, like what Lefebvre has claimed, it could find an “echo within” its believers.²⁶⁰ I will delve more into this in my discussion on the believability of political rumor in the remaining two sections of this chapter. People may, therefore, not always accept rumors or religious truths based on faith alone, but will do so when they deem the information plausible from a credible source and it affirms something they already know and want to believe. Thus, ultimately, the authority of the truth of both rumors and religious truths determines its believability or otherwise.

Although religious truths cannot be empirically proven, we cannot say they are based on rumor, since their believers trust the credibility of their source and deem them as ultimate truths. That is, while religious belief shares a kind of provisional quality, and is not susceptible to empirical proof, believers generally believe that their faith is trustworthy and consistent with their experience and thus at least partially confirmed. Saaka, the 60-year-old lecturer, illustrated this point when he observed that:

It depends on your experiences, what you have observed, events that have come up or led to a particular rumor. Some are so credible that you can’t say that they are just wild tales or rumors. Though you will not be there to witness them, you just don’t say because you haven’t seen it with your eyes it is not true.²⁶¹

Rumor, then, cannot be said to be true or otherwise because it has not been verified. To even say that rumor is a falsehood is also problematic—the information may be considered as

²⁵⁸ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 264.

²⁵⁹ Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789*, 74.

²⁶⁰ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 84.

²⁶¹ Saaka, interviewed by author, Legon-Accra, February 14, 2014.

rumor only because it has not been verified or refuted, but it also does not mean that there is not a “residual particle of truth” in it.²⁶² This thesis is not concerned about the truth or falsity of rumors, especially political ones, however, but rather their potential to influence popular opinions about politicians, particularly, and the political process in general.

There is also a natural correlation between rumor and the occult due to the perceived secrecy of the occult. Meyer has argued that earlier colonial Christian critiques of GTR practices classified as the occult also focused on their apparent secret, hidden character, which was a familiar characteristic of Western esotericism.²⁶³ However, this secrecy of GTR was not of the making of the religion and its adherents, but something that was forced on them by the Christian missionaries and colonial authorities, who banned some of their shrines and thus forced the adherents to observe their rituals secretly.²⁶⁴ As I already pointed out previously in the last chapter, anti-witchcraft activity, and colonial policy conspired to drive certain practices that had previously been more visible and accepted underground. This made previously visible practices secretive and rendered them more liable to be viewed as the occult. Due to this supposed secrecy of GTR practices that colonialists interpreted as the occult, rumor provided the needed access to them.

The notion about the secret nature of the occult has been carried on into present characterizations of the phenomenon. Some Ghanaians still see the occult as a society whose activities are shrouded in secrecy. Rumor, therefore, acts as the avenue of access into the secret realm of the occult and politicians’ alleged involvement in occult activities. Ghanaian popular notions about the secret nature of the occult came through in my field interviews. Sussy, a 34-year-old female university student in Fadama-Accra for example, said that “anything that is done in secrecy and under the cover of darkness” is occult.²⁶⁵ Maa May also considered “belonging to a secret society” as constituting the occult.²⁶⁶ She expounded on this by saying that people in these occult societies “secretly use sacred books, human parts,

²⁶² Allport and Postman, *The Psychology*, 144.

²⁶³ Meyer, “Religious and Secular.”

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 110.

²⁶⁵ Sussy, interviewed by author, Fadama-Accra, February 6, 2014.

²⁶⁶ Maa May, Nyamekye-Accra.

and blood in their rituals.”²⁶⁷ Due to this supposed secret nature of the occult, membership is restricted to only those who adhere to their principles and go through initiation. Initiation is, therefore, crucial to the occult and, as part of the initiation rites, initiates are alleged to sleep in coffins for days; it also involves the shedding of innocent blood, as claimed by Nana B. in Kaneshie-Accra.²⁶⁸ This is why many Ghanaians believe there are so many things about occult practitioners that one would never know until one is initiated. The intriguing thing about the claims made by my informants that the occult is a phenomenon shrouded in secrecy is that they still came up with some of the so-called secretive beliefs and practices they thought it was constituted of, mentioned in the main Introduction to this study.

The revelation was stunning, however, that when I asked one of my respondents, Nana Agyei, the polytechnic student in Lapaz-Accra, about some of the constituents of the occult, he shot back with another question that: “Since occult practices are not public, as some people claim, how will you know the kind of things the practitioners do and what it is constituted of?”²⁶⁹ I managed to explain that as he rightly said some Ghanaians claim that the occult is a secret society; those involved in it are allegedly ashamed of what they do and, therefore, cannot identify themselves or engage in their activities in public. “I don’t think that is true,” he said.” Nana Agyei elaborated to me that occult practitioners did not engage in their activities because they are ashamed of it, but possibly kept them secret because it was “the only way they can entice prominent people to it. If it is so out there why would people want to be part of it anyway?”²⁷⁰ This underscores why others argue that the occult is appealing to especially the rich and powerful, such as politicians.

It is the perceived secrecy of the occult that leads some Ghanaians to come up with rumors about what activities go on in the world of the occult, especially rumors about some of the things politicians allegedly engage in due to their ambition to win power at all cost. But if the occult is secretive, then most of the things Ghanaians claim to happen in the world of the occult are speculative. The insightful perspective on the occult by Nana Agyei shows that

²⁶⁷ Maa May, Nyamekye-Accra.

²⁶⁸ Nana B., Kaneshie-Accra.

²⁶⁹ Nana Agyei, Lapaz-Accra.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

part of the greater puzzle facing researchers of religion in Africa is the very important question that: since most of the activities of occultists are allegedly done in secrecy, how then can we tell what goes on in the world of the occult? An answer to this question is academically significant as it will give relevant insights into how certain information, such as notions about the occult are communicated in a religiously pervasive society, like Ghana.

Since rumor is the avenue of access to the occult, due to the perceived secret nature of the occult, politics, an arena deemed to be equally shrouded in secrecy and mystery, makes for ideal breeding grounds for rumors about politicians' involvements with alleged secret, occult activities. Thus, "the contexts in which such contemporary notions flourish are ones in which secrecy is prevalent."²⁷¹ Politicians tend to keep their activities and deliberations secret, reinforcing popular impressions about their possession of power derived from the occult. This is why "as soon as a new political space is opened, it is overrun by rumors about the use of sorcery and witchcraft."²⁷² In the run-up to presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana, for example, the political field becomes rife with rumors, particularly about political actors' alleged use of the occult.

This section has demonstrated that there is a natural compatibility between rumor, religion, and the occult. The next section explores the relationship between rumor and politics; it argues that rumor flourishes in the field of politics and is important in shaping especially ideas about politicians' engagements with occult activities and politics in general. The section also highlights what accounts for the believability of political rumors in Ghana.

Section III: Rumor and Politics

If rumor is news in Ghana, then how does it influence the nation's politics and what accounts for the believability of political rumors? This section explores rumor's influence in Ghanaian national electoral politics and argues that the political field is rife with rumors: it is one of the main breeding grounds for the production and circulation of rumors, which in turn help shape public opinion about politicians and the political process in general. Rosnow and Fine have

²⁷¹ Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors, and Gossip* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 77.

²⁷² *Ibid*, 78.

contended that the political field is one for “rumor plants” because rumor-mongering becomes widespread “during the political campaign prior to election.”²⁷³ Electioneering campaign periods are, therefore, the time “everything is worth a try in the attempt to destabilize bothersome future candidates.”²⁷⁴

In the political field, rumors abound on a multiplicity of subjects. Kapferer cites, particularly, the ones about “secret agreements between opposing political parties, money, illness, sex, and double-talk.”²⁷⁵ In what follows, I identify four main categories of political rumors, in which occult rumors occur, recognizing that there may, in fact, be others. The first type of political rumors focuses on how individual politicians rose to power and their personal affairs, such as issues with drugs, corrupt activities, health problems, sexual escapades, and other alleged untoward activities. The second type relates to actions of the various political parties and the mechanisms they use to win elections, popularly known in Ghanaian local parlance as ‘ways and means.’ They also focus on some of the things government institutions, like the Electoral Commission, do to allegedly help one party to win elections over others.

The various political parties in Ghana, in their bid to smear one another and to make known to Ghanaians some of the things their opponents are allegedly doing in order to win crucial votes, have been accusing one another of distributing money, foodstuffs and household things, like roofing sheets, and sometimes even “bentoa” (enema).²⁷⁶ A case in point was when Nana Akufo-Addo, the current presidential candidate of the NPP, was rumored to have accused the NDC in Twi that: “monenam na mokyekye bentoa ma nkurofo senea ebeye a wobetow aba ama mo” [you are going around sharing enema to people for their votes].²⁷⁷ The notion behind such rumors is that political parties distribute things to prospective voters in order to buy their votes. National electoral politics is, therefore, not about convincing the electorate with ideas and campaign promises, but rather politicians materially buying their way to power. Other rumors are about how some of the political

²⁷³ Rosnow and Fine, *Rumor and Gossip*, 27.

²⁷⁴ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 216.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 220-21.

²⁷⁶ Ebo Quansah, “Money Swine! NDC plotting to buy the vote,” November 7, 2012 <http://thechronicle.com.gh/money-swine-ndc-plotting-to-buy-the-vote/>

²⁷⁷ Emma, Legon-Accra.

parties import people from neighboring countries, such as Togo and Cote D'Ivoire to vote for them.²⁷⁸ The two major parties, NDC and NPP, have also accused each other of being financed by drug dealers.²⁷⁹

There are also rumors about government policies, which constitute the third type of political rumors in Ghana. The economic and developmental difficulties many Ghanaians go through are sometimes blamed on failed government policies through rumors. Ghana's relations with other nations also provide the context for the production and circulation of the fourth type of political rumors. As part of the rumors about Ghana's international relations, there are rumors about how ineffective government functionaries are when they attend high-level international conferences, like the African Union and United Nations summits.²⁸⁰ These rumors comment on the context of Ghana's international relations. I argue in this chapter that rumors are part of the political strategy of seeking to gain political advantage over opponents in a competitive political field. This is because political rumors create either a positive or negative perception about a politician. The electorate also uses them to symbolically resist political power and through that contest, critique and deride the actions, behavior and policies of their politicians and political institutions.

Within the four main categories of political rumors in Ghana can also be found the popular and widespread rumors about political elites and their alleged links with the occult. This is even more so in a Ghanaian society where many believe their politicians use the occult to win and hold on to power. These political-occult rumors are fuelled by a popular notion that the occult influences all aspects of life in Ghana, including politics. On the perceived influence of the occult in modern politics, Kapferer has observed that one major theme on political rumors is that of an "invisible hand, occult power, or a secret society that is pulling the strings of power."²⁸¹ This theme, he claimed:

²⁷⁸ Nana Kwesi Coomson, "PHOTOS: 5 Togolese arrested for electoral fraud," August 13, 2014 <http://233times.com/2014/08/photos-5-togolese-arrested-for-electoral-fraud/>

²⁷⁹ 'SpyGhana.com,' "NPP Men Run For Cover Over Cocaine," June, 2014 <http://www.spyghana.com/npp-men-run-cover-cocaine/>

²⁸⁰ Emma, Legon-Accra.

²⁸¹ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 218-9.

Follows logically from the conception of political life as a stage. Behind the electoral staging and a democratic façade, in reality, there is an occult power or hidden hand unbounded by the harness of parliamentary procedure and universal suffrage.²⁸²

Pentecostals in Ghana characterize politics as a field indebted to “occult powers” and one with a “dark side.”²⁸³ Political power, then, Ghanaian Pentecostals claim, “may not stem from the people, as the language of democracy claims, but from secret rites,” as Meyer aptly states.²⁸⁴ This Pentecostal notion about the occult and its engagements with politics is what informs the way many Ghanaians perceive their politicians and political parties’ alleged links with the occult. Rumors about politicians and their occult dealings, therefore, abound in Ghana and have become important tools in the hands of both politicians and the electorate to dominate and resist at the same time. My interview respondents recounted to me 87 distinct political-occult rumors – these were aside from the occult rumors that were not political – which illustrate both the abundance of occult rumor and the import of the occult in modern Ghanaian politics.

It is difficult to prove the truth or falsity of political-occult rumors and rumors generally. For instance, Guha has argued that even though there were many rumors during the colonial insurgency in India, the ones about “supernatural and occult phenomena,” were the staple of them, but they “lived only in words,” since the stories were neither verified nor had any witnesses.²⁸⁵ Although the context of Guha’s claims was colonial India, we can still draw some parallels with the Ghanaian political experience with respect to rumors about politicians’ alleged involvement in occult activities. This is because while some Ghanaians claim that political-occult rumors are true, most of the stories have no witnesses, living or dead, and are not verifiable. In fact, the content of some of the rumors is incredible. Guha, for instance, cited examples of the rumors about Gandhi’s imperviousness to British bullets. Rumors about Nkrumah’s supernatural ability to command toffees from heaven with the help of Kankan Nyame and to turn into any kind of animal were equally incredible. Also, although many Ghanaians were convinced at the time that Nkrumah kept “Kankan Nyame” in a secret

²⁸² Kapferer, *Rumors*, 219.

²⁸³ Meyer, “The Power of Money,” 29.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*.

room at the castle, no one could say for sure that they saw it.²⁸⁶ Rumor, therefore, does not have to be verifiable in order for people to believe or accept it as truth.

Due to the ability of rumors to affect public opinion, individual politicians and political parties try their best to control especially the negative ones, although rumors are often difficult to control once they have gone out. Allan Kimmel, in his discussion of the elusive nature of rumor, posits that “rumor spreads rapidly, is difficult to control, is invisible yet nearly impossible to ignore, and can have damaging and perhaps even deadly consequences.”²⁸⁷ This point by Kimmel was echoed by Nana Agyei who said that “you know the funny part of this is rumors spread quickly.”²⁸⁸ As a politician, you ignore negative rumors about you or your party at your own peril because “once opinions start to form, it becomes increasingly difficult to put an end to them.”²⁸⁹ Rosnow and Fine claim that “like prejudices, hardening with time, the more established and rehearsed the opinion, the less vulnerable it is to counter-argument.”²⁹⁰ People’s opinion about a politician can thus influence their attitudes to rumors about them.

Ghanaian politicians and political parties know how detrimental negative rumors about them can be to their electoral fortunes and sometimes come up with measures to control them. Managing rumors, I suggest here, is part of good governance; statecraft itself has to be managed and due to the detrimental quality of rumors, when not managed properly, it can cost the fortunes of a politician, political party or a government. This is why political elites and governments go out of their way to control rumors. A case in point was when a former Head of State of Ghana, General Ignatius Kutu Acheampong, banned rumor-mongering in the early 1970s.²⁹¹ Acheampong and his government banned the standing or gathering together of two or more people because he was worried they may be spreading negative rumors about them. Hence the popular saying in Ghana at the time that “where two

²⁸⁶ Maa Akos, Nyamekye-Accra; Sefakor, Legon-Accra.

²⁸⁷ Kimmel, *Rumors and Rumor Control*, 3.

²⁸⁸ Nana Agyei, Lapaz-Accra.

²⁸⁹ Rosnow and Fine, *Rumor and Gossip*, 46-7.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Kingsley E. Hope, “Akwasidae brings Manhyia Alive,” April 5, 2007 <http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/index1.php?linkid=65&archiveid=537&page=1&adate=05/04/2007>

or more are gathered, they are spreading rumors,” parodying the biblical verse in Matthew 18:20 that reads: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst.”²⁹² Acheampong came to power in 1972 through a coup d’état and although he promised the redemption of Ghanaians, many people suffered economic hardships during his tenure. He was wary of the power of rumor, and in the usual style of dictators sought to control the flow of information. The law was to safeguard his administration from opponents who they feared were spreading rumors among the general populace to overthrow them, as they did to the government before them.

My respondents particularly mentioned two main ways in which individual politicians and political parties manage rumors in Ghana presently. The first approach is to respond to the rumors and deny them; the second is to not react to the rumors at all. But one thing about politicians’ denial of or silence on rumors is that there is no winning. Denial of a rumor can make things worse and “only increase people’s suspicions that it is in some way accurate”; the more and harder you deny, the more you implicate yourself.²⁹³ In Ghana “denials of plausible rumors are usually ineffective” because once a rumor is accepted as true, it can never be denied.²⁹⁴ On the other hand, if you decide not to react to them, your silence will make them seem true—confirming the popular adage that “silence means consent.” Examples of this dynamic include the rumors about the NPP’s presidential candidate, Nana Akufo-Addo, and his alleged use of narcotic drugs.²⁹⁵ Some of my informants said that Akufo-Addo has said several times that he was not going to comment on such rumors because they were false. But his silence has caused people to believe that the rumors are in some way true. Nana Agyei, for instance, told me that “if he [Akufo-Addo] is as innocent of the rumors as he claims, then why can’t he just come out to deny them, rather than keeping quiet about them?”²⁹⁶ To Nana Agyei and many other respondents who claimed to be staunch supporters of the NPP, these negative rumors about Akufo-Addo’s purported use of narcotic drugs,

²⁹² Gifty, Legon-Accra; Acquah, Legon-Accra; Kofi Halm, Fadama-Accra.

²⁹³ Shibutani, *Improvised News*, 212.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Isaac Kofi Amissah, “Nana Akufo-Addo and Drugs,” July 28, 2011 <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/artikel.php?ID=214834>

²⁹⁶ Nana Agyei, Lapaz-Accra.

although false, have partly cost him (Akufo-Addo) and the NPP the presidency and control of parliament twice. Political rumor has, therefore, become a two-edged sword; if you come out to deny it, you commit yourself the more and if you do not, it is taken as truth. But some rumors can fade away on their own, although they may resurface at another point in time when the situation that brought about the rumor in the past recurs.

Rumors can influence public opinion, especially about politicians, because people believe them. It is this element of the believability of rumor that makes it “powerful.”²⁹⁷ A rumor becomes convincing when everybody talks about it; it becomes believable when it is repeated because “everybody says it, and what everybody says must be true.”²⁹⁸ According to Rosnow and Fine:

As a rumor spreads it becomes more convincing. Repeated at the outset just for fun, it becomes a certainty. Indeed, one’s conviction grows when one hears the same information from several different people: if they all say the same thing, then it must be true.²⁹⁹

Rumor can be convincing upon repetition, but it may not be repeated in the same way the transmitter heard it. Often, the information gets diluted in transit—more information can either be added or taken out as the rumor moves from one lip to the next. Sometimes, too, the details of the rumors could be exaggerated for emphasis, while the person passing on a rumor will also determine what is added to or taken out of it.

Certain rumors are convincing and, therefore, rendered credible because they come with seeming proofs. That is why “we rarely hear a rumor all by itself: it is always accompanied by a whole slew of proofs that endow it with undeniable credibility.”³⁰⁰ Rumors “convey information we want to believe.”³⁰¹ We also believe certain rumors because they “often find an echo within us.”³⁰² This explains why “barely believable rumors” spread because they “vindicate our intuitions, feelings, and opinions.”³⁰³ In the case of Ghana, some people believe

²⁹⁷ White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 57.

²⁹⁸ Rosnow and Fine, *Rumor and Gossip*, 1.

²⁹⁹ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 80.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid, 82.

³⁰² Ibid, 84.

³⁰³ Ibid, 82.

political-occult rumors, for example, mainly because they feed into the highly negative and popular discourse, spearheaded by Pentecostals, that politics has a “dark side” and is an arena of the devil’s activities, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Three.³⁰⁴ The rumors, therefore, confirm what people already know and want to believe.

Sometimes the circumstances surrounding a particular political rumor or the time that it comes out will determine its believability or otherwise. In his discussion of why some rumors are believed, while others are not, Kapferer argues that “sensitivity of the Moment: The emergence of rumor is thus linked to momentary circumstances.”³⁰⁵ An instance in Ghana that some of my respondents mentioned to me was when there were rumors about the deteriorating health of the late former President Mills. What made some of them believe the rumors were that he looked physically ill, disappeared from the public’s eye for some time and eventually had to go to the US for a so-called “routine medical check-up,” fuelling the rumors, some of which sometimes pronounced him dead, even more.³⁰⁶ It was no surprise then when the news broke on the 24th of July, 2012, of the President’s passing because “all the signs were there; the writing was on the wall,” according to Salaam.³⁰⁷ Salaam’s sentiments were shared by other respondents, showing that sometimes the circumstances surrounding a particular rumor accounts for its believability or otherwise. As far as political-occult rumors are concerned, some Ghanaians argue that they believe some of them because of certain “strange” events that often occur around the same time the rumors come out, as I show in Chapter Three.

The ideology of the hearer can also affect whether they believe a particular political rumor or not. It is, therefore, “the ideological... context rather than the words themselves that ultimately produces the effects” of rumors.³⁰⁸ The Ghanaian electorate is mainly divided along political party lines and so the minds of the majority are basically made up about their preferred individual candidates or political parties irrespective of the kinds of rumors about

³⁰⁴ Meyer, “The Power of Money,” 29.

³⁰⁵ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 75.

³⁰⁶ ‘Myjoyonline.com,’ “Prez Mills off to the US for medical check-up,” August 16, 2012 <http://edition.myjoyonline.com/pages/news/201206/88463.php>

³⁰⁷ Salaam, Legon-Accra.

³⁰⁸ Stewart and Strathern, *Witchcraft, Sorcery*, 30.

them. They will, however, believe negative rumors about political opponents. This is why even though political-occult rumors influence some Ghanaians who accept the rumors at face value, to a large extent, some of my informants claimed that most of these negative occult rumors mainly influenced those known in Ghana as floating or undecided voters; people who are not yet decided on which party or candidate to vote for.

From the foregoing discussion in this section, it might be assumed that those who believe rumors about politicians do so without making any efforts at checking their veracity. This may not always be the case. As Kapferer notes:

To say that the public does not check would be erroneous. Individuals certainly do not personally verify, proceeding instead by intermediaries. Indeed, rumors come to their ears with the best proof they could possibly ask for: that of irrefutable direct testimony.³⁰⁹

In the Ghanaian situation, it can be said that a particular rumor is according to a party insider, a foot soldier, a relative or someone close to the person involved in the rumor and even the politicians themselves. As I noted earlier in this chapter, the Ghanaian media also adds to the credibility of rumors. This is because whether the media checked the information and source before publishing them or not, as long as they have been published and there is a record of them, it makes it easy for the information to convince some readers and hearers. Thus, some Ghanaians will tell you that if the information was not true, the media would not have published it, although some of them will also claim to not trust the same media because some of the things they put out there are for the sake of sensationalism and to sell their news, as I will demonstrate in chapters Three and Four.

But sometimes certain rumors need no proof to make them believable; some rumors “require no proof” since “public opinion is often founded more on impressions than on facts. Accusations alone suffice,” which is why “not every rumor targeting someone can succeed... rumors must first be rendered probable. They actually reveal latent image problems.”³¹⁰ In Ghana, while some political rumors are believed by many, others do not gain traction. This is because whether people will believe a particular political rumor may often be determined by the existing public perception of the politician or party in question. As I will demonstrate in

³⁰⁹ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 214.

³¹⁰ Ibid, 215.

Section IV of Chapter Four, a politician's public image often determines whether rumors, specifically negative occult ones, about them are believed or treated with cynicism.

Rumors can be deployed by politicians for political gain, as I will show in Chapter Five, but the electorate can also come up with their own to check their politicians. I explore some of the ways in which the masses can also use rumors as "weapons of the weak" next.³¹¹

Section IV: Rumors are "Weapons of the Weak"

I propose in this section that political rumors serve as metaphors used by the Ghanaian electorate to challenge the action and behavior of their otherwise powerful politicians. In this way, the rumors serve as "weapons of the weak" to ensure some leverage in the political landscape. As characterized by James Scott, rumor acts as one of the important "weapons of the weak" in society, and the political field is no exception.³¹² Guha has offered that during the peasant revolt in colonial India rumor became "a necessary instrument of rebel transmission."³¹³ It was through rumors that the peasants were incited and mobilized for the uprising. While sometimes the general populace cannot come out to physically express their displeasure with politicians, governments, and their policies, they can do so through rumors.

Although the authorship of rumors is usually seemingly unknown, some of my informants told me that apart from politicians putting some of the rumors out there, others are spun by the Ghanaian electorate. An example was what was cited by Yaw, a 35-year-old male commercial car driver in Awoshie-Accra, that:

You know it is true some of our politicians and parties are behind many of the negative rumors to win cheap popularity, but what I know is that we the ordinary people also make up some of the rumors.³¹⁴

I asked Yaw further why he thought that was the case, to which he answered that:

I think the Ghanaian people themselves spread these rumors to get back at their politicians for the failed promises and their perceived invincibility. That is why I say that not all the rumors are put out there by politicians, but the Ghanaian people themselves also concoct some of them.³¹⁵

³¹¹ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, 256.

³¹⁴ Yaw, interviewed by author, Awoshie-Accra, December 16, 2013.

³¹⁵ Yaw, Awoshie-Accra.

Politicians are regarded as powerful and the electorate, weak and, therefore, powerless but rumors, the section suggests, serve as empowering mechanisms for the electorate. Rumor is then “the weapon of the powerless” in society.³¹⁶ Rumors level the playing field for both the politician and the electorate; they provide avenues for the populace to produce narratives about political elites without being held responsible or punished for them.

Rumors spun and spread by the electorate, render political power in Africa “banal.”³¹⁷ According to Achille Mbembe, this “banality of power creates a particular closeness between the ruler and ruled, a form of ‘conviviality’ or ‘intimate tyranny’ that goes far beyond the binarist conceptions of the oppressor and oppressed, resulting in powerlessness.”³¹⁸ The populace may not have as much power as their politicians, but they still wield some form of symbolic power over them through the deployment of rumors, which they use to critique, mock and contest political domination. These negative rumors can mar the political fortunes of the political elites and parties involved. Since rumors, created by the ordinary people about politicians, can have dire consequences for the “ruler” involved, Mbembe calls them the “poor person’s bomb.”³¹⁹ If rumor is the “poor person’s bomb,” as Mbembe suggests, then Ghanaian politicians may choose to ignore occult rumors about them at their own peril. This inevitable reality was captured by Hassan that: “Sometimes negative rumors about politicians are very dangerous and so if you are a politician and you don’t do damage control, they are going to affect you; you will actually be in trouble.”³²⁰ Hassan’s statement underscores the potential of political-occult rumors in influencing the electorate’s attitude to politicians and the political process as a whole; it is also partly why many politicians go out of their way to pre-empt negative occult rumors about them by seeking virtue through their association with Pentecostals even before the rumors are constructed about them. I will touch on this further in Section I of Chapter Five.

³¹⁶ C.M. Toulabor, “Jeu de mots, jeu de vilains,” [translated in English as “Wordplay, naughty game”], *Politique Africaine* 3 (September 1981), 69.

³¹⁷ Achille Mbembe, “Provisional Notes on the Postcolony,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 62, No. 1, (1992), 3-37 URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1160062> Accessed: 25/06/2008 18:07 Accessed: 25/06/2008 18:07

³¹⁸ Mbembe, “Provisional Notes on the Postcolony.”

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Hassan, Ajiringanor-Accra.

One way the Ghanaian electorate is using political rumors is to critique political action and behavior. The rumors then serve as corrective structures in the Ghanaian political field. In his assessment of why rumors are prevalent in African politics, Nyamnjoh observed that “political control, draconian press laws, selective communication and downright misinformation and disinformation by states in Africa have pushed ordinary people to seek alternative ways of satisfying their information and communication needs.”³²¹ These “alternative ways,” he claims serve as “vital and pervasive undercurrents and reservoirs of political commentary, critique, and political mobilization.”³²² In the case of Ghana, the electorate uses rumors to comment on, interpret and critique government policies and the actions of individual politicians and political institutions. For example, the economic and developmental difficulties most Ghanaians go through are sometimes blamed on failed government policies through rumors. Instances are the rumors explaining the incessant nationwide power outage currently happening in Ghana, popularly known as “dumsor.”³²³ One such rumor going around presently is that whenever an area experiences a power outage, it means that Mahama, the President, has come to pass by and asked the Electricity Company to switch off the lights because he is jealous that the people are enjoying hydro-electric power.³²⁴ A variation of this rumor is that the lights go out whenever the President charges his countless cell phones – over 10 very expensive and energy-consuming ones.³²⁵ This may sound like a political joke, but it is a popular commentary on the perceived greed of Ghanaian politicians, including the President. This rumor was supposed to comment on the fact that even though the general populace is suffering from the harsh economic conditions, the President, and his operatives are hoarding the nation’s resources at the expense of the

³²¹ Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media*, 204.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ “Dumsor” is a popular term in Ghana characterizing the inconsistent nature of power supply in Ghana. The situation is such that because of the shortage of hydroelectric power due to the drying up of the Akosombo dam in Ghana that provides power for the nation, there has been for some time power outages mostly for very long hours and even days. So the ‘Dum’ means the going off of the lights and the ‘Sor’ means the lights coming on.

³²⁴ Maa Akos, Nyamekye-Accra.

³²⁵ Ibid.

poor Ghanaian—the real taxpayer. This also points to the perceived insensitivity of their politicians. In this way, the rumors have become the “counter-power” of the weak.³²⁶

The general populace uses rumors to check their politicians without risking getting into trouble for them. Rosalind Shaw, in her discussion on political-occult rumors in Sierra Leone, for example, argued that such rumors are used by the electorate “to challenge the excesses of power.”³²⁷ She mentioned how “images of sinister links between politicians and occult forces draw upon the symbolism of power and critique of its excesses.”³²⁸ In Ghana, occult rumors about politicians are serving as the tools the populace are using to challenge government policies and excesses. As Osikani, a 28-year-old female university student put it, “such rumors, when they come out and people are talking about them, you don’t see anyone coming to confront you with the police as to why you are talking about this or that politician.”³²⁹ Thus, one avoids taking responsibility for the consequences of negative rumors about politicians.

Furthermore, the Ghanaian electorate deploys rumors to mock political action, behavior, and policies. The rumors serve as political satire; that is, while the electorate laughs about the questionable actions and behavior of their politicians, they express their frustrations with the political system. A case in point was when in 2014 the Mahama-led NDC government announced its intention of giving free sanitary pads to high school girls in the rural and poor areas of Ghana.³³⁰ This initiative was to ensure that the students do not have to miss school due to lack of sanitary pads during their periods.³³¹ This move by the government sparked some controversy and led to the rumor that “the Mahama-led government’s main intention for distributing the pads was to use them for juju rituals to help

³²⁶ Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media*, 217.

³²⁷ Rosalind Shaw, “The Politician and the Diviner: Divination and the Consumption of Power in Sierra Leone” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 26 Fasc. 1 (Feb., 1996): 35.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Osikani, interviewed by author, Fadama-Accra, February 6, 2014.

³³⁰ ‘Myjoyonline.com,’ “Loan for pads shows Ghana’s level of poverty under Mahama – STUNNAD,” July 10, 2014 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/555183/1/loan-for-pads-shows-ghanas-lev.html>

³³¹ Edna -GC Staff, “NDC Approves 156 Million Dollar Loan to Buy Sanitary Pads...,” July 3, 2014 <http://www.ghanacelebrities.com/2014/07/03/ndc-approves-156-million-dollar-loan-buy-sanitary-pads/>

them win the 2016 elections.”³³² Apparently, the menstrual blood of a woman especially that of a virgin is considered as potent and used by occult ritualists for potions for their clientele. The rumor alleged that when the girls used the sanitary pads, their menstrual blood would ritually translate into votes for the NDC in the 2016 elections. The rumor, therefore, portrayed the sitting President, Mahama, a Pentecostal, as someone who used the occult, in spite of his public show of Pentecostal piety. On the surface, the rumor was used to mock the government’s initiative, but it exhibited how *occultic* meanings can be read into some government policies by Ghanaians.³³³

The rumor about the NDC government’s intention of ritually and magically translating the menstrual blood of school girls into votes when they announced their free sanitary pad initiative is just one of the many examples of how Ghanaians can make light of some government decisions they may deem important. The person who told me this rumor laughed out loud while she was saying it, which led me to ask her if she was sure about the story; she said: “Yes, but even if it is not true, the most important thing is that it is funny.”³³⁴ Allport and Postman have postulated that rumors, like humor, “are frank products of imagination, intended to arouse not credulity, but laughter.”³³⁵ It is true that some political rumors may be sources of humor in Ghana, but I argue here that they mean more than that because they can sometimes be “convenient ways to let out what is repressed; rumors are not funny stories; they claim to reflect reality.”³³⁶ This is why some Ghanaians argue that the political-occult rumors particularly reflect the hidden realities of modern Ghanaian politics.

Apart from the supposed occultic implications of the free sanitary pad initiative, the rumor was criticizing the perceived misplaced priorities of the NDC government, and that of many other governments before it. Some Ghanaians are of the opinion that the country has much more pressing problems, such as the lack of school supplies for students and the perennial problem of electricity shortage that has come to be called “dumsor,” than the lack

³³² From a conversation I had with a friend recently over the phone.

³³³ I am using the term ‘occultic’ in this thesis to refer to phenomena that are deemed as occult in nature.

³³⁴ Maa Jane, interviewed by author, Nyamekye-Accra, January 26, 2014.

³³⁵ Allport and Postman, *The Psychology*, 192.

³³⁶ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 46.

of sanitary pads for girls. This “dumsor” prevents students, especially those in the poor and rural areas where there are no power generators, from studying in the evenings after school. In a nutshell, the government could put the money to better use that would go a long way to improving school attendance and ultimately the performance of the target students. And so for Mahama and his administration to be thinking about giving sanitary pads, which purportedly would collect the flow of blood of the girls, most of whom were believed to be virgins, was allegedly seen as “demonic,” as characterized by the NPP’s Sammy Awuku—having an occultic implication.³³⁷ The question that my friend who told me about the rumor asked me was: “If the government is not considering using their menstrual blood for occult rituals, then why sanitary pads of all the things they could have given the students for free?”³³⁸ This underscores the notion that when a Ghanaian says “politics is a dirty game,” although on the surface it may seem the person is commenting on the mudslinging and corruption that have come to characterize the nation’s politics, the underlying implication is the occult machinations of political actors who will allegedly go to any lengths to ensure their electoral success.

