Interrogating Dominant Ideology in Media Representations of Witchcraft-Related Gendered Violence: The Case of Mariama Akua Denteh

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Media studies scholarship in Ghana has disproportionately focused on political communication and press freedom, with few studies taking a feminist approach to understanding the representation of marginalized people in media narratives. Existing scholarship has examined the representation of Ghanaian women in film and music. This study examines the way that women are represented in news media, focusing on one specific incident as a case study. Through framing theory guided by an intersectional African feminist lens, I examine the way that mainstream media represented the lynching of Mariama Akua Denteh. I argue that although news media purport to be objective in news reportage, the patriarchal systems within which media organizations are situated shape the ways in which they report narratives that focus on marginalized communities. I demonstrate how the news frames on the lynching of Madam Denteh demonstrate the marginal position that Ghanaian women occupy and how that can guide us toward deconstructing how intersecting oppressions are treated in narrativizing news stories that focus on marginalized women.

Keywords: African feminisms, Akua Denteh, feminist journalism, intersectionality, representation, patriarchy, witchcraft accusations

Although gendered violence has seen extensive discussion in the public sphere often by government actors, civil society organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), not much attention has been paid to the way that gendered violence is mediated and how these mediations can interrogate, challenge, or reproduce violence in Ghana. For years now, discussions around witchcraft in the Ghanaian public sphere have often been shaped by the news cycle. Many news media organizations often look to authority figures and stakeholders to tell the stories around gendered violence. Very often, the voices of victims are erased from these discussions for various reasons. While there may be "well-meaning" erasure of victims' voices to protect their identities and respect their wishes to not retraumatize themselves by having their experiences relitigated in the media, the most common form of erasure is rarely "well-meaning." This erasure happens when media organizations frame stories that reproduce the patriarchal status quo and

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often align with the abuser by presenting victim-blaming frames (Owusu-Addo et al., 2018). Various types of gendered violence such as rape and physical abuse often dominate the news cycle.

In recent times, an uptick in religiosity and religious content on media platforms in the country has meant that religious actors have come to be regarded as opinion leaders on various social and political issues (Mohammed, 2019). This elevation of religious actors as opinion leaders in media mirrors their elevation in society where many community members express strong commitment and identification with religious identities. Religion and spirituality therefore occupy an important position in the Ghanaian public sphere today (Adjepong, 2021; Owusu, 2020). Despite these evolutions in the public sphere, not enough scholarship has examined the mediation of religion in news media, film, television, print, and digital media platforms, among others. Existing literature has merely examined the relationships between media and religion and focused on evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity (Asante, 2020; Meyer, 2004).

Even more scant is the literature that examines gendered violence in media. A quick review of the literature focusing on Ghana demonstrates that there is very little scholarly work that examines the representations of witchcraft and violence associated with witchcraft accusations in the media. In this article, I examine media representations of witchcraft and violence associated with witchcraft accusations by critically analyzing news reports of the lynching of Mariama Akua Denteh, a 90-year-old woman in Kafaba in the Savannah Region of Ghana on July 23, 2020. I present the analysis as a case study of media framing of gendered violence and the ways in which media systems reproduce dominant societal ideology about gendered violence. I argue that although news media purport to be objective in news reportage, the patriarchal systems within which media organizations are situated shape the ways in which they report narratives that focus on marginalized communities.

Research on Witchcraft in Africa

Although there is scant scholarship on witchcraft that focuses on media and communication studies, existing scholarship on witchcraft accusations is often concentrated in the disciplines of anthropology (Crampton, 2013), sociology (Assimeng, 1977), religion (Gray, 2005; Kirby, 2015; Thomas, 2012), criminology (Owusu, 2020), and global health (Owusu-Addo et al., 2018; Tenkorang, Gyimah, Maticka-Tyndale, & Adjei, 2011). Much of the scholarship on witchcraft in African communities focuses on the way that witchcraft accusations disproportionately affect elderly women, therefore drawing attention to the gendered nature of violence that emerges from these accusations (Adinkrah, 2004, 2017; Owusu, 2020).

In Kleibl and Munck's (2017) analysis of the relationship between NGOs, religion, politics, and witchcraft in Mozambique, they assert that although scholarship on witchcraft has focused on the discipline of cultural anthropology, this scholarship needs to be expanded and explored from the perspective of development studies and social justice studies given the critical role that NGOs, state actors, and traditional society play in discourses on witchcraft. They also assert that witchcraft accusations are a way for communities to articulate their problems and find solutions to them (Kleibl & Munck, 2017).

