

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

IMPRECATION IN CONTEMPORARY GHANAIAN POLITICAL
ACTIVITIES: THE CASE OF THE ASANTE

BY

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DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby affirm that this thesis is entirely unique to me and that no portion of it has ever been submitted for credit toward another degree at this university or anywhere else.

Candidate's Signature: Date:

Name:

Supervisors' Declaration

By this declaration, we at the University of Cape Coast attest that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were guided by the standards established for thesis supervision.

Principal Supervisor's Signature: Date:

Name:.....

Co-Supervisor's Signature: Date:

Name:.....

ABSTRACT

The thesis examined the use of imprecation in Ghanaian political activities. The motivation of the study is about the contention between African Traditional Religion (ATR) writers on whether or not ATR has a place in the lives of Africans. Thus, the study sought to prove that, the beliefs and philosophies of African Traditional Religion continue to influence the decision making, behaviours and total life of Ghanaians by relating it to the rampant usage of imprecation in contemporary political arena in Ghana specifically among the Asante. The purpose of the study is to bring to realisation reasons where some Ghanaians prefer the use of imprecation in resolving election-related issues to the laid down adjudication systems and mechanisms. Using semi-structured interviews, the study explored the nature of imprecation among the Asante, the role imprecation plays in their socio-cultural life and the various reasons for its employment. Also, questionnaires were given to respondents to investigate how widespread the practice is, taking into consideration especially the religious affiliation, and educational background since *duabɔ* is a phenomenon peculiar to ATR practitioners. From interviews, the study also reveals that imprecation was once part of the Asante arbitration. Yet its use in contemporary times is not limited to the social life of the people alone but also in politics especially during elections processes. This is mostly as a result of challenges and weaknesses in the processes on the part of the electoral resolution agencies namely, the court and disciplinary committee in political parties. Hence, imprecation is used to serve as a tool for check and balances during electoral processes. Again, imprecation creates a platform for political actors to air out their frustrations and discusses certain malfeasances to which electoral officials do not pay much attention. The use of imprecations in Ghanaian elections is a symptom of mistrust in the electioneering process and avenues for seeking redress on election related grievances. There is a high possibility of violent conflict in Ghana if the ‘red flag’ of *duabɔ* is not addressed.

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DEDICATION

To my family



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ATR	African Traditional Religion
DRRC	District Registration Review Committee
EC	Electoral Commission
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
IDEA	International Institution for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
INEC	Interim National Electoral Commission
IPAC	Innovative Inter-party Advisory committee
MP	Member of Parliament
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NPP	New Patriotic Party



GLOSSARY OF ASANTE (TWI) WORDS

<i>Abisa</i>	Divination
<i>Abosom</i>	Minor Divinities/Deities
<i>Abusua</i>	Clan /Lineage
<i>Adontehene</i>	Commander of King's army
<i>Afisem</i>	Household/Civil cases
<i>Akyiwadeɛ</i>	Taboo
<i>Asase Yaa</i>	Earth Goddess
<i>Asantehene/hemaa</i>	Asante King/ Queen
<i>Benkumhene</i>	Left Wing Chief
<i>Bonsamboɔ</i>	Evil Stone
<i>Bosomfoɔ</i>	Deity Servant
<i>Dedua</i>	Fine
<i>Dwanetoani</i>	Intervener
<i>Duabo</i>	Imprecation
<i>Gyaasehene</i>	Head of Royal Household
<i>Kyeame</i>	Linguist
<i>Kyidomhene</i>	Commander of the Rear Guard
<i>Manwerekene</i>	Head of Interior
<i>Mmotia</i>	Dwarfs
<i>Mpiisoɔ</i>	Counter Money
<i>Nananom Nsamanfoɔ</i>	Ancestral Spirits
<i>Nhyire</i>	White Clay
<i>Nifahene</i>	Leader of the left division
<i>Nkosɔhene</i>	Chief of Development

<i>Nnome</i>	Agentless imprecation
<i>Nsedie</i>	Self Imprecation
<i>Nsumankwaahene</i>	Head of Traditional Priest/Priestess
<i>Ntam</i>	Reminiscential Oath



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

It appears that there are two contending opinions among scholars with regard to relevance of African Traditional Religion (ATR) in the lives of Africans today. While one group of scholars suggests that ATR is alive and its practices continue to influence the lives of the people, the other group with a contrary view supported with statistics suggests that with the reduction in the numbers of people who formally accept to be members of the traditional religion, the influence it previously had has waned. For example, Idikwu (2017) observes that formal adherents of ATR in the south of the Sahara have decreased from a population percentage of 76% in the 1900s to 13% in 2010. From the first population census conducted in the year 1948 in Ghana (then Gold Coast), the practitioners of ATR constituted 66% of the entire population. The percentage has consistently reduced over the years. It reduced to 38% in 1960, 21.6% in 1970 and 21.4% in 1980 (Pobee, 1991). According to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) the trend has continued in the last three housing and population censuses. That is, in 2000 it reduced to 8.5% and then to 5.2 in 2010 and the last 2021 census provided a figure of 5.1 %. With these statistics, it is argued that ATR has drastically lost its place in the lives of Africans. Instead, impinging religions like Christianity and Islam are increasingly filling the place ATR held in the lives of Africans because population census over the years reveals an exponential increase in the number of their adherents.

The group of scholars who argue for the relevance of ATR includes Shorter (1978) and Mbiti (1991). This group is of the view that ATR is alive and active in the lives of Africans. The group contends that although the African religion may no longer be seen in visible structures such as shrines, rituals, and oracles, it lives in the minds of ordinary people and in new Christian movements such as African Independent Churches (AICS).

It seems the position of the later scholars has some credence. It is noted that some indigenous African practices and worldviews are not totally displaced by Christianity and Islam. Nweke (2020), claims that Nigerian Muslims still visit 'traditional medicine men and soothsayers from whom they hope to get answers to their many problems'. The same applies to most African Christians who continue the worldview that there are numerous malevolent spirits so one needs to be protected against them. In Ghana, Agyemang and Nyamekye note a growing market of the indigenous religion, where both Christians and Muslims are active participants in seeking spiritual assistance to solve problems such as "wife and child seeking, employment, visa to travel to mostly USA and Europe, success in trading activities, knowing the outcome of a venture and protection against evil spirits" (2018). Similar to Nyamekye and Agyemang, Dovlo, (2005) contends that, some political actors who seek power continue to patronize traditional deities for support, galvanizing of votes, and also to correct wrong wrought made by opponents. Tweneboah (2021) also adds that, traditional deities have over the years demonstrated their vitality in diverse areas such as justice delivering and have also become useful in peace building in the society.

Thus, this study intends to agree with the later scholars by using the imprecation (*duabɔ*) by some Ghanaian political actors as an illustration to point that ATR still influences the African person. Imprecation here basically refers to the invocation or petitioning of indigenous deities routinely to judge and punish guilty parties in an unfair situation.

Statement of the Problem

With the inauguration of the fourth republic about three decades ago, the indigenous religion is finding its way into the political life of Ghanaians. One clear example is the use of imprecation (*duabɔ*). This practice is found especially when Ghana's political parties are electing their officers and during the parliamentary /presidential elections, these have been circulating mostly on mass media. Although Herman and Chomsky (1988) have indicated that for one or the other reason editorial policy makes the mass media unreliable for accurate reporting as news is filtered, one cannot ignore the importance mass media in either print or electronic form in our contemporary society. The mass media, at least, gives a lead for a proper investigation to be done. In recent times, there have been appreciable tendencies of high-profile political actors resorting to imprecations instead of appealing to civil court trials to seek redress. For instance, during the 2020 primary elections to select parliamentary candidates of one of the leading political parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), imprecations were used as an intervention mechanism because rumours of electoral malpractices such as candidates bribing delegates to influence voting behaviour (UTV Ghana online, June 20, 2020).

There is an antecedent to this practice. Before the 2016 general election the then Regional Youth Organiser of the NPP in the then Bono Region and a

self-acclaimed member of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Kwame Baffoe, popularly called Abronye DC imprecated the then Chairperson of the Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana, Charlotte Osei. In the imprecatory ritual, he invoked *Antoa Nsuo Nyama*, a deity in the Asante region of Ghana and other deities to punish the EC boss and the security agencies if they made any attempt to rig the elections for the then ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC). (Adomonline.com 30, November 2016). Also, Acheampong (2008) had earlier reported the use of imprecation during the 2008 election by the then National Democratic Party (NDC) Regional Minister of the Ashanti Region, Mr Daniel Ohene Agyekum who is a Catholic. He also invoked the deity *Nyamaa* to punish some members of the N.P.P who had accused members of his party of attacking members of the N.P.P in the Subin Constituency.

Though there is the claim of converts to other religions, resorting to the imprecation on regular basis is evidence that ATR is still active in the lives of Ghanaians. But then, since we do not have any substantial data to support this claims the study would first collect quantitative data to ascertain frequent use imprecation among the Asante, then qualitative data to understand experiences of members of political parties and why they prefer imprecation to existing avenues and laid down mechanism for redressing of grievances.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are to:

1. explain the nature imprecations among the Asante;
2. investigate how widespread imprecation is used to seek for justice among the Asante

3. examine the reasons for the use of imprecations in contemporary Ghanaian political arena
4. evaluate if the use of imprecation is a critique of current happenings in Ghana's politics especially within the context of electioneering and the organisation of elections.

Research Questions

The major research questions guiding the study are:

1. What is the nature of imprecation among the Asante?
2. How prevalent is the use of this indigenous Asante justice seeking medium?
3. What factors necessitate the use of imprecation as a means of seeking justice in contemporary Ghanaian political arena?
4. Is the use of imprecation in contemporary Ghanaian politics a critique of things as they are in the Ghanaian politics especially in the context of electioneering and the organisation of elections?

Significance of the Study

The study seeks to bring out knowledge on the regularity of the use of one indigenous Ghanaian practice by both adherents and non-adherents of the indigenous religion. The outcome, especially the quantitative information, would help us to question census figures on religious affiliations in Ghana. The reason is that population census has the assumption that a person cannot belong to more than one religion at the same time. If the current study gives us the knowledge that some Ghanaians do belong to more than one religion, then we need to start asking questions on the reliability of figures provided by the census on religious affiliation. Moreover, the analysis of the reasons why

some people resort to the use of this indigenous justice seeking medium in the political arena will come out with the level of trust that Ghanaians in the study area have in the electoral system and all the in-built adjudicatory measures. This will help policy makers to have a second look at our electoral laws and the implementers of the laws to improve upon elections and reduce the tension and conflicts associated with elections at all levels in Ghana.

Research Method

Among the issues addressed in this section are the following: research design, population, sampling and sampling techniques. The section is also concerned with data issues such as sources of data, instruments for data collection and data analysis and ethical considerations. The research methodologies that will be used to find answers to the study's research questions are detailed in this section. As a result, it presents a full description of the study under the topics of research design, population, sample and sampling technique, and data collection instrument. The utility of research methodology is to afford the researcher an in-depth understanding of the process involved in the inquiry. This was to also assist in the evaluating of the validity of research instruments. The secondary sources of data, in the form of academic text, journals, media reports, library and internet material will be made use of. To overcome the shortcomings associated with both the positivist and constructivist paradigms, the study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods (mixed method) for data collection and analysis.

Research Paradigm

There have been two main paradigms of social research, namely positivist and constructivist schools of thought. The positivist paradigm is

founded on the belief in an objective reality, in which knowledge is derived solely through sense facts that can be directly experienced and validated by independent observers (O'Brien, 2001). Positivists are of the view that, natural laws govern phenomena, which are discovered logically through empirical testing and inductive and deductive hypotheses developed from a body of scientific theory (Sarantakos, 2005). Furthermore, its methods rely heavily on quantitative measures, with mathematical means being used to establish correlations between variables. The positivist tradition usually employs quantitative research methods. This method involves the collection of numerical data and the use of statistical methods for analysis. However, one of the criticisms leveled against the key characteristic of the quantitative approach is how it isolates the subject of the investigation from its surroundings, effectively turning the environment into an artificial laboratory (Sarantakos, 2005).

On the other hand, the constructivists, also known as interpretivists believe that, the complex world of lived experience may be comprehended through the eyes of people who live it (Schwandt, 1994). As a result, they try to comprehend occurrences by looking at the interpretations individuals give to them. The constructivist paradigm is based on inductive research. This begins with the observation of events or particular processes before arriving at generalizations based on these events or processes. Constructivist researchers also employ qualitative methods. Qualitative methods, according to Gergen & Gergen (2000), are more authentic to the social world than quantitative methods because they allow facts to emerge more freely from context. Some criticism leveled against this paradigm borders on the representation of results,

a generalisation of findings, objectivity of researcher as well as validity and reliability of methods (Sarantakos, 2005).

The researcher employed the constructivist paradigm because the research is concerned with exploring people's experiences, perceptions, and everyday behaviour to understand why some Ghanaians take certain decisions which could be best if explained and elaborated upon than quantifying. Thus, interviews and participant observation were used to get an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon from the lived experiences of the people.

Research Design

The study adopted the mixed-method approach where both quantitative and qualitative approach of data collection was used. Mixed methods study is described as "research in which the investigator collects and processes data, incorporates the outcomes, and draws inferences from the data utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approaches and methodologies in a single study" (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007). Also, Creswell and Clark (2007), discussed that mixed methods research helps address research concerns which cannot be addressed by quantitative or qualitative methods alone, and it offers a wider range of tools to meet the objectives of a study. Combining research methods yields a more complete and thorough view of the phenomena under investigation. This does not mean that the mixed methods are not under criticism.

Within the quantitative approach, the cross-sectional design was used. In the cross-sectional study, data is collected from many people at the same time. The purpose of using cross-sectional design was to investigate the prevalence in the use of imprecation by cross section of Ghanaians within

Ashanti region as the study area. The intension of the study was not to establish the relationship between the use of imprecation and religious affiliation rather it was a means to answer the second research question: How prevalence is the use of indigenous Ghanaian justice seeking medium? The cross –sectional study was used because of it is cheapness and less time consuming in gathering data to answer that research question. The cross-sectional study could provide data in prevalence but there other research questions on how and why, which needed qualitative data to answer. There are other research questions on how and why the indigenous justice seeking system is prevalent, which needs qualitative data to answer.

Since data was needed on the lived experiences of the people selected, the phenomenological approach within the approaches of the qualitative stream. The phenomenological study was adopted because the study wanted to know the people’s experiences and the use of imprecation to understand the reasons behind their experiences. This also helped us to make an informed evaluation on the perceptions people have on the existing electoral laws at various levels of politics and the use of imprecation in politicking in Ghana. Moreover, phenomenology made it possible to make an unbiased vivid description of the ritual of imprecation and why it is presently practiced in the study area.

Study Area

The Ashanti Region of Ghana specifically Kumasi metropolis was the study area of the research. This area was chosen for the research because of the existing indigenous structures for arbitration on cases of imprecations in Ashanti Region. Also, the court of the Asante queen mother, (*Asantehemaa*)

which is known for the purpose adjudicating and revocation of imprecation is located here. Another structure is an institution in Asante called *Nsumankwaa* with its own chief called *Nsumankwaahene* whose prime purposive is the personal spiritual protection of an Asante's chief. This institution also settles issues on imprecation. Moreover, newspapers reportage indicates the phenomenon of the use of imprecations to be nationwide but it is very much concentrated in the Ashanti Region.

Sampling

Two types of sampling techniques were used. For the quantitative data, multistage sampling was used and for the qualitative data, the non-probability sampling specifically the purposive was resorted to.

Non-Probability Sampling

In all, eighteen (18) people were selected purposively. The criteria for selecting them were their knowledge of the internal politics of the two major political parties in Ghana NPP and NDC; their knowledge of the customs and traditions of the Asante in relation to imprecations and those who had directly or indirectly been involved with the use of imprecation in the last two national elections in Ghana.

Consequently, eight (8) executives of the two parties at the local and regional levels were chosen for interviews. Additional, two (2) members of each the two major political parties who were accused to have used imprecation for political purposes during elections were selected with assistance of local party members. Three (3) caretakers of the Antoa Nyamaa shrine (*bosomfo*) and one (1) elder were also chosen. Again, the *Ntaherahene*

and spokesperson of the *Nsumankwaahene* of the Asantehene were also selected. Put together those purposively selected were 18 in number.

Probability Sampling

Multistage sampling was the taking of samples in stages using smaller and smaller sampling units at each stage. Multistage sampling can be a complex form of cluster sampling because it involves dividing the population into groups (clusters). Here, the researcher randomly selects elements of each group.

There were four stages in the data collection. In the first stage of the research, the Asante was purposively selected because of the potent deities (*Nyamaa*) which is mostly invoked by the people. In the second stage, the Kumasi metropolis was selected since the *Asantehene's* palace is located there. Simple random sampling was used in the third stage to select three old towns which includes Manhyia, Suame, and Bantama because these are old towns which is believed to have much natives of the indigenes. In the fourth and last stage, simple random sampling was used to elect respondents for the study base on their knowledge of imprecation.

Data Collection Instruments

Semi-structured interview guides, observations and questionnaires were the main instruments used for collecting data.

Interviews

The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide in interviewing respondents. This interview guide was designed to enable the researcher to probe areas based on the interviewees' answers and also ask supplementary questions for clarifications. The response of the interviewees was a recorded

for transcribing and analysis. The interview method was used to help the interviewer judge the non-verbal behaviors (such as gestures) of the respondents. The interview guide ensures in-depth collection of information in systematic manner from interviewees.

Observation

The study also used observation as data collection tool. The court of the queen of the Asante Kingdom (*Asantehemaa*) where cases of imprecation are settled among the Asante and other societies who swear allegiance to the King (*Asantehene*) and the palace of the Nsumankwaahene were visited for observation. The *Antoa Nyamaa* shrine was visited twice to observe how matters of imprecation are settled and the process of averting the consequences of an imprecation. Upon these visitations, a notepad was used to record all observances since video footage were not allowed. Observation method was used to enable the researcher to interact and gain rich picture of the participants in their natural environment which allows a better understanding of the processes, culture and the people under study.

Questionnaire

Data for the survey were gathered via questionnaires. This is a list of inquiries used to learn more about respondents' attitudes, experiences, or opinions. The response of the respondent was used to determine how much the phenomena imprecation is known about and how common it is. Also, the questionnaire allowed for a wide range of responses in the respondents' own words, since it was an open-ended questionnaire.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study relied on both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data measured respondents' attitudes, behaviors and opinions with variables to support or reject a premise. By modifying existing statistical data using computer methods, it places an emphasis on objective measurement and the statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data gathered through surveys, questionnaires, and polls (Creswell, 2003). SPSS was the statistical tool used to interpret the results.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

In qualitative data analysis, patterns and themes in text documents are found, examined, and interpreted to see how they relate to the research topics at hand. Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) suggests steps or process in analyzing qualitative data which include;

- i. Transcribing: First, data which were recorded were listened to several times, then all information were written. This written information was read and re-read to get a clear meaning of the text. Then afterwards, data was organized by questions to look across all respondents and their answers.
- ii. Coding: Data was categorized by putting shorthand codes made up of a few characters, phrases, or figures next to the themes and concepts that were discovered.
- iii. Sorting: Once categories and label data are defined, grouping data which involves sort form of cutting and sorting was done. This process involved selecting sections of data and putting them together

- iv. Looking for patterns and relationship: As data was sorted either by questions or case, it begins to form similar patterns and connections. Important relations of the themes were assessed and variations which were important were highlighted to analyse.
- v. Interpretation and bringing it all together: Themes and connections were used to explain the finding by attaching meaning and significance to the data. The research examines data-based inference using explanatory and analytical methodologies.

Literature Review

This section would summarize and evaluate related studies or literature which would be relevant and would aid this research. These studies will be grouped into 4 themes namely: Concept of imprecation, worldview, political activities in Ghana and electoral disputes.

Concept of Imprecation

Imprecation is a worldwide practice, rooted in various cultures, present in all major faiths, and prevalent in practically all historical communities. Imprecation has been used over the years by either group of persons or individuals in diverse situations. An "imprecation" is defined as a call for judgment, misfortune, or a curse directed at one's adversary (Laney, 1981). Imprecation is the invocation of magical or supernatural powers with the intention of harming or causing calamities or adversity to a victim. (Tweneboah, 2014). With imprecation, certain spirits may be invoked and subsequently directed to harm the enemy (Raymond, 1960). To Agyekum (1999), imprecation is also seen as an invocation involving the use of magical and supernatural powers to hurt one's addressee. This is usually associated

with supernatural abilities that people regard as precious and powerful. Imprecations are often defined as a curse prayer intended to bring bad luck to someone else (Wenkel, 2008). The use of imprecation is abundant in the Bible especially in the book of Psalm which has been commonly classified by some scholars as imprecatory Psalms. "Appeals for God to pour out His wrath on the psalmist's enemies" are found in the majority of these psalms. Hawkins (1992) contends that imprecatory psalms are screams for judgment or appeals to Yahweh to carry out His judgment on those who would curse the nation according to the Abrahamic covenant's provisions. Imprecation victims are sometimes thought to suffer from a variety of spiritual ailments, such as unexplained illness - enlarged stomachs, swollen legs, abrupt seizures, mental illnesses, loss of farm produce and cattle, and any unexpected death (Agyekum, 1999).

The term curses seem to have similar definition and function as imprecations. For instances, King (1976) describes curses as words spoken or an appeal made tacitly or overtly to gods and spirits (including bad spirits and ancestral spirits) to witness a person's wrongdoing and to impose punishment on the wrongdoer by way of death, sickness, or some other disaster. Curses were spoken, enacted, and engraved by human practitioners, yet they were imbued with the force of the divine realm, according to Ramos (2015). According to Kitz (2007), the ultimate objective of a curse among ancient Near Easterners is to incite supernatural fury by requesting the maledictions of deities to intervene in a situation that is believed to be beyond mortal control or to cause harm to a person, place, or thing. From the speaker's point of view, he or she wants to profit from the deity's pain inflicted on a foe, whether it be

an object or a fellow human person. As a result, many curses are seen as blessings by the speakers. Kitz continues to argue that all curses have similar features irrespective of the culture of the people. Every curse aims at seeking divine judgment, arouses the wrath of divinities, and separates the ‘adversary’ from deities, society, and life. Segregation is the primary effect of all executed imprecations though it occurs on several levels; the ultimate goal of all curses is separation from life.

Among the people of ancient Israel, Anderson (1998) notes that, some curse brings about sleeplessness, health problems, weariness, a lack of offspring, blindness, the loss of spouses to the enemy, and a number of other catastrophes act as potent deterrents to potential treaty violations. In a similar vein, a Chaffart (2016) note that among the Kenyans of Africa curses can express themselves in a variety of ways. Persistent difficulties with regards to finances, economic instability, chronic diseases, unusual deaths, recurrent accidents or injuries, recurrent conflict, recurrent suicides in the same household, chronic mental anguish, sickly children, recurrent failures in business, infertility, and recurrent miscarriages are just a few of the common manifestations. This means not all curses result in the separation of life or death but tragedies which would make an offender’s life unbearable.

But Fox (1919) has a different idea altogether and is of the view that, if a curse would ‘work’, the reason on which it rests should be true. Fox argues that the primitive man believes that a name is not merely a conventional label to identify an individual but the name is the individual himself or herself. Thus, in speech or writing of a person's name coupled with a wish will bring about an inevitably farewell or fare ill. In the same way, if an

essential jot, alphabet, or title is omitted consciously or unconsciously, the curse will be annulled. Fox again reveals that the Romans used to curse as a weapon against their foes. Often after victories in battle, curses were invoked on the land of the enemies to make the site unfit for human habitation.

In examining the Nuer community, Evans-Pritchard (1949) discovered that the Nuer think that a person's curse is effective if they have been harmed. If people curse without reason, the curses will not damage those who were cursed, but will either be ineffective or inflict harm to the speakers. Some curses are regarded by the Nuers as weightier than others, especially the kind of curse by reference to a relationship one has with the person. For instance, the curse of a parent, maternal uncle, clan head or chief, and the aged is very serious as compared to others of the society. A stretch of poor luck is sometimes attributed by the Nuer to a relative's curse. Relatives, particularly mothers and fathers, may curse their son for neglecting them during their old age. As a result, the Nuer describe a curse as a sense of injustice crying out for vengeance, and the only way to stop the effects of a curse is to give a sacrifice to God and, if possible, to make recompense to the person who has been wronged.

Mostly in cases where crimes are committed secretly with no accuser, justice through the law might fail if the law is not properly enacted. In such cases, spiritual agencies are consulted through imprecation to take care of the situation (Assmann, 1992). While laws and curses are both ways of seeking justice, and preventing damage by threatening potential evildoers with punishment, Assmann claims that the differences lie in the fact that in one case, punishment is to be enforced by a social institution, while in the other,

punishment is to be enforced by divine agents. The law safeguards social order and curses safeguard the law. Curses continue to conservatively lead, guard, inspire fear and influence Africans in their socio-cultural and religious lives, indicating something positive that brings value not only to one's life as a person but also to the community (Wachege, 2003).

While Africans acknowledge the reality and potency of imprecation, people of the West in modern times discount the power of curses, dismissing them as mere fiction. Imprecation in foreign societies would be used in the ancient era because contemporarily the term has been associated with mere insults making it lose its root meaning. From the description of curses or imprecations by writers the phenomenon does not only seem to be an act of retaliation, vengeance and sacrifice of a life to a deity but also a form of prayer (communicating between a believer and his object of worship) why the deity in question answers the wish of the believer whether good or evil. Since from scholarly perspectives curses and imprecation have the same description and functions, one can argue that both terms are synonymous and thus have been used interchangeably to describe specific acts over the years. Hence in this write-up, the terms imprecation and curse would be used synonymously or interchangeably to refer to the same phenomenon. Literatures were reviewed on imprecation/curses because it is the subject matter of the whole study and hence its general understanding needed to be grasped in order to lay a good foundation for the reader.

Worldview

According to Rusbult (2015), a worldview is a psychological model of reality, a framework of ideologies about the globe, humanity, and existence,

which refers to our basic set of values, system of belief, or way of thinking. A worldview can simply be defined as a cognitive orientation of an individual or society, consisting of their knowledge, point of view, and perception about the nature of reality. This includes their core values, beliefs, and ethics that are deeply rooted in their way of life (Olumbe, 2007). It reflects how one would answer all the questions of human existence and how the universe and everything that exist within it. Occurrence in the world makes humans reflect and ask various questions about what happens. People have different perspectives on things, and their perspectives are influenced by their cultural ideas, ideals, and values, which may differ from one group to the next. A worldview is an idea of how things are and should be, influences behaviour and gives the environment purpose (Grim, 2001).