While some Ghanaians read occultic meanings into the government’s sanitary pad initiative, others saw it as their way to winning support in the targeted rural and poor areas. Akuffo, for instance, claimed that the government was only using the distribution of the pads as a “strategy to win cheap popularity among the rural poor.”³³⁹ He said that instead of the government to use the money for better things, they decided to use the opportunity to lure the poor into voting for them, something that one of his friends on Facebook called “broad daylight bribery.”³⁴⁰ To Akuffo then, Mahama and his NDC government were using such an initiative to make sure they got the votes of the people living in the poor and rural areas. Akuffo’s point goes to show that the rumor critiqued the government’s initiative in more ways than one.

³³⁷ ‘Adomonline,’ “Mahama’s Pad Campaign Is Demonic – Sammy Awuku,” July 4, 2014 <http://www.myjoyonline.com/politics/2014/July-4th/mahama-sanitary-pad-initiative-is-demonic-sammy-awuku.php>

³³⁸ Maa Jane, Fadama-Accra.

³³⁹ Akuffo, Tema-Accra.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

The interesting thing about the rumor about the occultic implications of the NDC's free sanitary pad campaign was that as soon as the NPP saw its popularity and impact in the public domain, they added their voice to the public outcry. According to Sammy Awuku, the National Youth Organizer of the NPP, the "Mahama sanitary pad initiative is demonic."³⁴¹ By his use of the word "demonic," Awuku was also alluding to the occultic implications of the government's proposed program. This means that sometimes the electorate can start a conversation on what politicians have been meaning to say all along. It was possible the NPP wanted to say something about the free pad campaign but was afraid of a public outcry against their kicking against the government's good intention. But when the public showed their displeasure with the initiative, it gave the NPP the leeway or even audacity to add their voice to the public outcry. In Ghana Pentecostals characterize the occult as "evil," "demonic," "satanic," among others, and so Awuku's characterization of Mahama's pad campaign as "demonic" was another way of calling it occultic in line with what some Ghanaians thought of as the President's ploy to allegedly use the blood of the girls for occult rituals to help the NDC retain power in 2016.

Additionally, through the rumors some Ghanaians have a peek into the lives of their otherwise powerful politicians. As an illustration of this point, Akuffo, for instance, noted that:

It is very difficult for the ordinary Ghanaian to get close to the politicians because of the people around them who make them look like God and so individual Ghanaians in their bid to level the playing field with the politician and to draw their attention to the fact that 'obiaa nnye obiaa' [we are all nothing] after all, will sit down and concoct these stories just to deride and make fun of their politicians. It is only through rumors that an ordinary person can disrespect a politician and go scot free and so why not cook up a story that will allow me to do just that?³⁴²

In Ghana, because the ruled are often distanced from the affairs of the ruler, it is only through rumor that the former gets a peek into the life and affairs of the latter. Through the rumors, the electorate tries to come up with their own insights into a politician's life, thereby conjecturing about what is going on in the lives of their "former friends and neighbors."³⁴³ It is obvious from this discussion that the Ghanaian electorate is not as credulous as their

³⁴¹ 'Adomonline,' "Mahama's Pad Campaign Is Demonic – Sammy Awuku," July 4, 2014 <http://www.myjoyonline.com/politics/2014/July-4th/mahama-sanitary-pad-initiative-is-demonic-sammy-awuku.php>

³⁴² Akuffo, Tema-Accra.

³⁴³ Akuffo, Tema-Accra.

politicians may suppose. The politicians may seem powerful, but the power they wield is a shared one because through rumors the electorate also has some symbolic power, which brings us full circle to Mbembe's notion of the "banality" of political power in Africa.³⁴⁴

The rumors about Ghanaian politicians' suspected involvement in the occult especially provide the weak and marginalized with the idioms to offer popular critiques of the corrupt wealth and dominance of those in power by linking them to evil medicines prepared by occult ritual specialists. Thus, those few who allegedly empower or enrich themselves through dubious, occult means become associated with symbols, which have come to carry meanings of backwardness. And in so far as those in power are forced to shape themselves to these popular stories, the rumors have become "weapons" in the hands of the "weak."³⁴⁵ The rumors then serve as both empowering and disempowering mechanisms and, consequently, offer political actors in the Ghanaian political square the tools to dominate and resist at the same time. By offering the populace, those considered to be weak and marginalized, the spaces and the language to critique and deride political action and behavior, rumors participate in the modern African, and for that matter Ghanaian, experimentation with democracy.

Conclusions

This chapter argued that rumor plays a vital role in Ghanaian socio-political life. Rumor serves as a source of news, shapes public opinions about political elites and the political process generally and informs people's beliefs and ideas about the political use of the occult. Although the original means for the transmission of rumor is by word of mouth, the print and electronic media facilitate its spread exponentially. The chapter also highlighted the natural correlation between rumor, religion, and the occult. Because rumor spreads much the same way as religious truth—through words and believed based on faith—some scholars have claimed they are similar, if not the same. Rumor also acts as an important avenue of access to the realm of the occult due to the perceived secret character of the occult.

³⁴⁴ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*.

³⁴⁵ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 25.

The political field is one of the main arenas for the production and spread of rumors. Rumors parade as letting the public in on what pertains in the secret world of politics. While some Ghanaians believe that their politicians deliberately spread rumors for political gains, others are of the view that the electorate can also use them as “weapons of the weak” to ensure some leverage on the political landscape.³⁴⁶ The Ghanaian populace can sometimes deploy rumors as metaphors to challenge, mock political action and behavior and through them have a peek into the lives and affairs of their otherwise powerful politicians. This chapter considered a number of scholarly definitions and some Ghanaian popular understandings of rumors but suggested a working definition of the phenomenon. It proposed that rumor is any information circulated by word of mouth or the print and electronic media, which cannot be said to be either true or false, but serves as a source of news because some people believe it and has the potential to influence public opinion about its subject.

There is a popular sense in Ghana that politicians and their operatives spin rumors to influence public opinion, but there are two conflicting attitudes of the Ghanaian public to them. These attitudes are the ready acceptance of the rumors and cynicism towards them. The next chapter is a discussion of the first of these attitudes—the acceptance of the rumors at face value. It accounts for what lends the authority of truth and credibility to political-occult rumors that make some Ghanaians readily accept them.

³⁴⁶ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 25.

CHAPTER THREE

ACCEPTANCE OF POLITICAL OCCULT RUMORS AT FACE VALUE

The previous chapter examined the socio-political significance of rumor in Ghana. This present chapter considers one of the two conflicting popular attitudes of the Ghanaian electorate to political-occult rumors, which is the acceptance of the rumors at face value. There is a common perception among a section of the Ghanaian public that all politicians use the occult for electoral success without any exceptions and this makes rumors that link politicians to the occult believable. I explore in this section what accounts for the persuasiveness and authority of the truth of political-occult rumors, which leads some Ghanaians to readily accept them.

Four main factors that also form the four sections of this chapter were highlighted by my interview respondents as what accounted for the credibility and, therefore, the believability of political-occult rumors in Ghana. The versatility of the occult as a spiritual resource in meeting people's needs, which proves that political-occult rumors are real life stories and not mere rumors was cited as one of the reasons some Ghanaians accept the rumors. The first section of this chapter will investigate this versatility of the occult as a vital spiritual resource. The negative Pentecostal narrative on the occult and some of the claims made by occult ritual specialists that politicians come to them for help also give credence to the rumors and are serving as the major drivers of Ghanaians' acceptance of political-occult rumors. These two issues constitute the second and third sections of the chapter respectively—the second will discuss the former, while the third will examine the latter. Additionally, the rumors are used by some Ghanaians to explain what they term “strange” happenings. These four factors, this chapter suggests, lend political-occult rumors their authority of truth; they render them credible to be believed.

Section I: Versatility of the Occult as a Spiritual Resource

There is a popular perception in Ghana that the occult is everywhere, everyone uses it, irrespective of whether they are Christian or Muslim, and politicians are no exception. I argue in this section that one element that accounts for the credibility and thus ready acceptance of political-occult rumors in Ghana is the characteristic of the occult as a versatile spiritual

resource. Many of my respondents emphasized that people used the occult in Ghana because of its versatility as a spiritual resource. They claimed that the occult exists and works for those who believe in its power. The versatility of the occult stresses its multi-dimensional qualities of being an accessible, neutral, potent and important spiritual power.

The occult is regarded by many Ghanaians as a neutral space to seek help for both mundane and spiritual needs. Echoing the neutrality of the occult, Hassan, the 61-year-old male lecturer, said that “the occult is a spiritual help that individuals seek from people with higher knowledge; where the knowledge is coming from and how it is used will make it good or bad.”³⁴⁷ The occult in itself, then, could be either malevolent or benevolent depending on who is using it and for what it is used. It became obvious in my interviews that just as people go to church with different motives, so do individuals have different motives for using the occult, but the main reason is for the protection from evil forces, such as witchcraft, although some people equate the occult to witchcraft. Individuals and groups seek solutions to their daily problems and anxieties from people believed to have access to knowledge of the occult spiritual realm. I will talk more about this neutrality of the occult in Chapter Five.

Some Ghanaians are also of the view that the spiritual power of the occult is easily accessible and can be harnessed to achieve ends in the social, economic and political spheres of life. For example, Hassan again stated categorically that:

I am an African and every African looks to the spiritual realm for help. Students, accountants, medical officers, teachers, I mean everyone seeks help from different sources, especially the occult realm, okay. So we should not actually exempt our politicians from the occult; we should not even single out any one party or politician from it. All of them do flirt with it.³⁴⁸

As a consequence of Hassan’s assertion above, many Ghanaians argue that “life is largely a game of chance” and by securing the backing of supernatural sources of power, a person will ensure his or her chances of success here on earth. While some people rely on the so-called legitimate religious sources of power for this success, such as Pentecostal Christianity, others allegedly rely on occult means due to its potency. Apparently, politicians do not want to be left out on this potency of the occult and are, therefore, alleged to rely on ritual specialists

³⁴⁷ Hassan, Ajiringanor-Accra.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

who have the ability to probe into the occult world to empower them to win elections, ensure their hold on political power and for protection against those who may seek to harm them.

Other respondents described to me how people, through the potency of the occult, seek to have control or selfish advantage over others. This tendency often plays out in contexts where there is competition over resources, such as the political field. It is assumed that even some Pentecostal pastors use the occult to perform miracles to draw people to their churches.³⁴⁹ The occult is allegedly used by students, as well, specifically, those in the universities, to manipulate lecturers and examiners in order to get good grades.³⁵⁰ It is thus a common occurrence for almost every Ghanaian, including politicians, to use the occult in times of difficulty, they said. This view was captured by Salaam when he suggested that:

If you look at the general picture, what the politicians are doing now [seeking help from the occult] is not limited to them; it is what every Ghanaian will do. For example, about 60% of Christians, if they have critical moments in their lives will go beyond Christian spirituality to consult other spiritualities and the easiest and most potent one is the occult and they do this under the cover of darkness. Likewise, there are some Muslims who when they have some challenges will do the same. So it is like what they say in African traditional religion that “when your spirituality fails you, you try another one.”³⁵¹

To Salaam, then, when people face very difficult challenges in their lives that they believe neither the Christian nor Muslim faith is able to help them solve, they find themselves going secretly for help from occult ritual specialists. In the same way, when Ghanaian politicians need supernatural assistance that goes beyond their respective religions—Christianity and Islam—to win crucial elections or retain political power, they seek the help of the occult. As Salaam further argued:

African politicians become religious in election years. What I mean is that they seek religious favors, interventions, assistance to outdo their political enemies. They have the conviction that spiritual personalities can change their fortunes and turn a losing party into a victorious party, and a losing candidate into a winning candidate. And so they use occult spirituality in some cases to weaken the physique, mentality, and aspirations of their opponents. You know an election is always uncertain; you have done all the humanly possible things to win, but you need spiritual fortification or back-up. The first instinct is to get the backing of powerful occult spiritual forces, and not just prayer because of the tedious nature of campaigns.³⁵²

³⁴⁹ I.F. Joe Awuah Jnr. and Ernest Kofi Adu, “‘Juju’ Planted In Church,” *Daily Guide*, June 11, 2015.

³⁵⁰ Hassan, Ajiringanor-Accra; Kwame Fosu, Nungua-Accra.

³⁵¹ By “spirituality,” Salaam was referring to the supernatural power found in religion.

³⁵² Salaam, Ajiringanor-Accra.

Politicians purportedly use the occult for various ends in their bid to fulfill their ambitions, which highlights the indispensability of the occult in Ghana. The occult has, therefore, allegedly become the *fallback plan* for many people in Ghana, including politicians.

Politics in Ghana is regarded as having a spiritual dimension to it; the political race is often perceived as fixed in the spiritual realm before it manifests in the physical realm. Many Ghanaians believe that just as rulers in pre-colonial times consulted ritual specialists for spiritual help with winning the favor of kingmakers and their subjects-to-be, so do present-day politicians seek help from the occult world to boost their electoral chances. This idea was captured by Damba, the 41-year-old male academic, when he contended that “we do not have to consider voting to be just a physical affair—something that is done physically because it has to be fought and won from the spiritual realm.”³⁵³ He explained to me, reiterating Salaam’s position above, why this is the case that:

If you are an underdog in the political race and your stars are not shining, you can consult a traditional ritualist who will find a spiritual way to boost your chances of winning. If the spirits support you, they can sway people to change their minds toward you. They can manipulate occult spiritual forces to undo the stars of your opponents so that you win the election over them. So normally we don’t necessarily look at the electoral process as a physical issue. That is why we have so much unexplainable over voting in our elections and most of these politicians, as soon as after the elections, the victor is made to do a lot of sacrifices and has a lot of responsibility to pacify all the spirits that were invited to assist them to win.³⁵⁴

Modern Ghanaian politics is, therefore, a spiritual affair and by no means a physical one. The electoral process does not only involve going to the polls on Election Day and casting one’s vote to choose his/her preferred candidate or political party with his/her thumb, as normally thought of in Ghana as “kokrommoti power” (the power of the thumb), but the elections are already fixed in the spiritual realm.³⁵⁵ This explains why aspirants to political offices will allegedly consult ritual specialists, mostly occult ones, who would probe into the spiritual realm to determine their chances of winning elections. The popular notion in Ghana is that while politicians publicly associate with Pentecostals for prayers, support and legitimation due to their influence and negative discourse on the occult, these politicians supposedly use the occult surreptitiously to win or stay in power. The occult, then, has the necessary

³⁵³ Damba, Ajiringanor-Accra.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Kofi Halm, interviewed by author, Fadama-Accra, February 12, 2014.

resources to meet an individual or a group's spiritual and physical needs, although a negative connotation is attached to such help.

It may seem that all of the rumors in Ghana about politicians and their links with the occult are about those in the two major parties, the NDC and NPP, but the smaller parties also purportedly benefit from help from the occult. Salaam again said that:

All the political parties in Ghana have used the occult at some point; even the small parties struggling at the bottom. The smaller parties know their chances of winning are slim and, therefore, seek the help of the occult not to win, but to gradually build their bases in order to be able to compete with the bigger parties when the time is right.³⁵⁶

The popular perception in Ghana about individuals and groups using the occult for help with various spiritual and material needs are depicted in Ghanaian and Nigerian movies.³⁵⁷ Popular cinema, therefore, plays an important role in portraying the changes in context and functions of discourses about the occult.³⁵⁸ These movies predominantly portray how people use the occult to achieve various ends, including spiritual protection from enemies, acquiring visas to travel abroad, getting a spouse, money, children, to mention just a few. Some of the movies also show how some politicians go for occult powers to help them win elections.

Although the source of occult spiritual power is undermined in Ghana, especially by Pentecostals, it is still regarded as a multi-purpose spiritual power by many in meeting people's needs. Consequently, rumors that link politicians to the occult are deemed as real life stories and thus true. This is because politicians are allegedly confident in the potency of the spiritual power of the occult and harness it for political success. As Abeiku, the foot soldier who was introduced earlier, said: "I believe some of these stories cannot be discounted as just rumors because I know they are real stories. There were times that I visited shrines with politicians to perform rituals to help us win elections and in many cases, they won."³⁵⁹ This was why Hassan was of the view that: "The stories about politicians' association with the occult are not just rumors; some of them are just information floating around about the reality of what is happening here [Ghana], with regards to the kinds of help politicians get

³⁵⁶ Salaam, Ajiringanor-Accra.

³⁵⁷ Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, xviii.

³⁵⁸ Birgit Meyer, "Occult Forces on Screen: Representation and the Danger of Mimesis in Popular Ghanaian Films," *Etnofoor*, Vol. 15, No. 1/2, SCREENS (2002): 212-221.

³⁵⁹ Abeiku, interviewed by author, Nungua-Accra, February 22, 2014.

from occult agents.”³⁶⁰ Political-occult rumors then help Ghanaians to think they know what their politicians are doing behind the scenes—beyond what they do and claim in public—to ensure their political successes. This point was underscored by Salaam, who revealed to me something he claimed to be a top secret that:

When Kufuor wanted to be President in 2000, he went to Yendi, in the northern region of Ghana, for some rituals to be performed for him and the NPP. After the rituals, Kufuor was asked to ride a ram, which he did. Mind you that prior to Kufuor’s time, Adu Boahen, the first presidential candidate of the NPP in 1992, went to Yendi, but refused to ride the ram, and as a result did not win. Akufo-Addo, the successor to Kufuor in 2008, also refused and didn’t win. You see the trend here; the one who rode the ram won, while those who refused to do it lost. The point is that although neither Adu Boahen nor Akufo-Addo did ride the ram, they still went to Yendi. I know that sometimes even when the actual flag bearers do not go themselves to consult the occult specialists, their operatives go on their behalf.³⁶¹

Salaam is also a former politician, belonging to the NPP, and someone who claimed to be privy to the inner workings of the party. Animals are common motifs in occult rumors in Ghana and Kufuor riding the ram was a sign of victory in the impending elections and therefore symbolic of how he was going to conquer his opponents and become the next President of Ghana. If the NPP did not believe there was any power in the occult, they would not have allegedly consulted the shrine for help with winning the elections, even though Adu Boahen and Akufo-Addo refused to “ride the ram.” But these politicians either winning due to following the instructions given to them by occult ritualists or losing as a result of doing the complete opposite could be classed as mere coincidence and not because of the occult help they may have received or not. In other words, the outcomes of the above scenarios could have been circumstantial and, therefore, not sufficient evidence for the so-called potency of the occult. Having said that, circumstances, like those cited above, confirm people’s belief in the versatility of the occult as a spiritual resource and subsequently influence their acceptance of political-occult rumors as real life stories and, therefore, true.

One other respondent who thought of political-occult rumors as credible because they were real life stories about the political use of the occult was Ahodor, a 51-year-old male public relations officer in Legon-Accra, who argued that: “We can say stories about our politicians’ involvement in the occult are just rumors, without even an iota of truth in them,

³⁶⁰ Hassan, Ajiringanor-Accra.

³⁶¹ Salaam, Legon-Accra.

but in the Ghanaian political context, these are real stories and cannot be ignored as mere rumors or lies.”³⁶² Damba corroborated this position and opined thus:

All of our politicians use the occult. I know there is the rumors dimension, but there are also the ones that are true and real stories based on my own experiences and what I have come to know about some of the help our politicians get from occult ritual agents in order to win elections. This is because I have had personal interactions with some of the occult ritualists who have told me categorically about the rituals they have performed to help most of our politicians. What I know generally about politicians, even rich men, is that they always consult occult ritualists. So all our politicians use it.³⁶³

For someone like Damba, who also claimed to have personal experiences and, therefore, first-hand information about the so-called occult activities of Ghanaian politicians, he will not doubt the political use of the occult. Some of the rumors then come from credible sources, such as people very close to the politicians, political parties, the politicians themselves and the ritual specialists involved, which highlights one of the elements of the transmission of rumors that lead people to believe them; that is, they supposedly come from credible or trusted sources. This also means that the veil of anonymity is lifted off such rumors. By coming from so-called credible sources, the rumors are also regarded as news, which increases their persuasiveness. These credible sources, I argue, lend authority to the truth of political-occult rumors in Ghana.

This section has been a discussion of the popular perception in Ghana that most of the stories circulating about politicians’ engagements with the occult are not mere rumors, but real life stories because they confirm the versatility of the occult as a spiritual resource. That is, the occult is regarded as a phenomenon with the multi-dimensional qualities of being an accessible, neutral, vital and prevalent spiritual resource for meeting the needs of people. The occult is, therefore, used by many people due to its spiritual versatility irrespective of their religious affiliation and politicians are no exception. This perception leads to the ready acceptance of political-occult rumors by some Ghanaians. The next section examines one of the two major drivers for ideas about the prevalence of the occult in modern Ghanaian politics, which is the negative Pentecostal narrative on the occult. The section argues that this discourse, far from discounting ideas about the existence and power of the occult, in fact,

³⁶² Ahodor, interviewed by author, Legon-Accra, January 17, 2014,

³⁶³ Damba, Ajiringanor-Accra.

upholds beliefs in it and thus accounts, in part, for why some people accept political-occult rumors at face value.

Section II: Negative Pentecostal Narrative on the Occult

In this section, I argue that some Ghanaians readily accept rumors about their politicians' involvement in the occult, mainly because the rumors feed into the negative Pentecostal discourse about politics having a "dark side" and being an arena of the devil's activities.³⁶⁴ This negative Pentecostal narrative gives political-occult rumors credibility; hence their ready acceptance. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, this perception partly explains why when Ghanaians claim that "politics is a dirty game," on the surface it may seem the person is commenting on the political mudslinging and corruption, but they are, in fact, alluding to the occult machinations of political actors. The negative Pentecostal view on and narrative about the occult provide ideas about the occult and its use by Ghanaian politicians. Pentecostal Christianity informs how many Ghanaians perceive the world and the occult. As I have argued in Chapter One, Pentecostalism thrives in contexts that are also crucial breeding grounds for occult beliefs and practices. I emphasize here my argument that the equally widespread nature of the occult and rumors about it in Ghanaian socio-political life is tied to the growth of the public visibility of Pentecostals and the expansion of Pentecostalism in modern Ghana. This section, therefore, sets out to answer the very important question: How has the growth of Pentecostalism informed the prevalence of the occult in Ghana and the nation's politics?

The occult is one of the major competitors of Pentecostalism in Ghana when it comes to the production of supernatural power. As a result of this, the Pentecostal tradition sponsors the delegitimization of the occult through its narrative. The occult landscape is described by Pentecostals as an important repository of "demonic doorways," and "the abode of evil spirits."³⁶⁵ This negative Pentecostal discourse on the occult finds expression in many ways, including their songs. For instance, one popular Pentecostal song says: "Yen nenanom som abosom, nananom som nkongwa, nanso yen de yebesom Yehowa." To wit the song

³⁶⁴ Meyer, "The Power of Money," 29.

³⁶⁵ Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu uses this term to refer to areas of moral vulnerability that are believed to open doors to demons - or spiritual "gate-crashers" in his book, *African Charismatics*, 110.

means that our forefathers worshiped stones, lesser gods, and stools, but as for us and our generation, we will serve Jehovah. Pentecostals claim that: “abosom ne nkongwa tumi de, mfaso biara nni so” [meaning that there is no benefit in serving the occult traditional gods because they have no power]. And even if these lesser gods and spirits have power, it is only through the name and blood of Jesus that one can have victory over them, as appropriately captured in another Pentecostal song that: “Nkunimdi wo ho ma won a wotwen Jesus, na ne mogya no ye won akokyem” [there is victory for those who wait upon Jesus because his blood is their armor]. It is obvious from these two songs that Pentecostalism fosters belief in the occult but places a negative value on it at the same time.

Movies—both Ghanaian and Nigerian—which have become hot entertainment commodities are also important conduits for the transmission of occult narratives. In present-day Ghana, aside from Pentecostal churches channeling their discourse through modern media outlets, there are independent cultural entrepreneurs who engage in transmitting Christian views using music, popular art, drama and video films.³⁶⁶ Tapping into the “highly pentecostalized” popular culture in West Africa, which often pits Christianity against the occult, filmmakers emphasize the superiority of Christianity in their films.³⁶⁷ They are able to achieve this by vesting the Christian God and his agents with the power to not only see but also to effectively neutralize the powers of satanic forces operating in the dark underworld of the occult. These forces include witches, Mame Wata, ghosts, African traditional gods, ancestral spirits and their human agents.³⁶⁸ In fact, one of the main attractions of these videos is their visualization of evil. Making use of computer-derived special effects, they unveil evil forces and their agents believed to be in operation and responsible for the vicissitudes of life, which otherwise remain concealed to the ordinary eye.

These local movies claim to portray the realities of life in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, especially with regards to people’s—including politicians—involvement with the occult. An example of these movies is “The Chosen One” (1 and 2), a Nigerian movie and its

³⁶⁶ Meyer, *Religion, Media*.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid, 282-3.

sequel, “Beware of Wonders” (1 and 2).³⁶⁹ This four-part movie follows the lives of four individuals who used different means to acquire their wealth and fame. One of them was a businessman and a landlord who in the quest to make his business grow was directed to a certain “Man of God,” known in the movie as “My Lord Bishop.” This “Man of God” was portrayed in the movie as someone who professed to be a Pentecostal pastor, but in essence was an occult ritualist. The “Man of God” asked the businessman to sacrifice (ritually kill) his wife in order for his request to be granted. In one of the scenes of the movie the businessman wondered in his mind that:

What has the world come to? These so-called men of God are now operating in ways that make them even worse than native doctors [occult ritualists]. How can I sacrifice my wife, my own wife? Even if I am a ritualist, sacrificing my lovely wife is way out of it. But my business, my 250 million Naira, hmm hmm.

Even though the man was fully aware that ritually killing his wife in order for his business to thrive was not the right thing to do, he went ahead to do it eventually, in his quest for wealth. After sacrificing his wife and seeing that his business was actually flourishing, he gave the “Man of God” a huge sum of money as a compensation. The “Man of God” in turn ‘prophesied’ about how the wealth of all his tenants would be transferred to him.

Another man sacrificed his mother and brother for wealth. He ended up confessing, was later struck by thunder and had to be buried in the village’s “evil forest.” In the movie, a politician, who was aspiring to be the governor of one of the Nigerian states, went to the same “Man of God” who had him sacrifice six virgins and two of his sons in order to win the seat. The irony of the situation was that another businessman, named God’s Power, who, unlike the others, made his money through hard work, was rather branded as the one who used the occult in obtaining his wealth. It was even rumored that he had designs to use his mother and brothers’ heads for “blood money.” Eventually, those who used the occult to gain their wealth and political power lost it all at the end and the one who was falsely accused was exonerated. The moral of the story was that although the occult would help you to some extent, it would in the end land you in disgrace, poverty, and even death.

³⁶⁹ Popular Nigerian movies found on the YouTube online channel https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=the+chosen+one+nigerian+movie

But we must also note that the so-called Man of God made his followers engage in acts that were seen by his followers themselves as the occult. This is because although he posed as a Pentecostal prophet, the kinds of activities he made his followers engage in were similar to what occult ritualists allegedly asked their clients to participate in, confirming why some people argue that even the practices of some Pentecostal preachers are akin to that of occult ritual agents. Although these movies are supposed to just entertain, they confirm the prevailing sense that they are true depictions of what pertains to society and politics today, supported by Pentecostals themselves who often refer to them as confirmations of the existence and actions of occult spiritual forces, especially in politics.³⁷⁰

While some Ghanaians find in the occult available resources for meeting their needs instantly, this view is in sharp contrast with the Pentecostal claim of having the only supernatural power through which people can find solutions to their material and spiritual problems. It may seem both Pentecostalism and the occult have the power to offer individuals and groups solutions to their problems, but Pentecostals argue that the gifts one may get with the help of occult supernatural forces may not last. This notion came through when Maa Akos, who has been cited earlier, offered a word of caution to politicians who allegedly use the occult that:

Even though the occult can give you instant gratification, like political power, its end is destruction for yourself and the nation. Only God's protection is the best form of protection for a politician or anyone who needs it. God's power is the only one which can give a politician true success.³⁷¹

Thus, help from the occult is only temporary and does not last. Even if it does, one's association with the occult will only bring curses upon them—as depicted by the outcome of the movies cited above—and if they happen to be politicians, then the whole nation is cursed too. The occult, according to Pentecostals, is, therefore, what some people, especially politicians, use to do their “dirty work” for them; by “dirty work” they mean the use of human blood for rituals among other untoward practices cast as belonging to the realm of the occult.

³⁷⁰ Meyer, “Religious and Secular,” 99.

³⁷¹ Maa Akos, Nyamekye-Accra.

The political dimension of how Ghanaian Pentecostals frame the occult phenomenon in Ghana is their characterization of politics as a field indebted to occult powers.³⁷² Pentecostals in Ghana engender belief in the occult and specifically link it to politics. Politics, Ghanaian Pentecostals claim, has a “dark side.”³⁷³ To Pentecostals, power “may not stem from the people, as the language of democracy claims, but from secret [occult] rites.”³⁷⁴ This notion even extends to how Pentecostals put most of the national misfortunes and the social, economic and political plight Ghanaians face at the doorstep of the supposed occult dealings of politicians. Pentecostals claim these things are repercussions of the curses politicians have brought on the nation and its people as a result of incurring the anger of God by following demonic occult spiritual powers, instead of the Christian God.³⁷⁵ That is why Pentecostals attribute the failures—both past and present—of government policies, national disasters, corruption, coup d’états, poverty, etc., to the evil forces residing in Ghana’s occult landscape. Pentecostals contend that the association of past leaders with the occult has put the nation and its people under a curse from God. For example, Ghanaian Pentecostals often blame the failures of the nation on Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first President, for his association with Kankan Nyame, an occult god he allegedly imported from Guinea.³⁷⁶ They say that Nkrumah sold the fate of Ghana and its future to this god and as a result put the nation under a curse because he made God angry with the nation. On the other hand, if Nkrumah had relied solely on the Christian God to govern the nation, Ghana would be a much more prosperous country than it is now.

Pentecostal pastors and prophets, at various points in time, come out to warn politicians in Ghana about their use of the occult, which they claim has brought the wrath of God on the country. They have said that if these politicians do not desist from such behavior, it would mean dire consequences for the nation. Other Pentecostal pastors have given “prophecies” that allude to the occult dealings of politicians. For example, Prophet Isaac

³⁷² Meyer, “The Power of Money,” 29.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Aduako, Fadama-Accra; Kofi Halm, Nyamekye-Accra; Amissah, Fadama-Accra; and KJ, Kasoa-Accra.

³⁷⁶ Ellis and ter Harr, *Worlds of Power*, 91; Aduako, Fadama-Accra.

Owusu Bempah, the founder and leader of the Glorious Word Ministry International in Accra, at his church's 31st December 2015, service warned Ghanaians about what he called "prophecies" that God revealed to him concerning the year 2016. Bempah is known in Ghana for his 31st December prophecies and so at the end of every year, many people look forward to hearing what he has to say in terms of the so-called prophecies, which have become newsworthy. This time there were 31 prophecies in all, three of which alluded to the occult means through which politicians in Ghana purportedly intend to win the 2016 general elections. They were:

Some people need the blood to do something... (For power)... Rituals performance for experiencing rainfalls to take more lives because they need blood for power... During [the] campaign, convoys shall encounter accidents which will take away lives... (Blood is needed).³⁷⁷

Bempah's prophecies highlight the tendency of Ghanaians to attribute some events they term as "strange" to political manipulation of the occult, as I will show in the final section of this chapter. The Pentecostal discourse on the influence of the occult in Ghanaian politics is why Meyer has argued that "political conflict in Ghana appears to be cast in terms of a dialectics of divinization and demonization of power."³⁷⁸ Ghanaian Pentecostals shun the occult and so if a politician or a political party is perceived to be slightly associated with it, then there is a big problem for the politician or political party involved. Politicians and political parties, in their efforts to avoid the occult and rumors about it, then, go out of their way to pre-empt occult rumors by associating with Pentecostals and engaging in Pentecostal activities. But we must bear in mind that Pentecostals have themselves come under some suspicion of their own use of the occult due to some of their actions and practices being looked upon as manifestations of the occult. Some of their pastors have even been alleged to sometimes obtain ritual devices from occult ritualists to enhance their charisma and to attract large numbers of followers to their churches. I will elaborate on this in the next section.

The negative Pentecostal view of the occult and its influence in politics in Ghana even informs Pentecostal attitudes to politicians and political parties' efforts at publicly associating with them and engaging in their activities. Pentecostals are of the view that some of the

³⁷⁷ Gyan Kwame, "2016 Prophecies By Prophet Isaac Owusu Bempah," January 1, 2016 <http://www.ghhotnews.com/2016/01/01/2016-prophecies-by-prophet-isaac-owusu-bempah/>

³⁷⁸ Ellis and ter Harr, *Worlds of Power*, 18.

politicians who come to them for prayers are only doing so to show off and, therefore, not being sincere. An example of this was what was related to me by Sesinam, a 28-year-old female seamstress in Legon-Accra, as follows:

During the campaigns for the 2012 elections, a certain politician visited my church, a Pentecostal church in Accra, one Sunday. He happened to sit beside my friend and me. I remember vividly that there was a time when the pastor leading us in prayer asked us to shout a big Hallelujah, which we all did, but when the politician did same, my friend made a funny comment to me under her breath that, 'this hallelujah is sick; it is suffering from diarrhoea.' She said that because most of us do not trust our politicians when they come and worship with us and all those other stuff they do to prove to us that they are part of us. We know that behind that façade of 'sanctimonious piosity,' they [politicians] actually consult occult ritualists in secret when no one is watching. My friend and I thus followed every single gesture of the politician throughout and made fun of him the whole time.³⁷⁹

Sesinam's claim above reflects that of many Pentecostals, especially the ones I spoke to, that although politicians come to them for prayers and go out of their way to act according to Pentecostal decorum, these politicians engage in occult activities in private. This perception has, therefore, made some of them cynical of politicians' efforts at associating with Pentecostals and engaging in their activities. This cynical attitude of some Pentecostals to politicians' show of Pentecostal piety relates to what Syl Cheney-Coker described in his novel, *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, that:

Colonel Akongo decided to drive to the coast to clear his mind of all the doubts about the justice of his decision and to feed on the contempt that he felt for the ruling class. He laughed when he recalled that incongruously with their three-piece woolen suits and the Sunday charade of going to church, they were the biggest practitioners of sorcery.³⁸⁰

Although a novel, the sentiments expressed by the book's character, Colonel Akongo, fittingly captures how some Ghanaians perceive their politicians and their links with the occult, although they portray themselves as Christians or Pentecostals in public, an attitude which has made them suspicious of politicians' actions and behavior. This points to the so-called double-standards of politicians who purportedly use the occult, but demonstrate their Pentecostal credentials in public. Some Pentecostals even go as far as arguing about what the Bible tells them that "not everyone who cries Lord, Lord, is a true Christian and so some, if

³⁷⁹ Sesinam, interviewed by author, Legon-Accra, November 17, 2013.