Some scholars have taken a comparative approach to understanding witchcraft accusations, drawing attention to the global nature of patriarchal violence while parsing out the contextual differences in

these violent acts that disproportionately affect older women. Adinkrah and Adikhari's (2014) comparative scholarship on witchcraft in Ghana and Nepal demonstrates that although older women are often accused of witchcraft in both countries, in the case of Nepal, caste factors into witchcraft accusations, leaving older female members of lower caste communities like Dalits the most vulnerable. They found that in both Ghana and Nepal, "witchcraft-related violence is a form of gender injustice used as a ploy by aggrieved men and their agents to deprive widows and other women of their succession rights and inheritance rights to property" (Adinkrah & Adhikari, 2014, p. 318). More work needs to be done to examine the way that gender, age, class, and ethnicity intersect in cases of witchcraft accusations in Ghana.

Relatedly, Roxburgh's (2017) comparative study of witchcraft narratives in Ghana and Cameroon indicates that in Ghana, witchcraft could be viewed as a force for both good and evil, whereas in Cameroon, her respondents perceived witchcraft solely as a tool of evil and harm. Roxburgh (2017) critiques the reductionist approach to examining witchcraft and witchcraft accusations as a Northern Ghanaian problem by drawing attention to the complexities of the issue within Ghana and across the continent. Despite the existence of scholarship on witchcraft in other disciplines, the issue remains under-theorized in the field of media and communication studies.

Gendered Violence and Witchcraft Accusations in Ghana

Although there is scant research on the relationship between gendered violence and media in Ghana, existing research on the topic has examined the ways in which the media has been complicit in reproducing violence through news media representations. Using framing as an analytical framework, Owusu-Addo and colleagues (2018) found that news frames about stories that focus on gendered violence published in 2014 participated in the reproduction of harmful narratives by blaming the victim, exonerating the perpetrator, and divorcing violence from the structural factors that produce it. This means that the news media were not objective but instead parroted the dominant ideology around gender-based violence by downplaying its severity through the aforementioned frames. They also found that the news stories "quoted sources such as perpetrators, family members and criminal justice officials blaming the victims," thereby erasing the experiences of victims and siding with the perpetrators of violence (Owusu-Addo et al., 2018, p. 6). While Owusu-Addo and associates (2018) take a broad approach to examining media representations of gendered violence, I focus specifically on the representation of witchcraft-related gendered violence using the Mariama Akua Denteh story as a case study.

In studying witchcraft-related femicide in Ghana, Adinkrah (2004) analyzes "13 incidents of homicide committed against women accused of witchcraft during 1995 to 2001" (p. 325). Adinkrah (2004) argues through a gender-analytical lens that witchcraft-related violence is a form of gender discrimination shaped by social and cultural factors. Focusing on the Akan group, Brempong (1996) examines the relationship between witchcraft and childbearing, bringing attention to the ways in which witchcraft is often used to explain female infertility. Other scholars have also found that witchcraft has often been blamed for various misfortunes such as illness and unexplained deaths, among others (Adinkrah, 2008; Owusu, 2020; Thomas, 2012). In other scholarship, researchers have sought to understand how discourses of witchcraft in Ghanaian society have been transmitted through music (Adinkrah, 2008; Brempong, 1986). Adinkrah (2008) asserts that the proliferation of discourses on witchcraft in Akan highlife music has had a tremendous

impact on popular notions of witchcraft, which in turn has reinforced belief in witchcraft and has facilitated the growth in radio programs dedicated to discussing bewitchment.

While various scholars have aimed at explaining witchcraft, witchcraft accusations, and witchcraft-related violence, more work needs to be done to connect this type of gendered violence to the systemic factors that produce it and how media organizations that are part of these systems can reproduce gendered violence in news narratives. In this article, I am not interested in explaining witchcraft or debating its existence; rather, I am interested in contributing to addressing the gaps in the literature that fail to examine how structural oppression that produces multiple marginal identities often presents poor old women as targets of this gendered violence and the way that dominant ideology is reinforced in news stories about this type of violence. More work remains to be done to examine how news media organizations are implicated in the institutional oppression of women and other marginalized groups in Ghana.

Intersectionality, Media Representation, and Framing

Although intersectionality has been theorized by Black feminist scholars in the United States to understand gender and race, there is more work to be done to understand how intersectionality can be conceptualized in Global South contexts like Africa. Since Crenshaw (1989) proposed this concept to highlight the uniqueness of the oppression of African American women, there has been growing interest in using this concept to understand oppression and marginalization as they apply to other identity categories and different sociocultural contexts (Mohammed, 2022). Here, I use intersectionality to understand the way that Mariama Akua Denteh's identities shaped her lived experience and how that in turn was represented in media frames.