Worldviews have been categorized in several ways but the two-broad types are the religious worldview (theism) and secular worldview (atheism). A secular worldview denies the existences of the transcendent. Their view is that, reality is made up entirely of physical particles of nature. Secular worldviews are rooted in science, philosophical naturalism and humanist ethics instead of relying on faith (Stenmark, 2020). On the other hand, religious worldview affirms that, reality has a transcendent, divine or spiritual dimension and their importances reflects on how one understands the world and live. Religious worldviews are not only expressed in beliefs but also in narratives and symbols (Ward, 2008). Consistent with the famous Smart theories on worldview, the supernatural dimension strongly influences a person and forms a deep part of human consciousness since the supernatural is equivalent to power which has control of the physical (1995). Hence whether

religious or secular, worldview underpins an individual's beliefs which goes a long way to determine one's behaviour, and impact on people's values, attitudes, and opinions, as well as their thoughts, assessments, and behaviours, in addition to explaining reality and their position and purpose in life.

Baggett (2020) explains that people's values, norms and actions, whether on the polling booth, on the job, or at home are an outgrowth of a supernatural they hold at the centre of their being. Worldview has the power to affect individual's everyday decision which turns to affect how they act politically, socially and economically. For instance, Weir (2018) is of the view that Hitler's racial worldview was the drive shaft into many of his ideologies and other parties in the country. Weir notes that, Hitler's worldview (racial hierarchy) emanated from the society in which he lived; a mixture of his religious background and the German culture wars in the twentieth century. Thus, even though there was a distinction between the worldview and political engagement, it was his inner beliefs and core values that underpinned his political actions.

Increased knowledge, new experiences, and interaction with other cultures can all have an impact on a person's worldview. The dilemma is whether it is possible to speak of a "unique worldview" that is resistant to change. Hart's (2010) study of Indigenous worldviews provides some insight into the aforesaid question. According to Hart, Eurocentric thinking has dominated the world to the point where "worldviews that differ from Eurocentric thought are relegated to the periphery if they are acknowledged at all". Hart (2010) contends that one can still speak of a unitary worldview in spite of external influences. Stenmark (2020) in the same vein notes that,

worldview is not something that can easily or frequently change. Rather it is something that is part of one's cultural inheritance and social upbringing.

These claims by Hart (2010) and Stenmark (2020) are evident in majority of African tribes who have interacted with 'foreign forces' like Western faiths and education may have been impacted in some way. In addition, Ghana's colonial history and the accompanying influences of Western faiths and education (which are grounded in Western worldviews) undoubtedly may have influenced the worldview of native tribes. This implies that, prior to their interaction with colonialism; such tribes' worldview would not have been the same as it is now. If this is correct, can we still speak of an Asante worldview despite the presence of Western education and religions?

Almost every day we come across, through media instances which demonstrate that various individuals, groups and institutions still hold on consciously or unconsciously to the values and beliefs either religious or secular. Whether it is the legislative process in a particular country, political violence in a certain society or voting behaviour of a specific group or community, worldview evidently plays an essential role. Numerous protests in most developing countries against public policies such as abortion and same sex marriage have been rejected due to the society's values and beliefs (worldview). This discussion explores the ways by which worldview of a society shapes political behaviours of citizens in a nation. Readers will be presented information regarding the worldview of the Asante (religious perception) and how the beliefs affect their political lives. The concept of worldview is important to this study because it will enlighten the researcher on why the most Asante political actors who are no longer adherents of the

traditional religion would still prefer the deities to administer justice instead of human leaders with their perception that adjudication of cases is handled fairly in the courts of divinities than that of men.

Political Activities in Ghana

Political activities refer to actions conducted by individuals with the hope of influencing the government or attempts to shape government policy in favourable ways (policy making, elections, political parties, government officials and government actions) (Hillman et al, 2004). This implies an active role in politics which includes campaigning for or against candidates in partisan elections, organizing and participation in political rallies, working to register voters signing a petition and lobbying for a political cause. Verba et al (1993) describes political activities as actions that intends or has the consequence of affecting government action directly or indirectly or any actions taken by citizens directed towards influencing some political outcome. Participating in electoral processes involves much more than just voting.

The act of speaking out on political matters, the ability to take part in conducts of public affairs and also campaign for a candidate whether privately or publicly is known as a political participation activity. It is through these means and other different ways citizens express their opinions about the happenings in their country and how it's been governed Uhlener (2015). Through participating in political activities citizens can influence how elected representatives create, and implement political, economic and social policies.

There are components of political activity, first, there should be an action with citizen part taking and these actions should aim at influencing people in power and in their policies that concerns public issues. Verba and

Nie (1987) distinguish four types of political activity; this includes voting, campaign activity, citizen- initiated contacts and cooperative contacts. Party et al (1992) on the other hand suggest six types of political activities; electoral participation, party activities (party membership and donating money to party), protest activities as participating in strikes and demonstrations, contacts activities (contacting political organization, public officials politician) and consumer consumption (political consumption, signing petitions, and boycotting).

In recent development, modern technologies such as social media have led to a renewed type of political participatory activities. Salovaara (2015) asserts that the new media technologies are causing significant changes in citizens' experience. In this new definition, any online or offline action by a citizen which is done in an attempt to influence certain policies or political institution either positively or negatively is referred to as participating in a political activity. Thus if any one attends a political rally or contacts people in power through online platforms regarding a public matter, it must be considered a political activity because the act intends to influence an outcome of a political institution. But liking or sharing online political post to friends on social media is can be termed as a civic engagement rather than a political action since there is no direct intention of influencing outcomes of political institution. Participating in political activities by the citizens of Ghana gives clear evidence of successful democratic governance in the country where Ghanaians access far larger variety of freedoms and rights, including a freedom of speech, to join any political organization and free independent media that holds the government responsible on behalf of the people.

There are various way citizens participate in political activities both formally and informally with the aim of influencing the actions of government. These formal ways of participating in political activities could be peaceful demonstrations, protests, and phone-in into mass media (FM/television) discussions whiles the informal way may include video of threat, insults and curses against people in power to show their disapproval to a government policy or to address a political matter. Political activities are important to his study because it is amidst expressing one's rights through participating in political actions those misunderstandings, argument and sometimes conflicts which bring about imprecations arise.

Electoral Disputes and its Resolution

Most African elections in recent years have been marred by post-election disputes that have had terrible effects on the populace. Ghana is one of these countries, along with others like Kenya, Ivory Coast, and Zimbabwe (Adams and Asante, 2020). The issue, however, is that the alleged defects and anomalies in the electoral process cast doubt on the validity of the results.

Among other things, there have been concerns about inflated voter rolls, over-voting, and tampering with election results (Omotola 2010). Non-acceptance of electoral results is manifested in a variety of ways, from outrage, protest, and demonstrations like the old ladies of Nigeria staging a naked-breast protest and a sex strike, to the use of violence that occasionally results in civil wars. Others are using the courts or other forms of alternative dispute resolution which are already in place for electoral justice remedies. As a result, post-election dispute settlement becomes a crucial component of the

electoral process and it is worthy of serious consideration. Existing literature has not given it the necessary attention, nevertheless.

Election-related disputes refer to any violent or non-violent expression of dissatisfaction by some or all of the candidates for an election with all or part of the electoral process (Mietzner, 2010). Electoral disputes come about mostly when the EC delays in declaring who won, electorate suspects electoral malpractices, malfeasance and irregularities leading to victory of an opponent. Also, when there is non-compliance with the electoral laws by EC officials, the status of candidates, that is, whether they are qualified or not to contest in an election, misconducts of EC officials and temporal staffs such as polling agents and security personnel's (Adams and Asante, 2020).

Due to the fact that election results are initially revealed at the constituency level before being forwarded to the central electoral commission in the capital, political parties and the media are typically able to create their own projections. (Ichino & Nathan, 2010). This leads to the refusal to concede defeat either by a presidential or parliamentary candidate and such issues are brought before the court to be resolve in other to maintain peace in the country since constitutionally, all political conflicts must be resolved within specific laws, procedures and institution of the state. Through a variety of processes, including the courts, administrative authorities, and alternative dispute resolution bodies, the election laws allow for the resolution of disputes arising from complaints and appeals related to any component of the electoral process (Fall et al, 2011).

Among these, judicial decision-making is regarded as essential to preserving electoral justice. However, there have been concerns expressed

regarding the resolution of some of these election issues by the courts. Election disputes are not usually settled quickly, and the courts' rulings on these issues are occasionally overruled by events (Nkansah, 2017). In other circumstances, there is also the impression of judicial bias. In a similar vein, the overwhelming volume of election petitions burdens the judiciary and clogs the courts. There are several instances of this, most notably in regard to parliamentary and other elections other from presidential ones. African courts have rendered decisions on cases involving election irregularities and fraud and have even overturned EC decisions by annulling results, requesting replays, and declaring losers as winners and winners as losers (Ubanyionwu, 2011).

Despite the sense of judicial prejudice, it should be remembered that election disputes are politically driven and that the opposing party and its followers are likely to view judicial rulings on them with suspicion and criticism regardless of the outcome (Fall et al. 2011). Participants in the opposition who have complaints may not have been heard because of this important stakeholder's stance. Owing to this important stakeholder's position, those in the opposing party who have complaints may be afraid to go to court for redress for fear that fairness may not be done.

Once more, the transitioning process is uncertain when electoral issues take too long to be resolved. As a result, if a contested position is being litigated in court, it causes uncertainty for both the candidate who was proclaimed the winner by the election results and the candidate who is contesting the stated result (Nkansah, 2017). However, electoral adjudication offers a chance to assess the electoral process. In fact, it makes it possible to

spot irregularities and offers the chance for helpful comments that will improve subsequent electoral procedures.

In conclusion, researcher argues that the domination and semi-autonomous power of executive, weakens the independency of institutions from horizontal accountability (judiciary, national elections committee, and anti-corruption committees) which compels some citizens have expressed their preferences and sentiments by imprecating in order to curb the problem of transparency within the electoral process as well as serve as a check to these institutions. Filling the research gap in this area is important because as stakeholders have not noticed that it is as a result of the weakness (mistrust and lack of transparency) in the electoral disputes resolutions that some citizens resort to *duabɔ*.

Though in some African societies, imprecation has dwindled, we shouldn't overstate how much it has declined or assume that it no longer exists. A critical look at the issue of imprecation especially from the perspective of the West shows that it was practiced in the pre-scientific era where social institutions and justice systems were not comprehensible. This is quite different as compared to the happenings in Ghana. The reason has been that, in contemporary Ghana, the use of imprecation is not only manifesting in religious institutions or social institutions but also in political discourse, especially during elections.

Literature was reviewed on topics such as worldview in other the fully grasp the perception of Ghanaians (Asante) as to their preference in sanctioning culprits to the supernatural rather than physical law implementers. The concept of imprecation was looked at from the broader perspective and

narrowed to the people of Asante in order to understand the nature of the phenomenon and the various ways it has been used in other societies as well. Also, the role of some selected organs and stakeholders of government which breeds manipulation leading to mistrust of officials were reviewed. Lastly, electoral disputes resolution was reviewed to bring out its weakness and challenges that encourage citizens to employ imprecation instead of laid down mechanisms.

Theoretical Framework

Theories are formulated to explain, predict and aid in understanding cases or phenomena. A construct that underpins a theory and is pertinent to a study is known as a theoretical framework. It presents and describes the reasoning behind why the understudied research topic exists (Abend, 2008).

Performativity theory was employed in this study. J.L.Austin, a philosopher of language and pioneer in speech-act research, coined the term performativity in a series of lectures at Harvard University in 1955 (Felman, 1983). The performative theory deals with statements that do not just describe an action but perform a designated function. In other words, it does more than simply educate; it does an act or performs a performance through the process of enunciation. Language can function as a tool for social action as well as a way of expressing reality, and this power to create impact in the society is known as performativity (Cavanaugh, 2015). As a result, uttering a performative sentence is more than just speaking something; it is also doing something. When asked, "Do you take this guy to be your lawfully wedded husband?" at a wedding ceremony, speaking the words "I do" is not simply

describing a circumstance or reporting on the wedding; rather, it is doing what you are saying, participating in a marriage (Austin, 1962).

In the same vein, Brubaker (2013) notes that, in America's 2000, 2004, 2008 presidential debates, language in rhetoric and religious context were used. In a broad sense, the consistent use of language within a religious context is appropriate to be called a religious language. These candidates used religious languages such as apocalyptic judgment and fear metaphor to prey on Christians and unconsciously sway undecided votes. This is no different from what has been happening in Ghanaian elections since 1992. Dovo, (2006) reveals that, the psychology of Ghanaian electorates is probably based on religious traditions. This is because especially in 1992 and 1996 religious language were used in campaigning in order to sway the public. Most electorates voted for candidates on the tickets of a candidate identifying himself with a particular church and describing himself as either a 'born-again God-fearing man or a god loving man'.

In 2012, candidates' speeches were full of religious innuendos with campaign songs indicating that the candidate is chosen by God to lead the country. For instance, the NPP in 2012 and 2016 used religious phrases such as 'the battle is the Lord's' to influence the votes of Christians. Mostly politician frequently make religious appeals and these appeals are persuasive mechanisms since religious languages can affect political attitudes through implicit processes. It may influence citizens without their awareness because religious attachments are forced in the lives of many people. Thus, since political actors have seen the influence of religious language on citizens and how it implicitly affects attitudes and behavioural implications in the

Ghanaian political realms one can argue that it might be in this same vein that other chooses religious (traditional) means to address certain grievances in the political space.

This theory has been employed for this study because, a critical look at the phenomenon *duabɔ* shows that, in the invocation, the statements are uttered which may or may not be accompanied by symbolic gestures, are not mere utterances but performs functions that has a certain impact on the individual(s) it is uttered to/ against. Also, if certain religious languages especially in campaigning are able to influence a voter behaviour consciously or unconsciously on a polling booth into choosing a perceived right candidate, then the utterances in imprecation is also potent to serve as a check mechanism and also deliver justice.

Electoral Justice

There are many studies about the relationship between seats and votes in a given electoral constituency. In fact, the emphasis on electoral justice gave rise to proportional representation systems in the mid-nineteenth century. Increasing dissatisfaction with plurality systems as being unfair to especially small parties led to the idea of proportional representation which aims at greater exactness according to electoral results.

Electoral justice is one of the emerging theories for electoral conflict settlement and serves as the study's conceptual framework. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2010) defined electoral justice as the means, measures, and mechanisms incorporated into an electoral system to either prevent irregularities and, by extension, electoral disputes, or to lessen their impact and, in the event that they do occur, to

resolve them and punish offenders. The means and procedures of an electoral justice system include those for ensuring that every step of the voting process is conducted in conformity with the act (the law, civil procedure code international agreements, and all other requirements), also for safeguarding or restoring the satisfaction of electoral rights, and giving people who believe their electoral autonomy have been infringed the power to make a complaint, get audience and receive compensation" (Appiah-Thompson & Jose 2021).

An electoral justice system, also known as an electoral dispute resolution system, is made up of appeals through which any electoral action or procedure can be legally contested. This type of system strives to ensure that elections are regularly held and are conducted in accordance with the law. Legal adjustments of any error or improper electoral action are necessary for valid elections (Nkansah, 2017). This can be categorized into formal systems, whose decisions are intended to fix irregularities, punitive systems, whose decisions are intended to penalize offenders, or alternative dispute resolution methods, which parties to an election dispute may use to settle their differences amicably. A constitutional court, a division of regular courts, specialized electoral courts, or administrative courts are all examples of electoral justice mechanisms (IDEA 2010).

Elections are frequently held and carried out in conformity with the law under this kind of system. Valid elections must be corrected legally if there is any error or improper electoral action (Nkansah, 2017). This can be divided into formal systems, whose decisions are meant to correct irregularities, punitive systems, whose decisions are meant to punish offenders, or alternative dispute resolution techniques, which parties to an election dispute

may utilize to settle their issues amicably. An electoral justice system is meant to "prevent and identify abnormalities in elections and to offer the tools and ways to fix those irregularities and to punish the culprit" (IDEA 2010). (Akuamoah, 2017). It is the foundation of democracy insofar as it safeguards "the fundamental role in the continuing process of democratization and catalyzes the change from the use of violence as a method of resolving political problems to the employment of legitimate measures to arrive at a fair resolution" (IDEA 2010). Even if it is shaped and impacted by the history, politics, laws, and cultures of a particular country, an electoral justice system must conform with or adhere to certain principles in order to be efficient and effective. These electoral justice principles integrity, participation, lawfulness, professionalism, independence, timelessness, transparency, non-violence, and acceptance are intended to ensure that elections are conducted fairly and in accordance with citizens' electoral rights.

Electoral justice seeks to remind readers that, there are legal laid down measures and institutions to deal with misconducts and address issues that may arise during the electoral process so the citizen will not be pocket lawyers by taken matters into their own hands. But since, these are human institution, they are not devoid of challenges and criticisms. Thus, the question is posed again, if the law checks humans, then who or what checks the law when it is failing?

Organization of the Study

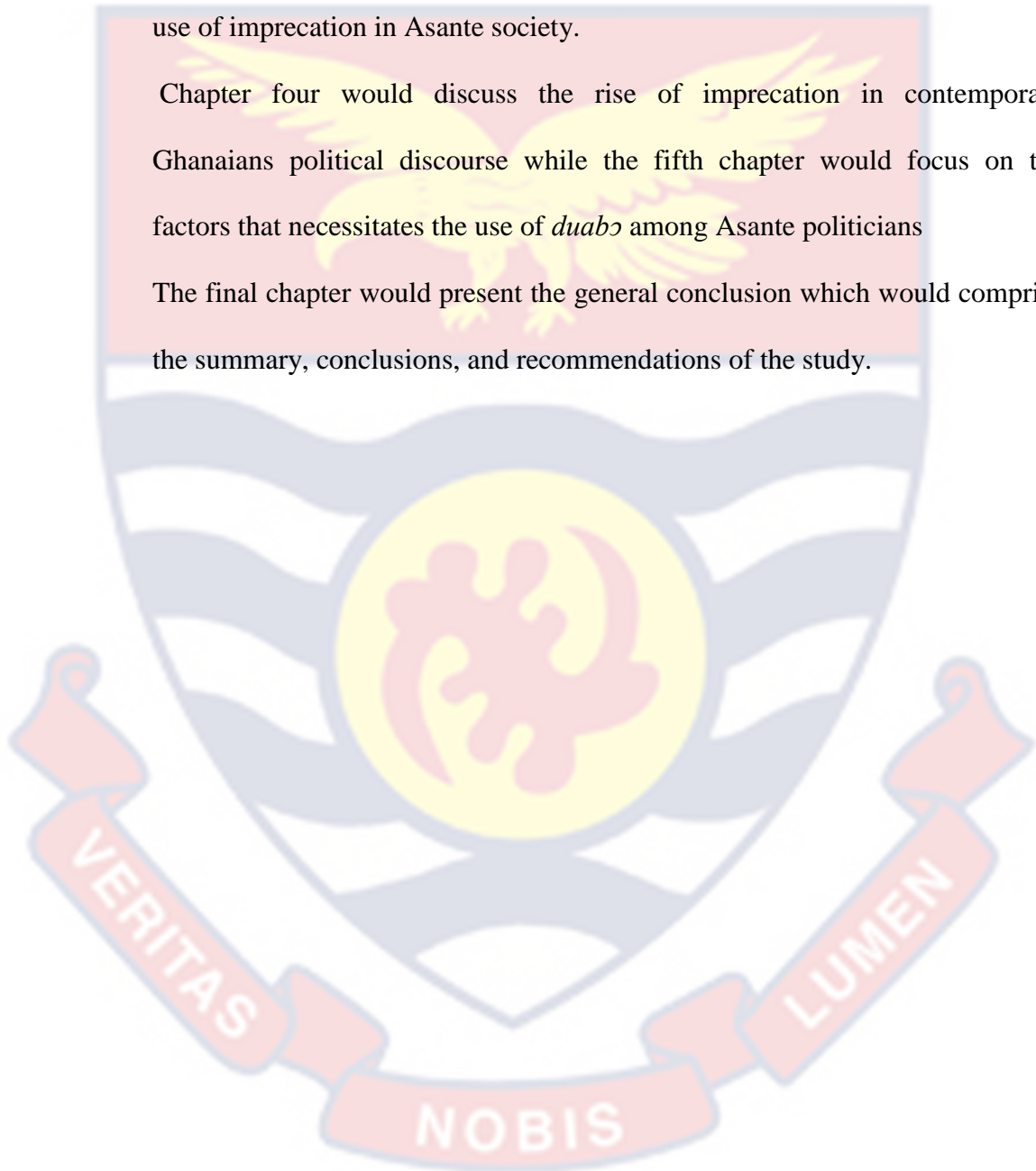
The research would consist of six chapters. The first chapter would deal with the general introduction. This would include the background to the study, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research objectives,

research question, significance of the study, methodology, and literature review.

Chapter two focused on the nature of imprecation among other foreign societies. The third chapter would examine the worldview of Asante and the use of imprecation in Asante society.

Chapter four would discuss the rise of imprecation in contemporary Ghanaian political discourse while the fifth chapter would focus on the factors that necessitate the use of *duabɔ* among Asante politicians.

The final chapter would present the general conclusion which would comprise the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.



CHAPTER TWO

THE NATURE OF IMPRECATION IN FOREIGN SOCIETY

Introduction

This chapter seeks to examine the nature of the phenomenon imprecation in general as to how scholars from various backgrounds and diverse fields of study have discussed it. The chapter also intends to look at the phenomenon from the perspective of foreign societies such as some ancient near eastern societies (Israel and Egypt), ancient Ireland, India, and Arab societies. The study is looking at the phenomenon in ancient time because contemporarily, most foreign societies have reduced the meaning of curse to be mere insult or a scornful abuse. Thus, for the researcher to come to a full understanding of the nature of imprecation and also be enlightened on whether or not the phenomenon plays similar or diverse roles in these various societies mentioned above, ancient societies must be studied.

Imprecations among Ancient near Easterners

Curses as studied by students of folklore and primitive religion dates back to the Neolithic period through to the civilization of the Near Easterners and later adopted by the ancients Greeks (Fraser, 1922). Curses were an important aspect of ancient Near Eastern legal, political, and religious life, as evidenced by the Hebrew Bible, Neo-Assyrian treaties, and Northwest Semitic inscriptions, among other ancient literature (Quick, 2020). Little (2007) is of the view that in ancient times, curses were mostly uttered by people on top of the religious hierarchy because the license bestowed upon them to bless well-wishers was the same authority; they had to curse transgressors such as enemies, sinners, heretics, and competing deities. Fraser (1922) argues that,

ancient curses were fearful acts with possibilities of dangerous results against whom it is directed if compared to modern curses which only constitutes an unreasonable outpouring of anger under stress or irritation.

Most scholars who studied the Ancient Easterners including Israel noted that curses were in full usage in almost every aspect of their life from simple basic affairs to complex relations with other societies. For instance, curses were administered as a threat, to enforce the signing of treaty documents and also to prevent a breach of the treaty by either party (Fraser, Kitz and Anderson 1998). Similarly, Assmann (1992) agrees by noting that, imprecation was a central instrument in ancient foreign policies. Almost all contracts had to be sealed with a sacred conditional curse and breaking it entailed consequences of the most terrible kind, which were explicitly depicted in the form of maledictions. Thompson (1964) presents some written curses found in an ancient document of the Hittites treaty which ends with a call of divine witness and curse. It quotes;

The storm-god of heaven, the sun-goddesses of Arinna, mount Nanni and mount Hazzi, gods, and goddesses of Hatti, the land, moon, and great sea..., let all these be the witness of this treaty that should Duppi-Tessub dishonour these words of the treaty, may all the gods mentioned destroy Duppi-Tessub together with his people, wives, sons, grandsons, family lands and all he owns

Curses were frequently founded on a belief in a transcendental principle of justice that masked the judicial system's flaws. Anderson (1998) argues that one cannot ignore the various functions of curses in the Near Eastern culture which has the literature of the Hebrew Bible as evidence. Curses were used as

a tool for social control, a means of punishing offenders which made the people fear going contrary to social norms. Curses also served as a deterrent and were even more efficient if it was stated in a form of a divine curse signifying that it is from Yahweh (Deuteronomy 27:15-26, 28). This helped to prevent behaviors that were harmful to an individual and society as a whole. Furthermore, curses were avenues through which social values were conveyed from one generation to another. Anderson goes on to argue that usually in a lawsuit when the arm of the law is limited curses were resorted to especially when criminals were unknown and the truth is undetermined. Among the near easterners, curses were aroused in a form of an oath to find the guilty.

In Numbers 5:23, for example curses were written and washed into a bowl of water by a priest. The water is then given to the woman suspected of adultery to drink. If she is guilty the “dranked” curse will make her body swell but if innocent, nothing would happen. From the above, one can comprehend that curse was not utterances or actions that were disregarded but rather it was generally accepted to be of great essence to ancient near easterners. Definitions of curses may vary broadly from one discipline to another. From the anthropological perspective, curses were seen as part of magical phenomena such as witchcraft, divination, and occultism among others. Curses could explain the causes of misfortune upon the life of an individual or society. Curses could also control societal behaviors as well as serving as a means of transmitting values from one generation to the other. Curses were used to discern guilty parties, discover the truth, and punish offenders. Curses could serve as a judge, jury, and executioner.

The writings of Anderson seem to have focused solely on the positive function of curses and how it was been used in curbing the behaviors of the near easterners as though curses did not have any negative effects on the lives of the people. Meanwhile, the contagious nature of some curses can affect the innocent (whole family, society, and even the next generation). Anderson's work may have perhaps focused on only the positive aspects of curses in order to prove to other biblical scholars who have written extensively on the negative aspects that, curses could and have contributed essentially to the lives of ancient easterners.