³⁸⁰ Syl Cheney-Coker, *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar: A Novel of Magical Vision* (Heinemann, 1990).

not all, of our politicians cannot be trusted.”³⁸¹ That is why some Ghanaians will categorically tell you that: “Yes, our politicians actually use the occult, and there are no two ways about it.”³⁸² If Pentecostals claim politics is “indebted to the occult,” then it means the occult narratives about politicians are true and can, therefore, not be discounted as mere rumors without truth, but credible stories.³⁸³

I have illustrated in this section that the negative Pentecostal narrative on the occult is influencing Ghanaian popular perceptions about the influence of the occult in the modern political sphere. Pentecostalism is a major producer of the religious *habitus* in Ghana and has become one of the major drivers for the prevalence of the occult in Ghana. The spread of occult beliefs and rumors presently in Ghana is directly linked with the growing popularity of Pentecostalism. The Pentecostal narrative also helps us explain why many Ghanaians believe that Ghanaian politics has a “dark side” and, therefore, their politicians use the occult without exception. The next section looks at the other major driver of the prevalence of the occult in Ghanaian politics, which is the claims made by occult ritual specialists that some politicians come to them for help to win elections.

Section III: Claims Made by Occult Ritual Specialists

I suggest in this section that the practice whereby occult ritual agents are coming out to claim their offering help to politicians in their electoral victories is serving as the other major driver for some Ghanaians’ acceptance of political-occult rumors at face value. Meyer calls this “self-assurance of spiritualists from the traditionalist camp” a move that “triggers a massive opposition on the part of Pentecostals, many of whom, however, retort by declaring a ‘spiritual war.’”³⁸⁴ This means that it is not only the negative Pentecostal narrative on the occult that fosters notions about its influence in Ghana’s politics and, therefore, the persuasiveness of political-occult rumors. The claims made by occult ritual specialists also give credence to the rumors about how Ghanaian politicians allegedly consult “juju men or

³⁸¹ Sefakor, Legon-Accra.

³⁸² Ayittey, Nungua-Accra.

³⁸³ Meyer, “The Power of Money,” 29.

³⁸⁴ Meyer, “Religious and secular,” 105.

Mallams to assist them with spiritual support, particularly during electioneering campaigns and ultimately help them win votes.”³⁸⁵ Although Pentecostals and occult ritual agents are opposed in their views on the occult, the claims by the latter confirm the former’s discourse on politics being an arena “indebted to the occult.”³⁸⁶

The occult ritualists who were hitherto seen as weak because they kept quiet and were hidden from the public’s eye in post-colonial Ghana seem to still wield some amount of power in Ghana’s religious and political fields. The occult ritual specialists are serving as counter-power to Pentecostalism when it comes to the production of supernatural power. They are now acting politically because they are leveraging their political power, seeking market share, and maximizing their power position due to the fear of what they represent. That is, the ritual specialists exert some power in Ghana’s religious and political fields through their public utterances about helping to ensure the electoral success of politicians. By coming out to make claims about the help they offer politicians to win elections, the occult ritual specialists have now become an equal match for Pentecostals in Ghana’s religious field. This is why Meyer has observed that:

If for some years Pentecostals appeared to run the show, more recently traditionalists have given signs of retaliation. This points to the deep entanglement of Pentecostalism and traditional religion, which both invoke spirits—the former to fight them in the name of God, the latter to stress the superior power of traditional spirits.³⁸⁷

Occult ritualists are now re-asserting the authority they used to wield in Ghana’s religiopolitical field prior to the advent of colonialism and mission Christianity.

Apart from their claims about helping politicians, the occult ritual agents have also accused some Pentecostal pastors and prophets on several occasions for coming to them for supernatural powers to perform miracles, although Pentecostals claim to have the requisite power to combat evil supernatural forces of the occult.³⁸⁸ About this dynamic, Meyer has also argued that:

While African culture and religion are ever more attacked as devil worship... Recently, however, there are some instances of traditionalists talking back in new ways, as for example the Kumasi-

³⁸⁵ Okyerefo, Fiaveh and Asante, “Religion as a tool,” 125.

³⁸⁶ Meyer, “The Power of Money,” 29.

³⁸⁷ Meyer, “Religious and Secular,” 107.

³⁸⁸ Ibid, 102.

based priest Kwaku Bonsam, who has publicly revealed that many Christian Pentecostal pastors rely on his spiritual power.³⁸⁹

Nana Kwaku Bonsam is the custodian of the “Kofi oo Kofi” shrine in Kumasi and is considered by Pentecostals as an evil occultist priest, as indicated by many of my Pentecostal respondents.³⁹⁰ There have been times that Bonsam has publicly dared some Pentecostal pastors to confess to Ghanaians about going to him for spiritual powers to help their churches grow. An illustration of Bonsam’s claims is in a video currently on the YouTube online channel about when he went to a Pentecostal church in Kumasi to dig up a charm he supposedly gave to the church’s leader to perform miracles to help draw more members to the church.³⁹¹ In the video, Bonsam went to the church with policemen and journalists, but he could have done that for the possible publicity his action would generate. Although Bonsam’s action proves the vindictive nature of the occult, it highlights the justice of the occult, which I will touch on in-depth in Chapter Five. After Bonsam had recovered his “juju” from the church, the people gathered there started chanting his name and lauding his action, showing that not all Ghanaians, including politicians, scorn the occult and, therefore, avoid it, but some embrace it, as I will also demonstrate in Chapter Five.

A confirmation of Bonsam’s claims about politicians consulting him and other occult ritual specialists for help to win elections was published by the ‘Daily Guide’ newspaper of March 13, 2009. The report alluded to how certain politicians sought assistance from occult ritualists to win elections but have refused to go back to perform the necessary rituals to thank the gods, as a result of which many road accidents were happening in Ghana. Bonsam even threatened to expose the politicians he was referring to if they did not go back to appease the gods. The article was captioned, “Kwaku Bonsam speaks on accidents!” Below is an excerpt from the story:

Nana Kwaku Bonsam... says the gods in the country are angry hence the many road accidents... that have claimed many lives and injured scores of people... because politicians who sought assistance from deities and oracles to win power have refused to perform the necessary rituals to show appreciation to them. The traditional worshipper observed that until those politicians came back to their senses and performed the required rituals to appease the gods, worse

³⁸⁹ Meyer, “Religious and Secular,” 92.

³⁹⁰ Maa Akos, Nyamekye-Accra; Maa Gee, Korle Bu-Accra; Kofi Halm, Nyamekye-Accra.

³⁹¹ A YouTube channel video titled, “Nana Kwaku Bonsam collects his juju from fake pastor” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=il_IFCutgLo

calamities would befall the nation in the not-too-distant future... Though he would not mention names, the fetish priest indicated that many politicians were guilty of seeking assistance from deities and oracles to achieve their political ambitions.³⁹²

The newspaper did not mention the occult directly but rather used “gods,” “deities,” “fetish,” and “oracles.”³⁹³ In the view of Ghanaian Pentecostals, Bonsam is an occult practitioner and his gods, evil occult agents, and so by mentioning the gods, the newspaper was referring to occult gods. The use of the term “fetish priest” is unacceptable to the adherents of GTR. It is a derogatory term, which feeds into the colonial and Christian construct of GTR being “fetish” and, therefore, “superstitious.”³⁹⁴ The priests of the religion see themselves as following the religion handed down to them by their forebears and not a fetish one. For the reporter to use the term “fetish priest” gave the impression that Bonsam was not following what is regarded as a ‘real’ religion in Western and Christian understandings, but that is the term many people use for them in Ghana, apart from the occult.³⁹⁵ The newspaper was, therefore, repeating the popular term in Ghana, but their characterization of Bonsam as a “fetish priest” shows how the vestiges of the derogatory colonial and Christian missionary depiction of the occult and its adherents still linger on in Ghana even after colonization. It also exposed the media’s bias toward Pentecostalism and their negative portrayal of the so-called occult and its agents. Although it is wrong to call him a “fetish priest,” Bonsam’s name, indeed, gives him away as a worshiper of Satan. The name Bonsam is the Twi translation of the Devil or Satan, and so for a person to call himself the Devil and be proud of it means he is a worshiper of the devil, some Ghanaians argue.

The last statement of the quote about politicians being “guilty of seeking assistance from deities and oracles to achieve their political ambitions” to some Ghanaians confirms the popular notion that their politicians dabbled in occult activities in their bid to secure power. Bonsam’s claims also meant that the road accidents had nothing to do with the sometimes reckless driving and poor road conditions in Ghana but rather repercussions of politicians’ use

³⁹² *The Daily Guide*, “Kwaku Bonsam speaks on accidents!,” March 13, 2009 <https://www.modernghana.com/news/206255/1/kwaku-bonsam-speaks-on-accidents.html>

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ McCaskie, “Sakrobundi and Abrewa,” 116; Gray, “Witches, Oracles, and Colonial Law,” 346; Parker, “Witchcraft and Trans-Regional Ritual Innovation,” 399.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

of the occult and their refusal to adhere to the rules of the gods. As to what rituals the politicians were supposed to perform in order to avert the anger of the gods, Bonsam did not mention. He also did not say whether the politicians in question performed parts of or none of the required rituals to thank the gods for helping them in their electoral successes. One cannot tell if Bonsam was just making the claims for attention but one thing which is of certain is that occult ritual specialists, like Bonsam, now coming out to boldly announce the help they offer to politicians is a means to assert their authority in Ghana's religious field and to demonstrate that they are equal match for Pentecostals. Such claims also partly inform some Ghanaians' suspicions about politicians' involvement in occult activities, thereby convincing them that political-occult rumors are actually true.

Bonsam's statement that "calamities will befall the nation if the politicians did not go back to appease the gods" highlights the unforgiving nature of the occult and the fact that when one sinned against the gods, they did not just punish the offender but innocent people also get caught in the middle. The gods were, therefore, holding the electorate as a ransom for the disobedience of their politicians. On the one hand, this element of the occult gods is seen by some people and even politicians, as I will show in Chapter Five, as a positive one since the occult is the deliverer of instant justice. On the other, the unforgiving nature of the occult and the punishment of innocent people, instead of the real culprits, sometimes make people see the occult as unjust, making the occult a two-edged sword of justice and injustice. Bonsam's claims are also considered as news and, therefore, receive considerable chatter in Ghana because some Ghanaians believe them to be important information that serves as windows into the inner workings of modern Ghanaian politics, including the alleged occult dealings of individual politicians and political parties.

Bonsam's claims endorse some of the political-occult rumors; they also justify a very popular Twi adage in Ghana that "se aponkyerene fi nsu ase beka kyere wo se odenkyem awu a, wonnye no akyinnye" (if the frog comes out of the water to inform you that the crocodile is dead, you don't argue with it because they are neighbors after all). This means that if the occult ritualists who politicians allegedly consult are themselves coming out to make claims about helping them, then one has no reason to doubt their claims. It is imperative, however, to draw attention here to the seemingly selfish aspect of the operations of these occult ritual specialists. They are also in a struggle, as Pentecostals, for the limited *capital* at stake in

Ghana's religious and political fields, and so by alleging to be associated with politicians, they also stand a chance of enjoying a part of this *capital*. Nevertheless, the occult ritualists are strategically positioning themselves to be taken seriously as custodians of a potent source of supernatural power in Ghana's religious and political fields by the Ghanaian public.

Bonsam's public utterances were cited by some of my respondents as giving credence to the popular perception in Ghana about politicians' involvement in the occult. Salaam, for example, suggested to me that:

You should listen to all the bragging of Kwaku Bonsam; he claims the majority of pastors and politicians come to him for power. So you know if you listen to him and you want to generalize it, people have come to think that to win power and hold on to it is all that matters and so wherever they will go to in order to get what they want, they will go and in most cases the sources are occult in nature.³⁹⁶

Bonsam, then, by his bold claims is challenging the perceived dominance of Pentecostal Christianity in the Ghanaian religiopolitical landscape. As I demonstrated in the previous section, Ghanaian Pentecostals see themselves as having the solutions to all the mundane and spiritual problems the nation and its people are facing. However, here Bonsam's assertions show that the occult priests are providing an alternative. Meyer characterizes Bonsam's forceful claims and the attention he has received in recent times in the media and among Ghanaians, both home and in the Diaspora, as "remarkable and telling."³⁹⁷ Politicians may be seen openly associating with Pentecostals, but they still allegedly seek help from occult ritual agents secretly; this emphasizes the resilience of GTR and by extension the occult generally.

As a result of the bold claims, some of these occult ritual specialists are making about offering help to politicians, some politicians are alleged to be using secret and dubious ways to silence them by paying them huge sums of money or threatening to take their lives. Nana Agyei, for instance, claimed that:

There was a day Kwaku Bonsam came out to scare people that he was going to start naming names of those who have come to see him for powers, but then all of a sudden, the story died down. He claimed he will name all the names—politicians, pastors and prominent people in the Ghanaian society who have ever consulted him—but then we never heard from him again. I

³⁹⁶ Salaam, Legon-Accra.

³⁹⁷ Meyer, "Religious and Secular," 103.

think either he was bought off or scared to death but we never heard him make such claims again.³⁹⁸

To the above assertion, I asked Nana Agyei if he was saying Bonsam just disappeared from the system, to which he answered: “He didn’t disappear; he is still around, but he doesn’t say anything anymore.”³⁹⁹ I queried him further to know if he was trying to suggest that Bonsam must have been bought off because he did not hear anything from him again. Nana Agyei said that: “Of course, you don’t have to be a professor to know that.”⁴⁰⁰ Nana Agyei, therefore, saw the ‘sudden’ silence of Bonsam as a sign that he was bought off by whoever he claimed to expose in his earlier statements. Nana Agyei’s claim may not be a valid explanation for Bonsam’s ‘sudden’ silence, but it makes one wonder if these ritualists are even as bold as they portray themselves to be. One certain thing, however, is that Bonsam’s allegations give authority and credibility to some of the political-occult rumors in Ghana at the moment and lead to their ready acceptance.

Apart from politicians allegedly paying off occult ritualists to silence them, others are believed to kill them off in order to bury the evidence of ever going to them for help. Rawlings was cited by some of my informants as one of the politicians who purportedly masterminded the mysterious murders of some of the occult ritual specialists who helped them spiritually to come to power. According to Nana B., for example:

I was told that there was someone called Ghana Boy who Rawlings consulted and finally had him killed because he made Rawlings so powerful and was the only one who knew what could kill him [Rawlings].⁴⁰¹

As to whether these stories are true cannot be ascertained, but they feed into popular perceptions in Ghana about politicians’ use of the occult. Although Ghanaian politicians may claim in public to be winning elections with the help of Pentecostals and their support through prayers, the occult ritualists are now claiming they are, one may say, ‘the real spiritual powerhouses behind their political successes.’ I argue here that these public utterances, in turn, breed rumors about politicians’ engagements with the occult and are now serving as the

³⁹⁸ Nana Agyei, Lapaz-Accra.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Nana B., Kaneshie-Accra.

other evidence for the occult operations of politicians in Ghana. Some of the public statements by some politicians in Ghana about their own and opponents' use of the occult also confirm the claims made by these occult ritualists, as I will illustrate in my discussion on the political utilization of the occult in Chapter Five.

In this section, I have shown that the claims by occult ritualists about helping some Ghanaian politicians to achieve their political ends, in part, contribute to the credibility of and, therefore, ready acceptance of political-occult rumors in Ghana. That is, the claims are part of the evidence for people who believe rumors that allege politicians' involvement in occult activities. These claims are also deemed as newsworthy and receive much talk among the public because they allegedly give Ghanaians a peek into the otherwise secretive occult political world. The next and final section of this chapter argues that political-occult rumors are accepted at face value by some Ghanaians based on the premise that such rumors help them to explain certain "strange" happenings that occur before, during and after elections.

Section IV: "Strange" Happenings

Furthermore, the credibility of political-occult rumors are confirmed, in a secular fashion, by a disposition to use the occult to explain what some Ghanaians consider "strange" events. This final portion of the chapter, therefore, argues that some Ghanaians accept political-occult rumors as credible stories because of what they term as the "strange," sometimes horrific and tragic, circumstances surrounding such rumors. These people contend that most of the time, the circumstances surrounding stories about politicians' involvement in the occult are so strange but real that it becomes difficult to regard them as mere rumors. In this case, political-occult rumor becomes a sense-making activity.⁴⁰² By helping the populace to make sense of what they consider as strange happenings, the rumors become credible and thus believable. These strange happenings, I suggest here, are given life by the perception of the occult as a versatile spiritual resource, the negative Pentecostal discourse on politics as the

⁴⁰² David Coast and Jo Fox, "Rumour and Politics," *History Compass* 13/5 (2005): 225.

“abode of the devil” and the occult as the “dark side” of power, as well as the claims by occult ritual specialists that they offer help to politicians to boost their electoral chances.⁴⁰³

By “strange” happenings, my respondents meant events that happened before, during and after elections that the Ghanaian electorate found difficult to explain and, therefore, ended up explaining them in terms of the occult. This position was put across by Akuffo when he contended that:

I think when things happen that people find difficult to explain, they attribute it to occult manipulations and sometimes, too, the time during which these things occur make people believe they might be true. Examples of these happenings are frequent murders in which the private parts of the deceased are removed, accidents and many other strange happenings during elections. Ghanaians believe these stories [about politicians’ involvement in occult activities] and don’t see them as rumors, but facts.⁴⁰⁴

Akuffo’s view represented that of many others I interviewed. To them, although not all politicians and political parties in Ghana used the occult, many of them did because these politicians were “power hungry and would do anything within their means to win that power, even if it meant using the occult to make it happen.”⁴⁰⁵ Akuffo said that power corrupts and so especially those people who have tasted it and seen the “sweetness” of it may not want to leave for others to come and enjoy and will go to any lengths to remain in power. The newcomers who are aspiring for political power have also seen how those already in power are enjoying the “goodies” of political power and would also stop at nothing to get it—including using the occult.

Other interviewees posited that even some of the horrid and tragic occurrences, such as road accidents, floods and fire outbreaks, which claim many lives in Ghana before, during and after elections are strange and can only be explained in terms of the occult manipulations of politicians in two ways. On the one hand, it may be because the forces politicians get help from need human blood to help them win elections or stay in power, as stated by Bempah in the previous section. On the other, it could be that the politicians have refused to go back and thank the gods for their help, and as a result incurred their wrath, as Bonsam has also claimed. One such informant was Nana Agyei, who attributed the believability of political-occult

⁴⁰³ Meyer, "The Power of Money," 29.

⁴⁰⁴ Akuffo, Tema-Accra.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

rumors to some of the strange things that supposedly occur especially during the periods leading to elections in Ghana. He stated emphatically that:

I seriously believe politicians in Ghana use the occult because around election time, some strange things are always happening. How come they don't occur at ordinary times, but they always occur during periods leading to elections? It seems like some kind of appeasement, you know; after all the occult spirits need to get paid. Most times during elections a lot of things happen; there are so many casualties, including accidents leading to untimely deaths.⁴⁰⁶

There have been some horrid motor accidents, floods and fire outbreaks, considered strange, which have claimed the lives of numerous people at a time. For instance, after a tragic flooding and fire incident that claimed the lives of over 100 people in Accra on June 4, 2015, 'Myjoyonline.com,' the online version of 'Joy FM,' a reputable news outlet in Ghana, reported with photos that:

Residents of Ghana's capital, Accra, are no strangers to floods, which have become an annual occurrence. But the latest disaster, which hit the city on June 4, 2015, has never been seen; it has been described as unprecedented. A combination of extreme floods and an explosion at a sales point of the Ghana Oil Company (Goil) at the Kwame Nkrumah Circle claimed over 100 lives and displaced thousands of residents.⁴⁰⁷

The flooding and fire disaster cited above could have been explained in mundane terms, such as the poor drainage system, over-congestion and even the power outage situation in Accra, popularly referred to as "dumsor," but some people chose to explain it in terms of the occult. Confirming the occult implications of the road accidents in Ghana, as a result of the occult dealings of politicians, the 62-year-old male Pentecostal minister, KJ, opined that:

When the N1 [the Lapaz-Kasoa motorway in Accra] was commissioned close to the 2012 elections, there were so many vehicular accidents on it and a Christian friend of mine had a vision about dead people being buried in the middle of the road. He asked God what it was and he said all the accidents were the repercussions of what our leaders have done by way of consulting juju priests just to win power and now the gods are angry.⁴⁰⁸

Due to these strange things, some Ghanaians would tell you that it made one realize these accidents do not happen in a vacuum because politicians are behind them. Some said that when the politicians went to the occult ritual specialists, they were asked to do so many

⁴⁰⁶ Nana Agyei, Lapaz-Accra.

⁴⁰⁷ David Andoh, "Photos: Floods, fire disaster kill hundred plus in Accra," June 4, 2015 <http://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2015/June-4th/photosfloods-fire-disaster-kill-hundred-plus-in-accra.php>

⁴⁰⁸ KJ, Kasoa-Accra.

things, including killing others, and most of the time human sacrifice was the ultimate sacrifice one may have to offer in order to make possible something as important as winning a crucial election.⁴⁰⁹ Other times too, these things will be happening as a result of politicians' refusal to pay their dues to the gods and the ritual specialists who helped them to realize their political dreams, as alleged by Nana Kwaku Bonsam.⁴¹⁰ When this happened, the gods of these ritualists visited their anger on the populace; hence all the horrid road accidents and strange things that happen especially in the run-up to elections.⁴¹¹ These so-called strange happenings, I suggest, make the rumors credible and, therefore, believable.

One unfortunate episode in the past that many Ghanaians attributed to the occult deals of politicians was the murder of 34 women during the run-up to the 1999 elections.⁴¹² A 'Daily Graphic' newspaper report on Thursday, November 30, 2000, captioned: "Have serial killings come to stay?" mentioned that some of the victims were found with their private parts missing, while others had their blood siphoned.⁴¹³ The missing private parts and the siphoned blood of the victims led some members of the Ghanaian public to come to the conclusion that they were occult ritual murders and because it was in an election year, politicians were held responsible for them. Let me reiterate here that in Ghana, the male and female reproductive parts are considered as containing potent spiritual powers that occult ritual specialists apparently tap to make powerful potions for their clients. These murders at the time fed into the popular Ghanaian notion of how people killed others for occult rituals and how occult ritualists used human body parts, especially the reproductive parts, to make magical potions to help their clients to achieve various ends, including winning elections.

The political party that took the heat for these so called atrocious occult ritual murders and evil against innocent Ghanaian women was the NDC, the party in power at the time. The NDC was competing again in the 2000 elections to retain their incumbency and so were

⁴⁰⁹ Amissah, interviewed by author, Fadama-Accra, February 2, 2014; Abeiku, Nungua-Accra; Muhammad, Lapaz-Accra.

⁴¹⁰ *The Daily Guide*, "Kwaku Bonsam speaks on accidents," March 13, 2009 <https://www.modernghana.com/news/206255/1/kwaku-bonsam-speaks-on-accidents.html>

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1977).

⁴¹³ Afua Serwa Berko, *Daily Graphic*, "Have the serial murders come to stay? Asks Afua Serwa Berko," November 30, 2000, pp 9.

alleged to be using occult means to retain power. This allegation even drove Rawlings at one time to summon the leadership of the NPP before the popular Antoa Nyama shrine to prove his innocence.⁴¹⁴ The NDC at the time had already earned the reputation of being a party that was heavily involved in the occult through rumors, which explained why when the party was accused of being behind the ritual murders, some Ghanaians believed it.⁴¹⁵ This points to the notion that sometimes the believability or otherwise of a particular rumor is contingent upon the public image of the politician or political party involved. But even if the NDC was not behind the ritual murder of the 34 women, it was certainly one of the political parties, since they could not have happened in a vacuum, some Ghanaians claimed.

While the newspapers at the time characterized the murders as serial murders and others “mystery murders,” some Ghanaians saw them as occult ritual murders behind which were the leadership of the NDC, especially Rawlings, who were using the blood and the private parts of the women for occult rituals to help them win the impending elections in 2000.⁴¹⁶ Some of my respondents gave me variations of the rumors that came out at the time about the occult implications of the murders. For example, Sarpomaah, a 27-year-old female student in Accra, said that what was strange about the murders, which made her believe they were ritually motivated was that from what she heard “the private parts of the women were said to be missing.”⁴¹⁷ The murder of the 34 women was thus ritually motivated because of the missing reproductive organs of the victims. Ambitious politicians who wanted to win the 2000 elections at all cost allegedly perpetrated the murders and sent the private parts of the victims to occult ritual specialists to make potent potions to boost their electoral chances.

The murders occurred during the latter parts of 1999 and early 2000, which means that Sarpomaah would have been only 10 years-old when they occurred, but she talked about them as if she knew their details. She claimed to have heard the rumors a few years ago. Many of my respondents repeated to me this incident involving the murder of the 34 women and

⁴¹⁴ A.R. Gomda, “Rawlings Goes Antoa,” October 23, 2008 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/187723/1/rawlings-goes-antoa.html>

⁴¹⁵ Nana Agyei, Lapaz-Accra.

⁴¹⁶ The Ghanaian *Daily Graphic* newspaper reported on this in several of its issues in July 2000 including the following headlines: “Another mystery murder rocks Accra: victim No. 25 and no clues (July 3); “Government takes action on serial killings” (July 4); “Dealing with the serial killings in Accra” (July 5).

⁴¹⁷ Sarpomaah, interviewed by author, Fadama-Accra, February 6, 2014.

the rumors that ensued. These rumors and many others have lingered for years and are still talked about in Ghana, as illustrated by the number of political-occult rumors that were cited by my interview respondents. This shows that although certain rumors do not gain traction and as a result die out quickly, others never die or fade away; even if they did, it takes a long time for them to do so. As I pointed out in Section III of Chapter Two, even the ones that fade away can recur in the future when the circumstances that brought them about recur.

Many Ghanaians believe that there are certain things, such as the murder of the 34 women and the June 4 flood and fire disaster that happened to which they say in Twi that, “ade yi de ennye kwa,” meaning that as for this situation, there is more to it spiritually than the physical mind can explain. Although the murders, for example, could have been random acts of violence against women by just anybody for various reasons, the fact that they were more than one, the victims had their private parts missing, a typical characteristic of ritual murders, and happened in an election year, was enough for Ghanaians to attribute them to occult machinations by politicians. That is, the circumstances surrounding the events made the rumors persuasive and, therefore, contributed to their authority of truth. We must note that there is also an element of news about the examples of strange events listed above since many of them were publicized by the media, talked about in the news and produced considerable talk among the Ghanaian populace.

The field of politics itself is considered strange by many due to the alleged invisible occult forces that control it. This is why many of the rumors that abound in modern politics border on the influence of the occult. Kapferer once observed that one of the major themes in political rumors was that of an “invisible hand, occult power, or a secret society that is pulling the strings of power.”⁴¹⁸ This means that the political field is like a “marionette stage where the strings are manipulated by invisible hands,” and “behind the electoral staging and a democratic façade, in reality, there is an occult power or hidden hand unbounded by the harness of parliamentary [and presidential] procedure and universal suffrage.”⁴¹⁹ Kapferer’s claim about invisible occult forces “pulling the strings of power” was demonstrated in my

⁴¹⁸ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 218-9.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

interviews.⁴²⁰ For example, one of the members of the basketball team I interviewed in Nungua-Accra, in his answer to my question as to whether he believed Ghanaian politicians used the occult to win elections or not said that: “If there is no occult in Ghanaian politics, how then do you explain the over voting that has become so common during the presidential and parliamentary elections?” He explained further that:

I say this because if all the people that voted were duly registered and were checked by polling agents from all the political parties contesting the elections in broad daylight, then how does one explain how it is possible for there to be any kind of over voting in our elections? The only explanation for this would be that some of the individual politicians and political parties performed sacrifices to certain occult powers who then released thousands of their dwarves [goblins] to come and spiritually cast votes for them.⁴²¹

The above is a rather interesting claim, but it points to the seeming strangeness of the Ghanaian electoral process and another prevalent perception in Ghana that during elections, no party or candidate wins just by convincing the electorate of their vision, but by either being backed by the God of Pentecostals or the occult, although the occult is what is believed to be the prevailing driving force behind electoral victory. For the man to claim that the over voting in Ghanaian elections can be attributed to occult manipulations by politicians, in fact, rules out the other reasons others may give to explain the over voting in elections. That is, political parties or individual politicians’ recruiting people from other constituencies and neighboring countries, such as Togo and Cote d’Ivoire to vote for them, or conniving with electoral officials to manipulate electoral results in their favor. In other words, some people would say that the elections are physically rigged by the competing political parties. Due to some of these events that are considered as “strange” in the Ghanaian political process, such as over-voting, Pentecostals have claimed that the power politicians wield “may not stem from the people, as the language of democracy claims, but from secret rites.”⁴²² That is, the democratic process is fixed spiritually by occult forces and the physical voting process is just a formality.

Another example, which highlighted the perceived strangeness of the Ghanaian electoral system, according to Miss K., a 32-year-old female Pentecostal pastor in Lapaz-Accra, was an incident that occurred after the results of the 2012 elections were declared. Miss K.

⁴²⁰ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 218-9.

⁴²¹ Paa Kow, interviewed by author, Nungua-Accra, February 22, 2014.

⁴²² Kapferer, *Rumors*, 218-9.

said that the incident was “so strange” that it really made her believe that there was occult in Ghanaian politics. To drive her point home, she recounted to me the story that:

During the 2008 elections, what transpired was so strange; it was something that we have not seen before. You know when the ballots were being counted, the percentage showed that the NPP was winning with a very big margin, but all of a sudden the NDC overtook the NPP and won the elections in the long run. I for one was very shocked by this strange development and attributed the NDC’s win to two things—either God made them win or they may have won with the help of juju, but I was inclined to believe the latter reason more.⁴²³

To Miss K. the NDC winning the elections, instead of the NPP, may have been attributed to either the Christian/Pentecostal God or the occult, although she thought it was more likely to be the occult. The interview was in English, but she used the word “juju” and not the occult because she thought the two were the same. Miss K. is a Pentecostal, which makes her attribution of the NDC’s win to occult powers, and not the Pentecostal God, rather fascinating and revealing. But from all that she told me, Miss K. was one person who saw the NDC as an occultist party that would do anything, including dabbling in occult activities, to win elections. But the NDC’s victory could have been blamed on their connivance with the Electoral Commission at the time to help them rig the elections in their favor. In fact, that was what the NPP thought, which led them to drag the NDC government and the Electoral Commission to court in order to contest the outcome of the 2012 elections.⁴²⁴ The NDC won the case in the long run, but the court case left some Ghanaians wondering if the election results truly reflected the way they voted.⁴²⁵ Many other Pentecostals have alluded to the NDC’s alleged links with the occult in the past, an example of which is Rev. Enoch Agbozo, an important figure in the rise of Pentecostalism in Ghana and ardent critic of the NDC government. Commenting on the NDC’s loss of the 2000 general elections to the NPP and demonstrating his optimism about the NPP’s win, stated that: “Now has come an opportunity for Ghana to abandon the old order of Satanism, idolatry, and bloodshed, evil, wickedness, violence, and death, unrighteousness... as the basis of governance.”⁴²⁶

⁴²³ Miss K, interviewed by author, Lapaz-Accra, November 21, 2013.

⁴²⁴ ‘VOA,’ “Ghana Elects Mahama As President, NPP Cries Fraud,” December 10, 2012 <http://vibeghana.com/2012/12/10/ghana-elects-mahama-as-president-npp-cries-fraud/>

⁴²⁵ Kwame Mensah, interviewed by author, Accra, 16 November, 2013.

⁴²⁶ Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 164-5.

Even some of the statements politicians make about the alleged involvement of their opponents and themselves with the occult give them and their parties a reputation as users of the occult and justify the popular notion that politicians use the occult. Besides, their allegations often generate talk among the general Ghanaian populace and confirm political-occult rumors. As captured by Maa Akos: “If the leadership of these parties can invoke occult gods to curse their opponents in public, such as at a press conference watched on TV by the whole country without recourse to the public perception such actions would create, then what about the kinds of things they do in private to retain power when no one was watching.”⁴²⁷ Thus, some Ghanaians are of the conviction that both politicians who publicly embrace the occult and the ones who avoid it use the occult for certain. In Ghana the occult is opposed to Pentecostalism; Pentecostals claim to have all the answers to both the spiritual and mundane problems of Ghanaians, but in the case of politics, with the popular perception being that politicians use the occult, it is easier to explain every negative strange incident that occurs before, during and after elections in terms of the occult. Politicians may be seen in public as acting according to Pentecostal decorum, but are alleged to use the occult privately.

Some Ghanaians believe that political-occult rumors reflect the reality of what pertains in politics beyond what the physical can see. The rumors are then used to explain what they allege to be the “strange” things that happen during elections that they are not able to wrap their minds around. Some people argue that certain things are so strange that one cannot help, but explain them in occult terms. These rumors, therefore, do not only convey the anxieties, fears, and puzzles of Ghanaians about the political field, but they also shape how they respond to them. That is “like the conventional media, rumor is involved not only in the dissemination of information about events but also with their interpretation and commentary.”⁴²⁸ Ghanaians believe political-occult rumors not only because the rumors do help them in disseminating information about so-called strange happenings, but they also serve as their own interpretations of and commentaries on such events.