There has been growing scholarship in the field of media and communication that has focused on using intersectionality to understand the ways in which identity and social systems interact. According to Byerly and Sha (2023), editors of a recent forum on intersectionality in the *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, scholars in the field "tend to apply the term variously as a concept, a theory, a methodology, and even praxis" (p. 1). Scholars like Dosekun (2022) have used intersectionality to understand the feminist politics of Nigerian women, concluding that digital activism within the Nigerian space often leaves out the experiences of the majority of Nigerian women who are marginalized based on socioeconomic class.

In an essay on the feminist politics of Ghanaian activist organizations, Mohammed (2022) finds that very few feminist organizations clearly articulate an intersectional praxis, which means that issues affecting disabled people, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, and other (LGBTQIA+) people, working-class people, and people from marginalized ethnic groups and religions are often erased in the work of many activist organizations. Mohammed (2023) draws attention to the paucity of feminist scholarship that focuses on ethnicity as an identity category in African feminist digital organizing, arguing that although social media have facilitated organizing efforts in Ghana, people from marginalized ethnic groups are often erased from feminist movements and are rarely on the radar of these movements in their implementation of feminist praxis.

This growing scholarship on intersectionality in media and communication studies demonstrates the utility of this framework in theorizing structural oppression. In this article, intersectionality is useful for understanding the way that women marginalized based on age, ethnicity, and social class are often disproportionately affected as victims of gendered violence. I assert therefore that intersectionality is a useful tool for deconstructing the representation of gender in media frames. I expand further on this in the following section.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the politics of power and representation in the data gathered, I employ framing as a theoretical and analytical framework to analyze these news media representations. Framing demonstrates power relationships in society as reproduced by media by showing how media organizations report stories to align with the dominant ideology and what kinds of voices shape public opinion through their representation in these stories. According to Lawrence (2010), "News frames are likely to be driven and bounded by the preferred frames of powerful political players" (p. 274), meaning that the voices of marginalized groups are often drowned out in these representations. These "powerful political players" (Lawrence, 2010, p. 274) are the frame sponsors who shape the news narrative. Therefore, framing as a theoretical and analytical framework presents us with the tools to pay attention to what aspects of stories are highlighted, what aspects are minimized, and what aspects are excluded from the frame altogether. A feminist approach to framing therefore enables us to understand and interrogate the relationships between gendered "power, discourse and society" (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010, p. 314).

I complement framing by bringing an intersectionality framework sensibility to understanding the ways in which Mariama Akua Denteh's multiple intersecting identities shaped her experiences and how the media narrativize her identities in these representations. This framework of media framing enables us to understand how news media challenge or reinforce tropes around witchcraft accusations. Since framing aims to uncover power dynamics and how they shape media representations, an intersectionality approach complements the framework by extending the analysis to examine how the multiplicity of identities produces a lived reality shaped by structural factors (Crenshaw, 1989). Although feminist scholarship on Ghana has historically used a one-dimensional approach to understanding identity, recent scholarship has brought attention to the importance of theorizing structural oppression through a multi-axial analysis (Adjepong, 2021; Mohammed, 2022). As I examined the stories across various news sites, I paid critical attention to which voices were highlighted and how the lynching of Madam Denteh was constructed and discussed in the Ghanaian public sphere. This approach creates the conditions to understand the larger context of the news texts while pointing to ways in which news media can complicate the representations of marginalized groups.

Methodological Framework

To understand the representations of witchcraft-related violence in news media, a framing analysis was conducted on the data gathered. The data constituted news stories published on major news platforms between July 23, 2020, and July 23, 2021. Mariama Akua Denteh was lynched on July 23, 2020. The time frame of analysis examines news reports from the day of the lynching to exactly a year after her death. Data were sampled from the websites of Joy FM, Citi FM, GBC Ghana Online, and Graphic Online. Links to

the news sites have been included in the references section of the article. Joy FM and Citi FM are radio stations whose news bulletins are often transmitted across various regions in Ghana through their affiliate stations. They are also some of the oldest commercial media organizations in the country, having a wide audience in Accra and beyond. GBC Ghana Online is the news site of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, where various news stories are often shared. GBC is the country's public broadcaster and the oldest broadcaster in the country. Graphic Online is the news site of the *Daily Graphic* public newspaper, which has been in circulation since Ghana's independence. The news sites sampled cover the country's diverse mediascape by providing narratives from the private, commercial, and public media sectors.