Among the Israelites, Youngblood (2011) suggests that imprecation or curses played a significant role in their society because the curse was woven into the very fabric of the covenant that defines Israel's relationship with God. Taking into consideration the promise of God to the Israelites, "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you" invites imprecation as an act of faith in the covenant fidelity of God. Any injustice done to Yahweh's covenant people, a people regarded as his ownership, is a violation against him (Simango & Kruger, 2016). Imprecations can then be defined as requests to God to protect his covenant rights through enforcing justice. Broadhurst (2004) goes on to say that by the time of the Mosaic covenant, God had been revealed not only as a loving and faithful God, but also as an angry, jealous, and cursing God. Broadhurst goes on to say that in the Mosaic covenant, which is linked to the Abrahamic covenant, Yahweh promised to bless those who obeyed him and curse those who disobeyed him. Though imprecations are invocations, they can also be considered as a prayer or request to God since it is always in a form of request which is up to God to answer or ignore

(Hawkins 1992). Motyer (1994) also notes that the reason for the widespread and continuous use of imprecation among Israelites is to call God to remedy those injustices which neither individual nor the state is competent to remedy. Since Yahweh had promised the people of Israel that He would fight all their battles and give them victory (Exodus 14:14 NIV). Thus, imprecation is a means where the people of Israel do not take vengeance or justice into their own hands but leave it into the hands of God to fight and bring certain punishment to their enemies.

Colledge (2015) studying the process of cursing in ancient Egypt came out with findings that, curses were usually inscribed on Egyptian monuments, deity temples, and tombs and were always in a form of direct speech to visitors. These temples and tombs mostly contained valuable ornaments and statues which may be stolen or inappropriately used by people who may not know its worth. Egyptian curses usually had no specific targets and mostly started with a phrase such as, “any man or woman who may do evil in this tomb or sell anything in it...” then ends with a curse. Thus, the curse is labelled to any unidentifiable future wrongdoer who would perform any unwanted act is the prospective criminal the curse would work on.

Colledge notes that Egyptian inscribed curses do not always target a wrongdoer but sometimes people in authority who may neglect their responsibility of protecting the tombs. For instance, Colledge observes that tombs had inscription curses such as “any chief, nobleman or august man who will fail to protect this tomb from harm would be subjected to his curse...” Although no physical wrong has been done, neglecting responsibility could lead to an individual been cursed. Thus, rather than

dealing with the wrongdoers, the curser intends to keep the tomb safe and not to seek revenge on others.

Among ancient Egyptians, Colledge argues the three agents were responsible for responding to a curse depending on who was invoked; the king (Pharaoh), animals, and deities. Curses may also range from physical punishments (suffering while alive) and spiritual punishments (denial of the afterlife) where deities would judge the spirits of wrongdoers unfavourably. Also, animals such as crocodiles, hippos in water, snakes, and scorpions of the land may be called upon to devour a wrongdoer.

Imprecations among Iranians

According to Masliya (2001), the term curse has different connotations when translated to many Iran. '*La'nah*', '*massabbah*', '*shattmah*' and '*Fashshar*' has been used synonymously to refer to curse. But the Arabic word which is globally accepted as an official term is *la'an*. Cursing (*la'an*) is defined by Zoltan (2018) as the act of excluding someone from God's grace. By speaking the curse, a person invites God's judgment and potentially, the recipient's eternal damnation. Masliya (2001) further points out that God regularly warns unbelievers, wrongdoers, and infidels to be condemned in the Qur'an. 'God's curse, the curse of angels, and the curse of all mankind is on those who reject the faith and die rejecting it' (Quran 2:161). Thus, though cursing is prohibited by Islamic laws as well as social customs some Muslims still resort to cursing. Hence in some Muslim societies, the subject is of curse and its use has been banned both in social and religious activities. Nevertheless, Floor (2015) notes that, ancient Iranians been Muslims had varieties of words used to denote curses and ranges of function. Although

cursing is a sin among Muslims, an Iranian could pray to God to curse someone mostly infidels or unbelievers.

In Iran, there also existed state-sponsored imprecation where for instance in the year 1501, Shah Esma'il (i), made it obligatory for people to curse those who rejected the primacy of religious leadership of Ali and his descendants. Thus, the cursing of the first three caliphs (Abu Bakr, Uthman, and Omar) and Aisha the prophet's youngest wife became formalized by the state. Thus, after any official occasions, religious meetings, or prayer sessions, Iranians did not thank God without cursing these caliphs. Again, Floor continues that, there was an occasion called Omar-koshan which was celebrated with only one purpose, to curse Omar and symbolically kill and burn him in fire because Omar was a traitor. But in 1555, the Ottomans considered cursing of the early caliphs as offensive and ordered that it be banned. It must be noted that the effectiveness of Persian curses relied on a formula that includes, i) who utters the curse, ii) what situation brought about the act, iii) to who is the invocation, iv) reason for the invocation.

The other form of a curse that was not banned because it is endorsed by the prophet Mohammed was a meeting or event called '*mubahala*'. Though '*mubahala*' is not a curse per se but gathering where curses were invoked in ancient times, it has been contextualized to mean curses in contemporary times. The word '*Mubahala*' comes from the Arabic root '*bahlah*,' which means 'curse.' As a result, the meeting of *al-Mubahala* entails each of the two sides (accuser and accused) invoking Allah's wrath on the other in order to reveal the truth in any material situation. The event of '*mubahala*' (invoking mutual curses) was seen as a way of divine solution and has been revealed to

resolve the conflict that existed between early Muslims and Christians about the nature of Jesus (whether he is divine or man, made with dust) and several theological issues that could not be resolved by negotiations in a town called Najran in the year 10.A.H (al Hasan, 1977; Aldemir, 2011).

Qu'ran 3:61 states, “And should anyone argue with you concerning him, after the knowledge that has come to you.... and call down Allah’s curse upon the liars. They said: “You have been just”. They agreed on a date for ‘*mubahala*’ (mutual imprecation).

According to Mikati (2019), the ‘*mubahala*’ meeting in later years, involved a ritual of invocation, which is reciprocal self-cursing or mutual self-cursing, during which two individuals seek to confirm the accuracy of their position by appealing to God’s curse upon them. Each of the parties invokes the “curse of God” (la‘nat Allāh), a conditional fatal self-curse, with the anticipated outcome being the death and eternal damnation of the liar. Mikati interprets further that, *mubāhala* also operates as an oath; a conditional curse as it involves the resolution of a dispute. The *mubāhala* formula is exceptionally illustrative since it usually consists of an oath along the lines of “I swear that x” followed by the self-curse “God curse me if y.

Nabhani (2003) on the other hand suggests that a meeting of ‘*muhabala*’ is used by Iranians and all other Muslim communities when solving the issue of adultery on the side of women. The issue may mostly be in two forms wherefore one is dependent on the other. The first is in a situation where a husband believes that a child is not his and wants to disown him or her. The second is when a husband intends to divorce his wife on the accounts of infidelity. Nabhani further explains that the disowning of the child should be

followed by imprecation (li'aan). The child will not be disowned from him unless he disclaims it through complete imprecation. If the conditions of the disownment of the child are not fulfilled, then it is not disclaimed and its paternity is ascribed to the husband and all the rules of fatherhood will be binding on him. About infidelity, the Holy Qu'ran states following as sayings from the Prophet (swt):

"And for those who accuse their wives but have no witnesses except themselves, let the testimony of one of them be four testimonies (i.e., testifies four times) by Allah that he is one of those who speak the truth. And the fifth testimony should be the invoking of the Curse of Allah on himself if he is of those who tell a lie against her. But it shall avert the punishment (of stoning to death) from her, if she bears witness four times by Allah, that he (her husband) is telling a lie. And the fifth (testimony) should be that the Wrath of Allah be upon her if he (her husband) speaks the truth". [Qu'ran 24: 6-9]

So, if a man accuses his wife and says to her: "You have committed adultery or I have seen you commit adultery, and he did not bring proof, they would have to invoke a curse upon each other. If he invoked curses upon her and she does not do the same to him then the punishment will be imposed on her as due. Her refusal to invoke curses proves that she has committed adultery and obliges the imposition of the punishment on her (stoning to death). But if she also invokes the curses on herself to prove her innocence, a judge will separate between them (terminate the marriage) and they can never come together again. Despite the general dislike of cursing and imprecations, the Muslim

legal tradition does allow for the use of curses, specifically a “May I be damned if I am lying” self-curse (li‘ān), in cases of accusations of adultery without the requisite four witnesses (Tohidlou 2017). The accuser may resort to “li‘ān” to avoid the requisite punishment of slander (qadhf).

Imprecation in India Societies

Hindu curses, according to Smith (1986), serve a moral didactic purpose, in that they educate people about virtues and vices, provide lessons on the importance of respecting holy beings and the perils of offending them, and provide a fundamental grasp of moral cause and effect. In diverse cultures, Hindu curses are thought to serve a range of purposes, including the negative, such as harassing opponents and excluding unwanted persons (Little, 1987). Cursing has thus been a component of a society's protective measures, warnings or penalties, and linguistic explanations for unexpected illness and death throughout Indian history. Curses play an important role in Hindu epics and subsequent works based on them. In modern studies, Vail (2006), doing an ethnographic study of curses in North Karnataka oral history, points out that curses indeed formed an important part of ethics in ancient North Karnataka society. Curses provided more positive aspects like law enforcement, maintenance of moral discipline, punishment by respected judges, and protection of sacred places. Each of these functions aimed to protect the integrity of sacred beliefs, people, or places. Yet in modern life curses are often disconnected from anything either powerful or good.

Curses have been described as a form of negative speech act, and vows, mantras, prayers, and curses are all regarded to have immense autonomous power once pronounced or "released" in Hindu belief (Vail 2006). Many

curses in Karnataka are verbal, while others are nonverbal and based only on intentions, sentiments, or deeds. The empowered sound in verbal curses is thought to have the capacity to cause occurrences. For example, if rumor mongers make a mistake and unfairly accuse the innocent, Karnataka residents believe that God will punish them (which might even be a curse, according to the principle of analogy). As a result, rather than trying to debunk the rumors, society and family members may choose to remain silent (Vail 2006).

On the other hand, Reddy and Natarajah (2011) studying the Cuppadah district of India describes curses from another perspective. According to them, imprecation among the Cuppadah district was usually in inscriptions. Inscriptions, being one of the earliest types of record-keeping, are one of the most important sources for reconstructing history in our country and around the world. Imprecations ranged from mild warnings to harsh abuses, reflecting the society and societal ideals of the time. The number of such sentences in an inscription can range from one to a half-dozen, and they almost always end with an imprecation.

Ordinarily, imprecatory phrases are placed at the end of the inscriptions. The donors felt compelled to put imprecatory remarks and stanzas pronouncing curses and punishments on those who dared to defy the donation in order to instill dread based on ethical and religious grounds as the grants were unscrupulously squandered. On most occasions, these inscriptions, whether etched on stones or metals to ensure their endurance, served as a manner of officially certifying the endowments. Because the givers wanted their philanthropy to continue as long as the sun and the moon, they included imprecations with their donations or generous deeds to prevent embezzlement.

These instances of curses discussed these scholars above seem to contradict with the doctrines of karma in Hinduism.

Goldman (1978) defines karma as a system of belief that sees the physical, social, and moral condition of an individual as the consequence of an action performed by the individual in the past. This means that karma binds a doer (either good or bad) to an irrevocable fate. Thus naturally, every good action will be rewarded and evils actions will reap a consequence in this life or the next. Curses and karma are frequently mentioned together in Kannada phrases as two possible explanations for painful events (Mitchiner, 1982). Mitchiner continues that, "there are no curses save karma," some say, implying that all curses have karmic consequences (or perhaps that curses do not exist). Either approach places moral blame squarely on the shoulders of the victim, who is the one who has brought his or her curse or trouble upon himself but karma cannot be said to be the same as curse since curse are uttered to the supernatural but karma seem to take a natural effect.

Usharbudh (1972) explains that, before 1500BCE, when the liturgical text that formed the basis of Brahmanical ideology (Vedic period) was introduced, gods were regarded as being capable of punishing, blessing when invoked, as well as liberating people from their transgression. But after the post-Vedic era, the doctrine of karma was raised in India and formed an essential of the Hindi tradition. Yet the doctrine of karma has not successfully erased other Hindi basic beliefs such as rituals, prayers, blessings, and curses which contradicts the theory of karma.

Usharbudh (1972) discusses some contradictions between the concept of karma and other Hindi doctrine of forgiveness. For instance, there are

emphasis made direction towards confession, repentance, and forgiveness. “A man who has committed evil through confusion but later repents by confessing to Brahmins is set free from any dishonour arising from the sin (like a snake shedding old skin)”. Also, offerings and rituals may be performed to counter the effect of sins. Here, all his karma is forgiven.

According to the Karma hypothesis, every action produces an equal or proportionate fruit, either good or bad, which the agent enjoys or suffers in this or the future life. For instance, if someone harms an innocent person and he in turn curses the wrongdoer with some malady, loss, hell, or some other form of misery, it will come to pass either in this life or in the next. In these instances, the curses once uttered acquire a mysterious power of their own. This contradiction between karma and curses or other Hindu doctrines is because India had certain kinds of beliefs doctrines earlier before Vedism had the right amount of doctrinal uniformity to give some sort of cohesion to religious theory and practice (Bhattacharji, 1982). Also, the contradictions could be as a result of diverse belief systems, even though Hinduism is the major religions in India, there are other belief systems and religions whose doctrines may differ.

Imprecation in African Societies

Curses in African communities were real and it was feared no matter the status or gender of an individual. Adamo (2008) suggest that, like ancient Israel, the African society also believed in the existence of both visible and invisible enemies. Africans dealt with the problem of foes and evildoers in a culturally specific fashion. There were a variety of strategies for dealing with visible wicked people, including the use of natural materials and forceful

words for protective and attacking purposes, and imprecatory words were one cultural means of protecting oneself from foes. p'Bitek (1971) notes that, a curse was to be effective only when the person who cursed was right for instance in an argument and the accursed person in the wrong. But such a curse could play double roles. Besides being a penalty to the offender, the curse could play the role of deterrence to the witness, if it is effective.

Also, when a member of the family died from a curse, the other members immediately sought for the sword chief to ask him to take away the curse from the rest of the family for fear that the whole family too would be struck by lightning. The sin of one man visiting the third and fourth generations must be warded off by the sword chief. Again, p'Bitek argues that the people of Central Luo believed that curses affected human beings and the course of events. But despite that, curses were not tools resorted to in the settling of even petty crimes or differences. The curse was instead the last resort that a person turned to, and it drew urgent and immediate attention to a serious social situation.

LeVine & Lloyd (1966) observes that among the indigenous Gusii people of Kenya, in cases of social deviance such as stealing, curses were the major method for religious sanctions. For instance, if a thief was unknown, the use of a curse would make the thief give up himself. Actually, in most cases of such type, a thief would not wait until a curse has been uttered to confess, but rather, the threat of the curse, was by itself, enough to make him confess. LeVine continues that, curses provided an opportunity for a formal settlement of serious social problems and, also used as a form of deterrent punishment which could at times be retributive. This is when all efforts to make an

offender confess had failed. In such a case, the community (or the offended party) had no alternative except to resort to cursing.

Again Miencha (1993) provides similar views using the case study of the Abagusii people of Kenya and emphasizes what curse is and how it is used among the traditional Abagusii people of Kenya. According to him, a curse was used as a form of deterrent punishment to prevent further crimes from occurring. In this community, a curse was generally regarded as the severest form of punishment. No one ever wanted to be cursed and people often made sure that their relatives were not visited with a curse, since the effect of the curse went beyond the criminal himself and encompassed even his relatives. Imprecation was meted out to prevent the criminal and witnesses from committing a crime, making an offender pay compensation to the offended party and punishing for the sake of changing the criminal's character.

Placing a curse is one such supernatural force believed to be possessed by both the homestead head and the clan elders. Miencha goes on to argue that, after colonization, the British introduced their system of laws and punishment to Kenya. Yet not all indigenous institutions and practices were discarded as useless. In fact, among some practices that were tolerated was placing a curse as a tool of punishment in some African communities. This was perhaps due to the realization that in some cases, a curse as a tool of punishment was found to be more effective than the British system of punishment in deterring criminals.

According to Wachege (2003), a curse does not only avenge or punish but conservatively guides, guard, and influence the African's socio-cultural and religious life and adds positive value to not only an individual's life but

also the society. Kombo (2003) elaborates on African curses, explaining that in African tradition, cursing entails the use of words or deeds against an individual or group. Words may be spoken that indicate the disaster one will face as a result of engaging in a specific behaviour or saying certain words. Certain actions, such as a mother baring her breasts to her son in retaliation for whatever the son did, result in a curse that has a detrimental impact on the person cursed. The result of curses can emerge in a variety of ways. Curses may be spoken on selected targets because of anger, envy, greed, jealousy, the use of magic, spiritual strife, or the desire for revenge, according to Edmiston (2010).

The idea behind this belief in the power of words is that a curse is not a mere wish for misfortune on a person or thing but a power that produces tangible results, for in cursing it is believed that a power is released that is effective in determining the destiny of the recipient of the curse. Powerful as curses are believed to be, it is also believed that they function following a specific operating principle.

Some scholars on the other hand have different views altogether. According to Hachanlinga (2017), the invocation of mystical powers to punish an individual is generally known as witchcraft among Africans. This is because the term witchcraft is extensively used to describe all kinds of evil employment of mystical power used in causing harm. Thus, if curses are mystical words or acts believed to carry power and produce tangible results for the recipient then it belongs to the category of witchcraft only that curse can be revoked. Further still, it was believed that curses do not only emanate from the uttering of words or performing rituals. Other curses occurred as a result of

the conduct of an individual that may not be known to the general public but known to the spirits since they (spirits) are invisible and ubiquitous. This explains why most misfortunes among the indigenous people were attributed to a curse of one kind or the other.

Conclusion

Attempts have been made in preceding paragraphs to look at imprecations from the lens of some societies, both ancient and modern, to understand the phenomenon of imprecations. Curses and imprecations were synonymous in nature and had the same functions. Deductions made from the above discussions prove that imprecations or curses were evident in most societies to deal with complex issues even at the national level. Among the near Easterners, imprecation was used as a tool for social control behaviours, as punishments, and also used to threaten opponents to sign treaties. Among the Iranians imprecations were invoked on traitors of their religion and also used to settle issues of infidelity between married couples.

In African societies, imprecation served as a deterrent mechanism when ensured that social vices were minimized and truthfulness was encouraged. It sometimes also served as an oath to prevent future negative occurrences. Among the Hindus, the issue of curses contradicts the doctrine of karma where it is believed that every effect is a consequence of past action in an individual's life and not as a curse. Some writers of Hindu epics concluded that some aspects of Hindu customs that precede the doctrine of Karma still live on and that include blessing and curses.

In all, the structure or element of imprecation may differ from one society to the other yet there are similarities that manifest in the practice,

irrespective of the society. These similarities can be found in the context of its aims in seeking divine justice and bringing punishment upon an offender in a situation by invoking the supernatural to intervene. Thus, imprecation is not peculiar to only African but almost all societies in the world but rather the supernatural entity which is invoked differs from one society to the other. Having discussed the general understanding of imprecation and its uses, the next chapter focuses on the imprecation in the study area.



CHAPTER THREE

THE CONCEPT OF IMPRECATION AMONG THE ASANTE

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the nature of imprecation from the perspective of ancient societies, its role or functions, and how it was used in their day-to-day activities which included their legal, religious and social life. According to the discussions, imprecation was used as a tool for social control behaviours, as punishments, and also used to threaten opponents to sign treaties. Among other societies, imprecations were invoked on traitors of their religion and also used to settle issues of infidelity between married couples. Imprecation served as a deterrent mechanism when ensured that social vices were minimized and truthfulness was encouraged and also served as an oath to prevent future negative occurrences.

This chapter intends to examine the nature of imprecation among the Asante, its role in the socio-cultural life of the people and various reasons why it is used in their day-to-day activities. Hence, the chapter would first look at a brief history of the Asante, their worldview, their understanding of imprecation, the role of imprecation in the past and present lives, its consequences and why it is still used when most Asante are not formally ATR adherents. This will in the long run enlighten the researcher on the perception of politicians in Ashanti region and why they prefer to resort to imprecation in redressing political issues than the legal procedures.

The Asante People of Ghana

According to Busia (1968), etymologically, Asante comes from *Osa* (war) and *nti* (because of), making *Osa-nti-fo* literally meaning kingdom

formed for the purpose of war. Osei (2001) also opines that the unique item the Asante used to serve Denkyira gave the Asante their name. Every *Akwasidae*, all the states sent *Denhyirahene* goods such as plantain fibre, firewood, and gold dust. Red clay, however, was a unique item being sent to Denkyira by the Asante in addition to these other goods. The Asante were distinguished from other people by the appellation *Asan-tefo*, which means "those who dig for clay," because the Akan call the red clay "*Asan*" (Osei 2001).

Asante though the anglicized Ashanti refers to both the territory and the people who live in the central part of Ghana's modern political state in West Africa. Kumasi, the kingdom's old capital, is the seat of administration, the focus of commercial activity, and the location of the *Asantehene's* (king's) palace as well as the province council (Johnson, 1970). Arhin (1978) argues that, in nearly a century ago the Bono and Ahafo chiefs recognized the Kumasi chiefs and swore allegiance to him. Revenues from their lands were paid by officials to the Kumasi chiefs' treasure until in 1960 when the Nkrumah government dissolved inter-regional traditional political allegiances by recognizing some sub-chiefs in Bono as *Amanhene* enabling them to become autonomous in traditional and political terms. Though "free" the Bono regard themselves as culturally Asantes while the people of Ahafo are Asantes both in tradition and politically.

The Asante are members of the Akan-speaking groups, according to history. The Asante people are the most numerous of the Akan people, and they live in the Ashanti Region, a forest belt area in Ghana's central region. According to one oral tradition the Asante's came from Adansi in the southern

part of the region. Another oral history has it that, they emerged from a hole in Techiman, an area which was part of the Northern Section of Ashanti region before independence (Twumasi, 1984). But studies from the oral tradition (myths, folktales, proverbs) have declined these entire hypotheses.

The traditional occupation of the Asante is farming, hunting, sculpture and weaving (Johnson, 1970). However, as a result of people moving from one region to another in pursuit of work, most Asante people may be found working in a variety of occupations other than farming throughout Ghana. The Asante traditionally follow a matrilineal inheritance system, which means they inherit from their mother's side. Upon the death of their uncles (mother's brothers), nephews inherit their properties through matrilineal inheritance. Matrilineal descent is the foundation of Ashanti social system. Every Asante is a member of one of the eight exogamous matrilineal clans, each of which is linked to a totemic animal (Rattray, 1924).

While matrilineal descent determines property inheritance and succession to chiefship and other offices and ranks, paternity is highly essential in Ashanti social system. Every man is a member of a ritual group (*ntoro*) or patrilineal related people through his father. Each *ntoro* has one or more mythical animal ancestors, and if one of these animals (such as a python or a leopard) is discovered dead, members of the corresponding *ntoro* must bury it and display mourning signals (Rattray 1924). Before the arrival of the Europeans, the Asante were established in both their political and socio-economic aspects. Their political units were under state headship and of kings, chiefs, and elders. For instance, the Asante king (*Asantehene*) governed with other paramount chiefs in various towns and villages (Rattray 1929). The

original location of the Asante is the Ashanti region but in contemporary times Asante can be found anywhere in Ghana and beyond due to migration. Despite the presence of migrants, it is arguable that the Asante make up a larger part of the population in this region (2010 PHC, GSS).

Asante Worldview

Our daily lives are intertwined with society, history, the cosmos, and reality as a whole. All societies have worldviews that are tied to ethics, the arts, politics, and religions. They have a powerful motivating and inspiring effect on people. A culture's feeling of direction, confidence, and self-esteem are all enhanced by a socially shared image of the whole (Apostel et al, 1994).

According to Frimpong (2011), the world is divided into two parts: the supernatural (spiritual) and the natural (or physical), with the former having authority over the latter's issues. To enjoy the good things in life (such as fertility, bumper harvests, good health, and so on) while avoiding the negative things (such as sudden deaths, incurable diseases, recurring accidents, and infertility), a human must understand both the spiritual and physical aspects of the universe, as well as how to relate to each other (Omenyo, 2001). This helps to understand why the Asante's life and thinking are influenced by the supernatural. In the spirit realm, there is usually a link between an event and a supernatural source (Larbi, 2002). The foregoing implies that the supernatural (spiritual) plays a prominent part in Asante's society. Mbiti (1990) also share similar thoughts that, among indigenous people (of which the Asante are included) there is no clear distinction between the two realms. Mbiti asserts that the spiritual and the material worlds are "two dimensions of the same universe". These dimensions are so well matched that sometimes and, in some

situations one is more realistic than the other, but not always. A close examination of African people's lives and behaviour reveals that their worldviews are based on a religious framework. All components of creation are respected in the Asante worldview, which is based on indigenous religion.

African religious beliefs are primarily concerned with interpersonal interactions, whether with living people, spirits of the dead, or animals, water bodies, land, and forest (Ranger, 1988).

Asante worldview before colonization is somehow different from what we have today, thereby affirming Hart's (2010) observation that worldview is susceptibility to change. Nevertheless, from the practices and behaviours of the Asante people, it seems that much has not changed. This is because the Asante worldview, which includes beliefs in the Supreme Being, various divinities, nature spirits, ancestor spirits, and a belief in and dread of witchcraft, has not changed and continues to influence people's conduct (Sarpong, 1967). Sarpong continues that, the deep belief in a community of spirits is central to Asante's religious beliefs. In the spiritual universe are the benevolent spirits (good and just) and the malevolent spirit considered as evil and wicked. These benevolent spirits are God and his functionaries who always range in hierarchical order with first the Supreme Being or Creator (*Onyankopɔn/ Oboadeɛ*), divinities/deities (*Abosom*), and the earth deity (*Asaase Yaa*) to the ancestral spirits (*Nananom Nsamanfoɔ*).

The Asante belief in the existence of the Supreme Being is evident from several facts. This is seen in the everyday language of the people. The Supreme Being has many names and attributes which signifies him as the Giver and Sustainer of life (Sarpong, 1967). *Onyankopɔn* refers to the

supremacy of God and him alone as the creator of the universe, both visible and invisible entities, and humanity as caretakers. According to Agyarko (2013), the Asante view of God (*Onyankopɔn*) as the creator has an impact on people's attitudes towards creation. Each creature's spirit carries *Onyankopɔn* with them (*sunsum*). This understanding of God's immediacy in beings has ramifications for how the Asante respect and treat one another and other species. God is also believed to be the rewarder of the good and punisher of the evil.

There are also the ancestral spirits (*Nananom nsamanfoɔ*), often known as the "living dead," despite the fact that they are deceased members of the community or clan, they are still regarded alive since they are said to have an influence on the lives of the living. In the Asante society, only adults can become an ancestor. By adult here means someone who was married, have experienced at least the world and was in a much better position to "rule or control people" (Sarpong, 1967). In the Asante worldview, to qualify as an ancestor, one must, among other things, have died peacefully, be married with children, and have lived an exemplary life (Rattray, 1924). These ancestral spirits play the role of intermediaries between humans and God. According to Sarpong, Asante do not think of ancestors as gods as their position seems greater than gods since they wield much power to influence the living and also have means of supplying the needs of their subjects. Thus, in helping or punishing living members, they act in their own power.