⁴²⁷ Maa Akos, interviewed by author, Nyamekye-Accra, November 17, 2013.

⁴²⁸ Shibutani, *Improvised News*, 211.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined the first of the two contrasting Ghanaian popular attitudes to political-occult rumors, which is the acceptance of the rumors at face value. It explored what accounts for the authority of truth and credibility of the widely-held notion in Ghana that politicians use the occult for electoral success without exception. First of all, some Ghanaians believe that most, if not all, of the stories circulating about politicians' engagements with the occult, are not mere rumors, but are real life stories that confirm the versatility of the occult as a spiritual resource. The negative Pentecostal narrative on the occult, far from discounting its existence, rather upholds beliefs in it and serves as one of the major drivers for why some people accept political-occult rumors without question in Ghana. The practice whereby occult ritual agents are coming out to claim their offering help to politicians in their electoral victories is serving as the other major driver for some Ghanaians' acceptance of political-occult rumors at face value. Others also accept the rumors as a result of events they deem "strange"; that is, happenings they are not able to explain in natural terms and are tempted to make sense of in the context of the occult manipulation on the part of political elites.

The fact that some Ghanaians accept political-occult rumors as truths in themselves does not mean a blind acceptance on their part. Their acceptance of political-occult rumors also does not always correlate with the rumors influencing them to switch their political loyalties. In other words, some people may believe the rumors, but the rumors do not affect the voting behavior of those who vote based on issues and not on party affiliation, rumors or sentiments. Such people claim to vote on the campaign platform that makes the most sense to them at any given time. Political-occult rumors may, therefore, be deemed true and the windows into what apparently pertains in modern Ghanaian politics—acting as confirmations of the political use of the occult—but not all the people who accept them are influenced by them. The next chapter examines the flipside of the ready acceptance of political-occult rumors—the cynicism towards political-occult rumors.

CHAPTER FOUR

CYNICISM TOWARDS POLITICAL-OCCULT RUMORS

Although, as Chapter Three demonstrated, some Ghanaians believe politicians use the occult and thus accept occult rumors about them at face value, others are more cynical of these rumors. Such people suspect that politicians and their operatives deliberately spin occult rumors for strategic purposes, as part of their struggle for the electorate's support and eventual votes. These skeptics tend to regard political-occult rumors as publicity stunts that politicians pull in their efforts to delegitimize opponents, whilst simultaneously boosting their own credentials in the eyes of prospective voters. The prevalence of political-occult rumor, therefore, does not demonstrate complete credulity and acceptance on the part of the Ghanaian electorate. Rather, more variegated attitudes are evident.

This chapter sheds light on the cynical attitude to political-occult rumors among a section of the Ghanaian public and outlines some of the factors giving rise to such skepticism. These include cynicism about politics generally, as well as a range of other issues, specifically the sensational reportage of the rumors by the Ghanaian media, voters' political alignment and the public image of the subject of the rumor. Those who are cynical of political-occult rumors think of themselves as more sophisticated than the ones who readily accept the rumors. The factors that would be discussed in this chapter are evidence that indicate what predisposes people to be suspicious of political-occult rumors and shape the main sections of this chapter. They show us that the Ghanaian electorate is not just either accepting or being cynical of occult rumors about politicians, but demonstrate variegated attitudes to them, particularly from those with skeptical or dismissive attitudes. I argue in the next portion of this chapter that the cynical attitude to political-occult rumors by some Ghanaians is informed by their cynicism toward politics in general.

Section I: Cynicism Towards Politics in General

My field research indicated that some Ghanaians see modern politics as a "dirty game," whereby politicians will go to any lengths to discredit opponents in order to cast themselves as the better alternatives and regard occult rumors as an example of this tendency. Many of

these people argued that modern politics has become lucrative in the African part of the world due to the wealth, power, and prestige it bestows on politicians and their families and this has made competition for it very vicious. In this way, the Ghanaian political field is understood as a microcosm of a broader dynamic in the struggle for political power. This section suggests that some Ghanaians have become skeptical of political-occult rumors as a result of their cynicism toward politics generally.

A section of the Ghanaian populace believe that the stakes are high in the political square, and so politicians are more willing to peddle negative, mostly false, occult rumors about political opponents as part of their smear campaign tactics. Writing about the phenomenon of how rumor can be used by competing agents to smear opponents or enemies, Shibutani has reasoned that:

The concept of the enemy is often constructed by projecting onto it all the attributes most hated or despised in one's own group... Motives imputed to the enemy, however, almost invariably vile, and the enemy becomes the living embodiment of everything condemned.⁴²⁹

In Ghana, occult rumors are perceived by some in these terms – as projections of “hated or despised” attributes – that are designed to persuade potential voters to switch their loyalties. When a particular political aspirant or party is considered to be in the lead in a crucial electoral race, the trailing candidates and or parties sponsor rumors about their alleged associations with the occult, in order to discredit them. This view was advanced by Sefakor, previously introduced, who argued that:

Some of the rumors are put out there by politicians themselves and their operatives, serial callers and schemers. Politics is about scheming and so in order to win votes, politicians intentionally sit down to concoct negative [occult] rumors about their opponents in order to discredit them in the eyes of the Ghanaian people. And then their serial callers and schemers will, in turn, come on radio and TV to talk about them. They also publish them in the newspapers.⁴³⁰

Although it is often impossible to trace the source or originators of rumors, Sefakor's claims demonstrate that some Ghanaians believe their politicians and their operatives are the ones who put negative rumors about their opponents out there, making politicians themselves perpetrators of damaging (occult) rumors in their bid to delegitimize opponents. Maa May is

⁴²⁹ Shibutani, *Improvised News*, 190.

⁴³⁰ Sefakor, Legon-Accra.

an ardent supporter of the NDC and also regarded occult rumor as a political smear tactic. As she said:

I believe some of the stories are true, but most of them are not—all the political parties spread these rumors during the run-up to elections as a way of smearing their opponents in order to frustrate their chances of ever coming to power.⁴³¹

Crucially, Maa May believed that some of the rumors could be accurate. Nevertheless, she still thought most of them were put out there by politicians themselves to discredit their political opponents as they competed for political power, and was, therefore, skeptical of them. Maa May highlighted the 1992 presidential and parliamentary elections as an occasion where occult rumors were used as part of political smear campaigns.

The 1992 elections marked the return of Ghana to democratic rule and ushered the country into its 4th Republican era after a series of coup d'états. It was one of the most highly contested elections in the nation's political history.⁴³² Of the seven political parties involved, the NDC, the incumbent party, and the NPP, the biggest opposition party, were the front-runners. Few months to the elections, the NDC held a slight lead in the polls.⁴³³ According to Maa May, because the NPP were trailing the NDC in the polls, they had to do something fast to catch up.⁴³⁴ She claimed that a rumor emerged around that time about a strange sighting of a giant crab in the sea holding the flag and other insignia associated with the NDC in its mouth.⁴³⁵ In Maa May's opinion, this rumor was spread by the opposition NPP purely to discredit the NDC so they would lose the impending elections. The implication of the rumor was that the crab was a physical manifestation of the occult forces backing the NDC to win the elections. Through its retellings, the story developed many varying strands and spread like

⁴³¹ Maa May, Nyamekye-Accra.

⁴³² Assimeng, *Salvation, Social Crisis and the Human Condition* (Ghana University Press, 1995), 5.

⁴³³ Rawlings came to power again through a coup in 1981 (his second coup, with the first one been in 1979) as the leader of the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) and ruled as the Head of State of Ghana from that time till 1992 when there were calls from the Mainline churches for him to return the country to a democratic rule. He then run on the ticket of the PNDC as the party's presidential candidate. The name PNDC was changed to the National Democratic Congress (NDC) prior to the 1992 general elections.

⁴³⁴ Maa May, Nyamekye-Accra.

⁴³⁵ I cited this particular rumor in my MA thesis (*Pentecostalism and Politics in Ghana*), and when I went to the field, Maa May confirmed it.

wildfire. Maa May believed there was no truth to the rumor and that the NPP was behind it as part of their political gimmick of discrediting the NDC in the eyes of Ghanaians.

The nature of the rumor also made it incredible to believe and said a lot about the political system, whereby political actors will do just about anything to get their way or win the crucial votes of the electorate. But the question is how Maa May could be sure that the NPP was behind the rumor. Was she saying that because she was a supporter of the NDC? Would she have believed the rumor if it was about the NDC and not the NPP? It is worth pointing out that Maa May's example highlights the fact that where one's political allegiance lies in many cases will determine how they view certain occult rumors. The possibility of some people blaming one political party for spreading occult rumors about opponents or not sometimes depends on their party affiliation, as I will demonstrate in Section III.

Another illustration of how some Ghanaians allege that politicians are the ones who spread occult rumors about opponents to discredit them was the series of murders that took place during the latter parts of 1999 and early 2000, cited in the previous chapter. The murder victims were women, their vaginas and other internal organs had been removed, giving rise to the perception that the victims were ritually murdered. As I pointed out earlier, these murders generated a number of rumors with many different versions. One version of the rumor was that the NDC was behind it because they needed the blood and reproductive parts of the women for rituals to help them win the 2000 elections.⁴³⁶ Sister Anobeah, a 50-year-old housewife in Lapaz-Accra, was of the view that this rumor became a major campaign tool in the hands of the NPP to discredit the NDC—this was corroborated by Rawlings, the NDC's leader, who at one time summoned the NPP to the Antoa shrine to prove his innocence.⁴³⁷

According to Sister Anobeah, the NPP promised that as soon as they came to power in 2001, they would put a stop to the so-called ritual murders.⁴³⁸ She argued that some people may have believed the rumors, but she knew it was all a ploy that the NPP used to transform a social crisis—the serial murder of innocent Ghanaian women—into a political campaign tool

⁴³⁶ Osikani, Fadama-Accra; Sister Anobeah, interviewed by author, Fadama-Accra, November 29, 2013; Sarpomaah, Fadama-Accra.

⁴³⁷ Sister Anobeah, Fadama-Accra; see also A.R. Gomda, "Rawlings Goes Antoa," October 23, 2008 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/187723/1/rawlings-goes-antoa.html>

⁴³⁸ Sister Anobeah, Fadama-Accra.

to make the NDC look illegitimate in the eyes of Ghanaians. Although the police arrested a suspect, Charles Quansah, for some of the murders, the rumors continued.⁴³⁹ Sister Anobeah said that: “It is rather unfortunate for politicians to manipulate the occult that way.”⁴⁴⁰ She concluded that, instead of reading occultic meanings into such a serious social issue, the best way was for the government and opposition parties to work together to find lasting measures to making sure women in the country were safe because if everything is to be attributed to the occult, then nothing will get done in Ghana. This proves that the Ghanaian electorate is not as naïve as politicians may think. Some of them weigh occult rumors for their plausibility before they accept them or not. When the rumors are found to be not plausible, then they are viewed as politicians’ way of manipulating occult narratives for political gain—to delegitimize opponents; hence the cynicism.

Another example of the use of rumors to delegitimize political opponents, according to Yaa, a 26-year-old female polytechnic student, came out about Kufuor during the latter part of 2001. Just six months into his tenure as President, Kufuor frequently visited the then President of Togo, the late Gnassingbe Eyadema. After the visit, a rumor emerged that he had gone for occult powers from Togo to help him and the NPP remain in power.⁴⁴¹ The rumor was validated by the fact that in West Africa, Togo and Benin are noted as the hotbeds of the occult and many believed Eyadema openly practiced occultism.⁴⁴² According to the ‘Ghanaian Mirror’s’ report on January 6, 2001, even some Pentecostal preachers at the time, one of whom was Apostle Arhinful, warned Kufuor “not to taint or soil the divine sacredness of his presidency and incumbency by visiting Vodou shrines and associating with the occult.” The paper claimed that in the mind of Apostle Arhinful, “such Satanism will destroy what Kufuor

⁴³⁹ ‘Ghana News Agency,’ “Serial Killer Arrested,” May 16, 2001 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/14127/1/serial-killer-arrested.html>

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ *The Ghanaian Chronicle*, “The Furore Over Pres. Kufuor's Visit To Togo,” February 6, 2001 <http://allafrica.com/stories/200102070193.html>; Ghanaweb, “The Exploits of Kufuor,” December 2004 <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=70889>

⁴⁴² Yaa, interviewed by Fadama-Accra, November 17, 2013.

got [his presidency] through countless days of fasting and fervent prayers to the Supreme God and will incur God's anger to the detriment of the Ghanaian populace."⁴⁴³

Yaa insisted that the rumor was sponsored by the NDC and was geared to making the NPP look bad, a strategy she thought worked for the NDC, since the NPP tried all it could to deny the allegation, but the minds of many Ghanaians were already made that Kufuor and the NPP, in fact, associated with the occult. Some Pentecostals may have become disappointed in Kufuor on that account and that may have accounted, in part, for the NPP's painful loss in both the 2008 and 2012 elections back to the NDC. But the questions one is tempted to ask about Yaa's claim that the NDC was behind the rumors about Kufuor's frequent visits to occult shrines in Togo are: What is the proof that the NDC were the ones behind the rumors? Was Yaa saying so because her political sympathies lie with the NPP? But Yaa told me she did not support any political party and, therefore, voted based on which political party's message makes sense to her at a particular point in time. That is, she claimed to be objective in her judgment of the rumor.

Some Ghanaians believe that politicians are even behind some of the so-called prophecies or divine revelations of certain Pentecostal pastors and the rumors they create. This is because some of these pastors are allegedly influenced by politicians and their political leanings to come up with the prophecies and revelations. For instance, the 'Daily Guide' newspaper on December 5, 2012, published a story about Kwabena Tawiah of the Church of Rabbi, a Pentecostal church, who claimed to have received a revelation from God about the burial of live cows at the "Asomdwee Park" [the burial place for Mills in Accra].⁴⁴⁴ This revelation came out just three days to the December general elections. The burial of the cows was alleged to be an occult ritual performed by the ruling NDC to kill the leadership of the NPP. In the view of mostly the supporters of the NDC I spoke to, the opposition NPP influenced the prophet to come up with the rumor in order to cast doubts about the NDC's credibility. But if the NPP was actually behind the rumor, what did they stand to gain from spreading

⁴⁴³ *The Ghanaian Chronicle*, "The Furore Over Pres. Kufuor's Visit To Togo," February 6, 2001 <http://allafrica.com/stories/200102070193.html>; GhanaWeb, "The Exploits of Kufuor," December 2004 <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=70889>

⁴⁴⁴ Raphael Ofori-Adeniran "Prophet Decrypts Nine Graves," December 4, 2012 <http://www.ghanamma.com/news/1/preophet-decrypts-nine-graves/>

such a rumor? The answer given by Sister Anobeah was that: “It was to cement the NDC’s reputation as an occultist party.”⁴⁴⁵ This means that in the NPP’s bid to confirm the existing reputation of the NDC as an occultist party, they used a Pentecostal pastor to come out with a prophecy that fuelled rumors about the occult intentions of the NDC to harm the NPP’s leadership and to prevent them from coming to power.

The story about the occult ritual involving the burial of live cows at the Asomdwee Park, as we can see, was not started by just anybody, but a well-known Pentecostal leader and published by a pro-NPP newspaper, the ‘Daily Guide,’ which undermined its credibility. In this instance, the people who were suspicious of the story questioned the proof of what made the prophet’s claim true. They contended that even if there was the possibility of finding cows buried at the Asomdwee Park, they would only serve as circumstantial evidence since they could have been deliberately planted by the same NPP. This shows that sometimes, too, the source of a particular rumor can shape people’s cynical attitudes to it.

Other informants drew my attention to the fact that even sometimes when it comes to sponsoring negative occult rumors about political opponents, it did not matter whether the person was in one’s own party or an opposing one when the stakes are high. There have been rumors about contestants in the same party fighting for the same position accusing one another of using the occult to either influence voters or incapacitate opponents. For example, Maa Gee, a 39-year-old female nurse at the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital in Accra, claimed that:

It is politicians themselves who put these rumors out there about their opponents—and sometimes it does not really matter if the person is in the same party—especially during party primaries.⁴⁴⁶

While Ghanaian politicians discredit opponents through negative occult rumors, they are making a point to cast themselves in a good light in the eyes of prospective voters. That is, some Ghanaians suspect that some politicians and their supporters deliberately spin negative rumors about their opponents in order to boost their own electoral chances. Shibutani says that while “the enemy becomes the living embodiment of everything condemned,” he/she “becomes the exact opposite of oneself; one’s own side is viewed in idealistic terms; it is

⁴⁴⁵ Sister Anobeah, Fadama-Accra.

⁴⁴⁶ Maa Gee, interviewed by author, Korle Bu-Accra, November 30, 2013.

endowed with all the noble virtues, fighting selfishly for the worthy cause.”⁴⁴⁷ Thus, the more mud—negative rumors—a politician piles on an opponent, the better his/her chances of looking better in the eyes of prospective voters. This view concurred that of Salaam who argued that during one of the electioneering campaigns for the NPP primaries at the constituency level, in which he was a contestant:

One of the candidates used rumors linking other candidates to the occult to enhance his political development and influenced the electorate to think good of him, while he downgraded other candidates.⁴⁴⁸

Politicians and political parties may spread rumors about opponents to delegitimize them and make them seem unfit to rule, but their aim is to present themselves as the better alternatives to vote for.

Other interview respondents were of the view that, apart from peddling occult rumors about political opponents, some politicians, and their operatives also intentionally spread such rumors about themselves in order to create a sense of fear among the populace about their personalities. The same can be said of the politicians who publicly embrace the occult and its attendant rumors. The actions and statements of these politicians are viewed as part of their strategies to scare voters into voting for them. One instance was Aduako who said that:

You see when we get to the political season and during the campaign, many Ghanaians think politicians have consulted occult spiritualists and so for the politician to claim that he has power, some Ghanaians believe somebody has promised him the said power. It may not be true, but they strongly believe it and this puts fear in them.⁴⁴⁹

Politicians, tapping into the fear many Ghanaians have of the occult, have acquired an aura of fear around their personalities due to some of the things they have done and said about their involvement with the occult in the past. This is to say that some politicians boldly embrace the occult due to the fear it represents; it is also for them to leverage the power found in it to deter opponents and detractors. I will touch more on this in Chapter Five.

⁴⁴⁷ Shibutani, *Improvised News*, 190.

⁴⁴⁸ Salaam, Legon-Accra.

⁴⁴⁹ Aduako, Fadama-Accra.

There is a popular Ghanaian view that Rawlings, for example, knew how much many Ghanaians dreaded the occult and, therefore, capitalized on the public's perception of him deriving his charisma from occult forces. This suspicion was illustrated in Nana Agyei's answer to my question to him about rumors alleging Rawlings' dealings with the occult. He contended that: "For Rawlings, I think he was just a bully and there was nothing occultic about him. He just knew the people were afraid of the occult and so enforced it to scare them to do his every bidding. He didn't have anything [occult]. Rawlings was just a bully."⁴⁵⁰ I queried further to confirm if he meant that Rawlings deliberately, through his words and actions, used occult rumors about him to create a sense of fear, to which Nana Agyei answered in the affirmative: "Exactly! You know how we are told sometimes that 'oh don't play with this guy, he is scary because he uses juju?' Most of the time they don't have anything."⁴⁵¹ Rawlings, therefore, did not possess occult powers; he only created the impression that he did in order to enforce an aura of fear around him and consequently intimidate people to vote for him and put enemies and detractors at bay, according to Nana Agyei.

My conversations with Nana Agyei and a few other respondents highlighted the fact that the public perception about Rawlings' use of powerful occult forces ensured that he was feared by many Ghanaians, a fear that drove them "to do his every bidding."⁴⁵² The rumors seemed to have given Rawlings a certain kind of mystical quality. Some of my interviewees, such as Joyce, a pharmacy attendant and Lizzie, a seamstress, even believed that Rawlings could read the minds of his officials and people around him.⁴⁵³ This perception about Rawlings allegedly made people afraid to vote against him in both the 1992 and 1996 elections; he is still feared by many in Ghana today, although he is no longer the President, they said. Rawlings, therefore, allegedly rode on this aura of mystery and fear built around his personality. Although a politician's association with the occult can mar their electoral chances, associating with it can be beneficial sometimes in creating a sense of mystery and keeping detractors at bay. Thus, most of the stories about Rawlings' occult dealings may have

⁴⁵⁰ Nana Agyei, Lapaz-Accra.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Lizzie and Joyce, interviewed by author, Lapaz-Accra, February 27, 2014.

been inflamed by him and his supporters.⁴⁵⁴ It is possible some Ghanaians believed the rumors about Rawlings' involvement in the occult partly due to some of his public statements and actions in the past, as I will show in the next chapter. But these rumors also point to the public's cynical attitudes to politics in general and some of the things that politicians will do to win crucial votes.

This section has demonstrated that the Ghanaian electorate is not entirely credulous and accepting of political-occult rumors. Some of them are disbelieving of such rumors because they can recognize political motives at play. In the words of Philip, a 37-year-old up-and-coming academic in Accra: "Those politicians who still capitalize on the occult for their whims and caprices will be disappointed. Ghanaians are now vigilant about the politicians who play to the gallery of religious sentiments by way of associating opponents with the occult just to win elections."⁴⁵⁵ These rumors do not only illustrate their reputed function, but also their effects because there are times where people see some of them as being part of politicians' gimmicks of discrediting opponents, but believe them anyway. This shows that there are even gradations in people's skepticism toward political-occult rumors. The next section argues that the fact that the Ghanaian media picks up on and publishes political-occult rumors in sensational ways has also made some Ghanaians skeptical of the rumors.

Section II: Occult Rumors and the Media

This section suggests that the fact that the Ghanaian media picks up on and reports certain political-occult rumors have led some people to become suspicious of the rumors, although this media reporting is a minority position. In other words, the sensational way the Ghanaian print and electronic media reports rumors that link politicians to the occult is one of the factors that inform some Ghanaians' cynical attitudes to the rumors. I proposed in Chapter Two that, although the traditional means of transmitting rumors is through word of mouth, their reportage by the media increases their spread exponentially. The media's coverage of news goes national and beyond and so it takes a shorter amount of time for the information they put out to get around and reach the ears of Ghanaians living at home and abroad.

⁴⁵⁴ Nana Agyei, Lapaz-Accra.

⁴⁵⁵ Philip, Nyamekye-Accra.

The Ghanaian media's role in facilitating the faster spread of political-occult rumors and news generally was exemplified by Aduako that: "Due to the liberalization of information in Ghana, even if you cough, people will hear about it everywhere; the whole Ghana will catch it."⁴⁵⁶ When I asked him about his thoughts on the popularity of occult rumors in post-colonial Ghana and especially in politics, he answered that:

When I was growing up, the print and electronic media were not this popular and so news and some of the information I tend to regard as rumors mostly used to travel by word of mouth and took longer to reach everybody, but now with the expansion of the media, not to talk of the introduction of the internet, in the so-called modern and rumor hungry Ghana, most of these stories accusing politicians of using the occult especially get everywhere in no time.⁴⁵⁷

Rumors about political elites and their purported associations with the occult now travel faster with the help of the media, according to Aduako.

A popular perception in Ghana, as illustrated by many of my informants, is that the media over-sensationalizes political stories that link political actors to the occult. This sensational way in which the Ghanaian media reports such rumors has led some people to disregard them as plausible information and highlights the ambivalent attitude of Ghanaians to political-occult rumors. Although some of them believe the rumors because they were reported by the media, as I pointed out in Chapter Two, others have become cynical of the rumors due to the same reason. They argue that the media houses, in their eagerness to report what they deem important and bid to sell their news, publish sensational information about the alleged occult dealings of politicians, sometimes without checking. In this way, the media is accused of spreading rumors about the politicians involved. But how does the Ghanaian media publish and as a result perpetuate political-occult rumors? The answer is that such information, apart from being rumors in themselves parading as news, when they are put out there create numerous rumors among the Ghanaian public.

The media outlets do not have to belong to a particular political party to publish occult rumors about them; their business actually thrives on rumors. The more rumors they spin and make believable, the more audiences they draw. But sometimes, the type of occult rumor and the manner in which it is reported by the media can depend on what end of the political

⁴⁵⁶ Aduako, Fadama-Accra.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

spectrum they find themselves—pro-government, pro-opposition, state-owned, or independent. The independent media houses publish political rumors irrespective of who the stories are about, have not taken a stance and, therefore, do not belong to any of the political parties in Ghana, at least in public. The pro-government and pro-opposition media institutions, however, report rumors that cast their opposing parties and candidates in a negative light, while portraying their own parties and politicians in a positive one. For example, a radio station like ‘Radio Gold,’ a pro-NDC station, is alleged to only report negative rumors about opposition parties and hushes the negative ones about the NDC, while embellishing the good ones. The same is said of ‘Oman FM,’ a pro-NPP radio station, which does the same for the NPP.

The inclination of the pro-government or pro-opposition newspapers to publish news stories or rumors that favor their respective parties at the detriment of opponents can also be said of their newspaper outlets. Newspapers, like the ‘Statesman’ and ‘Daily Guide’—pro-NPP newspapers—will report occult rumors that are in favor of the NPP, but not in favor of the NDC or other opposition parties. The pro-NDC newspapers, like the ‘Republic’ and ‘Al-Hajj,’ will do vice-versa. It is important, therefore, to consider the type of media outlet that publishes the so-called occult statements made by politicians. The state-owned media, such as the ‘Daily Graphic’ and ‘The Times’ may only report positive stories about the government in power at every point in time and not necessarily negative ones about parties in opposition. But sometimes, even the public media houses can unintentionally or carelessly put some of the information that sometimes turns out to be rumors out there without checking. The media does not only publish political-occult rumors that are already in the public domain but sometimes initiates the rumors themselves for the sake of sensationalism and financial gains.

The Ghanaian media sensationalizes stories about the occult. By sensationalizing stories on the occult, they are made believable and this helps to sell their news—the more sensational the news, the more people read them. Stories about politicians, either admitting to their own occult use or associating opponents with it, sell in Ghana and help newspapers to fly off shelves and online ones to get more clicks or reads. For instance, Rawlings has always accused certain newspaper outlets in Ghana for using sensational stories about him to sell

their newspapers.⁴⁵⁸ It is this same sensational reportage, which has made some Ghanaians cynical about the stories that allege the political use of the occult, which breeds rumors that the media puts out there. As put by Sussy, a 34-year-old female student in Accra, “I know the occult is there, but the media talks about it too much; I think most of the time these stories about politicians’ involvement in the occult are blown out of proportion by the media.”⁴⁵⁹ Thus, although some members of the Ghanaian public do not rule out the possibility of politicians using occult means to win power, the fact that the media hypes the stories makes them cynical of the rumors.

It has become the norm in modern Ghana for the media—newspaper outlets, radio stations, and television stations—in their crucial efforts to catch up with the rapid growth and influence of the worldwide web or the internet, to also publish these political-occult stories online. The use of catchy and sensational phrases, such as: “We Believe In Antoa: Ohene Agyekum Boasts,” “Juju Means More to Us than Bible, Quran – Rawlings,” “Rawlings Goes [to] Antoa,” “Mallam Issah dares Kufuor: Meet me at Antoa if you are a man,” among others, as headlines draw people to their stories. It is true these catchy headlines will draw people to the stories, which will, in turn, convince some to believe the rumors they generate, but others argue that sometimes the stories do not even match their content. Even if they do, one cannot say that they are true, since their sources are questionable. As one of my respondents, a 51-year-old female civil servant, Gifty, put it, “these stories, although you know are rumors still linger in your head; you discuss with a few friends and even sometimes share on Facebook and other social media sites, but you later realize that it is just the media’s way of selling their stories.”⁴⁶⁰ Gifty’s position speaks to that of many people I spoke to in my interviews and explains their cynical attitudes to the media in general, even apart from how they report on political-occult rumors.

The marketing strategy by the media is increasing the accessibility to occult statements made by politicians and the rumors they breed. The catchy headlines are,

⁴⁵⁸ ‘Ghanaweb,’ “JJ dominates Ghanaian media once again,” July 17, 2015 <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/JJ-dominates-Ghanaian-media-once-again-146408>

⁴⁵⁹ Sussy, interviewed by author, Fadama-Accra, February 6, 2014.

⁴⁶⁰ Gifty, interviewed by author, Legon-Accra, February 19, 2014.

therefore, serving as ways to direct people's attention to the stories and also facilitate the speed with which they spread. The print and electronic media, therefore, contribute to popular impressions about politicians' alleged use of the occult by reporting spectacular stories about the occult dealings of the political elite. The media, in their bid to cash in on the alleged dealings of politicians, draws on "urban rumors and legends as their sources and multiply their circulation."⁴⁶¹ This means that while politicians gain publicity and political advantage by the talk the sensational stories about them produce, the media also potentially cashes in on the sensationalism of the stories.

The nature of political-occult rumors that the media publishes makes people skeptical of their credibility, irrespective of whether there is some truth in them or not, as demonstrated by Salaam's argument that:

To be sincere with you, the majority of our politicians use the occult and in my own experience some of the stories out there are true, but in most cases, the media exaggerates them to the point that it becomes difficult to believe them.⁴⁶²

The nature of the rumors, therefore, renders them incredible to be believed, although the stories may be true. The way in which the media reports occult rumors about politicians also reveals their bias toward Pentecostalism and their negative depictions of the occult. This attitude of the media was illustrated by the example I cited in Section III of the previous chapter on how the media reported Nana Kwaku Bonsam's story about him blaming many of the horrid accidents in Ghana on some politicians' refusal to show their gratitude to the gods who allegedly helped them to come to power.⁴⁶³ The newspaper report used the words "fetish priest" and "fetish" to describe Bonsam and his gods. These terms, as well as the occult, are used by many Ghanaians, the chief of whom are Pentecostals. But they are derogatory terms that feed into the colonial and Christian construct of GTR as a "fetish" and "superstitious" religion. The newspaper's characterization, therefore, showed how remnants of this derogatory colonial and

⁴⁶¹ Gifty, interviewed by author, Legon-Accra, February 19, 2014.

⁴⁶² Salaam, Ajiringanor-Accra.

⁴⁶³ *The Daily Guide*, "Kwaku Bonsam speaks on accidents!," March 13, 2009 <https://www.modernghana.com/news/206255/1/kwaku-bonsam-speaks-on-accidents.html>

Christian missionary depiction of GTR beliefs, practices and adherents still linger on in Ghana even after colonization.

Individual politicians and political parties can sometimes sue the media houses for publishing negative stories about them, but there are no laws in Ghana against the media's reportage of some of the negative stories that associate politicians with the occult, due to the repeal of the "Criminal Libel Law" in 2001, which restricted the media in their reportage.⁴⁶⁴ But, if there were laws against such negative reportage, then the media may be forced to check their information before putting it out there. Although many Ghanaians are happy with the freedom of information, others see this liberalization of the media as rather a negative thing, since it has now given them the leeway to publish mostly falsehood about especially politicians and their engagements with the occult. That is, apart from losing trust in the credibility of the media as the transmitter of important news, some people have called for the media to be sued for libel when they publish negative and false occult rumors about politicians. Such people are of the conviction that these stories are tantamount to character assassination of the politicians and political parties in question.

The position that the media is to be sued for libel was, however, countered by Akuffo, who argued that:

I think these rumors are all part of being in the spotlight. This is because the moment you put yourself out there as a politician, you must be psychologically prepared to battle with such things like negative and occult rumors about you... I call these rumors occupational hazards.⁴⁶⁵

Other respondents were of the opinion that the Ghanaian media is rather doing a good job by checking politicians and their excesses, especially their secret occult deals, and bringing these stories to the knowledge of the average citizen.⁴⁶⁶ This shows that while some Ghanaians believe the media is doing well in transmitting important information about politicians' purported involvement in the occult, others believe that they sometimes stretch their role to publishing stories, which can be described as rumors at best. Sussy, the 34-year-old female student in Accra, interestingly likened this ambivalent role of the Ghanaian media

⁴⁶⁴ 'Graphic Online,' "Criminal libel law repealed," July 30, 2001 <https://www.modernghana.com/news/15786/1/criminal-libel-law-repealed.html>

⁴⁶⁵ Akuffo, Tema-Accra.

⁴⁶⁶ Kofi Halm, Nyamekye-Accra; Salaam, Legon-Accra; Hassan, Ajiringanor-Accra.

in Twi as “ahuhuru ne awo” [heat and cold].⁴⁶⁷ That is, the media is like a very warm coat; putting it on makes you feel too warm, but taking it off also means becoming cold. The media has thus become important such that although you do not agree with everything they do and publish, you also cannot live without the news they publish.

The fact that many Ghanaians are cynical of media reports generally and of the alleged occult dealings of politicians specifically leads to the very important and relevant question that: If most Ghanaians are cynical of the media, how does the media still retain its power to spread rumors? This question might be answered that people sometimes spread rumors that they do not believe. In other words, although some people may doubt the authenticity or intent behind some of the so-called occult rumors the media puts out there, they still go ahead to repeat them, as illustrated by some of my informants, who recounted to me certain rumors they claimed to be suspicious of. Thus, although an individual can clearly be cynical of a particular occult rumor because the rumor is about a political opponent, they are likely to pass it on. The person might not believe the rumor but still feel the need to spread it, since most of the time such rumors are deemed funny and worthy of repetition. The media may be spreading falsehood, according to some people, but they still see it as their duty to spread it. The Ghanaian media, therefore, wields some power; this is because although many people doubt the truth in some of the stories about politicians’ alleged involvement in occult activities they publish, there are still people who believe them and others who spread them, even though they do not believe such information or deem them as true.

This section has been a discussion of how the Ghanaian media’s reportage of political-occult rumors in sensational ways has influenced some Ghanaians’ cynical attitudes to such rumors. The section that follows is an examination of the political alignment of an individual that also predisposes them to treat certain political-occult rumors with cynicism.