Since the study focuses on the lynching of Mariama Akua Denteh as a case study to examine witchcraft-related femicide, "Akua Denteh" was used as a keyword to search the online platforms of the sampled news media organizations. In total, 141 news stories were sampled after 33 articles were eliminated for duplicity. Of the 141 articles analyzed, 42 were published by Joy FM, 48 by Citi FM, 26 by GBC Ghana Online, and 25 by Graphic Online. A framing analysis of the news stories was conducted paying attention to the ways in which frame sponsors shaped the narrative and how news media organizations reported this particular case of gendered violence. To arrive at the frames, the headlines of all the articles sampled were reviewed and organized into the pervading frames that emerged. Afterward, the articles were analyzed in depth to examine how they fed into the frames identified by pulling quotes and paragraphs from these stories that directly supported the frames identified. The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1:   *How is gendered violence represented in media in Ghana?*

RQ2:   *Who are the frame sponsors of narratives around witchcraft accusations?*

RQ3:   *How is gendered violence as a result of witchcraft accusations represented in Ghanaian news media?*

In the next section, I present a critical analysis of the news frames around the lynching of Madam Denteh, filtering the frames through an intersectionality lens.

Context of Case Study

Mariama Akua Denteh was accused of witchcraft by a priestess and lynched in Kafaba in the Savannah Region of Ghana on July 23, 2020. A video of the mob attack was widely circulated on Ghanaian social media, which led to this incident making news headlines for days. The publicity garnered by the video led to wide public outrage and calls for immediate investigations into the lynching. Some activists circulated petitions to secure signatures from Ghanaians to put pressure on the government to move swiftly to get justice for Madam Denteh. According to the literature reviewed earlier, witchcraft accusations disproportionately affect older women and can often lead to violent attacks on the victims. There are a number of witch villages in Ghana in places like Gambaga and Gnani, among others. Women who are accused of witchcraft are often banished to these villages for "rehabilitation."

Frame Sponsors Collectively Blame Ghanaians for Lynching/Femicide

In many societies, various systems are in place to produce and maintain the dominant ideology, which is often maintained across various institutions such as politics, education, the law, the health sector, and other social institutions (Mohammed, 2019). Very often, opinion leaders shape discourses in the public sphere, and many opinion leaders often speak in their capacity as leaders of organizations and institutions. To understand the dominance of certain narratives on the lynching of Mariama Akua Denteh, it is important to deconstruct the notion of frame sponsors and the role they play in setting the agenda in the news and shaping conversations in the public sphere in Ghana.

According to Wichgers, Jacobs, and van Spanje (2021), frame sponsors are actors "promoting a certain perspective or argument regarding" an issue (p. 681). The authors identified examples of frame sponsors to include the "court, political parties, politicians, government, organizations, citizens, academics" (Wichgers et al., 2021, p. 681). Following the lynching of Mariama Akua Denteh, frame sponsors representing government institutions, civil society organizations focused on human rights, traditional leaders such as queen mothers, and the health sector made various speech acts in response to the tragic news. As with the news coverage of many sensitive issues in the public sphere, these frame sponsors, who wield various levels of power, shared their perspectives on the lynching of Mariama Akua Denteh. The dominance of frame sponsors in news narratives demonstrates a paternalistic approach to news coverage and news making, which can often disenfranchise citizens, mitigate citizen engagement, and further marginalize groups working specifically to bring attention to and address these issues. Some might conclude that the work of frame sponsors is to make symbolic discursive speeches and comments rather than take concrete action to address the issue.

The aforementioned frame sponsors whose perspectives often make news headlines contributed to the discourses on this incident of femicide by blaming both bystanders and the general social disposition toward witchcraft in the country for Madam Denteh's lynching, attributing the circumstances leading to her death to larger societal failures. Many of the frame sponsors in the news articles took a moralizing tone in their response to the issue. They collectively blamed all the witnesses to the lynching and some even called for prosecuting them for not intervening to save the life of Madam Denteh. In a Citi FM news report by Jonas Nyabor, organizations like Occupy Ghana noted the illegality of the lack of intervention from bystanders:

> Indeed, each of the persons captured on the video as being present are guilty of the misdemeanour of being present when the crime was taking place, under section 316 of the Act. For not taking any step to prevent the crime, all those persons are guilty of a second misdemeanour under section 22 of the Act. (Nyabor, 2020, para. 14)