The Earth goddess (*Asase Yaa*) ranks second after the Supreme Being and it is evident in the offering of libation. It may probably be that she is given a feminine image because of her responsible for fertility and her ability to

produce. *Asase Yaa* has no temple, shrine, or priest dedicated to her because she is accessible to all. In some sense, *Asase Yaa* is also the “custodian of morality and social decorum, the traditional ethical code” (Okorochoa, 1987). The hosts of gods/divinities (*abosom*) are believed to be the children of God thus his creatures. They are generally known to provide solutions to problems (social or personal) as well as reveal truth and inflict punishment.

These divinities have the power to produce and destroy. Within the Asante religious circle, some deities are associated with mountains, forests, animals, caves, trees, rocks but more especially water bodies such as *Antoa Nyaama*, *Bosomtwe*, and *Subin*. It is mostly believed that these deities either reside or manifest themselves in these natural substances. In the Asante worldview, being religious requires actively participating in rituals such as sacrificing, praying, and seeking esoteric knowledge from spirits, as well as having positive relationships with other people. Furthermore, it entails enlisting the help of a variety of spirits to battle social issues and bad forces thought to exist in the globe. More importantly, being religious entails maintaining peace with fellow humans, nature, and spirits.

There is also the belief in other spiritual agencies “natural spirits” disembodied or otherwise (Danquah, 1968). Frimpong (2011) notes that there are also the evil spirits who are believed to be hovering among humanity and causing havoc even though invisible. The ones mostly known are the *sasabonsam* and *mmotia* and mystical forces. *Sasabonsam* is assumed to be a forest monster of a fearsome appearance with a long tail and wings. They are mostly associated with witches in harming people while *mmotia* (dwarfs) are believed to be short with curved noses and feet pointing in opposite directions.

In Asante myths and folktales, these *mmotia* are not always portrayed as entirely evil (inflicting tragedies) but also can impart knowledge of medicine to herbalists, medicine men, and priest/priestesses.

The Asante worldview comprises of a collection of fundamental presumptions and ideas that have developed into a method of understanding reality as well as one's position and function within it. Their way of life is an expression of their attitudes and presumptions. The Asante people's worldview, controls their behavior and way of life, enabling them to coexist peacefully with their natural surroundings. The Asante worldview has been discussed to explain the perception and experiences which gives them some kind of confidences in supernatural entities or deities that the deities have all power to grant their request if they are appealed to. Worldview helps in showing the importance and value Asante attach to deities in their everyday life. Thus, worldview underlines their reason for invoking when one finds him/herself in an unjust situation.

Etymology and origin of *duabɔ*

Various explanations have been given concerning the etymology of the Akan term “*duabɔ*” which is usually translated as “imprecation”. It is often assumed that the term comes from two conjoined terms ‘*bɔ*’, (hit/ club) and ‘*dua*’, (wood, tree) (Agyekum, 1996; Asenso, 2013). The very statement (*bo no dua*, hit him/her with a wood) has its implication in the action. To club one’s adversary is to kill, or perpetually damage or weaken him or her. Others believe that “the worst accident for someone in the past was when a tree fell on them in the bush.” So ‘*dua abu abɔ no*’ (a tree has fallen on him or her) was a common way of expressing an omen. Cursing someone has progressively

been twisted into everyday English, where cursing someone means “falling a tree on him” (Tweneboah, 2014). The imprecator is wishing a bad omen on their intended victim.

According to Tweneboah (2014), when he had an interview with Peter Sarpong an African writer and anthropologist, he also looked at the roots of *duabɔ* from another perspective. According to Sarpong, the name was obtained by combining the terms ‘*due*’ [woe] and [hit, knock]. That is, desiring for some type of affliction [due] to befall one's target, usually an opponent, is to use the word “*duabɔ*”.

Similarly, some informant shared in the knowledge of Sarpong and affirmed that the etymology of *duabɔ* may not be clubbing someone with a stick as most scholars have interpreted but rather ‘*due*’ which is translated as ‘woes’ and “*bɔ*” means telling. Together is “*duebɔ*” literally meaning telling someone to woe. In the words, to the informant, “since the invocation of the curse would bring about calamities, tragedies, and affliction, the imprecator is indirectly saying “*due ne amanehunu wɔ nea woaye me yi*” (woe to you for the evil you have done to me)”. In other words, the offended somehow desires that some kind of punishment may befall the offender. Here the term woe is defined as ‘a condition of deep suffering from misfortune, affliction, grief, misery, troubles, sorrows and difficulty’.

The two diverse perspectives from which these writers have viewed the etymology of the phenomenon is very reasonable and I believe the opinion of these writers may fit as the root of *duabɔ* depending on the situation and the context in which it is used. Using two cases witnessed at the *Antoa* (*Nyamaafie* /court) might aid in giving much understanding.

In the first case, a supposed landowner (woman) argued with a queen mother over the ownership of a piece of land. The woman is charged to have said “*meka Asuo Nyamaa ne nananom nsamanfoɔ se awerɛhoɔ a woama meredi yi, ebi mpa wo efie da*” meaning river *nyamaa* and the ancestors are my witness that this pain you have caused me will never depart from your household.

There was another case between two mason colleagues, where one accused his fellow of stealing building materials. The accused resorted to *duabɔ* during an argument by saying,

“*nneema a ayera yi, se mennim ho hwee na wode ato me so, agu me anim ase se me namafa a, Antoa nyamaa nku wo, na se me nso na mafa na meredi akohwi se mennim ho asem biara a, enee, dua no nnya me ara*”

Literally meaning, these items that are missing, if I know nothing about how it got missing yet you have accused and disgraced me that I did then *Antoa Nyamaa* should kill you. Likewise, if I did steal it and I am refusing to admit my wrong then I should bear same consequence.

These two instances give further interpretation to the act of *duabɔ*. From the first case, it seems like the landowner is telling the queen mother who wants to take possession of her land that woe unto her if she takes her land, then she (the queen mother) and her household will feel the pain she is going through forever. In the second instance, the utterance of the accused seems to be in a “woe” form in the sense that, he is calling forth or petitioning the deity to kill either of them found guilty in order to defend one and prove his innocence. Thus, woe to the accuser if he is really innocent because tragedy of death would befall him (the accuser). Hence from these acts of

duabɔ I have witnessed and from this analysis made I conclude that *woes* (*due*) could be the etymology of *duabɔ*. *Duabɔ* therefore refers to rituals performance which may include utterances, gestures and sometimes offerings to appeal to a deity to settle a situation by bringing out prove of innocence or rendering punishment to a guilty party.

The difference between Asante Imprecation from Foreign Societies

Based on the definitions and descriptions of curses or imprecation in the previous chapter, both terms were used synonymously since its role, functions and performance were the same in the societies mentioned. That is both terms referred to the petitioning or invocation of a deity to judge and punish an offender in an unjust situation. This is quite different from that of the Asante society. Among the Asante, there is a distinction between the words and the function they both offer. Curses are known as *nnome* whiles imprecations are *duabɔ* and its natural ally swearing (*nsedie*). Thus, there is a need to make clear distinguishing between the three in other for readers to recognise *duabɔ* when displayed.

Duabɔ

With *duabɔ*, specific names of deities are called upon to perform a deed. Arguably, one cannot say that *duabɔ* have a specific or laid down process of how it should be performed but some elements which might aid in identifying an act to be *duabɔ* is calling forth a particular deity or deities and summoning an individual or a case to the deity. According to Agyekum (1996) a conditional clause ‘if’ is an important element to *duabɔ*. *Duabɔ* may range from a statement to much sentences but its longevity does not show its severity. As observed in both the *Asantehemaa* and *Nyaama* court, there are

different ways by which people go about it. That is, in an imprecator's utterance, he may choose to add to his petition the punishment he wants to be metered out to the guilty party.

For instance, “*Onipa a w’ahwia me sika wɔ me dan yi mu yi, sɛ adekye na wommfa mmɛto hɔ a, Baffoe mma ɔmmɔdam*”. Literally meaning the person who stole my money from my room, if by tomorrow morning the person has not returned it, then Baffoe should make him go mad.

Another person would also prefer knowing the culprit who did evil to him/her, thus his/her invocation will not be to harm but rather give a kind of sign to know the culprit. This type of *duabɔ* is usually used in cases of accusation when one wants to prove his innocence.

“*Obibiara a wafa me borɔdeɛ yi, ɔnoa bi di biara a Asuo Subin mma apo ngu no*”.

Whoever took my plantain, anytime he eats some, may Subin inflict him/her with a particular skin disease. Thus, after a while any individual who would be seen with any weird disease become a prime suspect for questioning.

There are also instances an individual may prefer to leave the punishment to deity to deal with the culprit.

“*Ama konadu sɛ menim agudeɛ no a ayera no ho biribi na sɛ mennim no hwee nso a, Nyamaa, wo na wonim nokware no nti kyere wo tumi na ma nokware no nnaadi*”.

“Ama Konadu accuses me of having a hand in her missing treasure if I know nothing of it, *Nyamaa*, it is you who know truth therefore show your potency and let the truth be known.”

These instances above are some of the formats a *duabɔ* can take depending on the individual using the *duabɔ* and the case at hand. Also, from the survey conducted, some respondents were of the view that, sometimes, items such as eggs, local or foreign alcoholic drinks such as “*akpeteshie*” and schnapps are used in the act to quicken the effect of the curse. Also, others may add actions such as kneeling and crying at the sacred place where the deities manifest themselves or also choose to sit or drag their buttocks on the bare floor in the process of the invocation. Again, some people will prefer going straight to the deities’ shrine or river of the deity with their petition by narrating the situation at hand and appealing to the deity to punish the offender.

Lastly, some deities have certain items they prefer. For instance, two respondents noted that a *Dunkwa* deity known as “*Ama kokora*” likes “tea bread” thus if a petition is made alongside breaking of the bread into the water body the request would be granted faster. These actions and items are seen to serve as a catalyst to speed the process of the curse in order to bring about prompt answers to their request. Thus, among the Asante’s, it is believed that, with *duabɔ*, the deities invoked are the beings who respond to the curses and bring forth the punishment on the guilty party. However, according to Nana Yaw of the *Nyamaa* court, there are sometimes when *duabɔ* plays a role in the process of arbitration. This happens when there is an issue between two individuals without any witness yet both claim to be innocent. Here permission would be granted by the jury that, each party should use *duabɔ* on him or herself “*bɔ wo ho dua*”. In this case the juries have washed their hands of the matter and to be left in the hands of the Supernatural. This does not

happen for trivial or domestic offenses but grave offences such as treason and murder.

Nnome

On the other hand, '*nnome*' is also a proclamation or denunciation of evil wishes against an individual to bring misfortune to the individual. But this is done without the mentioning of any deities' name and no addition of items or actions. *Nnome* is described as Omission of deity or 'agentless' imprecation. It is possible for an imprecator to avoid the use of any deity but may voice a punishment an offender (Agyekum 1996, Little 1987). An interviewee gave a scenario of a parent arguing with his ward and through anger uttered a statement such as "*menni wo ho mfasoɔ biara, kaa mmɔ wo nku wo*". This means "I have no use of you, a car should even kill you". And truly the next day the child in question died in a car accident. Since the African worldview has it that invisible beings, both good and evil roam the world, hence "*nnome*" is believed to be answered by spirits who were roaming about at the time when the utterances were made and it is believed to be scarier than *duabɔ* since no deity is mentioned, one or more evil spirits can be the respondents of *nnome*. Especially if it is a mother who made the utterance, a female spirit who feels the pain of the mother during her utterances may answer her plight. *Nnome* can be revoked only when an offended party decides to let go the bitterness and forgive the guilty.

From observation, another difference between *duabɔ* and *nnome* is that, *duabɔ* is used when an unfair situation has happened, in case of stealing, accusation and so on but for *nnome* it is used freely at any time on unknown enemies. This is mostly seen and in the ending part of offering libation during

social functions and private occasions. In a marriage ceremony for instance libation could be offered as;

<i>Tweredeampon Kwame, nsa,</i>	Dependable God (here is) drink.
<i>Asase Yaa, nsa.</i>	Earth Goddess (<i>Yaa</i>) (here is) drink
<i>Nananom Agonafoɔ Nsamanfoɔ,</i> <i>mo nsa nie.</i>	Ancestors of the <i>Agona</i> clan here is your drink.
<i>Yefrɛɛ baako a, na y'afre monyinaa.</i>	Once we have called one, we have called you all.
<i>Yefrɛɛ mo awia yi a enye bɔne.</i>	We called you here this afternoon not for any ill reason.
<i>Enne da yi na mo ara mo dehyee, Ama</i> <i>Ataa, yede no rema Kwame Bonsu</i> <i>awaree.</i>	It is today that we are giving your royal, Ama Ataa, into marriage to Kwame Bonsu.
<i>Momme gyina yen akyi akyiagyinapa.</i>	Come and give us support.
<i>Momma wɔn awaree no nkɔso.</i>	Let their marriage prosper.
<i>Momma wɔn abrabɔ nsiwɔnyie.</i>	Let their life end well.
<i>Momme hyira yen a ahyia ha yi</i> <i>nyinaa.</i>	Come and bless all who are gathered here.
<i>Momma mmusuo biara nka yen.</i>	Let no evil befall us.
<i>Na nipa bɔnefoɔ biara a ɔmpɛ wɔn yi</i> <i>deɛ,</i>	But for any person who does not wish them well,
<i>Momma wɔn nwu awia ketekete,</i>	Let them die when the sun is scotching hot.
<i>Momma wɔn ase nhye pɔtɔɔ,</i>	Let them perish from the face of the earth.

Other informants were also of the view that *nnome* is effective even though no deity is mentioned. This is because the Asante believe that the tongue is a deity itself (*tekyerema ye bosom*) which carries power and that is why whatever incantation/utterance an individual has a dire consequence. Also, while the effects of '*duabo*' take few weeks or months for the misfortunes to be evident and could be resolved if signs and symptoms are seen earlier, "*nnome*" may not be resolved because the spiritual respondent is unknown and would live with the individual for the rest of his or her life since the individual may not be conscious of the fact that his/her misfortune are as a result of *nnome*. From the perspective of this informant, it gives the idea that among indigenous Asante also the belief of the power of spoken word that, in the tongue of man carries a kind of power that if it professes good or bad, it shall be established.

Nsedie

Self- imprecatory oaths (*Nsedie*) on the other hand like *duabo* involves the invocation of Supernatural power. This type of oath, according to Ramos (2015), is a solemn vow that necessitates an act of conditional self-cursing or calling upon divine power to inflict severe punishment if the promise is breached. It is seen as religious invocations in the sense that, the speaker calls down the wrath of the supernatural being to punish himself or herself if what is asserted is perjury. Among the Asante, *nsedie* is used as a judicial instrument at local arbitration (Agyekum 1996). *Nsedie* is a spoken invocation to safeguard the virtuousness of the mutual trust uniting two parties, is also a self-imprecation. Should the receiver break a pledge or vow, the recipient is forced to call the name of a deity to cast doom for

him/her. Though mostly *nsedie* is used in arbitration, there are certain instances it could be used among two individuals as described in the case below;

“*Me Kwasi Mensa asere Agya Amoah asase se meredidi so, na mfie mmiensa akyi no ma dane n’adee de amma no. Se mfie mmiensa akyi m’afaa amma no a, Asuo Tano ne menni*”.

Meaning, I Kwasi Mensah has borrowed Agya Amoah’s land to feed on it for 3 years and after that I would return it. If after 3 years I don’t return it, the river deity Baffoe should deal with me.

From this instance, it is seen as a form of agreement and one can even infer that since Asante in pre-colonial times were unschooled, *nsedie* might have been one of the ways signing contracts. *Nsedie* is said to be part of the indigenous justice system where adjudicators permit for it to be used when a witness is about to testify in arbitration, he/she is made to take an oath, to tell nothing but the truth and its nature is same as *duabɔ*. Example of *nsedie* is as follows;

“*Asem yi a yeyi me danseni yi, nea menim fa asem no ho a eye nokware nkoa na meka, megyina nananom anim, se medi akohwia biara a Kwaku firi nku me*”.

The difference between *nsedie* and *duabɔ* is that, in *nsedie*, there is an aspect of promising to do or not to do an act is the main focus for its performance and also deities playing a role of both witnesses and punishers during arbitration.

Adjudication among Asante

Before the advent of British colonialism, customary laws were the prevailing norm in Africa and it was one of the sources of the African justice

system. Simply put, each tribe had its distinct identity, techniques/ methods of administering justice, and regulating the lives of the people Alemika (2009). Arguably, there was no uniform customary law in African tradition thus ethnic groups had unique customary laws which was practiced. *Asennie*, or "arbitration," is the term used in Asante to describe the peaceful settling of problems outside of the current judicial system. Politics, business, religion, and other areas of disagreement can all be resolved through arbitration respecting the idea of the face when interacting with others (Agyekum, 2004b).

Among the Asante, the chieftaincy institution was responsible for all adjudications and mechanisms for conflict resolutions. The chief, assisted by his elders, used traditional arbitration to settle all disputes at all tiers of society, from the local to the state (Brobbeey, 2008; Acquah, 2006). In accordance with Brobbey (2008), Asante societies utilized arbitration to settle disputes in the numerous communities under the direction of the chiefs, aided by opinion makers and experts, and decisions were based on the customs and practices of the populace.

Nana Yaw Frimpong, the "Ntahirahene" of Otumfuo Osei Tutu (ii) among the Asante explains that there is hierarchy in cases and its adjudication. Not every case is sent to the King's courts but all steps and procedures of adjudication in other courts takes the format of the Kings court. The lowest court among the Asante is the family court, which is ruled over by family chiefs (Abusuapanin) and elders. They deal with crises, mend offences, and make decisions in family cases. This court deals with a variety of issues, including wife battery, family inheritance disputes, and petty theft, among

others. Because each occurrence in the family might have significant ramifications for the greater community, the court's responsibilities are critical.

The Asantehene/Ohemaa has representatives' chiefs in all villages (some of which have become big towns and cities) to rule on his/her behalf. These chiefs and queens also have courts which deals with inter-family disputes, investives, disputes in marriages, abuses, fraud, and land disputes between two or more families in the same village. Most times cases which were difficult to handle in this court can be appealed in King or Queenmother court.

The king's court is higher in the hierarchy than the others and grievous cases including murder, land conflicts between families, treachery and any other offense by the council of chiefs or traditional spiritualists that might enrage the ancestors are all matters they preside over and decide on.

The last category includes traditional extrajudicial tactics, such as invoking the spirits or deities in the community's alongside other ancestral deities in settling disputes. This could be done by adjudicators though it was the very last option when all avenues and strategies of unearthing truth have been exhausted. At the shrines traditional courts, hearings are also done by religious panel made up of the elders and custodians of the shrine and 'the deity's spokesman 'bosom kyeame', okomfoɔ 'priest/priestess' or bosomfoɔ 'deity servant'. Although the cases are resolved and decided by mankind, the final judgment and forgiveness of sins is based on the divine laws of the deities. He emphasized that, duabɔ was a legally accepted way of dealing with criminal cases in the Asante kingdom by our fore fathers many centuries ago. "Like the way Christians or Muslims pray for God to deal with their enemies,

so is the duabɔ. It is a kind of prayer to judge a case and punish the guilty or wicked." **FIELD WORK 2021**

Agyekum (2006) adds that these courts mentioned above adjudicate cases based on their distinct jurisdictions and powers. The chiefs' courts are made up of dignified persons and family heads of the hamlet or town, with the chief serving as the principal arbitrator. The highest (supreme) court among the Asante societies is the Kumasi Traditional Council court made up of chiefs and the King (Asantehene). These chiefs who also act as judges include the *Adontenhene*, *Benkumhene*, *Nifahene*, *Oyokohene*, *Manwrehene*, *Kyidomhene*, *Gyaasehene* and the *Nkosohene* (Agyekum, 2006). The king's court has jurisdiction over all issues, but it focuses on chieftaincy and land conflicts. Certain subjects may rebel against the chief or king, or there may be disagreements over the installation of a new chief or the dethronement of a current chief. The *Asantehemmaa*, (Asante queen), has a court that rivals that of the king. Most domestic matters, such as invectives, assault, libel, slander, gossiping, revocation of imprecation, extreme marriage disputes, rivalry, and violations of *Asantehemmaa ntam*, "*hemmaa Kokoniwa*," are settled in the *Asantehemmaa's* court (Agyekum, 1996, 2004b). Unlike modern courts, Asante arbitration does not have written constitution or formally trained judges, adjudicators are believed to be properly trained informally through observation. There are a few steps that would lead to the case being settled, including (1) presenting the case through the *Okyeame*, (2) gathering testimony from each side with cross-examination by opponents and the jury, (3) calling witnesses and cross-examination, (4) the court's decision, and (5) the parties' expression of acceptance or refusal. (6) Condemnation, (7)

Imposition of Fines and Sanctions, (8) Oath-taking, (8) Libation and Drinking, (9) Ritual Handshakes or Hugs, (10) Dismissal (Yankah, 1995; Agyekum, 2006).

The spokesperson of the Nsumankwahene clarified these steps of arbitration, that in previous times, when the court is faced with rare cases of allegations without witnesses, *duabɔ* was used for adjudication. This kind of case did not go through these procedures but rather after numerous investigations and yet no fruitful result, the suspects are asked to self- imprecate, “*bɔ wo ho ‘dua’*”. This self-imprecation was not the usual *nsedie* since that is used mostly by witnesses to vow/promise to speak the truth (either seen or heard) but the phrase ‘*bɔ wo ho dua*’ does not require a promise but rather takes the form of *duabɔ*. But since *duabɔ* has been prohibited, even the phrase “*bɔ wo ho dua* must not be spoken rather ‘*di nse/ nsedie*’ is the accepted norm used in arbitrations.

For instance, if an accused person was brought before a chief, suspected by others to have stolen a treasure, the first and second steps of arbitration which is presentation of case and cross examination of the suspects and accused would be done but if the cross examination proves futile, the suspect would have to use duabɔ on him or herself.

“Me Afia Pokuaa, agudie yi a ayera yi, ɛnnye me na mefaa ye, mennim ho asem biara. Na mmom se benim ho biribi na meredi toro a Asuo Baffoe na ɔnim nti, ɔnkyere ne tumi”.

In turn, any of the members of the jury can add up another invocation, this time to the guilty party unknown in order to end the arbitration successfully.

“Onipa biara a ɔfaa agudie yi na nso w’ama, nipa foforo anim regu ase yi, nkosi nan wotwi yi awiee no, Asuo Baffoe mfa yare dam ngu nenim ase na ma nokware a ewo asem yi mu nna adi”.

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The antecedent shows that in the past, *duabo* was acceptable and used but only as a last resort when all avenues of human organisation proved futile. Nevertheless, in contemporary times, both the private and public employment of *duabo* has been discouraged as about two decades the current *Asantehene*, *Otumfo Osei Tutu* (ii) noticed its rampant use in the Asante kingdom even in trivial matters and as a result causing great losses to the kingdom as a whole and decrease in the society population. This does not mean that *duabo* is absolutely tabooed, but there are times when it can be mentioned (restricted to be used as a weapon of the last resort in some defined contexts for bringing about social justice). Yet even with its prohibition, some of the populace still make use of it.

***Duabo* in Contemporary Asante**

By observation the role of *duabo* has not much changed in contemporary times just that nowadays *duabo* is being used not only when there is a serious situation which is beyond human solution but is used during arguments, mere insults, and provocation. In discussing the use of *duabo* among the Asante, findings would be grouped under five (5) subheadings. This would begin with, how widespread is cursing in the Asante society today,

the participant and target of *duabɔ*, reasons for invocations, how does it work, and the consequence thereof.

How widespread is the use of *duabɔ* among the Asante?

The socio-demographic factors of respondents included their sex, age, religious affiliation, ethnicity, and level of education was taken to enable the researcher define the specific group of people who use *duabɔ* among the Asante.

A survey was conducted with 192 respondents to the questions in Kumasi the capital of Ashanti region. The respondents constituted 98 females and 94 males. All respondents agreed to have knowledge about the practice of *duabɔ* in contemporary Ghana. However, description or explanation of the term *duabɔ* varied from one respondent to the other. The different description included;

“Duabɔ is an offensive word used to express anger or annoyance when someone does something wrong to you.”

“Duabɔ is a way of seeking justice for pain caused someone by pronouncing a curse or evil utterance over the person’s life. Like a way of retaliation not by oneself but through the gods”.

“Duabɔ is calling upon anything that has the power to seek revenge on an offender. It could be a river, thunder, trees, mountains anything at all that is believed to possess power.”

This affirms Sarpong (1967) observation that, the Asante belief in the lesser gods (*Abosom*) that though invisible but are commonly associated with visible objects with remarkable characters such as large trees, water bodies and mountain, stones and rocks with peculiar appearances. Individuals consult

these gods for protection against calamities and also invoke their vengeance and wrath upon people who offend them (Sarpong, 1967; Agyekum, 1999). Hence, *duabɔ* is as defined as those utterances and actions which involve supernatural invocation to inflict harm on a target.

With the ethnicity of the respondents, the table shows that, most of the people in Kumasi, the capital of the region are of Asante origin. As reported in Global data (2018), majority of Ashanti region populations are Akan while a smaller population originated from outside the Asante and “Akan lands” of Ghana.

Table 1: Population and Respondents

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
Asante	115	60%
Other Akan group	40	21%
Non- Akan	37	19%

With the religious affiliation of respondents, the figure below shows that most of the respondents were Christian (80.7%), 11.4% of the respondents were of Islam, 6.8 % were African Traditional adherents while people without any religious affiliation were 1.1%. This confirms the report of Ghana Statistical Service (2021), that the officially dominant religion in Ghana is Christianity followed by Islam and ATR been the least.