Section III: Political Alignment

In many cases when people are decided about their parties, it becomes difficult to influence them to change their minds, irrespective of the number of negative rumors about them. In this section, I argue that political party affiliation can influence a voter’s cynicism towards

⁴⁶⁷ Sussy, Fadama-Accra.

political-occult rumors about their party or the individual politician they support. In this way “it is ideological... context rather than the words themselves that ultimately produces the effects” of political-occult rumors.⁴⁶⁸ That is, people who support a particular party would not readily believe occult rumors about their party, unless in certain circumstances and for particular reasons, such as if they believe the supposed occult actions and behaviors of the parties and individual politicians they support go against their religious beliefs and values.

There are some Ghanaians who see themselves as being the “faithfuls” of particular political parties.⁴⁶⁹ Some of my interviewees were of the view that this group of people is stuck in their respective political party’s ideology and so nothing will make them change their minds. In this case, no rumors alleging their candidate or political party’s use of the occult will affect them to switch their political loyalties. Such people, then, do not accept rumors about their parties and candidates’ dabbling in the occult, although they may believe the ones about opponents, which makes them selective in their cynicism toward political-occult rumors. This tendency was underscored by Hassan, introduced previously when he observed that:

Well, for Ghanaians once we say this is my house it is difficult to get you out. No matter how bad the house is, you still try to belong to it. So even if the party is known to use the occult, its core supporters will still go ahead and vote for them.⁴⁷⁰

Hassan’s comment points to the issue that in Ghana when individuals are for or against a particular political party, it becomes difficult to influence them to change their opinion and this has made an individual’s political party alignment become crucial in determining their attitudes to political-occult rumors. Many people tend to view negative occult rumors about the parties they support with disdain and, therefore, do not believe them to be true, but part of opponents’ schemes to undermine them.

Apart from individual voters ardently supporting certain political parties irrespective of the negative, mostly occult, rumors about them, there are some regions in Ghana considered as the “world banks” or strongholds of the two major political parties, the NDC and NPP.⁴⁷¹ The Ashanti and Eastern Regions primarily support the NPP, while the Volta and

⁴⁶⁸ Stewart and Strathern, *Witchcraft, Sorcery*, 30.

⁴⁶⁹ Akuffo, Tema-Accra.

⁴⁷⁰ Hassan, Ajiringanor-Accra.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

the three Northern Regions also predominantly vote for the NDC. These regions have consistently voted for these parties in every election, particularly in the Fourth Republican era. Some of my respondents argued that these “world banks” do not vote based on rumors or issues, but based on the mere reason that they support their respective parties. As Hassan, who claimed to be an ardent supporter of the Convention People’s Party (CPP), Nkrumah’s party that has never been able to come to power again since his overthrow in 1966, again put it:

I was listening to a radio discussion the other time when one of the panel members said that the NDC is very good at winning elections, but they are bad at governance and what do you think accounts for it? Then another person on the panel went ahead and argued that the NDC wins elections because their world banks in the Volta region and the North keep on voting for them. I believe the same goes for the NPP who the Ashantis will vote for no matter what.⁴⁷²

In my own experience growing up in Ghana and witnessing six presidential and parliamentary elections, I have often heard people say that the people in the so-called “world banks” support particular political parties to the extent that “se wode akoko koraa gyina ma won mpo aa wobetow ama no” [even if a chicken stands as the candidate for the party they love, they will still vote for it]. Some of my informants also alluded to this popular saying and argued that sometimes it did not matter who stands as the candidate for a particular party in some areas in Ghana; the people there will vote for them whether they qualify, are competent, have brought or can bring development to their regions or not.⁴⁷³ The same is said about their attitudes to occult rumors about their parties and candidates; they do not believe such rumors and view them with suspicion. Clearly, this perception undermines the fact that the voters in these so-called “world banks” may have good reasons for voting for the parties that they support, but it highlights the reality that a person’s political alignment can potentially make them cynical of negative rumors, including political-occult ones.

The ardent political supporters are driven by their love for their parties, as illustrated by Sarpomaah, who claimed to be a supporter of the NPP, that:

⁴⁷² Hassan, Ajiringanor-Accra.

⁴⁷³ Joshua, interviewed by author, Legon-Accra, February 19, 2014; Hassan, Ajiringanor-Accra; Nana B., Kaneshie-Accra; Kofi Halm, Nyamekye-Accra; Gifty, Legon-Accra.

I love the NPP so much that no rumor would make me change my mind about them. The occult rumors about them rather appall me because I see them as cheap ways for their opponents to drag their reputation through the mud so that Ghanaians won't vote for them.⁴⁷⁴

Maa Akos argued along those lines when I asked her about the possibility of negative occult rumors affecting her to change her political party affiliation, and she answered thus: "No, the rumors won't affect me because I love my party and do not vote for them based on mere rumors."⁴⁷⁵ Adj, the 26-year-old female teaching assistant, also told me that she is a staunch supporter of the NPP and so I asked her what her attitude to the political-occult rumors about the NPP was and their potential to affect her voting behavior; her response was that:

I don't accept rumors that claim my party deals in the occult; such stories make me realize that there are political opponents out there who are working hard to bring my party into disrepute.⁴⁷⁶

These assertions confirmed why Nana B. opined, in his response to whether political-occult rumors have the potential to affect people's voting behavior and sway their votes, that:

These rumors affecting the voting behavior in Ghana, I doubt. Ghanaians are such that if they have accepted you as NPP, it is NPP; if they know you as NDC, it is NDC. In fact, no matter who you are, no matter what you do, that is how they are going to vote.⁴⁷⁷

Fervent supporters of political parties will, therefore, not believe occult rumors about their parties. Many Ghanaian voters are entrenched in their political ideologies and are not moved by occult rumors about the parties and politicians they support; they rather believe that it is political opponents using such rumors to discredit their parties and candidates. Even if they are convinced that the rumors could be true, they will still not influence them to change their minds because it would be better for their party to be in power than an opposition party, since their opponents are also using the occult.

Salaam was apposite in his claim about the tendency of some Ghanaians to discount political-occult rumors, irrespective of their truth due to their political alignment, when he argued that: "If your political leaders are going to Kwaku Bonsam, your opponents are also

⁴⁷⁴ Sarpomaah, Fadama-Accra.

⁴⁷⁵ Maa Akos, Nyamekye-Accra.

⁴⁷⁶ Adj, Legon-Accra.

⁴⁷⁷ Nana B., Kaneshie-Accra.

going to Antoa or another spiritualist, it becomes normal and acceptable.”⁴⁷⁸ Hence the popular saying in Ghana in Twi that: “Nea ebeko goal no de, anka enko corner” (I’d rather the ball goes to a corner than for it to enter the goal net of my team). Thus, zealous supporters will say that “I will rather give my vote to the occultist candidate or party that I support than to allow power to go to my political opponents or the wrong hands.”⁴⁷⁹ Such people may believe their parties use the occult; hence the truth of the occult rumors about them, but since all politicians use the occult, supporting their party irrespective of the rumors is a matter of voting for the least of the evils. This is why sometimes, people’s cynicism toward political-occult rumors does not mean discounting the rumors as false; the person is cynical only because the rumor is about their party and not the opposing camp, pointing to their selective cynicism. There are, therefore, gradations of people’s cynical attitudes to political-occult rumors, as far as their political alignment is concerned.

Those people who are cynical of political-occult rumors as a result of their political alignment claim that it is only floating or undecided voters who accept and are influenced by negative political-occult rumors. Floating voters are the people who do not belong to a particular political party, are undecided and can be swayed to support any political party or candidate at any given time. Some regions in Ghana, such as the Greater Accra and Central regions are also considered as floating or “swing” regions. Because these floating voters or regions are undecided in their decisions about what political parties or candidates to vote for, many Ghanaians are of the view that political parties and individual candidates depend on them to decide the outcome of crucial elections. This is why many people in Ghana are of the view that negative political-occult rumors are put out there to influence only undecided voters and not staunch political party supporters. For instance, Nana B. maintained that:

There are few people they call floating voters and even now the politicians themselves are taking advantage of the floating voters, but for the hardcore supporters, no matter what you do or the rumors about their parties, they will vote for them.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁸ Salaam, Ajiringanor-Accra.

⁴⁷⁹ Salaam, Ajiringanor-Accra.

⁴⁸⁰ Nana B., Kaneshie-Accra.

This view was corroborated by Hassan that: “The rumors will only affect floating voters, but for the true supporters of a politician or the party involved, they will not.”⁴⁸¹ That is, often when politicians carry out their electioneering campaigns, the idea is that their main goal is to win these undecided voters to their side because Ghana is politically polarized and the electorate is biased toward the NDC and the NPP. There are other parties, but those tend to have very few followers.

It may be true that if an individual supports a particular politician or political party, they have already formed particular views about them and are more likely to be cynical about negative rumors concerning them, but there are exceptional cases. Some people will be supporters of particular parties but will switch their loyalties due to their religious background. If they believe what the politicians or parties in question are alleged to be doing goes against their religious beliefs, then they might be forced to change their political allegiances. An example was Mr. Osafo, who professed his staunch support for the Convention People’s Party (CPP), but also admitted that:

I love my party very much, but if there are convincing rumors about their involvement in occult activities, which I believe go against my Christian faith, then they will in a way make me change my mind. This is because if they are doing something evil on my behalf then I may have to say bye, bye to them.⁴⁸²

I asked him why that was the case, to which he said:

For Christians, we believe the occult is a bad thing for a person to get involved in and so for me to still vote for a politician or political party that meddles in the occult means that I am consenting to their evil deeds and, therefore, playing a part in it.⁴⁸³

One’s party affiliation can then make them suspicious about occult rumors about their party, but it is not always the case that such people will continue to follow them when they realize that their actions and behaviors, in this case, the occult, contravenes their religious values.

In this portion of the chapter, I proposed that an individual’s political alignment will predispose him/her to have a cynical attitude to certain political-occult rumors, although there are different gradations of this cynical attitude. We now turn our attention to the final

⁴⁸¹ Hassan, Ajiringanor-Accra.

⁴⁸² Mr. Osafo, Adenta-Accra.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

section of this chapter that argues that the public image of a politician or political party can ultimately determine people's skepticism of occult rumors about them.

Section IV: Politician's Public Image

This chapter has so far examined three of the four main factors that predispose some Ghanaians to treat political-occult rumors with cynicism. This section explores the fourth issue and offers that sometimes the cynical attitude of some Ghanaians to political-occult rumors can be due to the public image of the subject of the rumor. Kapferer has argued that "rumors [are] aimed at constructing an image" [of a politician].⁴⁸⁴ The rumors "targeting politicians [therefore] are not started by accident," but "they seek out the politician's weak point."⁴⁸⁵ Through these rumors and the acceptance of their credibility, a certain image is created for the politician or the political party in question because certain rumors "require no proof."⁴⁸⁶ This is because "public opinion is often founded more on impressions than on facts. Accusations alone suffice... not every rumor targeting someone can succeed. Rumors must first be rendered probable. They actually reveal latent image problems"⁴⁸⁷ I propose in this section that some Ghanaians treat certain rumors about politicians' links with the occult with cynicism due to the public image or reputation of the individual politician or political party involved, although the rumors do not just reflect this image, but shape it as well.

There are some politicians the majority of my respondents told me were above occult rumors due to the way they carried themselves in public; hence the suspicion of the negative occult rumors about them. These politicians were publicly seen as people who always did the "right thing."⁴⁸⁸ By "right thing" they meant that the politicians walked according to Pentecostal principles and would in no way dabble in the occult. These politicians were seen as the "incarnation of God himself on earth."⁴⁸⁹ Akuffo, the 57-year-old banker, spoke to this

⁴⁸⁴ Kapferer, *Rumors*, 223.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid, 220-1.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, 215

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Kofi Halm, Fadama-Accra.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

perception when he said in response to the potential of occult rumors affecting his voting behavior that:

I think it will depend on the individual the rumor concerns. If the person happens to be seen as a clean politician, then people will not believe the negative rumors about him, but if the politician involved is known to be towing that line already then nobody would be surprised and it would make people believe the rumor about them. It is actually the way a politician carries themselves that would make people believe these rumors or not.⁴⁹⁰

The interesting observation by Akuffo above was illustrated by many of my interview respondents' opinion of Mills, Ghana's former President who died while in office in June 2012. Although Mills distinguished himself as a Pentecostal President—and Vice-President before that—there were still negative occult rumors about him. But Mills was an example of a politician who many of my informants said they did not believe occult rumors about him and this made them treat such rumors with scorn.

Some of the occult rumors about Mills claimed he was only posing as a good Christian, but dealt in occult activities in secret. A particular ring Mills wore on the middle finger of his left hand during the 2008 electioneering campaigns was alleged to have been given to him by an occult specialist. This story was published in the dailies and on the internet and alleged that the ring in question appeared from nowhere since Mills did not have it on before and even after the elections; it also did not look like his wedding ring and looked strange.⁴⁹¹ This rumor was to contrast Mills' public image as a true Pentecostal and to show that although he (Mills) professed to be a Pentecostal in public, he was secretly using the occult. There have also been rumors about Mills and his operatives going to Togo to consult a powerful occult ritualist for spiritual powers that supposedly helped him win the 2008 elections.⁴⁹²

Even Mills' long sickness and eventual death have been attributed by some Ghanaians to the fact that he did not stick to one "spiritual power" to win the 2008 elections.⁴⁹³ Musah, a 58-year-old male computer technician I interviewed in Adenta-Accra, for example, argued that the angry spiritual forces of the occult agents Mills visited to help him win the elections

⁴⁹⁰ Akuffo, Tema-Accra.

⁴⁹¹ Kwadwo Anim, "Ntiwul proves Mills 'magic' ring claim with evidence," unspecified date <http://ghanamps.com/news-events/details.php?id=1074>

⁴⁹² Musah, interviewed by author, Adenta-Accra, 17 November, 2013.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

came to give him a “spiritual knockout blow” when he least expected it.⁴⁹⁴ This was because after they allegedly helped Mills to win the presidency, instead of him and his operatives going back to pay their respects and make the whole world know about what they did for him, Mills rather chose to move from one church to the other to publicly attribute his victory to the Pentecostal God. All these rumors were meant to demonstrate that Mills may have been roaming from one Pentecostal church to the other to prove his devout nature, but he was only doing it for the show of it and was secretly consulting with occult practitioners as well. From my conversations with my respondents, it became obvious to me that not many of the occult rumors about Mills gained traction, however. This was essentially because to them, Mills was not capable of using the occult. Even those who believed some of the rumors were cautious to do so and claimed it was possible the leadership of the NDC mobilized the help of the occult without Mills’ knowledge.⁴⁹⁵ Thus, Mills’ handlers could have used the occult without his consent and so he could not be blamed for their actions.

The occult rumors about Mills were viewed with skepticism because he was successful in establishing himself as a Pentecostal President. Before he came into office, Mills made it a point to associate with some of the very popular Pentecostal preachers, such as T.B. Joshua from Nigeria and Charles Agyin-Asare from Ghana. Many Ghanaians regarded Mills as a very God-fearing and gentleman and later referred to him as the “Asomdweehene” (The Prince of Peace), a name associated with Jesus Christ.⁴⁹⁶ After his election, Mills continued to associate with these Pentecostal preachers who constantly came to pray for him at the castle, the seat of government, a situation that even led some Ghanaians to accuse him of turning the seat of government into a “prayer camp.”⁴⁹⁷ Most of Mills’ public utterances were also in line with Pentecostal language and imagery. Some of my respondents even said that the reason they voted for Mills as President was not because they knew he was going to be a competent

⁴⁹⁴ Musah, Adenta-Accra; Nana Kwame, interviewed by author, Ashale-Botwe-Accra, November 17, 2013; Maa Gee, Korle Bu-Accra; Amissah, Fadama-Accra.

⁴⁹⁵ Nana Kwame, Ashale Botwe-Accra.

⁴⁹⁶ Ameyaw Debrah, “Our Celebs Mourn Prez Mills,” July 27, 2012 <http://www.accra.io/blogs/t/89833/he-john-evans-atta-mills>

⁴⁹⁷ Masahudu Ankiilu Kunateh, “Is President Mills turning the Castle into a prayer camp?,” March 20, unspecified year http://www.ghanadot.com/social_scene.kunateh.032009.html

President, but because he was a “good man with a gentle demeanor and was upright.”⁴⁹⁸ Thus, Mills was more like Jesus, who had no wrong in him, as observed by Pontius Pilate, the Roman Emperor during his trial.⁴⁹⁹ This was why Mills would have won the 2012 presidential elections, in spite of problems with his health, because Ghanaians trusted him to always do the “right thing,” according to Nana Kwame, a 22-year-old student at Ashale Botwe-Accra, who is also a Pentecostal.

To many Ghanaians, then, Mills’ reputation as a staunch Pentecostal was enough to guarantee him their vote and support.⁵⁰⁰ It was also enough to make them disbelieve negative occult rumors about him. Nana Kwame asked me: “Why do you think John Mahama, Mills’ Vice-President, won the elections in just a short amount of time?”⁵⁰¹ I said I had no idea, and he said: “It was because of the goodwill Mills enjoyed among many Ghanaians.”⁵⁰² I found this assertion to be rather intriguing because it actually conflicted with what other Ghanaians believed; that is, Mahama was only able to win the elections in less than five months with the help of occult manipulation, an example of whom was Kwame Mensah, a 37-year-old mechanic in Nyamekye-Accra.⁵⁰³ Mills’ public image as a staunch Pentecostal may have won him the needed support and votes of Pentecostals, but it also made many people doubt rumors that linked him to the occult. It also illustrates that a politician or political party’s public image can influence the cynical attitudes of people to occult rumors about them.

While many Ghanaians do not believe occult rumors about politicians, like Mills, due to their positive public image, there are others, who when rumors about their use of the occult come out, some people, including the ones who are cynical toward occult rumors about politicians, would not hesitate in believing them. An example was Rawlings, who many of my respondents believed relied heavily on occult forces to remain in power for as long as he did. They argued that Rawlings’ public utterances and general demeanor also fed into this popular

⁴⁹⁸ Salaam, Legon-Accra.

⁴⁹⁹ Nana Kwame, Ashale Botwe-Accra

⁵⁰⁰ Nana Kwame, Ashale Botwe-Accra; Maa Gee, Korle Bu-Accra; Amissah, Fadama-Accra.

⁵⁰¹ Nana Kwame, Ashale Botwe-Accra.

⁵⁰² Maa Gee, Korle Bu-Accra.

⁵⁰³ Kwame Mensah, Nyamekye-Accra.

negative perception about him.⁵⁰⁴ CAN, a 47-year-old male Pentecostal pastor and a teacher visiting Accra from Kumasi at the time I spoke to him, told me categorically that Rawlings' reputation as an occult dealer confirmed what Jesus meant in the Bible in Matthew 7:16 that "by their fruits, you shall know them."⁵⁰⁵ CAN's assertion contrasts that of Nana Agyei who claimed to be suspicious of rumors alleging Rawlings' possessing occult powers because he believed Rawlings only manipulated occult rumors about him to create an aura of fear around his personality in order to coerce people into voting for him and keep enemies and detractors at bay.⁵⁰⁶ But at the same time, CAN's opinion proves some Ghanaians' conviction that they are able to distinguish politicians who use the occult from those who do not by their words, actions and occult rumors, which circulate about them, be it negative or positive. These rumors culminate in building the reputation of individual politicians and political parties.

Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, also had to grapple with occult rumors during his time. Meyer has cited a personal communication she had with one of her students, Kojo Senah, in her book chapter, "The Religious and the Secular," that:

The association of the head of state with occult powers also pertained to Nkrumah, who was rumored to be protected by spiritual forces that made him immune to several assassination attempts. He was often seen with a white handkerchief that allegedly linked him to his spiritual protector.⁵⁰⁷

Some of my informants, who also alluded to the above rumor about Nkrumah, told me that the image Nkrumah projected in public made it easy for people to believe occult rumors about him. One such proof, apart from Nkrumah hailing from the Western Region or Nzema, one of the alleged hotbeds of witchcraft in Ghana, was Nkrumah's escape from numerous assassination plots, as cited by Kojo Senah above. CAN made mention to me that:

The strange thing about the assassination attempts on Nkrumah was that some of the people around him died, but not Nkrumah. And so if Nkrumah was not spiritually protected by powerful and mostly occult forces, there was no way he could have avoided all of the assassination attempts.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁴ Sussy, Fadama-Accra.

⁵⁰⁵ CAN, interviewed by author, Lapaz-Accra, November 27, 2013; also see The Holy Bible, Matthew 7:16.

⁵⁰⁶ Nana Agyei, Lapaz-Accra.

⁵⁰⁷ Meyer, "Religious and the Secular," 112.

⁵⁰⁸ CAN, Lapaz-Accra.

Supposedly, from CAN's claim, Ghanaians did not need any more proof about Nkrumah's use of the occult, since the rumors alone were enough to convince them. Some also claimed Nkrumah was always seen with a white handkerchief and sometimes a walking stick that they believed were given to him by Antoa Nyama, the god from Guinea. Through the negative rumors that alluded to Nkrumah's occult use, then, a certain image was carved for him and made people believe occult stories about him, although others were skeptical of the rumors because they were convinced that Nkrumah, like Rawlings, deployed the rumors to create a sense of inviolability or invincibility around him.

The discussion in this section has highlighted an important point that the public image of the subject of a particular political-occult rumor goes a long way to informing people's cynical attitudes to negative occult rumors about them, although this same reputation can also make others believe such rumors about them. That is, whether the Ghanaian public will accept political rumors at face value or be skeptical of them sometimes depends on the cumulative total of all the negative rumors that come out about the subject. When the rumors become so credible that one political party or politician becomes known or is notorious for engaging in occult practices, then people may be tempted to believe them, irrespective of their cynicism toward such rumors.⁵⁰⁹ The flip side to this argument is that if the politician is known to have a positive public image, then no amount of negative occult rumors will make people doubt their credibility; hence, occult rumors about them are viewed with skepticism.

Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated the cynicism of a section of the Ghanaian electorate to political-occult rumors, although there are variations of this distrustful attitude. It argued that some Ghanaians view political-occult rumors with suspicion due to their cynicism toward politics in general. That is, due to the competition in the political field and their bid to have access to the wealth, status and prestige that come with political power, Ghanaian politicians, political parties and their operatives are alleged to spread occult rumors about opponents as part of their publicity stunts to discredit them, while portraying themselves as the better

⁵⁰⁹ Saaka, Legon-Accra.

candidates and parties to vote for. Others are believed to spread occult rumors about themselves in order to create an aura of fear around their personalities as means to coerce people into voting for them and put opponents and detractors at bay.

The people who are suspicious of political-occult rumors due to their suspicions about politics generally see themselves as more sophisticated than those who readily accept them. They argue that it is only floating or undecided voters who the rumors can influence. The sensational reportage of political-occult rumors by the Ghanaian media also leads some people to treat them with doubt. Furthermore, if an individual supports a particular politician or political party, the person has already formed positive views about them and are more likely to be cynical about negative rumors concerning them. Ultimately, a politician's public image goes a long way to influence cynical attitudes to occult rumors about them. The contemptuous attitude to political-occult rumors underscores the incredulity of the Ghanaian electorate, as far as political-occult rumors are concerned, although sometimes this cynicism does not determine if such rumors would be discounted.

The previous and present chapters have been an examination of the two contrasting popular attitudes of the Ghanaian public to political-occult rumors—acceptance of the rumors at face value and cynicism towards them. They accounted for what factors incline people to either readily accept or view such rumors with suspicion. The next chapter explores the political utilization of the occult and its concomitant rumors and argues that politicians in Ghana either avoid or embrace the occult and rumors about it to gain political advantage.

CHAPTER FIVE

POLITICAL UTILIZATION OF THE OCCULT

This chapter assesses modes of political alignment with the occult and rumors about it. It argues that politicians in Ghana adopt one of two broad stances towards rumored association with the occult. On the one hand, many politicians go to great lengths to avoid such association by eschewing rumors of participation in occult ritual, which they believe will damage their reputations and, therefore, their electoral prospects. On the other hand, others view the fearsome reputation of the occult as an opportunity to gain political advantage. Such politicians cultivate perceptions of occult participation through statements and actions that are reported by the media, which in turn breed rumors about their involvement in occult activities. In this sense, politicians themselves can be leading sources of political-occult rumor. Political power in Ghana is hotly contested and Ghana's growing ethos of consumer capitalism has made competition for it more vicious. I argue that in this context, one strategy used in the struggle for political power is for political agents and institutions to exploit the public's fear of the occult. In many instances in this chapter, as will be seen in most of the examples cited, my references to "the occult" would be closely aligned to GTR. I use GTR as the occult as per the Pentecostal definition of GTR as a manifestation of the occult, although at other times, I employ the term in its broader sense (GTR and other non-Christian elements).

My analysis of what I am calling political utilization of the occult emphasizes the role of negative views, largely perpetuated by Pentecostals, in shaping the political field in post-colonial Ghana. In particular, I highlight some of the unintended consequences of these negative views of the occult that lead to occult rumors and show that they can become such significant tools for gaining political advantage in a variety of ways. The first section of this chapter shows that Ghanaian politicians avoid the occult due to the Pentecostal influence in Ghana and the perceived moral and spiritual backwardness of the occult. But their ultimate goal is to gain political advantage. The second section, therefore, argues that politicians distance themselves from the occult in order to buttress claims about their moral credentials. By avoiding the occult, while associating opponents with same, these politicians deflect responsibility and criticisms for their actions (and inactions) and build trust among the Ghanaian electorate that they do not use the occult while discrediting opponents for using

the occult. Other politicians also seek to act as bearers of important news about the occult dealings of their political opponents.

Although anti-occult rhetoric in Ghana is strong and influential, there are nevertheless signs of resistance to this. Such resistance is evident in the counter-positioning of a few number of politicians who publicly embrace identification with the occult and exploit, even cultivate, rumors about their occult activities. I must point out here, however, that appealing to GTR or the occult is not a common practice on the part of politicians seeking re-election. Politicians' avoidance of the occult and negative rumors about it is, therefore, the norm, while their public association with them is an anomaly. But what attracts these politicians to do this in the face of strong anti-occult pressure? My claim is that such politicians draw upon the *capital* available in the occult by virtue of certain key characteristics that are associated with it. I reason in the third section of this chapter that politicians who identify with the occult and rumors about it utilize the occult's social reputation as a space for adjudication – as a truth and lie detector and the deliverer of instant justice, which lead to vindication. I claim in the final section that these politicians' public alignment with the occult serves a dual strategic focus. On the one hand, occult rumor generates controversy that leads to publicity and an enhanced media profile. On the other, the strategy provides a means for building their political identity, advancing claims to trustworthiness, and asserting their power as the ones who are backed by powerful occult spiritual forces. That is, these politicians also embrace the occult for political gain. The next section discusses many Ghanaian politicians' strategy of avoiding the occult and rumors about it.

Section I: Avoiding the Occult

In this section, I suggest that many Ghanaian politicians distance themselves from the occult due to the Pentecostal influence in Ghana, and an associated perception that the occult represents moral and spiritual backwardness. As I have argued throughout this study, the Pentecostal influence in Ghana is prevalent and its narrative on the occult is negative. Pentecostal discourse, communities, praxis, and symbols inform how many people feel, think and act in Ghana, including how they see the occult and its engagements with modern politics. As a consequence of this, many Ghanaian politicians avoid the occult by either associating opponents with it or denying rumors that link them to occult activity.

Pentecostal Christianity has an established influence in Ghana, making Pentecostals the 'default' political power-brokers. Associating with Pentecostals for legitimation and support can guarantee a boost in a politician or political party's electoral fortunes. An illustration of the Pentecostal influence that leads politicians to deny allegations and rumors about the occult, all in their efforts to avoid the occult, occurred during a legal hearing between the NPP and NDC in 2013. After the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections, the former dragged the latter and the Electoral Commission to the Supreme Court over the alleged rigging of the elections in the NDC's favor.⁵¹⁰ During one of the court hearings, Anita DeSooso, the NDC's National Women's Organizer, made the allegation that "the NPP was counting on 'juju' to win the case."⁵¹¹ She particularly accused Stephen Amoah, an NPP leading member, of "rubbing a substance [she believed] to be 'juju' on her chair in the courtroom."⁵¹² Mr. Amoah could not let the allegation slide due to its possible long-term negative implications and, therefore, denied it. To this effect, the 'Daily Guide,' a pro-NPP newspaper, stated in its April 22 issue that:

But in a sharp rebuttal, Stephen Amoah, a staunch Christian who worships with the Calvary Charismatic Centre (CCC) in Kumasi, vehemently denied visiting the court with any 'juju' substance.⁵¹³

This example underscores the Pentecostal influence in Ghana. Many politicians, aware of this influence, invoke their Pentecostal credentials in order to be accepted as candidates fit to rule the nation according to Pentecostal ideals. We must note how swiftly the accused denied the allegation, but also how the paper identified him as a "staunch Christian" associated with the CCC, which is a popular Pentecostal church in Kumasi. As a pro-NPP newspaper, the 'Daily Guide' was invoking a deliberate strategy to, on the one hand, disassociate Amoah – and by extension the NPP and itself – from occult rumor, and on the other hand to explicitly align with Pentecostalism by advertising Amoah's Pentecostal credentials.

⁵¹⁰ Kofi Yeboah, "Opposition NPP Takes Ghana Presidential Election Results to Court," December 29, 2012 <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2012/12/29/opposition-npp-takes-ghana-presidential-election-results-to-court/>

⁵¹¹ *Daily Guide*, "'Juju' at Supreme Court," April 22, 2013 <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Juju-at-Supreme-Court-271746>

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

The strategy of identifying with Pentecostalism, and advertising of Pentecostal credentials, has been observed by Meyer to have been employed for some time in Ghana by politicians— sometimes in combination with another strategy of besmirching opponents with claims of occult practice. Writing after the national elections of 1996, Meyer says she “noted a strong inclination on the part of politicians to stress that they were ‘born again’ and to assault other politicians as being in league with demonic spirits.”⁵¹⁴ Such alignment with Pentecostalism sometimes occurs in response to accusations of occult practice. At other times, politicians use popular Pentecostal discourse and imagery to couch campaign messages, adopt Pentecostal songs for campaigns, and associate with prominent Pentecostal leaders.⁵¹⁵ In doing this they pre-empt rumors that will link them to the occult even before they are constructed. Indeed, as the following discussion exhibits, alignment with Pentecostalism takes many forms. Ghanaian politicians deliberately borrow from Pentecostal language and imagery to frame their campaign messages. While some may couch their campaign messages in biblical language, others spice them with actual quotes from the Bible. Whether articulating the themes for their campaigns, adopting mottos, or using slogans, politicians make a point of demonstrating sympathies towards Pentecostals.

Ghanaian Pentecostals have a tendency to rely on God to resolve apparently insurmountable problems, drawing on biblical teachings and figures for models or exemplars. This inclination was demonstrated by the late Mills in the run-up to the 2000 general elections. Gifford argues that “while the NDC were plotting to win the election by every means at their disposal, Mills took the opportunity to present himself nationally as the anointed and God-fearing leader the Deuteronomic history required”⁵¹⁶ Mills, therefore, established his credentials as a Pentecostal Vice-President when he said some few weeks before the 2000 elections that:

I have come to realize after being Vice-President for four years that there are many problems that we cannot solve as human beings, and that it is only God who can assist us to solve all the problems. Our prayer has always been that God will lead us in all our endeavors and set us on

⁵¹⁴ Meyer, “Religious and Secular,” 98.

⁵¹⁵ Some portions of this section have been adapted from my MA thesis that discussed how Ghanaian politicians manipulated Pentecostal symbols for political gains (*Pentecostalism and Politics in Ghana*).

⁵¹⁶ Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 178.

the right path. We are, therefore, convinced that with the help of God we shall succeed in all we are determined to do for the nation.⁵¹⁷

For Mills to claim that the success of his government hinged on the help of God could sound as if he was shirking his responsibility as an aspirant to the presidency. However, such utterances appealed to the sympathies of many Ghanaians; they helped Mills to distance himself from his predecessor, Rawlings, and the rumors that circulated around the latter. As Gifford put it: “if... one refused to have any truck with Rawlings because he was an idolater and thereby bringing God’s wrath upon Ghana, one could still rally to his intended successor, Mills, because he was totally born-again.”⁵¹⁸ The positive public perception Mills garnered, to some extent, helped him to silence occult rumors about him. This effect is exemplified by an observation made by Maa Akos, who contended that: “I knew there was no way the rumors about Mills using the occult could be true because he was one of us [a Pentecostal] and someone who feared God.”⁵¹⁹ Maa Akos’ view represents the notion held by many of my respondents and for that matter some Ghanaians, that Mills could not be an occultist politician because he was publicly known as a staunch Pentecostal (as I demonstrated in the previous chapter).

Political parties also strategically choose campaign slogans that are in line with Pentecostal rhetoric. Examples are “The voice of the people is the voice of God” and “The battle is the Lord’s” by the NPP during the 2008 and 2012 elections, respectively.⁵²⁰ These slogans are used to demonstrate that their candidates are God’s chosen to lead Ghanaians, create the sense that the candidates would further Pentecostal interests and another clever way to avoid being associated with the occult through rumors.⁵²¹ This is because if the “battle is the Lord’s,” for example, then it means the party is relying ‘solely’ on God and not the occult for electoral victory. In the same way, the slogan, “The voice of the people is the voice of

⁵¹⁷ Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 178.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid, 177-8.

⁵¹⁹ Maa Akos, Nyamekye-Accra.

⁵²⁰ The Bible, 1 Samuel 8:7; 2 Chronicles 20:15.

⁵²¹ Nana Agyei, Lapaz-Accra.

God,” was to pre-empt rumors about the NPP’s occult mobilization if they happened to win the elections.