While it is important that this activist group drew attention to the stance of Ghanaian law on this behavior, it is widely known and documented that while there are laws governing various issues in Ghana, there is very little effort directed at implementation (Dawuni & Bonthuys, 2014). This statement can serve to provide education on the criminality embedded in apathetic behavior that leads to the murder of a victim of mob violence; however, it is symbolic at best due to the weak systems of implementation that exist in this sociopolitical context. In another news story, the Savannah Region's police commander, Deputy

Commissioner of Police (DCOP) Enoch Adu Twum Bediako, asserted, "We can charge you for abetment because being there and looking at the crime, you were giving encouragement to the wrongdoers to continue to do [what they were doing]" (Adogla-Bessa, 2020, para. 7). While two of the alleged perpetrators of this violence have since been remanded into police custody and charged with conspiracy and murder (GhanaWeb, 2021), the bystanders who were blamed by the police and civil society organizations for their complicity in this violence have not been charged. Interestingly, the discursive frame of collective blame focused disproportionately on individuals rather than the structural systems that created the conditions for this violence to occur. This reinforces the earlier assertion that there is a weak policy implementation framework, which often reduces these pronouncements and expressions of outrage to symbolic gestures that typically do not yield justice for victims or create a more just society to curtail future violence.

In the analysis, I observed that academics and some civil society organizations made attempts to connect this particular type of gendered violence to structural oppression. For example, the acting director of Amnesty International Ghana at the time, Frank Doyi, drew connections between this incident of femicide and the oppression of other marginalized communities such as refugees, older people, and women by demonstrating the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated structural inequalities across the continent (GBC Ghana Online, 2021). This assertion about the complexities of structural violence targeted at marginalized people across the continent draws attention to the various systems at the national, continental, and global levels such as patriarchy, colonization, and imperialism, which maintain the perpetuation of structural oppression. Here, the director does not just focus on violence at the interpersonal level but also draws attention to the ways in which oppressive systems are connected.

In addition, while many of these opinion leaders and frame sponsors blamed either society or individuals for this violence, very few of them made connections between the recurrence of femicide and the state's inaction and lack of political will to structurally address the problem. However, the country director for Amnesty International at the time, Robert Akoto Amoafo, publicly named and shamed the government for not doing enough to prevent the recurrence of femicide related to witchcraft accusations, saying, "Amnesty International Ghana has criticised the lack of action from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, for not doing enough to protect elderly women from violence associated with witchcraft allegations" (Caesar, 2020, para. 1). The statement above reinforces the argument that the weak implementation framework of existing policies has left marginalized people further disenfranchised. It also draws attention to the symbolic nature of the outrage expressed by various public figures in relation to gender-based violence in the country.

Scholarship has demonstrated that since its establishment in the 2000s, the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection has operated within neoliberal frames rather than working to dismantle structural oppression (Tsikata, 2009). Although the ministry purports to address issues affecting marginalized communities as defined by their mandate, the ministry has, in its various iterations across various political administrations, in a way perpetuated the pigeonholing of these issues that are not placed at the front or center of the national agenda. While many frame sponsors called for sensitization and creating awareness of witchcraft accusations and their relationship to gendered violence, it is clear that sensitization alone is not enough. Others such as the executive director of the Ark Foundation, Dr. Angela Dwamena-Aboagye, have called for a multidisciplinary approach that involves all sectors of institutional structures in

the country working together in the long term to address the issue (Joy FM Online, 2020a). This recommendation by Dr. Dwamena-Aboagye may work to mitigate the growth of gendered violence in the country in the long term. While institutions working together can move the needle on organizing to end witchcraft-related gendered violence, it is imperative that the survivors of this type of violence are actively involved in this initiative. In addition, other stakeholders such as community organizations, women's organizations, religious leaders, and chiefs should be brought on board in this multidisciplinary project to address the issue. In the next section, I examine the ways in which news organizations employ intersectional frames in their coverage of gendered violence.

Lack of Intersectionality Framework in Understanding Gendered Violence

In Ghanaian feminist scholarship, there has been little attention paid to the intersectionality of identity and how that shapes the lives of marginalized people. Research on gendered violence has often been filtered through the woman frame without drawing connections between that identity and other identity categories such as age, social class, sexuality, disability, and religion, among others (Mohammed, 2022). In the instances when gender-focused research has tangentially examined intersectionality, it has not used this language to theorize marginality. Recent scholarship on intersectionality in the country has focused on LGBTQIA+ identities (Adjepong, 2021), feminist activism and social movements (Mohammed, 2022), and ethnic identity (Mohammed, 2022). Here, I draw attention to the utility of an intersectional framework in understanding and addressing gender-based violence in the country.