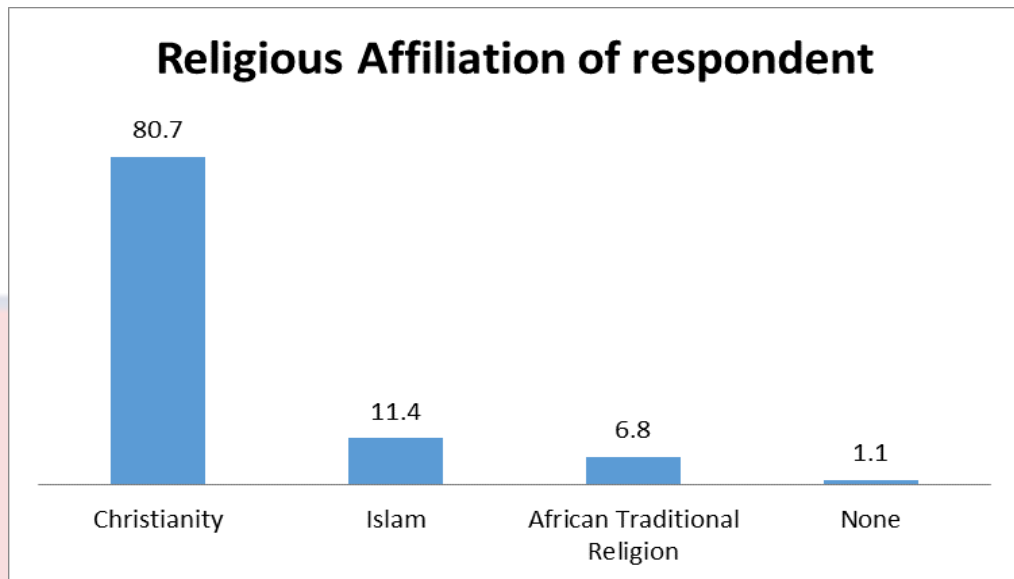


Figure 1: Religious Affiliation of Respondents
Source: Koka (2021)

Furthermore, the table below reported the religious affiliation of respondents who would resort to *duabɔ* in any given situation through a cross tabulation. The Table 2 revealed that of the total of 192 respondents, 100 out of 142 Christians were willing to use *duabɔ* in any unjust situations. Also with Islam, 12 out of 20 responded to use *duabɔ* when need be. However, there was no significant difference among the religious affiliation of respondents in restoring to *duabɔ* in any given situation.

Table 2: Religious Affiliation* Restoring to *Duabɔ* in any given situation

Religious Affiliation	Resorting to <i>duabɔ</i> in any given situation	
	Yes	No
Christian	100	42
Islam	12	8
African Traditional Religion	6	0
None	2	0

Pearson Chi-square = 3.486 Asymp. Sig= .323

Source: Koka (2021)

With the above assertion, one can argue that *duabɔ* is one of the numerous ways in which some people of the Asante society have sought for, and continue to seek, justice and settlement of grievances in their day-to-day activities. *Duabɔ* has been rampant in the life of Asante's and is not seen as the last option to resort to rather sometimes the first. Also table also shows that, *duabɔ* is not only used by only ATR adherents but by various people from different religious backgrounds, illiterate and educated, poor and rich, male or female.

From Figure 3, it was revealed that majority of the respondent had some level of formal education. Respondents with tertiary education formed 43.2% as those without any form of formal education (8.0%). This shows that knowledge and use of *duabɔ* is not limited to individual educational level.

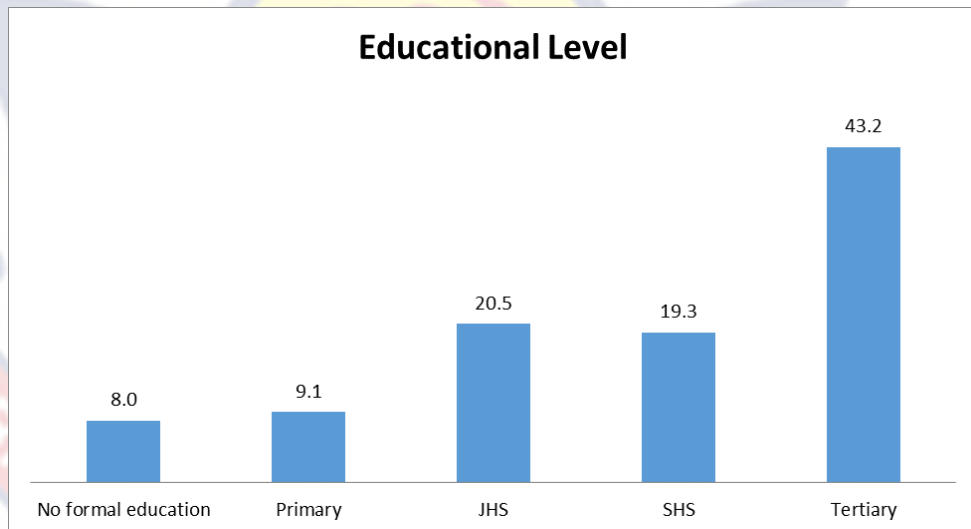


Figure 2: Educational Level of Respondents

Source: Koka (2021)

This does not support the suggestion of Tweneboah (2014) that, the educated in the society do not associate themselves with *duabɔ* since they know when and how to petition the court when the need arises as compared to the uneducated and the poor who do not patronize the court for the fear of

paying certain court levies and not understanding court proceedings are those who resort to curse.

The curser and the target (imprecator and imprecatee)

The curser is usually the offended in a given situation who invokes or call upon the wrath of a deity while the target represents the offender. Also, the question was asked if *duabɔ* is effective on an innocent target.

“The cursers are mostly individuals who believe in the potency of a particular deity they invoke and are usually victims of accusation or theft who are willing to punish a criminal for an evil deed.

A target of duabɔ could be one or a group of people who may be offenders and have done wrong to the curser, consciously and unconsciously”.

Other informants were of the view that, apart from the culprit, the target of *duabɔ* would be the whole family of the culprit.

“duabɔ can never be effective on an innocent person(s) unless a person is found guilty. But sometimes the format of the duabɔ could affect the family of the target and other people who might have sided with the offender that (s)he is not guilty of the crime”.

“Mostly duabɔ can also affect family members of offender if for instance in a situation where items have been stolen, the family may have been part of the consumption of stolen items knowingly or unknowingly. This makes them also guilty of the crime”.

“If in an utterance of duabɔ, the curser utters that the family members of the criminals may be used as thanksgiving and it is believed to be effective even though the family may be innocent because the spiritual realms deals with bloodline”.

“Deviant behaviours such as theft is like a disease which is in a family hence if one person is a thief in the family, the possibility of other thieves in the family is high. Here the death of all members means wiping the society of all thieves to bring peace into the society”.

This brings to mind the “we” concept, “you are because we are”. This notion is understood as a homogenous group who has their members feeling, thinking and behaving in a similar and predictable ways (Weisenfeld, 1996). Hence, if an individual in a family has a deviant behaviour, there is a possibility that, if not all members, there may be others in the family who has same deviant behaviour. Thus, for the society to be free from such there is need to rid them. Miencha (1993) observes that, among the Abagusii people of Kenya, no one ever wanted to be cursed and people often made sure that their relatives were not visited with a curse, since the effect of the curse went beyond the criminal himself and encompassed even his relatives. Another outcome from the survey proves that *duabɔ* is used by most of the people in the society irrespective of the person's social status, education, and gender.

Reasons and situations for use of *duabɔ*

There are various reasons as to why people in the Asante society prefer to use *duabɔ*. The reasons for using *duabɔ* in contemporary Asante society may be from grievous to trivial matters such as when one feels insulted or provoked about an issue. Some respondents answering reasons for invoking deities when petty issues would be solved by police or court made comments that;

“The police and court are for those who can offer them money and not he who speaks the truth. Why would I take my matter to the court when I know that nothing would be done about it rather my opponent who may be richer than me will either win the cases or the case would be rendered useless”

“Another also complained that the police waste time in finding culprit and if even they do the court could adjourn the case for a long period of time which is also money consuming. As the saying goes justice delayed is justice denied, hence it is better to rely on mighty hands and on human hands”.

From another perspective, other respondents noted that, issues such as defending oneself of accusations (prove of innocence), punishing wrongs especially thieves; threats were the main factors that encourages *duabɔ* among Asante. From the survey, out of the 120 respondents who noted that they will resort to *duabɔ* if need be. 53% claim they will use *duabɔ* if wrongly accused in order to defend, while about 28% of respondents may use *duabɔ* to punish a criminal for stealing a valuable item. Lastly, 16% of respondent would use

duabɔ to threaten criminals in order to either prevent crimes or establish the truth in a situation.

Duabɔ is a tool for defending oneself from accusations. Most interviewees also agreed that *duabɔ* was usually used when one wanted to prove him/herself innocent but does not have any means. A respondent quoted that

“to be accused of mostly infidelity or theft means that one’s integrity and reputation is at stake and would at the long run not affect only the individual but also his family and even the generation unborn”.

“Sometimes saying that you are innocent, people will still not believe you. Therefore, when duabɔ is used and tragedies start befalling the guilty, then truth comes out, the innocent name is cleared and then the guilty is disgraced”.

Most times *duabɔ* served as a means of punishments to criminals (especially theft cases) in the society. Thus, when an offense has been committed and yet the criminal is unknown because no one owns up to take responsibility for the necessary punishment, then the case would be handed over to the supernatural to punish the criminal as he/she truly deserves. This is usually to restrain people from committing such crimes in the society.

Furthermore, *duabɔ* was used as threats to control behavioural patterns in the society. Again, when item(s) gets missing, invocations are used in order to retrieve the stolen items. Mostly the curser would just announce plainly that if by a specific time or day the item is not returned that he/she would resort to *duabɔ*. Others may also go ahead to perform the acts of *duabɔ* to threaten the thief that he/she is in danger if item is not returned. It is believed that *duabɔ*

would start working a day after the invocation. Thus, if the item is returned that same day, it can be revoked by the curser without necessarily visiting the location of the deity invoked. Also, on the of land dispute, an individual may use *duabɔ* to deter another party from visiting apportion of land. This is to claim ownership of the land.

From the above roles of *duabɔ* in the indigenous Asante society one can conclude that, the sum of all these roles aforementioned, results to *duabɔ* serving as a deterrent for members of the society. Punishing with *duabɔ* would make people fear to do evil acts against a fellow and even if they do, accept their fault and receive their punishment duly. Like the Asante, Abagusii people of Kenya. According to him, a curse was used as a form of deterrent punishment to prevent further crimes from occurring. In this community, a curse was generally regarded as the severest form of punishment (Miencha, 1993). *Duabɔ* also ensured that people were always truth and would not bear false witness. *Duabɔ* also deterred people from engaging in social vices such as stealing and disrespecting taboos. At the long run the fear of *duabɔ* conveyed social values such as hard work, honesty and truth from one generation to another. LeVine and Lloyd (1966) agrees that among the indigenous Gusii people of Kenya, in cases of social deviance such as stealing, curses were the major method for religious sanctions. For instance, if a thief was unknown, the use of a curse would make the thief give up himself.

Actually, in most cases of such type, a thief would not wait until a curse has been uttered to confess, but rather, the threat of the curse, was by itself, enough to make him confess. LeVine and Lloyd continue that, curses provided an opportunity for a formal settlement of serious social problems and, also

used as a form of deterrent punishment which could at times be retributive. The root cause of the grievance(s) are diverse and may include breach of secrecy and contracts, failure to protect the inviolability of dignity; encroachments on property, infringements on rights, conflict, disturbance of peace, breakdown of trust, dishonesty, betrayal (Agyekum, 1999).

How *Duabɔ* works

From my observation of the cases adjudicated in the Asantehemaa and *Nyamaa* deity's courts, there is no uniform formula to Asante's invocation but there are some elements that may classify an utterance as *duabɔ*. The length of the ritual may be significantly different its structure may always differ yet the elements are mostly the same but does not always follow same pattern. The elements include, mentioning the wrong act or offence, invoking a deity, declaration of consequence or judgment and thanksgiving (either promised or offer at the spot). The person uttering the invocation is not the agent of the punishments. The agents always involve a supernatural such as gods or divinities as already mentioned. When the question was posed as to who is the respondent of *duabɔ*, most respondents mentioned that, the gods and ancestors are responsible for bringing unto people all kinds of misfortunes when *duabɔ* is used while others were of the view that, they see no difference between gods, witches, and ancestor because they all classified as "evil spirits".

On the visitation to the *Nyamaa* court, 107 people both men and women were there for revocation of *duabɔ*, thanksgiving (3) or petition (8). The *bosomfo* of the *Nyamaa* court explained that, among the Asante it is believed that the gods have courts and jury in the spiritual realm where cases that brought before them through *duabɔ* is settled. Deities do not work in same day

of invocation until the next day, to give opportunity for revocation if they were mistakenly called. But after a day passes, the gods sit in jury and calls the spirits of both the offended and offender as it is done in the physical court and then questions concerning the case are being asked. If a river god/goddess was invoked, it is said that sometimes in a dream, each (the offender and the offended) would see themselves standing in a water body which signifies being called to the court of the supernatural with a jury of gods and one who is found guilty will see himself in another dream drowning. The drowning of the guilty is that which mostly causes swollen bellies and other body parts because during the drowning in the spiritual realm much water has been consumed. This is what makes an individual aware that he or she has been imprecated.

Revocation of *Duabɔ*

The procedure for settling cases of *duabɔ* requires that when a person invokes a deity upon another, the accused person must bring the offender to the traditional court, and then prove to the court that the person invoked the curse (the process as already discussed under the Asante adjudication system). When the court determines that the *duabɔ* was used legitimately, the person found guilty is asked to revoke it. Both the person who invoked the curse and the person who has been cursed, as well as any other individuals involved, should go to the court and then to the location of the god with whom the individual was cursed for additional rites to cancel the curse. It has been seen that the effect of a curse can be averted by performing certain propitiatory rites.

But the process of cleansing was in itself very delicate. In order to cleanse oneself from a curse, one has to get prescriptions from the

priest/priestess who serves as an intermediary between humans and the deity. Sometimes if the accursed person is stricken and it is evident through signs and symptoms then a diviner is consulted to foretell the source of the illness. Among the Asante cases of *duabo* are settled mainly at the *Asantehemaa's* court and revocations by the *Nsumankwaahene*.

The *Asantehemaa's* court

Among the most prominent of the institutions, in this case, is that of the queen mother, the female counterpart to a chief. At the head of the Asante, the confederacy is the king of Asante, the *Asantehene*, and the *Asantehemaa*, queen mother of the Asante. But every village, town, and paramountcy also has a queen mother as well as a chief, and they are from the same royal family. They are never married to each other and maybe blood-related as brother-sister, uncle- niece, aunty-nephew sometimes mother-son. The chieftaincy system is replicated by every town and they are organized into divisions and then paramountcy's (Stoeltje 1999). The paramount chiefs and queen mothers' rule on behalf of the *Ashantehene/hemaa* in their various villages. As already stated, queen mothers is responsible for settling domestic or household include invocation of curses, invectives, and accusations of witchcraft. Generally, *duabo* cases are settled by all queen mothers in paramountcy's but must the laid down process of the *Asantehemaa*.

During a study and observation in the *Asantehemaa's* court, the *Asantehemma* (or her representative) serves as the head judge, and the majority of the arbitrators are queen mothers from the Kumasi traditional council's cities and villages. Nonetheless, some active males participated in the adjudication, including the principal spokesperson (*Akyeame*), a

representative of the *Asantehene* and *Nsumankahene* but the queen has ultimate authority. As observed in the *Asantehemaa*'s court, before a dispute is settled a charge must be brought to the traditional court then the second party involved would be summoned into the presence of the leaders.

As customs demands, the one who first reported the case pays some money, then the other also pays a counter money (*mpiiso*). The phrase is "*merepii asem no so*," which means "I am countering the case." The offended party files a complaint against the defendant, which can be done verbally without the use of money or alcohol. A messenger is sent by the chief or queen mother and his elders to call the guilty to appear before them. If the accused feels guilty, he or she will plead guilty through a *dwane toani*, or 'intervener,' who may or may not be a member of the arbitrators (at the time or afterwards), and an apology will be delivered to the victim, and the case will be settled peacefully. The participants are also warned that the supernatural entities and the ancestors are now aware of the resolution and would exact their wrath on anyone who revisits the issue.

In the court of the queen mother, the jury consists of the queen mother her linguist, subordinate queen mothers, a representative of the king, the *nsumankwaahene*, some servants, and contemporarily a secretary. The *Asantehemaa* jury sits every Tuesday and Friday (except for *fofie*) to settle issues. Before the *Ohemaa* and her jury would settle a case of *duabɔ*, it should have been brought to the notice of linguist at least a day before the sitting. Once that is done, the linguist would give every information out to secretary who acts as a clerk. On the said day, both culprits and victims of *duabɔ* would be called in front of the jury to make known the situation that brought about

the invocation. Both parties would tell their side of the story (by going through the process of adjudication as aforementioned) and the jury would give judgment as to who is guilty and innocent. Yet still, the imprecator will not go unpunished since he/she has violated a taboo. Thus (s)he would pay a fine to appease the land for breaking a taboo, a ram or cock (depending on the utterances made in the curses), bottles of schnapps for the revocation.

After the fine is paid, both parties would be led by the *nsumankwaahene* to the place of revocation, the *bonsamboɔ* (evil stone). The *bonsamboɔ* is a small rock located in the middle of the Manhyia palace. The *bonsamboɔ* is said to have been planted by the *Okomfo Anokye* for sacred purpose (healing, fertility) and has the power to annul curses if proper rituals are performed on it. Nana Yaw Frimpong agreed and added the *bonsamboɔ* is actually known as “*oboɔ a esombo*” meaning a stone of value but as the Westerner came and saw the wonders it does they referred to it as a devil or evil rock and that’s how the name *bosamboɔ* came about. Osei Baffour, who assists the *nsumankwahene* noted that, any Asante deity invoked can be revoked on the *bonsamboɔ* except for the *Nyamaa* deity because its ritual of invocation needs to be done in the Antoa river itself, otherwise, the *Nyamaa* deity would not accept the appeasement. This shows how powerful the deity *Nyamaa* is as compared to other deities in the Asante society and why most people in Ghana prefer its invocation.

***Nyamaa* Court and Revocation ritual**

Nyamaa is a river deity located at Antoa a town in Kwabre East municipality in the Ashanti region. Its original name is *Anyaman* but has been popularised by non-indigenes as *Nyamaa*. The river is about 1.5 miles away

from the Antoa town itself. People from all around the country and beyond visit the place for diverse reasons such as to petition the goddess, for thanksgiving and mostly revocation of curses. The river is secured with a wooden fence inside the bush with path way. From 6:00 am each morning to 12 noon (apart from Tuesdays which is a resting day) the *abosomfoɔ* sits to settle cases of *duabɔ*.

There were three *abosomfoɔ* (as at the time of visitation) who served as intermediaries between humans and the deity. They are not priest/priestess who are said to have been possessed by the goddess but rather a chief of the town from ancient times chose a family to work for the deity and as generations past descendants of the family have been taught through oral instructions and observation to work for the deity. After 12 noon when cases are settled, and guilty parties are being hooted at, movement towards the river begins. If an Individual is cursed with the Antoa *Nyamaa* river, the case has to be brought before the 'river servants' (*bosomfoɔ*). Since the river has neither a priest nor priestess, the cases of *duabɔ* are always settled in the palaces of the river goddess (*nyamaa fie*) simultaneously by the *Abosomfoɔ* and other elders of the Antoa town. The jury constitutes the *bosomfoɔ* who is the judge, representative(s) of the Antoa chiefs, linguist, and prospective successors of the *bosomfoɔ* (his younger brother, son and nephews, six in number).

When a case is brought to the palace, the imprecator and imprecatee would stand at the middle facing the *bosomfoɔ* and surrounded by elders and people who the matter concerns. Before a case would be settled in the palace, the two parties involved would be fined (*dedua*) for using the name of the deity to imprecate. Then the argument or issue which brought about the

invocation is explained by both parties (first the imprecatee then the imprecator). Afterwards, the *bosomfoɔ* and his elders ask questions for clarity and also to find out details of the matter to see who is guilty or at fault (Stoeltje 1999). Then the final verdict is taken. If the two parties are at fault, both are fined (depending on how grave the case is), a cock(s) and a bottle(s) of schnapps each to appease the deity and to start the process/ ritual of averting the curse but if one party is found guilty then he pays his fine as well as the innocent party's own.

After the court sitting, the guilty party, whether an individual or group, is required to carry a brass pan (*yaawa*) on their head that contains a bottle of schnapps, a cock, a piece of calico (white cloth), and a knife (Asenso 2013). Then, while the audience and other tourists look on, women of menopausal age would follow the perpetrators with songs to address the supplicant's specific issue from one end of town to the other. The purpose of the 'hooting' is to make the individual who committed the offense feel humiliated. According to the *bosomfoɔ*, these women are used in the ritual of hooting because youthful women are seen to be ritually unclean especially in their menstrual cycle thus they are prohibited from being involved in the process of ritual acts.

If the imprecation has resulted into death of individual(s), other rituals are performed else, anyone who touches the corpses or tries to conduct any burial service will also die until the ritual is done and curse is revoked. The *bosomfoɔ* explained that in a situation like this, it is believed that the 'knife' of the deity is active in the home/family of the deceased culprit and its anger strikes others who tries to give any befitting burial (the culprit is believed not

to be worth it). Hence the deceased family would have to pay another fine called 'knife cleaning' (*sekan hohoro*) to return the knife from the culprit family to the deity. The *sekan hohoro* is symbolic and does not ordinarily mean knife cleaning, but it is another ritual on its own. This ritual means the family has accepted that their "royal" is at fault and are pleading for forgiveness. Afterwards some of the relatives of the deceased would represent the whole family in the revocation process.

After the hooting procession, all people who came to visit the deity with diverse issues are matched to the riverside. As already mentioned, the river is secured with a wooden fence with no one is supposed to enter with their footwear and without the permission of the *bosomfoɔ*. Upon entering (first by the *bosomfoɔ*), they begin shouting, "*Nsuo Nyamaa yereba oo*" meaning (river Nyamaa we are coming). This is said to make the deity aware that she has visitors and it is time for her to work. Then the people would be grouped as to the purpose for coming.

One of the *bosomfoɔ* stands in the river where there is a rock to "chair" the ritual while the others would be at the bank ushering and regulating movement of people as well as the utterances of the "chair". The group who are guilty of the curse would be invited one after the other into the middle of the river where they carry along their schnapps and the fowl. When one is invited into the water, he/she first mentions his name (local name only) then the *bosomfoɔ* take the schnapps first from the accused, offers libation into the water, tells the offense of the victim and also ask for mercy and forgiveness on behalf of the culprit on behalf.

Afterwards, the *bosomfoɔ* again takes the fowl from the culprit, slits its throat and pours the blood upon the rock in the water. At the same time the culprit is made to go out of the water to kneel on the bank of the river while beating the surface of the water and pleading for mercy. The fowl is then dropped into the water to struggle and die. After the fowl dies, its head and arm are “torn” off with bare hand and thrown out to one side of the river. Then the fowl is opened wide and its intestines are rinsed in the water. If the intestines turn pale (white) after rinsing, it means the ritual has been accepted and the culprit has been forgiven. While the revocation ritual is ongoing, those standing around would chant appellation unto the deity.

Afterwards the culprit would fetch some of the water to bath his whole body (if a sign of affliction is showing) or wash his face, legs and arm if no sign of punishment has begun. But if there is any black spot on the intestines then it means the ritual has been rejected and so, “*abisa*” (divination) has to be done to find out why the ritual was not accepted. Probably the offender did not confess all his sins then the process of propitiation will start afresh or *nyamaa* was not the deity invoked. The divination is not done by the *bosomfoɔ* since I have already indicated that they are not priests but servants of the deity, but divination is done in the Antoa shrine by another priest to know the way forward. If the ritual cleansing was successful, the culprit will be sent behind the fence, where (s)he will be marked with white clay (*hyire*) symbolizing one is free or victory from all impediments.

Conclusion

In order to understand why *duabɔ* is used by Asante political actors, there was the need to understand the kind of worldview which informed the

people's way of life, how the worldview influences their behaviour or decision making and how imprecation is used in the context of that society to situate its usage. This chapter examined the phenomenon imprecation (*duabɔ*) among the Asante. With the nature of *duabɔ* among the Asante, definitions were examined from the perspective of some writers, and then the root word from which the term *duabɔ* was coined was discussed. Again, the researcher differentiated the subject from other conflicting terms which are *nnome*, *ntam* and *nsedie* which were mostly used interchangeably. The second aspect was about the role of *duabɔ* among Asante and here the focus was on how and when the subject was used both in times past and presently. Thus, the Asante indigenous justice system was briefly looked at to enable researcher to situate the role of *duabɔ* in their arbitration process. Findings were that before *duabɔ* was prohibited, it had almost the same role as *nsedie* (*bɔ wo hodua*) in the Asante arbitration process. The chapter ended with discussion on the consequence of *duabɔ*. Here the researcher centred on the revocation of *duabɔ* both at the *Asantehemaa's* court and at *Asuo Nyaama's* location. It has been understood that imprecation is not peculiar to Asante alone, it is evident in most ancient societies. Yet there is much contrast when the whole ritual of revocation is taken into consideration.

From the literature and fieldworks, the Asante have a religious worldview and though contemporarily most Asante are not formally ATR adherents, their worldview continues to affect their way of life. For instance, in seeking justice, the belief that deities give fair and firm ruling if invoked is still unmitigated and not even their switch to monotheistic religion has erased that mentality. Hence, even with the prohibition and consequences of costly fines,

the people still invoke this deity to solve both social and political issues. This is because of the strong belief of its potency and its efficacy petrifies people into doing the right deed as compared to human organizations.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE RISE OF IMPRECATION IN GHANAIAN POLITICS

Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the concept of imprecation (*duabɔ*) among the Asante and the role imprecations played in their socio-cultural life. The phenomenon imprecation was described as rituals performance which includes utterances, gestures and sometimes offerings to appealing to a greater entity to settle a situation by been the judge, bringing out prove of innocence or rendering punishment to the guilty as deserved. It also looked at the role *duabɔ* played in the adjudication process of the Asante, how widespread *duabɔ* is in present-time and its consequence. The chapter concluded that the belief in the potency of *duabɔ* by the Asante as fair judgment has not dwindled but continues to be effective if invoked. As data has already proven in the previous chapter, *duabɔ* is mostly used in an unjust situation or when an individual is not satisfied with the ruling of human organizations.

This chapter intends to look when *duabɔ* entered into Ghana political sphere and what necessitated it. Since election periods are one times when *duabɔ* is mostly in full display, the chapter would also discuss why *duabɔ* is used by some political actors in seeking redress in political matters especially in electoral disputes. Thus, is there a problem with ways electoral disputes have been resolved by political parties and the court? This will enlighten the readers on the shortcomings of the adjudicating process by these avenues which have encouraged politicians to prefer *duabɔ* as tool for seeking redress to laid down mechanisms of electoral dispute resolution.