Aspirants to political offices and political parties also adopt popular Pentecostal songs to help sell their campaign messages and through that avoid the occult. Pentecostal songs are popular and enjoy massive airplay on the various radio and television stations in Ghana; they are highly patronized and their musicians are equally popular. Not many social functions in Ghana can go on without being opened with a prayer and a Pentecostal song as a way to invite God into the ceremony. For instance, in the 1996 and 2000 general elections, the NPP appropriated the Pentecostal song entitled, “Awurade Kasa” or “Speak Lord” by Cindy Thompson as the theme song for their campaigns. “Awurade Kasa” at the time was a very popular tune in the Pentecostal repertoire, and adoption of the song was clearly designed to attract the attention and support of Pentecostals. The NPP later adopted “Through Jesus Christ, I am moving forward” by Christiana Love in 2008. Following this tradition, all the leading parties in subsequent elections adopted Pentecostal songs in their bid to bolster their claims to being the “chosen of God” to lead the country.⁵²² They also employed gospel musicians from Pentecostal churches to compose songs for them, tapping into the popular appeal these singers currently enjoy in Ghana. The NDC has also for the past elections used “Di wo Hene” (Keep on reigning) by the late Comfort Annor and “Jehovah, you are the most high” by Pastor Lenny Akpadie, as their major campaign songs. Through the use of these songs, politicians and political parties are able to transform political rallies into religious “crusades,” drawing huge crowds and demonstrating enough Pentecostal support base to convince undecided voters that their parties do not use the occult and are the winning teams to follow.⁵²³

Moreover, Ghanaian politicians and political parties distance themselves from the occult by physically associating with Pentecostals and their popular leaders. The strategy of politicians worshipping with Pentecostals, donating money to their causes, chairing fundraising ceremonies and making surprise visits to their churches are some of the ways to

⁵²² Kofi Halm, Fadama-Accra.

⁵²³ A Pentecostal crusade is an open-air outreach event where Pentecostals mount platforms to share the message of their gospel to their audience through preaching by their ministers and singing by popular musicians.

win the confidence of Ghana's political power brokers, Pentecostals. For example, Kufuor, prior to his nomination as the presidential candidate for the NPP in 1995, was a practicing Catholic, but in the run-up to the 1996, 2000 and 2004 elections, he constantly consulted Pentecostal churches and their leaders for support. Kufuor, like many other Ghanaian politicians, became a Pentecostal overnight, frequently attending the International Central Gospel Church in Accra, led by Pastor Mensah Otabil so that prayers would be said for him and the NPP.⁵²⁴ The late Mills did the same thing; even the current President, Mahama, also constantly appeals to Pentecostals and is publicly known as a professing Christian who worships with the Assemblies of God, a popular Pentecostal church in Ghana and worldwide.

Ghanaian politicians visit Pentecostal churches to pray against the alleged occult machinations of their political opponents and for God's favor before, during and after their electioneering campaigns. For example, one of my informants, Aduako, the 52-year-old Pentecostal pastor in Nyamekye-Accra, conveyed the testimony one politician gave at his church. The politician claimed that an opponent was using the occult to win elections, while he (the politician) decided to rely solely on God.⁵²⁵ By asking for prayers against the occult dealings of opponents, politicians, such as this one portray themselves as godly candidates who would not use the occult, but would govern with the help and favor of God when given the nod by Ghanaians. This is not to say that all politicians are insincere in the public expression of their Pentecostal religiosity and identity. Nevertheless, even for Pentecostal politicians, the need to win Pentecostal support is a significant factor, and allaying concerns about any possible occult connections matters to Pentecostal voters.

Many Ghanaian politicians also distance themselves from the occult and rumors about it because of its perceived moral and spiritual backwardness. Ghanaian Pentecostals cast those who dabble in the occult as people who are on the other side and agents of the devil. Equally important in reinforcing the negativity of those who associate with occult practices is the Pentecostal perspective on modernity as a Christianizing project. According to this view, the occult represents the pre-modern past from which all Ghanaians should distance

⁵²⁴ Salaam, Legon-Accra.

⁵²⁵ Aduako, Fadama-Accra.

themselves if they want to progress in life.⁵²⁶ Suspected occult agents and their clients are thus described by Ghanaian Pentecostals as backward, uncivilized, and stuck in the past. According to Salaam, the 56-year-old male African Religions scholar and former politician, Nana Kwaku Bonsam, the custodian of the traditional religious *Kofi oo Kofi* shrine in Kumasi, for example, is regarded by Pentecostals as “evil and someone plunging the nation into its evil, uncivilized and backward past where their forebears worshiped idols—agents of the occult.”⁵²⁷ Bonsam and all that he stands for, therefore, represent what Pentecostals are admonishing all Ghanaians to desist from in order not to be associated with backwardness.

Meyer has talked about how Nkrumah and Rawlings tried to adopt some Ghanaian indigenous religious practices, viewed as part of the people’s tradition, like the pouring of libation, to be part of state ceremonial functions.⁵²⁸ This was because to these two former Heads of State, the indigenous practices reflected the heritage of the Ghanaian people and necessary to be part of national politics to perpetuate Ghanaian religio-cultural values. They wanted to uphold the Ghanaian ideal of going back to their indigenous roots “to promote unity based on the recovery of Ghanaian cultural heritage”—“Sankofa.”⁵²⁹ But Meyer further observed that Pentecostals:

Resisting a reading of heritage in mere symbolic terms, they found such state policies implied an invocation of traditional spirits who, certainly from a Pentecostal perspective, were regarded as demons that led people into “backward” customs and brought them under satanic control. Cultural heritage, in this sense, was a ‘bad’ religion in disguise, to be replaced by a “decent” religion as (Pentecostal) Christianity.⁵³⁰

The Pentecostal discourse on “backwardness” suggests not simply that the so-called occult practices have been made out of date, but also its reputed demonic elements. This latter factor is a key consideration that explains why many Ghanaians will not vote for a politician or political party publicly known to use the occult.

⁵²⁶ Meyer, ““Make a complete break.””

⁵²⁷ Salaam, Legon-Accra.

⁵²⁸ Meyer, “Religious and Secular,” 90.

⁵²⁹ Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 171 (According to Kalu, “Sankofa is the bird that turns its head to look backward in the direction from where it came and is used to remind a person to be conscious about where a journey started, otherwise the person may not know where he or she is going. This symbol urges people to go back or look back and reclaim their cultural heritage”).

⁵³⁰ Meyer, “Religious and Secular,” 90.

The issue of the backwardness of the occult was demonstrated in an incident that occurred during a bye-election held in July 2015 in Talensi in the Northern region of Ghana. This bye-election followed “the resignation of the former NPP MP [Member of Parliament], Robert Nachinab Mosore,” who was “enskinned as [the] Tongo Chief.”⁵³¹ The election was very crucial and signaled a fierce competition between the NDC and NPP. Its outcome was supposed to be representative of the general political climate in Ghana; it was to test and establish the contesting parties’, especially the NPP and NDC, popularity among the Ghanaian electorate generally. It was “less than a week to the elections” and “campaign activities in Talensi had intensified” due to the keenness of the competition between the two major parties.⁵³² ‘Kasapafmonline,’ the online newspaper for ‘Kasapa FM,’ one of the up-and-coming privately-owned radio stations in Ghana, reported that the NDC and NPP were “accusing each other of using unorthodox means to win the coveted seat.”⁵³³ Bernard Antwi-Boasiako, popularly known as “Chairman Wontumi,” the Ashanti Regional Chairman of the NPP, was rumored to have consulted an occult deity in Talensi ahead of the elections. The media report was that:

Pictures of him [Antwi-Boasiako] and other able-bodied men walking bare-chested on a vast land and subsequently appearing at a deity[’s shrine] have gone viral on social media platforms, sparking speculations that the NPP has resorted to employing superstitious means to win the seat.⁵³⁴

References to the use of “superstitious” and “unorthodox means” indicated that even the paper did not consider the deity the NPP allegedly consulted as coming from a genuine spiritual source. Such language also feeds into the wider Pentecostal discourse on the backwardness of the occult.

The report about Antwi-Boasiako and the NPP allegedly consulting an occult deity ahead of the Talensi bye-election spawned some controversy and rumors among the Ghanaian public, which threatened their electoral fortunes. Sensing the potential of the

⁵³¹ ‘Kasapafmonline,’ “I’ve not consulted any juju man ahead of Talensi election – NPP’s Wontumi,” July 2, 2015 <http://www.kasapafmonline.com/ive-not-consulted-any-juju-man-ahead-of-talensi-election-npps-wontumi/>

⁵³² *ibid.*

⁵³³ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*

rumor to mar the NPP's chances at winning the impending by-elections, Antwi-Boasiako came out to deny the rumors.⁵³⁵ According to the newspaper report, he:

Admitted that the said pictures [of him and his men posing without shirts] were his, but was quick to add that there was an explanation to how he appeared in that picture. ...as you know every traditional area has its norms; where we visited one has to take off his cloths and footwear before he is allowed to meet and speak with the people; hence my appearance. As you know, one has to do what the Romans do when you go to Rome and give unto Caesar what is Caesar's. I have not consulted any juju man.⁵³⁶

According to Antwi-Boasiako then, his men and himself took off their shirts in order to follow the traditional requirements of their hosts, which they did not see as an occultic act. He said that the rumors were all part of the NDC's strategy to discredit the NPP in the eyes of the populace. Although Antwi-Boasiako discounted the effectiveness of the rumor and claimed to rely on the "good works" of the NPP to clinch the victory, his denial meant that he knew the rumor could be detrimental to the NPP's electoral fortunes. He was aware that many Ghanaians, and specifically Pentecostals, saw juju as both morally and spiritually backward and did not want to associate with it. In Ghana, every traditional community has its social, cultural and religious norms that they expect visitors to abide by. Antwi-Boasiako and his men thought that as long as what they did was within the parameters of the culture of their guests, what they did was just customary and did not constitute partaking in an occult activity. That explains why he admitted that what he and his men did was part of the traditional religious customs of his hosts and not juju. This shows that there are aspects of the occult, such as the ones deemed as part of tradition that politicians are happy to identify with, but avoid others perceived as unacceptable and frowned upon.

I have illustrated in this section that many politicians in Ghana avoid the occult and its concomitant rumors due to the Pentecostal influence in Ghana and the associated notion that the occult is morally and spiritually backward. The next section considers some forms of political advantage politicians gain from avoiding the occult.

⁵³⁵ 'Kasapafmonline,' "I've not consulted any juju man ahead of Talensi election – NPP's Wontumi," July 2, 2015 <http://www.kasapafmonline.com/ive-not-consulted-any-juju-man-ahead-of-talensi-election-npps-wontumi/>

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

Section II: Avoiding the Occult for Political Advantage

I propose here that Ghanaian politicians and political parties gain the political advantage of buttressing their moral credentials by distancing themselves from the occult, while they accuse opponents of engaging in occult activities. This section identifies three main ways in which political actors seek to gain a political edge over opponents by avoiding the occult, bearing in mind that there may be many others. These are: deflecting responsibilities and criticisms; seeking trust among the electorate that they do not use the occult while delegitimizing opponents; and touting themselves as the bearers of important news.

As indicated in the previous section, one of the ways in which politicians in Ghana divert occult speculation about themselves is to associate opponents with the occult by accusing them of engaging in its activities. By accusing opponents of using the occult against them, politicians deflect responsibility for and criticisms of their performance. That is, politicians have sometimes blamed opponents' use of the occult for the inability of government functionaries to perform their assigned duties. One example of this pattern can be found in a story that was published on 'Peacefonline.com,' the online platform for the popular privately-owned radio station in Accra, 'Peacefm.' The story read thus:

The National Democratic Congress has accused the New Patriotic Party of casting a magic spell on its ministers of state and other functionaries... This alleged magic spell, according to Japheth Baidoo, the NDC's Campaign Manager for Shama constituency, has taken a serious effect on many ministers of state and government functionaries, rendering them incapable of taking full control of their responsibilities, alleging that their brains have been spiritually tied by the opposition NPP... have virtually become 'vegetables' and cannot even think straight as a result of the alleged spell cast on them.⁵³⁷

It is worth mentioning here that the solution Japheth Appiah offered was that of calling on all their supporters to "pray for them to be freed from the powers of the evil one," which is fairly consistently a Pentecostal one. Appiah's assertion came in response to concerns about Ghana's economy deteriorating under the NDC. Hackett calls this strategy "a form of externalization, of not assuming responsibility for problems, and unscrupulously manipulating popular opinion."⁵³⁸ Appiah's allegation that the NDC officials' performance was

⁵³⁷ *The New Statesman*, "NDC Blames Mills' Failures On 'Juju,'" February 2, 2012 <http://elections.peacefonline.com/pages/politics/201202/92543.php?page=3&storyid=100&>

⁵³⁸ Hackett, "Discourses of Demonization," 70.

being stalled by the occult maneuverings of the NPP seemed designed to deflect public criticism of the NDC. Asamoah-Gyadu has suggested that “to always cast human problems in super-naturalistic terms, runs a risk of blinding people to their responsibility to remove the causes of disease, and allowing those in power to avoid accountability for decisions made or how public resources are handled.”⁵³⁹ Thus, apart from making sure the NDC avoided criticism, Appiah also justified the poor performance of NDC functionaries by blaming it on the so-called occult machinations of political opponents. This strategy was a way to avoid any form of accountability on the part of the NDC and its ministers.

The strategy of politicians blaming opponents with the occult highlights the common tendency of many Ghanaians to link almost every physical misfortune to occult spiritual causality. In other words, the propensity to assign spiritual causes to mundane issues is not unique to politicians but embedded in the way the traditional Ghanaian sees the world, which suggests that the spiritual world influences that of the physical.⁵⁴⁰ Ghanaians conceptualize their universe as a spiritual realm in which supernatural forces, more than simply natural causes, determine almost all outcomes. The world is, therefore “essentially spiritual,” which is why whenever something happens in the physical realm that they find difficult to explain in mundane terms, Ghanaians will say “ade yi de ennye kwa” [there is more to it than meets the physical eye].⁵⁴¹ Although Pentecostals and adherents of GTR share this view that the universe is “essentially spiritual,” made up of spirits, both benevolent and malevolent ones, Ghanaian Pentecostals cast the traditional religious and the broader occult realm as the one made up of these evil spiritual forces.⁵⁴²

Appiah’s claim that the NPP was using juju to mitigate the performance of their MPs is aptly captured by Meyer’s previously cited argument that “political conflict appears to be

⁵³⁹ Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Christ is the Answer’: What is the Question?’ A Ghana Airways Prayer Vigil and its Implications for Religion, Evil and Public Space,” *Harvard University and Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana* 2005, 115.

⁵⁴⁰ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*; Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*.

⁵⁴¹ A very popular saying in Ghana that attributes almost every physical life occurrence, especially the ones people find it difficult to explain, as having a spiritual cause. That is, either evil spirits or their equally evil human agents must be behind it; Yusufu Turaki, “Africa Traditional Religious System as Basis of Understanding Christian Spiritual Warfare” <http://www.lausanne.org/content/west-african-case-study>

⁵⁴² Turaki, “Africa Traditional Religious System;” Kofi Halm, Fadama-Accra.

cast in terms of a dialectics of divinization and demonization of power” in Ghana.⁵⁴³ Ghanaian politicians, like Pentecostals, have a penchant to “spiritualize... issues out of the mundane plane.”⁵⁴⁴ Through this strategy, they explain almost every physical problem as having a spiritual, mostly occult, causality. In other words, Pentecostals, as well as many politicians in Ghana, contend that “demons are responsible for the political situation, and their spiritual power must be broken.”⁵⁴⁵ By the strategy of blaming occult machinations of political opponents for everything that is not working for them, these politicians creatively avoid the occult (and rumors about it) and shift the electorate’s focus from their shortcomings, thereby deflecting responsibility and criticism for their actions and inactions.

The NPP has also accused the NDC of using the occult to cause confusion in their party in order to avoid criticism from the public. An instance was when the:

Member of Parliament for Kpandai, Matthew Nyindam, accused the ruling... NDC party of being responsible for the seemingly unending in-fighting in the opposition NPP. He said, the NDC has cast a spell on the NPP, which explains why the largest opposition party is not able to deal with its myriad of problems.⁵⁴⁶

This claim meant that conflicts happened within political parties as a result of the occult dealings of political opponents. Internal conflicts can potentially make the party involved look unstable in the eyes of the populace. The conflicts signal that members of the party are not peace-loving and, therefore, power-hungry. They also betray the party’s incompetence because if they have failed to manage the affairs of and maintain order in their own small party, their claims to bring order to the affairs of the whole country becomes questionable. Thus, if the occult schemes of political opponents can be blamed for their internal conflicts, the party does not have to take responsibility for them and thus evade the criticism such conflicts could engender.

Politicians often turn to Pentecostals for prayers in order to combat the occult influence from the camp of opponents. Due to the purported NDC occult influence in the internal rumblings of the NPP, for instance, the party:

⁵⁴³ Meyer, "The Power of Money," 29.

⁵⁴⁴ Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 169.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid, 161.

⁵⁴⁶ Kwadwo Anim, "NDC has bewitched NPP., it is behind NPP in-fighting - Kpandai MP" <http://www.ghanamps.gov.gh/news-events/details.php?id=469>

Launched a one week of fasting and prayer session to seek God's intervention to solve the crisis within the party... The party believes committing its problems to God will help them bounce back united and ready to win the 2016 elections... and to also deliver them from... [the] "Demon of confusion."⁵⁴⁷

As illustrated above, the NPP did not seek any human intervention, but that of God. By calling for a "crisis prayer and fasting" against the NDC's alleged occult schemes against them, the NPP was distancing themselves from the occult and at the same time deflecting criticisms and responsibility for their internal conflicts.

Another political advantage politicians in Ghana gain by portraying their dissociation from the occult is trust. As Kiernan has argued, political capital "can be gained from supporting popular drives for the suppression of occult dealings."⁵⁴⁸ When a politician is perceived as a user of the occult, the person is labeled as an agent of the devil and an "enemy of God."⁵⁴⁹ By associating opponents with the occult and detaching themselves from same, these politicians attempt to gain trust among the Ghanaian electorate as the ones who do not use the occult and, therefore, the "Chosen of God" to promote Pentecostal ideals in carrying out their official duties.⁵⁵⁰ An instance is Anita DeSooso's accusation that the NPP's Stephen Amoah rubbed something she believed to be "juju" on her chair.⁵⁵¹ She claimed that the NDC knew the NPP was using the occult to influence the court verdict, but they (the NDC) were being "guided by fervent prayers."⁵⁵² Miss DeSooso wanted Ghanaians to know that although the NPP had allegedly decided to resort to occultic means to win the court case, the NDC depended on Christian prayers. Her assertion was to dispel existing occult rumors about the NDC and to demonstrate that they can be trusted to not use the occult.

⁵⁴⁷ Magdalene Teiko Larnyoh, "NPP begins 'crisis' fasting and prayers today," May 31, 2015 <http://citifmonline.com/2015/05/31/npp-begins-crisis-fasting-and-prayers-today/#sthash.OpjSIjFG.dpbs>

⁵⁴⁸ Kiernan, *The Power of the Occult*, 10.

⁵⁴⁹ Miss K., Lapaz-Accra.

⁵⁵⁰ Kofi Halm, Fadama-Accra.

⁵⁵¹ Anita DeSooso at one time claimed that the "Fall of the cedi is due to juju, dwarfs" (Adomonline.com, February 10, 2014 <http://graphic.com.gh/news/politics/17363-fall-of-the-cedi-is-due-to-juju-dwarfs-anita-desooso.html#sthash.NvJKGULI.dpuf>).

⁵⁵² *Daily Guide*, "'Juju' at Supreme Court," April 22, 2013 <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Juju-at-Supreme-Court-271746>

When politicians accuse opponents of using the occult against them and ask Pentecostals for prayers to ward off their occult influence, they are indirectly setting themselves apart from their opponents who allegedly use the occult and cannot be trusted to rule according to Pentecostal principles. But the rumors can also betray the trust some Ghanaians have for the politicians who peddle idle occult rumors about political opponents. This is because those who view the rumors with suspicion claim that the allegations and rumors are circulated to discredit opponents and score cheap political points, as I pointed out in the previous chapter.

In gaining trust as the politicians who do not use the occult, such politicians are discrediting opponents as the ones who do. They do this in order to “distinguish themselves from other political groupings in such a way that they are preferred over those alternatives.”⁵⁵³ For instance, ‘Citi FM,’ a respectable radio station in Ghana, published a story that the NPP Member of Parliament for the Bimbilla constituency in the Northern region, Dominic Ntiwul, accused Mills and the NDC of winning the 2008 elections with the help of the occult. He claimed Mills’ ties to the occult was symbolized by a strange ring he allegedly wore on his finger at the time. The story was that:

Speaking on Metro T.V.’s ‘Good Morning Ghana’ show, the MP said he has conclusive evidence that the ring worn by President Mills during the 2008 election was not an ordinary ring, and this enabled him to achieve victory over his main challenger in the 2008 poll... ‘I am just relaying information from their own side of the political divide that is alleging that it is a magical [occultic] ring...’ Dominic Nitiwul said he ‘cannot fathom’ why President Mills did not wear the said ‘magical ring’ before the 2008 general elections and has not worn it since he was sworn in as President in 2009.⁵⁵⁴

In this case, Ntiwul and the NPP were casting Mills as a dealer in the occult, in spite of his public shows of Pentecostal devotion. In so doing, the NPP became perpetrators of occult rumors. Though they claimed to be speaking on the authority of reliable sources, such as party insiders, as well as Mills’ alleged “magical ring,” their allegations have not yet been verified. The sources of rumors are notoriously difficult to trace. When politicians publicly pass on

⁵⁵³ *Daily Guide*, “‘Juju’ at Supreme Court,” April 22, 2013 <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Juju-at-Supreme-Court-271746>

⁵⁵⁴ ‘Citifm,’ “NPP MP: Mills used magic ring to win Presidency,” May 10, 2011 <http://vibeghana.com/2011/05/10/npp-mp-mills-used-magic-ring-to-win-presidency/>

rumors themselves, they lift the veil of anonymity that often surrounds rumors. This process aims to lend their weight and credibility to the stories.

Yet other Ghanaian politicians seem to perpetrate rumors that link their opponents to the occult because the “news” such rumors create is useful to them. By generating news, these politicians present themselves as the bearers of important information – information that opponents would apparently rather have suppressed.⁵⁵⁵ The tactic of some politicians portraying themselves as the bearers of noteworthy information was demonstrated in the NDC’s accusation in 2011 that the NPP visited “juju priests to eliminate Mills, in the party’s quest to wrestle power from the NDC.”⁵⁵⁶ Solomon Nkansah, Deputy National Propaganda Secretary of the NDC at the time, for example, once made claims that “the NPP was frequenting juju shrines in Togo, Benin, and the neighboring countries to invoke serious illness on the President ahead of the general election.”⁵⁵⁷ He believed the NPP was:

After the life of President Mills because some members of the party had been sending text messages to Koku Anyidoho, Director of Communications at the Castle, asking him whether President Mills’ health had deteriorated and he had been rushed to the hospital.⁵⁵⁸

Indeed, Nkansah himself:

Conceded that though juju cases cannot be testified, there was the need for the Ghanaian public to have the fore-knowledge about this development. Religious groups must be informed to pray for the life of the President because this is a worrying situation from the camp of the NPP.⁵⁵⁹

This is a clear example of the accuser casting the NPP as dangerous, and the NDC as the genuine party. Significantly, Nkansah himself pointed out that these allegations were difficult to substantiate, but still wanted to draw Ghanaians’ attention to the occult dealings of the NPP so that they would pray to stop them. In the case of the NPP’s alleged intentions to eliminate Mills, the NDC made a direct request to religious groups “to pray for the life of the President” against the occult plots of the NPP. This plea highlights the position of the occult as removed from the legitimate Ghanaian religious landscape. Established “religious” groups

⁵⁵⁵ See Lord Northcliffe’s definition of rumor in Chapter Two.

⁵⁵⁶ *The Herald*, “NPP Visiting Juju Priests To Kill Mills – NDC Man,” December 19, 2011 <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/rumor/artikel.php?ID=225985>

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

oppose the occult, which they view as an illegitimate source of spiritual power. As a result of this, when people need genuine prayers and help, they turn to religious groups in public, while they allegedly use the occult for illicit purposes, such as harming opponents in private. The occult is, therefore, cast as the spiritual power that individuals, especially politicians, use to carry out their *dirty* jobs for them.

Nkansah, in his accusations, was purporting to give Ghanaians “news” about the occult dealings of the NPP, which although unsubstantiated, would provide a strategic advantage to the NDC. It provided assured publicity, but also acted as a positioning device in terms of presenting the religious credentials and reliability of each party. Politicians make statements about their opponents’ involvement in the occult because “they are news in the interest of the public.”⁵⁶⁰ The statements are framed as allegedly letting the general public in on the inner workings of politics—the “dark side of [political] power” and some of the occult activities politicians engage in to either win the support of the electorate or harm troublesome opponents.⁵⁶¹ Due to their very nature, these allegations are sensational and, therefore, spread fast among the public; they are talked about in the media and the general public adds their own commentaries to them that in the end spawn numerous rumors.

This section has highlighted some of the forms of political advantage politicians gain by either associating opponents with or avoiding the occult. The next section shows that although it is not often the case, a few politicians in Ghana invoke the occult, instead of avoiding it, due to its positive attributes.

Section III: Embracing Positive Characteristics of the Occult

Although it is rarely the case, a few politicians in Ghana sometimes embrace the occult, instead of avoiding it. This section answers the question: Why will these politicians invoke the occult or GTR gods and not the God of Pentecostalism, for example? In other words, why do they identify with the occult, instead of distancing themselves from it? I offer here that there are certain acceptable characteristics of the occult that politicians feel comfortable to identify with in public. This is because, although the occult is despised by many Ghanaians, some

⁵⁶⁰ Philip, Nyamekye-Accra.

⁵⁶¹ Meyer, “The Power of Money,” 29.

aspects are also admired. Thus, such politicians draw upon these positive aspects and publicly invoke or identify with the occult. In this section, I highlight three main qualities of the occult seen as positive by these politicians. Fundamentally, the occult serves as the neutral and trusted adjudicator, acts as a truth and lie detector, and the deliverer of instant justice. In a nutshell, the occult acts as the vindicator of the innocent. These characteristics, I argue, underscore the legal implications of the occult in modern Ghanaian society and politics. Where the legal system fails, the occult can be counted on as the reliable means to ensure justice is served, which leaves a lot to be said about Ghana's legal system. I discuss the positive aspects of the occult in the following paragraphs.

One positive trait that attracts the few politicians in Ghana who embrace the occult is its quality as a neutral and trusted space for settling disputes between aggrieved people, irrespective of whether they are Christians or Muslims. Some Ghanaians are of the view that the realm of the occult provides an impartial space in which disputes can be settled without fear or favor for any of the individuals or groups involved. This positive characteristic of the occult has transformed it into a trusted space for adjudication. An example of a Ghanaian politician who invoked the neutrality and trustworthiness of the occult was Mallam Ali Yusif Issah. Issah is a People's National Convention (PNC) member and a practicing Muslim who was co-opted by the newly elected NPP government, led by Kufuor in 2000. He was appointed the Sports Minister as part of the NPP's bid to fulfill a promise they made to Ghanaians and the other political parties that merged with them to unseat the NDC in the 2000 elections to run an inclusive government.⁵⁶² Only a month into his appointment, Issah was accused of stealing the \$46,000 he was sending to the Black Stars, Ghana's senior male national football team. The Black Stars were then playing in the African Cup of Nations qualifying series in Sudan and the missing money was supposed to be their winning bonus. Issah alleged at the time that some leading members of the NPP framed him for political reasons—that the NPP used him as a scapegoat to prove that they were doing their best to fight corruption.

⁵⁶² 'BBC Sport Online,' "Ghana's ex-sports minister charged," May 8, 2001 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/football/africa/1318746.stm>

Issah was jailed for the crime in 2001 for a term of four years for what the NPP government termed as “fraudulently causing financial loss to the state.”⁵⁶³ The NPP was at that point overtly attempting to clamp down on corruption, and Issah’s case was widely touted as an example of their efforts to bring “corrupt” public officials to judgment. Issah was later granted a Presidential pardon due to ill-health in 2003 and so did not serve the full term of his jail sentence. In a story reported by ‘Modernghana.com’ on January 14, 2014, with the sensational headline, “Mallam Issah dares Kufuor: Meet me at Antoa if you are a man,” Issah summoned Kufuor to meet him at the Antoa Nyama shrine to prove his innocence in the case.⁵⁶⁴ This was a reaction to a question about his thoughts on his sentence and early release on ‘Time FM’ in Obuasi in the Ashanti region.⁵⁶⁵ According to the story:

To prove his innocence, therefore, he [Mallam Issah] is daring the former President to meet him at the shrine so they both invoke the gods to adjudicate in the matter... If President Kufuor says I am the one who stole the money, I'm a Muslim, he is a Christian, let's go to Antoa Nyamaa and swear and after one week we will see who will die. “I am a Muslim 100% but I want instant justice.”⁵⁶⁶

Issah was trying to show that the law courts failed him in 2001, although he was innocent, but he trusted the occult to be the only neutral, politics-free space available for him to receive exoneration. He admitted to being a Muslim and Kufuor a Christian in his call for Kufuor to meet him at the Antoa Nyama shrine, but for the purposes of that case, he was convinced it was only the shrine that could settle the issue between them. In this case, Issah invoked the occult as the last resort and the only means through which he could prove his innocence to Ghanaians. There is some justice in Christianity, Islam, and the law courts, but some Ghanaians think that “when God took a stone, he did not throw it fast enough.”⁵⁶⁷ Thus, the God of Christianity and Islam and even the law courts are too patient, but the occult gods are

⁵⁶³ ‘BBC Sport Online,’ “Ghana’s ex-sports minister charged,” May 8, 2001 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/football/africa/1318746.stm>

⁵⁶⁴ Frank Agyei-Twum, “Mallam Issah dares Kufuor: Meet me at Antoa if you are a man,” January 14, 2014 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/515664/1/mallam-issah-dares-kufuor-meet-me-at-antoa-if-you-.ht>

⁵⁶⁵ Many Ghanaians, especially Pentecostals, believe that the god, Antoa Nyama, whose shrine is located in the Ashanti region of Ghana, to be the leading occultist god in Ghana and therefore regard it with a lot of fear and scorn.

⁵⁶⁶ Frank Agyei-Twum, “Mallam Issah dares Kufuor: Meet me at Antoa if you are a man,” January 14, 2014 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/515664/1/mallam-issah-dares-kufuor-meet-me-at-antoa-if-you-.html>

⁵⁶⁷ Aduako, Fadama-Accra.

swift in making sure that justice is served. The occult then has become the only neutral and trusted adjudicator between aggrieved persons when in doubt—more like the most neutral and trusted referee in Ghana’s political field. It is particularly significant that Issah, a self-acclaimed staunch Muslim, would seek vindication when his religion admonishes peace and forgiveness. There is, therefore, a shock factor – a somewhat transgressive suggestion – on his part—considering his religious background. But this example shows how some Ghanaians would invoke what Pentecostals consider as the occult in challenging times when they feel that their religion and the law courts are not enough to grant them the needed justice and vindication.

The occult also acts as a truth and lie detector. Rawlings, for example, has highlighted this positive attribute of the occult as a truth and lie detector. Rawlings was quoted by the Ghanaian media as saying that Juju meant more to Ghanaians and Africans than the Bible and Quran because they feared it. In a ‘Radioxyz.com’ story published on March 28, 2014, with the caption, “Juju means more to us than Bible, Quran”:

Rawlings says Ghanaians and Africans have more reverence and fear for their juju shrines and gods than the Christian Bible and the Islamic Quran.⁵⁶⁸

According to the paper, Rawlings made this observation during a lecture he delivered outside Ghana and said that “the Bible and the Qur’an do not mean anything to the continent.”⁵⁶⁹ He gave the people present an example that:

Three people [were] in a room. The following morning one was dead and the other two who were alive were arrested and taken to court. And as the court proceedings were going on, the case was beginning to find one of them guilty. And they were gonna make a pronouncement on him... You know what he asked? ‘The one who is alive, he and I come from the same village. We’ve sworn on the Bible, sworn on the Quran, sworn on the sword and yet I am the one being found guilty. Please, I beg the Judge; take us to the village we come from. We have a shrine over there and let us go and swear on that shrine and see whether I am innocent or he is the culprit. Whether I am the Murderer or he is the culprit.’⁵⁷⁰

Rawlings further argued that:

That’s all the question I asked these Catholic Priests. They could not answer me because they know, you are not gonna swallow any poison, but they know that we don’t fear that Bible, we

⁵⁶⁸ ‘Radioxyzonline.com,’ “Juju Means More To Us Than Bible, Quran – Rawlings,” March 24, 2014 <http://elections.peacefmonline.com/pages/politics/201403/194497.php>

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

don't fear that Quran, but when it comes to our shrine, that one we dare not joke with it. We'll go and tell the truth.⁵⁷¹

In these statements Rawlings casts juju as a truth and lie detector, the very reason for which Ghanaians feared it. The paper concluded with a comment on how Rawlings used the story "to demonstrate how much Africans revere and fear their deities despite the prevalence of Christianity and Islam."⁵⁷² Rawlings referred to GTR as "juju" and saw the truth and lie detecting function of it as positive; he thus differentiated the occult from GTR. Rawlings' statement demonstrated that the occult was a negative phenomenon, while GTR spiritual power or what he referred to as "juju" was positive, socially accepted, and useful. This is why the character of the occult in accusations of politicians' occult activity mainly focused on the occult as a dangerous and malevolent power that is used to harm political opponents and have undue advantage over them.

According to Ghanaian traditional religious adherents, such as Nana Kwaku Bonsam in public, some Ghanaians may claim there is no power in the occult, but there is a deep-seated conviction in the efficacy of the occult in Ghana. Most people may, therefore, profess to be Christians or Muslims who do not rely on the supernatural powers of the occult, but allegedly consult its agents clandestinely should a misfortune befall them. Consequently, Ghanaians, including some Pentecostals, who claim there is no power in the occult apart from the name and blood of Jesus, fear juju or the supernatural powers of the traditional gods and their agents more than they do the Bible and the Quran. And as Rawlings claimed, such people could lie after swearing on the Bible and the Quran, but cannot do the same at the occult shrine due to the fear they have for it. In the place of lie detectors then, some individuals, in this case, politicians, still use traditional religious divination to detect the truth or otherwise of crucial issues.