Although existing scholarship demonstrates that news coverage of witchcraft-related gendered violence has been extensively documented in the Ghanaian mediascape (Adinkrah & Adhikari, 2014; Crampton, 2013), the violence inflicted on Madam Mariama Akua Denteh is the one case that has inspired national outrage for many reasons. In the past, visual documentation such as videos did not accompany the news about this type of violence. In fact, this issue became a national story because it was captured on video and shared on WhatsApp and Facebook platforms. The virality of this tragic documentation of mob violence targeted at an old woman was not only emotionally provoking but demanded national outrage. It is therefore unsurprising that people such as the late former president of Ghana Jerry John Rawlings, former president John Mahama, current president Nana Akufo-Addo, and current first lady Rebecca Akufo-Addo unequivocally condemned the lynching.

Even though gender and age were identified as the reasons for which Madam Denteh was targeted, they were mostly used as descriptors rather than tools to facilitate the analysis of this violence. For example, of the 56 news stories analyzed in the gender frame, 33 used the referent "90-year-old woman" in the headline. While this may draw attention to the specific kind of women who may be subjected to this violence, the stories did not go beyond that to deconstruct how gender and age intersect to produce the lived reality of women in Ghana. In addition, news sites attempted to humanize Madam Denteh by highlighting her social relationships as a mother and a grandmother. Besides this, there were very few feature-length stories that paid specific attention to these intersections while connecting them to structural oppression. Despite the sensitive nature of the issue, most of the media organizations accompanied the news stories with a still image from the lynching video, further dehumanizing Madam Denteh even in death and retraumatizing her family with every story in which this image was published. While the intention behind circulating this video

was to draw attention to this injustice, it may have caused psychological discomfort to some people who viewed it since many of these posts did not come with trigger warnings so that audiences could decide if they were comfortable watching a video depicting murderous violence. In a story published on May 8, 2023, about witchcraft-related gender violence, TV3 (a private commercial TV station) included a still image from the murder of Madam Denteh in the story (Amoako, 2023). With this, the family of Madam Denteh was retraumatized almost three years after she was lynched. This unfortunate memorialization of Madam Denteh further dehumanizes her even years after her death. Moreover, dehumanizing and graphic videos such as this one often circulate in the Ghanaian WhatsApp and Facebook mediascape, with these platforms doing very little to take them down.

In addition, the newsmakers mostly parroted the frame package that frame sponsors presented to them. Of all the news sites analyzed, only one had published an opinion piece by Dr. Akwasi Osei, the chief executive officer of the Mental Health Authority. In this instance, a public newspaper/news site, Graphic Online, had ceded power to a frame sponsor they perceived to be an authority figure to address the issue. In the opinion piece, Dr. Osei used anecdotes and research to attempt to deconstruct witchcraft accusations, paying attention to the ways in which older women were disproportionately targeted with violence, writing, "My little study and anecdotes indicate that for every 20 persons believed to be possessing witchcraft, 19 may be women (witches), with only one being a man (wizard)" (Osei, 2020, Type section, para. 1). He also drew attention to the physical and psychological attributes related to aging that may put old women at risk of gendered violence: "The typical 'witch' is an elderly woman, childless or all her children having pre-deceased or abandoned her, may have some deformity of some sort, poor, no relatives around and perhaps lost all teeth" (Osei, 2020, Type section, para. 2); "She may be suffering from dementia which makes her forgetful and behave like a child, or depression which makes her confess to imaginary crimes, or schizophrenia which muddles her thinking and behaviour" (Osei, 2020, Type section, para. 3).

As seen in the quotes above, women whose womanhood departs from normative constructions of womanhood are often targeted with this type of violence. Therefore, a perceived inappropriate or nonnormative performance of womanhood can put women at risk of violence. Here, we see the ways in which gender intersects with age and disability to produce the lived reality of women targeted with this type of violence. In addition, socioeconomic class can be a factor determining which kinds of women are targeted with witchcraft-related violence. According to Crampton (2013), "Media representations of witchcraft as an older woman's problem omits the more complex power dynamics and socioeconomic contexts in which accusations arise, and isolates the problem as self-evident rather than as subject to interpretation and negotiation" (p. 203). While the women banished to witch villages are often from working-class backgrounds, sometimes wealthy women can be targeted because their wealth can be attributed to their "practice of witchcraft."