Historical usage of Imprecation in Ghanaian Politics

As far as documented, the first time a politician publicly threatened to use *duabɔ* was in 1996. Daniel Ohene Agyekum (then Ashanti Regional Minister) was accused of declaring that, he did not fear the Asantehene but respected him. In order to prove his innocence of not making such statement, Ohene Agyekum sorted to use *Nyamaa* to clear himself of the accusation. (Dovlo, 2006; Acheampong, 2013).

The same individual who had previously made references to the god was responsible for the revival of the name Antoa Nyamaa in the 2008 election campaign. In August 2008, according to Acheampong (2013), Daniel Ohene Agyekum reportedly publicly invoked the *Nyamaa* River to deal with some N.P.P. members who had accused his party (the NDC) of attacking N.P.P. members in the Subin Constituency. Similar to in 1996, Ohene Agyekum asserted that he had not broken any Ashanti Kingdom traditions by invoking the deity and that he had done so only because it had become necessary for him to do so. The invocation was a part of his (Ohene Agyekum's) ancestors' process of seeking justice and truth even before the advent of the Christian and Islamic religions in the country. He explained his decision, saying:

Enough is enough; we can no longer stomach the dirty propaganda machinery of the N.P.P. I am a devoted Christian but I do also believe in our traditional customs and culture. I would therefore seek the intervention of the powerful river *Antoa* to judge this case between us (the NDC) and the N.P.P (Acheampong 2013).

Again, on October 28, 2008, at a press conference, Daniel Ohene Agyekum used a bottle of schnapps, two eggs, and a freshly plucked leaf to call the Nyamaa deity to slay all N.P.P. members who were involved in propagating the lie that N.D.C. members had attacked some N.P.P. members. At the same forum, he “invoked curses on any person or group of persons who would engage in violence or election rigging, and called on the same deity to strike such persons’ dead.” The NDC chairman said he had no regrets despite the condemnation from most Ghanaians for invoking the *Nyamaa* deity to curse certain people in the Ashanti region. (Daily Guide 06/12/2008)

After the above incident, Ohene Agyekum’s successor, Mr. Yaw Obimpeh, the Ashanti regional chairman of the NDC in 2012 also invoked *Nyamaa* on leading members of the opposition NPP. Mr. Yaw Obimpeh utterances were that, ‘may the deity kill the flag bearer of the NPP, Nana Akuffo Addo, the MP for Manhyia constituency Matthew Opoku Prempeh and the Assin North MP, Kennedy Agyapong if they have stocked arms to cause mayhem in the 2012 elections. In a press conference with the journalist of Luv FM, Mr. Obimpeh is reported by Erastus Asare Donkor to have invoked curses again, this time with a bottle of schnapps as he mentioned the names of the three leading members of NPP as already stated. Obimpeh is said to have concluded that if any of his party members, be the NDC leaders commit the same crime the deity should equally strike him dead (Myjoyonline.com 30.10.12).

Apart from Ohene Agyekum and Yaw Obimpeh, another personality who is known for publicly endorsing the use of *duabo* is the late former president Jerry John Rawlings. According to Tweneboah (2014), the late Ex-

President Rawlings has on various occasions after leaving office in 2000, asked his immediate successor the then President John Agyekum Kuffour and other ministers in the N.P.P administration to accompany him to the *Nyamaa* deity to prove his innocence in the killing of some 31 women in the Accra Metropolis after his calls for a Lie Detector yielded no response. Ex-President Rawlings is also claimed to have turned down an offer to attend a national prayer breakfast from His Excellency John Agyekum Kuffour. Rawlings accused Kuffour of concealing national concerns behind prayer groups. He (late ex-president Rawlings) went on to say that if he had been invited to Antoa *Nyamaa*, he would have accepted because there is always fast proof to an accusation (Tweneboah 2014). Though these individuals used *duabɔ* privately, there are political express who represent the leadership of a party yet expressing their political grievances through *duabɔ*. But from 2016 to 2020, the consistent use of *duabɔ* was seen mostly during both primary and general elections.

Parties and Adjudication of Intra-Electoral Disputes

The role of parties in modern democracy goes beyond recruiting leadership for the contestation of elections to cover wide spectrum of activities including enabling the public to participate in activities designed to share in staffing, government and influencing policies with their ideology (Ninsin & Drah, 1992; Morrison 2004). They are more effective means for grassroots participation, speak out their views, and influence the political process than independent candidates. As any organization, political parties have constitution that governs the conducts of its members and how misconducts are managed in the party. There are many political parties in Ghana which

includes the National Democratic Congress (NDC), New Patriotic Party (NPP), Convention Peoples Party, Democratic People's Party, Ghana Freedom Party, Ghana Union Movement, National Democratic Movement, Progressive Peoples Party, United Front Party among others. But in this chapter, the NDC and NPP would be understudied since both are the major political parties in the nation. The NPP and NDC's party have a well-documented constitution which makes it quite explicit on how their internal affairs are to be conducted. The internal affairs of these political parties are also legally guided by legislative frameworks (Article 55 of the 1992 constitution). Thus both parties aforementioned have legal mandate to resolve intra-party disputes.

Political Parties' Constitution

The NDC constitution (2010) comprises of nine (9) chapters, the first chapter explains the name, motto, symbol, color, philosophy and establishment of the party. The second is about the aims and objectives of the party. The third focuses on memberships and affiliation where every citizen could be a member irrespective of origin, religion or social status. The fourth chapter explains the structures and levels of organizations in the party. These structures fall under four levels namely, the branch, constituency, regional, national congress and council of elders. The branch level is the basic unit which comprises of members resident at a polling station. The branch has executives which recruits members and serves party members at the grassroots communities.

Next is the constituency level which also has executive committees responsible for implementing party decisions at the constituency level, supervising branches levels, and nominating candidates for parliamentary

elections. The regional level has executive committee responsible for monitoring the performance of the constituency executives and district coordinating committee within the region, organizing party activities within the region and evolving strategies for conduct of electoral campaign in the region. The highest decision making body of the party is the national congress.

The national congress is convened by the general secretary. The executive of the national congress ensure that the policies and programs of the party are implemented, vet candidates to be elected at constituency levels, endorse the parliamentary candidacy, settle disputes between party officials. The fifth and sixth chapter deals with functions of national officers and structure of national secretariat. The seventh chapter explains code of conducts and the disciplinary codes of the party. Lastly, the chapter eight and nine looks at elections and amendment of constitution respectively. Much emphasis would be on chapter eight (which focuses on elections), chapter seven (code of conducts and disciplinary codes) and chapter four (structures and levels of organization)

On the other hand, the NPP constitution (2009) is categorized into nineteen (19) articles where article one is about the name of the party. The second describes the aims and objectives of the party. The third article explains how citizens can become members of the party, their rights and duties as members. Membership is opened to all citizens of voting age but there are three categories of membership namely founding members, patrons, and members. Those who contributed to forming the party and paid the prescription price are considered founding members. Patrons are people who agree to make regular contributions to the national fund and pay supplemental

taxes to support the party. Persons who are neither founding members nor patrons but have enrolled with any constituency are known as members. The fourth is explains disciplinary and grievance procedures. Here, the appointment and duties of the disciplinary committee at every level (branch, constituency, regional and national) is described as well as various proceedings in resolving appeals from aggrieved members and misconducts.

The article five describes what the structure and organization of the party entails. The sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth articles give detailed explanation on the organizations at the constituency level, regional level, external branches and national levels respectively. Each level has executive committee who should be either appointed or elected from within membership. Article ten looks at removal of officers and this is done if 40% of the delegates that elect at every level (constituency, regional and national) give written notice of the demand for removal of any elected officer shall go through processes before suspension. Selection of parliamentary candidate is the eleventh article. Here the steps to selection are 18 months of advertising prior to that of national election, candidate must be elected at least twelve months to national elections, two years of active membership before applying for nomination and nominees should be registered member and voter in the constituency which he/she seeks to represent. The twelve and thirteen focuses on selection of presidential candidates and the parliamentary group respectfully. The article fourteen explains special organs of the party while fifteen is about council of elders. The sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth article focuses on auditors, rules and regulations to the constitution and amendments of the constitution. The last article which is the nineteenth article is on revocation of the 1992

constitution. Also with the NPP constitution, much emphasis would be on disciplinary and grievance procedure and selection of parliamentary candidates.

Mechanisms of Adjudicating Intra-Party Dispute

With regard to the electoral disputes, Scarow (2005) observes that, settlement of intra-party disputes is usually done internal; during party meetings and conventions. Other mechanisms through which parties ensure that disputes are settled internally is before proceeding to court. As stated earlier, the article 4 of the NPP constitution focuses on disciplinary and grievance committee. The committee can be found in every level of their structure, that is, there are disciplinary committees at the constituency, regional and national level affecting discipline in their jurisdiction by the appointed executive committee in each level. Their duties are to investigate complaints concerning misconduct, make impartial enquiries, report in writing the result of the enquiry and make recommendations.

Per the constitution, aggrieved members are to submit their complaints in writing to the branch executive members to process. Afterwards, proceedings of the disciplinary committee would be held in camera in conducted in accordance with the rules of natural justice. Members of disciplinary committee within 21 days of receiving complaint must conclude on deliberation. As earlier discussed, in the party constitution, the party structures are hierarchical with the council of elders on the top, followed by the national executive committee, then the regional executive committee, the constituency and lastly the branch executive committee. If the aggrieved party member is not satisfied with the verdict of the disciplinary committee a higher level can

be appealed to, either the regional, national executive committee or council of elders. All avenues in the political parties must be exhausted before appealing to the court.

With the NDC, procedures for dealing with complaints of aggrieved members are not clearly defined in their constitution though it is outlined that, any grievance against a leadership of the party should be petitioned to executive members of the higher level. Members are to exhaust all complaint procedures before legal proceedings or adverse publication. The disciplinary committee within 7 days of receiving complaint shall consider the complaint, deliberate and conclude within 21 days of first sitting. If response is dissatisfying, appeal in writing is to be done, addressing the secretary of the executive committee of the immediate higher level. Both parties do not give any laid down process on how electoral disputes are resolved in their constitutions. Despite the existence of all these statutes and regulations, there are still numerous implementation issues and constraints.

The absence of complex dispute resolution processes can be seen by closely examining the constitutions of both parties. Although formal structures and procedures for resolving conflicts are provided by both constitutions, it is important to highlight that while the provisions are extensive, they primarily center on disciplinary measures for dealing with party members who violate the party's norms and regulations. According to Nkansah (2017), neither the NDC nor the NPP's constitutions have any particular provisions for electoral-related concerns. Thus, whenever a problem with the election develops, the two parties form an ad hoc committee. If one is not pleased with the results of these committees' investigations, they can be appealed to at a higher level,

such as the council of elders or the national executive committee. Due to the factionalism inside the party, these procedures have been criticized for being ineffective because of the mistrust and suspicion they have for one another (Akuamoah, 2017).

One would have thought that there should be at least a detailed provision on electoral disputes stating clearly the procedures to be employed in the event of electoral disputes, given that the majority of their internal conflicts have been caused by electoral disputes (candidate and leadership selection). Also, the committee which is created to resolve these disputes do not consist of neutral people but of party executives who caused the disputes from the start. According to Maiyo (2008), disputes are more likely to lead to party splits than coordinated factionalism, there are insufficient formal routes for resolving dissonances, and these disgruntled combatants are more likely to seek redress in national courts.

Looking at these intra-conflicts disputes over the years, it seems like none of these were settled amicably but rather it was an issue of the “survival of the fittest” why the bloc which had powerful supporters often had their way leaving the others to accept their fate and move on. Also, members of parties sometimes do not trust these internal mechanism or may not be satisfied with their judgment thus party members tends to use other favorable means without exhausting all the avenues available. Another reason for unsuccessful dispute resolution is illiteracy or lack of education among party membership. Some members are unaware of the existence of internal structure and mechanisms for resolving disputes in the party.

The Court and Adjudication of Electoral Cases

Most constitutional systems of government divide the judiciary functions into three categories: supervisory, protective, and interpretative. This is due to the judiciary's oversight responsibility to defend the constitution against executive and legislative abuses, safeguard fundamental human rights against infringement by private people or by the general public, and interpret the law (Adams & Asante, 2020). The judiciary has the power to settle issues, particularly those surrounding presidential elections, in its function as the forerunner of democratic rights in the constitutional system. Gloppen (2007) summarizes the judiciary's participation in election adjudication into two key functions: 1) Resolving rule conflicts and making sure that the rules "provide a level playing field" (i.e., they are rule-evaluating). By doing this, they ensure that the laws controlling how elections are conducted are in line with the more important standards and ideals of the constitution.

The courts' second duty is to "ensure fair play; they are rule enforcers" (Gloppen, 2007). In this regard, the court serves as the contest's referee, hearing allegations of violence, correcting errors, and even calling off elections when they think it essential. Yet one of the most notable trends rulings are always in favor of the incumbent or a candidate sponsored by the incumbent or presumptive winner party (Nkansah, 2017). It is crucial to provide a quick overview of Ghana's post-election dispute resolution institutional architecture, as outlined by the constitution, in order to comprehend the function of the courts. The constitution also states in Article 99 (2) that "a person aggrieved by the determination of the High Court may appeal to the Court of Appeal." For instance, Article 64(1) outlines that a

Ghanaian citizen has the right to contest the election of the president by submitting a petition to the Supreme Court within 21 days of the election's results being announced.

Additionally, the Representation of the Peoples Law, 1992 [Act 284] provides more information on a variety of topics, including who is eligible to present a petition (section 17), the deadline for doing so (section 18), reliefs that may be granted (section 19), and the justifications for annulling election results (section 20). The fact that general bribery, treating, intimidation, or other misconduct or conditions, whether or not listed in Act 284, have happened and have affected the outcome of the election, is again one of the reasons for annulling election results. The constitution does not also specify the procedure the resolving these electoral disputes.

Scenarios of Petition to the High and Supreme Court

As witnessed in the 2020 Ghana elections, since voting results were originally released at the constituency level before being forwarded to the central electoral commission in the capital, most political parties and the media were able to create their own calculations. This led to the refusal to concede defeat either by a presidential and some parliamentary candidate and such issues are brought before the court to be resolve in other to maintain peace in the country since constitutionally, all political conflicts must be resolved within specific laws, procedures and institution of the state.

Article 99 (1) of the 1992 constitution confers jurisdiction on the high court to determine any question concerning whether a person has been validly elected as an MP or the seat of a member has become vacant. What this means is that, any complaint or dispute regarding election of any person as a Member

of Parliament as constituted under the 1992 constitution has been conferred on the high court and appeals can be done at the Court of Appeal (article 99 (2), 1992 constitution). Most of the issues regarding the nation's electoral rules have been resolved by the courts since the start of the fourth republic.

Some irregularities and dissatisfaction about general elections ended up in court as the enshrined by the constitution. For instance, Mr. Joe Danquah of the NPP, one of the aspirant parliamentary candidates, requested that a new election be held in the Wenchi West Constituency in Sunyani High Court. He claimed that Mr. Asiedu-Nketiah, his opponent, perpetrated a fraud that altered the results because the District Election Officer did not follow Act 284's requirements (Daily Graphic, January 24, 2001). He claimed that on Election Day, his opponent helped the EC transport ballot boxes holding cast ballots out of the polling place using his personal vehicle. Once more, in order to obtain votes in the election, his opponent gave cash, rice, and flashlights to some of the constituency's registered voters. Even though Mr. Danquah may have had a case, the court did not consider it because of its pre-maturity. (Daily Graphic, January 24, 2001).

Another case that made its way from the High Court to the Supreme Court was the Asutifi South Constituency case. The process began when the Sunyani High Court decided that Mr. Yiadom Boakye-(NPP Boateng's parliamentary candidate) request for an injunction to prevent the EC from announcing the results of the elections had been properly put before it. The NDC parliamentary candidate, Mr. Collins Dauda, and the EC, who were the respondents, subsequently submitted a motion asking the High Court to reject the petition on the basis that it should have been filed within 21 days of the

election's winner being announced and not before (*Daily Graphic*, February 25, 2009). Mr. Dauda filed an application for an order of certiorari after the court dismissed his opposition to the petition, requesting that the Supreme Court reverse the High Court's decision to hear the case that tried to prevent the EC from carrying out its constitutional mandate (*Daily Graphic*, February 25, 2009).

The Asutifi South Constituency case following the 2008 elections is a significant aspect of the causes of election disputes. It was noted that a petition had been submitted against the newly elected MP (Alhaji Collins Dauda of the NDC). The petitioner claimed that the election officials, including the presiding officers, poll workers, security guards, and NDC candidate, engaged in electoral misconduct and that as a result, one could not trust the way they conducted themselves (*Daily Graphic*, February 16, 2009).

As results were announced from different polling places, there were some inconsistencies in the 2020 parliamentary elections as well. One of these cases was in the Assin North constituency, where Micheal Ankomah-Nimfa, a resident of Assin Bereku in the Central Region, filed a petition at the Cape Coast High Court seeking to overturn the declaration of Mr. James Gyakyey Quayson as the Member of Parliament for the Assin North Constituency on the grounds that he owed allegiance to Canada after Mr. Quayson was declared the winner of the constituency. A person is not eligible to serve as a member of parliament if they (a) have loyalty to a nation other than Ghana, according to Article 94 (2) (a) of Ghana's 1992 constitution. In the Central Region of Ghana, the Cape Coast High Court ruled that the 2020 parliamentary election held in the Assin North Constituency was invalid. The

court thereupon mandated that a new election be held in the constituency. The court, presided over by Justice Kwasi Boakye, issued its decision on July 28, 2021, a Wednesday. Joe Gyakyé Quayson, a 2020 contender for parliamentary office on the National Democratic Congress, was found to have violated the constitution's rules governing dual citizenship, according to Justice Boakye's ruling (citinews 03/08/2021).

Another is that of the Techiman South constituency where Mr Baasongti filed a writ at the Wenchi High Court after the December 2020 general election to challenge the declaration of Mr Korsah, the then NPP candidate as the winner of the Techiman South parliamentary election. The issues brought to court included whether the Returning Officer of Techiman South, Nana Dwamena Prempah, collated or did not collate the results of the parliamentary election and whether the NDC candidate, Mr Baasongti, garnered the majority votes as he claimed. The third and fourth issues to be determined, according to the court, were whether or not the declaration by the returning officer was valid and whether or not Mr Korsah was validly elected. As at March 2022, the court had not given any ruling but adjourned the case to 13th and 14th April, 2022 (myjoyonline.com, 30/03/2022).

Unfortunately, due to procedural mistakes, the majority of these petitions had to be rejected or removed from the courts. The court might have given petitioners and respondents the chance to go and correct the inconsistencies, according to an interview with one of the key sources. On the other hand, the 1992 constitution article 64(1) provides that, the validity of the election of the president can be challenged only by a Ghanaian citizen by a petition presented to the Supreme Court within 21 days after declaration of results.

In 1992, the opposition parties that lost the election asserted that the NDC had an unhindered advantage because to the electoral system and procedures used for the 1992 election. The "Stolen Verdict" campaign was started by the opposition parties, led by the NPP, and it presented a compilation of alleged electoral fraud committed during the election against opposition parties by agents of the NDC and the Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC). This resulted in making reforms of the electoral laws and the establishment of the IPAC (van Gyampo, 2017).

On December 28, 2012, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) opposition leaders filed a petition with the Supreme Court of Ghana objecting to the results of the presidential elections, as allowed by Article 64 (1) of the Constitution. These leaders included the party's presidential candidate, vice presidential candidate, and chairman. As soon as the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and its candidate John Dramani Mahama were declared the winners of the 2012 presidential election, Akuffo-Addo, Mahamudu Bawumia, and Jake Obetsebi-Lamprey, the then-leader of the NPP, filed a lawsuit challenging the outcome of the election and the legitimacy of Mahama, who had been sworn in as president on January 7, 2013, who had won the election. Akuffo Addo and the others claimed that the said election was marred with irregularities and the results as declared by the Electoral Commission should be set aside.

The petitioners requested a judicial review and relief on the grounds that: "(1) Nana Akuffo-Addo, the first petitioner herein, was legitimately elected President of the Republic of Ghana; and (2) John Dramani Mahama and his National Democratic Congress (NDC), as the second Respondent

herein, were not validly elected president of the Republic of Ghana." There were "constitutional and statutory violations, malpractices, and irregularities in the conduct of the 2012 Presidential Election," according to the petitioners, which "influenced the outcome of the elections" (Bimpong-Buta, 2013). The petitioners specifically named three major concerns that, if confirmed, would show that the election results should be thrown out: excessive voting, voting without biometric verification, and the absence of presiding officers' signatures on pertinent paperwork pertaining to the voting and counting procedures of the election and the declaration of the final result (Bimpong-Buta, 2013).

The petition's evidence for this claim, however, was solely based on "the entries on the pink sheets completed at the end of the elections at the various polling stations" (Ephson, 2014). The voters' list at any polling place was not used by the petitioners as any kind of support. The second concern brought up by the petitioners was the purported "absence of signatures of presiding officers or their assistants on the statements of poll and declaration of results," also known as "the pink sheets," which, if true, would be a blatant violation of the electoral and constitutional requirements (Bimpong-Buta, 2013). The third topic of irregularities related to instances where persons were said to have "voted without biometric verification" (Bimpong-Buta, 2013). The Supreme Court affirmed the results as announced by the election commission on August 29, 2013, in a 5-4 decision following several months of court hearings and legal discussions.

Similarly, the just ended 2020 president election results was not accepted in good faith as the flag bearer of the opposition party John Dramani Mahama

petitioned the court with his first respondent been the EC chairman that in sum, the declaration of the electoral results were bias in favour of the second respondent, the president elect, Akufo Addo and total lack of transparency. Former president Mahama petitioned that, an order of injunction should be placed on the incumbent president to restrain him from holding himself as a president until further investigation was done. After several sittings and hearing of the cases, the Chief justice Kwasi Anin- Yeboah , dismissed the case on the bases that, the petitioner did not demonstrate in any way how the alleged errors made by the EC chairperson on the 9th December 2020 affect the validity of the declaration made. Also, the chief justice continued that, the petitioner did not produce any evidence to back his presumptions therefore, the case was dismissed since there was no reason for a re-run as indicated by the petitioner (myjoyonline.com, 4/03/2012).

Nevertheless, the final verdict of the Court triggered some criticisms from some civil society leaders, lawyers, legal scholars and the public. They questioned the political autonomy and decisional independence of the judges in the majority camp, which they insisted affected the impartial adjudication of the election petition. Specifically, they argued, that the verdict of the Supreme Court failed to uphold the rule of law and constitutionalism due to the liberal interpretation of the electoral constitutional laws by the majority of the Judges. Despite publicly accepting the Court's ruling, the failed litigants made it apparent that they disagreed with it. The leader of the NPP, Nana Akuffo-Addo, emphasized in his concession speech following the Supreme Court's ruling that while he disagreed with the court's decision, he accepted that "what

the Court says brings finality to the election dispute" and that it was crucial to "move on in the interest of our nation" (Baneseh, 2015).

Similar to this, the Citinews videotaped a former president Mahama's speech, in which he said that "anyone who followed the Supreme Court's proceedings would be astonished by the ruling delivered a few hours ago". Even while I am aware that we must abide by Supreme Court rulings, I don't agree with the process of the trial and the ruling of the court (Citinews, 4/03/2021).

Conclusion

From the literature presented above, observations made were that, until now final decisions made by the court about presidential election disputes are always in favour of the incumbent and either has any of the opposition presidential candidate fully agreed with the courts pronouncements. It seems that even before the case is presented to the judiciary, it is already prepared to preserve the election results that has been announced because the presidential candidate may have been sworn-in months before final verdict is pronounced. Thus the adjudication process has lost its meaning and the work of the judiciary is to most likely explained away discrepancies as inconsequential or not substantial. Also, since the constitutions of both political parties do not have laid down procedures in adjudicating electoral disputes, ad hoc committees which are created to deal with such issues when need arises are partial in their dealings and prone to manipulation by 'big men' or "camp mates" as in the cases cited during candidate and leadership selection hence encouraging mistrust and lack of confidence in party members. As some

research has proven, Ghanaians already have the perception of a corrupt judiciary and their failure in administrating justice.

With the issue of resolving electoral disputes, a major challenge of the court adjudication is its delay in ruling as witnessed in the 2020 Parliamentary elections of the Techiman South and Assin North constituencies which the former has not been resolved after almost two years. Again there should be citizen education on how to petition court with complaints and grievances since some people may have genuine cases but as a result of minor errors and anomalies in petitioning their cases might be dismissed without consideration of merits. All these shortcomings of the aforementioned agencies of electoral conflict resolution persuade some citizens to invoke extra judicial measures such as '*duabo*' in adjudicating electoral disputes.

In sum, the chapter looked at electoral disputes and its adjudication by the courts and by political parties (NDC and NPP). First the issue of electoral disputes and what resolution systems referred to were discussed. Then the constitutions of both parties which included their structures, level of organisations, and the mechanisms for adjudication were also examined. The chapter also discussed internal disputes that happened over the years in both parties and reasons for the disputes. Lastly, the role of the courts and its involvement in resolving electoral disputes were explored by looking at scenarios of electoral disputes, how the court managed it and the criticisms levelled against these agencies.

CHAPTER FIVE

ASANTE POLITICAL ACTORS AND IMPRECAATION

Introduction

The previous chapter focused on electoral disputes and its adjudication in Ghana. Discussions were made on mechanism through which political parties and the court used in resolving electoral disputes and its limitations. The chapter concluded that, most political activists do not trust the judiciary to give a fair ruling when it comes to resolve electoral disputes since the incumbent are always pronounced winners as even stated in the speeches of the presidential candidates of both the NPP and NDC in the 2012 and 2020 general elections respectively. Also, delay and manipulations in the adjudication process by some “gurus” in both the court and party committees has led to the mistrust of the populace. Hence, these agencies are not patronised by aggrieved electorates but rather, invocation of deities (*duabɔ*) which is believed to be faster, easier, effective and trustworthy is preferred.

The chapter also examines why some politicians of the NDC and NPP in the Asante region used *duabɔ* and not the laid down procedures of resolving electoral disputes in past elections especially 2016 and 2020 primaries and general elections. The chapter presents the findings from the field, media reports and discusses the results vis-à-vis the literature.