Other politicians in Ghana have also demonstrated that the occult is the deliverer of instant justice. An example again is Rawlings, who has on several occasions, invoked the occult to prove his innocence. For instance, in 2008 Rawlings summoned some leading members of the incumbent NPP government before the same god, Antoa Nyama, over alleged rumors that

⁵⁷¹ 'Radioxyzonline.com,' "Juju Means More To Us Than Bible, Quran – Rawlings," March 24, 2014 <http://elections.peacefmonline.com/pages/politics/201403/194497.php>

⁵⁷² Ibid.

he was behind the murder of the 34 women that occurred during the latter parts of 1999 and early 2000. A 'Modernghana.com' story, titled "Rawlings Goes [to] Antoa" by A.R. Gomda recounted that:

An enraged Jerry John Rawlings dares President John Agyekum Kufuor to come along with him to the shrine to prove his innocence or otherwise in the mysterious deaths of some 34 women shortly before the 2000 polls... Screaming his heart out, Mr. Rawlings told his supporters that he is ready to subject himself to the oath of 'Antoa Nyama', as a demonstration of his innocence... swearing that he would not rest until justice is served.⁵⁷³

Here Rawlings was demonstrating that the only means through which he could prove his innocence before Ghanaians and to make sure justice was served was the occult. This maneuver by Rawlings is not simply a politician's one; any other Ghanaian would have acted in the same way were they in his position. Someone may well argue that Rawlings invoked the positive instant justice attribute of the occult after he left political office and not when he was actively involved in politics. But we must also bear in mind that it was not the first time Rawlings publicly invoked the occult in a provocative way. Rawlings' association with GTR gave him a reputation in Ghana as a practitioner of the occult. His actions and statements in public also gave the impression about his occult use, an example of which was when he was alleged to have signed the manifesto of the NDC with his blood.⁵⁷⁴

Another politician who invoked the instant justice characteristic of the occult was Daniel Ohene-Agyekum, a former Ashanti Regional Minister, Ambassador and Ashanti Regional Chairman of the NDC. Ohene-Agyekum saw the occult as space for one to get justification. During his time as Ghana's Ambassador to the United States in 2012, Ohene-Agyekum was unhappy about rumors allegedly spread by the NPP that accused the leadership of the NDC, including himself, of hoarding ammunitions to cause violence in the country after the 2008 elections. A 'Daily Guide' newspaper story, titled, "Ohene Agyekum goes wild as he dares Kennedy Agyapong," said that the Ambassador invited the media and the police to

⁵⁷³ A.R. Gomda, "Rawlings Goes Antoa," October 23, 2008 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/187723/1/rawlings-goes-antoa.html>

⁵⁷⁴ 'Ghanaweb,' "Why J.J. drew fresh blood," August 16, 2000 <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Why-J-J-drew-fresh-blood-10978>

inspect his home to see if they would find ammunitions there.⁵⁷⁵ It was during this inspection that Ohene-Agyekum:

Somewhat lost his temper, swore the great oath of the Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II and challenged Kennedy Agyapong, New Patriotic Party (NPP) MP for Assin North in the Central Region, to hit back if he was man enough.⁵⁷⁶

Ohene-Agyekum maintained the innocence of the NDC and saw the move as the NPP's ploy to discredit the NDC in the eyes of the Ghanaian electorate as they headed to the polls. By invoking the gods, he was asking them to deliver instant justice on his offenders, the leadership of the NPP, and exonerate him and the NDC from the allegations. We must note, however, that Mallam Issah and Ohene-Agyekum embraced the occult when their political careers were over. This is because although they were still involved in the affairs of their respective parties, they were no longer active politically and campaigning to be elected into office. One could, therefore, argue that some politicians felt more comfortable speaking positively about or invoking the occult once they have retired or are no longer actively involved in politics. But at the same time, their actions and statements have the potential to affect their parties as a whole, since their association with the occult can lead people to think and generate rumors that their respective parties also used the occult.

The allegation about the NDC's piling of arms to cause violence after the 2012 elections even led to clashes between supporters of the NDC and the NPP in the Ashanti region and resulted in the shooting death of one member of the NDC. The NDC called for a press conference, led by the then Ashanti Regional chairman, Yaw Obimpe, at the party's headquarters in Kumasi to respond to the accusation about the arms. The press conference was also to brief the media and the general public on the circumstances surrounding the shooting death of their member. In his address, Obimpe accused the leadership of the NPP of being behind the rumors. 'Myjoyonline.com' reported on November 30, 2012, that in the middle of the press conference Obimpe:

⁵⁷⁵ *Daily Guide*, "Ohene Agyekum Goes Wild As he Dares Kennedy Agyapong," December 6, 2012 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/434634/1/ohene-agyekum-goes-wild-as-dares-kennedy-agyapong.html>

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

Invoked three deities to deal with the presidential candidate of the NPP, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo and other leading members of the party over allegations that the NDC was stockpiling weapons to disrupt the December elections in the region.⁵⁷⁷

At the press conference, Obimpe and the NDC were trying to appeal to the conscience of the Ghanaian public but realized it was not enough and had to do something more to ensure that the NDC proved their innocence. He invoked the gods to bring instant justice between the NDC and NPP. The question one then asks is why Obimpe had to invoke the gods to curse his opponents, instead of leaving the matter in the hands of the laws of the land to deal with it. He may have done that, but, according to some of my respondents, even the politicians themselves do not have faith in the legal system. And even if they did, they were afraid the matter would be dragged in the law courts and the perpetrators of the crime and rumors subsequently left to go unpunished. There is the possibility that the cynical attitude to the legal system in Ghana by Ghanaians, including politicians themselves, could change when the system becomes a bit more effective. It may also reduce the incidents whereby politicians especially invoke the instant justice of the occult in cases that clearly belong in the law courts.

As I have argued in earlier chapters of this project, what Mallam Issah, Ohene-Agyekum, Rawlings and Obimpe did was not uncommon, but something embedded in the Ghanaian traditional religious experience whereby the traditional gods were called upon in very critical times to mediate between opposing parties and make sure justice was served. But due to the negative view of such practices, they are seen as evil and the occult by many Ghanaians, a notion fronted by Pentecostals. Notwithstanding this negative attitude to the occult, it is still powerful in Ghana. Apart from it granting instant justice, it also acts as the vindicator of the innocent. It is noteworthy to mention here that the major driving force behind these politicians' public invocations of the occult, especially in proving their innocence, making sure the truth is told and for justice to be served, is anger.

The ambiguous positioning of Rawlings and some of the claims made by the people cited in this section point to a deliberate identification with the occult because of the fear that it represents. I argue that this overt positioning of these politicians gives the impression among the populace that, indeed, politicians use the occult, which leads to the creation of

⁵⁷⁷ Kwame Asare Boadu, "NDC man invokes Antoa deity on Akufo-Addo, others; wants them dead if...", November 30, 2012 <http://politics.myjoyonline.com/pages/news/201211/98057.php>

numerous occult rumors about them. The next section explores the particular political advantage gained by the politicians who identify with the occult.

Section IV: Embracing the Occult for Political Advantage

This section argues that the politicians who embrace the occult draw upon its positive features outlined in the previous section and utilize them for different kinds of strategic advantage. Politicians achieve from their bold move of embracing the occult, in spite of its far-reaching negative consequences of potentially risking being unpopular among the populace, the political edge over opponents. Their strategy confirms the Ghanaian public's perception and rumors about their use of the occult – a reputation they have boldly embraced. But their alignment with the occult serves a dual strategic focus. It generates controversy, which leads to publicity and an enhanced media profile, on the one hand, and provides a means for building their political identity, asserting their power and advancing claims to their trustworthiness, on the other. Thus, in a bid to attain political advantage, these politicians embrace the occult and its attendant rumors through their own words and actions, instead of “supporting popular drives for the suppression of occult dealings.”⁵⁷⁸ This section differs from the previous one because it demonstrates that the goal of the politicians who embrace the positive characteristics of the occult is to gain political advantage.

Some politicians embrace the occult to demonstrate their identity as true Ghanaians. They see the occult, specifically the aspects involving GTR beliefs and practices, as part of their culture as Ghanaians regardless of whether they are Christians or Muslims. Being true Ghanaians means that they are the ones proud to call themselves Ghanaians and, therefore, willing to associate with the traditional religion irrespective of the backlash they may receive for doing so from the Pentecostal front. But, according to Webb, Schirato, and Danaher, “all action is necessarily ‘interested.’”⁵⁷⁹ This is why I argue here that behind these politicians' attempts to portray their identity as true Ghanaians, they are seeking to build their political identity and as a result, gain political advantage over opponents. Rawlings, for instance, identified with ‘juju’ to demonstrate his identity as a true traditional Ghanaian. As I have

⁵⁷⁸ Kiernan, *The Power of the Occult in Modern Africa*, 10.

⁵⁷⁹ Webb, Schirato and Danaher, *Understanding Bourdieu*, 14.

already pointed out in this project, there have been many rumors that linked him and the NDC to the occult. This is because Rawlings himself made public his use of the occult through his statements and actions. An example was when he said that Ghanaians and Africans have more reverence and fear for their juju shrines and gods than the Christian Bible and the Islamic Quran due to the fear they have for the occult.⁵⁸⁰ Apart from the statement showing Rawlings' reverence for his tradition, it highlighted his pride in his identity as a Ghanaian. Rawlings complimented this proud Ghanaian identity with his way of dressing. Some Ghanaians may not have liked Rawlings' alleged occult dealings, but still admired the portrayal of his identity as a proud Ghanaian.

The fascinating thing about Rawlings was that he never publicly denied nor admitted to rumors about his links to GTR gods and shrines—what he referred to as 'juju'—when he was asked by the media but was mostly ambiguous in his responses to questions about rumors that alleged his occult use. He skillfully traversed both Pentecostal and GTR turfs and was able to deploy both religious traditions to his political advantage. How he managed to be in support of 'juju,' something to which he professed in public constantly, and still managed to win the support of highly respected Pentecostal preachers remains an enigma. I asked some of my respondents about what their thoughts were about Rawlings' successful subscription to both GTR, regarded by Pentecostals as the occult, and Pentecostalism. Interestingly, one of them, Kwasi Ansah, a 25-year-old male hotel worker, was of the view that:

Rawlings was a master of the political game because he was aware that although he needed primarily Pentecostal support and votes, he could not win by their support alone, since all the other candidates were fighting for same, thereby choking the Pentecostal field.⁵⁸¹

Rawlings' best bet then, in order to improve his chances of winning, was to extend his patronage to followers outside of the Pentecostal cohort—adherents of GTR and other non-Christian religious traditions considered by Pentecostals as belonging to the world of the occult.⁵⁸² Although traditional religious adherents were not as many as Pentecostals, their

⁵⁸⁰ 'Radioxyzonline.com,' "Juju Means More To Us Than Bible, Quran – Rawlings," March 24, 2014 <http://elections.peacefmonline.com/pages/politics/201403/194497.php>

⁵⁸¹ Kwasi Ansah, interviewed by author, Lapaz-Accra, February 12, 2014.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

votes still counted and so Rawlings invoked the occult in order to gain a political edge over his opponents. Thus, to Ansah and other Ghanaians, Rawlings was using his association with the occult to gain the political advantage of identity, all in his bid to win Ghanaians outside of the Pentecostal fraternity.⁵⁸³ But his statement also highlights a contradiction to how Pentecostals are perceived as the key political power-brokers in Ghana. This is because, although the Pentecostal influence in Ghana is strong, one could not win elections without the support from followers of the other religious traditions, as well.

Mallam Issah also illustrated his identity as a true Ghanaian when he summoned Kufuor to meet him at the Antoa Nyama shrine to prove his innocence in the case of the missing \$46,000 that sent him to jail in 2001.⁵⁸⁴ He admitted to his being a devout Muslim and Kufuor a Christian, but then when it came to making sure he got the justice that he deserved, his words demonstrated that he was a Ghanaian first. It is not uncommon for the traditional Ghanaian to subscribe to multiple traditions irrespective of whether they are Christian or Muslim when the need arises.⁵⁸⁵ Ghanaian politicians' invocation of the occult, therefore, demonstrate that the traditional religious gods, beliefs, and practices cast by Ghanaian Pentecostals as belonging to the realm of the occult, were part of their culture as Ghanaians and available for use whenever the need arises irrespective of one's religious affiliation. Having said this, I propose here that these politicians' bold embrace of the occult as a demonstration of their identity as traditional Ghanaians is "politically motivated"—in seeking the political advantage of identity.⁵⁸⁶

Another form of political advantage politicians in Ghana gain from embracing the occult is power. As already pointed out, many Ghanaians fear the occult to the point where those believed to dabble in it are talked about in hushed tones for fear of incurring the anger of the powerful evil occult forces backing them. This is why the politicians who publicly invoke

⁵⁸³ Kwasi Ansah, interviewed by author, Lapaz-Accra, February 12, 2014.

⁵⁸⁴ Frank Agyei-Twum, "Mallam Issah dares Kufuor: Meet me at Antoa if you are a man," January 14, 2014 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/515664/1/mallam-issah-dares-kufuor-meet-me-at-antoa-if-you-.html>

⁵⁸⁵ It is alleged in Ghana that many of the politicians are mostly Christians and Muslims, but they still subscribe to their traditional religious beliefs and practices at the same time, as the popular Akan adage says: "Nam dodow nsei nkwan" [a multitude of meat does not spoil the meat, but rather enhance the taste] (see Owusu-Ansah's *Islamic Talismanic Tradition*, 124).

⁵⁸⁶ Kiernan, *The Power of the Occult*, 169.

the occult do so to cast themselves as being powerful through it and by that creating an aura of fear around their personalities to ward off opponents and detractors. Even some African charismatic personalities, in general, are almost always linked to the occult because they are seen as possessing supernatural magical powers.⁵⁸⁷ This alleged supernatural power emanating from the occult is what some of these politicians tap into to portray themselves as being powerful. Thus, they leverage the power of the occult.

Rawlings, for example, has been perceived by many Ghanaians to possess occult powers. This is due to his charismatic qualities, although some of his statements and actions, reported by the media also suggested that he was deliberately associating with the occult as a ploy to create an aura of fear around his personality and to show that he derived his charisma and power from the occult. Rawlings, therefore, manipulated perceptions about his being backed by occult powers to his advantage. Through that he was able to scare off opponents and detractors; he has threatened opponents and detractors with the occult constantly.⁵⁸⁸ Ohene-Agyekum also claiming that the leadership of the NDC went to Antoa for spiritual fortification also showed that contrary to the Pentecostal narrative that there was no power in GTR, and for that matter the occult, some individual politicians and parties depended on its power for their political success.⁵⁸⁹ I will talk more about this example later in this section. Hence, Ghanaian politicians leverage the fear of the occult for political advantage, as also argued by some scholars that the occult is a source of political power in Africa.⁵⁹⁰

The attribution of the charisma of politicians to occult spiritual forces is not a new phenomenon in Ghana. Some Ghanaians believed the same thing about Kwame Nkrumah when there emerged rumors at the time about his associations with Kankan Nyame, a god he purportedly imported from Guinea.⁵⁹¹ These rumors were particularly given credence by a

⁵⁸⁷ Rosenbaum and Saderberg, "The Occult."

⁵⁸⁸ A.R. Gomda, "Rawlings Goes Antoa," October 23, 2008 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/187723/1/rawlings-goes-antoa.html>

⁵⁸⁹ Stella Danso and Ernest Kofi Adu, "We Believe In Antoa: Ohene Agyekum Boasts," December 6, 2008 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/193684/1/we-believe-in-antoa-ohene-agyekum-boasts.html>

⁵⁹⁰ Kiernan, *The Power of the Occult*; Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds of Power*; Niehaus, Mohlala and Shokane, *Witchcraft Power and Politics*.

⁵⁹¹ Joshua, Legon-Accra.

white handkerchief and a walking stick Nkrumah carried with him during some of his public addresses, which were alleged to have been given to him by Kankan Nyame. The handkerchief and walking stick were believed to magically enhance Nkrumah's aura, which caused many people to literally worship him at the time. Nkrumah was a native of the Western Region of Ghana, or Nzemaland, a place noted in Ghana as the hotbed of witchcraft and the occult, known in popular Ghanaian parlance as “Nzema bayi” [translated into English as ‘witchcraft made in Nzema’].⁵⁹² People hailing from Nzema are feared by many Ghanaians due to this perception about them; some Ghanaians are also allegedly afraid to rub them the wrong way. This means that Nkrumah’s ethnic background also made the occult rumors about him credible and, therefore, believable. Through the rumors, a sense of inviolability was created around Nkrumah’s personality and consequently made some people believe that his charisma emanated from occult spiritual sources. This invincibility of Nkrumah, many believed, helped him ward off opponents, detractors and their schemes, such as assassination plots, although it did not stop the opposition from eventually overthrowing him and his CPP government in 1966.⁵⁹³ By identifying with the occult, the politicians, therefore, create the impression about the powerful occult spiritual powers they possess.

Other politicians who embrace the occult do it to portray themselves as the honest politicians who Ghanaians could trust to come clean of their occult use. There is, therefore, “no such thing as a purely disinterested act” because “all activities... are informed by the notion of self-interest to some extent.”⁵⁹⁴ In other words, the Ghanaian politicians who come out to testify to their own occult use as a sign of their honesty do it for the advantage of trust they will gain from such actions. Paradoxically, Rawlings, for example, gained trust among some Ghanaians by associating himself with GTR or the occult. Although many Ghanaians saw him as a politician who dabbled in the occult, others regarded him as an honest politician who did not hide his association with juju and risking being unpopular, unlike his opponents who allegedly pretended to be Christians or Muslims in public, but used the occult in private.

⁵⁹² Sister Anobeah, Fadama-Accra.

⁵⁹³ CAN, Kumasi; Nana B., Kaneshie-Accra.

⁵⁹⁴ Webb, Schirato and Danaher, *Understanding Bourdieu*, 12.

Ohene-Agyekum also embraced the occult to show that he could be trusted. During his tenure as the Ashanti Regional Chairman of the NDC, he declared that the NDC as a party believed in Antoa Nyama. In a statement published by 'Modernghana.com' with the dramatic headline, "We believe in Antoa: Ohene-Agyekum boasts":

The Ashanti Regional Chairman of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), Daniel Ohene-Agyekum, has stated categorically that founders and leaders of the party believe in the Antoa river god and will always visit it when the need arises.⁵⁹⁵

Ohene-Agyekum's statement gave the leadership of the NDC away as people who believed in the occult and saw nothing wrong with it. He continued, this time casting aspersions about the NPP leadership's occult use, that:

Both members of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the NDC rely on the river god for most of their activities; therefore, there was no difference between the two parties... In his view, though some members of the NPP secretly visit various shrines for assistance he would continue to make his open to the general public as a matter of principle. The NDC chairman said he had no regrets in spite of the condemnation from most Ghanaians for invoking the Antoa deity to curse certain people in the Ashanti region.⁵⁹⁶

Ohene-Agyekum was here making public his and the NDC's use of the occult regardless of standing the risk of being branded as an evil party, as he himself pointed out. He claimed that the most important thing was that he was being honest with Ghanaians. He believed that inasmuch as Ghanaians feared and derided the occult, they would at least appreciate his honesty, something that could not be said about his opponents who secretly used the occult, but denied it in public through their show of Pentecostal devoutness. Ohene-Agyekum was, therefore, casting himself and the NDC as the honest political brokers who could be trusted by Ghanaians. Politicians themselves claiming that all of them used the occult without exceptions, re-echoes another cynical perception in Ghana that the public show of piety by some of them was insincere, but just a ploy to win the electorate's votes; they also give the authority of truth to occult rumors about politicians.

Certain people, such as the chief in charge of the spiritual affairs of the Ashanti king (Nsumankwaahene), castigated Ohene-Agyekum for his invocation of the gods to curse

⁵⁹⁵ Stella Danso and Ernest Kofi Adu, "We Believe In Antoa: Ohene Agyekum Boasts," December 6, 2008 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/193684/1/we-believe-in-antoa-ohene-agyekum-boasts.html>

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

leading members of the NPP, but others, like Mahama, supported him and characterized his action as a “mark of courage.”⁵⁹⁷ Mahama was at the time Mills’ running mate in the 2008 presidential elections. According to him, “Ohene-Agyekum was not the only Christian who would go to 'Antoa,' pointing out that there were a lot of people who invoked deities and still take the front pew in churches.”⁵⁹⁸ Ohene-Agyekum’s action was “a mark of courage” because he was ready to be branded as an occultist, but it was to validate his and the NDC’s trustworthiness to come clean about their own use of the occult even if it meant confirming negative occult rumors about the NDC and being potentially discredited in the eyes of prospective voters. Mahama’s support of Ohene-Agyekum’s action, however, conflicted with his own public profession as a Pentecostal.

I reiterate here the argument made in Section II of this chapter that by making claims about their own use of the occult, as well as casting aspersions about the occult use by their opponents, Ghanaian politicians have themselves become perpetrators of occult rumors and have thus lifted the veil of anonymity shrouding these rumors. This is because although we cannot entirely discount the claims about their own use of the occult as rumors, some aspects of their claims can still be said to be rumors, especially the ones about opponents’ alleged use of the occult. Since these allegations cannot be verified, they could be part of their schemes to undermine opponents by casting them as dishonest politicians who have links with the occult but are deliberately withholding it from Ghanaians who deserved to know the truth about their alleged occult dealings. They are casting their opponents as dishonest politicians who could not be trusted by Ghanaians while portraying themselves as the honest political brokers who the Ghanaian voter could trust. By associating opponents, too, with the occult, they are also making a point to Ghanaians that all politicians were the same, as far as their occult use was concerned; it was, therefore, a matter of voting for the least of the evils.

Finally, other politicians embrace the occult and its accompanying rumors about them as their way of deliberately generating controversy to constantly keep their names and profiles in the media. The rumors such claims potentially breed serve as news and are,

⁵⁹⁷ A.R. Gomda, “Rawlings Goes Antoa,” October 23, 2008 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/187723/1/rawlings-goes-antoa.html>

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

therefore, for advertising—self-promotional—purposes.⁵⁹⁹ As I argued in Chapter Two, rumor is news in Ghana, which makes the popular saying that “there is nothing like negative publicity” ring true in the Ghanaian political experience. By being in the news and talked about among the general populace, the names of these politicians remain on the minds of the populace constantly—better this than being unknown to the electorate whose support and votes a politician needs to succeed. For instance, Ohene-Agyekum did not only accuse the opposition NPP of using the occult but also admitted to his and the NDC’s, as well, something that he believed was newsworthy.⁶⁰⁰ Someone would argue that his claim that the NPP leadership also dabbled in the occult meant the allegation was true because he and the NDC were also implicated in the accusation. Ohene-Agyekum was, therefore, objective in drawing Ghanaians’ attention to what pertained in the political circles not known to the public. If the politicians themselves are confirming the notion that all of them used the occult without exceptions, then it makes it easy for Ghanaians to believe political-occult rumors- a clear case of not doubting the frog if it comes out of the water to announce the death of the crocodile.

By their very nature, the occult claims made by politicians and the rumors they engender are sensational and highly patronized in Ghana. Every Ghanaian wants to know the “juicy bits of the news and, therefore, sits up” when information like that headlines the news.⁶⁰¹ Consequently, most of the claims are unconfirmed but are still regarded as news in the Ghanaian sense because they create sensation and promise to report the covert occult activities of politicians. Thus, the few Ghanaian politicians who embrace the occult are moved by the political motivation of keeping their names and profiles in the news. They also spread important information about the alleged occult dealings of their political opponents.

Politicians’ public invocation of the occult in the face of vehement opposition from Pentecostals may be due to its positive features and their bid to gain political advantage, but it is possible that the politicians who consider themselves to have “made it” and, therefore, established loyal constituencies are more likely to identify with the occult publicly. These include the ones who are no longer actively involved in politics; that is, after they have retired

⁵⁹⁹ Lord Northcliffe.

⁶⁰⁰ Stella Danso and Ernest Kofi Adu, “We Believe In Antoa: Ohene Agyekum Boasts,” December 6, 2008 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/193684/1/we-believe-in-antoa-ohene-agyekum-boasts.html>

⁶⁰¹ Aduako, Fadama-Accra.

and are no longer actively campaigning for votes, although their actions can cause problems for their respective parties that they use the occult. Age or seniority could, therefore, be a factor of why a politician will embrace the occult. Moreover, failed politicians who have nothing to lose and non-Christian politicians whose religions do not frown on their association with the occult as strongly as Christians are also likely to embrace the occult. Thus, politicians' identifying with the occult and rumors about it is not the norm, but rather the anomaly.

Conclusions

I have shown in this chapter that Ghanaian politicians either avoid or embrace the occult and rumors about it as part of a broader agenda of gaining political advantage. Those who avoid the occult by either associating opponents with it or denying rumors about it do so due to the prevailing Pentecostal influence in Ghana and the perceived moral and spiritual backwardness of the occult. The Pentecostal discourse on the occult is negative and casts it as the realm of evil and backwardness. Many politicians, therefore, make pre-emptive strikes at warding off rumors about it even before they are constructed. They do this by adopting Pentecostal language, imagery, songs and tunes for campaigns and physically associating with Pentecostals. But in the long run, their strategic agenda is to deflect responsibility and criticism, seek to gain trust as the ones who do not use the occult, while delegitimizing opponents and act as the bearers of important news about the occult dealings of opponents.

Many Ghanaian politicians invoke the occult in negative ways by distancing themselves from it. Although rare, there are some who invoke it in a positive way. That is, there is a resistance to the anti-occult rhetoric because a few Ghanaian politicians, instead of avoiding the occult, have embraced it. Most of these politicians, as we saw from the discussion above, have already left office, are no longer seeking re-election and, therefore, have nothing to lose. Having said this, the politicians who boldly embrace the occult and rumors about it risk becoming unpopular in key parts of the Ghanaian electorate by appealing to certain characteristics of the occult that are deemed to serve positive functions and are deployed accordingly. These key features include seeing the occult as a neutral and trusted space for adjudication, a truth and lie detector, and a facilitator of instant justice. But these politicians also deploy their association with the occult for the political advantage of demonstrating their identity as true Ghanaians, seeking to gain trust, while pointing out the

dishonesty of their opponents, leveraging the power of the occult, and constantly keeping their profiles in the news. By making statements in the media about their own and opponents' use of the occult, these politicians have themselves become perpetrators of rumors. Political occult rumors swirl around politicians and political parties irrespective of whether they avoid or embrace the occult. Even those politicians who make pre-emptive strikes at warding off the rumors are still not above such rumors.

Ghanaian politicians' various forms of positioning in relation to the occult, and treatment of it for political advantage shows the occult's resilience in modern Ghanaian socio-political life. Apart from their claims reinforcing the popular perception in Ghana that politicians use the occult without exceptions, they demonstrate the vital role of the occult and rumors about it in post-colonial Ghana. The occult, branded by Ghana's default power-brokers, Pentecostals, as evil and backward, has nevertheless proven especially effective in contemporary Ghanaian democratic politics. That is, the occult, far from existing on the margins of society, is public, mainstream, and powerful in present-day Ghana by virtue of the abundant rumors on and about it, especially in political circles.

CONCLUSION

This thesis explored the dynamics of the rumor mill in Ghana, noting the synergy between the output of politicians and the public. It examined the understandings and deployment of the occult and rumors about it in modern Ghanaian politics. In analyzing the nature and significance of occult rumors, this thesis demonstrated that while rumors about occult practice cannot be taken as truth claims in themselves, in the context of Ghanaian socio-political space, they not only exist but constitute important forms of public discourse. Political occult rumors have become a lens through which certain seemingly hidden or strange occurrences are interpreted and explained within the highly religious political field in Ghana. Due to this importance of political-occult rumors, they have become crucial tools in the hands of Ghanaian politicians for political gain, and within the electorate as tools to resist political domination. In order to leave aside the truth or falsity of the occult and rather focus on occult discourse in the Ghanaian politico-public sphere, I elected in this study to focus not on the occult per se but on rumors about it.

This thesis highlighted the extent to which religion has always been a part of Ghanaian traditional life. Ghanaian indigenous religion enjoyed socio-political prestige in pre-colonial times and was a vital political legitimization tool. GTR remains a central feature in the influence of religion in contemporary Ghanaian politics. Colonial and Christian missionary enterprises in Ghana, then the Gold Coast, and their negative characterization of some aspects of the religious beliefs and practices of the people, eventually generated usage of the term “occult.” These older negative representations of certain parts of GTR are now particularly strongly perpetuated in Ghana by Pentecostal Christianity. Pentecostalism enjoys religious hegemony and informs the lives of many Ghanaians, including their views about the occult and its purported influence in contemporary Ghanaian politics. The realm of the occult constitutes a space in which individuals and groups seek answers to both mundane and spiritual needs, but the general sense about it in Ghana is negative. Being associated either directly or indirectly with it can be potentially detrimental to the individual involved.

The Pentecostal category of the occult is broader than that applied by colonialists and earlier Christian missionaries, however. While the colonial authorities and Christian missionaries cast only some aspects of GTR as the occult, the Pentecostal category now

includes both GTR elements, other non-Christian religious beliefs and practices and some aspects of technology. Pentecostals have also discarded the colonial and Christian notion that the occult is mere superstition without any supernatural power, but rather regard the realm of the occult as one populated by evil spiritual forces that need to be combatted constantly. In spite of this strong Pentecostal presence and influence in Ghana, and Pentecostalism's fierce hostility to the occult, the occult and rumors about it have become more visible and significant in many aspects of life, including the field of politics. Indeed, the strength of Pentecostalism is arguably the key factor generating occult-related phenomena, such as the growing visibility of occult narratives and of political-occult rumor.

Traditionally, rumors spread through word of mouth in Ghana, but the advent of modern print and electronic media forms facilitate their spread—dramatically increasing the speed at which rumors are dispersed, as well as their reach. This thesis proposed a working understanding of rumor as any information circulated by word of mouth or through the media, which cannot be said to be either true or false, but serves as a source of news because some people believe it, thereby giving it the potential to influence public opinion about its subject. In the Ghanaian political square, rumors have the potential to influence public opinion about political actors. Rumor is the avenue of access to the sphere of the occult since many Ghanaians believe the occult belongs to a hidden realm and is shrouded in secrecy. Occult ritual specialists also allegedly operate under the cover of darkness, as do those who consult them. This highlights the natural compatibility between rumor and the occult. In Ghana, rumors play a particularly significant role in politics. The political field is rife with rumors, especially those that focus on political elites and their alleged engagements in occult activities. These rumors, although most of them are not verified, serve as news and have the potential to influence public opinion about individual politicians, political institutions and the political process in general.

While many Ghanaians believe that politicians and their operatives generate occult rumors for political gain, others argue that the Ghanaian electorate themselves spin such rumors in order to check their politicians and to critique the political system. The Ghanaian public deploys these rumors as tools to resist political domination. They use rumors to achieve three main ends in this regard. First of all, the rumors act as metaphors to critique and contest political action and behavior. Secondly, the rumors are used as tools to mock the actions and

behavior of politicians, as well as the political process generally. In this way occult rumors serve as political satire; in that, while the populace makes fun of the political system, they at the same time express their frustrations with the system. Finally, the populace uses such rumors as means to peek into the lives of their otherwise powerful and somewhat distant political masters. Occult political rumors, therefore, level the political playing field and demonstrate that although politicians may wield ultimate power over the electorate, the voters also exercise some power over their political elites.

This thesis identified two contrasting popular attitudes of the Ghanaian electorate to political-occult rumors. The first attitude is shaped by acceptance of such rumors as being true, when taken at face value, usually based on the premise that the occult is everywhere, everyone uses it, and politicians are no exception. People who adopt such an attitude believe rumors about politicians' involvement in the occult because these stories confirm the versatility of the occult as a spiritual resource. The negative Pentecostal narrative on the occult that casts it as the sphere of demons and claims made by some occult ritual specialists that they offer help to politicians in their electoral victories are two major drivers for the acceptance of political-occult rumors. These rumors are also accepted as true because they help Ghanaians to explain what they call "strange" events. It is not clear that acceptance of rumors affects voting behavior. Some people accept the rumors but do not switch their loyalties, even though they think that occult activity reflects poorly on the politicians in question. In other cases, when a prospective voter feels that their religious beliefs are being undermined by a politician or political party's alignment with the occult, they do seem more liable to switch their allegiance.

On the other hand, a second attitude among Ghanaians is more cynical about political-occult rumors. Such people view politicians and their actions with deep suspicion due to their cynicism toward politics in general. They believe that politicians themselves and their operatives create and spread occult rumors as part of their publicity stunts to discredit opponents and portray themselves in a good light in the eyes of the electorate. They see occult rumors as political tools used by actors who are participants in a quest for power, affluence, and wealth. They also consider that politicians spin rumors about themselves in order to create a particular kind of persona, in which fear is a central weapon. Fear of the occult can allegedly be generated to scare people into voting for them and keep opponents

and detractors at bay. People who view political-occult rumors with such suspicion often see themselves as being more sophisticated than those who accept such rumors; they argue that only superstitious, credulous, floating or undecided voters and disgruntled members of political parties are likely to be influenced by the rumors.

The nature of political-occult rumors and the sensational way the print and electronic media publish them is another reason for some Ghanaians' cynical attitudes to the rumors. This points to Ghanaians' ambivalence to the media's reportage of political-occult rumors. That is, while some people believe rumors because the media has picked up on and reported them, others believe that the media reports falsehoods and tends to blow stories out of proportion for the sake of sensationalism and sales. Furthermore, if a person supports a certain politician or political party, he/she has already formed particular views about them; they are more likely to be cynical about negative rumors concerning their favoured figure, although some factors, such as an individual's level of education, religious background, and decision to vote based on issues may also be at play. The evidence from my fieldwork, therefore, indicates that there are significant splits within the Ghanaian public in their attitudes to political-occult rumors. Acceptance of the rumors does not equal belief, while cynicism does not amount to denial or rejection either.

