SOCI 223
Traditional Ghanaian Social Institutions

Session 8 – Witchcraft, Sorcery and Divination

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Session Overview

• At the end of the session, the student will
• Know the sociological relevance of the three terms
• Understand the role that witchcraft, sorcery and divination plays in traditional religion
• Understand how witchcraft, sorcery and divination serve as social control mechanisms in traditional Ghana
• Know the difference between witchcraft and magic
• Understand the usefulness of these crafts to the practitioners
Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:
• Topic One – Witchcraft
• Topic Two – Sorcery
• Topic Three – Divination
• Topic Four – Social Functions of witchcraft, sorcery and divination
Reading List

Topic One

WITCHCRAFT
Who is a witch?

- Male or female
- Young or old
- Possess supernatural powers
- Conscious or unconscious use of this power
- An inherent force (Evans-Pritchard, 1937)

- Witchcraft accusations
  - Envy, fear, hatred
  - Function of social relations
Transmission

• Inherited
  – Through parents who do not provide the line of descent

• Acquired

• Functional specificity

• Rituals for acquiring witchcraft
How do we identify witches?

• Physical defects
• Live alone
• Live with animals
• Miserly people
• Hot tempered
• Excessive wealth
• Abject poverty
Why are sociologists interested in the study of witchcraft?

• Social control mechanism
  – Based on the characteristics of a witch
  – People avoid becoming targets of witches
Topic Two

SORCERY
Sorcery

• The negative application of magical powers?

• Requirements
  – Manipulation of physical objects
  – Spells or incantations
  – Purity of the performer

• Acquisition – not inheritable
Topic Three

DIVINATION
Divination

• The art of seeking to know hidden things and the future by magical means

• 3 categories
  – Trials by ordeal
  – Hexing
  – Oracle consultation
Divination

- Trial by ordeal - the guilt or innocence of the accused is determined by subjecting them to an unpleasant usually dangerous experience

- Hexing - casting a spell over someone or something
Oracle consultation

• 3 types
  – Manipulated magical objects e.g. afa
  – Visible vocal oracles e.g. tsagbee, amega
  – Invisible vocal oracles
SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF WITCHCRAFT, SORCERY AND DIVINATION
Social functions of witchcraft, sorcery and divination

- **Political** – social control
- **Religious** – enhance relationship between people and the supernatural
- **Economic** – for acquiring wealth
- **Marriage and family** – enhance stability of traditional marriage (hex of chastity)
- **Education** – use of divination during rites of passage
- **Health** – healing by sorcerers