Factors that Necessitate the Use of *Duabɔ* among Asante Political Actors

From the period of 2016 to 2020 the use of *duabɔ* in political arena is on the increase as compared to previous years. Interviews with some party executives and delegates of the two major parties in Ghana (the NDC and NPP) shared various reasons why *duabɔ* has found its way into political

discourse. These includes, Mistrust in the electoral commission, corrupt nature of the justice system, Imposition of candidates, Registration of minors and foreigners, Membership and opportunities, character assassination which would be discussed in details with illustrations.

Mistrust in the Electoral Commission

Apart from neutrality, the Electoral Commission is supposed to be fair and firm, to be able to win the confidence of the contesting parties as well as the electorate. Even with the presence of the IPAC (Innovative Inter-party Advisory Committee), which was formed in March 1994 to bring together representatives of parties to regular meetings with the EC as a way of checking the action and inactions, the EC is still not trusted. Some Ghanaians have the perception that, the EC is not transparent enough with its processes and may be discriminate against some political parties; hence some citizen and political activist prefer to use invocation of deities (*duabɔ*) as a means to supervise the actions of the EC in order for fairness to prevail. Most issues have always heightened a party's mistrust for the EC acting as a referee in an election. Any party among the two leading political parties in opposition sees the EC as a devil and you bear witness to what happened prior and during the 2016 and 2020 elections. "Charlotte Osei must go" "Charlotte Osei is in bed with the NDC" "Charlotte has registered foreigners" Likewise Jean Mensah. The relationship with the EC is always negative as far as a party is in opposition and it is also unfortunate that the incumbent seem to be partners with the EC.

Therefore, on one knows which party is speaking the truth and its worse when representatives of parties return from the inter-party advisory committee

meeting and give different interpretation as to what actually transpired. An interview with the Ashanti Regional secretary of the NDC pointed out that, one among various reasons why the NDC distrusts the EC is about the situation which occurred in 2018 after the NPP had won the 2016 elections, the appointment of the EC chairperson (Charlotte Osei) and two commissioners were terminated and President Akufo Addo appointed a new EC chairperson and new commissioners. The Ashanti Regional secretary made an assertion that,

The conflicting issue here is that though Ex president Mahama appointed Charlotte Osei and her team, they fairly pronounced the NPP the winner of the 2016 election so why then would President Akufo Addo terminate their appointment and appoint his wife's relative, Jean Mensah as the chairperson for the EC if not for dubious means. This makes the NDC question the competency and neutrality of the EC over 2020 election results and also brings out the suspicion that the new commissioners might be NPP members.

Thus, though he as an individual would not use it because of his religious affiliation, every member of his party had the right to use any mechanism at their disposal to ensure that the NPP would not rig the election so far as it is devoid of acts of violence. Another informant (an NPP activist) also disclosed that

“because of the use of duabɔ, EC personnels especially polling station agents who were either planning to rig the 2020 elections in favour of the opposition party and also intimidate voters had to reconsider their decisions due to fear of the duabɔ been effective

them. Thus duabo protected the integrity of the polls as nobody was prepared to incur the wrath of dreaded deities”.

To add up to the above responses is a video circulating on YouTube of furious some citizens of the Subin constituency, identified with NDC colours who were seen at the banks of the Subin river with a crate of eggs, a bottle of schnapps, and a white ram as they stood at the bank saying that, “ the deity should deal with anybody who has the mindset of rigging or conspiring to rig the impending general election especially the EC and its officials who are perceived to be “in bed” with the ruling party. This is because Francis Dodovi, the NDC Ashanti regional communication member alleged that the EC has plans to rigs the 2020 elections for the NPP. Similarly, Nkansah (2017) observes that, the effectiveness of any EC is in carrying out its functions independently irrespective of composition or mode of appointment. Yet the EC of Ghana has been the major disputant in several cases and as this trend continuous, it weakens the electoral system as well as reduces public confidence.

Registration of Minors and Foreigners

Compilation and revision of the voter register is another aspect that sometimes breeds conflict which results to *duabo*. During these times, electorates are schooled on what is right (avoid multiple registration, impersonation, unlawful possession of voting materials, registration of minors and riots) and the rules and regulations that governs elections to ensure problem free registration and elections. Over the years, rumors has been heard of on how some “die hard” parent of parties register wards who are minors while political activists also bring in foreigners especially from neighboring

countries in order to increase floating membership of a political party with the final aim of winning elections.

When these concerns are voiced out authorities do their best to resolve these issues. For instance, the District Registration Review Committee (DRRC) is a body with exhaustive mandate and procedures in place to comprehensively address the issues on the qualification and disqualification of applicants who seek to be registered (Nkansah, 2017). Yet still some citizens do not see the service of this committee to be enough thus *duabo* is used to scare irregularities from happening during voter registrations. The NDC Ashanti regional youth organizer commented that,

“Sometimes when these illegalities (registering of minors and foreigners) are displayed and a citizen tries to carry out his legitimate duty of challenging the EC officials, the security personnel around turn a blind eye. I have witnessed an instance where a citizen was beaten by a security personnel for confronting the issue of registering minors. These securities persons who were supposed to be neutral were encouraging criminal activities. But invoking deities of the land instead, intimidates unqualified persons to getting registered as well as EC officials from knowingly registering minors and foreigners”.

In a circulating video are some unidentified men in NDC coloured apparels in Kumawu, a district in the Ashanti region invoking a “river deity” on the Electoral Commission, the Ghana Police Service, the Ghana Armed Forces and the ruling party NPP over the voter registration exercise. The members in the video are seen and heard invoking the deity to strike any of

these officials aforementioned if they try to assist in rigging the voter registration exercise by allowing minors and unqualified applicants to be enrolled on the voters register. From the video, an elderly man who appears to be a chief linguist of the “river deity” received items such as crates of eggs, an amount of money and a white cow which was slaughtered with blood spilling over (Daily Guide, 22 June, 2019).

One can infer that, *duabo* is used to deter anyone who intended to go contrary to the electoral laws by bringing in foreigners to register as eligible voters in Ghana and also serve as a check to certain inactions of EC officials. Frempong (2008) noticed that, there are still some flaws in the EC’s conduct of elections. For example, the 2004 voter registration exercise was somewhat marred by conflicting directives from the EC and the manner in which the related photo-taking exercise was conducted gave critics the chance to allege that the EC had favoured the incumbent party in its electoral stronghold of the Ashanti Region. Instead of the district office, the process should rather start from the registration centres and this creates a viable system to flush out unqualified voters from the register or to prevent unqualified people from registering to begin with. This process must be nurtured as it is effective in ensuring that the voters register is cleaned at the micro level rather than waiting to have it infested before attempting cleaning at the macro level through the EC.

Imposition of Candidate

Parties have various internal elections which start from the polling station level, electoral area coalition, constituency elections, regional elections

then to national elections even before primary elections and general elections which usually attract the attention of the populace.

Party executives are still interfering in these internal elections by purposely and selectively removing candidates from contention so that their preferred candidates can win with no opposition. Particularly when there are only two contenders for the nomination, party leaders get active in the primary process. There have been numerous reports of blatantly undemocratic methods being used to choose candidates for the presidency and for the parliament. Party leaders have frequently been charged with blocking primaries in some districts, while in other districts, poorly organized or botched primaries led to disagreements that cost both main parties votes in general elections. Once more, some parliamentary candidates themselves attempt to sway the vote of the electorate and delegates by "hosting" them, paying for their "transportation" and "refreshments," and occasionally by engaging in direct bribery on election day.

Unfortunately, the majority of these MPs who engage in such activities are individuals who have little contact with their areas, have not carried out any programs for community improvement, or have not kept their election-related commitments. Thus because party executives have the mandate to vet and reject candidates, vetting becomes one of the ways in which party leaders could prevent aspirants from contesting for these elections. Several candidates who spent huge sums of money running the primaries for parliamentary candidates expected significant returns of their investments through winning but failed. All these acts of discrimination and biases inform the decisions of

some “powerless” electorates, delegate and aspirants to use *duabɔ* during internal elections.

An interviewee, explained that,

“a party, though unified at the forefront has camps (factions or blocs) which exists within it, striving for power. The issue of power struggle at the presidential/ flagbearship level influences that of the parliamentary level since the person who wins the presidential primaries would want people from his camp to win parliamentary seats. For instance, among the NPP, there are members of the party who belong to the Allan Kyeremanteng camp and others for Akuffo Addo/Bawumia’s camp. So once Akuffo Addo won the presidential primaries, most parliamentary primaries would go in favour of his camp members. Similar issues happen at the constituency level where executives mostly have their preference depending on the camp they belong”.

“Also, some executives enjoy contracts and other benefit from incumbent MPs which influences their decision in the selection of candidate especially if they are convinced that the aspirant poses a threat to the incumbent.”

Another interviewee, noted that;

‘another target of elimination is an aspirant who does not have financially stability to support the constituency and the party in general, then, a richer rival who may have aided the party financially (patron or founding member) such as sponsoring the

parties campaigns is viewed more favourably and generally has an advantage’.

This explains where *duabo* was at full display during the primary elections for both NDC and NPP as recorded by the Peace FM.

During the 2015 primary elections of the NDC, where some National Democratic Congress delegates in Atebubu-Amantin constituency in the Brong Ahafo Region refused to cast their votes in the primaries for fear of their lives due to a curse on them. It was noted that, aggrieved supporters of the party whose favourite candidate, Sampson Owusu Boateng, was disqualified to contest in the primaries, invoked the Antoa deity on the delegates to scare them from voting. The supporters said they will only reverse the curse if Mr Boateng, who was the District Chief Executive in the area, was allowed to contest in the primaries to stand the chance of representing the party in the constituency, our Regional. These supporters wanted party officials to allow Mr Boateng to contest the sitting MP, Sanja Nanja, who was seeking a second term in the constituency. Reports have it that, as at 12:35pm of the voting day, only 100 out of the 10,413 delegates had voted. Meanwhile, voting was supposed to end at 3:00PM. (21/11/2015, tv3network.com/peacefmoline.com). The fact that these delegates feared to cast their votes proves that they were involved the claims of the supporters were true that the delegates were ‘in bed’ with Sanja Nanja, the incumbent MP and that was why he was going unopposed.

Again, some supporters of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in the Asokwa Constituency of the Ashanti Region were dissatisfied with the deeds of the executives for their intention to disqualify aspirants who they know are

genuinely qualified to contest in the June 2020 primaries. The single candidate running against the incumbent MP, according to the supporters, has supposedly been disqualified by the national leadership, even though the party hasn't formally disclosed the names. Invoking the god and pleading with the party leadership to ensure a fair election in the constituency, the enraged party members gathered beside the Susa River at Atonsu to express their displeasure. Concern at the development was voiced by some of the enraged Asokwa fans in interviews with Citi News. "The reason we are invoking the curses is that we want peace to prevail in this community. We don't know why the constituency executives have decided to disqualify the aspirant."

This curse-invoking craze is similar to one that saw Juaben and Offinso South NPP supporters execute rituals and invoke curses to protest what they believed to be a decision to disqualify some candidates from the NPP parliamentary election. Angry delegates from the Offinso South Constituency marched to the Offin River to carry out a ceremony in order to thwart any attempts by party executives to force them to vote for the incumbent MP, Abdallah Banda. Delegates in the Juaben Constituency of the Ashanti Region expressed their displeasure with the party officials' choice to exclude Francis Owusu from the constituency's primary elections (www.myjoyonline.com, 05/06/2020).

As stated earlier, all parties now have constitution which well-defined formal procedures and structures that regulating the conduct of parliamentary primaries. However, the existence of these formal rules does not prevent party executive manipulation the outcome election system. Most of the underlining issues that resulted to the use of *duabɔ* in the primary elections were about the

manipulation of party executives of various constituencies who because of the power vested in them wanted to disqualify opposing candidates in other for only one person, the incumbent to stand unopposed. Mostly this happens in the stronghold constituencies where if a candidate wins the primaries he/she would automatically win the parliament sit to become the Member of Parliament for the constituency. Due to the growing recognition that the office of MP carries with it not only status and prestige but also certain privileges, including financial benefits and even power, especially for the fortunate few who get nominated for ministerial positions, parliamentary primaries have grown in importance and have become the scene of bloody contests.

According to the Ashanti regional NPP organizer, there are mechanisms by which grievances of members of a political party are addressed. Yet these mechanisms are barely recognised and patronised. He notes that,

“ the party does not have law that prohibits its members from using duabɔ but rather the constitution has structures and laid down processes to deal with peoples grievances. But with all these structures members give preference to the use of duabɔ since the process is time wasting”.

the NPP organizer for Ejisu constituency further explains

‘sometimes complaints are writing to the disciplinary committee as needed yet never received claiming it went missing and nothing would be done about the complaint. Some constituency executives are able to influence the decision of the disciplinary committee to prolong and render the complaint useless because the decision for

disqualifying an aspirant was a direction from the national level or patrons. Also issues could be genuinely discussed and solutions are sort for but may delay to the extent that, by the time solution are brought both primary and general elections may be over. These structures are human institutions so definitely there would be some kind discrimination”.

Some scholars have observed that candidate imposition among the NPP and NDC results to all kind of disputes. Ninsin (2006) asserts that party leaders frequently force candidates on voters during primaries in an effort to take over the party structures at all levels. Party godfathers and elites use a number of tactics, including violence, to keep the rank and file out of the selection process for candidates and leadership (Debrah, 2014).

Perceived Corrupt and Partisan nature of the Judicial System

From the response of respondents, the judiciary is not trusted to be free and fair in its deals. Instance of Ghanaian elections which has been petitioned to the court has always been in favour of the incumbent party which results to opposition questioning the credibility of the court. The perception is that the proceedings of the court on disputes of presidential declaration is just a formality as the position of the chief justice is an appointment by the executive. Generally, many have questioned the fairness and firmness of the judicial system of Ghana. Some responses from members of the public were that;

“The courts are not accountable to we the citizens but their first loyalties lay with appointee, the president”. “the court is for the

rich who can give incentives and promotions to the judges and not poor people”.

Another instance is a video circulation over the claims of impersonation of Sarah Adwoa Safo, the MP of Dome Kwabenya Constituency, the NDC national organizer, Hannah Bissiw invoked several deities to deal with the aforementioned MP if she was the chamber of Parliament on the 30th November 2021 when the house voted and approved the 2022 budget. Hannah Bissiw in the video of her speaking at a radio station mentioned that,

“some of us will never go to the circuit court, Magistrate court, ‘Abusuapanin’ court, the Supreme or High court. Our laws are in our hands/pocket, we are pocket lawyers and that is why I am saying all water bodies surrounding this country, all deities in Ghana and in Adwoa Safo’s hometown should deal with her, her womb (generations) and the woman who represented her because this budget would affect the lives of some husbands, wives and children if she allowed another individual to sit in and vote on an essential issue in Parliament. But if Adwoa Safo was indeed present in parliament then these curses should escape her (Ghanaweb 10/12/2021).

The introductory statement that Hannah Bissiw made that, some of ‘us’ will never go to court demonstrates her intention of mistrusting Judicial system of Ghana. Also, Bissiw’s last statement that, if indeed Adwoa Sarfo was in court let the invocation escape her means there is the probability that the claims of impersonation is without much evident thus, the court might even dismiss the case. Again, Bissiw used duabɔ to draw the citizenry’s

attention to the fact that, this might not be first time an ordinary member of the public may have been to the chamber of parliament and partook in a crucial decision making process.

Similarly, in an interview with the Ashanti NDC regional Chairman stated

“the court is not for us (referring to those in opposition) but for the ruling government. The Supreme Court judges been appointed by the president are even worse. For instance the NDC won in parliamentary seats in two other constituencies where evidences were available to back the allegation, but the court kept giving flimsy excuses(lights off and plant is faulty) in other to adjourn the meetings till the case was dismissed. Personally, a property of mine has been demolished since 2015 meanwhile I have provided all the documents needed yet the case has been adjourned, many times and where the judge mockingly said we can meet again on this said date or you have to wait for your government to come to power. Some relatives have invoked deities which I have encouraged both personally and politically though I would not use it myself.

Generally, this perception erodes trust in the courts' impartiality, harming all the core judicial functions, such as dispute resolution, law enforcement, and protection of property rights. Judicial corruption is just more than material bribery but can also be sexual favors, or the offered 'furtherance of political or professional ambitions and may also take the form of avoiding something undesired, in the form of threats (Gyimah- Boadi, 2008). Even with bribery it may include fining of illegal 'fees' that court personnel levy to do what they should do anyway. The inability and inefficiency of the judiciary to

discharge their duty transparently without delay has resulted in citizens losing confidence in them and openly asserting their preference in *duabɔ*. Inductions from some political activists interviewed are that, sanctions in contemporary times appear to be sterile in being an effective deterrence but *duabɔ* is able to exercise considerable control in matters relating to rigging of elections.

Membership and Opportunities (fighting the big men)

The NDC and NPP are organized along the model of mass parties, each of them combines card bearing or fee-paying membership with informal or floating membership. The NDC constitution does not clearly define who a party member is but generally article 8 (1) states that, membership of the party is open to every citizen of Ghana irrespective of ethnic origin, religion, place of birth or socio/economic status. On prospective members, Article 8(4) states that “a person wishing to join the party shall apply to a branch by filling out membership form and upon acceptance; the member is entitled to pay a subscription fee and annual dues. Officially, such person qualifies as a registered card-bearing member of NDC. In contrast, membership in NPP is made up of three categories; founding members, patrons and members. Party loyalty and monetary considerations are significant in all these three categories of membership. Founding members are those who took active part in the Danquah-Busia club, paid prescription fees and contributed to the launching of the party in 1992.

The patrons are members who undertake to contribute to the national fund of the party for the support of the party’s organisation such as extra levies as the party may impose from time to time. This levy paid by the founding members and patrons are in addition to whatever membership dues they may

pay in the constituency in which they are registered as members. The third category of membership is simply known as the members. These are the rank and file member at the grassroots. The common thread is that all three categories of NPP membership have the same rights to contest for any position and participate fully in the activities of the party to ensure that local organs of the party work effectively and accountably. Like the NDC, party members varies in their involvement, there are smaller number who pick up forms and pay subscriptions and others who the larger pool those who are members but do not have any membership card.

The common thread is that all three categories of NPP membership have the same rights to contest for any position and participate fully in the activities of the party to ensure that local organs of the party work effectively and accountably. Both NPP and NDC, party members varies in their involvement, there are smaller number who pick up forms and pay subscriptions and others, who the larger pool; those who are members (floating members) but do not have any membership card.

For some Ghanaians, formal membership of a political party is an act of faith and loyalty while others demonstrate commitment and contribution of sustenance to the party with an expectation of a reward. These vibrant and committed people (mostly the youth) are mostly of the grassroots level and are known as foot soldiers. Foot soldiers ensure that directives and party information coming from the national level reach the grassroots and also perform crucial tasks during elections periods (Bob-Millar, 2014). Party leaders have been accused of neglecting the concerns of foot-soldiers once they secure office. These claims raises critical questions of the internal

working of the parties and their incentive system which makes some unsatisfied youths resorted to *duabɔ* after feeling cheated and neglected. This was revealed when Awudu Kasim, the NPP chairman for Bontodiase electoral area (Asante Akim North constituency) went to a river god called “Inspector” to invoke curses on the Member of Parliament for Asante Akyem North Constituency, Andy Appiah-Kubi. He reportedly mentioned that constituency chairman, Sampson Agyei, and other party executives including William Aboagye to further invoke curses on them. Awudu, according to a report cited by YEN.com.gh on Ghanaweb.com, felt deceived by the party and these executives after they promised him jobs but failed. The report has it that, Awudu felt he did so much for the party but after winning power, he was sidelined and later suspended from the party, hence, his action. At the premises of the deity, Awudu reportedly said: *[Inspector, my name is Kassim Awudu, a polling station chairman for NPP at Bontodiase Electoral Area in the Asante Akyem North Constituency. I have suffered and sacrificed a lot for the NPP and especially during the 2016 elections. I was used by Andy Appiah Kubi for a lot of dirty works which saw his victory and that of the NPP as well. I was promised a job by the MP and I have waited for 3years now but to no avail. I recently received a letter of suspension from the Party’s secretary, Williams Aboagye and according to him, my offense was organizing my fellow polling station executives to campaign for a candidate in the impending parliamentary primaries. Inspector, if the MP, William Aboagye, and the other constituency executives have ever met any polling station executive and campaigned for them to vote for the current MP, Andy Appiah Kubi, and have not suspended themselves, kill all of them]*. These were the exact words used

by Kassim at a river called Bonfo which is popularly known as inspector”, he invoked with a crate of eggs and a bottle of schnapps in a video sighted by MyNewsGh.com"(Dailyguidenetwork.com, 06/08/ 2019).

Then in 2020, before the parliamentary primary election, Kassim again invoked the same deity on his party executives with eggs and schnapps at a riverside wearing white cloth at the waist level and a red band on his head. His utterances were that the river deity should deal with any NPP constituency member who secretly met with delegates before official nomination for MP polls. His reason for the invocation according to him was that he has been accused falsely and suspended for meeting some delegates before the official nomination. Thus if any executive involves himself in this same act and is not suspended, then the deity should rule on his behalf. Kassim Awudu reportedly died after suffering an unknown ailment for some time and was buried that same day since he is a Muslim (February 21, 2020, Citinews).

According to the NDC Ashanti regional treasurer,

“the youth today are much concerned about what will come into their pockets personally after supporting their political party to win elections and not how good the party in power will perform for the betterment of the country as a whole. Most of these youth looking for an easy way of acquiring wealth think been active in politics and doing dirty works for a party is one of the easiest way to have a comfortable life thus by way of vote buying, some Mp’s and party executives go out of their way to make all kinds of promises to these youths who may be jobless or seeking for better opportunities that they make them involve themselves in all kinds of

malpractices (stealing of ballot boxes, conflict) even at the point of death to work for a party not for the love of the party.”

The NPP regional organizer also noted that,

“there are some foot soldiers who were not employed by any party leader to do anything but some people themselves work for the MP’s thinking that it may help them be in the good books of the MP who may also be of help to him/her when the need arises.”

Most people view politics as a means through which ambitious people might obtain power and seize control of the enormous patronage resources found within the state. Because they believe that elections are primarily advantageous financially to candidates and the party leaders themselves, party activists have a sense of entitlement and expect to be paid directly for their work. Few people join the NDC and NPP with the primary intention of aiding in national development or advancing the parties' stated common objectives, according to Bob-Millar (2012). Fundamentally, party activism in Ghana is driven by selective incentives. Some supporters, platforms, and foot soldiers from both parties gauge their activism by how much money they stand to make.

Character Assassination

Another issue that has called for the usage of *duabo* in Ghanaian politics is the act of character assassination which is a deliberate and sustained effort to damage the reputation and credibility of an individual. It refers to both the process (spreading false fabricated stories) and the outcome (damaged reputation). The act involves various kinds of defamation attacks which are similar to abusive attacks used in adversarial context to steer attention from

important issues to an opponent's personal traits or reputation. Character assassination has been a widespread method of power struggle and consists of character attacks in a form of verbal and non-verbal assaults which includes spoken insults, rumors, campaign ads and tweets.

As a result, potent candidates have been rejected by electorates. This is to misinform the crowd about the opponents moral, integrity and public image. This refers to intentionally and falsely accusing an opponent or a competitor with the aim of ruining ones reputation by fabricating lies to the public and the opponent especially during campaigning for a position. With the growing influence of public opinion in Ghana, the acceptance or rejection of a candidate sometimes depends on moral behaviors as it emerges as a desirable standard for electing candidates. Any attack that is in regards to inappropriate act such as theft, extramarital affairs drives away candidate interest in the citizens. An attack on a politician's image, reputation, or brand affects electorates' perception, thus raising false accusations and deliberately misinforming others about the opponent's morals, and integrity is a way of manipulating and misleading the populace.

Seth Atanga the NDC Ashanti regional youth organizer for instance observes that, issues with regards to character assassination cannot be taken to court because most times authors behind these fabricated stories are unknown people who are paid to hide behind social media and anonymously disgrace a contestant. He stated that,

[duabɔ has always been one of the ways used in our society to clear oneself from accusation and disgrace because some issues needs immediate resolution. Formal processes such as the court or disciplinary committee in

the party would prolong the case while the harm is already done]. A clear instance is the “Papa no” issue which fabricated against our presidential candidate in the elections season to rob him of the honour and respect Ghanaians have for him. Can this issue be taken to court?”

Similarly, the NDC regional chairman Augustus Andrews also noted that, *[I have been a victim of this issue quiet recently, as an internal election is approaching, an unknown person started sending video across NDC platforms that I (Augustus Andrews) and the general secretary Kwame Zu are solely to be blamed for Ex-president Mahama losing in some new demarcated constituencies in the Ashanti region during the general 2020 elections because there were some polling stations where myself and Kwame Zu refused to send polling agents to monitor the elections and a whole lot of untrue stories. Some of our supporter within our party especially in my constituency invoked deities to prove that we are innocent of these allegations before the case was called by the disciplinary committee].*

According to Ick & Shiraev, (2014), character assassination in politics, is usually part of political smear campaigns that involves intentional, premeditated efforts to undermine an individual or group’s reputation and credibility. Smears often consist of attacks in form of distortions, half-truth or even outright lies. Interestingly, the ability to polarize an opinion weakens a fellow candidate and set voters adrift. Hence, as a targeted candidate’s popularity declines, the other becomes more prominent.

From the above, observations are that in Ghanaian politics, the function of *duabɔ* was not only for seeking justice but address political disputes, demonstrate ones intentions and allow electorates and delegates to

voice out resentment and frustrations to the Electoral Commission, political leaders and party executives. This was because delegates and electorates are not convinced about the neutrality of the Electoral Commission and some party executives hence *duabɔ* is used as a check on them to ensure that they are fair in administering their work. Other political activists from both the NPP and NDC who suspected each other used it to intimidate themselves in other to prevent rigging of elections. Also *duabɔ* gave others the platform for some irregularities and misconduct of certain institutions to be presented, discussed and negotiated. Lastly, *duabɔ* was also used to express peoples mistrust and dissatisfaction of the services judicial system.

Response of leaders to *duabɔ* issues in politics

With the rampant usage of *duabɔ* in contemporary Ghanaian politics, much concern has been raised especially with chiefs and traditional councils because though *duabɔ* is not against the state laws, it is against the laws of the Ashanti kingdom since the deities that is mostly used is located in the Ashanti region. Baffour Asaberekogyawosu Ababio (111), the *nsumankwaahene* (chief priest of the Asantehene) who is responsible for all spiritual matters including averting *duabɔ* and sanctioning persons who invoked any deity in the region warned that the *Antoa* deity among others could strike the offenders anytime for its constant misuse of the name and the refusal to perform the necessary rituals to reverse politically-motivated curses (Daily Graphic 10.08.2013).