Beyond interrogating the intersectionality of gender and age and how it relates to gendered violence connected to witchcraft, the media organizations barely attempted to center the perspectives of surviving women accused of witchcraft to share their perspectives on the strategies that can be employed to address the issue. For example, while many frame sponsors in Accra called for a shutdown of witch villages where accused women often seek refuge, women at the Gambaga Witch Camp "have disagreed with calls on the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social protection to forcefully close down all witch camps in Ghana" (Suuk,

2020, para. 1). This clearly demonstrates a disconnection between the ministry and the women who are directly affected by the issue. It again reinforces my argument that frame sponsors often de-agentize marginalized communities by taking a patronizing approach to addressing issues affecting them. A woman in the Gambaga Witch Camp, Kolgu Tindana, called on the government to create the conditions wherein it is safe for women to reintegrate into their communities:

> We cannot all go home like that. We all didn't come together, why should we go home together. The government has to educate our communities for us to be sure that we will be safe when we go home. If we go home and they refuse, where will we enter? (Suuk, 2020, para. 7)

Given that there are several witch villages in the country to which women who are accused of witchcraft are often banished, the news frames were largely determined by Accra-based frame sponsors who are geographically and praxically removed from the issue. The perspectives of grassroots organizers and community organizations who work directly to address the issue were largely absent from news stories. This also demonstrates a lack of commitment to centering the agency and self-determination of accused women in news stories and the perspectives of frame sponsors. While intersectionality has been used in scholarship and organizing, it is imperative that newsrooms adopt this framework when reporting on sensitive issues affecting marginalized people. In the next section, I draw attention to media complicity in reinforcing gender-based violence in discourses through news framing.

Media Complicity in Reproducing Reductionist Tropes About Femicide

Throughout the analysis of news stories sampled for this study, it was evident that frame sponsors such as politicians, representatives of civil society organizations, and political activists among others were platformed through quotes from their commentary, which shaped the narrative of news stories. This trend brings up the question as to whether journalists and news media organizations critically interrogated frame sponsors on the perspectives they shared and followed up to hold them accountable regarding pronouncements they made on the issue. Given that these frames seemed to play out over and over again whenever witchcraft-related femicide was the topic of the news, it is imperative for media organizations to reflect on their approach to the coverage of these stories.

In addition, this uncritical repetition of commentary by frame sponsors has made media organizations complicit in upholding patriarchal systems through their framing of news stories (Muntané, 2019). For example, Owusu-Addo and colleagues (2018) in their study of the representations of gendered violence in media found that news media organizations represented victim-blaming frames in their coverage of news stories. In the analysis, I found that while Madam Denteh was not blamed for her own death, some frame sponsors such as Herbert Mensah, president and board chair of the Ghana Rugby Football Union, called for justice for the victim yet still blamed her family for not protecting her from this violence: "Reacting to the heinous crime, the astute businessman said, 'I feel hurt because we all have sisters and mothers.' He however questioned the whereabouts of the woman's family when she was being lynched" (GBC Ghana Online, 2020, para. 3).

This blaming of the victim's family derails accountability directed at policy makers and reduces structural violence to interpersonal violence that individuals are responsible for preventing.

A framing analysis of the stories demonstrates the erasure of the perspectives of grassroots organizations working to support victims of witchcraft accusations. I also found that only one story published by Citi FM written by Maxwell Suuk platformed the perspectives of survivors of witchcraft accusations. This finding aligns with Owusu-Addo and colleagues' (2018) study, which found that news media organizations often erase the perspectives of victims of gender violence. Although scholarship has highlighted the gendered nature of witchcraft accusations and connected them to patriarchal systems (Adinkrah, 2017), news media merely acknowledged the age and gender of Madam Denteh without interrogating how structural systems produced her lived reality.

While journalists merely reported the stories, frame sponsors who had connections to academia such as Dr. Akwasi Osei and others such as Amnesty International Ghana, who conducted independent research in relation to gender oppression, clearly articulated that this type of femicide is gender discrimination rooted in social systems. These assertions aligned with scholarly work by Adinkrah (2004), which made connections between gender discrimination and structural violence. Throughout the analysis, the news stories framed the issue as a Northern Ghana problem even though existing scholarship has theorized witchcraft accusations among the Akan (Adinkrah & Adikhari, 2014; Brempong, 1996; van der Geest, 2002) and Effutu (Wyllie, 1973) of Southern Ghana and examined the ways in which Akan highlife songs have contributed to entrenching the dominant patriarchal ideology about witchcraft (Adinkrah, 2008; Brempong, 1986). This reductionism has been extensively critiqued by Roxburgh (2017), who postulates that witchcraft accusations are not just a Northern Ghanaian problem but rather a problem whose complexities should be deconstructed by examining its manifestations in Ghana and other parts of the continent. Adinkrah and Adikhari's (2014) research on witchcraft accusations in Nepal and Ghana makes a strong case for the globality of patriarchy and the importance of interrogating its manifestations in various sociocultural contexts. In the next section, I provide recommendations for the way forward with regard to media representations of gendered violence in Ghana.