Ghanaian politicians either avoid or embrace the occult, and rumors that link them to it, as part of a broader agenda of gaining political advantage. Most politicians seek to distance themselves from the occult by either denying rumors that link them to it or by consciously associating their opponents with occult ritual practice. In either case, their ultimate goal is to gain political advantage—deflecting responsibility and criticism, while advancing claims about their trustworthiness. Tagging political opponents as occultists delegitimizes them and casts them as dishonest. At the same time, the accuser stands to benefit by casting themselves as honest political brokers and bearers of important newsworthy information about their political opponents.

In spite of the negativity attributed to the occult by Pentecostals, some Ghanaian politicians still embrace it for strategic political reasons, although this move is an anomaly, rather than the norm. These politicians boldly invoke the occult in word and deed. They embrace the occult, utilizing its cultural reputation as a tool for adjudication – a truth and lie detector and the deliverer of instant justice, which leads to vindication. Politicians who

embrace the occult take hold of these “positive” attributes. They also make use of a widespread belief that although “occult” practice is secretive and scorned by many Ghanaians, it is influential. Hence, they employ a political strategy that aims to attain political advantage by demonstrating their identity as true Ghanaians. They leverage the power of the occult, gain trust as the ones who are honest about their occult use while casting their opponents as dishonest and insincere in relation to their own occult use. By embracing the occult and accepting rumors about it, these politicians also cause controversy to keep their names and profiles in the news constantly.

Although we cannot measure the increase of the occult, generally, and its influence in modern Ghanaian politics, in particular, the highly popular rumors in Ghana about the alleged political use of the occult and politicians either avoiding or embracing it for strategic political reasons mean it is significant. It may, therefore, be difficult to quantify the influence of the occult or juju, especially in determining the outcome of elections, but its importance is discernible, as illustrated by the high number of political-occult rumors cited by my informants, constant media reportage and Pentecostal obsession with the phenomenon, which is fuelling the success of the many Pentecostal churches in Ghana presently.

The flourishing of religion in the political square, exemplified by the popularity of narratives about the occult in politics, is not peculiar to Ghana, but pertains to other African post-colonies and beyond. Much of what I have demonstrated in this thesis confirms findings of other recent scholarship, which highlights the ongoing importance of the occult in postcolonial Africa. Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Harr’s article, “Religion and politics in South Sahara Africa,” for example, talks about how democratic elections in Africa are fixed in the spiritual realm by spiritual agents and the politicians who consult them.⁶⁰² African democratic elections are, therefore, not just about going to the polls on Election Day and voting for one’s candidate or party, but the elections are fixed in the spiritual realm by occult spiritual forces. Peter Geschiere, also on the occult and politics in Africa, talks about sorcery and the state in Africa and how the Maka people of South-East Cameroon use sorcery in their politics.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰² Ellis and ter Haar, “Religion and politics.”

⁶⁰³ Peter Geschiere, “Sorcery and the State: Popular Modes of Action among the Maka of Southeastern Cameroon,” *Critique of Anthropology*, 1988, 8(1): 35-63.

In her 1996 study of the occult and politics in Sierra Leone, Rosalind Shaw referred to “images and perceptions about sinister links between politicians and diviners” or occult ritual specialists.⁶⁰⁴ Shaw argued that “in popular Sierra Leonean political discourse, this idiom of enchantment usually takes the form of rumors about malignant arrangements between diviners and politicians or other ‘big persons’—arrangements which make members of the ruling class the biggest practitioners of sorcery.”⁶⁰⁵ Hence, the popular perception in many parts of Africa that although everyone uses the occult for various ends, politicians, due to their quest to win and hold on to power, use the occult more than the ordinary African. This is why Donald B. O’Brien has also observed that “thought and talk of the devil seem to be on the increase in Africa—rumors and accusations of devil worship, in some instances.”⁶⁰⁶ He gave an example from Liberia where “the impact of multi-party struggle in recent years has added a new dimension to the competition of the market, the armed version of multi-party politics in the Liberian style providing a particularly favorable terrain for the devil’s work.”⁶⁰⁷ Competition for power, then, has led, even forced African political elites to allegedly engage in occult activities.

On the Nigerian political context, Ruth Marshall has made the point about the situation whereby many Nigerians blame “the failure of the nation” on their politicians and argue that the country is suffering from the repercussions of their politicians’ associations with the occult.⁶⁰⁸ This notion echoes that of the Ghanaian socio-political experience where politicians have been blamed for the myriad of economic hardships Ghanaians face presently due to their alleged dealings with the occult. In Ben Okri’s *Songs of Enchantment*, although a novel, the book also depicts vividly what is perceived to be happening in the lives of people with power and affluence in Nigeria, showing that these people will go to whatever extent conceivable, including the use of the occult, to supposedly get their hands on political

⁶⁰⁴ Shaw, “The Politician and the Diviner,” 35.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid, 36.

⁶⁰⁶ Donald B. O’Brien, “Satan steps out from the shadows: religion and politics in Africa,” *Africa* (pre-2011) 70.3 (2000): 520.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ Ruth Marshall, “‘God is not a Democrat’: Pentecostalism and Democratization in Nigerian Pentecostalism,” in *The Christian Churches and the Democratization of Africa*, *Studies in Religion* 12, ed. Paul Gifford (Leiden EJ Brill, 1995), 247.

power.⁶⁰⁹ Moreover, K. P. Matereke and P. Mungwini have also written about the occult and the politics of Zimbabwe's "Diesel N'anga."⁶¹⁰ Almost all these authors link the growing discourses about the prevalence of the occult in African politics to the excesses and fears of and people's desire to catch up with modernity; these discourses express the electorate's dissatisfaction with the excesses of power and the political process in general.

Previous studies have, therefore, shown that the occult is significant in politics in other parts of Africa. This study has confirmed this general observation in relation to contemporary Ghana. It has gone further, however, by focusing on the role of rumor. In particular, my thesis has identified the forms of political *capital* that are at stake for Ghanaian political actors, and the ways that such *capital* is accessed through occult rumors about themselves and opponents. The thesis has identified how politicians and political institutions utilize occult rumors for political advantage and some of the specific attitudes of the Ghanaian populace to political-occult rumors. It has shown that while the political elite may create political-occult rumors for their own political advantage, the electorate also constructs and utilizes such rumors for its own purposes – most particularly to critique political action, behavior and the political process in general. In a nutshell, the thesis underscored how notions about the occult and its role in politics are being fashioned in new ways in modern Ghana. This study, then, is the first to provide a comprehensive analysis of occult rumor, and the role of such rumor in the political sphere. It has highlighted the socio-political significance of rumor in Ghana, particularly the important place of political-occult rumors. Consequently, the thesis has demonstrated in a particular manner the significance of "the occult" in contemporary Ghana's public space.

Many studies have also demonstrated the role that modern Pentecostalism plays, both in shaping negative discourse on the occult and Pentecostalism's role in contemporary African modernity and politics. My thesis confirms that Pentecostals perpetuate a negative discourse on the occult and its influence in modern Ghanaian politics; this discourse informs the way many Ghanaians view the occult and politicians' alleged links with it. It is this negative

⁶⁰⁹ Ben Okri, *Songs of Enchantment*, 1st ed. (Doubleday, 1993).

⁶¹⁰ K. P. Matereke and P. Mungwini, "The occult, politics and African modernities: the case of Zimbabwe's 'Diesel N'anga,'" *African Identities*, 10:4, 423-438, DOI: 10.1080/14725843.2012.692551

discourse on the occult that has transformed rumors about it into important tools in the hands of both politicians and the electorate as they struggle for *capital* in Ghana's political sphere. As I have argued throughout this study, the negative Pentecostal narrative on the occult, instead of suppressing beliefs about it, has rather promoted notions and rumors about the occult in modern-day Ghanaian politics. It is no coincidence that the present popularity of rumors about the occult in the public sphere is happening side by side with the visibility and popularity of Pentecostalism in Ghana. As I have also demonstrated, Pentecostal opposition has led occult ritual agents to become more public in recent times, as they claim to offer politicians an alternative route to electoral success. Thus, the thesis showed that the twin influence of Pentecostal opposition and occult ritualist publicity have become major drivers in shaping contemporary notions about the role of the occult in Ghana; hence, the important place of political-occult rumors.

One further contribution of this study, related to its analysis of the influence of Pentecostalism, concerns the category of the "occult" that operates in the context of contemporary political-occult rumor in Ghana. My thesis has highlighted the emergence of a novel interpretation of the occult shaped by negative Pentecostal narratives. While colonialists and mission Christians saw only some aspects of GTR as representations of the occult, modern Ghanaian Pentecostals have broadened the category by adding other non-Christian elements, including Islam and Eastern religious traditions to it. This means that contemporary understandings of the occult in Ghana differ from its colonial and mission-Christian characterization, although the modern ones build upon earlier legacies that depicted GTR and the occult in largely negative terms.

I used Bourdieu's theoretical concepts, *field*, *habitus*, and *capital*, to demonstrate the significance of both Pentecostalism and the occult in modern Ghanaian politics in this project. My findings have established that the political field in Ghana is a competitive space for struggle. This struggle involves both politicians and the electorate deploying occult rumors as means to gain *capital*—the former to attain political advantage and the latter as tools or metaphors to symbolically fight back and stand up to their politicians, thereby leveling the political playing field. Pentecostal Christianity currently enjoys a sway on many Ghanaians, to the extent that its discourses and praxis inform the way many Ghanaians view the world, the occult and politicians' alleged links with the occult. Pentecostalism is, therefore, a major

producer of the religious *habitus* in Ghana and Pentecostals have by extension become the default political power brokers. But while a certain religious *habitus* is often imposed on populations by the powerful or political elites in a particular society, in the Ghanaian socio-political context, this *habitus* is already in place and so politicians do not have to impose it, but only manipulate it to their advantage. This is because many Ghanaians already view the world through the Pentecostal lens. Many Ghanaians fear and scorn the occult due to its alleged tendency to harm innocent people and so any politician known to be either directly or indirectly linked with the occult is viewed with suspicion and may have a fall out with the populace; hence many politicians' bid to distance themselves from the occult and its attendant rumors. Generally, there is a process through which actors in a particular field draw on a prior *habitus*, but they also reproduce it and often change it too. The *habitus*, then, does not just stay the same, and static, but is dynamic. Ghanaian Pentecostal leaders are arguably the most significant actors in shaping the religious *habitus*, and political leaders appear to have to submit to this sense of *habitus* in order to gain their support and endorsement.

Although it is rarely the case, a few politicians in Ghana view the occult positively and sometimes invoke it due to its positive attributes and to gain political advantage. This is in spite of the negativity attributed to the occult by Pentecostals. This shows that as far as popular perceptions about the occult in Ghana generally and politics particularly are concerned, the negative Pentecostal voice may be prominent, but not unitary; other voices exist, as illustrated by my informants who expressed frustrations about the negative view of GTR and the occult propagated by Pentecostals. The practice whereby occult ritual agents come out to claim that they also assist politicians in securing power is also serving as a counter-power to Pentecostals. The general view of the occult in Ghana may then be negative, but some Ghanaians still view it in positive terms – as a versatile spiritual resource. Although I used Bourdieu's concepts of *field*, *habitus*, and *capital* in this project, *capital* had the most traction on how I framed the deployment of occult rumors to gain political advantage by politicians and as powerful leveling weapons by the Ghanaian public.

Notions about occult or juju practices are old; the political dimensions of juju are long-standing and well-established, but with the advent of new media forms, the influence of Pentecostal Christianity, its negative narrative on the occult, and new political ambition, a particular political climate has been created whereby rumors that allege politicians'

involvement in occult activities flourish in Ghana. This was why this thesis relied on both historical and contemporary perspectives on the concept of the occult to demonstrate the force of rumors about it in the Ghanaian public space presently alongside the influence exerted by Pentecostalism in political-occult rumor-mongering.

Analysis of the political atmosphere in Ghana demonstrates the new meanings Ghanaians are attaching to the role of the occult and its place in politics due to the influence of the Pentecostal tradition. It will, therefore, be worthwhile for future research to further consider what is at stake for Pentecostal churches that promote or perpetuate beliefs and fears about the occult and its engagements with African politics. Others may explore the possibility of the occult gaining greater acceptance as a legitimate part of the African religious landscape and identity. We can also pursue comparative studies on the place of the occult in different countries in Africa and the rest of the world or to quantitatively explore whether juju or the occult determines elections in Ghana particularly and sub-Saharan Africa broadly. For, given the findings of Ellis and ter Haar, Shaw, Marshall and others noted above, it seems likely that similar dynamics may be present in other African post-colonies. Ultimately, we can further explore the future of post-colonial Ghanaian, and for that matter African, politics in the light of the widespread influence of the occult and rumors about it.

This thesis has addressed the broader, ever evolving topic of religion and politics in Ghana, with a combined focus on the occult and political rumor, and emphasis on the rise of Pentecostalism as a major variable. It has shown that although Ghanaian political elites may strategically position themselves with respect to the occult and rumors about it, the broader population is also implicated in this politicization of the occult in a highly pentecostalized public sphere. This study makes an original contribution to the existing literature on the occult in modern, urban settings in Ghana and various parts of Africa. The management and mediation of political-occult rumors will surely continue to flourish in Ghana, specifically, and Africa, more generally, with the rise of social media and the continuous growth of Pentecostalism, but I hope this thesis becomes the starting point for a broader academic study on rumors about the occult's influence in postcolonial African politics.

APPENDIX A

Sample Interview Questions

1. Profession:
2. Political party:
3. Religious Affiliation:
4. Does the occult exist?
5. Are you familiar with the occult?
6. What in your opinion is the occult?
7. What beliefs and practices constitute the occult?
8. Juju and the occult: are they the same, similar or different?
9. Does GTR constitute the occult; why and why not?
10. Do you believe in the occult?
11. If yes/no, why?
12. Do politicians use the occult; how and for what?
13. What in your opinion is a rumor?
14. Have you heard any rumors about a politician's involvement in the occult?
15. Can you share some of these rumors with me?
16. Through what means did you hear these rumors?
17. Do/did you believe/accept these rumors?
18. Why/why not?
19. Who in your opinion comes up with these rumors?
20. Why do you think politicians spread occult rumors?
21. Why do the Ghanaian media publish occult rumors; what do they gain?
22. Why would the Ghanaian public spread occult rumors about politicians?

APPENDIX B

Sample Political Occult Rumors in Ghana by Type

Type 1: Denigrating Opponents

1. Rawlings used the occult and had a lot of occult elements in the castle. That is why when Kufuor became President, he had to have the whole castle/seat of government spiritually cleansed before occupying it- with the help of led by Pentecostal pastors.
2. Before the 2012 elections, some members of the NDC buried 7 live cows in the Asomdwee (Peace) Park, the place where the former President, Atta Mills, was buried to harm the leadership of the NPP and to prevent the party from winning the elections.
3. There were stories about the murder of 34 women during the 2000 election period whose blood was used for occult rituals to help the NDC win the 2000 elections.
4. The NPP leadership took Mills to a juju man to make sure he becomes tongue-tied while delivering a speech and as a result be struck with stroke.
5. There were rumors about a fisherman claiming to have spotted a crab in the sea with NDC paraphernalia in his mouth—this rumor came out during the Rawlings era.
6. Rawlings' 20-year reign as Head of State and 2-term President was made possible by the various occult agents he consulted and the rituals they performed for him.
7. Rawlings killed Ghanaboy, the man who helped him to ascend the presidential throne.
8. Kufuor traveled to Togo in order to be fortified by juju powers.
9. Even though Attah Mills was known publicly as a staunch Pentecostal, he used juju powers to win elections; he belonged to the Illuminati group secretly.
10. Mills was given a spiritual knock-out blow by the various occult spirits who backed him to win elections because he did not go back to thank them but instead gave the credit to the Christian God.
11. In 2004 Madam Christine Churcher, the NPP Member of Parliament for Cape Coast was rumored to have buried a live cow to aid her to win her seat in parliament.
12. During the electioneering campaigns in Keta of the Volta region, a pig with a red bow tie was spotted running on the streets of the town one hot afternoon. One of the candidates accused the then Member of Parliament of the area, Hon. Dan Abodakpi of the NDC, to be behind the incident; that he did that in order to have an edge in the elections spiritually.
13. When the former Finance Minister and Member of Parliament for Asante Akyem of the ruling government (NPP), Kwadwo Baah-Wiredu, died just a few months to the 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections, it was rumored that his opponent in the party's constituency primary elections killed him with juju powers.
14. Nkrumah had a god called Kankan Nyame in the castle and he used to sacrifice pregnant women to the god to help him rule.
15. Kufuor was also rumored to be aligned with the occult because he at one time came out to defend the Lodge fraternity, which is seen in Ghana as an occult group. Kufuor, we are told, is also a member of Illuminati.

16. The current President, John Mahama, consulted a fetish priest and was made to spend 2 weeks there to fortify himself before he contested the 2012 elections.
17. Rawlings had one juju man who was so powerful and when he realized the juju man could reveal his secrets to the world he killed him.
18. Rawlings used to climb trees at the castle as a fulfillment of an occult ritual.
19. Rawlings wanted to make his Vice-President, Ackaah, to swallow a frog to prove his innocence about something, but he refused- this was part of an occult ritual.
20. Kwame Nkrumah kidnapped a certain pregnant woman and turned her into a goddess that was later named Kankan Nyame. The woman later died and her corpse was what was turned into a goddess in the castle. The woman was forced to give birth to the baby prematurely.
21. Rawlings had some form of juju outside of Ghana- somewhere in Togo- that he consulted frequently during crucial times.
22. Rawlings used to go to Dr. Berkeley for potions and charms to help him rule.
23. Before the 2012 elections, Kwabena Agyei, the NDC chairman, went to his hometown to sacrifice a bull to help the NDC win the elections.
24. Some years ago it came in the Free Press that Rawlings was in the river one night and they had a shot of him. He was there to consult an occult spirit.
25. Recently a certain juju man came out on the radio that he helped President Mahama who promised to make him the head of his spiritual team but has not and that is why Ghanaians are suffering under Mahama and the NDC.
26. John Mahama couldn't have used only 4 months to win the 2012 elections if he hadn't gotten help from occult sources.
27. Mahama and the NDC were planning to use the free pads they wanted to distribute to girls in rural and poor areas in Ghana for juju rituals to help them win the 2016 elections.
28. It was rumored that the NPP has been pestered by a certain occult agent who is ready to take them to Benin to see the most powerful occult spiritualist. When they go there the spiritualist will just blow something into Mahama's stomach to kill him within a few days in order to give the NPP the chance to come back to power.

Type 2: Politicians Invoking the Occult Positively

1. There have been cases of oath taking using drinks, leaves, eggs, etc. to determine the truth or otherwise of an accusation against political opponents.
2. The former Ashanti regional minister, Daniel Ohene Agyekum, went to Antoa, broke an egg and did some things to curse someone who had done something against him.
3. Kwame Nkrumah ruled the nation with the help of Kankan Nyame, a god he imported from Guinea, which was why many people feared him at the time.
4. Rawlings himself was rumored to have consulted Antoa Nyama a great deal for powers to help him stay in office for longer.
5. Kwame Nkrumah had occult powers and was able to command toffees from heaven.
6. Nkrumah could also turn into any animal of his choosing.

7. Rawlings himself was rumored to consult Antoa Nyama for powers to help him stay in office for longer.
8. There were so many attempts to eliminate Nkrumah, not just to overthrow him—one were the Kulungungu bombing and the way he narrowly escaped all that because he had juju. The girl who was presenting a bouquet of flowers to him at the time when the bombing happened died, but the President walked away unharmed.
9. During Nkrumah's time, he had a very faithful man called Colonel Azenbu from the Northern region guiding him. This man had occult spiritual powers and was the brain behind all of Nkrumah's successes in avoiding all the fatal plots of his enemies. When the 1966 coup took place and they came, Col. Azenbu was surrounded with soldiers firing and he killed so many of them. It got to a time he realized he was killing too many people and just decided to give up, otherwise, they wouldn't have succeeded in overthrowing Nkrumah.
10. And we know Nkrumah to have come from a village where they have occult powers—I haven't seen it myself, but the rumors claim that it is true.
11. Capt. Kojo Tsikata, a former politician in the NDC government, could turn into a cat, a 'gbagbladja' (cockroach) and anything that he wanted and disappeared anytime he was wanted by the military. The last time they went to arrest him, the military men swore to be swift so they could catch him. The soldiers went there when he was bathing; they knocked on the door and he came to answer it with a towel around his waist. He asked them to sit and wait for him to dress up and go with them. So the soldiers sat down with their guns with the intention that this time around they were going to take him along. All of a sudden, they felt a cold air blow around them and he was nowhere to be found. That was the last time they ever saw him—he ran away until Rawlings asked him to come back to Ghana. So for him (Tsikata) he changes into anything with the help of occult spirits he works with.
12. Kwame Nkrumah was able to magically pull toffees and coins from people's pockets.
13. Former President, Afrifa, was too powerful spiritually to the extent that when you shot him you will not get him—the bullets hit him, but they did not hurt him.
14. The police wanted to arrest former President, Afrifa, one time; they tried several times but found it very difficult to arrest him because he possessed occult powers.
15. Some politicians make people swear after giving them money and other things to ensure that they vote for them in elections.
16. Some politicians trick the electorate to swear by certain occult gods—to get them to vote for them since no one can be trusted to ensure loyalty.
17. Other politicians make people swear oaths to certain occult gods and deities to force them to vote for them. They invite prospective voters to parties they themselves organize and after the invitees have eaten, drank and had their full, they are scared into believing the food and money shared at the party have been taken to a juju shrine and so whoever partook in that party and took some of the money, but refused to vote for them stood the chance of either becoming seriously sick or dead alongside their families.

18. There was an issue with Owusu Akyeampong in Berekum—he gave out money and said anybody who collects his money and did not vote for him, something will happen (they must swear an oath) and some people went ahead to collect the money; they went to the same god and came back to him to bluff that “this is not even your own money, it is the Ghana government’s money.” He rather collapsed on the platform. They used his own trick on him and succeeded.

Type 3: Using Occult ‘Ways and means’ to win elections

1. Live cows were buried in Togo, others in Abidjan and even some parts of Ghana as part of politicians’ occult rituals to win elections.
2. Some of the parties also ritually buried live cats, dogs, chickens, goats, sheep and even human beings for electoral success.
3. In the run-up to the 2012 elections, the leadership of some of the parties went to Benin to consult an occult agent for powers. It was rumored that they were asked by the occult agent to eat the fresh carcass of an animal that has been ritually killed.
4. The military men who staged coup d’états in Ghana had occult backing because there was no way they would have succeeded without occult spiritual help. Some of the coups did not succeed because their leaders did not follow strictly the instructions they were given by the occult spiritualists who backed them.
5. The other political parties apart from the NPP and NDC, the so-called small parties, also use occult powers—not to necessarily win the elections, but to help them build their support base.
6. There is more to Ghanaian elections/voting than what the eyes see—it goes beyond registering and queuing to vote because there are juju powers out there backing the various political parties and individual candidates.
7. Overvoting is caused by juju practitioners’ dwarves and spirits that are released to come and vote for some politicians and parties.
8. All the political parties use juju to challenge themselves.
9. Some politicians in Ghana use the juju to sometimes kill off their troublesome opponents or incapacitate them to prevent them from competing.
10. I believe that almost all our politicians consult the occult for powers and in Africa generally, there are rumors that border on that subject.
11. About 8 years ago the police caught a juju man, one Dr Berkeley, in Fadama-Accra and upon inspection in his house they found pictures of a lot of politicians/ministers/presidents who had come to him for powers. That juju man was known to use human blood for the various potions and medicines he made for the politicians who consulted him.
12. Many of the frequent murders in which the private parts of the deceased are removed, accidents and many other strange happenings are caused by politicians who need blood to win elections.
13. There is a certain member of parliament who has been in parliament since 1992 but does not do anything to develop his constituency. When it’s time for elections he

- comes around with bicycles and cows, he slaughters them, shares the meat to spiritually confuse the people to vote for him. I hear that is how he won the elections.
14. You know those who usually come to power through coup d'états, I hear they went in for juju powers before the deed.
 15. Some of our politicians don't really use juju to get into power, but once they come into power and because they have too many enemies they go for juju for protection from enemies and political opponents.
 16. Some politicians ritually bury live cows as a symbolic way to bury their competitors and their chances of winning the elections in order to have an advantage over them.
 17. Some politicians also bury albinos alive to fulfill occult rituals to aid them to win votes.
 18. During elections, a lot of strange things happen in the country, such as frequent accidents, untimely deaths, people getting missing and ritual murders; all these are ritually manipulated by politicians to gain power.
 19. When they construct new roads, all the people who die through accidents on those roads are being ritually killed by some of our politicians.
 20. Because of power, people want to find ways and means to win and therefore go through a lot of things; they will go and visit juju men to get power or they will go and join occult groups so that they can get power or become influential.
 21. A certain politician performed animal sacrifice in the Volta Region in 2012 to have an advantage over his opponents.
 22. Every politician is always trying to outdo the other and if he cannot find a case against you, he/she will use what they call "ways and means"; they will use spiritual forces to kill you, to bring you down and to charm people just to get the votes.
 23. During campaigns, some of the parties go to the Volta region because they think the Volta region is where the higher occult power is. They go there and it is claimed that they buy cows that they later bury alive because they want to win.
 24. The same politicians who go to church and to Israel to pray to God to win elections are those who use the occult to help them to win.
 25. When the N1 [the Lapaz-Mallam highway in Accra] was commissioned, there were so many accidents and a Christian friend of mine had a vision as to why all those accidents were happening and it was before the elections that all these things were happening and he says he saw a big hole in the middle of the road (the N1) where victims of the accidents were being buried on the road and he asked God what it was. He said they were the repercussions of what our leaders have done just to win power.
 26. It was foreseen that John Mahama would become Mills' Vice-President even before he was appointed. It was also spiritually foretold by the same occult agent that along the line he would become the President of Ghana, but his regime will experience a lot of challenges and difficulties. So these politicians do probe into the occult spiritual world for confirmations, predictions, and protection.
 27. The senior brother of Mahama went to see an occult ritualist who gave him instructions about what needed to be done before the elections to ensure victory for Mahama in 2012.

28. Some Ghanaians are also of the view that although Mahama didn't go himself for occult powers, his people were doing things on his behalf to ensure his win in 2012.
29. Politicians use occult powers to hypnotize people and coerce them spiritually into voting for them and their parties.
30. All the parties go for juju powers to help them win votes, but as to whether those powers work for them is a different story altogether. Since all the parties go for occult powers, winning the election proper comes down to the party that puts much more physical efforts into selling its message to convince the electorate.
31. African politicians become religious in election years; they seek religious favors, interventions, assistance to outdo their political enemies and they have the conviction that spiritual personalities can change their fortunes and turn a losing party into a victorious party and turn a losing candidate into a losing candidate. And so they use occult spirituality in some cases to weaken the physique, mentality, and aspirations of their opponents.
32. Some politicians use the occult to enhance their political development, influence the electorate to think good of them and downgrade any other candidate.
33. The occult agents now go to ambitious political office holders and aspirants, rather than the former going to the latter for spiritual help.
34. When president Kufuor was looking for the leadership he went to Yendi and they had done a lot of things and just wanted his consent for the things to click or work for him and all the things they did were to be put in a ram and he was supposed to ride it. They were a bit skeptical as to whether he would agree to ride the ram; he did and when he won, they (the Yendi spiritualists) claimed they had facilitated his (Kufuor) win spiritually. On the other hand, prior to and after his (Kufuor) time, Adu Boahen went to the same Yendi and refused to ride the ram, and didn't win; Akufo Addo, I am told, also refused and didn't win.
35. The NPP consulted some Mallams who gave them certain things to do before Akufo Addo comes to the Northern Region. When he is to start the journey, they are supposed to roast a ritually slaughtered fowl and distribute the meat in some way before he starts. Any village he visits they have to do the same, but the NPP leadership didn't do it and when he lost they said that they don't listen to spiritual advice.
36. If they tell you the sorts of things John Mahama did to win the last elections, you will marvel—rumor has it that he consulted a lot of occult ritual agents, although he was publicly parading about seeking prayers and support from Pentecostals.
37. Many politicians in Ghana go under the cover of darkness to see Mallams for power.
38. There are some politicians who camp Mallams for at least six months to offer directions to them about impending elections.
39. Jerry Rawlings was a problem to some people in the north and so they wanted to kill him. They met in a village close to Tamale in the Northern region to prepare spiritually: they dressed a male cow in red clothing, which represented Rawlings, to bury it alive. If they had succeeded, Rawlings would have died, but there was a tip-off; national security operatives rushed there and the people ran leaving behind the cow. They saw

the cow and knew some people wanted to kill the Head of State, not through physical means, but through spiritual means.

40. Some people are made confused, even in the courtrooms—in one Dagbon chieftaincy issue, we are told that one of the lawyers was actually confused in the courtroom. The lawyer was making a presentation and at some stage, he got confused—it could have been a natural thing, but some people interpreted it as having a spiritual meaning from the other side. Some of the people who supported the lawyer were even attacked by bees. The politicians who were the defendants in the case consulted some juju priests who performed certain rituals to confuse the complainants' lawyer and sent the bees.
41. Before the 2012 elections one parliamentarian claimed that during the campaigns, a certain spiritualist called him and said if he wanted to win the election, he needed to offer a higher form of sacrifice that involved somebody dying. And he said if killing somebody was the only means through which he can maintain his seat, then he won't do it and lo and behold he lost it.

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1. Miss K	32	F	Pentecostal Christian	Pastor	NA
2. Nana Agyei	30	M	GTR adherent	Student	NPP
3. Sister Anobeah	47	F	Pentecostal Christian	Housewife	NPP
4. Maa Akos	50	F	Pentecostal Christian	Businesswoman	NA
5. Maa May	42	F	Pentecostal Christian	Businesswoman	NDC
6. Nana B.	41	M	Pentecostal Christian	University Lecturer/Pastor	NPP
7. Akuffo	57	M	Mainline Christian	Banker	NPP
8. Salaam	56	M	Muslim	University Lecturer	NPP
9. Ahodor	45	M	Catholic Christian	Lecturer	NA
10. Amissah	38	M	Pentecostal Christian	Self employed	NDC
11. Osikani	31	F	Pentecostal Christian	Student	NPP
12. Sarpomaah	27	F	Pentecostal Christian	Student	NA
13. Rose	28	F	Pentecostal Christian	Seamstress	CPP

14. Sussy	34	F	Pentecostal Christian	Student	NDC
15. Kwame Mensah	37	M	Mainline Christian	Auto mechanic	NDC
16. Kofi Halm	50	M	Pentecostal Christian	Chartered Accountant	NPP
17. Emma	32	M	GTR adherent	Graduate student	NA
18. Sefakor	39	M	Mainline Christian	University lecturer	NDC
19. Saaka	60	M	Catholic Christian	University lecturer	CPP
20. Adi	27	F	Mainline Christian	Research Assistant	PPP
21. Muhammad	37	M	Muslim	Physical trainer	NDC
22. Aduako	52	M	Pentecostal Christian	Pastor	NPP
23. Hassan	61	M	Muslim	Lecturer	CPP
24. Damba	41	M	Muslim	Lecturer	NDC
25. Dave C.	23	M	GTR adherent	Teacher	NDC
26. Kwame Fosu	48	M	Mainline Christian	Self employed	NA
27. Ayithey	48	M	Mainline Christian	Computer software developer	NA
28. Alex	63	M	GTR adherent	Public servant	NDC
29. Abeiku	46	M	NA	Public servant/foot soldier	NA
30. Ato Kwamena	33	M	NA	Businessman	NA

31. Paa Kow	44	M	Mainline Christian	Public servant	NDC
32. Mr. Osafo	49	M	Pentecostal Christian	Mental health worker	CPP
33. Joshua	53	M	Pentecostal Christian	Accountant	NPP
34. Gifty	51	F	Mainline Christian	Public servant	NPP
35. Philip	37	M	Mainline Christian	Lecturer	NDC
36. Frank	41	M	GTR adherent	Driver	NDC
37. Isak	37	M	Pentecostal Christian	Computer technician	NPP
38. CAN	47	M	Pentecostal Christian	Teacher/pastor	NA
39. Evans	45	M	Pentecostal Christian	Businessman	NPP
40. Felix	58	M	Pentecostal Christian	Businessman/pastor	NPP
41. Nana Kwame	22	M	Mainline Christian	Student	NPP
42. Yaa	26	F	Pentecostal Christian	Student	NA
43. Kj	62	M	Pentecostal Christian	Pastor	NPP
44. Kokubor	43	M	GTR adherent	Public servant	NDC
45. Maa Jane	70	F	Pentecostal Christian	Retired teacher	NPP
46. Maa Gee	39	F	Pentecostal Christian	Nurse	NDC

47. Aisha	28	F	Pentecostal Christian	Pastor	NA
48. Yaw	22	M	Mainline Christian	Driver	NDC
49. Frank	41	M	GTR adherent	Driver	NDC
50. Bridget	35	F	Pentecostal Christian	Civil servant	NPP
51. Kojo	36	M	Mainline Christian	Lawyer	CPP
52. Sesinam	28	F	Pentecostal Christian	Seamstress	NPP
53. Lizzie	45	F	Pentecostal Christian	Seamstress	NPP
54. Joyce	44	F	Pentecostal Christian	Pharmacist	NDC
55. Bentum	26	M	Pentecostal Christian	Lawyer	NPP
56. Empress	24	F	Mainline Christian	Student	NDC
57. Kwaku	28	M	Mainline Christian	Teacher	NDC
58. Kwasi Ansah	28	M	Pentecostal Christian	Hotel worker	NPP

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