Again, most of these political activists who publicly resorted to *duabɔ* went unpunished, while few faced the consequence of their actions. For instance the Obosomfo of the Nyamaa deity stated that, some executives of the Asokwa constituency were summoned, reprimanded, and fined for engaging in

an abominable act. They were also made to render an apology to the paramount Queen mother and members of the traditional council with a promise to be of good behavior. Similarly in Juaben, the leadership of the NPP in the constituency were brought to disciplinary measures for their actions.

The actions and inactions of political leaders shows that they are not ready to put measures in place to prohibit the act. Thus one can infer that they see nothing wrong with it and that the use of *duabɔ* can always be used by citizens of Ghana. To some extent the executives NPP showed little abhorrence to the use of *duabɔ*, as some members of the party who employed *duabɔ* during the elections were suspended from the party. But other prominent person(s) in the party such as Chairman for Bono Region, Mr. Kwame Baffoe (Abronnye) who used *duabɔ* publicly, even on national television since 2016 has not been apprehended.

On the other hand, the leadership of the NDC seems to have endorsed the use of *duabɔ*. As observed in the NDC Ashanti regional headquarter, Daniel Ohene Agyekum is been nicknamed “Nana Obɔdua” and his past actions of resorting to *duabɔ* did not seem a problem to the party. The late former president J.J. Rawlings as aforementioned also threatened to resort to *duabɔ* couple of times in history by insinuating that it was even effective and the judicial system. Kwame Zu when interviewed responded that he as a Christian will not make use of *duabɔ*, but will never discourage anyone who would want to use it for the betterment of the party. Lastly is the former Women’s Organizer for the NDC, Madam Anita De-Soso who is said to have called on all executive members of her party to commit the 2020 general

election to any deity to punish anyone who is harboring an intention to rig the polls. In her claims, she notes that

“....as for me I am a Christian and so I am fasting and praying to my god but if anyone has any belief in anything, whether river, rock, trees or any object, pray to them, invoke their power during the election because we don't have guns or any weapons; place a curse against anyone who will dare to rig the polls.....” (Okay Fm, 8/10/ 2020, youtube).

Lastly Seth Atanga again opines that

“the question we should be asking is, is duabɔ a wrongful act? While some may view the act from a Christian or Islam lens and condemn it, we should not forget that, some Ghanaians also believe that deities are children of God and can be called upon at any point in time. If a Christian pray that, God should deal with an enemy and that is not a wrong prayer, why should another person's prayer that Nananom Abosom should deal with you be wrong. Duabɔ is not an evil act and more of it usage would be seen in the coming years if that is what will make people act properly”

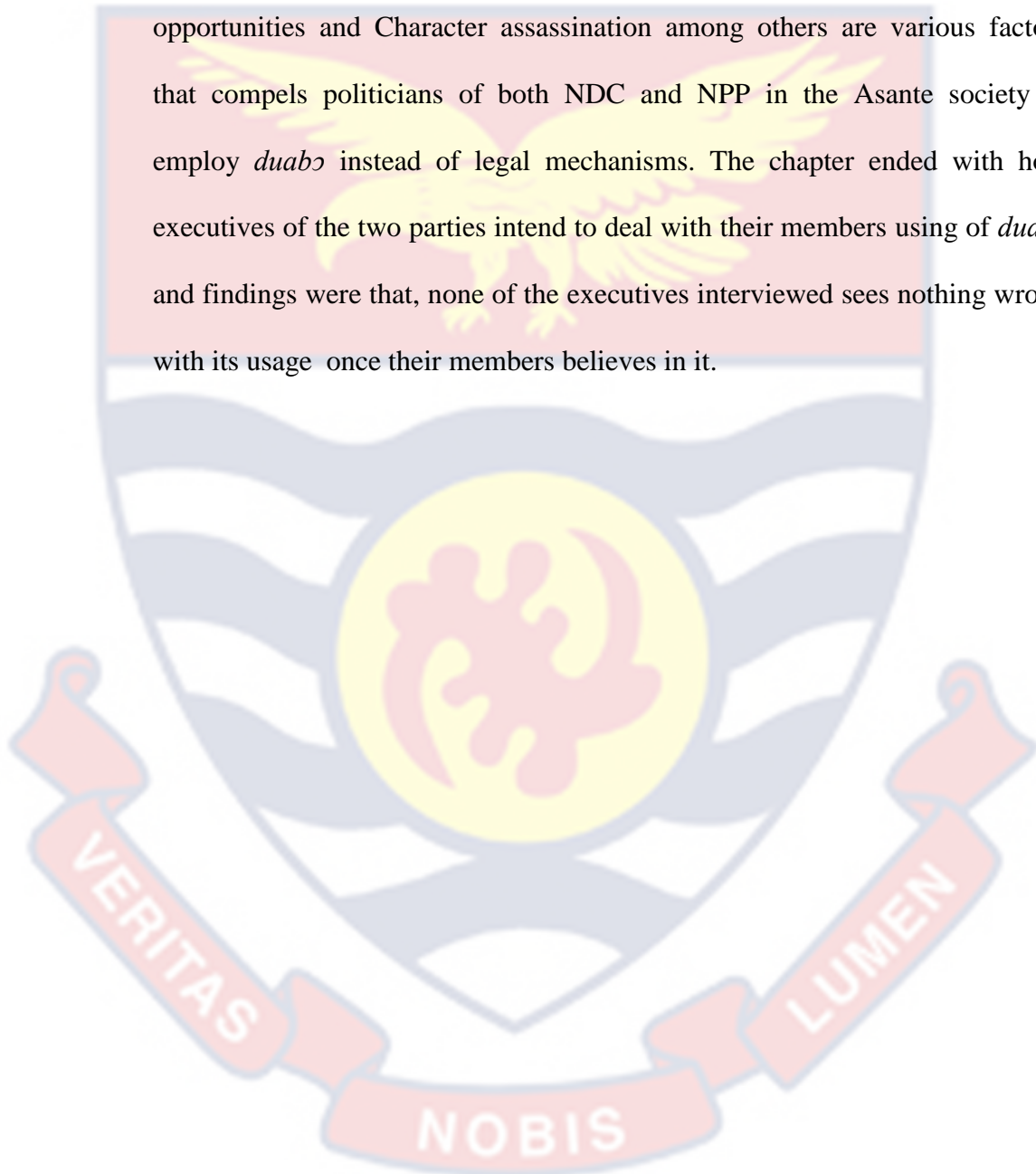
Conclusion

One can infer that one of the reasons why *duabɔ* has found space in contemporary political affairs is because first of all, when it was used in the past sanctions were not metered to the users in order to serve as a deterrent to the current generation. Hence it gives the assumption that once prominent leaders made use of it and nothing was said gives the

impression that it is a rightful and acceptable act. Also, though most respondent were of the view that the corrupt nature of the judiciary that some political activist prefer *duabɔ* to the court, most times, on the issues of elections, *duabɔ* is used because of a feeling or hunches that a leaders of a political party may rig the election. Obviously, a case of having a feeling of an opponent rigging an election cannot be settled in court since the court needs tangible and substantial evidences in other to give a verdict. Again people have come to believe that measures in the various political parties to settle grievance of party members are not dependable since the process is long (to the extent that elections may have ended) or may yield no result thus invocations which are faster and easier are preferred. Lastly is the belief that *duabɔ* is effective both as a deterrent and punishment once the individual to whom it is invoked against is guilty. All politicians aforementioned agreed to the effectiveness of *duabɔ* that, most of invocation works but because it is mostly against the masses, evidence cannot be given. Also most of these tragedies such as road accidents we see happening to some politicians could be as a result of *duabɔ*. But one cannot turn a blind eye the function of *duabɔ* as a means of drawing attention to certain issues happening in society which makes authorities hesitate to seek redress in order to solve those issues.

The chapter mainly focused on factors that compel some politicians of the NDC and NPP in the Asante society to use *duabɔ* means of seeking justice and redress political matters. The chapter then presented the findings from both primary and secondary sources in line with the objectives of the study. The study established that, there is a significant relation between the

ineffective adjudication of electoral disputes and the use of *duabɔ* in contemporary political discourse. The chapter also identified that, mistrust of the Electoral commission, registration of minors and foreigners, imposition of candidates, corrupt nature of the judicial system, membership and opportunities and Character assassination among others are various factors that compels politicians of both NDC and NPP in the Asante society to employ *duabɔ* instead of legal mechanisms. The chapter ended with how executives of the two parties intend to deal with their members using of *duabɔ* and findings were that, none of the executives interviewed sees nothing wrong with its usage once their members believes in it.



CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the research process and main findings, draws conclusion from the main findings and gives recommendations based on the findings can conclusion drawn.

Summary

This thesis sought to investigate the claim of some writers who claimed that the African Traditional Religion (ATR) has gradually faded out and its ideas and practices are no more relevant to contemporary Africans since the introduction of western religions and cultures. Hence, a contemporary practice of the Asante's of Ghana was studied to buttress the argument of the researcher that ATR is still relevant and active in the lives most Africans. This was done by researching on *duabɔ*, the invocation of ATR deities as a means of seeking justice by some political actors in the Asante society. In this thesis, I have tried to examine the use of *duabɔ*, in seeking justice and addressing political disputes among the Asantes to prove the fact that, the practices and philosophies of ATR, has not been totally abandoned as some African scholars perceive.

The mixed method approach was employed for the study. Using quantitative approach, questionnaires were given to respondents to ascertain the widespread of the knowledge and use of *duabɔ* among the people of the Asante society. On the other hand, the qualitative using interview guides was used in acquiring information from traditional leaders on the nature of *duabɔ*

and from some politicians reasons why it is used in political arena especially in political disputes.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study are summarized under the various research questions.

Research question 1:

The role of imprecation in the socio-cultural life of the Asante

Duabɔ played a judicial role in the socio-cultural life of indigenous Asante's. It was seen as the last resort means in adjudication of cases in where there were no witnesses and truth was not ascertained. Though *duabɔ* is believed to be too vindictive and retaliatory that amounts to nothing but crisis and enmity, *duabɔ* was a justified mechanism in the judicial institution of the Asante. It was used to frown upon inappropriate behaviours capable of being mimicked and disrupting legal norms to ensure social equilibrium.

This finding contradicts the writings of Agyekum (1999) that *duabɔ* has been a taboo since the 1900's and was catamount to severe punishment. It is rather about two decades ago that the current Asantehene prohibited the act due its rampant usage at least provocation leading to loss of many lives. Thus, dire consequence including sanctions of paying of fines and performance of revocation rituals befalls any individual who uses it. However, the consequences of resorting to *duabɔ* still does not prohibit some Ghanaians from using it in their day-to-day activities as witnessed in full glare during the 2020 primary and general elections. This is because of the belief that *duabɔ* is more effective and efficient than the adjudication systems in the society since

the supernatural is fair and prompt in their judgment as compared to humans who are easily manipulated into being dishonest.

Research question 2:

How prevalent is the use of *duabɔ* among contemporary Asantes

On the issue of how widespread *duabɔ* is in contemporary Asante's society, findings were that though Asante's have been influenced by foreign religions and Western cultures to the extent that almost all members of the society is officially an adherent to a foreign religion, yet the worldview that underpins their indigenous belief systems has not been totally erased off. Hence, in situations where the new found faith does not give solution, the 'ways of the fathers is followed'. All respondents had knowledge of the term *duabɔ* but explained it differently.

All respondents also believed in the existence of various deities in the Asante society come to people's aid when invoked. Even though *duabɔ* has been publicly declared as a taboo among the Asante's, most respondents preferred it to the legal judicial system for its effectiveness and promptness in administering justice. About 70% of respondent agreed to use *duabɔ* in dire situations since the court favours the rich and not the innocent and most time settling of cases are prolonged with the excuse of conducting investigations which result to delay of justice.

On the visitation to the *Nyamaa* court as already stated, 107 people both men and women were there for revocation of *duabɔ*, thanksgiving or petition. According to the *Obosomfoɔ*, the turn up would sometimes increase because people came from not only the Ashanti region but other part of the country or the world with different problems but many issues are that of *duabɔ*. This

shows that, even though Asantes may officially belong to any of the world's religion, the beliefs of their fathers (ATR) is inherent in them that anytime it's seem the official religion is not giving a solution, then ATR is the next option to go with. It was also found out that those who engage in the practice of imprecation cut across all social, religious and educational divide. Though scholarships on the subject *duabɔ* has largely been normative as they mostly rely on qualitative approach, this findings with the use methodological strands has brought on board statistical evidences to prove the widespread of the act and reasons it is heavily relied on by modern secular society as the Asante.

Research question 3:

Factors that necessitates the use of *duabɔ* as a means of seeking justice in Ghanaian political arena

Findings were that, the various factors which compels politicians to use *duabɔ* during electoral process include mistrust in the Electoral Commission, registration of minors and foreigners, imposition of candidates, perceived corrupt nature of the judicial system, perception of members of the two leading political parties, NPP and NDC that when parties are in power opportunities are not equally offered to members of parties and character assassination for political advantage.

First, findings were that, though the EC is supposed to be independent and serve as a referee in the electoral process, the appointment of the EC chair by the executive makes Ghanaians to perceive that, the incumbent president has power to influence some decisions of the EC during both compilation of eligible voters and elections thus leading to mistrust of the EC and its officials. Hence some citizens and political activists invoke deities to serve as a check

and also supervise the EC from rigging the election to favour a party. *Duabɔ* serve as a deterrent but it also ensured that some measures were put in place for security persons to secure border towns so that no foreigner may get access into the country.

Again, imposition of candidates on delegates and parties members as a whole is another reason why *duabɔ* has been employed by some politicians. There is also perceptions that, party executive disqualify aspirants either because they do not belong to their camp or as a result of some benefits gained from incumbent MP's. Hence they allow the incumbent to go unopposed during internal and primary elections. Though there are mechanisms to resolve these issues, the process take a longer period to the extent that general elections might even be over before verdict may come out, therefore, *duabɔ* is resorted to deter party executive from been bias.

Another factor that encourages *duabɔ* in Ghanaian politics is the lack of confidence in our judicial system. Ghanaian judiciary for a long time have been tagged by most citizens as corrupt in delivering their services, comparably, some politician especially parties in opposition also share same sentiments that as the judicial council is appointed by the executive, the judiciary is prone to being manipulated by the party in power.

Further, another reason for the use of *duabɔ* in politics is the neglect of vibrant party members who were promised of better livelihood after winning election yet afterwards are forgotten. Findings were that some youth indulge deeply in politics doing all sought of "dirty works" for the party or some "big men" of the party with the aim of being in the good books of these men. Yet after elections are won, they are forgotten and left to fend for themselves.

Thus, vibrant members with the aim of seeking vengeance on party leaders resort to *duabɔ*.

Lastly is on the issue of character assassination where politicians believe that, *duabɔ* is the fastest way to clear one's name and reputation when an untrue story is fabricated against an opponent since it has been ancient ways of clearing one's name when accused. Delegates and party executives of the two major parties in Ghana (NPP and NDC) and various reports from media outlets aided in given supportive instances backing the outlined issues.

Research question 4:

Is the use of imprecation in contemporary Ghanaian politics a critique of things as they are?

The study shows that, non-adherence to electoral laws of the state are the causes of most electoral disputes. This involves, among other things, official meddling, fraud in the electoral process, or violations of the law. Election laws typically allow for these abnormalities as justification for contesting the results in court and with certain political parties, among other venues. Yet the various challenges associated with these mechanisms have resulted to most citizens' employment of extra-judicial measures known as *duabɔ*. These resolution agencies are criticized for not being transparent in executing justice and delay in adjudication resulting to mistrust in the whole resolution system. Also, general perception of Ghanaians about these agencies is that they are not independent but are influenced by incumbent leaderships in practice as doubts have been expressed about their impartiality.

The courts have never invalidated election results as announced by the EC in regard to petitions regarding presidential elections. The announced

winners, who are typically the incumbent presidents or their associates, have generally had the election results upheld by the courts and prevailed. This makes citizens perceive that the process of adjudication is just a mere formality but does not aim at righting wrong acts. Thus the courts should ensure that their decisions on electoral laws should lead to fairness, clarity and certainty of electoral laws. Impartiality requires that the judges dispense justice without fear or favour. The aggrieved citizens choose the law as their arbiter and put their hope in the law hence adjudication should bring closure to electoral disputes, all things being equal.

Additionally, the question of how free and fair these procedures have been rising despite the fact that political parties have encouraged some level of competition by allowing nominations from qualified members who are interested in running, promoting it widely, and having elections. The same persons who are at the hierarchy in decisionmaking and adjudication are those who do so when party leaders force their will on members while remaining hidden behind the scenes

Last but not least, while Ghanaians have had legitimate concerns about how elections have been conducted over the years, the parties in dispute have done nothing to address pre-election irregularities through established mechanisms until they have already lost and are attempting to have the results overturned due to irregularities. It's also possible that they wanted to draw attention to the legal flaws even if they lost in the hopes of making the system better the next time around. They undoubtedly found it difficult to concede loss in the electoral contest, and the court gives them a place to vent their resentment in the hopes that the outcome would be favourable.

The study found out that, *duabɔ* is a means by which some politicians and political actors express their sentiments, frustrations and their dissatisfaction about the irregularities and partialities during electoral processes and how political disputes are adjudicated. They also express their frustrations on happenings in their respective political parties in the context of contesting for positions in the parties and the sharing of ‘booties’ after winning political office. The use of *duabɔ* brings out an illness in the way elections are conducted and election disputes are arbitrated or settled. It serves as a catharsis for these pent-up resentments to come out to the opening for redress. In so doing, citizens seem to be indirectly calling forth for solutions to problems associated with the whole electoral administration in the country and in individual parties.

This finding is a confirmation of various studies in Africa on the relationship between the role of religion and the resurgence of indigenous African institutions in contemporary governance. The idea is that when there is institutional failure religion and indigenous institutions come in to fill the vacuum so created or come to complement the existing modern institutions. In the context of resource development Ellis and ter Haar (2004) make the following observation: “. . . where the state can no longer convince people of its ability to deliver prosperity through development, religious ideas are likely to gain a renewed attractiveness”. George Bond has also makes similar observation. He says that the resurgence of indigenous institutions like the chieftaincy institutions is due to the failure of modern states in Africa to address the needs of the governed (1976: 160).

Conclusion

The first chapter dealt with the general introduction. This would include the background to the study, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research objectives, research question, significance of the study, methodology, and literature review.

In the chapter two, imprecation among societies such as the near easterners, the Iranians, the Hindus and some Africans were discussed. Among the near Easterners, imprecation was used as a tool for social control behaviours, as punishments, and also used to threaten opponents to sign treaties. Among the Iranians imprecations were invoked on traitors of their religion and also used to settle issues of infidelity between married couples. In African societies, imprecation served as a deterrent mechanism when ensured that social vices were minimized and truthfulness was encouraged. It sometimes also served as an oath to prevent future negative occurrences. Some writers of Hindu epics noted that some aspects of Hindu customs such as the act of blessing and curses preceded the doctrine of Karma thus the term curses is not alien to the Indian society. Imprecation may differ from one society to the other yet there are similarities that manifest in the practice, irrespective of the society. These similarities can be found in the context of its aims in seeking divine justice and bringing punishment upon an offender in a situation by invoking the supernatural to intervene.

The chapter three examined the phenomenon imprecation (*duabɔ*) among the Asante. With the nature of *duabɔ* among the Asante, definitions were examined from the perspective of some writers, then the root word from which the term *duabɔ* was coined was discussed. Again, the researcher differentiated

the subject from other conflicting terms which are *nnome*, *ntam* and *nsedie* which were mostly used interchangeably. The second aspect about the role of *duabɔ* among Asante and here the focus was on how and when the subject was used both in times past and presently.

The fourth chapter looked at electoral disputes and its adjudication by the courts and by political parties (NDC and NPP). First the issue of electoral disputes and what resolution systems referred to were discussed. Then the constitutions of both parties which included their structures, level of organisations, and the mechanisms for adjudication were also examined. The chapter also discussed internal disputes that happened over the years in both parties and reasons for the disputes. Lastly, the role of the courts and its involvement in resolving electoral disputes were explored by looking at scenarios of electoral disputes, how the court managed it and the criticisms levelled against these agencies.

The final chapter focused on factors that compel some politicians of the NDC and NPP in the Asante society to use *duabɔ* means of seeking justice and redress political matters. The chapter then presented the findings from both primary and secondary sources in line with the objectives of the study. The study established that, there is a significant relation between the ineffective adjudication of electoral disputes and the use of *duabɔ* in contemporary political discourse. The chapter also identified that, mistrust of the Electoral commission, registration of minors and foreigners, imposition of candidates, corrupt nature of the judicial system, membership and opportunities and Character assassination among others are various factors

that compels politicians of both NDC and NPP in the Asante society to employ *duabo* instead of legal mechanisms.

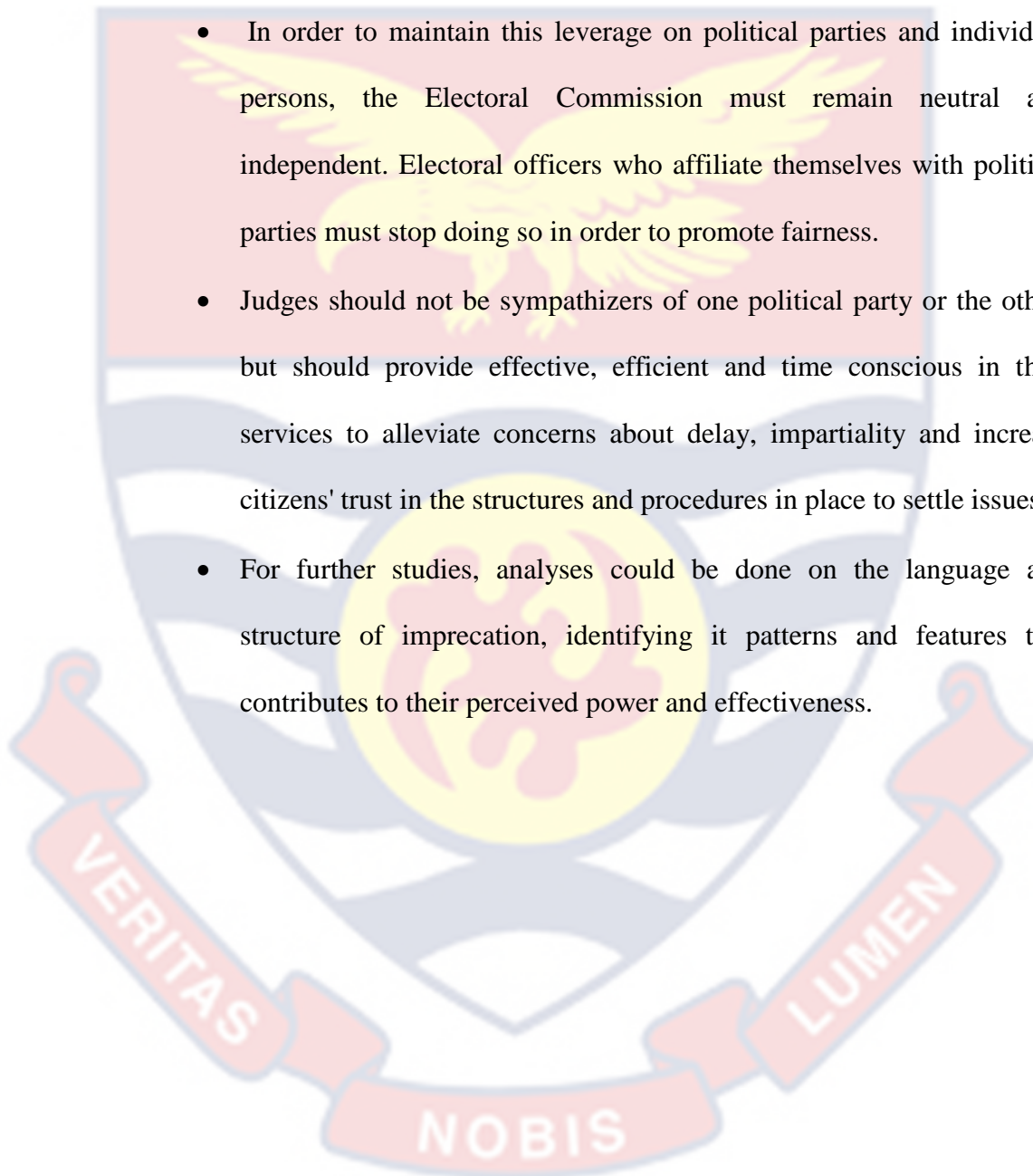
In sum, the research has not only exposed the weaknesses and challenges of the electoral resolution mechanisms (court and political parties) in Ghana which included delay and lack of transparency in adjudicating electoral disputes but has unravelled factors that encouraged the employment of *duabo* among politicians in the Asante society. The challenges and constraints identified in the electoral administration, resolution of election related cases, the internal activities of both NDC and NPP question the basic practice of democracy in the country as a whole and the practice of internal democracy in both the two leading political parties in Ghana.

Recommendations

- Political parties must strengthen their conflict resolution mechanisms to promote fairness in resolving disputes. Disciplinary committees must perform their duties with neutrality and transparency to boost the confidence of party members.
- The constitution of parties should be elaborate enough to provide more clarity in order to prevent subjective interpretation and ensure effective resolution process. Also, amendments should be made in the constitution of both parties (NDC and NPP) as to creating an electoral dispute resolution committee and proceeding on how election related dispute would be adjudicated, independently of the disciplinary codes and committees.
- Both parties must also embark on a large education campaign to empower and strengthen the capacity of lower-level members, as well

as teach them about internal dispute resolution methods. This will increase their participation and inclusion in decision-making, while also reducing the use of unconstitutional measures to express dissatisfaction.

- In order to maintain this leverage on political parties and individual persons, the Electoral Commission must remain neutral and independent. Electoral officers who affiliate themselves with political parties must stop doing so in order to promote fairness.
- Judges should not be sympathizers of one political party or the other, but should provide effective, efficient and time conscious in their services to alleviate concerns about delay, impartiality and increase citizens' trust in the structures and procedures in place to settle issues.
- For further studies, analyses could be done on the language and structure of imprecation, identifying its patterns and features that contribute to their perceived power and effectiveness.



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