Undoing Patriarchal Values in News Coverage

Although media coverage of the lynching of Madam Mariama Akua Denteh in the Savannah Region brought attention to the issue and resulted in the prosecution of two of the alleged perpetrators of this violence who are currently on trial (GhanaWeb, 2021), my analysis of the news stories indicates that none of the news frames brought attention to or interrogated the structural systems that produce the marginalization of and discrimination against women in Ghana. The reason for a lack of critical analysis of structural oppression is that many news organizations uncritically repeat the perspectives of frame sponsors (Kamal, 2021; Muntané, 2019) without examining how gender discrimination is institutionalized across sectors such as education, health, the law, social systems, and even media. This means that the people whose very material realities are affected by this structural violence barely get to speak for themselves.

Since Ghana's mediascape was built on the foundations of media for social good, as enshrined in the values of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, media organizations need to revisit and assert this ethos

in the coverage of sensitive topics such as gender-based violence. This could take the form of media activism through sensitization of stakeholders about the complexities of gendered violence, centering the perspectives of subaltern communities, and interrogating patriarchal structures in news coverage. Following the lynching of Madam Denteh, a youth-led political activist group, the Economic Fighters League, attempted "to organize a vigil in honor of Madam Denteh and organized a Facebook Live conversation on September 4, 2020 to bring attention to the relationship between witchcraft accusations and gendered oppression" (Mohammed, 2022, p. 9). However, these efforts were barely covered in the news.

In addition, there is a need for journalism training institutions to mandate the instruction of sensitive topics such as reporting on gender-based violence. Beyond pedagogy, the Ghana Journalists Association should mandate members to take training courses in ethical reporting every few years so that they can stay updated on new approaches to humanizing news coverage of subaltern communities. To create conditions for marginalized people to assert their agency in news narratives about them, newsrooms and media training institutions should adopt development communication and social change approaches to media representations. A development communication approach to journalism is interested in centering the agency and self-determination of historically disenfranchised groups (Kamal, 2021; Melkote & Steeves, 2015). This will ensure that community members are involved in sharing their perspectives to address gendered violence. Adopting a culture-centered approach that draws on indigenous epistemologies of humanity and rights can be useful not only for complicating narratives on gendered violence but also for working toward finding a lasting solution to the problem.

More importantly, news reporting focused on gender should not be pigeonholed into its own category. Rather, newsrooms should take an intersectional approach to examining the ways in which the topics covered affect various marginalized communities (Muntané, 2019). Although this specific issue focused on gendered oppression, I found that the perspectives of male frame sponsors were overrepresented in news stories, while the perspectives of women, feminists, and activist organizations were in the minority. According to Muntané (2019), feminist journalism is a useful tool for undoing patriarchy in the newsroom because it does the work of "giving a voice to everyone that mainstream media has consciously or unconsciously forgotten, placing forgotten topics, organisations and territories in the news agenda, thereby revealing the multiple discriminations of a sexist, racist and classist society" (p. 2). This approach will facilitate a disruption of the institutionalization and entrenchment of power in the framing of news stories.

Conclusion

In this article, I interrogated the ways in which power manifests in the framing of news stories by focusing on gender-based violence reportage to illustrate these power politics. The article fills the gap in the literature on media coverage of gendered violence and the framing of narratives around witchcraft-related femicide. Since the gruesome video of the lynching of Madam Denteh went viral and sparked wide public outrage, the Akua Denteh Foundation was launched in July 2020 to provide education on gender-based violence directed at older women (Joy FM Online, 2020b). Although I found that news media organizations were complicit in entrenching the dominant patriarchal ideology in their coverage of the lynching of Madam Mariama Akua Denteh, I demonstrate the potential that feminist journalism and intersectionality hold for undoing patriarchal values in media representations of gender oppression. Beyond incorporating these

praxis tools in journalism work in the country, there is a need for a holistic approach to covering issues that affect marginalized communities. More work needs to be done in journalism training institutions to bridge the gap between theory, pedagogy, and practice so that subaltern communities are not further marginalized by media practice. Future research may examine the relationship between journalists and frame sponsors in Ghana to deconstruct how this relationship shapes the public sphere and influences media agenda setting in the public realm. In addition, there is a need for more scholarship on gender-based violence from media and communications perspectives.

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