

LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mensah Adinkrah. *Witchcraft, Witches and Violence in Ghana*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2015. xii + 325 pp. Maps. Photographs and Illustrations. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. \$110.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-1-78238-560-8.

Mensah Adinkrah, a sociologist specializing in criminal justice, makes a bold argument that acts of violence against people accused of witchcraft in contemporary Ghana must be recognized as violations of human rights by perpetrators motivated primarily by sexism. Adinkrah's twin aims in undertaking this study were to increase knowledge about witchcraft beliefs and to aid victims of witchcraft accusations. He hopes that "by highlighting the sufferings that arise from witchcraft accusations and persecutions, individuals and groups will be impelled to channel resources into confronting and eliminating the social, psychological, and physical violence that accompanies witchcraft accusations" (17). The book is based on a variety of sources collected and analyzed by the author, including his original translations of eight popular songs and thirty-four proverbs about witchcraft, transcripts and press reports from four witchcraft-related trials between 1975 and 2001, and case histories of thirty-five homicides triggered by witchcraft accusations from 1980 to 2012. Adinkrah demonstrates that women are the majority of the victims of anti-witchcraft violence and argues that "female overrepresentation among suspected and accused witches is traceable to deeply held misogynistic attitudes and gynophobic beliefs, which are the effects of patriarchal arrangements and ideology embedded in the society" (271).

In addition to calling for protection for the victims of witchcraft accusations, Adinkrah asserts that witchcraft beliefs erode social trust and stigmatize achievement, especially for women and girls. He describes how fear of being branded as a witch keeps girls from excelling at academic disciplines viewed as masculine like math and science. He argues that "teaching and quizzing youth about witchcraft phenomena in a school setting" tends to aid in "reinforcing and cementing witchcraft beliefs" (111). Adinkrah quotes extensively from Ghanaian government-issued textbooks that avoid challenging the validity of witchcraft beliefs out of respect for religion. It is easy to see how an adolescent might interpret the neutral language in phrases such as "people are said" (to practice witchcraft) or "it is believed" (that witches engage in various practices) as an endorsement of the belief in witchcraft by school and government authorities.

Unfortunately for the reader, Adinkrah presents his original material in list form, analyzing each song, proverb, and case study one after the other. This stylistic choice results in maddeningly repetitious writing. The upside is that many of the chapters could be assigned independently as reading in college courses.

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